

# "We do opera!" Participation in German opera houses: institutional strategy and aesthetic concepts

Ulrike Hartung

Research Institute for Music Theatre Studies, University Bayreuth, Germany  
ulrike.hartung@uni-bayreuth.de

**Disciplinary background A.** My research has its origin in performance studies understanding opera and music theatre as performative phenomenon – with special consideration of instrumental and vocal practice.

**Disciplinary background B.** Exploring contemporary music theatre practice in Germany, I see a necessity to involve theories and methods of social sciences and educational theory to fully understand institutional influence on aesthetic products and production.

## Abstract

Based on concrete examples, this paper will elaborate on participatory practices between the agenda of cultural policy, audience development goals and everyday practice of German music theatre houses within the context of urban society.

State funded opera houses in Germany are becoming increasingly a target of public criticism. The combination of certain factors – for example diversification of urban audiences, digitalization, changes in aesthetic demands etc. – raises questions of institutional legitimacy and thus a certain state of crisis. My research has shown that opera houses develop systematic strategies to counter these kinds of transformative powers on the one hand and the related fundamental institutional criticism on the other: participatory formats can be determined as one of these strategies. Participatory formats can not only be seen as an artistic development within the portfolio of events that music theatre houses offer in addition to its main events, i.e. opera performances, but also as strategic action to gain new audiences, meet cultural-political demands and generally opening up to a divers urban society. What measures are being developed and in what way do these measures raise questions of actually cultural participation? How can these measures be realized within the structural and aesthetic requirements of an opera house?

**Interdisciplinary implications.** Opera and music theatre as contemporary performative practice can no longer be explored by looking at musical scores only. Bringing musicology, performance studies and social sciences (and esp. its methods) together has the potential to explore the many interdependencies between institutional structures, social participation and artistic demands that contemporary music theatre is so heavily characterized by.

## References

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