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Mariia Yakovenko*

Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts, Kyiv, Ukraine

Organization of Theatrical Activity Within the Non-Governmental Sector of Culture

Abstract: *Introduction.* The importance of studying independent theatre initiatives in the Ukrainian context is not only theoretical but also practical because it is not just a comparison of different models but also the formulation of recommendations for theatre reform in Ukraine. The emergence of independent theater organizations gave rise to independent artistic practice, which dramatically increased competition among theaters in the struggle for the audience. As a result, the ability to use management and marketing technologies as a tool for market promotion began to play a leading role for such institutions. *Purpose and methods.* The purpose of the article is to develop theoretical foundations and practical recommendations for improving the organization of theatrical activities within the non-governmental sector of culture. The work was based on dialectical, empirical, and systematic approaches, which allowed us to summarize the theoretical and practical achievements accumulated by the community in the context of organizing the activities of modern theaters. *Results.* The essence, role, and significance of the activities of independent theater organizations are revealed. The problems of the existence of independent theaters are determined. Methods for improving the work of theatrical organizations in the independent sector of culture and theatrical reform have been formulated. Peculiarities of management of the subjects of the independent sector of culture have been revealed. *Conclusions.* The scientific novelty of the obtained results lies in the deepening of the theoretical foundations of the organization of independent theaters based on generalization of the best world experience in this culture segment. The significance of the study is manifested in the expansion of knowledge in the field of organization of independent theaters and the possibility of their use in the process of reforming the theatrical sphere of Ukraine.

Keywords: theater, independent organizations, theater management.

*Scientific Adviser, Professor Yaroslav Martynyshyn

1. Introduction

The problem formulation. The importance of researching independent theater initiatives in the Ukrainian context is not only theoretical but also practical because it is not just a comparison of different models but also the formulation of recommendations for theater reform in Ukraine. The study of the modern Ukrainian theater as a complex system should be carried out comprehensively, taking into account creative, financial, legislative, and sociological indicators, as well as various factors influencing the development of the theater industry. All over the world, the non-state theater, non-academic scene moves the industry forward, but in Ukrainian realities, independent organizations face many problems, which calls into question the possibility of their existence.

The emergence of independent theater organizations gave rise to independent artistic practice, which dramatically increased competition among theaters in the struggle for the audience. As a result, the ability to use management technologies and marketing as a tool for promotion in the market began to play a leading role for such institutions.

Recently, there is a special need to study and research the theater organization as a special system related not only to art but also to the production, promotion, preservation of social values, and organization of artistic activities.

State study of the problem. Scientific and theoretical aspects of socio-cultural management, its place, role and significance in society have been thoroughly developed by Ukrainian and foreign scientists, in particular Ya. Martynyshyn, O. Khlystun, R. Adamoniene, M. Blašková, Ye. Kovalenko (Martynyshyn et al., 2020a, 2020b; Martynyshyn & Khlystun, 2018, 2019; Martynyshyn & Kovalenko, 2018a, 2018b; Kovalenko, 2020, 2021, 2022).

The desire to clarify the role and state of theater art can be traced in many scientific works of foreign and domestic figures. Over the past thirty years, Ukrainian theater historians have published a large number of works. Dedicated to various topics and issues, they also tell about the organizational activity of the Ukrainian theater, as well as ideological, political, patriotic, internationalist, and moral aspects. Here I should first of all, name the works of L. Baraban (1979), I. Bezghin (2005), V. Kovtunenکو (2001), O. Semashko (2005). Серед закордонних діячів можна зазначити M. Dansilio (2017), S. Langley (1974), J. Huberman, B. Pope, J. Ludwig (1997), A. Boal (1994), D. Conte, S. Langley (2007), A. Rhine (2018).

Since Ukrainian independent theater is a rather young phenomenon, its problems have been studied by several figures, in particular, N. Miroschnychenko (2017), O. Miroschnychenko (2018), and N. Nezhdana (2018), and also a study was conducted by the NGO “Cultural Assembly” (Vasyliiev and others, 2018).

Unresolved issues. Researchers have done considerable work to highlight the principles and forms of theatrical art. Despite a sufficient number of scientific works on the activities of independent theaters, this topic remains insufficiently studied, and practical recommendations need to be updated over time because theatrical reform has not taken place over the years.

Given the enormous power and social value of the theater, it is worth tracing the trends of the Ukrainian theater environment, which have not only theatrical but also sociological significance. First of all, the activity of independent theaters deserves attention because they are active participants in social and political life, highlight important moments of modern history, and become a platform for raising socially important and topical issues. Despite this, independent organizations have rather difficult conditions for their existence and lack of resources which prevents them from performing their functions.

