

Collective Leadership and Participation in Theatre Companies

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ABSTRACT

Collective leadership – or, depending on the definition, shared leadership (Rybnikova & Lang, 2021) – is being intensively tested in the cultural sector. In German-speaking countries, this phenomenon is particularly prevalent, though not exclusively limited to theatre companies. This study aims to understand the management model of collective leadership in theatre companies as a reflection of the democratic-theoretical ideal of deliberative democracy. According to political theorist Chantal Mouffe, conflicts between opponents (e.g., the artistic management and the demands of the actors) and conflicts within cultural operations (e.g., the tension between artistic-cultural and financial goals) must be de-antagonised. The focus is on Theater Basel, which, as a cooperative (*Genossenschaft*), is experimenting with a dual collective model: collective bodies have been established both at the level of the theatre company's management and the management of the drama division (called *Basler Compagnie*), which are currently working on implementing participation formats within the ensemble.

Keywords

collective leadership, participation, theatre companies, deliberative democracy, case study

1. Introduction

Collective leadership – or, depending on the definition, shared leadership – (Rybnikova & Lang, 2021) is being intensively tested in the cultural sector. In the German-speaking countries, this does not apply exclusively to theatre companies (e.g. Kunsthalle Wien, documenta 15), but here it is conspicuously frequent. It is becoming increasingly common for groups of three or more people to share artistic and sometimes also financial and administrative responsibility for a theatre or division. For example, at the *Theater am Neumarkt* in Zurich, Switzerland, a group of three people currently – since 2019 and until 2025 – hold the leadership and work together with a commercial director. From 2018 and until 2023, the *Theaterhaus Jena*, Germany, was run by a theatrical collective (called Wunderbaum) that introduced the model of an ensemble council. In April 2024, it was announced that the *Deutsches Nationaltheater Weimar*, Germany, a publicly funded three-division company, will be managed by a trio from 2025.

From an academic point of view, the opportunities of shared or collective leadership are seen primarily in being able to meet the increased demands on the transformation of cultural organisations, e.g. diversity, sustainable development or digitisation (Schrauwen, Schrammen & Segers, 2016). However, younger employees also see this as an opportunity to implement participation and flatter hierarchies (Mandel, 2018) to prevent abuse of power.

This study focuses on theatre companies. The reason for this is not only the conspicuous accumulation in the cultural field, but also certain research results (Bolden, 2011, 264). Bolden has shown that there is a strong contextual dependency in the model of collective leadership concerning its efficiency or efficacy. This finding also applies to the cultural sector: Work and production processes within the sector are fundamentally different, for example between a museum and a theatre company. It is reasonable to assume that the different work and production processes also have an impact on management structures – and vice versa.

After an overview of the current state of research on collective leadership, the essay presents lines of tradition from German-language theatre history which are central to an understanding of current developments. The results of the case study on the *Theater Basel* are then presented. It is demonstrated how a collective management structure is realised on two levels of the theatre company and how co-determination is implemented within the *Compagnie Basel*, the drama division of the three-division theatre. Finally, this model is interpreted as a realisation of the democratic-theoretical ideal of deliberative democracy according to Chantal Mouffe (2014).

2. On the State of Research on Collective Leadership

Business administration and sociology have dealt intensively with collective management constellations. Methodologically, the research is characterised by “a diversity that is to be welcomed” (Rybnikova & Lang, 2021, 173). The variety of terms used for the shared leadership structures found in practice is striking (cf. Bolden, 2011). The following selection was chosen with a view to the following argumentation:

- Distributed leadership is understood by Bolden (2011) – in reference to the work of Spillane (2006) and Gronn (2008) – as an “analytical framework through which one can assess and articulate the ways in which leadership is (and is not) distributed in organisations” (Bolden, 2011, 256). “Distribution per se is not necessarily associated with more effective or efficient leadership.” (Bolden, 2011, 256) which leads to the question of how and, more importantly, *why* leadership is distributed (Spillane, 2006, 103).
- Shared leadership is understood by Pearce and Conger (2003) as “a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both.” (Pearce & Conger, 2003, 1) This process is often influenced by peer or lateral structures, and sometimes also by hierarchical structures.
- Managerial shared leadership is understood by Döös and Wilhelmson (2021) as “organisational phenomenon where a few individuals have and/or take mutual responsibility for the tasks included in holding a managerial position. This encompasses tasks such as administration, leadership towards goals and organizing working conditions for others.” (Döös & Wilhelmson, 2021, 717)
- Denis et al. understand collective leadership (Denis et al, 2001) as a group whose members “play distinct but tightly-knit and complementary roles” (Denis et al, 2001, 2) to enable substantial change in an organisation.
- Rosenthal (1998) discusses collaborative leadership as a special style of leadership that is associated with the attributes “less hierarchical and more consensual” (Rosenthal, 1998, 850). Her focus was on work situations in civic engagement and their committee work.
- Against the “old corporate monotheism” (Heenan and Bennis, 1999, 4), which heroises the one CEO at the top of the company, Heenan and Bennis present the concept of co-leadership to pay credit for the leading employees at lower levels of the hierarchy. Further work has been presented by Alvarez & Svejnova (2005) and Denis et al. (2021), among others.

Rybnikova and Lang (2001) see the lack of a consistent nomenclature as an expression of a lack of conceptual consistency: According to them, the authors have not made sufficient references to each other. Additionally, the conceptual connection between individual, group and organisation in the sometimes strongly normative terminology is also not yet convincing (Rybnikova & Lang, 2021, 172f.). They have presented a classification scheme that distinguishes between the terms participative, shared and collective leadership. This terminology has three points in common: Firstly, leadership tasks, e.g. planning and control, are shared, including responsibility for achieving goals. Secondly, power resources are shared and, thirdly, the group shares at least partial assumptions about leadership, the leadership process, and results (Rybnikova & Lang, 2021, 154f.).

- In participative leadership, managers involve employees in the decision-making process. A distinction must be made here between voluntary and binding co-determination.

- In the case of shared leadership, management responsibility is shared within a group. Within the terminology of this scheme, participative leadership could be combined with shared leadership: A collective leadership establishes forms of co-determination within the staff.
- Collective leadership, on the other hand, is a special case of shared leadership that explicitly pursues the goal of democratising organisations and breaking down hierarchical structures for normative reasons.

This classification scheme is used for the following discussion because it clearly distinguishes between organizational decisions at the level of management structures on the one hand and other decisions, including co-determination instruments within the staff, which are often linked to “expectations, assumptions and agendas” (Bolden, 2011, 260) on the other hand.

Bolden (2011) emphasised that the introduction of collective governance structures is not politically neutral:

“It is motivated by a series of expectations, assumptions and agendas which, while at face value may appear reasonable enough, may actually serve to legitimize and reinforce the domination of particular individuals and groups over others.” (Bolden, 2011, 260)

This finding will be particularly important for examples in which management responsibility is distributed among several people and expectations for co-determination (“Mitbestimmungserwartungen” Rybnikova & Lang, 2021, 155) are to be implemented, as is the case at *Theater Basel*. Due to the special significance of ‘expectations, assumptions and agendas’ in the case study of *Theater Basel*, the term collective leadership is used for this purpose.

Furthermore, studies have repeatedly examined the extent to which the named leadership models correlate with the efficiency or effectiveness of an organization. Bolden (2011) established that “distribution (of leadership; JG) per se is not necessarily related to more effective or efficient leadership” (Bolden, 2011, 256). Only a few studies exist for the cultural sector. Schrauwen, Schramme and Segers (2016) investigated the hypothesis that shared leadership is better suited to mastering the increasing challenges of a rapidly changing world. They examined “if and how leadership is shared with middle management and also with most other employees.” (Schrauwen, Schramme & Segers 2016, 104) This was the case in half of the organisations they examined. “But even in organisations where (operational) leadership was shared with almost all staff members, sharing leadership did not necessarily mean that long-term strategic decision-making was also shared, or that every decision was made democratically.” The organisation's vision continues to be set by management, which also works with standard procedures to involve employees in the operational area (Schrauwen, Schramme & Segers 2016, 114).

