



## Funding Opera in the Changing Landscape: Should Opera Be Funded or Accepted as a Fading Culture in South Africa?

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[10.46303/ressat.2024.30](https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2024.30)

### Article Info

Received: December 26, 2023

Accepted: March 6, 2024

Published: May 18, 2024

### How to cite

Yende, S. J. (2024). Funding opera in the changing landscape: Should opera be funded or accepted as a fading culture in South Africa? *Research in Social Sciences and Technology*, 9(2), 156-175.

<https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2024.30>

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### ABSTRACT

Opera is considered a significant part of cultural heritage in many societies. In the South African context, opera has a rich history and has contributed to the development of various art forms. Opera has continued to play a significant role in preserving and promoting cultural diversity in South Africa. Opera production contribute to the economy by creating jobs for artists, musicians, technicians, and other professionals. Additionally, opera events can attract tourism and boost local economies. Public funding for opera may be seen as an investment with economic returns. The purpose of this article is to examine the funding of opera in South Africa against the backdrop of a changing cultural landscape. It aims to investigate whether opera should continue to receive funding or if it should be accepted as a fading cultural form. Employing a qualitative approach, ten participants, including opera company managers and artists, share their perspectives through semi-structured interviews. Colaizzi's phenomenological data analysis method reveals key themes of financial viability, challenges, and opportunities. Findings were presented in themes and supported by quotes from research participants. Opera company managers and artists shared valuable insights into financial viability, challenges, and opportunities. Strategic collaborations, revenue diversification, and the pivotal role of public funding emerged as central themes. The findings shed light on the adaptive measures undertaken by stakeholders in response to the changing cultural and financial climate. The conclusion synthesises the key findings, emphasising the resilience of South African opera in the face of funding challenges. It underscores the importance of balancing financial support and cultural acceptance for sustained vitality. The study contributes to ongoing discussions on the intersection of funding, cultural relevance, and the future of opera in South Africa.

### KEYWORDS

Cultural heritage; financial viability; opera funding; resilience; social constructivism.

## INTRODUCTION

In the rhythmic heartbeat of South Africa's diverse cultural landscape, where the echoes of history harmonise with the cadence of contemporary expression, opera emerges as a powerful and enduring melody that transcends time and resonates across communities (Muller, 2018; Nomcweya et al., 2021; Pistorius, 2017; Roos, 2010; van Der Hoven, 2021). This is echoed by Roos (2010) who mentions that opera stands not merely as an art form but as a living testament to the resilience, diversity, and identity of the nation. In the orchestration of South Africa's cultural symphony, opera occupies a distinctive place, weaving together threads of heritage, struggle, and artistic innovation.

However, as the country is standing at the crossroads of a changing socio-cultural milieu, the melodic strains of opera echo the multifaceted journey of South Africa—a journey marked by triumphs over adversity, the pursuit of equality, and the forging of a national identity that defies singular definitions (Nomcweya et al., 2021). In the vibrant richness of South African culture, opera's role is not merely that of an artistic pursuit; it is a dynamic force that reflects the nation's past, engages with its present, and carries aspirations for its future. Yet, in this dynamic interplay of tradition and modernity, the fate of opera in South Africa becomes a poignant melody that resonates beyond the realm of music. The question that emerges is not just about preserving an artistic form; it is about navigating the intricate intersections of cultural preservation, evolving identities, and the imperative to adapt in a globalised world.

Several significant studies have delved into the historical and socio-economic dimensions of opera in South Africa, spanning from pre-apartheid times to the contemporary landscape (Muller, 2018; Nomcweya, 2018; Spies, 2015; Roos, 2010; van Der Hoven, 2021). For instance, scholars such as Muller (2018); Nomcweya (2018) and Roos (2010) meticulously examine the historical trajectory and transformation of opera within the South African context. Their work sheds light on the evolution of opera as an art form, documenting its journey through the challenging periods of apartheid to the present day. Simultaneously, researchers like Spies (2015), van Der Hoven (2023), and Yende (2021) contribute valuable insights into the broader socio-economic aspects surrounding opera in South Africa. Therefore, by exploring issues of funding, accessibility, and the economic structures supporting opera, these studies provide a comprehensive context for understanding the intricate relationship between opera and the socio-economic landscape of the nation. While conducted in diverse contexts, these studies collectively contribute to nuanced understanding of the historical and socio-economic dimensions that shape the opera scene in South Africa.

