

Transformation East Fuels Transformation West: Tendencies in Cultural Politics and Its Transformations in the Process of German Unification

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ABSTRACTS

Die Vereinigung der beiden deutschen Staaten 1990 stellte die Kultur in der ehemaligen DDR vor große Herausforderungen. Im Theaterbereich mussten die bisherigen Trägerschaften überprüft und wirtschaftlich tragfähige Modelle gefunden werden, um gleichzeitig Modernisierung und Erhalt der Theaterhäuser zu gewährleisten. Da die Bundesländer diese neuen Herausforderungen nicht bewältigen konnten oder wollten, intensivierte die Bundesregierung als Ergebnis des Artikel 35 des Einigungsvertrags ihr finanzielles Engagement im Kultursektor, ein Bedeutungszuwachs, der nachhaltig das kulturpolitische System Deutschlands verändert hat.

Die Theater wurden zudem zu einem Experimentierfeld für neue Verwaltungsautonomiemodelle im Zuge des New Public Management, das bisher in Deutschland und seinen Kulturbetrieben noch nicht angekommen war. Mit Fusionen und Zweckverbänden sollte auch die Trägerschaft auf eine breitere Basis gestellt werden, wobei jedes ostdeutsche Bundesland einen eigenständigen Entwicklungspfad eingeschlagen hat, besonders in Hinblick auf die finanzielle Beteiligung an den meist kommunalen Theaterhäusern.

Die Transformationen in Ostdeutschland sind dabei nicht als singuläre Ereignisse zu verstehen, vielmehr bildeten sie die Blaupause, um in der Folge der 1990er auch in Westdeutschland neoliberal inspirierte Strukturreformen anzustoßen.

The unification of the two German states in 1990 presented great challenges to cultural professionals in the former GDR. In order to maintain and modernize the existing theatres their organizational forms had to be adjusted and new economic models had to be implemented. Since the Länder were not willing to or able to meet the new challenges with their own resour-

ces, the Federal Government generated investments on its own according to article 35 of the *Einigungsvertrag*, thus shaping a new system of cultural politics.

Theatres were a field of experimentation to seek new and more autonomous models of administration. This was especially proposed by the advocates of New Public Management that had not been applied to the cultural sector until the early 1990s. Mergers and regional cooperation created new formations of stakeholders. In this process, each of the *Länder* in East Germany followed its own path, especially focusing on the distribution of funding between the local authorities and the *Länder*. Finally, the transformations in East Germany cannot be seen as a singular process but as a blueprint to foster neo-liberal reformations of structures throughout the 1990s in West Germany as well.

“The situation of the theatres in the GDR is worrying. The accomplished transfer of the new currency and the rising costs in the theatres, the paid subventions do not reflect the actual needs. Especially middle and small theatres are in the threat of closing.”¹ It was with these words that the Deutsche Bühnenverein (German stage association), the coordinating council of the German theatre managers, demanded quick changes and answers from West German political leaders in 1990 to secure the survival of the 68 theatres in the then still existing German Democratic Republic (GDR). With the unclear developments of unification ahead and the poor economic structure of the Eastern area, theatres seemed to be at stake. While many theatres played a crucial role in organizing rallies and giving rooms and infrastructure to civil society during the peaceful revolution in 1989, they now had to adapt to the new times; the threat of being closed for good hanging over their heads like the sword of Damocles.

This article gives an overview of the transformations and outcomes of cultural politics in the GDR during the early 1990s. Some of these changes were planned, some simply emerged from the circumstances. The article also reflects how measures and adjustments taken worked in the same way as a blueprint for the reorganization of certain arrangements in the theatre system in the Western part of Germany. This results in the argumentation of Gert Joachim Glaesner and Rolf Reisig who claimed already in the 1990s that the transformations after 1989 affected both sides of the former Iron Curtain: a double transformation.² The double transformation, of course, did not run equally – and not equally visible, one may add – but the neo-liberal hegemonic spirit, set free by the assumed end of history,³ worked in all places at the same time. However, the ways were not the same in East and West since certain path dependencies had to be taken in account that altered the outcomes. In an international perspective these neo-liberal tendencies

1 As quoted in: R. Weinert/F.-Z. Gilles, *Der Zusammenbruch des Freien Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes (FDGB). Zunehmender Entscheidungsdruck, institutionalisierte Handlungsschwächung und Zerfall der hierarchischen Organisationsstruktur*, Opladen 1999, pp. 141–142.

