

# From Local to Global – An Overview of the Croatian National Theatre in the Era of Globalization

Ana Penjak

University of Split, Faculty of Kinesiology, Department of Foreign Languages, Split, Croatia

## ABSTRACT

*The article offers an overview of the Croatian National Theatre research. It comes in two parts. The first examines the position theatre in the era of globalization, while the second focuses on the Croatian National Theatre, in the era of globalization, in the context of specific social and national interests, as well as within the limits of the national possibilities. What emerges in this overview is a feel for how complex the field of theatre research is in Croatia, given its specific position since there are four National Theatres in a country of approximately 4 million people. Also, local budgets and the lack of strategical plan and programme for culture in general represent a sort of limitation. The article ends with two conclusions: a) the Croatian National Theatres in the effort to go global experience primarily different economic status; b) the article draws attention to the present and future challenges that the Croatian National Theatres are faced with, posed by issues such as correlation between globalization and theatre.*

**Key words:** budget, Croatia, global, local, national, theatre

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## Introduction: The Croatian Culture and Globalization

The connections between local and global are rather new in the human history. Globalization is not something that exists 'elsewhere'<sup>1</sup>, but it is the local phenomenon affecting everyday life. Globalization is the way we think of ourselves, as well as our relationships with the others. Our everyday experience is essentially local, even though this local experience is increasingly shaped by global processes, as asserts John Tomlinson<sup>2</sup>. If we apply the above mentioned to the theatrical world, we conclude that the process is by no way simple. As Škvob-Đokić<sup>3</sup> says, the general growth and the variety of cultural traditions at the global market enables us easier approach to various cultural and theatrical production. In addition, Škvob-Đokić argues that one of the major conditions to enter the global cultural world is by cultural variety values of individual creativity enriched with national and ethnical culture<sup>4-6</sup>.

Croatian culture, like those of many other nations, comprises a set of heterogenous and, at times, contradictory values. Recently, however, Croatian culture has been

facing great challenge in the form of multimedia products that are being distributed through different ways of expressions<sup>7,8</sup>. These products vary from very elaborate performances produced by the qualified individuals (Rade Šerbedžija – one man show, reproducing Miroslav Krleža at the Split Summer Festival, 2010), groups (Theatre Ulysess Brijuni and their presentation of the play King Lear by Lenka Udovički), or by amateurs in a form of street events<sup>9</sup>. Mass production emerges as the result of generally approachable means of technological progress used in a propiate or an unpropiate way (displaying a human body). Because multimedia and mass production invaded unprepared Croatian culture, the culture resulted in the fragmentation of its values. Explining the fragmentation of culture one comes to the recognition of the individual personalities and their individual choices that split global vision into fragments<sup>10</sup>.

Because cultural is the rapid transmitting of ideas, attitudes and values across national borders, it generally leads to interconnectedness and interaction among peo-

ples of diverse cultures and their lifestyle<sup>11</sup>. According to Mosquera<sup>12</sup>, cultural globalization provokes, at the same time, excitement and fear in individuals and society. Excitement results as a momentary pleasure that later on, elaborated by individual mind, may lead to fear of the unknown. Culturally, globalization threatens local customs that act as a source of national identity<sup>13</sup>. Economic expansion of the West, by which we consider countries that politically form the group of developed capitalistic society (all Western Europe) divided by countries on the same continent but with a different social system, has brought with itself its culture. The global adoption of the Western culture has brought about the general approach to new ways of seeing and understanding once own cultural values.

This article sets itself to show how the Croatian National Theaters reflect national trends (national/traditional mixed with modern trends) flooded by numerous new ideas in relations to which the Croatian National Theaters could not stay immune.

### *Era of the two -isms: nationalism and globalism*

When talking about nationalism, we often refer to feelings of belonging to a nation and a state. Also, we may be referring to the support of political doctrines that emphasize the interest of one nation, or ethnic group, over those of other nations, or other ethnic groups<sup>14</sup>. Globalism, too, can be viewed from two perspectives: political and economic<sup>15</sup>. First, it may stand for a political ideology trying to establish a single global system. Second, almost invisible, multinational companies interfere into national economies making it depended on their capital that primarily includes investments. This relationship between the two -isms in Croatia has not yet reached the necessary level of assimilation. Hopefully it will happen in the future<sup>16</sup>.

War in the 1990s, primarily with Serbia on the one side, and Bosnia and Herzegovina on the other hindered Croatian cultural development. Since Croatia has become independent in 1991, its foreign policy has been trying to adopt European standards in all sectors of life including culture<sup>17,18</sup>.

