

EXCELSIOR TEEN-FEST, BETWEEN CREATIVE SPACE AND EDUCATIONAL PLATFORM

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Abstract

The non-formal education is a concept which stands for a complementary type of education which enhances the formal education and aims at enriching children's educational horizon, has entered a stage of vitalisation and regulation. Even if Bucharest has a rich and various offer of cultural events dedicate to children, there are several cultural events which have started to gain reputation with adolescents and, moreover, lead to the expected results by achieving their aims. One of them is **Excelsior Teen-Fest**, the only professional theatre festival in Bucharest dedicated to teens – an event offering all the opportunities of a creative space, as well as an educational platform dedicated to the young generation.

Key words: *teens, creative space, educational platforms, theatre festival, non-formal education*

The non-formal education set forth in the Lisbon Strategy National Reform Programme and stated in the National Education Law no. 1/2011, Art. 330-2, a concept which stands for a complementary type of education which enhances the formal

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education and aims at enriching children's educational horizon, has entered a stage of vitalisation and regulation.

Bucharest has a rich and various offer of cultural events dedicate to children, among them projects, short-term and long-term programmes set up by cultural associations or state institutions. Some of them have a visible pragmatic dimension, while others are in a sort of Brownian motion. We could say that such institutions assume a higher amount of responsibility when dealing with the younger generation as compared to cultural institutions in general, because their role of a *cultural vector* is complemented by that of an *educational engine*.

Going a bit deeper into analysing the cultural offer, one can notice an imbalance in the quantity of events dedicated to the various age group categories, with an emphasis on promoting non-formal cultural education with children and pre-teens, and a shortage of cultural programmes dedicated to teens. Yet, there are several cultural events which have started to gain reputation with adolescents and, moreover, lead to the expected results by achieving their aims. One of them is **Excelsior Teen-Fest**.

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Excelsior Teen-Fest⁷⁸ is the only professional theatre festival in Bucharest dedicated to teens; its first edition was organised in 2014. As stated above, it is a theatre festival, but it goes way beyond that. The concept put together for the **Excelsior Teen-Fest** from the very beginning was that of an event offering all the opportunities of a creative space, as well as an educational platform dedicated to the young generation.

⁷⁸ **Excelsior Teen-Fest** is an event organised by Excelsior Theatre Bucharest in partnership with T.E.T.A. Association and the Replika Centre for Educational Theatre.

The main topic of the festival changes yearly (the previous topics were: *the city in movement*, *urban culture*, *the hidden city or the imagined future*) and it brings theatre performances of theatres or professional companies whose target audience are teenagers. Ever since the first edition, the selection followed two main directions. It favoured performances dealing with the teenagers' interests, talking about their problems or focusing on their values (**Teen Attitude**), but also *re-interpretations* of classical dramaturgy also included in the school curriculum (**Reborn Classics**). The two editions did not go beyond the national dimension, but in 2017 the festival opened towards Europe, bringing on its stage productions of foreign companies who dedicate their activity to staging plays for that particular target audience. That is a way of sharing not only a variety of styles, but also a variety of interpretations of some recurring themes with teens, filtered through the mindset of different societies, all fundamentally linked by the European spirit, but different in what their peculiar realities shape each of them.

And, since *opening* – also interpreted as *relevance* and *synchronisation* – is the key-word conceptually at the basis of the festival, its latest edition included a new section, **#impreună** (**#together**). Its main aim is that of growing social interaction, targeted especially to teens with special needs. Trying to prove that, more often than not, what is seen as *abnormal* can be easily tagged as *normal*, the festival took the opportunity of the interest of certain theatres in producing performances for teens with hearing or visual impairments, and included them in its programming.

In other words, consistent with its concept of creating a platform of education and direct communication with the young generation, the festival has continued its programmatic activities inside the training environment itself, in *high-schools*, where it

activated a cultural and ideological dialogue. In this way, the stress is on the creative and cultural dimension of this educational space, which goes beyond its classical function of an environment for formal education exclusively. The section **#teatruînlicee** (**#theatreinhighschools**) means watching a social theatre performance in the ceremony halls of various high-schools in Bucharest, followed by talks with the artistic team and other specialists. Its aim is instilling the habit of watching a theatre performance in the teens who are not used to going to the theatre.

At the same time, the festival aims not only at organising events for teens, but also at involving them in the artistic process, turning the event into a true creative space. **Teens in the Spotlight** is a section which functions as a direct answer to high-school students' need for validation and visibility of their art. This section brings together theatre companies of various high-schools in Bucharest, who work with professional artists, be they directors or choreographers, and make a *performance* on the topic of each festival edition. The performance, alongside other creations in the company portfolio, are played on a special day, which is exclusively dedicated to teens, called **Maratonul adolescenței** (Adolescence Marathon).

Atelier Teen-Fest (Teen-Fest Workshop) is placed under the same sign. It is a section in which high-school students can test their artistic skills, while learning interesting things about theatre and related arts (film, photography, creative writing) and working on the final product of their learning process, to be presented at the Adolescence Marathon. That is how fathoming the mystery of such special careers as the artistic ones is the first step in turning those students into future story creators, maybe the creators of stories to be developed or watched at future editions of a festival dedicated to teenagers.

References

Lisbon Strategy National Reform Programme

National Education Law no. 1/2011, Art. 330-2,
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