2 G.-J. Gläßner, *Der schwierige Weg zur Demokratie. Vom Ende der DDR zur deutschen Einheit*, Opladen 1991, p. 213; R. Reißig, *Transformationsprozeß Ostdeutschlands. Entwicklungsstand – Konflikte – Perspektiven*, in: R. Reißig (ed.), *Rückweg in die Zukunft. Über den schwierigen Transformationsprozess in Ostdeutschland*, Frankfurt am Main 1993, pp. 11–48, at 18.

3 F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York 1992.

were fostered by the administrations of US president Ronald Reagan and British prime minister Margaret Thatcher (and they were implemented by their successors as well). Under these preconditions the neo-liberal concept started its successful struggle for hegemony around the Western world and also reached the ex-socialist countries. In Germany, in a general view, those neo-liberal strategies were mainly tested in the East before being transferred to the West. This article will show how the cultural field was affected by these winds of change of liberalization and privatization of former common goods. The particular German path in the field of cultural politics will be described focusing on two main shifts: firstly, the implementation of new legal forms, more oriented on economic players than bureaucratic administrative structures and, secondly, the new balances of power in the field of cultural policy and public financing of culture implied by the *Einigungsvertrag* (contract of unification) between the GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), which gave the central government a new role to play in cultural politics.

1. Changes in the Framework of Cultural Politics in Germany

The unification was an unprecedented endeavour with implications for all sectors in society, especially in the former GDR, which now was reorganized in five new *Bundesländer* (federal states) and, of course, a unified Berlin with its parallel structures in East and West. To create guidelines and get national and international support and legitimacy, the federal government had to find a legally binding form for the whole process both internally and internationally; it was headed by chancellor Helmut Kohl with Wolfgang Schäuble as minister of internal affairs, the department organizing the legal terms of the unification. Therefore, both German governments negotiated a treaty with the USA, France, the Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom, settling the occupation agreements after 1945 once and for all, known as the Two Plus Four Agreement. Internally the above-mentioned *Einigungsvertrag* was negotiated between the new democratically elected government of the GDR, led by Lothar de Maizière, who was member of the Christian Democratic Union and its Western counterparts (as were Kohl and Schäuble). In the treaty the field of culture was mentioned only in Article 35 proclaiming in its second paragraph: “The cultural substance in the area defined in Article 3 shall not be damaged.”⁴ A short phrase with huge implications for the field of culture and the evolution of cultural policy. In general, West Germany’s cultural politics in those times were managed by the *Bundesländer* and the local administrations, the latter of which are usually trusted with the funding of their cultural institutions such as theatres, orchestras, museums, public libraries, etc. The federal government had only competences in foreign cultural affairs as, for example, the maintenance of the Goethe Institutes.

4 Bundesrepublik Deutschland/Deutsche Demokratische Republik, *Einigungsvertrag*, in: *Einigungsvertrag*. Sonderdruck aus der Sammlung Das deutsche Bundesrecht, Baden-Baden 1990, Art. 35.

These arrangements were partly the same in the GDR where 46 theatres were funded by local authorities like towns and counties, although the central state commissioned the budgets to the local authorities, and there was no free space to discuss the budgets internally. Furthermore, 13 theatres were funded by the 14 *Bezirke* (districts), an administrative unit created by the socialist government in 1954. The *Bezirke* were larger than the counties but smaller than the former states (*Länder*). The states were then dissolved and newly founded in 1990. Five theatres had been directly funded by the central government, all of them located in East Berlin. In the GDR, of course, there had been an expansive control by the socialist party and its hierarchy as well as by the socialist labour union and other mass organizations interfering with the artistic outcomes and plans on several levels. However, the main connection between local public administrations and theatres was never cut. These were merely the last connections that could prevail after all other bounds with the state party had been dissolved due to the democratic process in 1989/90. Taking this into account the ongoing transformation in the cultural sector also has to be understood as a form of decentralization, as an implementation of the principle of subsidiarity. This concept was well-known and had a long practice in West Germany but was without tradition in socialist East Germany where in cases of conflict the socialist party and/or the socialist government always had the last word. Especially in the first years after unification this new autonomy led to a certain insecurity. It has to be born in mind that the decision-makers in local politics were often new in the field in a way that learning and deciding had to take place simultaneously. Nevertheless, there was also a high intrinsic motivation, as Ulf Großmann, the first elected councillor of culture, in Görlitz describes: “All of us who were thrown in this adventure were fuelled with the spirit to create a – probably their particular – contribution to the ongoing transitional work.”⁵ Later on, especially in the bigger cities, experienced Western specialists were hired by local authorities as can be seen in the case of Leipzig.⁶