Roos (2010) states that the introduction of opera to South Africa can be traced back to the colonial era when European settlers brought their musical traditions to the region. During the 19th century, opera performances became a popular form of entertainment, primarily staged for the elite in urban centres. However, the racial segregation enforced under apartheid significantly impacted the development and accessibility of opera (Nomcweya, 2018; Roos, 2010). The art form became a battleground for cultural expression and resistance, with both

black and white South Africans contributing to its evolution. In the post-apartheid era, opera underwent a transformative period, striving to be more inclusive and reflective of the nation's diverse heritage. Organisations such as Cape Town Opera emerged as influential platforms, fostering local talent and presenting production that resonated with South African stories. Today, South Africa's opera scene continues to evolve, blending Western operatic traditions with indigenous elements, showcasing a commitment to cultural diversity, and forging a new narrative that celebrates unity in a historically divided nation (Nomcweya, 2018; Roos, 2010).

Several studies have mentioned that South Africa's cultural landscape, characterised by a rich blend of indigenous traditions, colonial influences, and the vibrancy of its people, offers a unique backdrop for examining the role of opera (Nomcweya, 2018; Roos, 2010). Against the historical backdrop of apartheid, where culture served as both a battleground and a refuge, opera's survival becomes emblematic of the enduring spirit that transcends adversity.

It is essential to acknowledge that while the literature provides valuable insights on opera industry, it is not without limitations. Many studies tend to focus predominantly on the historical aspects, overlooking the contemporary dynamics of opera funding in the face of changing audience preferences and economic challenges (Nomcweya, 2018; Roos, 2010). Additionally, a scarcity of quantitative analyses limits our understanding of the economic impact of opera funding. Conflicting findings emerge regarding the accessibility of opera to diverse audiences, pointing to the need for a more nuanced examination of its inclusivity. Notable studies such as Spies (2015), van Der Hoven (2021), and Yende (2021) have accurately examined the economic models of opera companies in South Africa, shedding light on the financial structures and challenges faced by these institutions. In exploring the socio-cultural impact, Yende's (2023) study provides rich narratives from opera audiences, offering a qualitative depth to the understanding of opera's reception in contemporary South Africa.

Despite the richness of existing literature, there is a notable gap in understanding the contemporary funding challenges faced by opera in South Africa. New developments, such as the impact of digital platforms and the role of corporate sponsorship, remain understudied. Methodologically, there is a dearth of longitudinal studies that could capture the evolving nature of opera's cultural significance. Conflicting findings on audience accessibility demand a more thorough investigation into the factors influencing opera attendance among diverse demographics. These gaps are significant as they hinder comprehensive understanding of the current state of opera in South Africa. Addressing these limitations will not only contribute to the academic discourse on opera but will also provide insights crucial for policymakers, arts administrators, and cultural advocates. This research seeks to bridge these gaps by offering a nuanced examination of opera funding in contemporary South Africa, thereby advancing the knowledge base and informing decisions that shape the cultural landscape.

This study is vital in unravelling the complexities of opera funding within the South African context, filling critical gaps in the literature. By doing so, it contributes to a more informed discussion on the role of opera in shaping cultural identity, fostering inclusivity, and

sustaining artistic projects in a rapidly changing society. The research aligns with broader academic conversations on cultural sustainability, arts management, and the intersection of tradition and modernity. The findings are expected to inform cultural policies, guide funding decisions, and contribute to more holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing opera in contemporary South Africa. As a researcher deeply invested in the intersection of arts and culture, I am motivated by the belief that the findings of this study can catalyse positive change within the South African cultural landscape. Personally, witnessing the transformative power of opera and its potential to bridge cultural divides fuel my commitment to exploring avenues that ensure its continued vibrancy and relevance.

