

## Why FAIRSTAGE? Focal Points of the Work and Perspectives for the Future

Over the recent years, the German theater sector has been criticized again and again. The occasions for this are and have been manifold: accusations regarding abuses of power and racist incidents, but also debates about the working environment, diversity-oriented work as well as cancellations costs or contracts that are not extended.

Alongside all of the justified criticism and the desire for change, a large number of suggestions for modifications and initiatives already exist. Specific levels of responsibility must be addressed and a process for finding consensus amongst all participants that is as broad as possible must be found. Proceeding from these considerations, Diversity Arts Culture, ensemble-netzwerk and LAFT Berlin (Landesverband freie Darstellende Künste Berlin) jointly initiated the Berlin pilot project FAIRSTAGE, which is funded by Berlin's Senate Department for Culture and Community. FAIRSTAGE is dedicated to achieving good working conditions that are free from discrimination for all formal employees and freelancers working in publicly financed theaters in Berlin. In addition, the project issues recommendations for theaters that are privately operated. The goal is to bundle expertise and focus on establishing a fairer theater sector in Berlin. But what does that mean specifically?

In the summer of 2021, FAIRSTAGE – which began as a voluntary initiative – conducted a participatory process for the first time: the goal was to create a list of measures that contained recommendations for actions for the various levels of responsibility. Specific recommendations for improving the working climate and for diversity are found within this list. Since then, two additional participatory formats have taken place: in 2023, both a list of recommendations for the creation of transparent, diversity-sensitive and participatory leadership search processes was created and participation tools and strategies for a fair everyday work environment have also been in development since the end of the year.

One of the developments called for in the list of measures is the empowerment of marginalized parties. FAIRSTAGE has devoted itself to this measure and introduced the first edition of the fellowship program in 2023. Parties that have been affected by discrimination receive insight into the procedures and structures of cultural policy process in partner organizations. The goal is to create networking opportunities for marginalized parties and to make diversity in cultural policy part of the mainstream step-by-step.

Networking plays a central role in the work of the pilot project FAIRSTAGE: an initial conference was already held in 2022. Under the title *Late to the Game? Digital Symposium of the Pilot Project FAIRSTAGE*, specific examples from practical experience were presented that can be transferred to institutionally funded stages in Berlin. Experts from a variety of disciplines and structures provided ideas and suggestions for how cultural policy recommendations for action can be realized and what challenges can arise in the praxis of operating a theatrical venue. In addition, the cooperation and participation in the conference *Rethinking Intendantzfindung*

*(Rethinking Searches for Artistic Directors)* from January 13 to 15, 2023, realized together with the Bundesakademie für Kulturelle Bildung (German Federal Academy for Cultural Education), ensemble-netzwerk, Deutsche Bühnenverein (the German Stage Association), Genossenschaft Deutscher Bühnen-Angehöriger (GDBA, the Union of German Stage Workers), Kulturpolitischen Gesellschaft (the Cultural Policy Association) and Dramaturgischen Gesellschaft (dg, the Association of Dramaturgs), also had a large influence on the further development of the project. This was followed in January 2024 by the conference *Wir sind auf dem Weg (We're On Our Way)*, where colleagues could discuss the status quo of the theater industry on the ground.

The publication *Repräsentation, Leerstellen, Ausschlüsse – Über diversitätssensibles Arbeiten am Theater (Representation, Gaps, Exclusions – On Diversity-Sensitive Work in the Theater)*, which was also published in 2024, collects voices that call for a structural and artistic transformation of the theatrical landscape and, in part, also realize it. As such, it is the starting shot for further considerations of diversity-sensitive work as well as an examination of the status quo at theaters in Berlin. The question regarding the collection of data as part of a specific fight against discrimination is raised in the publication and will also continue to engage the team: there is an urgent need for a data-based overview of the situation in theaters in Berlin. In practice, this means diversity-sensitive work for FAIRSTAGE as well, calling for and supporting further education, qualification and exchange opportunities for institutions and supporting marginalized parties here as well. An initial workshop has already been held together with BIPoC-Netzwerk.

FAIRSTAGE is a coordination center and interface – between those seeking advice and the organizations and experts that provide advice, between those who have been affected and the information centers and aid opportunities, between the practical needs and the political processes as well as between the theaters themselves. The goal, however, remains bringing about the redundancy of FAIRSTAGE, in a diversity-sensitive sector where it has been made obsolete. This remains our focus and this is why we are working together with others who want to bring about change for a (fairer) future.

While the working language of the pilot project FAIRSTAGE is German and most of our events and opportunities are in German, it is always possible to contact us in English and ask questions in English and we are happy to hear from you.