

Leadership Models in Theater Training Institutions Navigating Intergovernmental Cultural Agreements

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Abstract

Theater training institutions function as pivotal sites for artistic formation and cultural transmission, yet their leaders must increasingly navigate multifaceted intergovernmental cultural agreements that influence mobility, funding, curricula internationalization, and collaborative governance. This article analyzes leadership models facilitating effective engagement with frameworks such as the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, the ITI/UNESCO Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts, and EU Erasmus+ joint programmes. Employing a qualitative case-study methodology grounded in policy documents, institutional reports, and pre-2023 scholarly literature, the research examines how hybrid leadership configurations—integrating distributed-collaborative, transformational, and adaptive intercultural approaches—enable institutions to reconcile artistic autonomy with supranational policy imperatives. Primary cases include the global ITI/UNESCO Network, characterized by democratic, multi-continental governance structures promoting knowledge exchange and intangible heritage initiatives, and the Theatre SPACES Erasmus Mundus Joint Master, a European consortium advancing applied and community theater through multi-country mobility and joint degrees. Findings demonstrate that distributed leadership fosters inclusive decision-making across diverse stakeholders, transformational elements sustain visionary alignment with cultural diversity goals, and adaptive intercultural competencies mitigate asymmetries in resources, pedagogical traditions, and geopolitical contexts. The study identifies persistent challenges, including bureaucratic compliance burdens, North-South inequities, and tensions between standardization and localized artistic practices, while highlighting opportunities for innovation in social-impact training and cultural diplomacy. By bridging arts leadership theory with cultural policy analysis, this research contributes to understanding how educational leaders operationalize intergovernmental agreements to advance equity, creativity, and cross-cultural dialogue in performing arts higher education. Implications extend to policy design and leadership development programmes in creative fields.

Keywords: distributed leadership, theater training institutions, intergovernmental cultural agreements, UNESCO cultural diversity, Erasmus+ performing arts education

1. Introduction

Theater training institutions, including vocational conservatories, drama academies, and university-based performing arts programs, function as essential sites for artistic development, cultural preservation, and innovation. These entities cultivate technical skills, interpretive abilities, and creative capacities while operating within increasingly internationalized policy environments shaped by intergovernmental cultural agreements. Such frameworks encompass the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, the ITI/UNESCO Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts, and European Union initiatives such as Erasmus+ joint master programs. Leadership within these institutions requires strategic alignment of artistic missions with multilateral priorities concerning mobility, funding, curricular development, and collaborative governance.

The 2005 UNESCO Convention establishes a foundational legal instrument for global cultural policy. By recognizing the dual cultural and economic dimensions of creative expressions, the Convention commits parties to supportive measures for creation, production, distribution, and access. Articles 10 and 14 explicitly address education, public awareness, capacity-building, and international cooperation, thereby positioning performing arts training institutions as central actors in advancing cultural diversity. Pre-2023 implementation studies document the Convention's impact on national policies promoting artist mobility, educational exchanges, and preferential treatment measures for developing countries. These developments have prompted theater training institutions to incorporate transnational elements into curricula while addressing structural inequalities.

Regional mechanisms complement global frameworks. The Erasmus+ program has supported structured mobility and joint degree initiatives in performing arts since its 2014 expansion. Multi-institutional consortia deliver shared curricula in applied theater, community practice, and educational drama, aligning with EU goals of inclusion, intercultural dialogue, and creative economy growth. Bilateral cultural cooperation agreements similarly facilitate faculty and student exchanges, joint productions, and research partnerships, subject to reporting, evaluation, and diversity compliance requirements.

Leadership scholarship from 2022 and earlier underscores the complexities of operating within these environments. Research on cultural policy responses during the COVID-19 pandemic highlights deficiencies in strategic leadership and shared governance in performing arts organizations, with direct implications for training institutions managing international transitions. Studies of specialized arts education leadership, such as those examining principals in Finnish dance institutes, emphasize visionary planning, stakeholder collaboration, and adaptability to policy shifts.

Theater management analyses identify persistent dualities between artistic autonomy and organizational demands. A 2022 synthesis identifies effective leadership traits including clear vision, authenticity, respect for autonomy, and balanced guidance as critical in collaborative international contexts. Higher education administration research stresses the

role of leaders in facilitating change, informed decision-making, and fostering creative risk-taking amid external constraints.

Internationalization literature in higher education documents benefits such as enhanced intercultural competence alongside challenges including resource asymmetries and unequal partnerships. In performing arts education, these dynamics are intensified by the discipline's dependence on embodied practice, ensemble work, and culturally embedded narratives. Leaders must therefore develop intercultural competencies to reconcile diverse pedagogical traditions.

The ITI/UNESCO Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts exemplifies multilateral coordination. Aligned with UNESCO's UNITWIN programme, the Network linked over forty institutions across continents by the early 2020s. Objectives include widening access, exchanging methodologies, developing innovative models, and preserving intangible cultural heritage. Governance through an elected executive board and secretariat coordination embodies distributed leadership principles, while festivals, conferences, and exchanges operationalize the 2005 Convention.

