

DIE FIBEL

A Primer for Independent Theatre



SUPPORT-ENVIRONMENT

IN LOWER SAXONY



Editorial



You have a sparkling idea for a theatre project of your own and no clue how to set about it? What does it take to realise a piece or a performance? How to finance your production? What's the best way to advertise and make the press write about you? And what legal regulations do you need to adhere to?

Lower Saxony is big and colourful – the Independent Theatre scene in particular is very lively and diverse. We welcome you to this community! The Association of Independent Theatre in Lower Saxony (*Landesverband Freier Theater in Niedersachsen, LaFT*) and the

Theaterhaus Hildesheim (TH) know their way about the scene and give advice on all matters at hand. Now we have distilled our many years of experience and created ***A Primer for Independent Theatre***, a concrete practical instruction guide in several brochures for Independent Theatre professionals. The Primer offers first steps for newcomers but is also suitable as a definitive update for the advanced.

Good luck from: Martina von Bargaen, Maria Gebhardt, Uta Lorenz, Ulrike Seybold, Carola Streib.
English translation by Mark Roberts.

Signets

We have flagged certain sections in ***A Primer for Independent Theatre*** with pictograms to indicate notes we wished to highlight, definitions, or tips. Aspects you should give special atten-

tion to when creating your project are marked with the pictogram 'attention'. The authors chose simplified icons of the respective sign language words.



Attention



Example



Definition



Note

Gender

A Primer for Independent Theatre was written in gender aware language. After conferring with a diversity consultant at the university of Leipzig, the authors chose a language model that was meant to allow self-recognition to a maximum of readers and to avoid the 'gender-gap'.

Aiming to reach the same goal in the English version of the Primer, the translator consulted a professor at the university of Hildesheim and has attempted to follow her advice.

Gender



In order to do justice to all gender classifications, readers should be given the opportunity to classify themselves.



1. The basics

One of the main aspects of Independent Theatre is the absence of fixed and permanent financing. All Independent Theatres draw their income from a mix of various sources, including funding. Mostly they are granted project funds. That means that only one particular encounter per funding is financed, usually a production. Ways of receiving permanent, structural funds or support for larger investments are scarce and unfortunately the rare exception.

The following is a few classifying notes regarding the main financiers of Independent Theatre in Lower Saxony and

a few tips where to further search for possible funding for your project. We make no claim to be complete. Even if, at first, some support tools may not seem to fit for you, it is still wise to familiarise yourself with the variety available and not to let yourself be confused or put off.

It isn't easy to assess which of the funding sources provide you with a moderate chance of being accepted, whether your group is entitled to a particular grant at all, and which amount you should sensibly apply for, particularly if you're only just beginning. In order to avoid unnecessary work and frustration you should therefore definitely get advice. Even at a later stage it is worthwhile to regularly reconsider which money sources could be applicable for your theatre's current situation. You can get concrete and detailed counselling from the Association of Independent Theatre in Lower Saxony (*Landesverband Freier Theater in Niedersachsen, LaFT*) and the *Theaterhaus Hildesheim (TH)* at any time.

2. The main financiers

2.1. PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

2.1.1. MUNICIPAL FUNDING

How the municipalities finance Independent Theatre in Lower Saxony varies. Mostly they give money for projects – with an emphasis on original productions – on an annual basis. In general, municipal funding lends itself to young groups as the basic financing source. When in doubt, inquire at your town's cultural office. Larger cities will have the relevant information on their websites.

Lower Saxony's capital Hannover, for instance, currently provides a comparatively large EUR 700,000 for Independent Theatre through an intricate system of grants. How other towns give grants differs a great deal. Small towns and rural areas in particular tend to possess vanishingly small cultural budgets, often without any specific theatre means at all. Inform yourself of the conditions in the community where you live and/or wish to work. For instance,

most towns and communities will only support projects by artists that actually live in the respective area. In certain circumstances some will participate in guest performances or other projects that bear a reference to the town, even if carried out by outside artists.

In addition to project funding there are other support tools for venues and established groups, not all of which are limited to the annual period. You will see different terms in different places. Basic funding (*Basisförderung, Grundförderung*), structural development (*Strukturförderung*), conception promotion (*Konzeptionsförderung*), continuity promotion (*Kontinuitätsförderung*). None of these longer-term grant systems are useful for groups only just beginning.

2.1.2. REGIONAL CULTURE FUNDING IN LOWER SAXONY

Lower Saxony has 13 regions (*Landschaften*) and regional authorities (*Landschaftsverbände*) who have as-





sumed certain functions of an intermediate level of government discontinued in 2004. Specifically, they are responsible for the promotion of culture on behalf of the federal state Lower Saxony. In 2015 approximately EUR 460,000 were forwarded to Independent Theatre via this path.