Theatre management, producing, and performing arts administration offer a broad, comprehensive, and inclusive view of theatre management, based on the premise that all performing arts share the same basic concerns: creating or presenting works that are artistically satisfying to audiences following their objectives, finding and retaining audiences, ensuring the financial and creative well-being of the organization or production, and maintaining good human resources and community relations.

In addition to dealing with basic management issues, theatre management also deals with broader issues that affect all performing arts: mission statements, legal organization and structure, personnel, venue, budgeting, box office and ticket sales, fundraising, marketing, public relations, advertising, and performance management.

Because of this, the activities of theatre managers and producers, as well as the peculiarities of functioning in the Ukrainian cultural space, require deeper study to increase the efficiency of the organizations in general.

Particular attention should also be paid to the models of financing and organizational structure of theaters of various legal forms, focusing on the experience of foreign organizations. Changing approaches to strategy formation can positively affect the state of the theater environment and independent institutions in Ukraine.

2. Purpose and methods

The purpose and research tasks. The purpose of the article is to develop theoretical foundations and practical recommendations for improving the organization of theatrical activities within the non-governmental sector of culture.

Achieving this goal necessitated the following research tasks:

- to reveal the essence, role, and importance of the activities of independent theater organizations;
- to identify the problems of the existence of independent theaters;

- to develop methods for improving the work of theater organizations in the independent sector of culture and theater reform;
- to identify the peculiarities of management of independent cultural sector entities.

Methodology and methods. The methodological basis of the study is the general provisions of the theory of scientific knowledge, the principles of scientificity, consistency, and unity of theory and practice. The work is based on dialectical, empirical, and systematic approaches, which made it possible to summarize the theoretical and practical achievements accumulated by the community in the context of organizing the activities of modern theaters. Using the empirical approach based on own observations, it is possible to study the peculiarities of the professional component of the theater manager, identify new factors in it, and, based on this, draw conclusions and practical recommendations. A systematic approach is used to highlight the problems of organizing the activities of independent theaters, components of the professional competence of a modern theater manager.

To achieve this goal, a set of methods was used, including analysis, synthesis, systematization, and generalization, which allowed to organize scientific sources of domestic and foreign researchers and official documents on state cultural policy in the field of theater in Ukraine; using the situational method, the conditions, and circumstances of the theater manager's work were identified; the comparative method of research was used in comparing European and domestic models of theatrical activity organization; comparative method in comparing different forms of theatrical organization; modeling in predicting possible scenarios for the development of the theatrical environment in Ukraine; observation in collecting empirical data on the object of study.

Information base. The information base of this research is made up of scientific works of domestic and foreign scientists on the theory, history and organization of theater business, the problems of the independent sector of culture, reforming the existing system; the Law of Ukraine "On Theater and Theater Business" (2005). The results of the research are also based on my own experience gained through work in the independent theater «Center for Contemporary Art "DAKH"».

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Problems of independent theater existence

Independent theatre is outside of repertory theatres or so-called "permanent stages". It emerged as an alternative and in opposition to such theatres. In most European countries, it still represents a separate theatrical culture, but it always demands modernity and even explores new ways, going beyond the boundaries and conventions.

Since its inception, the independent theatre has been changing: structurally, in its artistic orientation, and social positioning. This transformation has its roots in the changed circumstances of the times, thanks to the new generation and life experience of the people who are now working in the theatre field. The same applies to the audience. Many things have been eliminated, such as tiered pricing and the hierarchy of seats. In this way, independent theatre responds to the audience's expectations of "other theatre" even in its artistic form, which allows for the unwieldy and imperfect and which experiences the unusual, challenging the audience as it goes.

The idea of national theatre stands for a continuity of tradition that has been revered in almost all European theatre cultures since the nineteenth century. But internationally oriented independent theatre allows its audiences to experience theatre from other countries and other cultures more often than is possible on the "traditional stage". Independent theatre, however, reflects the social complexity and change in European societies even more acutely: in its challenges, its transcendence of national theatre cultures, and its experimentation with new, more flexible production structures. By its very nature, independent theatre is an international community of young artists.

In Ukraine, independent artists, groups, and theaters emerged in the 1990s because then the ideological restrictions in public and theatrical life were weakened, after the abolition of censorship, theaters were finally able to independently form their repertoire.