2. Research Question and Methodology

In the following, collective leadership (translated into German as ‘kollektive Intendanz’) is understood as groups of at least three people (following the Latin phrase *tres faciunt collegium*) who jointly take on at least the artistic management tasks, and sometimes also the financial-administrative management of a theatre company. The paper asks about the motivations of the collective leadership team who currently take on these tasks for *Compagnie Basel*. It interprets their way to let the ensemble participate in their decision-making process from the political-theoretical understanding of deliberative democracy. Methodologically, the paper combines a content analysis of the documents in which the collective management of *Compagnie Basel* describes its own approach with structured argumentation from political theory.

3. Historical Traces in Theatre History

Selected lines of development in theatre history, in particular the development of the notion of the Intendant and the co-determination theatre of the 1960s/70s (“Mitbestimmungstheater”) (Nitsche, 2021; Doyon & Freixe, 2014), are central to an understanding of current developments.

3.1 On the Model of *(General-)Intendant*

Two aspects of the history of the term and its cultural context of origin are particularly important for the argumentation of this paper:

- The notion of *(General-)Intendant* has its roots in feudal-bureaucratic structures: The term comes from the French *intendant*. It was first used in the courtly administrative system in general and not just for theatres. It originally referred to an overseer or administrator, and in absolutism to a tax collector. This context of origin went hand in hand with hierarchical structures and mechanisms of sole decision-making. It supported a supposedly unalterable junction between the one, usually directorial and mostly male artistic director and a leadership style described as charismatic, which – as we already know from Max Weber – is unstable and crisis-prone (Balme, 2019, 38, 39, 43). Because the term has its roots in feudal-bureaucratic structures, it is largely uncommon in the Swiss cultural sphere, for example, which has no monarchical structures. In Switzerland, the termin is *Theaterdirektor*in* (Cahn, 2002, 10).
- The scope of duties and the degree of autonomy of *Intendanten* varied: In the feudal French administrative system, *intendants* were initially only active in an exclusively administrative area of responsibility. Over time, they took on more and more artistic competences (Cahn, 2002, 10-12). This also increased the degree of autonomy, to put it bluntly: The directing artistic director – and he alone – shaped the theatre as art (Balme, 2019, 48). The powerful model of the one, mostly male leader emerged, onto whom – in some cases – ‘superhuman’ abilities were projected and for whom the idea of not claiming power alone, but sharing it, seemed counterintuitive.

This model of the (general) director stands in this antithetical position to contemporary concepts of governance, of steering action in the broadest sense with demands for transparency, but also participation (Balme, 2019, 48). Furthermore, it has shown itself to be highly susceptible to abuse of power and is therefore criticised (Diesselhorst, Hütter & Philipp, 2021).

3.2 The Co-Determination Theatre of the 1960s/70s

In the 1960s/70s, recent West German theatre history experienced a phase in which collective management structures were tested in theatre companies. These experiences still shape the discourse on new forms of management for theatre companies today. The term co-determination theatre (*Mitbestimmungstheater*) was coined for these experiments. Three theatres were the focus here: the *Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer* in Berlin, the *Schauspiel Frankfurt* and the *Frankfurt Theater am Turm*. In these theatre companies, co-determination models were introduced that were intended to enable theatre employees to participate directly in "all projects, tasks and decisions affecting the theatre" (Kabelitz, 1969, 28). The ensemble was united by common values and working principles: The direct, grassroots democratic participation of all groups in the ensemble took centre stage. The division of labour between actors and directors was seen as the “main enemy of collective work” (Gurreck, 1969, 25). Central concerns were the demands for the abolition of the division of labour in the production process and the rejection of authority. All groups should work on an equal footing, both in the general organisational structure and in artistic production. The attempts were directed against the structures of the traditional theatre business, which were criticised as authoritarian, and the model of the autocratic and director-led artistic director. The co-determination theatres wanted to create a counter-model to municipal theatre, which they saw as the epitome of centrally organised power structures that they rejected.