Pre-2023 literature reveals a research gap in integrated studies of leadership models in theater training institutions navigating intergovernmental agreements. Cultural policy research addresses macro frameworks, and arts management studies explore organizational dynamics, yet few works focus specifically on performing arts education. This analysis examines hybrid leadership configurations combining distributed-collaborative structures, transformational vision, and adaptive intercultural strategies.

The inquiry holds significance for artistic training quality, creative economy contributions, and cultural diplomacy. Theater training institutions prepare graduates for global professional contexts involving international productions and community interventions. Insights also inform parallel creative disciplines facing comparable policy pressures. UNESCO's emphasis on arts education within sustainable development further underscores the societal relevance of institutional leadership capacity.

Contemporary scholarship further elaborates on these dynamics. Köngäs, Määttä, and Uusiautti (2022) demonstrate how leaders in specialized arts institutions balance tradition with innovation amid policy changes. Dragičević Šešić (2022) reveals leadership gaps in crisis contexts, stressing the need for shared models. Theater management reviews from 2022 reinforce the importance of authenticity and autonomy in international collaborations. These studies collectively indicate that successful navigation depends on hybrid approaches capable of addressing both artistic and policy demands.

Additional pre-2023 sources on higher education internationalization highlight structural barriers, including funding disparities and recognition issues, that leaders in theater training must mitigate. The ITI/UNESCO Network's emphasis on global inclusion provides a practical model for addressing such barriers through distributed governance. Erasmus+ consortia illustrate how regional agreements can operationalize diversity principles at the programme level.

Leaders in these settings engage multiple stakeholders, from faculty and students to funding bodies and international partners. Transformational elements inspire collective commitment to cultural diversity goals, while adaptive strategies respond to evolving geopolitical and technological contexts. Distributed models distribute decision-making, enhancing resilience and innovation. Pre-2023 evidence consistently supports the efficacy of such hybrids in multilateral environments.

The 2005 Convention's educational provisions have influenced institutional practices worldwide. National reports and academic reviews pre-2023 document increased emphasis on mobility programmes, joint research, and culturally diverse curricula in response to the Convention. Theater training leaders play pivotal roles in translating these commitments into operational realities, balancing compliance with creative freedom.

In summary, intergovernmental cultural agreements create both opportunities and demands for theater training institutions. Leadership models that integrate distributed, transformational, and adaptive dimensions offer robust frameworks for navigation. This article contributes to the literature by examining these models through targeted case studies grounded in pre-2023 sources. The analysis reveals pathways for enhancing artistic education, promoting cultural diversity, and strengthening international cooperation in the performing arts.

2. Literature Review

Scholarship on leadership in theater training institutions and their engagement with intergovernmental cultural agreements draws from multiple intersecting fields, including arts management, cultural policy studies, higher education internationalization, and specialized performing arts education research published in 2022 and earlier. This review synthesizes key contributions, identifying theoretical foundations, empirical findings, and persistent gaps that frame the present analysis.

Arts management literature provides foundational insights into leadership dynamics within creative organizations. A comprehensive 2022 review of key aspects of theatre management synthesizes English-language research on theater functions, cultural policy influences, artistic autonomy, organizational forms, stakeholder relations, and leadership practices. The review highlights how effective leaders balance artistic and economic goals through clear vision, authenticity, respect for autonomy, and balanced guidance. Qualitative case studies of French theaters illustrate how leadership facilitates adaptation to external pressures while preserving creative integrity. These findings extend to training institutions, where leaders must similarly navigate policy-driven collaborations without compromising pedagogical or artistic standards. Earlier works reinforce the distinction between management and leadership, noting that successful theater leaders combine theoretical knowledge with practical experience and life skills.

Cultural policy research examines the implementation of intergovernmental frameworks and their effects on performing arts education. The UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions has generated extensive

analysis. Pre-2023 national reports and scholarly assessments document how the Convention encourages educational initiatives, capacity-building, and international cooperation in creative fields. Germany's 2020 quadrennial report covering 2016–2019 exemplifies coordinated policy efforts across government levels to advance Convention objectives in performing arts training. These instruments create structured opportunities for mobility and joint programming while imposing compliance and evaluation demands that test institutional leadership.

Pandemic-related studies offer critical perspectives on leadership under constraint. Dragičević Šešić (2022) investigates theater production and cultural policy during COVID-19, analyzing “pandemic production,” digital narratives, and leadership approaches in public theaters. The research identifies a notable lack of proactive cultural policy leadership and emphasizes the role of shared or team-based models in preserving institutional memory and adapting to new realities. Such insights hold direct relevance for theater training institutions that shifted to hybrid international formats, highlighting the need for adaptive governance in multilateral contexts.

Specialized arts education leadership studies provide parallel empirical grounding. Kögäs, Määttä, and Uusiautti (2022) examine principals in Finnish dance education institutes, revealing how leaders manage change through visionary planning, stakeholder collaboration, and responsiveness to policy and societal shifts. Their qualitative findings stress relational leadership and the importance of balancing tradition with innovation—dynamics directly applicable to theater conservatories engaging global agreements. The study underscores contextual and intercultural dimensions of effective leadership in specialized arts settings.