The Revolution of Dignity became one of the stages of Ukraine's development in the period of restored independence and revealed all existing social problems, the illusory nature of democracy, an insufficient departure from the Soviet system, lack of reforms and changes. The active artistic community, which united in the Assembly of Cultural Figures in 2014, showed that the theatrical system of Ukraine turned out to be one of the most outdated, compared, for example, with cinematography or literary and publishing business, where independent film companies and publishing houses have long become participants of state programs and make up the majority compared to state ones.

According to statistics, today in Ukraine there are 113 theaters of state and municipal ownership (*Figure 1*).

Since the 1990s, there have been more than 200 independent theatre organizations in Ukraine. Today, there are more than 100 of them in Kyiv, three times more than the number of state theatres, and their number in Ukraine is over 300 (Vasyliiev et al., 2018, p. 124). Mostly independent institutions cease to exist due to a lack of funding or premises. They conducted many experiments in the early 1990s, but this did not change Ukrainian theatre in general. The environment still remains traditional, inflexible, and rigid. The lack of cultural reforms, the outdated cultural policy structure, and the uncertain economic conditions make

it difficult for independent theatres to operate in today's Ukraine and have an extremely unfavourable impact on the development of new groups.

Independent theaters actively use modern Ukrainian and foreign drama, new methods, invite young artists and international figures, and open studios. They embody modern organizational forms that are more economically efficient. Artists of independent theaters are the same citizens of Ukraine as workers of state theaters and work for the same citizens, but all of them have no benefits and support, and their taxes are given to the state (Husieva, 2018).

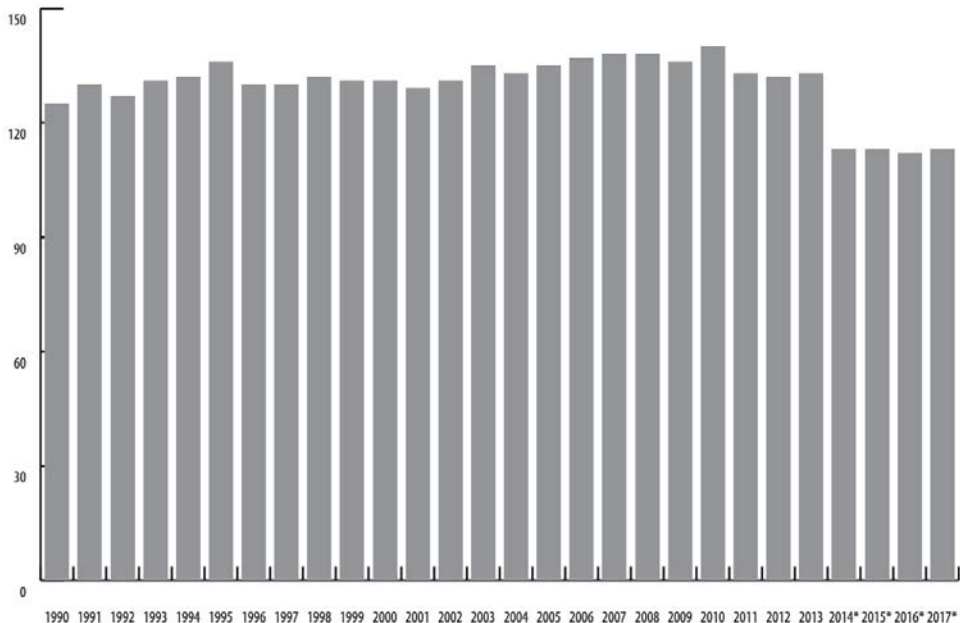


Figure 1. Number of theaters of state and municipal forms of ownership
Source: developed on the basis of (Vasyliiev et al., 2018, p. 124)

In other European countries, independent theatres are in the absolute majority and have the opportunity to work in state theatre premises, as well as receive grants and benefits. Instead, repertory state and municipal theatres usually make up a small percentage. Also, the relations between theatrical organizations of different forms of ownership have changed over the past decades. In Ukraine, independent theatrical institutions do not have any mechanisms of work that correspond to the circumstances and economic realities. Also, national priorities of the state within the theater sector have not been developed, and the popularization of this activity abroad is at a low level.