The theatres in the towns and cities were quite strongly involved in the ongoing turmoil, which, in 1990, was dominated by a mix of revolutionary enthusiasm (the “short year of anarchy” as Christoph Links puts it)⁷ and a great insecurity about the future existence of the cultural institutions, the latter due to the lack of financial powers. This also applied to local and regional stakeholders, i.e., those primarily responsible for the maintaining and funding of the cultural institutions in their respective areas. The Western *Länder* (states, singular *Land*) also clearly communicated their limited financial abilities in the process.⁸ The fund *Deutsche Einheit* (German unity) included DEM 47,5 billion by the *Länder* and DEM 67,5 billion by the federal government. Since the demands of the cultural players and the demands of politicians and administration leaders rose quickly, the

5 U. Großmann, Retrospektive: Zehn Jahre Umbau einer städtischen Kulturlandschaft, in: O. Scheytt (ed.), Was bleibt? Kulturpolitik in persönlicher Bilanz, Essen 2001, pp. 188–198, at 188.

6 See the article by Thomas Höpel in this edition, which examines the case of Leipzig.

7 C. Links/S. Nitsche/A. Taffelt (eds.), Das wunderbare Jahr der Anarchie. Von der Kraft des zivilen Ungehorsams 1989/90, Berlin 2004.

8 W. Schäuble, Der Vertrag. Wie ich über die deutsche Einheit verhandelte, Stuttgart 1991, p. 176.

federal government soon established several programmes to match especially the needs of cultural institutions added to the fund just established. Between 1990 and 1993 in total DEM 2,5 billion were transferred to the theatres by the federal government with the aim to consolidate the cultural substance and to create an environment for decisions on the reform of the supported institutions. The amount of cultural spending in the total expenditures of the federal government more than tripled from 0.1 per cent in the 1980s to a share of 0.35 per cent in 1996.⁹ Nevertheless, the federal government did only spend money to existing cultural institutions and did not take over control of existing theatres and museums. This enlarged pre-existent institutions such as the foundation *Preussischer Kulturbesitz* (Prussian cultural heritage foundation) with its great museums or the *Berliner Festspiele* (Berlin festival). In the long run, this stronger involvement of the federal government in the field of cultural politics strengthened its position in a sustainable manner. The changes at the beginning of the 1990s resulted in the creation of a small state ministry of culture and media within the framework of the chancellery in 1998. Later on, new institutions were founded and funded such as the *Kulturstiftung des Bundes* (Federal Cultural Foundation) in 2002, the main objective of which is to support nationally relevant cultural players and to bring about new innovative networks. These results show how the involvements in the 1990s allowed the federal government to appear as a new player in the cultural field. It created new institutions to set new agendas and booster cultural politics above the heads of the *Länder*, which until then had a monopoly on the funding of cultural infrastructure, together, of course, with the local and regional administrations still shouldering the main share for cultural enterprises.

2. Organizational Reforms in the Light of New Public Management

Back in the early 1990s with the transformation process still ahead, these shoulders were quite weak. On the one hand the breakdown of all economic and industrial structures in the GDR was followed by mass unemployment and tossed away the financial possibilities of the local administrations. On the other hand, the new local elites were often unsure how to act in the new system. On the level of administration, this system was a pure implementation of West Germany's structures and processes. For the leading persons, it was often totally new to manage and steer such processes since many of the old elites had vanished or circulated to other fields of works. At the level of the *Länder* the administrations were soon filled with public workers from the Western *Länder* to reform the existing or the new institutions built up according to West German blueprints. Estimations calculate that up to 80 per cent of the new administrative leaders on the *Länder* level came from West Germany to establish the Western model of administration.¹⁰ But

9 K. Beyme, *Kulturpolitik in Deutschland. Von der Staatsförderung zur Kreativwirtschaft*, Wiesbaden 2012, p. 112.

10 H. Gergs/C. Hausmann/M. Pohlmann, *Political and Economic Elites in the Transformation Process in Eastern Germany*, in: H. Best/U. Becker (eds.), *Elites in Transition. Elite Research in Central and Eastern Europe*, Opladen 1997, pp. 203–247, at 227.

on the local level these adoptions were massive undertakings. The theatres were, in comparison to their Western counterparts, relatively large institutions with a bigger staff both in the artistic areas and with respect to technical workers. Furthermore, the density of theatres in East Germany was one of the biggest in the world. In some cases, towns with merely 30,000 inhabitants had a fully working theatre with orchestra and ballet section. Thus, all cultural players tried to subsume their institutions under the label of cultural substance as mentioned in Article 35.