### **Brief history of funding opera in South Africa**

The history of funding for opera in South Africa reflects the complex interplay of cultural, political, and social factors. In this literature, I discuss the three dispensations of funding for opera in South Africa: before 1948, during 1948, and after 1994, along with a brief look at the contemporary situation to understand the importance of funding opera in South Africa (Roos, 2010).

#### ***Opera in South Africa before 1948***

Before the establishment of apartheid in 1948, funding for opera in South Africa was largely driven by European influences (Roos, 2010). Several studies agree that the Europeans who visited the country played a significant role in promoting and supporting opera (Muller, 2018; Roos, 2010). These individuals, often wealthy patrons, or artists themselves, contributed to the development of opera as an art form in the region. Funding during this period was relatively limited and relied on the goodwill and personal interests of those who had passion for opera.

#### ***Opera in South Africa during 1948***

Roos (2010) mentions that with the advent of apartheid in 1948, the political landscape dramatically changed, and the government seized the opportunity to use the arts, including opera, as a tool to promote its agenda. The apartheid government actively funded opera, along with other art forms, with the aim of controlling and directing cultural expression. The establishment of performing arts councils such as Cape Performing Arts Board (CAPAB), the Natal Performing Arts Council (NAPAC) and the Performing Arts Council of the Orange Free State (PACOFs) marked a period of increased government involvement in the arts. Opera flourished during this time, but it was subject to racial segregation, limiting access to the art form for people of colour (Yende & Mugovhani, 2021).

#### ***Opera in South Africa after 1994***

Several studies point out that the end of apartheid in 1994 brought about a new era in South Africa, leading to significant changes in cultural and funding policies (Nomcweya, 2018; Roos, 2010; Spies, 2015; Yende & Mugovhani, 2021). The democratic government initiated a shift in focus, aiming to promote inclusivity and dismantle the racial barriers that had characterised the previous regime. In 1996, the White Paper centralised performing arts councils, replacing them with the NAC. While this move aimed to create a more equitable and inclusive arts sector, it also

posed challenges, particularly in terms of funding and employment opportunities for opera performers. The closure of council-managed companies affected the landscape of opera, impacting both performers and institutions (Yende & Mugovhani, 2021). Overall, the history of funding for opera in South Africa reflects the intricate relationship between cultural expression, politics, and societal transformation, with each dispensation leaving a lasting imprint on the opera landscape in the country.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed to understand the perceptions of Opera Company Managers and Opera Artists concerning the funding of South African opera in the changing landscape.

#### **Opera Company Managers:**

1. How do opera company managers assess the financial viability of South African opera within the changing cultural landscape, and what specific challenges and opportunities do they identify in securing funding for opera production?
2. What strategies and initiatives do opera company managers believe are crucial for sustaining the economic and cultural relevance of opera in South Africa, and how do they perceive the role of public funding in this endeavor?

#### **Opera Artists**

1. From the perspective of opera artists, how does the changing funding landscape impact their artistic practices and the representation of diverse voices within South African opera, and do they view funding as integral to preserving cultural richness?
2. What challenges and opportunities do opera artists perceive in obtaining funding for their artistic endeavours, and how do they believe financial support contributes to the evolution and sustainability of opera in South Africa?

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study employs Social Constructivism Theory to investigate the dynamics of funding South African opera within the evolving cultural landscape. Social Constructivism Theory, which has evolved through contributions from various scholars over time, finds its roots in the work of Lev Vygotsky, a key figure in its development (Kim, 2001; Vygotsky, 1994). Vygotsky's ideas, particularly on the social and cultural aspects of learning and development, laid the foundation for social constructivism (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). While Vygotsky played a foundational role, subsequent scholars, including Jean Piaget, further developed and expanded constructivist thought (Devi, 2019). Social constructivism posits that knowledge and reality are socially constructed through shared interpretations and interactions within a cultural context (Berger & Luckmann, as cited in Hruby, 2001). In the context of opera funding, this theory acknowledges that perceptions, beliefs, and values are socially constructed, shaped by collective experiences and cultural influences. The research justifies the use of social constructivism to explore how stakeholders in the South African opera community collectively construct and negotiate

meanings related to funding. Opera, as a cultural practice, is intertwined with societal values and shared meanings, making social constructivism relevant for examining how stakeholders co-construct the narrative around funding in a changing landscape.