Higher education internationalization scholarship addresses broader structural and strategic issues. Pre-2023 works document the benefits of mobility and collaboration, including enhanced intercultural competence and innovation through diversity, alongside persistent challenges such as resource asymmetries, credential recognition barriers, and risks of cultural homogenization. In performing arts, these tensions intensify due to the embodied, ensemble-based nature of training. Leaders must mediate between standardized requirements of programmes like Erasmus+ and localized pedagogical practices. Evaluations of joint master initiatives highlight the governance demands placed on participating institutions and the value of hybrid leadership models for ensuring quality and equity.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion research intersects meaningfully with leadership in arts training. Yingling's pre-2023 study of Intiman Theatre's educational programmes analyzes efforts to broaden access through pre-professional initiatives and technical training for students from marginalized communities. Employing literature review, document analysis, interviews, focus groups, and surveys, the research demonstrates how intentional leadership can advance equitable practices within arts education. These findings offer transferable lessons for institutions participating in international agreements that prioritize cultural diversity and inclusion.

The ITI/UNESCO Network features prominently in policy and network-oriented literature. Reports and aligned studies pre-2023 describe its role in connecting over forty institutions worldwide to promote access, knowledge exchange, innovative models, and intangible heritage preservation. Governance arrangements featuring elected boards and secretariat coordination exemplify distributed leadership while operationalizing the 2005 Convention. Analyses note successes in fostering global dialogue alongside challenges in achieving balanced participation, particularly for Global South institutions, thereby underscoring the need for adaptive and inclusive leadership strategies.

Adjacent fields contribute additional perspectives. Theater for young audiences research highlights leadership development needs and the scarcity of specialized management training programmes, affecting the sector's capacity for international engagement. Cultural leadership studies advocate for sector-specific preparation to equip leaders for multilateral environments. Arts education policy literature emphasizes advocacy roles for leaders in securing funding and integrating performing arts into wider educational agendas.

Despite these contributions, pre-2023 literature reveals notable gaps. Cultural policy studies tend to operate at macro levels, focusing on Convention implementation or programme outcomes, while arts management research examines organizational leadership without sustained focus on training institutions. Internationalization scholarship addresses higher education broadly but rarely delves into the specificities of performing arts pedagogy. Few works integrate empirical case analysis of networks such as ITI/UNESCO or Erasmus+ consortia with explicit leadership theory. Pandemic and crisis studies touch on related themes but seldom center on theater training contexts. This article addresses these lacunae by synthesizing distributed-collaborative, transformational, and adaptive intercultural models and applying them to targeted cases.

The reviewed literature collectively establishes that leadership in theater training requires hybrid approaches capable of spanning artistic, educational, and policy domains. Transformational vision aligns stakeholders with cultural diversity objectives, distributed structures enable effective collaboration in consortia, and adaptive intercultural strategies manage complexities and asymmetries. Empirical evidence from theater management, specialized education, and policy implementation supports this synthesis and justifies further contextual research. Subsequent sections build upon this foundation through theoretical elaboration and case-based analysis.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study employs a hybrid theoretical framework integrating three complementary leadership models—distributed-collaborative leadership, transformational leadership, and adaptive intercultural leadership—to examine how leaders in theater training institutions

navigate intergovernmental cultural agreements. These models draw from pre-2023 scholarship in arts management, educational leadership, and cultural policy. The framework posits that their synergistic application enables leaders to reconcile artistic autonomy, institutional missions, and multilateral policy demands more effectively than any single model.

Distributed-Collaborative Leadership

Distributed-collaborative leadership conceptualizes leadership as a shared practice spread across multiple actors rather than residing solely in formal authority figures. Building on Spillane's distributed perspective and its extensions in creative sectors, this model emphasizes collective sense-making, joint decision-making, and mutual influence. In theater training institutions, it aligns with the ensemble ethos of performative arts, where collaboration drives innovation. Pre-2023 theater management research shows that shared leadership fosters authenticity, respect for artistic autonomy, and balanced guidance when responding to external pressures. For institutions engaged in the ITI/UNESCO Network or Erasmus+ consortia, distributed approaches support democratic governance, knowledge exchange, and equitable participation across diverse members. They reduce hierarchical constraints, enhance ownership, and build resilience against policy shifts or resource limitations.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership focuses on inspiring and elevating followers through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Leaders articulate a compelling vision that connects daily practices to higher cultural and societal goals. In the context of intergovernmental agreements, this model helps frame UNESCO 2005 Convention principles—cultural diversity, international cooperation, and capacity-building—as opportunities for artistic and educational advancement. Pre-2023 studies in specialized arts education demonstrate how transformational leaders motivate stakeholders to embrace change while safeguarding core values. In theater training, this appears as advocacy for applied and community theater, promotion of global citizenship, and commitment to mobility and joint programming. The model counters resistance to bureaucratic elements by linking them to broader purposes of cultural dialogue and social impact.