While Giddens describes living in a globalized world as walking through a self-service market, Jandrovčić claims that it is a process of harmonization and a standardization of social and political life around the world, suggesting that it is a step towards truly integrated international community. Forty or so years ago, McLuhan also conceived the notion of the global village<sup>8</sup>. He described as something positive that enables people around the world to connect with each other in order to exchange ideas and information. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the phenomenon of globalization was recognised widely, people in many countries understood it as a threat to their own national wellbeing. It became apparent only later that such reaction was due to uncertainty in the face of change because, step by step, people realised that the change has brought some benefit they were not aware of. Hence, no country that has been touched by

globalization has managed to avoid adopting some of aspects of it. Italy, recently, proved it with an international production of *Rigoletto* by Giuseppe Verdi (8<sup>th</sup> September, 2010) produced by the unified artist from Italy and France that could be seen all over the world (it was broadcast online on and other stations in Europe, including Croatian HRT1). While some countries, such as Rumania and Bulgaria have no major problems in adapting globalism, others (Hong Kong and Singapore) are still trying to cope with it whether more, or less successfully. It is clear that the British, for example, with their long tradition and self-independence have always thought that they are the world for themselves and that the rest is the continent. Still, modern time makes the British think there might be a certain threat. Croatia, for example, is just a minute part of that continent that is inevitably looking over the fence out of her borders. While becoming a member of the NATO, and full of hope of becoming the member of EU, Croatia can not boast with any evidence of coming closer to the cultural trends present in Europe and in the rest of the world. The cultural isolation from foreign cultural politics is not a solution. Even in this field we should be prepared to respond positively to the present cultural challenges<sup>18–20</sup>.

Furtheron, the situation in Croatia is a bit different from the other countries in transition<sup>21</sup>. In post-transitional cultural and theatrical development phases, Croatian culture and the National Theaters have started to abandon their own ethnic and national identification frames. It seems that with the disintegration of Yugoslavia, national and international cooperation, as well as mutual exchange of people, texts and performances has mostly stopped<sup>16,17</sup>. While with some National Theatres, like Slovenian, Bosnian and Macedonian, the cooperation was kept, or was occasional (Italy, Spain, Hungary), with Serbian and Montenegrin theatres it was cut off. Recently there has been a certain revival of the cooperation between national and international theatres. It is mostly based on or individual efforts, their works and ideas, on performances of foreign artists (Festival of Foreign Theatre in Zagreb, 2010; International Festival of Puppet Theatre in Zagreb, 2010), and on a few invitations of Croatian ensemble to some international festivals (Zagreb Youth Theatre (ZKM) presented its play »Garaža« by Ivica Bulja in theatre »La MaMa« in New York in 2010).

### **Fundamental Problems of the Croatian National Theatre in the Era of Globalization**

Knowledge of English is the must in the expansion of cultural and theatrical life in Croatia. »Everpresent English«, as Borges called it, is the universally recognized language of communication, rejecting the possibility of using any other language including Esperanto. But, the knowledge of this international language is not the only important fact. There are also some other elements (political and financial strategy, publicity, international broadcasting, various forms of media) that appear to be

important at least partially, if not entirely, for one country to resist in the era of globalization.

Crisis is the key word that explains Croatian everyday life that comprises culture in general<sup>22</sup>. One can expect a certain conflict in 'such a situation' on local, regional, and/or national levels that tries to diverge ideas coming from theatre as to please their own aspirations. In their arguments they give such importance and energy as if it were something of the global interest. The crisis effects mostly the National Theatres, although there are those independent ones (City Drama Theatre (GDK) Gavella, Zagreb Youth Theatre (ZKM), Theatre & So on (ITD), Theatre Ulysses, etc.) that act freely and view the reality according to their own standpoint. Apart from the specialized theatrical magazines, little is spoken in public about serious intellectual thinking that the function of theatre is. Once again we are being faced with the problem of what theatre critics think. Sometimes, they seem indifferent pretending not to see what is going on behind the stage. Other times, they simply do not care. It is the way they put themselves aside avoiding any responsibility towards the opposite opinions that might come from those who stand on the other side and are involved institutionally, financially and productively in theatre<sup>23</sup>.

Namely, to better understanding the basic problem, when it comes to the national stage, two questions emerge: what the Croatian National Theatre presents to us today – the means or objectives, or it is the means to reach the objective<sup>24</sup>?