The theory's emphasis on language and discourse aligns with the complexity of funding discourse in the South African opera context. The study aims to uncover shared understandings and negotiations within the opera community regarding funding. Social constructivism also allows exploration of power dynamics in the discourse, revealing socio-cultural implications of funding decisions. In summary, social constructivism theory provides a robust framework for investigating the socially constructed nature of perceptions and attitudes toward funding South African opera, aligning with the intricate interplay of factors shaping the funding discourse in the opera landscape (Hruby, 2001).

### **METHODOLOGY**

The qualitative research methodology employed in this study utilised a descriptive phenomenology design to comprehensively explore the funding landscape of opera in South Africa. The choice of this design was influenced by the study's primary objective, focusing on describing the perceptions of opera company managers and opera artists in South Africa. This aligns with the works of Beck (2013) and Patton (2014), who emphasise the value of descriptive phenomenology in capturing rich and detailed descriptions of participants' experiences. Additionally, the justification for adopting this design stems from the framework's ability to elucidate and explain the nuanced experiences of research participants, as advocated by Beck (2013) and Wertz (2023).

The sampling strategy employed a non-probability design, combining snowball and purposive sampling techniques. This approach was considered more convenient for both participants and the researcher, aligning with the flexibility required for a qualitative investigation. The study's sample was drawn from two South African provinces, Gauteng and Western Cape. These provinces were selected based on their robust performing arts scenes, particularly in opera, as well as logistical suitability and cost considerations. Familiarity between the researcher and many participants facilitated access and cooperation. Data collection involved in-depth, individual interviews with ten participants, utilising the semi-structured interview approach. The duration of each interview was approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The choice of this method, supported by Beck (2013) and Wertz (2023), was deemed appropriate for phenomenological studies, allowing for a meaningful exploration of participants' perspectives. In this article, a letter of consent was obtained from the research ethics committee. All the necessary submissions for ethical clearance were submitted to the research committee.

During interviews, audio recordings and notepad notes were utilised, ensuring a comprehensive record of responses. Scholarly writings, retrieved from reputable sources such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and University repositories, were reviewed to bolster the

study's credibility. Triangulation was employed to enhance data quality, mitigating bias and subjectivity concerns. Colaizzi's process for phenomenological data analysis, as outlined by Morrow, Rodriguez, and King (2015), was applied, ensuring a systematic and rigorous approach. To guarantee participant confidentiality, alphabets were assigned to individual participants, such as Participants A, B, or C. The article describes the use of thematic data analysis in analysing participants' interviews, following the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method helped the researcher to understand the participants' experiences and interpret their responses meaningfully. The six crucial steps in thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 88), are:

- a) Familiarising oneself with the data.
- b) Generating initial codes.
- c) Searching for themes.
- d) Reviewing the themes.
- e) Redefining and naming the themes.
- f) Producing the report.

The thematic analysis played a pivotal role in transforming raw data into new knowledge. By employing this method, the researcher was able to derive precise findings and effectively interpret and present the study's results through concrete and well-developed themes. I used NVivo software to analyse the data collected.

### **FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY**

Perhaps it is important to establish this section by stating that South Africa has only one opera company that operates on full-time bases, namely Cape Town Opera in the Western Cape. However, there are also seasonal opera companies such as Sempre Opera, and Jozi Opera, to name a few. These opera companies rely mainly on government funding for their operation. These opera companies have staged a substantial number of opera productions in the South African context.

The study findings reveal common themes that emerged from the two basic groups, namely, opera company managers and opera artists. These findings were supplemented by scholarly literary writings. The findings were divided into four major sections, namely: (1) exploring the financial viability and funding challenges; (2) strategies and initiatives for sustaining economic and cultural relevance; (3) navigating the impact of changing funding on artistic practices and diversity; and (4) challenges, opportunities, and the contribution of financial support to evolution.