Adaptive Intercultural Leadership

Adaptive leadership addresses complex, non-technical challenges marked by uncertainty, conflicting values, and the need for learning. Leaders diagnose situations, regulate distress, maintain disciplined attention, and mobilize collective action. In multilateral cultural environments, adaptive approaches manage ambiguities from compliance requirements, cultural differences, and geopolitical dynamics. Pre-2023 internationalization scholarship underscores the value of adaptive strategies in navigating asymmetries and hybrid transitions. For theater training, adaptive leadership mediates between standardized mobility rules and the embodied nature of performative pedagogy. It supports

experimentation with digital exchanges and culturally responsive curricula consistent with the 2005 Convention's inclusivity emphasis. Intercultural competence—the ability to function effectively across cultures—further strengthens this dimension by addressing power imbalances and promoting mutual exchange.

Integration and Synergies of the Hybrid Framework

The strength of the hybrid framework lies in the interplay of its components. Distributed-collaborative structures provide the operational foundation for multi-stakeholder engagement required by agreements such as Erasmus+ joint masters. Transformational vision supplies motivational energy and strategic coherence, sustaining alignment with UNESCO diversity goals. Adaptive intercultural competence equips leaders to handle implementation complexities and equity issues. Pre-2023 evidence from crisis leadership and arts management studies confirms that hybrid models outperform singular ones in volatile, multicultural settings. For example, shared decision-making combined with inspirational vision helped institutions sustain international linkages during disruptions.

Propositions and Contextual Considerations

The framework generates key propositions. Distributed leadership enhances legitimacy and innovation in consortia. Transformational elements maintain long-term commitment to policy objectives. Adaptive practices enable responsive adjustment to evolving conditions. Intercultural competence moderates overall effectiveness, especially in cross-regional partnerships. Contextual factors— institutional governance, resource levels, national policies, and specific agreement terms— influence enactment. The framework thus functions as a flexible analytical tool for nuanced examination across settings.

This hybrid approach bridges gaps in pre-2023 literature by connecting micro-level leadership practices with macro-level policy dynamics. It offers a theoretically grounded explanation of leadership efficacy in theater training and sets the stage for case-based application and analysis

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative exploratory approach based on secondary data analysis and instrumental case studies to investigate leadership models in theater training institutions navigating intergovernmental cultural agreements. The design suits the research aim of developing a contextualized understanding of complex, policy-embedded phenomena without requiring primary data collection at this stage. It draws on pre-2023 scholarly, policy, and institutional sources to ensure rigor and relevance.

Research Design and Approach

The research employs an exploratory case-study design, allowing in-depth examination of contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts. Yin's case-study principles guide the work, emphasizing multiple sources of evidence and triangulation for construct validity. A qualitative orientation prioritizes interpretive depth over statistical generalization, focusing on how and why questions regarding leadership practices. The hybrid theoretical

framework (distributed-collaborative, transformational, and adaptive intercultural leadership) informs data collection and analysis, providing sensitizing concepts rather than rigid hypotheses. Pre-2023 sources ensure the analysis remains grounded in established literature while addressing identified gaps.

Case Selection

Two instrumental cases were purposefully selected for maximum variation and theoretical relevance. The first is the ITI/UNESCO Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts, representing a global, UNESCO-aligned multilateral network. The second is the Theatre SPACES Erasmus Mundus Joint Master programme, exemplifying a regional EU-funded consortium in applied and community theater. These cases illustrate different scales (global vs. European), governance structures, and operational mechanisms while sharing engagement with the 2005 UNESCO Convention principles. Selection criteria included public availability of rich documentary data, direct relevance to theater training, and representation of diverse intergovernmental frameworks. This purposeful sampling enables analytic generalization to broader leadership challenges in the field.

Data Sources and Collection

Data derive exclusively from publicly available secondary sources published or issued in 2022 and earlier to maintain temporal consistency. Primary categories include:

- Official policy documents and reports (UNESCO Convention texts, national quadrennial reports, ITI/UNESCO Network reports, Erasmus+ programme descriptions and evaluations).
- Institutional websites, programme handbooks, and activity reports from member organizations.
- Peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters on leadership, cultural policy, and internationalization in arts education.
- Gray literature such as conference proceedings and network publications.

No primary data collection (interviews or surveys) was undertaken. Sources were identified through targeted academic database searches and official organizational repositories, focusing on materials addressing leadership, governance, or internationalization in performing arts higher education. Collection continued until saturation, with emphasis on documents providing concrete examples of leadership practices, challenges, and outcomes.

Data Analysis Procedures

Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach structured the analytic process. First, familiarization involved repeated reading of documents. Second, initial codes were generated deductively from the theoretical framework (e.g., references to shared decision-making, visionary motivation, adaptive responses) and inductively from emergent

patterns (e.g., equity challenges, digital adaptation). Third, codes were collated into potential themes. Fourth, themes were reviewed for coherence and distinction. Fifth, themes were defined and named, with clear links to research questions. Sixth, the report was produced through narrative synthesis. Cross-case comparison highlighted similarities and differences between the global network and the European consortium. Rigor was enhanced through triangulation across source types, thick description, and constant comparison with the hybrid framework. Potential biases from secondary data (e.g., institutional self-reporting) were mitigated by seeking corroboration across multiple documents and acknowledging limitations.

Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

As a secondary analysis of public documents, the study raises minimal ethical concerns regarding human subjects. All sources are publicly accessible, and interpretations respect original contexts. Trustworthiness follows Lincoln and Guba's criteria: credibility through triangulation and member-checking proxies (cross-referencing institutional claims); transferability via thick description; dependability through detailed methodological audit trail; and confirmability by grounding claims in evidence rather than researcher bias. Limitations include reliance on English-language or translated materials and potential underrepresentation of non-Western institutional voices, acknowledged in the discussion. The approach prioritizes transparency and reflexivity.

Rationale and Limitations

The chosen methodology balances depth with feasibility, leveraging existing rich documentation on the selected cases. It aligns with the exploratory nature of the inquiry and the availability of pre-2023 sources. While secondary analysis limits access to tacit knowledge or internal dynamics, it provides a robust foundation for conceptual advancement and hypothesis generation for future empirical work. The design supports the study's contribution to bridging leadership theory and cultural policy in performing arts education. Subsequent sections present findings from the case analyses informed by this methodological approach

5. Case Studies and Findings

Case 1: The ITI/UNESCO Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts

The ITI/UNESCO Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts stands as a leading example of global multilateral collaboration in theater training. Launched under the auspices of UNESCO's UNITWIN programme and closely aligned with the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, the Network had linked more than forty higher education and research institutions across six continents by the early 2020s. Its stated objectives encompass making performing arts education accessible irrespective of socio-economic background, race, religion, ethnicity, gender, culture, or nationality; promoting professional education worldwide; exchanging knowledge and best practices in teaching methodologies; developing and disseminating innovative models for higher education in drama, theater, dance, music theater,

playwriting, and related fields; supporting institutions in developing and developed countries with special attention to Africa; initiating collaborations; protecting and promoting unique cultural identities; preserving intangible heritage in the performing arts; and advancing peace and mutual understanding. Governance operates through a non-profit, democratic structure featuring an elected executive board drawn from member institutions and coordination by the International Theatre Institute General Secretariat.

Leadership practices within the Network vividly illustrate the application of hybrid models. Distributed-collaborative leadership manifests in the way member institutions independently initiate and lead regional or thematic projects while contributing to collective goals. Examples include school festivals, international student exchanges, research collaborations, and symposia often organized in conjunction with ITI World Congresses. The Shanghai International Experimental Theatre Festival, co-organized by Shanghai Theatre Academy and other members, demonstrates how leaders facilitate cross-cultural artistic dialogue, academic symposia, and performance showcases that bring together students, educators, and professionals from diverse contexts. Transformational leadership emerges through the articulation and reinforcement of a shared vision centered on cultural diversity, inclusivity, and the role of performing arts in peace-building. This vision inspires participation and sustains commitment across continents. Adaptive intercultural leadership addresses practical challenges such as resource disparities between well-funded European or North American institutions and those in the Global South, linguistic barriers, and the digital divide highlighted during the 2020–2022 period. Online connecting events and virtual festivals allowed continuity while requiring leaders to adapt formats, ensure accessibility, and maintain engagement.

Empirical findings from Network reports and related pre-2023 documentation reveal clear strengths. Democratic governance fosters a sense of ownership and encourages innovation tailored to local needs while contributing to global objectives. Successful outcomes include student festivals that promote intercultural exchange, academic publications on applied theater, and heritage preservation projects. Leaders have effectively used distributed mechanisms to prioritize African participation and support developing-country institutions. However, several challenges surface consistently. Resource and infrastructural asymmetries limit the depth of involvement for many members, necessitating adaptive fundraising, capacity-building workshops, and targeted support programmes. Cultural and pedagogical differences require ongoing facilitation to ensure genuine dialogue rather than dominance by more resourced partners. Coordination across time zones and administrative systems can delay decisions, revealing limits to purely distributed models without central transformational direction or adaptive problem-solving. Bureaucratic elements tied to UNESCO alignment sometimes create additional reporting loads. Overall, the case demonstrates that hybrid leadership sustains a far-reaching global network and delivers tangible educational and cultural benefits, yet demands continuous refinement to achieve more equitable and impactful outcomes.

Case 2: Theatre SPACes Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programme

The Theatre SPACes Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programme exemplifies structured regional collaboration in applied, community, participatory, and educational theater training. Coordinated by Western Norway University of Applied Sciences and involving partners from Trinity College Dublin (Ireland), University of Arts Targu Mures (Romania), University of Hamburg (Germany), and the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (Czech Republic), the programme was developed under the EU's Erasmus+ framework. Students complete four semesters (120 ECTS) across at least three countries, earning a joint degree. Full scholarships covering tuition, travel, and living expenses promote access for outstanding candidates worldwide. The curriculum integrates participatory learning, field visits, group projects, artistic research, and extended fieldwork with labour market partners, emphasizing theater in non-conventional spaces and with non-professional participants to address social issues such as inequality, inclusion, and climate change.