Independent theatre reflects social complexity and change in society: in its themes, its transcendence of national theatre cultures, and its experimentation with new, more flexible production structures. By its very nature, it is an inter-

national community of young artists. Unlike large cultural institutions, the so-called “independent cultural scene” is, by definition, open. This means that it is accessible to topics, people, and artistic or aesthetic forms of expression that do not always find a place within traditional cultural institutions. Through independent theatre companies, music groups, or artistic initiatives, alternative narratives and models of interpreting urban and social reality can be explored. However, access to funding and venues is not equal, which significantly affects the quality and further existence of companies. Furthermore, it is impossible to draw a clear line around the “independent scene” because many initiatives would not be able to exist without state or even institutional funding or direct connection with public institutions.

As you might assume, funding for independent theatre companies varies greatly from country to country (Brauneck, 2017, p. 231). Firstly, there is financial support from the relevant ministry of culture. It consists of project, long-term, and short-term funding. Secondly, financial support is also offered at the municipal or regional level. In this case, there are also different provisions regarding prerequisites and decision-making. Thirdly, financial support can be obtained from large companies. Fourthly, private funding can also be obtained through individual sponsors. Fifthly, international cultural organizations such as the Goethe Institute and the British Council also offer project funding. Finally, there is the possibility of partial funding through ticket sales. The income from sales is usually quite low, so it is only a small part of the theatre’s income. Also, international cooperation and networks provide opportunities for financial support. But despite the available funding opportunities, production, and performance, conditions for independent groups and artists are unstable, while state theatres are mostly fully funded by the state and have permanent venues.

Independent theatre usually operates with a limited budget, lack of resources, and small profits. It tends to believe strongly in certain ideals and often tries to survive on box office receipts and donations, but in recent years, it has become increasingly dependent on public and private subsidies. Those companies that cannot obtain adequate funding usually face bankruptcy after a short time or are forced to compromise their ideals to survive. In addition to the financial aspect of independent theatres existence, there is also the issue of premises, as they have to find or create venues for their performances without receiving subsidies and privileges from the state.

Several issues affect the work of theatre organizations, such as legislative policy, competition, sources of funding, and other cultural activities. From a legal point of view, the question is whether theatres should be included in non-profit organizations or not. It is important to distinguish between non-profit organizations, non-governmental organizations, and governmental organizations. Theaters are part of non-profit organizations, are part of state organizations,

and are financed by funds from local and state budgets. Their main goal is to democratize culture, facilitate access to cultural values and promote local and universal artistic values. In addition to funding sources from the state and local budgets, other funding sources (sponsorship) can be obtained to attract additional financial resources for better development of activities.

The Guild of Independent Theaters of Ukraine, which was established in 2018, will also contribute to solving some problems of independent theaters. It is a platform for cooperation, monitoring, and communication of non-state theaters. Among the main activities of the Guild is the communication platform creation, non-state theaters audit, a discussion club creation, etc. Communication between state and non-state theaters is also important, as emphasized by *Olena Salata*, member of the Guild Council, and culture manager of the NGO “Cultural Assembly” (Ukraine Crisis Media Center, 2018). Other strategic plans of the Guild include the improvement of the legislative framework. Today, independent theaters are registered differently – as private entrepreneurs and as NGOs. Some theaters are not registered at all. According to the current Law of Ukraine “On Theaters and Theater Business” (2005), such activities are non-profit. “However, almost all theaters, including state ones, work as profitable enterprises and pay all taxes. We insist that theaters should have a separate organizational and legal status – theater. We will initiate amendments to the law”, *Inna Honcharova*, a member of the Guild Council. The Guild should become an all-Ukrainian union and unite independent theater groups of the country voluntarily and with the support of the stated goals and objectives (Ukraine Crisis Media Center, 2018).

The most important thing that the state should do in this area is to provide opportunities because without mechanisms and state support, the development of the industry is impossible. Grant funding mechanisms should be created, and Ukrainian theater should switch to project financing when the theater does not just receive money for a year and dispose of it, but there is a project competition. The state should develop and implement these mechanisms, make access to funds open, and equalize the rights of the public and non-governmental sectors because now the public sector does not have access to community funds.

The revenues of Ukrainian theater are quite low compared to foreign theater, although the population of Ukraine is larger than in many European countries. This can be attributed to the passivity of the potential audience, outdated methods of communication and organization of the public, and low ticket prices, taking into account the cost of creating and showing performances.

The most appropriate for the Ukrainian environment is the UK model, where the state understands the economic potential of culture (especially in tourism) and is responsible for providing it with funds. Despite the general tendency to reduce budget funding in the field of culture in Europe, the UK does

not implement it uncontrollably but encourages cultural institutions to develop independently, creating new mechanisms for adaptation. The state is trying to stimulate corporate and individual sponsorship through a system of tax incentives and is developing new opportunities for additional funding.