This regional funding is intended for projects with a funding amount of less than EUR 10,000**. It goes mainly to original productions, but any sufficiently special project can also be supported, including guest performances and revivals. The purpose of these regional grants is to help projects with small to medium budgets without demanding that they be state-wide beacons. Close exchange of applicant and regional authority is explicitly desired. Therefore please approach the respective contact if you intend to apply. If your concept is coherent, even your first application stands a reasonable chance of being accepted. Most regional authorities have application deadlines at least twice a year. You can inquire about the exact dates from the regional office responsible for your case or from the LaFT.



Some regional culture promoters support Independent Theatre with regional means in addition to the federal state means. The corresponding grant conditions are sometimes more flexible. If your project just won't fit Lower Saxony's formalities, ask for such alternatives.

2.1.3. LAND NIEDERSACHSEN

One of the most important support sources for Independent Theatre in Lower Saxony is the federal state itself or, to be precise, the theatre grant programme of the Lower Saxony ministry for Science and Culture (*Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Kultur, MWK*). The MWK currently supports Independent Theatre with EUR 1.2 million per year. EUR 255,000 go into what is called conception promotion (*Konzeptionsförderung*), and a little less than EUR 600,000 finance general project support. The remainder is used for a few special events, e.g. festivals, and the institutional support of the LaFT. The main intention of general project support is to enable original productions, but in some cases small festivals or certain programmes of theatre venues can also be funded. Revivals and guest performances cannot be sup-

ported. The minimum funding amount is EUR 10,000. While there is no official maximum, experience shows that the funding amount in your application should not exceed EUR 30,000. The application deadline is always October 15th. Around the end of the year a designated advisory board determines the projects that will be funded.

In principle any Independent Theatre can apply for a grant from the general project support pool. But approvals usually go to better known groups that have already shown at least one successful production. An unknown group may be able to strike gold with an especially unique concept – but for your first production it is safer to bet on other horses. Conception promotion, on the other hand, is definitely located later in an artist's biography – for newcomers to apply for such a grant is a waste of time. Conception promotion is granted for three years. The applicant then receives between EUR 10,000 and EUR 40,000 per year. Such grants are intended to enable further conceptual development of the theatres beyond concrete project work and to provide a little financial security for a medium period. The items that are permitted

for support are manifold. Only about ten to twelve theatres/groups are selected per funding period. For this reason conception promotion can be viewed as an honouring privilege.

2.1.4. FEDERAL AND EUROPEAN MEANS

Funds granted by the federal government and by the EU play only a minor role for theatre support, particularly in a theatre group's early years. Nevertheless and for the sake of completeness they shall be mentioned here.

Responsibility for cultural affairs in Germany lies with the federal states. Therefore there is no such thing as a federal ministry for culture. The federal government offers funds mainly via the Federal Culture Foundation (*Bundeskulturstiftung*). Its annual volume is EUR 40 million and is taken directly from the budget of the federal government's secretary for culture and media. It offers general, sector-transcending project support intended mainly for large beacon projects and a number of topical furthering programmes, including the 'TURN' programme for artistic collaboration of Germany and Africa



and 'Doppelpass' (cooperation of Independent scene with state and city theatres).

The 'Fund for Performing Arts' (*Fonds Darstellende Künste*, Fonds DaKu) is a designated Independent Theatre fund and provides about EUR 700,000 per year for Independent Theatre projects. In the past it drew its means from the Federal Culture Foundation, but as of January 1st 2016 the federal means are supplied directly by the federal government's secretary for culture and media.

An established Independent Theatre group might very well be accepted for the Federal Culture Foundation or the Fonds DaKu programmes. A group's first project, however, definitely not.

If you're just beginning your career as an Independent Theatre artist you also needn't lend too much thought to support from EU means. The EU mainly finances larger investments, for instance for energetic renovation of theatre venues. Projects with participating partners from several European countries (institutions or groups, not individuals!) can also be eligible for grants

under certain conditions. The roads to an application in this area are long and winding and invariably a large percentage of own resources is demanded.



The case of socioculture. The areas "Independent Theatre" and "socioculture" overlap, and regularly Independent groups receive funding from the sociocultural sector. But by far not every Independent Theatre project is automatically sociocultural. To cut a long explanation short, the main aim of socioculture is not so much the artistic work as to involve and to activate people. So if in your project you work a lot with laypeople, embrace a particular living environment (for instance a township), or have a strong theatre pedagogic accent, applying for funds from the sociocultural sector can make sense. In principle, all the support programmes stated above exist equivalently for socioculture. But do get exhaustive advice before applying, because it is uncommon, and in some cases impossible, to finance a project from both sources at the same time.