Leadership dynamics in the consortium highlight hybrid model operation at both programme and institutional levels. Distributed-collaborative governance involves joint curriculum development, shared responsibility for mobility coordination, quality assurance, and student support across partner institutions. Transformational leadership is evident in the programme's overarching vision of theater as a powerful instrument for social change, community building, and inclusion, which inspires faculty collaboration and attracts diverse student cohorts. Adaptive intercultural leadership manages differences in national higher education systems, pedagogical traditions, regulatory frameworks, and student backgrounds. Consortium leaders navigate EU-level compliance—detailed reporting, evaluation metrics, and inclusivity standards—while preserving artistic and educational flexibility. They address logistical challenges of multi-country mobility, visa processes, and credit recognition through proactive problem-solving and cultural sensitivity.

Findings from programme descriptions and related Erasmus+ evaluations indicate substantial achievements. The mobility structure significantly enhances participants' intercultural competence, adaptability, and professional networks. Graduates pursue careers in social and health contexts, cultural institutions, community organizations, and formal or non-formal education. Scholarships effectively broaden access beyond traditional European demographics. Pre-2023 assessments of similar joint masters confirm positive impacts on employability, research skills, and contributions to European cultural cooperation. Challenges remain prominent. Administrative demands of coordinating across multiple countries and regulatory systems create significant workload for leaders. Variations in institutional resources and priorities can lead to uneven contributions. Ensuring deep integration of theoretical, practical, and fieldwork components requires ongoing adaptation. Cultural and linguistic adjustments for international students demand sustained intercultural effort. Leaders employing hybrid approaches—shared decision-making forums, inspirational programme-wide communications, and flexible problem-

resolution protocols—mitigate these issues most successfully. The case illustrates how EU regional agreements can translate global cultural diversity principles into concrete educational practice, albeit with the requirement for sophisticated leadership to balance standardization, quality assurance, and creative freedom.

Cross-Case Analysis and Overarching Findings

Systematic comparison of the two cases uncovers recurring patterns and contextual nuances in leadership model application. Both cases confirm the centrality of distributed-collaborative structures for managing complex partnerships. The ITI/UNESCO Network depends more extensively on distributed mechanisms given its voluntary, global character and lack of centralized funding, whereas Theatre SPACEs benefits from the structured support and accountability of Erasmus+ financing. Transformational leadership proves indispensable in both for maintaining a unifying vision—global cultural exchange and heritage in the Network, social impact through participatory theater in the programme. Adaptive intercultural leadership emerges as the critical differentiator for addressing scale-specific challenges: vast geographical and developmental diversity in the Network versus intra-European harmonization plus global student intake in Theatre SPACEs.

Overarching findings from the cross-case analysis are robust. Hybrid leadership models enable theater training institutions to convert intergovernmental agreements into drivers of curricular innovation, enhanced mobility, and expanded social impact. Distributed elements promote inclusivity and collective ownership. Transformational components sustain motivation and strategic coherence. Adaptive practices resolve operational and cultural frictions. Measurable successes include broadened student access, rich intercultural learning, knowledge dissemination through festivals and publications, and improved graduate trajectories in international creative and community sectors. Persistent challenges encompass resource and power imbalances, administrative overhead, tensions between policy standardization and artistic autonomy, and the digital or infrastructural divide. Institutions and consortia exhibiting stronger integration of the three leadership dimensions achieve more equitable participation, innovative outcomes, and long-term sustainability. Pre-2023 evidence consistently links hybrid leadership proficiency to superior results in policy navigation. Contextual factors—scale of the agreement, funding availability, and institutional autonomy—significantly moderate effectiveness. These patterns affirm the proposed framework and yield actionable insights for leaders and policymakers seeking to maximize the benefits of cultural agreements in performing arts education

6. Discussion

The findings from the ITI/UNESCO Network and Theatre SPACEs cases illuminate how hybrid leadership models—distributed-collaborative, transformational, and adaptive intercultural—enable theater training institutions to navigate intergovernmental cultural agreements effectively. These models do not operate in isolation but interact dynamically to address the multifaceted challenges of artistic education within multilateral frameworks.

The analysis reveals both the strengths and limitations of current leadership practices, offering nuanced insights into the interplay between policy, pedagogy, and performance.

Distributed-collaborative leadership emerges as foundational for operational success in both cases. In the ITI/UNESCO Network, the elected executive board and member-initiated projects distribute authority across continents, fostering ownership and localized innovation. This structure aligns with the ensemble nature of theater, allowing diverse institutions to contribute according to their strengths while advancing collective goals of cultural diversity and heritage preservation. Similarly, in Theatre SPACEs, shared curriculum design and mobility coordination across European partners exemplify collaborative governance that leverages complementary expertise. Pre-2023 theater management research supports this observation, showing that shared leadership enhances authenticity and resilience in creative teams facing external demands. The model mitigates risks of top-down imposition common in international agreements, instead promoting co-creation that respects institutional autonomy. However, distribution alone proves insufficient without mechanisms to resolve conflicts or ensure accountability, as evidenced by occasional delays in global Network coordination.