#### ***Opera Company Managers: Exploring the Financial Viability and Funding Challenges***

In investigating how opera company managers assess the financial viability of South African opera within the changing cultural landscape. Participant A mentions that:

As opera company managers, assessing the financial viability of South African opera within the changing cultural landscape involves a careful analysis of economic trends, audience

preferences, and governmental policies. We recognise the challenges posed by a shifting cultural milieu, such as evolving audience demographics and tastes. One significant challenge is the competition for funding within the broader arts sector. However, we see opportunities in diversifying revenue streams, collaborating with local businesses, and exploring innovative funding models. Adapting to the changing cultural landscape requires strategic planning, continuous engagement with stakeholders, and a proactive approach to securing financial support.

Participant B points out that:

Financial viability assessment involves holistic understanding of South African opera's role in the evolving cultural context. We acknowledge the challenges of obtaining consistent funding, especially given the economic fluctuations and competing cultural forms. One challenge is the perception that opera is an elitist art form, which impacts public and private funding. To overcome this, we aim to highlight the inclusivity and cultural richness of opera. Opportunities lie in forging partnerships with educational institutions, leveraging digital platforms, and aligning opera with national cultural priorities. We view funding challenges not only as obstacles but as catalysts for innovation and redefining opera's relevance.

Participant C highlights that:

In our role as opera company managers, evaluating the financial viability of South African opera is a multifaceted process. We face challenges in securing sustained funding due to economic uncertainties, and there is a need for increased recognition of opera's cultural importance. Opportunities arise from potential collaborations with international organisations, exploring philanthropic partnerships, and leveraging government support. Additionally, embracing technology for virtual performances presents a new avenue for both artistic expression and revenue generation. The changing cultural landscape demands adaptability, and we see these challenges as catalysts for reshaping how opera is funded and perceived.

Participant D states that:

Assessing the financial viability of South African opera requires a strategic approach that acknowledges the evolving cultural landscape. Funding challenges include limited corporate sponsorships and lack of public awareness. However, we identify opportunities in cultivating private patronage, engaging in community outreach, and developing educational programs. It's essential to emphasise the socio-cultural impact of opera and its contribution to national identity. We believe that securing funding requires not only addressing current challenges but also fostering long-term vision for the sustained growth and relevance of opera within the South African cultural milieu.

Based on the above responses, opera company managers in South Africa navigate a complex environment where financial viability demands nuanced understanding of economic trends, audience dynamics, and governmental influences (Participant A). The challenges they encounter, including shifting audience demographics and intense competition for funding in the broader arts sector, are acknowledged but reframed as opportunities for growth and adaptation



(Yende, 2023). Diversifying revenue streams, forming partnerships with local businesses, and exploring innovative funding models emerge as strategic responses to these challenges (Spies, 2015; Yende, 2023). Essential to their approach is strategic planning, continuous engagement with stakeholders, and a proactive stance to meet the demands of the evolving cultural landscape (Participant C). The call for inclusivity, emphasising the cultural richness of opera, becomes a pivotal aspect, aligning with broader trends in fostering diversity and accessibility in the arts (Participant B). This perspective reflects a collective belief among opera company managers that funding challenges serve not only as obstacles but as catalysts for innovation, providing an opportunity to redefine the role and relevance of opera within the South African cultural milieu (Participant D). The resilience and adaptability of these managers resonate with the transformative potential found in navigating the complexities of funding within a dynamic cultural context.

### ***Strategies and Initiatives for Sustaining Economic and Cultural Relevance***

This research question seeks to understand how opera company managers perceive the role of public funding in sustaining both the economic and cultural facets of opera, providing insights into the strategies they believe are essential for the art form's enduring significance. In responding to this question, Participant A highlights that:

As opera company managers, sustaining the economic and cultural relevance of opera in South Africa demands a multifaceted approach. Strategic collaborations with educational institutions and community organisations are crucial for fostering a deeper cultural connection. We perceive public funding as instrumental in promoting accessibility and inclusivity. By leveraging public funds, we can invest in educational outreach programs, making opera more accessible to diverse communities. This aligns with our commitment to not only sustain opera's artistic integrity but also ensure its resonance within the broader cultural fabric of South Africa. Participant B reveals that:

To sustain the economic and cultural relevance of opera, our strategy involves fostering local talent and creating production that resonate with South African narratives. We see public funding as a vital catalyst for these initiatives. By securing public support, we can invest in training programs, commission works that reflects our diverse heritage, and organise outreach projects. Public funding plays a pivotal role in making opera a cultural cornerstone accessible to all. It aligns with our vision of opera as a dynamic and inclusive art form that reflects and enriches the cultural tapestry of South Africa.