3. Foundations




A foundation (*Stiftung*) is an institution that uses its capital to pursue a certain aim defined by the founder or founders. A foundation's capital is always preserved, the supporting of others is financed from interest yield. There is a vast number of private and public foundations in Germany. Many of them support theatre, either solely or as one of several aims. The website <http://www.stiftungen.org>, for instance, offers an overview of the numerous foundations and their sup-

port conditions. So does the brochure "Culture Foundations in Lower Saxony" (*Kulturstiftungen in Niedersachsen*, <http://ibk-kubia.de/IBK-Dateien/PDFs/Nachrichten/Kulturstiftungen-Niedersachsen.pdf>). In the following you will find initial information about a few foundations that routinely finance Independent Theatre in Lower Saxony.





 As a general rule, foundations only support charitable organisations, a status that applies to many registered societies but not to a BGB company (a civil law association, *Gesellschaft bürgerlichen Rechts*, or GbR) or a one-person business (→ *DIE FIBEL | A Primer for Independent Theatre: Legal Basics*). But it is possible to cooperate with a charitable organisation (like the LaFT or the TH), making them the officially responsible institution (→ *DIE FIBEL | A Primer for Independent Theatre: Cost and Financing Plan*).

The Stiftung Niedersachsen

One of the most important funding institutions in the state is the 'Lower Saxony Foundation' (*Stiftung Niedersachsen*). It is a state culture foundation, and its yield is expended for the furthering of art, culture, education, and science. The foundation has a programme explicitly for Independent Theatre and Dance, putting an emphasis on contemporary topics and plays. Its yearly volume is about EUR 550,000. Grants go exclusively to original productions of professional Independent Theatre groups. Applications for festivals with an expected supra-


regional impact are also welcome. The foundation itself organises the biennial 'Best OFF' festival which awards outstanding productions from Lower Saxony (see page 16 for further details).

It is sensible to apply for funding of approximately EUR 5,000. There are specific deadlines for larger projects with funding amounts of more than EUR 10,000, so that the committees can make timely decisions. These deadlines are April 30th, September 15th, and November 30th. Please note that stage fixtures, furniture and solo-performances are not supported. The foundation is probably not the proper partner for small and local first-time productions. But as soon as a group has made a bit of noise it stands a reasonable chance of being accepted. The LaFT is in constant dialogue with the Stiftung Niedersachsen. Please contact us if you intend to apply.

Foundations of the Sparkassen and Volksbanken

Two of the state's largest banks each possess a supraregional foundation that, among other things, supports art and culture. These are the 'Nied-

ersächsische Sparkassenstiftung' and the 'VR-Stiftung Volksbanken und Raiffeisenbanken in Norddeutschland'. Neither puts a specific focus on the support of Independent Theatre, and both accept only projects with statewide impact. Furthermore, each bank houses additional local foundations in many towns and districts, where an application for an Independent Theatre project is more promising. While the funds provided are usually below EUR 10,000, they are more easily approved to small projects and, as yet, relatively unknown artists. Particularly if the project bears a concrete local reference.

 Since the two banks in question are competitors you shouldn't apply for a grant at both places at ones.

The NORD/LB culture foundation

The NORD/LB culture foundation (*NORD/LB Kulturstiftung*) is a comparatively new foundation, initiated in 2012 as an institution of the 'Norddeutsche Landesbank'. Its aim is to support art and culture with monetary and non-material means in places where the bank is commercially active. It is supposed to prefer style- and topic-

spanning projects that actively support culture for selected target groups, open culture for broader audiences, and convey culture to the young. Independent Theatre groups are among the possible applicants, particularly with supraregionally visible projects. Experimental formats are especially welcome, even more so if the basic approach includes mediation. There are three application deadlines per year. The current dates can be found on the website.

The Klosterkammer Hannover

Compared to the other foundations the 'Klosterkammer Hannover' is a slightly different construction. It is a federal state authority responsible for governing four foundations of similar origin and aim. These are the 'Allgemeiner Hannoverscher Klosterfonds', the 'Domstrukturfonds Verden', the 'Stift Ilfeld' and the 'Hospitalfonds St. Benedikti in Lüneburg'. None of these are culture foundations – nevertheless the Klosterkammer allows theatre projects under certain conditions, if they serve to integrate children and youths or to reach the disadvantaged. So if your project has a strong theatre pedagogic orientation or you have a piece



for children and youths with a special mediation format, you should get information about the Klosterkammer. There are no particular application deadlines.