In 1990, also a dramatic loss of audience fuelled the fear of the artistic directors in the theatres, who were all new in this position. The turmoil of 1989 meant a nearly complete exchange of the leading positions in theatres. Fifty-four per cent of the new artistic directors were from East Germany while 46 per cent came from West Germany,¹¹ but the most influential houses in Berlin and in Dresden and Leipzig as well remained in the hand of directors from East Germany all the time. However, a certain experience in the West was surely helpful to gain a leading position, as the example of Wolfgang Engel shows who took over the Schauspiel Leipzig (Leipzig theater) in 1993 after several works as director in Frankfurt am Main. The biggest beneficiaries of the situation were GDR directors who would have obtained leading positions in a theatre anyway but, with this career boost, could follow this path earlier. On the one hand 54 per cent of the new leaders from the East were stage directors or dramaturgs without experiences in leading a theatre. On the other hand, nearly 50 per cent of the artistic directors transferred from West to East had such experiences, sometimes even in theatres of high rank as Günther Beelitz, the former artistic director of the Staatsschauspiel München (München state theater). Nevertheless, especially in 1990 and 1991, there were several, mostly temporary leaders who had come from the West but, for various reasons, could not adapt to the situation. In these cases, the inexperienced political leaders often decided for the West ticket even though the artistic directors chosen lacked experience and did not fulfil the requirements. The shiniest case of those surely was the engagement of Gregori von Leitis in Neustrelitz. The German director working in New York's off-off-Broadway suddenly was made the head of a theatre with orchestra, ballet, etc. His incompetence soon became obvious but the help of the ministry of culture in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania was necessary to get rid of him.¹² Such rare events – even in those troubled times – helped to paint the picture of the Western gold-digger and the ongoing colonization of the East. This picture may be true for other sectors especially when looking at the privatization orgy of the Treuhand, the organization charged with managing and, if possible, privatizing the property of the former GDR.¹³ However, it cannot stand for the cultural sector. There was simply no gold to dig: the main task for the new leaders and managers usually was to prevent the closing of the theatre and to maintain the artistic activities of the

11 A detailed analysis can be found in: T. Ibs, *Umbrüche und Aufbrüche. Transformationen des Theaters in Ostdeutschland zwischen 1989 und 1995*, Berlin 2015, pp. 119–128.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 131–134.

13 O. Jacobs (ed.), *Die Treuhand – ein deutsches Drama*, Halle 2020; M. Böick (ed.), *Die Treuhand. Ideen – Praxis – Erfahrung: 1990–1994*, Bonn 2018.

house with the given scarcity of resources. But this could be accomplished. With some exceptions nearly all theatres in the former GDR survived the transformation process. While the facades of the theatres stayed intact or got restored since the air pollution had damaged them during the 40 years of real existing socialism, the structures behind were modernized at an unforeseen speed and with outcomes that later provided new models even for Western theatre institutions.

