

The aim of this project is **to describe the practices and processes of democratization in modern public theatres in Poland**. The importance of culture for the development of democratic processes in Central Europe is of particular significance. However, it is worth examining how these basic principles of democracy have been implemented in cultural institutions. The democratization of institutional frameworks, including the ways of organizing institutions and decision-making processes, is a heterogeneous and non-linear process which requires constant supervision. By democratizing culture at the level of cultural institutions, we understand empowerment of employees of cultural institutions, increasing their individual participation in decision-making processes and the right to mutual criticism of employees and managers.

An institutional dimension of culture is a new subject in academic research in Poland. In theatre, however, this project is innovative, since all previous studies were only reflections on culture on the basis of limited data and did not result from field research. The research, conducted by an interdisciplinary team of academics, is aimed at a multi-faceted look at the democratization process / es in cultural institutions of a specific nature, which are based on a team creative process. We wish to study democratization processes both at the formal level (procedures, documents) and at the employee's reception level (his/her emotions, sense of agency, etc.). The research conducted by foreign scientists [Th. Schmidt] and the preliminary investigation by members of the project team both show that the standards of democratization in theatres are severely strained.

This project is a continuation of the research carried out by Aneta Głowacka (Ph.D), Assistant Professor, and Dorota Fox, Ph.D, D.Litt, University of Silesia Professor in the years 2019 -2020 in a number of theatres in the Upper Silesia. The research was conducted among members of technical and administrative staff and it regarded a number of detailed questions, such as the change of the director, which frequently becomes a turning point in the life of an organization as a whole. By means of questionnaires and in-depth interviews the researchers examined attitudes, emotions and opinions of employees concerning the change. The research has shown that contrary to popular belief, a change in the management position was not indifferent to them. Moreover, they were fully aware of the processes running in their theatres. Therefore, it seems justified to extend this research and include other employees. In turn, by extending the research to cover the entire territory of Poland we will be allowed to indicate current practices and to develop models according to which standards of democratisation are currently realised.

Our research will explore the following questions/ issues: 1. what management models are predominant in Polish theatres; how aware theatre directors are of their management strategies; whether institutional theatres are prepared to adopt modern and democratic management methods, including, for example, the idea of the so-called learning organizations; 2. what are the relationships between the so-called organizer, i.e. a local government unit, and an institution, that is a theatre; 3. how power relations are shaped in an institutional theatre; 4. where are the lines of conflict and what they usually relate to; who are the main actors of such conflicts; 5. what kind of persons, with what kind of work experience decide to participate in the competition for theatre director; 6. what is revealed as a result of competition procedures, procedures related to the selection of a theatre director or a theatre team manager; 7. to what extent institutional theatres in Poland are prepared to introduce practices of empowerment of their employees outside the procedures regulated by the Act on Organization of Trade Unions.

For the sake of this project, we plan to conduct quantitative and qualitative research in selected theatres in Poland. Quantitative research illustrating the scale of the phenomenon must be deepened by qualitative research (in-depth interviews) in order to verify the results of the survey. The analysis of source documents (*research desk*) and questionnaire research will allow us to select a group of institutions in which democratic standards have been raised or whose employees have expectations related to increasing self-agency. Simultaneously, it will enable us to "map" theatres managed in a more authoritarian way.

The research will result in conclusions and guidelines which will be useful in verifying procedures, and modernising the ways of managing those theatrical institutions which take into account the idea of the so-called learning organizations. The project will also create an opportunity to develop a catalogue of good practices. Besides, it may offer scientific support in the works on amendments of *the Act on the organization and administration of cultural activities*. We are aware that our area of interest is part of relatively new research in Polish theatre studies. Therefore, we hope that it will significantly enrich the scholarly knowledge of an institutional dimension of theatrical life and its impact on the artistic condition of Polish theatres. This will also allow for a dialogue on the international forum with researchers dealing with the institutional dimension of theatre and the presentation of the Polish specificity. The status of Polish theatres and their current management models result from historical and political conditions specific to post-communist states.