Participant C establishes that:

Our approach as opera company managers centres on innovation and collaboration. To sustain economic and cultural relevance, we prioritise cross-disciplinary collaborations, incorporating elements from various art forms into our production. Public funding is indispensable in realising these ambitious projects. It enables us to push artistic boundaries, stage large-scale production, and engage with local communities. Public funding, therefore,

serves as a cornerstone for fostering a thriving opera culture that resonates with the diverse and dynamic cultural landscape of South Africa.

Participant D points out that:

Sustaining the economic and cultural relevance of opera in South Africa necessitates strategic initiatives that reflect the nation's diversity. We emphasise community engagement and prioritise production that address contemporary social issues. Public funding is crucial in supporting these initiatives, allowing us to offer subsidised tickets, organise workshops, and reach audiences in underserved areas. Public funding serves as a bridge, connecting opera with a broader audience and reinforcing its role as a cultural force that mirrors and enriches the South African experience.

Participant A underscores the multifaceted approach required for sustaining the economic and cultural relevance of opera in South Africa. This aligns with existing literature emphasising the importance of collaboration with educational institutions and community organisations to deepen cultural connections (Nomcweya, 2018; Roos, 2010). The participant recognises public funding as instrumental in promoting accessibility and inclusivity, echoing findings that emphasise the role of public funding in supporting cultural initiatives and making the arts accessible to diverse communities (Yende, 2023).

Participant 2's strategy involves fostering local talent and creating culturally resonant production, aligning with existing literature that highlights the significance of reflecting diverse narratives in the arts (Yende, 2021; Roos, 2010). The participant views public funding as a vital catalyst for these initiatives, echoing scholarly perspectives on the pivotal role of public support in promoting cultural activities and making them accessible to a broad audience (Mulcahy, 2016). Participant C's emphasis on innovation and cross-disciplinary collaborations align with scholarly literature advocating for dynamic and diverse approaches in the arts (van der Hoven, 2018; Yende, 2022). The participant recognises the indispensable role of public funding in realising ambitious projects and fostering a thriving opera culture, reflecting existing literature on the positive impact of public funding on cultural endeavours.

Participant D's focus on strategic initiatives that reflect the nation's diversity corresponds with literature that highlights the importance of cultural engagement with contemporary social issues (Nomcweya, 2018; Spies, 2015). The participant acknowledges public funding as crucial for supporting community engagement initiatives, subsidising tickets, and reaching underserved areas, aligning with research emphasising the role of public funding in fostering cultural participation and accessibility.

### ***Opera Artists: Navigating the Impact of Changing Funding on Artistic Practices and Diversity***

This research question delves into the perspectives of opera artists, examining how the evolving funding landscape influences their artistic practices and the representation of diverse voices within South African opera. Participant A establishes that:

As an opera artist, the changing funding landscape significantly impacts my artistic practices. The uncertainty and competition for funds have led to a more cautious approach to

selecting projects. It affects the creative freedom to experiment and take risks. Representation of diverse voices in South African opera is hindered as funding constraints often prioritise mainstream production. While funding is vital for preserving cultural richness, there is a need for more inclusive funding models that support diverse narratives.

Participant B mentions that:

The evolving funding landscape directly influences how I approach my artistic practices. Limited resources often lead to compromises in production quality and artistic vision. Representation of diverse voices becomes challenging, as funding tends to favour established themes. Viewing funding as integral to preserving cultural richness, there's a concern that without ample support, unique South African stories may be overlooked. More equitable distribution of funds could better reflect the richness of our cultural tapestry.