Nevertheless, the first political settings of regulation did not point in the direction of innovation at all. One of the first decisions was to expand the Western model of working conditions to East Germany, especially the system of labour unions and the respective pre-existent collective labour agreements. When the Bühnenverein wanted to establish several exclusions from the Western agreements particularly with regard to the duration of working contracts, however, well-organized protest of the theatres prevented too harsh conditions.¹⁴ The main discussion point was the so-called 15-year rule, meaning that a worker or actor in a theatre could claim a tenure position after 15 years. Since the mobility of the workforce in GDR stages was substantially lower than in West German houses, many actors and workers fell in this category. Thus, the artistic directors and managers were afraid that this could block their flexibility and hinder the restructuring of their institutions since this implied the reduction of staff in nearly all fields. Especially the new artistic directors feared that they could not engage new actors and create an ensemble according to their visions. However, when the new settlement was established and the existing Western system of contracts was transferred to the new *Länder*, the modernization of the houses started smoothly. The large goal was to maintain the theatres and to save costs. This remodelled theatre still had to produce creative output matching the local audience's needs, according to the motto that a sold-out house is the best argument for a theatre. Since closing was not really an option, new ways of management and funding had to be found. On the administrative level of public funding the local players (often pressured by the respective *Land*) searched for partners to create a *Zweckverband* (joint body) organizing the funding. These administration unions usually consisted of local authorities and counties, which came together to coordinate a collective funding of the theatres (and other cultural institutions) in their area. Often these collective efforts led to the merging of formerly independent theatres. Between 1992 and 1995, five mergers of theatres were conducted affecting ten theatres in total. And the process went on, as more mergers took place until 2011 and there were discussions of another one until 2017.¹⁵ The reasons to start such a process were always driven by monetary aspects and not grounded on artistic considerations.¹⁶ Michael Schindhelm was manager of the Theatre Gera when the merging process with the Theatre Altenburg started. He briefly described the political mechanisms in a rather poetic way: "Where was the magnetism

14 V. Trauth, Tarifkampf, in: Theater der Zeit 6 (1991), p. 87.

15 For a detailed account of these mergers, see Ibs, Umbrüche und Aufbrüche, pp. 73–78.

16 P. S. Föhl, Kooperationen und Fusionen von öffentlichen Theatern. Theoretische Grundlagen, empirische Untersuchungen und Gestaltungsempfehlungen, Wiesbaden 2011.

strong enough to make two houses into one, to make three into two or one? Where would the resistance be the lowest, where was the pressure of suffering the highest?”¹⁷ These mergers were usually organized as a top-down process implemented by political order and pressure. In the case of Altenburg and Gera in Thuringia the theatres’ staff was reduced by 140 to 400 people. They were still large institutions, especially when taking into account that theatres often were the enterprises with most employees in some towns in the crisis in the 1990s. In addition, theatres were not the only ones affected by the merging wave, 19 orchestras were merged between 1989 and 2012.¹⁸

The internal organizational schemes did also change and not only in the merged theatres but everywhere. In both Germanies theatres were mostly organized as part of the public cultural administration until the 1990s and legally were just a department of the cultural affairs office. With the challenges presented by the unification, the scarcity of resources in particular (apart from the temporal subsidies provided by the federal programmes), most local and regional actors tended to a more independent institutional setting for the theatres than before. This independence was embraced by the theatre directors, too. Therefore, the legal form was often altered to what is called an *Eigenbetrieb*, i.e., an owner-operated municipal enterprise. These are independent enterprises no longer working in the administrative framework but comparable to normal enterprises. Although they remain part of the communal assets they are not bound to all regulations of public services since they work as private companies. The autonomy in this construct is a matter of artistic freedom granted by Art. 5 of the German constitution (*Grundgesetz*), which is also reflected in budgetary matters. The theatres usually present a budget plan to the local parliament or the *Zweckverband* and – after discussions and negotiations – the funding is granted for a given time. Once authorized negotiators made their decision the theatre managers have the complete autonomy in their spending. Thus, it was impossible to force cuts in the decided budgets. With the negotiations about a new budget, though, the dance always begins anew. As a consequence, theatres tend to get long lasting agreements. This can be problematic due to the regulations of the public budget that has to be agreed on by local parliaments. In the case of a *Zweckverband* this of course applied to all contributing entities. Another option was to set up companies with limited liability, which are called *Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung (GmbH)* in German. This was also possible for non-profit organizations. In the theatre sphere such constructs were not completely new. In 1951, Gustaf Gründgens founded the Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus (Düsseldorf theatre) as company with limited liability and, in 1962, the theatre Schaubühne in Berlin was established in this organizational form by Jürgen Schnitthelm. However, the legal form of these theatres and some further houses remained special arrangements for decades, until the dawn of the 1990s.

17 M. Schindhelm, *Zauber des Westens. Eine Erfahrung*, München 2001, p. 106.

18 Deutsche Orchestervereinigung, *Rechts- und Betriebsformänderungen, Auflösungen und Fusionen deutscher Kulturorchester seit der Wiedervereinigung*, 2014, <http://www.miz.org/intern/uploads/statistik95.pdf> (accessed 22 November 2020).