Transformational leadership provides the visionary glue that sustains long-term engagement. Leaders in both cases articulate theater's role in social change, intercultural dialogue, and peace-building, directly echoing the 2005 UNESCO Convention's emphasis on diversity and mutual understanding. In the Network, this vision inspires participation from under-resourced institutions and frames digital adaptations as opportunities for broader access. In Theatre SPACEs, it motivates faculty to design fieldwork that addresses real-world inequalities, attracting diverse students through scholarships. Pre-2023 studies in arts education confirm that transformational approaches elevate motivation and align stakeholders with higher purposes, countering the potential bureaucratic fatigue induced by reporting requirements in multilateral programmes. Yet, over-reliance on charisma without structural support can lead to uneven implementation when visionary leaders depart or when daily operational pressures dominate. The cases illustrate that transformational leadership is most potent when embedded within distributed systems.

Adaptive intercultural leadership proves indispensable for managing complexity and equity. The global scale of the ITI/UNESCO Network requires leaders to navigate vast developmental, cultural, and technological disparities. Adaptive strategies such as virtual events and targeted capacity-building helped maintain momentum during disruptions, though they could not fully eliminate participation gaps. In the European consortium, adaptation to differing national regulations, pedagogical traditions, and student needs ensured programme coherence. Intercultural competence enabled meaningful integration of diverse perspectives, aligning with Convention goals. Pre-2023 internationalization literature highlights how adaptive leadership mitigates asymmetries and fosters genuine exchange, findings mirrored here. Challenges remain, however, including the risk of superficial adaptations that mask underlying power imbalances or the exhaustion of leaders constantly adjusting to shifting policy landscapes. The hybrid framework's strength lies in using adaptive elements to calibrate the other two models contextually.

Cross-case patterns underscore several broader implications. Hybrid leadership correlates with enhanced innovation, equity, and sustainability in theater training. Institutions and consortia employing integrated models achieve richer intercultural outcomes, more robust graduate employability, and stronger contributions to cultural diplomacy. The findings affirm the framework's propositions: distributed structures build resilience, transformational vision maintains direction, and adaptive practices ensure responsiveness. These dynamics transform agreements from regulatory burdens into catalysts for pedagogical renewal, such as expanded applied theater practices or digitally enhanced global exchanges. Nevertheless, systemic challenges persist. Resource inequities between Global North and South partners limit full realization of diversity principles. Administrative loads associated with compliance can divert energy from core artistic and educational missions. Tensions between standardization for mobility and the need for culturally specific training require ongoing negotiation. Pre-2023 pandemic research reinforces that leadership capacity directly influences institutional agility in crisis or transition periods.

The discussion of equity merits particular attention. Both cases reveal progress toward inclusive access—through Network focus on Africa and Programme scholarships—yet highlight structural barriers. Hybrid leadership can mitigate but not eliminate these without supportive policy changes, such as increased targeted funding or simplified reporting. Cultural diplomacy benefits are evident: graduates equipped with intercultural skills contribute to international productions and community initiatives, advancing soft power and mutual understanding. However, risks of neo-colonial dynamics in partnerships demand vigilant adaptive leadership and explicit equity protocols. The 2005 Convention's implementation reports pre-2023 repeatedly stress the need for balanced flows of cultural exchange, a goal partially realized through effective leadership but requiring further policy reinforcement.

Theoretical contributions arise from the application and refinement of the hybrid framework. The cases validate the synergy of the three models while highlighting contextual moderators such as agreement scale, funding mechanisms, and institutional autonomy. Distributed leadership proves more challenging at global scales without transformational anchoring. Adaptive intercultural elements gain prominence in diverse cohorts. These insights extend existing pre-2023 literature by providing a tailored lens for performing arts higher education, bridging gaps between general leadership theory and domain-specific policy navigation. The framework offers practical utility for leader development programmes, suggesting training in all three dimensions plus reflective practice on their integration.

Policy implications are significant. Intergovernmental agreements should incorporate flexibility for contextual adaptation and incentivize hybrid leadership capacity-building. Funding mechanisms could prioritize equity measures and reduce administrative burdens through streamlined digital tools. UNESCO and EU bodies might expand support for leadership exchanges or mentorship networks among theater training institutions. National governments could align domestic policies with international commitments to ease navigation for local academies. For institutions, investing in distributed governance

structures, visionary strategic planning, and intercultural training emerges as a priority for maximizing agreement benefits.

Limitations of the study warrant acknowledgment. Reliance on secondary sources provides breadth but limits access to internal decision-making processes or tacit leadership knowledge. The focus on two prominent cases offers depth yet may not capture variations in smaller or less-resourced institutions. Pre-2023 data excludes more recent developments, though it ensures historical grounding. Future research should incorporate primary data through leader interviews, longitudinal studies, or comparative analyses of additional agreements and regions. Mixed-methods designs could quantify impacts on graduate outcomes or institutional performance. Expanded work on Global South perspectives would enrich understanding of equity dynamics.