In terms of organizational structure, the experience of Germany is interesting where every four years a competition for the positions of theater managers is held. Different teams present their vision of the concept and development of the theater. So, institutions and the state avoid “stagnation” of personnel, and managers get the opportunity to gain experience in different theater organizations on a competitive basis, which encourages them to improve their professional skills.

The Ukrainian cultural environment, in particular the theatrical one, is at the stage of search and transition to new forms of financing and state support. But we have a huge advantage: the experience of other European countries and the possibility of using these mechanisms of additional funding in the Ukrainian cultural sector. The best way for our country is to develop alternative schemes of financing culture, according to our realities, and consistently implement them.

3.2. The role of management and marketing in the organization of independent theatrical activity

The modern theater is now in rather difficult conditions. Despite these circumstances, there are new options to improve their organizational and economic situation. The main ones are skills in marketing and management. At first glance, the impact of these areas seems to be small for the performing arts, but they are key elements for the existence and comprehensive development of the theatrical process.

Theatre marketing and management have their own specifics, so they cannot be fully compared with management and marketing in other spheres of social life. From a practical point of view, a manager can be a person who combines labor and capital to obtain the final product. From the sociological point of view, a theatre manager can be a person who influences the behaviour of employees. Usually, the profession of a manager is associated with planning, organization, recruitment, and control. According to *I. Bezghin*: “An ideal manager of a theatre project does not need to have a doctorate or vast experience in economics or theatre management. An ideal manager is, first of all, someone who is aware of an idea and makes others work for it” (2005, p. 255). Therefore, it can be said that a professional in this field should be able not only to organize and manage but also to creatively enrich, motivate and preserve the main idea of the theater.

Theatre managers oversee the administrative and production aspects of theatres. They can solve financial, marketing, and organizational problems necessary for the successful functioning of the theatre. As part of their job, these professionals oversee the theatre’s organizational structure, ticketing, marketing, budgeting, accounting, and daily operations. They also develop fundraising and promotion strategies to ensure that productions are sufficiently funded and attract large audiences to increase ticket sales. Training and compensating employees, designing and writing brochures and other marketing materials, coordinating activities between theatre staff and performances, and ensuring proper upkeep of the facilities are also shared responsibilities of theatre managers.

In addition to dealing with the management issues inherent in a clear theatre structure, the theatre manager also deals with broader issues that affect all aspects of the operation: mission statement, legal status, structure, personnel, public relations, advertising, and performance management (*Table 1*).

Table 1. Components of theater management

Administrative	Effectiveness Formal and informal institutional environment Administrative procedure and audit Budgeting Fundraising Staff recruitment Box office collections Touring
Production	Development of performances Implementation of the director’s idea Material and technical base
Communication	Formation of the mission Image support Coverage in the media Reputation and social status Public relations and public affairs Website and social networks Printed materials
Audience	Good service Accessibility Inclusiveness Prestige

Source: own development

Meeting the demands of actors, directors, production staff and audiences can also be part of the job.

The working environment for actors, directors, and theatre managers is stressful and involves constant pressure to succeed. A manager must be patient and dedicated, as well as able to withstand intense competition, grueling production schedules, and difficult working conditions, and have strong interpersonal skills and analytical thinking. Leadership and decision-making skills are also necessary to organize the work of the theatre together with other staff.

If we consider the problems of the existence and activity of independent theaters from the point of view of management, we can understand that one of the most important issues is the lack of qualified personnel. Theater management in general is not a popular field of activity in Ukraine, especially in the independent segment.

Of course, it depends not only on the financial capacity of the organization but also on its ability to attract and motivate new people. There is a big problem because we have a lot of small theatrical and performing groups that are trying to somehow raise funds but do not have sufficient qualifications and understanding of organizational processes. After the emergence of the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation, the possibility of attracting international grants, and cooperation with large institutions, new ways of obtaining funding have appeared. But we are talking not only about the monetary component, we need to understand how to allocate the resource as efficiently as possible to get the best result. It is in the organization of management and marketing processes that the question arises.

In the structure of a theatrical organization, artists cannot exist separately from management because it does not allow them to effectively create a new product and fulfill the artistic intention. Work on planning, search for additional funding, personnel management, ticket sales, market analysis, communications, and marketing adds value to the artistic work. Promotion is one of the key functions of organizational activity because without it there will be no audience that will buy tickets and see the performance. The socio-economic potential of culture cannot be revealed without quality management. It is a key tool for the effective use of existing resources and the interest and awareness of the audience, the theater's income from ticket sales depends on advertising.