The *Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer* in Berlin established a company constitution (“*Betriebsverfassung*”) for this purpose, which established collective leadership and representation structures for the various employee groups within the ensemble, especially the full assembly. It introduced information obligations and meeting routines, as well as delegated important decisions to the ensemble, including employee engagements, among other things. The company constitution was a part of all employment contracts.

At the beginning of the 1970s, this collective concept was inseparably linked to the ideology of Marxism (or more precisely: to the *idea* of theater practitioners regarding Marxism). It was considered “the common ideological foundation of the collective, guaranteeing its cohesion and unity” (Nitsche, 2021, 118). The definition of the term ‘collective’ is highly dependent on the academic context from a cultural and theoretical perspective. Historically, the concept of a collective has often been associated with collectively managed property and communal living. In many countries, the idea of the collective was also associated with expropriation, dictatorship, and injustice.

From a sociological and organizational theory perspective, collectives can be described as organized action communities characterized by their goal-oriented actions based on shared values and working principles. Such notions and principles often involve the use of flat hierarchies, if hierarchies are used at all, and decision-making based on grassroots democratic processes and the principle of consensus. In 1970, Henning Rischbieter, the founder of Germany's leading theater journal *Theater heute*, defined the collective as “a group liberated from established authority and self-determining” (Rischbieter, 1970, 11).

How such approaches are implemented is obviously highly dependent on the context. In a project group organised on a voluntary basis, which develops a theatre production once a year, such grassroots democratic procedures can be implemented more extensively in terms of time (e.g. in weekly plenary sessions that begin with emotional rounds and last until consensus has been reached on all issues) than, for example, a collective artistic direction such as that of the *Basler Compagnie* does or can do in terms of time in an operational structure.

According to Nitsche the theatremakers saw the introduction of collective forms of production “as a kind of dress rehearsal aimed at a larger-scale social transformation and ultimately the downfall of bourgeois-capitalist society. The theatre could be used to test co-determination on a small scale to subsequently transfer it as a political principle to the state level.” (Nitsche, 2021, 117) In the early years, Marxist-Leninist training courses were held at the *Schaubühne Berlin* to familiarise all theatre employees with communist theory. The ideology was projected onto the leadership model.

“The theatre collectives of the 1960s/70s thus saw themselves not only as an institution with its finger on the pulse of the times, but also as the spearhead of the development of society as a whole”,

states Nitsche (2021, 177). The fact that this attempt, for example at the *Schaubühne Berlin*, could only be partially realised is another matter. Minutes and reports from participants show that plenary sessions were sometimes painful and that individual groups, such as technicians, were not involved and complained about this (Sandmeyer, 1974, 167).

These experiences continue to have an impact on current discussions among theater professionals in the German-speaking countries and influence the way in which representatives of the younger generation in particular want to run theater companies, their “expectations, assumptions and agendas” (Bolden, 2011, 260).

4. Case Study *Theater Basel*

Theater Basel is a three division theatre company in Switzerland's third-most-populous city. Die cooperative (*Genossenschaft*) hat 781 Mitglieder including ten legal entities. It receives 86% of its public funding of around 46 million euros from the city of Basel and 14% from Basel Land, the region around the city of Basel. Formally, *Theater Basel* has 388 full-time positions. In fact, 429 people work there, 219 of them in the technical department, 171 in artistic production and 39 in administration. With 572 performances per year and an occupancy rate of 61% (around 148 thousand visitors), the theater has a self-financing ratio of 20% (*Theater Basel* 21-22). Collective bodies have been established both at the level of the theatre company's management and the management of the drama division which is called *Basler Compagnie*.

