

The article offers insight into various approaches to developing contemporary Slovenian playwriting at the beginning of the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It lists existing formal and informal educational opportunities for playwrights, methods of cultivating new writing and various public presentation formats of new Slovenian dramatic writing and the recent development of its staging in Slovenia. The author presents quantitative data on the percentage of Slovenian scripts staged in government-funded theatres and the variations of this percentage over the last two decades.

The author's analysis is based on an extensive questionnaire which includes both quantitative and qualitative research methods examining the processes and circumstances of writing contemporary Slovenian drama from the viewpoints of its various stakeholders: playwrights, translators, dramaturgs, directors, artistic directors and general managers of government-funded public cultural establishments, NGOs or private theatres, editors, publishers, teachers and the representatives of public funding bodies.

The findings show a lack of understanding of the creation processes of contemporary Slovenian playwriting by representatives of its peripheral professions (i.e., non-authors). The research results also reveal the consequences of the field's long-lasting insufficient funding and lack of an expert workforce.

Based on the research results, the author proposes possible future directions for the efficient development of contemporary Slovenian playwriting. These proposals include staging, commissioning and long-term theatre residencies for playwrights, as well as establishing a specialised venue aimed exclusively at staging contemporary Slovenian plays.

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**Keywords:** contemporary Slovenian drama, playwriting, writing circumstances, creative writing process, staging, cultural policy

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# Contemporary Slovenian Drama at the Beginning of the Third Decade of the 21st Century – Where Is It and Where Is It Headed?

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Playwriting by its definition resides somewhere between the stage and the page. On the one hand, this position offers new writing a wider range of development directions, on the other, it means it is marginalised in both fields: theatre and literature.

Our research study, “An Analysis of Current Condition and Progress Courses of Contemporary Slovenian Playwriting”, commissioned by the Slovenian Theatre Institute, is based on an extensive questionnaire exploring the circumstances of writing and translating new Slovenian plays, listing the methods and frequency of accessing these plays by the field’s professionals and finally, researching existing and proposed approaches to new writing development.

Our main research question was which physical, educational, economic, production and artistic circumstances are most influential in cultivating Slovenian new writing for the stage. We have employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods to look for the answers.

Since the start of the millennium, approaches to cultivating new Slovenian plays have included a range of informal education opportunities, i.e., intensive masterclasses and workshops organised by many NGOs and publicly-funded theatres: Sodobnost International, Slovene Writers’ Association, Glej Theatre, the Week of Slovenian Drama, the Prešeren Theatre Kranj, the Slovenian National Theatre Drama Ljubljana, Vodnikova domačija Šiška and others. Play readings, be they rehearsed script read-throughs or staged-reading types of performances, have been produced by festivals, such as Preglej, Vzkrik and the Week of Slovenian Drama. Another important approach to encouraging new writing has included playwriting in the academic curriculum at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television of the University of Ljubljana (UL AGRFT). Likewise, academic writings published in and occasionally commissioned by journals such as *Literatura*, *Amfiteater*, *Adept*, *Mentor* and others have also played a

vital role in promoting and developing contemporary Slovenian drama. A resource that stands out for its (as the research showed) perceived importance in contributing towards the overall progress in new writing for the stage is the website *sigledal.org*, founded in 2008. It publishes plays, reviews, interviews and academic articles on new Slovenian writing for the stage. More recently, the online journal *neodvisni.art* became another vehicle for publishing reviews of plays and their stage productions.

Anonymous public calls for plays and various playwriting awards represent a different approach to cultivating new Slovenian writing for the stage. There is the annual Slavko Grum Award for the best new Slovenian play (awarded at the Week of Slovenian Drama since 1979), extended in 2012 by its humbler sibling, the Young Playwright Award, aimed at writers under 30, also awarded by the Week of Slovenian Drama in Kranj. Significantly less influential for various reasons are two other awards, one for the best comedy and one for the best musical libretto, awarded by two regional theatres.

Despite this variety of cultivation techniques, new Slovenian playwriting still represents only a minority in the programming of publicly-funded theatres: only around a fifth of all theatre productions staged by public money in Slovenia are Slovenian plays or other forms of text-based work for the stage. The share of Slovenian scripts in Slovenian theatre was 14% in 2000, rose to 22% in 2015 and settled at 19% in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the sector a year later. Most likely, the reasons for this low share of the nation's own plays are weak economic circumstances in the field and a lack of systematic public policy encouraging Slovenian playwriting and its staging.

Perhaps the most surprising discovery of our research was that new Slovenian playwriting does not represent 100% of the workload for even one person working in the field. In other words: a total sum of zero professionals working with or creating new Slovenian plays attribute all their work time and energy to new Slovenian plays. Writing for the stage takes up a maximum amount of 70% for only three writers, whereas a third of the professional workforce in the field (writers and others) attribute only a tenth of their time to new Slovenian playwriting. These circumstances expose the field to a high risk of becoming de-professionalised, i.e., drifting into amateurism.

On the other hand, our research showed a need for a unified, systematic policy for the field, which was proven by the high number of professionals who answered the extensive questionnaire. Occasionally contrasting results, such as the highly-valued craft abilities of writers on the one hand, and the low importance attributed to the formal education of writers on the other, have shown that professionals, although working in the field of new Slovenian plays, do not possess a deep enough understanding of the writers' creation process. Other examples of such a poor understanding are the contrast of importance attributed to writers' having their own

computer (high, in fact, this was deemed the most important circumstance of new writing for the stage out of all, with an average score of 4.32 out of 5) and that of a writer's own office (which was deemed significantly less important, with an average score of 2.71 out of 5).

Similarly, the writer's economic safety during the creation process ranked high on the important circumstances scale (average score of 4.0 out of 5), whilst a secured financial compensation for a commissioned play got the lowest average score of all economic circumstances. In further contrast, commissioning a play was rated as the most important proposed approach to developing individual new plays, again demonstrating the poor and unbalanced knowledge of the field of new Slovenian writing for the stage.

Our research showed that there is one proposed approach that representatives of all the different professions in the field perceive as a highly important contributor to the progress of new Slovenian writing. That is a venue dedicated exclusively to staging new Slovenian plays. Such a venue could either be in an existing (publicly funded) theatre or in a newly founded specialised theatre.

Overall, the research brings a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data to support a unified national and/or regional policy for developing new Slovenian playwriting.