This striving for autonomy and to free theatres from bureaucratic boundaries must also be seen in the light of a neo-liberal modernization, which affected nearly all public areas. The *Eigenbetrieb* concept was originally applied to other types of public services such as waterworks, waste management, or public gardening. Hence, while they were managed in the manner of private companies they had not to gain in profits. In other fields former public offices were privatized in those years as can be seen with the German post service, the German telephone company, or the German railway. This development also led to a market liberalization in those fields by ending the monopoly of the former state-owned companies. This wave of liberal privatizations was a worldwide phenomenon in the 1990s; as seen, it also affected cultural institutions. The ideas and ideals of new public management emphasized the takeover of management methods from the private to the public sector in order to consolidate and boost efficiency and efficacy of public institutions.¹⁹

In the field of culture, the institutions in East Germany were the first massive rollout of such practices. Given the financial situation, this strategy seemed reasonable and additionally the transformation process itself provided a window to provoke even strong changes. Surely, we cannot talk of a shock therapy as Naomi Klein identified it as being established in the reform of Poland's economy,²⁰ but to a lesser account the all-over turmoil of society and economy favoured even more radical solutions than just a simple adaption to pre-existent West German patterns.

3. Developments in the New *Länder*

For the new *Länder* in East Germany a common path cannot be described. Saxony, Thuringia, Saxony-Anhalt, Brandenburg, and Mecklenburg-West Pomerania each created different approaches to meet the urgent needs of the cultural institutions and the local authorities in order to keep the cultural life running.

Saxony chose the most innovative path with the creation of the *Kulturraumgesetz* (cultural space law), which obliged towns and counties to work together in defined coalitions.²¹ *Kulturraum* can be translated as "space of culture" and, in the law, the Saxon government designated eight country spaces where the counties were supposed to collaborate, while the three urban cultural spaces for Chemnitz, Dresden, and Leipzig remained autonomous within the framework. The Free State of Saxony determined a sum of DEM 150 million per year, starting in 1995, which was assigned to the cultural spaces from the general budget of Saxony and divided between them by a certain key. Furthermore, the Saxon state had its own cultural institutions to be funded separately like the theatre, the opera, and the art collections in Dresden. Every *Kulturraum* should match the given sum

19 For an overview, see K. Schedler/I. Proeller, *New Public Management*, Stuttgart 2011; L. E. Lynn, *Public Management Old and New*, New York 2006.

20 N. Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, New York 2007, pp. 171–194.

21 For a detailed discussion of the *Kulturraumgesetz*, see Ibs, *Umbrüche und Aufbrüche*, pp. 78–82.

with own resources, which created a security of funding and planning for the institutions at hand. Throughout the years the amount of money given to the *Kulturräume* (plural of *Kulturraum*) was always a main point of discussion but the mechanism works stable and defines the cultural setting in Saxony.

The other new *Länder* did not produce such consistent long-lasting strategies. Thuringia focused on concentration via merging and got involved in the public funding of cultural institutions together with the respective partners on the local level. This phenomenon also holds for Saxony-Anhalt that co-funded the main institutions in its state. Brandenburg created state-funded theatres in cooperation with the local authorities as well. Moreover, they were obliged to tour around designated places in the country besides performing in their main cities. This accounts especially for Frankfurt on the Oder where the Kleist-Theater was closed in 1994 – the only theatre with a female artistic director in East Germany during the transformation process. The programme is fulfilled now by the theatres in Cottbus and Potsdam. Mecklenburg-West Pomerania put in place several mergers but also saw the necessity to support the theatres directly, upholding the idea of more mergers.

A special situation can be found in Berlin. Here Article 35 of the unification treaty struck in a particular way. With the unification the three big Western state-funded theatres Schaubühne, Schillertheater, and Hebbel-Theater, and the opera house Deutsche Oper had to cope with the situation that the four prestigious East Berlin theatres Volksbühne, Deutsches Theater, Berliner Ensemble and Gorki-Theater, as well as the opera houses Komische Oper and Staatsoper were part of the urban theatre mix now. In total 22 theatres were funded by public sources in Berlin in those days. Although the federal government assigned special funding for the new capital, reorganization and even the closing of one of the big houses was the strategy of Ulrich Roloff-Momin, the councillor for culture. Having in mind Article 35 and the huge traditions of all Eastern houses he decided, following the expertise of a strategic theatre paper written by Ivan Nagel,²² to close down the West Berlin Schillertheater in summer 1993 and to maintain all East Berlin theatres.²³ The smaller Theater im Palast (theatre in the palace), a special construct even in the GDR with Vera Oelschlegel as artistic director, under the command of the Staatsrat (council of the state), had been closed earlier. She was the wife of Konrad Naumann, a member of the leading heads of the SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, Socialist Unity Party of Germany). Therefore, the theatre was politically contaminated and had to close its doors forever in 1990 without big public discussions. But the final shut-down of the Schillertheater provoked an outcry in all German theatres, especially in the West: petitions, rallies, and protest on the spot were organized. The decision was final, but the theatres showed that they could organize public opinion and protests in those matters, hence probably hindering other politicians to even think of plans of closing