Topic based funding: Since the financing sources for Independent Theatre in particular and culture in general are too few to pay for all the exciting projects it is advisable to search for financiers not specifically aiming at culture but rather for those engaged with the topic your project will be dealing with. For instance if you plan to look into energy saving or the climate, you could inquire at your town's environment office. Or if your piece will tell

of new modes of working or of dementia patients, it can be profitable to see if there's a suitable foundation. Experience shows that you cannot acquire any major sums this way, but it can still be worthwhile.



Always pay close attention to the grant conditions. You're not always allowed to include general costs (administration, management, office rent, etc.) in the project plan. Similarly, investments (equipment) are usually supported only to a very limited extent. A good look at the detailed funding terms is always a good idea. Private and regional financiers often have more flexible conditions than large public funders.

4. Commercial promoters

4.1. SPONSORING

'Sponsoring' is the act of supporting a project financially or otherwise while the project, in turn, supports the sponsor's marketing goals. Individuals, companies, and organisations can each take on the role of sponsor. Sponsoring is a

part of the sponsor's public relations. It is not a question of benevolent furthering of art and culture, rather it is a plain deal: service and return service. Always keep that in mind when you start looking for sponsors.

The sponsor's contribution can be money, goods or services. Put differ-

ently, a company can support you by providing a sum of money or, for instance, rooms that you can use free of charge. The classical return service is putting the sponsor's logo in your programme, on your tickets, your posters, your website.

You can also be creative and think of other return services. The sponsor and/or his products want to be seen and heard.



You will need 400 umbrellas as part of your stage design. To have the sponsor's logo on the umbrellas and to visibly open them during the performance might be appealing to the sponsor. Whether that sort of sponsoring cooperation is a win-win situation or a sellout of your artistic integrity will have to be reconsidered for every new project. It is important to think about what you are able and willing to offer as your side of the deal even before you contact potential sponsors. Personal contact is also crucial. It is advisable to fix the sponsor's service as well as your return service in a written contract.

Independent Theatre performances don't usually generate the audience

numbers of football stadiums or Musical theatres, and they don't get the media coverage. You are therefore presumably not the proper partner for large companies with their correspondingly sized budgets. But it's worth trying to approach local firms and midsize companies. Don't expect to work wonders, though. It is no coincidence that large institutions employ whole departments for the acquisition and sustaining of sponsor partnerships. Finding sponsors takes a lot of communication work and often requires frustration tolerance. Experience shows that it is somewhat easier to get material or services from a sponsor than direct payments.

4.2. CROWDFUNDING

'Crowdfunding' describes the financing of a project by a larger group of supporters, a crowd, each individual providing only a small sum. Crowdfunding-projects are almost exclusively organised over the Internet. The website <https://www.crowdfunding.de> provides an overview of platforms offering such services. The principle is always simple: the project initiators present their project – usually in a video – and



define a minimum sum that needs to be raised before a fixed deadline, so that the project can be carried out. If it isn't, the money goes back to the supporters. Most platforms apply this all-or-nothing principle, so in a large project it is reasonable to only take the chance of crowdfunding for a small and well-defined part.

Crowdfunding doesn't magically grow money. Rather it takes a lot of communication and networking, and making the presentation video is already an effort. You should consider the costs and the benefits. If you succeed in getting the project financed by the crowd, you will usually offer a reward to the supporters. This could be public personal acknowledgement, free entry to the project, or a small gift – all this, again, takes time and possibly costs money.

Independent Theatre projects should not therefore consider crowdfunding as a substantial part of their income. But if you have a good network and are planning a unique and experimental project, it can make sense to check it out – maybe on a nice-to-have. Conventional funders like to see artists trying out alternative types of fund raising.

4.3. DONATIONS AND HONORARY ENGAGEMENT

The number of culture patrons and donors, that is people who offer monetary support for Independent Theatre without asking for a return service, is small and not suitable as a main pillar for financing the scene. But it does happen that companies or private individuals wish to donate three- or even small four-figure amounts to a particular project. Should you find yourself in such a lucky position, the following is important: for some donors the idea of donating is primarily a way of reducing their tax liability. But this only works if payment goes to a charitable organisation. As a BGB company (*GbR*, →DIE FIBEL | A Primer for Independent Theatre: Legal Basics) or individual

you cannot issue a valid donation receipt. But if you're cooperating with a registered society or other charitable institution on your project, for instance the LaFT, they can prepare an appropriate statement for you. The main difference between donation and sponsorship is that no return service is allowed for a donation. A word of thanks, of course, is permitted.