4.1 Collective Organisational Structures at *Theater Basel*

The general assembly of the theatre cooperative Basel elects the board of directors (*Verwaltungsrat*), which in turn appoints the theatre management (*Theaterleitung*). The cooperative's articles of association (*Statuten der Genossenschaft*) state:

“The governing body of the theatre cooperative is the board of directors, which consists of nine members. The direct management of Theater Basel is the responsibility of the theatre management under the chairmanship of the artistic director.” (Theatergenossenschaft Basel 2008, §§ 8-11)

Until 2021, the board of directors appointed the so-called 'directorship', a dual leadership consisting of the artistic director and the commercial director. With the appointment of Benedikt von Peter as artistic director from the 2020/21 season, the board decided to abolish the 'directorship' and instead establish a theatre management (*Theaterleitung*) responsible for all three divisions.

The actual theatre management, chaired by the artistic director, currently consists of ten people, five of whom form the executive board of *Theater Basel* (*Geschäftsleitung*), also chaired by the artistic director. The theatre management (*Theaterleitung*) includes the heads of opera, drama, ballet, the so-called *Theatre Public*, artistic directorate, technical directorate, finance/ administration, human resources, and communications/ distribution. The executive board (*Geschäftsleitung*) in turn is again chaired by the artistic director and includes a deputy artistic director (currently from the drama division), finance/ administration, human resources, and communications/ distribution. The executive board is responsible for strategy development, strategy implementation, and for the day-to-day management of the theatre. This gives the theatre director a special role at both levels. He represents the theatre to the external stakeholders.

Compagnie Basel, Basel's drama division, is currently led by a four-person management team (*Vierer-Leitung*) consisting of Anja Dirks (managing dramaturge and deputy artistic director of *Theater Basel*), Antú Romero Nunes (leading director), Jörg Pohl (actor) and Inga Schonlau (dramaturge). They are hereinafter referred to as collective management of *Compagnie Basel*. According to their self-description, they

“with their professional experience and perspectives, (...) represent the different areas of responsibility and interests that come together in a theatre company and are sometimes antagonistic to each other: Artistic-content orientation, concerns of the ensemble, finances, scheduling.” (Basler Compagnie 2022b)

Decisions in each person's area of expertise are to be accepted after internal discussions (Pohl, 2021, 108f).

The first mandate for the collective management of the *Basler Compagnie* had been given to them by the board of directors and the artistic director: to, firstly, make theatre in and for the city of Basel and, secondly, to stick to the budget. The second mandate, they gave it themselves: to organize their work “according to the ideas and needs” of the people “who are the bearers of the theatre's central purpose. The actors.” (Basler Compagnie 2022b) To this end, the four-member management changed some of the structural working conditions within the staff:

- All members of the company receive the same salary, graded according to age. The term 'company' rather than 'ensemble' is intended to emphasise that they do not wish to differentiate between those permanently engaged at the theatre and guests ('star principle') (Pohl, 2021, 107).
- All actors have the option of reducing their position to 70 per cent: “A 100 per cent contract covers 3.5 roles (the ‘half’ role includes participation in ancillary formats, involvement in working groups, etc.), 70 per cent means 2.5 roles” (Basler Compagnie 2022b).

Jörg Pohl reported on the frequency with which coordination meetings are scheduled for their collective management (Pohl, 2021, 108):

- twice a week jour fixe within the four-person management team

- once a week jour fixe with the dramaturgy team
- once a month a meeting with the artistic director
- regular meetings with the public relations department
- participation in the meetings of the Board of Directors
- meetings with initiatives from the company

With a playing time of ten months per year, this results in around 160 scheduled meetings, i.e. around four per week. Added to this are the staff meetings etc. that result from the implementation of co-determination expectations.

“But having several people in charge does not per se eliminate autocratic relationships. You can also suppress in a team,” states Pohl (Basler Compagnie 2022b). “We develop our practice by searching in the process” (ibid.) The collective management team is committed to being a learning organisation. They claim to want to try out “forms of cooperation based on transparency and participation” (Basler Compagnie 2022a).

4.2 Co-Determination in Compagnie Basel

“We are in favour of the freedom of art, but it must not serve as an absolution for poor organisation and must not be misused to disregard social standards.”

ensemble netzwerk

In response to widespread criticism of the inadequate collective negotiation situation for artistic employees under the so-called standard stage collective agreement (*Normalvertrag Bühne*) and the numerous cases of abuse of power in theatres, the lobby association *ensemble netzwerk* was founded in 2015. It calls for the “formation of ensemble representatives”, whose rights should be “permanently and legally anchored”. “Ensemble representatives should have a right to information in all questions of artistic and social planning, as well as a right to discussion and consultation in all organisational matters.” They also called for core working hours and other changes to protect artists against non-renewal (ensemble netzwerk 2019).