22 I. Nagel, Überlegungen zur Situation der Berliner Theater, in: Theater heute 5 (1991), pp. 37–43.

23 The perspective of Roloff-Momin in this matter can be found in: U. Roloff-Momin, Zuletzt, Kultur, Berlin 1997, pp. 93–126.

down theatres due to the overall difficult financial situation in those years. To complete the Berlin panorama: Also the Hebbel-Theater went through a rough re-organization. It merged with the Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer and the Theater am Ufer to build up a centre for independent theatre called *HAU*. This was a decisive impulse to develop the international performance scene in Berlin in the 1990s and 2000s.

4. Conclusions

The transformation during the 1990s can be seen as a forced modernization of the theatre structures both in its funding prerequisites and in its organizational hull with the new legal forms applying. Moreover, it created a new layer of public funding by adding a federal level with new institutions as the *Kulturstiftung des Bundes* and the commissioner for culture and media in the rank of a minister of state. The installation of the commission of inquiry for culture in Germany (Enquete-Kommission Kultur in Deutschland) in 2007, implemented by the Bundestag, the legislative chamber of federal Germany, exhibits the new role of the federal level in the field of culture. One of the conclusions of its final report was that the change of legal forms of cultural institutions had been merely motivated by the experiences in East Germany during the transformation.²⁴ In this case the Eastern theatres were a kind of experimental room to test these new forms. Having applied the concepts of new public management to the whole cultural sector in unified Germany the results of those experiments could soon be looked at throughout the whole republic.

The unification therefore did not only transform East Germany and put it under a colonizing order by Western invaders, a picture often found in public discussions.²⁵ The processes in East Germany produced repercussions to the West where alterations to the framework were adopted as demanded by the new neo-liberal ideology, which had its global rise in those days. Wolfgang Engler described the East German people as an avant-garde²⁶ that lived the societal processes of disintegration happening to the West Germans, too, before they realized it. Hence this image is quite true at least for the field of culture. But the transformation processes of the 1990s cannot be reduced to the sphere of the former socialist republics since they can easily be found in the Western states and societies. Or as the playwright and well-informed observer of Germany Heiner Müller

24 Deutscher Bundestag, Schlussbericht der Enquete-Kommission "Kultur in Deutschland", Drucksache 16/7000, Berlin, p. 96.

25 An early example of this discursive line is: W. Dümcke/F. Vilmar (eds.), *Kolonialisierung der DDR. Kritische Analysen und Alternativen des Einigungsprozesses*, Münster 1996. Meanwhile contemporary scholars still argue that Western forces took over in East-Germany but without using the harsh term of colonization as can be seen in: I.-S. Kowalczyk, *Die Übernahme. Wie Ostdeutschland Teil der Bundesrepublik wurde*, Munich 2019. Kowalczyk disagrees strongly with the term colonization, as seen in: I.-S. Kowalczyk, *Die Aufarbeitung der Aufarbeitung – Welche Zukunft hat die DDR-Geschichte?*, in: *Deutschland Archiv*, 24.7.2019, www.bpb.de/294350 (accessed 20 December 2020).

26 W. Engler, *Die Ostdeutschen als Avantgarde*, Berlin 2002.

put it in 1994: “Now the unification takes place as a vanishing of both parts. First it looked like this part of the GDR was only consummated by the West. But that does not seem to work. Both parts are vanishing now, which creates an unnameable vacuum held together by the D-mark.”²⁷

27 H. Müller, Für immer in Hollywood oder: In Deutschland wird nicht mehr geblinzelt, in: H. Müller, Werke, vol. 12, Frankfurt am Main 2008, pp. 459–475, p. 461.