Donations in kind or donations of time are naturally also possible. Donation of time is colloquially known as honorary engagement, but strictly speaking the concept of honorary posts exists only in charitable contexts. Outside of those one would correctly call it unpaid engagement.

Wording aside, you should be cautious when work is not being paid. Among other things Independent professional theatre differs from amateur theatre in that the people concerned are at least trying to make a living. So you should try to do without unpaid work particularly in art contexts so as not to further undermine already low payment norms. Student projects are of course an exception where they are part of education. Here it is fine, fair and de-

sirable for fellow students to help one another out.

Always make sure that people donating their work do so voluntarily and for their own motivational reasons and not because the project coordinator talked them into working for nothing or almost nothing. In any case you should recognise such donations as part of your cost and financing plan and never let them get brushed under the rug. Instead list them on the incoming side.



*Only if your project is officially run by a charitable organisation are you allowed to pay honorary workers expense allowances (**Aufwandsentschädigung** as per §3.26a EStG). Up to EUR 720 per year and person are free of income tax liability when payed for honorary tasks. These EUR 720 are called the **steuerfreie Ehrenamts-pauschale**. Any additional payment is subject to income tax. When in doubt, read the regulations!*




As a non-charitable organisation you cannot reward a time donor for their help with any more than the official de minimus threshold of EUR 10 without it becoming subject to income taxation.

Anything with a value of more than EUR 10 is treated as a fee and must be declared, even if it's only a box of good chocolates.

5. Competitions, prizes, festivals, scholarships

In a way, the funding sources illustrated so far form the daily routine of Independent Theatres striving for support. There is another area that could be summarised as 'awards'. Naturally they don't lend themselves to preliminary calculations of project income, but they do constitute a certain portion of theatre furthering.

Unlike other creative sectors – for instance architecture – prizes and competitions play only a minor role for Independent Theatre. There are a few theatre prizes, but they are generally given to finished productions or for the overall performance of individual artists or groups. However, you are often obliged to reinvest the prize money in artistic productions.

 Every year the community foundation (*Bürgerstiftung*) of the city of Hildesheim awards Independent Theatres EUR 8,500. The nationwide George Tabori prize goes to fully established groups and makes up EUR 30,000 per year.

Another form of award is the invitation to a festival.

The largest festival for Independent Theatre in Lower Saxony is the 'Best OFF' festival by the Stiftung Niedersachsen. Every other year it showcases six exceptional, jury-chosen productions during a three-day festival in Hannover. Every ensemble receives EUR 10,000 for its disposal. In addition, a festival-jury awards an extra EUR 5,000 to a winning production.


Not all festivals follow this pattern. Some invite pieces on a certain topic and pay normal performance fees. Some will include pieces specially created for the festival. You may find the SCHREDDER festival interesting: Independent groups are asked to submit a concept based on a particular topic – four of the applicants are given the opportunity to realise their idea. They are given a production budget, a mentor and several occasions to present themselves. One of the productions is chosen as the winner and is furthermore invited to a guest performance in another town.

Time and again artists have the opportunity to receive scholarships or to apply for residencies. The conditions vary a lot, from a (partly) financed stay at a place with very loose requirements, to a clearly defined task, as a theatre might issue to an Independent group that it accommodates for a given time. Time frames range from a few weeks to several months.

The programme 'flausen – young artists in residence' is interesting for artists in Lower Saxony just starting out. 'flausen' has been providing scholar-

ships for free research in Independent Art since 2010. 'flausen' wants to open a laboratory where professional artists can research, study, and test their styles free of the necessity to perform and to produce results. It offers seven four-week residencies at a number of places in Germany. The age limit for applicants was dropped in 2015.

Another relevant format in this context is 'deBühne' at the Theaterhaus Hildesheim. This annual programme aims to create a framework enabling young first-timers to create their first professional Independent Theatre works. The selected groups receive a contribution to their production costs, advice when applying for funds and with the setting of fees, and workshops along the way. Two to three groups are invited to join per year.

 The LaFT-newsletter, website, and facebook page regularly point out announcements of competitions, prizes, festivals, and scholarships!



Room for notes

Room for notes

All photographs in this brochure are from Independent Theatre productions, photographed by Andreas Hartmann and archived by Theaterhaus Hildesheim.

*Cover: Kompanie Kopfstand: Das schönste Ei der Welt
Editorial: Die Wilde Drei: subtil brachiale Literaturmusik
p. 4: Boxen Team: Boxen
p. 9: Flotti Canotti: Wenn junge Männer werden*

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