The collective management of *Compagnie Basel* is currently implementing such participation formats.

“At the beginning of artistic creation in the *Basler Compagnie* is an everyday, co-operative practice. All members of the company help to shape and decide. At the centre of our collegial way of working is the principle of involving everyone who is affected by a decision and asking everyone who has expertise in the matter.” (Basler Compagnie 2022a)

According to Pohl (2021, 111), the collective management wants to realise this in a process of learning that also includes external consultations and further training. All decisions are based on their shared basic understanding of “art as applied freedom” (Pohl 2021, 112): The actors “with their attitudes and their artistic autonomy” take centre stage, states Pohl (2021, 110). The following rules, procedures and formats are used for co-determination within the company (Pohl, 2021, 111):

- General assemblies of the artistic staff are held twice a year.
- The company works according to the principle of self-organisation. It elects ensemble spokespersons and establishes working groups for self-chosen topics.
- “Four annually elected members of the company, the so-called programme group, represent the concerns of the actors and assistant directors in the weekly programme meetings, which are moderated by the dramaturge.” (Basler Compagnie 2022b)
- The programme is determined in consultation with the actors in an extensive coordination process (Basler Compagnie 2022a). As soon as the draft programme has been presented, the actors can express their wishes for casts.
- In addition to the option of specifying requests for castings, they also have the right of veto: “Nobody has to do anything that they don't want to do for artistic reasons. This means that

players don't have to play roles they don't want to play. No one has to work with a director they can't or don't want to connect with.” (Basler Compagnie 2022b)

- There are more female actors than male actors within the company. “Because the conventional theatre canon largely provides roles written by men for men, we prefer a relaxed approach to gender definitions. Anyone can play (almost) anything.” (Basler Compagnie 2022a)
- The co-determination formats work with the principle of consent (not consensus): A decision is to be accepted as soon as there is no justified, serious counter-argument. (Pohl, 2021, 109)
- The four-person management team conducts follow-up discussions for each production, ideally after the fifth performance, to ensure a continuous evaluation and learning process.
- They conduct an annual “10-eyes discussion” (Basler Compagnie 2022b) with each actor (annual employee review).

The theatre’s annual programme is an expression of its performance policy. At the same time, it summarizes the most important planning and organizational decisions for the upcoming season, sometimes even beyond. The American government consultant Sherry Arnstein used the metaphor of a ladder in her famous 1969 essay to describe the various levels of participation. After distinct levels of nonparticipation, Arnstein classifies informing, consultation, and placation as stages of tokenism. Only when the involved groups are fully engaged in negotiations, power is delegated, then does Arnstein speak of participation in the full sense of the word (Arnstein, 1969, 217; Glesner, 2023, 45-49). Regardless of the question of how closely the implementation of the working principles and forms of participation in the *Basler Compagnie* aligns with the ideal, it can be noted that the aspiration to develop the theatre’s programme in a multistage negotiation process based on the consent principle illustrates that the leadership of the company genuinely intends to delegate decision-making power beyond mere token forms of participation. In principle, this form of participatory decision-making on the programme and the cast does not require a collective leadership.

5. Collective Leaderships as the Implementation of an Ideal of Democratic Theory

The thesis of the paper is that the organisational form and working methods of collective management constellation interact with current socio-political discourses: The leadership model of Compagnie Basel reflects the democratic-theoretical ideal of deliberative democracy.

The participatory ideal of deliberative democracy includes the following aspects:

- The decision of those involved is linked to the exchange of arguments.
- A rational decision is made possible by negotiating pros and cons.
- This decision has the greatest possible legitimacy and best promotes the common good (Velasco, 2010, 360).