No doubt, theatre should be used as means to reach the objective which is the recognition of the national identity inside globally interconnected states<sup>25</sup>. The result could be higher value of theatrical and cultural activity that would reinforce social and economical development. We should not forget that the key role in all developing strategies is inevitable influenced by economic power of the state, its financial position, trade, and production in general. Croatian cultural development strategical plan might have been brought about, but the present conditions do not guarantee its realization<sup>19–22</sup>.

Vjeran Zuppa, the eminent Croatian literary critic, tries to give correct diagnosis to the 'illness' of the Croatian theatrical institutions. He claims that the position of theatre in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is always the same. All that is, the old remains unchanged, while only the theatrical activities remain apparently different. The *new* never gets old, for it is constantly being replaced; it does not live by the artistic reputation, but by the working enthusiasm<sup>26</sup>! During the 20<sup>th</sup> century it happened in two occasions: a) during the 1920s under the directorship of Julije Benešić who established and maintained successful relationships with the dominant existing ideas, b) in the 1950s under the theatre manager of Marijan Matković when the National Theatre gave chance to new people and their fresh ideas. While the two above mentioned examples show aesthetic and artistic theatrical values, in accordance with the existing cultural trends. Starting with the structure of today's repertoire (all sequences –

opera, drama, ballet – are being performed on the same stage showing limited possibilities), we can not be satisfied with any creative changes, yet.

In the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century structural strategy has been going in two directions: nomination of theatre management, and defining financial funds<sup>27</sup>. In Croatia, culture gets less than 1% of the national budget. Often, if not always, culture gets supported by sponsorship. Out of that the biggest portion goes to major public projects in theatre, film, editorial activities<sup>17</sup>.

The author of this essay would like to present exact financial data of the Croatian National Theatres. They reveal all the previously mentioned situations and real possibilities on all levels.

Croatia has approximately 4 million inhabitants. It also has 4 National Theatres: the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb (HNK Zagreb), the Croatian National Theatre in Osijek (HNK Osijek), the Croatian National Theatre in Split (HNK Split), and the Croatian National Theatre Ivana pl. Zajc Rijeka (HNK Ivan pl. Zajc Rijeka). The Law on Theatres<sup>28</sup> defines them as specific institutions established for the purpose of public performance of drama, opera, operetta, ballet and puppet theatre. (Art.1). Furtheron, theatres can be either national, regional, municipal, or private. The same Law defines these four theatres as national ones, except Zagreb Theatre considered as the metropolitan one. Following the Art.13 para.1 of the Theatrical Act (Official Gazette No.71/2006), Minister of Culture of Republic of Croatia determines the rules on criteria and standards to provide the funds for the National Theatres. Money, that provides necessary funding of programmes, expenses (salaries, stage equipment, etc.), investment, and maintenance, comes from national, regional, and local funds. The below presented data show financial situation in all four theatres from 2006 to 2009. All data are also available on the website of the Ministry of Culture<sup>29</sup> and the Ministry of Finance of Republic of Croatia<sup>30</sup> (Table 1).

According to data from Table 1, it is evident that less money for culture was given in 2006, i.e., 38.756,759 USD less than in 2007, 53.522,808 USD less than in 2008., i.e., 28.510,685 less than in 2009. Accordingly, less was provided for theatre and music-performing arts, whose budget in 2006 was only 5.950,000 USD. Theatre applications, musical and theatrical activities, administration and management were included in that budget. In 2007 the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia realized that the provided money can not meet theatre, and music activities, theatre programme, administration and management needs. So, in 2007 the Ministry of Culture passed 187.993,820 USD on culture, i.e., 38.756,759 USD more than in 2006, but 15.766,049 USD less than in 2008. In 2008, the culture got 202.759,869 USD. Compared with the previous year, budget for theatre and music-performing arts was increased by 7.359,715 USD, budget for theatre and music-performing arts programme by 1.221,169 USD, and budget for administration and management by 6.038,546 USD. While the budget in some sectors was increased in 2009, budget for the others

**TABLE 1**  
MINISTRY OF CULTURE – FINANCIAL REPORT FOR THE PERIOD 2006–2009 (USD)

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009
National budget for culture	149.237,061	187.993,820	202.759,869	177.747,746
Theatre and music-performing arts	5.950,000	14.586,283	21.845,998	22.740,846
Theatre and music-performing arts programme	5.950,000	6.715,000	7.936,169	7.521,630
Administration and management	5.950,000	7.871,283	13.909,829	15.222,616