Indeed, the discussion affirms that hybrid leadership models constitute a powerful approach for theater training institutions engaging intergovernmental cultural agreements. By combining distributed collaboration, transformational inspiration, and adaptive intercultural competence, leaders convert policy frameworks into platforms for artistic excellence, educational innovation, and cultural equity. The cases provide compelling evidence of both achievements and ongoing challenges, underscoring the need for continued theoretical refinement and practical investment in leadership development. As globalization and multilateralism shape the future of performing arts education, such hybrid approaches offer a pathway toward more resilient, inclusive, and impactful theater training worldwide. This study contributes to that trajectory by illuminating the mechanisms through which leadership translates international aspirations into tangible educational realities.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The analysis of leadership models in theater training institutions navigating intergovernmental cultural agreements reveals the critical role of hybrid approaches in achieving educational and cultural objectives. Distributed-collaborative, transformational, and adaptive intercultural leadership, when integrated, enable leaders to transform policy frameworks such as the UNESCO 2005 Convention and Erasmus+ programmes into catalysts for innovation, equity, and global dialogue. The ITI/UNESCO Network and Theatre SPACES cases demonstrate that these models foster inclusive governance, visionary alignment, and responsive adaptation, resulting in enhanced mobility, intercultural competence, and social-impact training. Pre-2023 evidence confirms that hybrid leadership outperforms singular models in addressing the complexities of multilateral environments, including resource asymmetries, cultural differences, and administrative demands.

Key conclusions emerge from the study. First, distributed-collaborative structures provide the operational foundation for successful partnerships, mirroring theater's ensemble ethos and promoting ownership across diverse stakeholders. Second, transformational leadership sustains motivation and strategic coherence, linking daily practices to the higher purposes of cultural diversity and mutual understanding. Third, adaptive intercultural competence is essential for managing implementation challenges and ensuring equity,

particularly in cross-regional collaborations. The synergy of these dimensions produces resilient institutions capable of leveraging agreements for pedagogical renewal while preserving artistic integrity. Yet, systemic barriers—funding inequities, bureaucratic burdens, and power imbalances—persist, underscoring that leadership alone cannot overcome structural constraints without supportive policy environments. The findings affirm the proposed hybrid framework’s explanatory power and highlight its practical utility for arts education.

The study contributes to scholarship by bridging leadership theory with cultural policy analysis in the specific domain of performing arts higher education. It addresses gaps in pre-2023 literature, which often treated internationalization or policy implementation separately from leadership models. By grounding the analysis in rich case evidence, the research demonstrates how micro-level practices enact macro-level agreements, offering a nuanced understanding of leadership efficacy. Theoretically, it refines hybrid models by emphasizing contextual moderators such as agreement scale and institutional resources. Empirically, it provides detailed insights into global and regional networks, with transferable lessons for other creative disciplines.

Recommendations

For institutional leaders, several practical steps emerge. Invest in developing hybrid leadership capacity through targeted training that combines collaborative governance skills, visionary strategic planning, and intercultural competence development. Establish internal internationalization task forces with distributed authority to coordinate agreement-related activities, ensuring broad stakeholder involvement. Prioritize reflective practices and mentorship programmes that help leaders integrate the three models contextually. Foster partnerships with peer institutions to share best practices and resources, particularly supporting Global South participation. Regularly evaluate the impact of international engagements on artistic quality, student outcomes, and equity metrics to inform continuous improvement.

Policymakers at national and intergovernmental levels should refine agreements to better support effective leadership. Streamline administrative and reporting requirements to reduce burdens while maintaining accountability, perhaps through digital platforms and simplified templates. Increase targeted funding for capacity-building in under-resourced institutions, including scholarships, infrastructure support, and leadership development initiatives. Embed explicit equity and inclusion criteria in programme design, with incentives for balanced North-South partnerships. Promote leadership exchange programmes and joint training modules focused on hybrid models within UNESCO and EU frameworks. Encourage evaluation frameworks that assess not only compliance but also long-term cultural and educational impacts. Align domestic cultural and education policies more closely with international commitments to ease navigation for local academies.

For future research, several directions are promising. Conduct primary empirical studies incorporating interviews and longitudinal observations with leaders to capture tacit knowledge and evolving practices. Expand comparative analyses to include additional

agreements, regions, and institution types for greater generalizability. Employ mixed-methods designs to quantify impacts on graduate employability, institutional innovation, and cultural diplomacy outcomes. Investigate the role of digital technologies in supporting hybrid leadership within virtual or hybrid international programmes. Explore equity dynamics in greater depth, centering voices from the Global South and marginalized communities. Longitudinal studies could track the sustainability of leadership approaches over time and across policy changes. Interdisciplinary collaborations between leadership scholars, cultural policy experts, and performing arts educators would enrich the field.

Indeed, hybrid leadership models offer a robust pathway for theater training institutions to thrive amid intergovernmental cultural agreements. By embracing distributed collaboration, transformational vision, and adaptive intercultural practice, leaders can advance artistic excellence, educational innovation, and global cultural equity. Realizing the full potential of these agreements requires concerted action from institutions, policymakers, and researchers. As the performing arts continue to play vital roles in fostering understanding and creativity in an interconnected world, investing in such leadership becomes not only strategic but essential. This study provides a foundation for that investment, highlighting both achievements and opportunities for further progress in the field.

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