Currently, one of the most prominent voices is Belgian political scientist Chantal Mouffe. In her writings, she calls for an antagonistic society, a society in which practices of dissent are realised. In contrast to the consensus-oriented attitude of the deliberative model of democracy according to Jürgen Habermas, the agonistic model according to Chantal Mouffe accepts conflict as an essential component of liberal democracies (Mouffe, 2014). In Mouffe's understanding, liberal democracies are characterised by the acceptance and legitimisation of conflicts between adversaries. For Mouffe's agonistic perspective, the category of the adversary, the “opponent with whom one shares fundamental democratic principles” and with whom one disputes the “interpretation” of these democratic principles in an “agonistic dispute” is central (Mouffe, 2014, 29).

Conflicts, much like in society at large, are an intrinsic part of a theatre company and serve as the starting point for its decision-making processes. It is not only the needs of the actors that may clash with those of the management; financial and political constraints can also conflict with artistic goals. These conflicts must be de-antagonised. *Compagnie Basel* appears to strive towards achieving this political ideal: the company is not led by a sole artistic director, but rather by a group of individuals who bring diverse perspectives to the discussion and, as adversaries in Mouffe’s sense, engage in internal negotiations of pros and cons. The ensemble spokespersons, who have the right to inform,

advise, and discuss with the management, facilitate rational decision-making on behalf of the entire artistic staff. The collective management delegates decision-making power to the artistic staff, particularly concerning the programme. The general assembly brings together all parties in the decision-making process, thereby moderating potential adversaries.

6. Conclusion

With its portfolio of instruments enabling the ensemble to partake in pivotal aspects of theatre work, the collective management of *Basler Compagnie* addresses the expectations for co-determination (“Mitbestimmungserwartungen” Rybnikova & Lang, 2021, p. 155) held by its artists, thereby gaining legitimacy for its managerial activities. They illustrate that they share the same values and are committed to a common agenda. The following finding seems justified: Once again, as in the experiments of the 1960s/70s, a theater is testing how “co-determination on a small scale” could be used “to subsequently transfer it as a political principle to the state level” (Nitsche, 2021, 117). The leadership model, with its working principles and participation formats, is based on the idea of placing the actors and their artistic expertise at the centre of the work. The abuse of power must be avoided at all costs. Artistic work processes need to be continuously reflected upon. The participation formats grant the artistic staff extensive creative options and co-determination rights, though administrative and technical staff are excluded from this. At the same time, the collective leadership is integrated into the joint management of *Theater Basel*, with its artistic director retaining sole power of representation.

Bolden had already stated that it was “unrealistic” to expect a connection between forms of distributed leadership and performance outcomes (Bolden, 2011, 259). In addition to the question of how leadership is distributed, the questions of *why* this happens and *who* controls it are of central interest (Bolden, 2011, 260). Further questions arise for *Compagnie Basel*, in particular how decisions are made when the principle of consent (no one voices a counter argument) reaches its limits. Then, “internal antagonisms”, as Pohl (2021, 109) puts it, have to be moderated, for example in staffing processes:

“There are simply internal antagonisms, which is unpleasant, but the question is how to organise the inevitable unpleasantness. I sit down and talk to people. And everything else you have to learn.” (Pohl, 2021, 109)

Further research could focus on how this “inevitable unpleasantness” is organised and how the learning process of all those involved takes place. In the case study of *Theater Basel* in particular, further research could examine the following relationships:

- between the four-person collective management of the drama division to the theatre management of the three-division theatre
- between the four-member management of the company and the artistic director
- the interaction of these groups of actors with the cooperative's board of directors
- the involvement of the members of the cooperative

For theatre companies in general, further research could go into the following questions:

- Production teams that are (partially) reassembled for each production, that is the typical working format in a theatre company. Sometimes external guests work in these teams, too. Questions could be: How does the collaboration with the theatre management work here? How are conflicts resolved, the right to issue instructions exercised and the right to artistic freedom implemented?
- In theatre companies without a collective management, participation is realised by so-called lateral forms of management on the level of middle management (Kühl, 2017). What results does this model achieve?

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