**TABLE 2**  
CITY SPLIT FINANCIAL BUDGET (USD)

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Culture	12.477,320	15.380,070	14.524,970	15.504,340	16.586,730
Stage and music performing arts	6.616,604	7.756,646	7.806,230	8.423,449	9.084,817
Regular activities	6.169,504	7.226,246	6.147,540	6.645,300	7.183,690
HNK Split	5.232,951	6.145,500	6.326,040	6.832,300	7.380,890
Programme	144,500	236,300	178,500	187,000	197,200

was reduced significantly. National financial budget for culture in 2009 was 177.747,746, i.e., 25.012,123 USD less than in the year before. Furtheron, budget for theatre and music-performing arts increased in comparison to the previous year for 894,848 USD, resulting 22.740,846 USD in total. Budget for administration and management also increased for 1.312,887 USD in comparison to the previous year, while budget for theatre and music-performing arts programme was cut down for 585,461 USD, resulting 15.222,616 USD in total. From these data we can conclude that all sectors in culture recorded just a slight increase in budget from 2006 to 2009.

The National Theatres are directly financed by the national budget for culture, while the local theatres should be given financial support from the cities themselves. Since the author faced the lack of data, she has decided to present only budget for culture and theatre in the City of Split, while for the other three theatres – city centers data will be presented in writing (Table 2).

The City of Split has presented its basic programme and financial framework for its National Theatre (HNK Split) for the period 2010–2013. For 2010 it has already been presented in Table 2.; 2011 – 197,200 USD was planned for programme activities; 2012 – 6.829,208 USD, i.e., 5.632,008 USD more than in the previous year; 2013 – 7.034,084 USD, i.e., 204,876 USD, more than in 2012 and 6.836,884 USD more than in 2011<sup>31</sup>.

The City of Rijeka has presented its basic programme and financial framework for its National Theatre, i.e., HNK Ivana pl. Zajc for the period 2011–2014. In their budget aproved by the City authorities, expenditures have been planned as following: 2011 – 7.287,390 USD for programme activities; 2012 – 7.287,390 USD for programme activities; in 2013 and 2014 money will be provided based on the realisation in 2012, or as it was planned in the City budget for 2013–2014. HNK Ivana pl. Zajc planned for 2010 7.264,095 USD, 6.456,548 USD for

professional, administrative and technical staff, and 5.210,98 USD for regular activities of the institution<sup>32</sup>.

The City of Osijek (HNK Osijek) has also presented its basic programme and financial framework for the National Theatre in Osijek for the period 2009–2012. Funds for the period 2009–2012 are 2.222,750 USD.

Data for the City of Zagreb referring to the programme and financial framework of its National Theatre (HNK Zagreb) were available only for 2010 in amount of 7.769,000 USD.

Based on these data we can conclude that the theatre legislation in Croatia has been making slow but evident progress. The lack of finance in this field is not an exclusive phenomenon in Croatia<sup>16</sup>. Possible measures to achieve some changes are numerous. Some of them are: creating qualitative repertoire, long-term planning, more qualitative work conditions, possibility of organizing workshops, seminars, various scholarships, frequent exchange of actors and performances, guest performances, powerful PR either in small communities, or on the national level. Not less importance would be to cooperate with other theatres on all three levels: national, regional, and local. It is important to point out that the same objectives can be found in the Croatian Cultural Policy report (1998) published by the Ministry of Culture following the requirement of the European Council. Council suggests positive view, pointing out the importance of national identity. Based on Croatian Cultural Development Strategy document, Evaluation of this Report was positive. In this document objectives and means of Croatian cultural development were defined. Among the objectives of cultural development in the area of theatre, one can find the tendency towards more efficient cooperation among National Theatres<sup>27</sup>. Furtheron, the main strategical objective was to establish particular independent funds relaying on their own financial capacity<sup>27</sup>. But the most important need, according to Andrea Zlatar, is the

change in the approach of managing in cultural and theatrical institutions<sup>33</sup>. As Zlatar says, strategic plan should contain all the necessary changes in accordance with financial and strategic analysis for it could foster theatrical activities in general.