For foreign institutions, the presence of a theatre project manager or producer has become an integral part of the organisational process, and even theatre directors can have this profession. In Ukraine, this knowledge is already used in state and independent theatres but still needs to be improved, with a focus on the experience of other countries.

The development of the cultural environment and the constantly changing theatrical reality increases the importance of managers as an integral part

of a modern theatrical organization. Also, in recent years, we can observe the growing influence of marketing in the theatre sector, as institutions are interested in attracting a wider audience and increasing profits from their activities. Therefore, the level of management and marketing is an important criterion for the success of the theatrical product.

There are two types of marketing – “social” and “profitable”. According to researchers, the object of “social” marketing is the public authorities, sponsors, and part of the public, and “profitable” marketing is the high-income part of the public. The non-commercial component of theater marketing is manifested in the creation and promotion of the market of specific artistic values and achieving a positive response from the audience, the public, the media, and theater critics. The commercial component is aimed, on the one hand, at securing funding and support from the state, sponsors, patrons, and other donors; on the other hand, at meeting the demand of the audience and obtaining targeted profit on this basis. Both components of marketing, both commercial and non-commercial, “work” for the theatre to gain a certain competitive position in the market (Vasyliiev et al., 2018, p.79).

It is very important for theaters now to “create” their audience and not to try to reach the widest possible range of the existing public. If you constantly focus on the average consumer, you can lose the meaning and value of the artistic activity. Effective management of two factors – tickets and audience which directly determine the level of profit received, can increase the efficiency of the theater and reduce the need for state support.

Since the state is currently unable to increase the number of subsidies for theatrical activities, and the support from public funds and sponsors is rather insignificant, theaters must develop their competitiveness and improve their market position. Therefore, the main task for the management now is to attract a wider audience and profitable sales of performances, for which it is necessary to constantly analyze the environment and know the laws of the market. So, the activities of theater managers and marketers in today’s conditions are aimed at monetizing the social value of the theater. Features of these processes encourage one to look for new approaches to the organization of creative activity. Successful management of theaters of various organizational forms is possible with the interaction of the state, public foundations, and sponsors to support theaters, so now it is necessary to use the existing experience of foreign figures, taking into account Ukrainian realities.

4. Conclusions

The results of the study allowed us to define the concept of independent theatrical initiatives and the role of managers in the organization of their activities and come to the following conclusions:

1. The great social significance of independent theatre is based on its acuteness and the use of innovative forms of activity. Due to their flexibility, independent organizations can exist in difficult conditions and perform their functions.

2. The main problems in the future of independent theatres are the lack of financial resources and the lack of premises. In recent years, European states have been reoriented to support the independent sector by diversifying funding, introducing incentives, and creating the necessary legislative framework. In Ukrainian realities, it is necessary to reform and update the models of the theatrical environment, using the experience of foreign countries. It is also necessary to create a new network of venues and art centers to expand opportunities and improve the position of theaters.

3. The possibility of reforming the theater sphere lies in two areas: state support and theaters' activities. The state must ensure the development of cultural and art institutions, which consists in creating an effective model of financial and logistical support based on equitable distribution. The performance of theatrical institutions can be improved by redistributing funds, introducing a project-based model of existence, increasing the efficiency of staff, and expanding the range of potential audiences.

4. Today, theatre managers perform a key function in ensuring the activities of theatres, as they are involved in all stages of the creation and promotion of the performance. Particular emphasis can be placed on the management of organizations in the independent sector, given its instability and lack of resources. Ukraine needs to improve the national school of theatre management and production, providing access to the practical knowledge, to improve the skills of management personnel in institutions.

The scientific novelty. The scientific novelty of the obtained results lies in the deepening of the theoretical foundations of the organization of independent theaters on the basis of generalization of the best world experience in this field of culture.

The significance of the study. The significance of the study is manifested in the expansion of knowledge in the field of organization of independent theaters and the possibility of their use in the process of reforming the theatrical sphere of Ukraine.

Prospects for further research. The prospect of further research in this area may be the development of organizational structures and mechanisms for financing the independent theater sector.

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Information about the Author:

Mariia Yakovenko, Master Student, Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts, 36, Ye. Konovaltsia St., Kyiv 01601, Ukraine; e-mail: badmeduza44@gmail.com; orcid id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0728-6657>