*Examples of national theaters in the world and the way they face globalization*

Numerous studies done especially by the countries of Southeast Europe and Asian, show that Croatia is not the only one trying to find its way in the field of theatrical activities. Major difference among those countries and Croatia is in the nature of problem. The greatest obstacle presents the language – English language. As Kay Li<sup>34–35</sup> has shown in her observation, China is the one facing the language problem. Here we come not only to the problem of language, but to the race as well – physical characteristics, as Kay Li points out. She gives the example of the classical play *Pygmalion* by G. B. Shaw, in the Chinese version, i.e., *Yaotiao Shun*. Central character is Henry Higgins, professor of phonetics, who bets to teach Eliza Doolittle, flower girl, to speak correct English. It seems surprising that the National Theatre in Hong Kong has decided to make this play a part of their repertoire! What is more surprising is that they are trying to present the play as their national one. In the play they did not change only the place of action, but they showed the flower girl To Lan-heung from Taishan. She is the one who asks professor Tam Ying-kit to teach her English as to become an assistant at the florist's. The professor takes her to a garden party at the governor's house where the meeting of the University of Hong Kong is convened. At the party she is presented to be the illegitimate daughter of a British peer. While Eliza Doolittle attends lessons in phonetics, To Lan-heung asks the professor to give her lessons so that she could, like Eliza, sell flowers to rich customers.

The language question is the key issue in the original version of the play. It becomes basis for cultural and social politics in the Chinese version. Eliza's dialect turns into To Lan-heung's mixture of three dialects: Chiu Chow, inherited from her father, Punya, inherited from her mother, and the Taishan dialect, adopted by her step-

mother. This is how Eliza presents the local Chinese girl. The same happens to the other characters in the play. They all get local characteristics. Colonel George Pickering becomes Dr. Ma Tung-loi, the Chinese who speaks English with Malaysian accent.

Ko Tin-lung, director of Hong-Kong National Theatre, said to the leading English newspaper *South China Morning Post*, that he considered the play to be real refreshment. He also believes that it gives Hong-Kong Theatre possibility to overcome the language barriers between East and West. If I open my mind to the imagination, I may say that if we accept the novelties or not, still nothing is immune to the process of globalization.

Alvaray<sup>36</sup> gives example of Latin America and the way that country tries to keep its national identity in the era of globalization making, at the same time, the world familiar with their own cultural production. Here we deal with film *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004) directed by the Brazilian film director Walter Salles. Protagonist is the Latin – American film star, Gael García Bernal, together with many other successful musicians from all over the world, such as Gustavo Santaolalla, famous for his music in film *Brokeback Mountain* (2005). The success of *The Motorcycle Diaries* was enormous – \$ 57.6 millions.

## Conclusion

Culture as an investment that brings profit have never gone hand in hand. We are the witnesses of this reality. Culture, if it does not bring profit, might become ideology. It has been happening worldwide, including Croatia.

The focus of this essay was to show that money, whether on national or local level, has had an important role in the theatrical development in Croatia. It seems that the transitional period some countries go through, has involved theatrical policy sometimes influenced by local, and sometimes by national interests. Silence may be the answer to all of that. However, it seems that some changes are necessary if Croatia wants to present its theatrical production to the world. It will take time, but having always the permanent vision of what national interest is, and our capacities are in the field.

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A. Penjak

University of Split, Faculty of Kinesiology, 6 Teslina Street, 21000 Split, Croatia  
e-mail: [ana.penjak@kifst.hr](mailto:ana.penjak@kifst.hr)

## OD LOKALNOG DO GLOBALNOG – PREGLED HRVATSKOG NACIONALNOG KAZALIŠTA U ERI GLOBALIZACIJE

### S A Ž E T A K

Članak nudi pregled istraživanja Hrvatskog nacionalnog kazališta. Podijeljen je u dva dijela. Prvi dio pruža općeniti pregled kazališta u eri globalizacije, dok se u drugom dijelu propituje Hrvatsko nacionalno kazalište u eri globalizacije, u kontekstu specifičnih društvenih i nacionalnih pitanja, ali i unutar granica nacionalnih mogućnosti. Ono što slijedi u ovom pregledu jest jasna slika kompleksnosti istraživanja pitanja kazališta u Hrvatskoj, imajući na umu njen specifičan položaj i činjenicu da se radi o zemlji s oko 4 milijuna stanovnika i četiri nacionalna kazališta. Lokalni financijski izvori i nedostatak strateškog plana i programa za kulturu općenito također predstavlja nedostatak. Članak završava s dva zaključka: a) Hrvatska nacionalna kazališta u nastojanju da se suoče s globalnim kontekstom prvenstveno se susreću s različitim ekonomskim statusom; b) članak želi usmjeriti pozornost na sadašnje i buduće izazove s kojima se Hrvatska nacionalna kazališta suočuju, kao što je upravo pitanje odnosa globalizacija i kazališta.