Participant C points out that:

As an opera artist, the changing funding landscape poses challenges to the realisation of artistic vision. Financial constraints impact production scale and innovation. Diverse voices within South African opera struggle to find representation due to limited funding for unconventional projects. Funding is undeniably integral to preserve cultural richness, but current limitations hinder the exploration of lesser-known narratives. A shift toward prioritising cultural diversity in funding allocations is crucial.

Participant D ascertains that:

The impact of the changing funding landscape on my artistic practices is tangible. It often leads to compromises in production elements, affecting the overall artistic experience. Diverse voices in South African opera face marginalisation as funding tends to favour mainstream narratives. While funding is essential for preserving cultural richness, the current landscape requires a more inclusive approach to ensure that a broader spectrum of stories is told.

Participant E states:

The dynamic funding landscape significantly influences how I approach my artistic practices. Limited resources sometimes constrain the creative process and limit the exploration of diverse themes. The representation of diverse voices in South African opera is a constant challenge, with funding often favouring safer, commercially viable projects. Funding is undoubtedly integral to preserve cultural richness, but there is a need for increased support for projects that celebrate our diverse heritage.

Participant F asserts that:

As an opera artist, navigating the changing funding landscape requires adaptability and strategic choices in artistic practices. Limited funding often necessitates scaled-down production and compromises in artistic expression. The representation of diverse voices within South African opera faces obstacles, as funding tends to favour well-established narratives. While funding is crucial for preserving cultural richness, there is a call for more targeted support for projects that contribute to a more inclusive operatic landscape.

Opera artists in South Africa grapple with the significant impact of a changing funding landscape on their artistic practices. Challenges include cautious project selection, compromised creative freedom, and difficulties in representing diverse voices within South African opera. Limited resources lead to compromises in production quality, hindering the exploration of unique narratives. The need for a more inclusive funding model and equitable distribution of funds is underscored. Scholars like Yende (2021) and Roos (2010) align with these concerns, emphasising the importance of overcoming financial constraints to preserve cultural richness and promote diversity in artistic endeavours. Participant A highlights the significant impact of the changing funding landscape on artistic practices, leading to a more cautious approach in project selection and hindering creative freedom (Yende, 2021; Roos, 2010). The participant emphasises the challenge of prioritising mainstream production due to funding constraints, aligning with existing literature discussing the impact of financial limitations on artistic diversity.

Participant B discusses the direct influence of the evolving funding landscape on artistic practices, resulting in compromises in production quality and artistic vision (Yende, 2022). The participant underscores the challenge of representing diverse voices in South African opera and expresses concerns about the potential overlooking of unique stories without ample support, aligning with scholarly perspectives on the need for equitable funding distribution (Yende, 2021; Roos, 2010). Participant C points out the challenges posed by the changing funding landscape to the realisation of artistic vision, emphasising the impact of financial constraints on production scale and innovation (Nomcweya, 2018; Spies, 2015). The participant advocates for a shift toward prioritising cultural diversity in funding allocations, aligning with existing literature on the importance of inclusivity in cultural funding.

Participant D emphasises the tangible impact of the changing funding landscape on artistic practices, leading to compromises in production elements and affecting the overall artistic experience (Yende, 2021; Roos, 2010). The participant addresses the marginalisation of diverse voices in South African opera due to funding preferences for mainstream narratives, reflecting existing literature on the challenges of achieving diversity in funded projects (Spies, 2015). Participant F discusses the significant influence of the dynamic funding landscape on artistic approaches, noting constraints on the creative process and the challenge of representing diverse voices (Nomcweya, 2018; Spies, 2015). The participant advocates for increased support for projects celebrating diverse heritage, aligning with literature emphasising the importance of cultural richness in funded artistic endeavours. Participant F asserts that navigating the changing funding landscape requires adaptability and strategic choices, leading to scaled-down production and compromises in artistic expression. The participant calls for more targeted support for projects contributing to a more inclusive operatic landscape, reflecting scholarly discussions on the need for focused funding to promote diversity (Nomcweya, 2018; Spies, 2015).

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***Challenges, Opportunities, and the Contribution of Financial Support to Evolution***

In this section, participants A through E provide diverse perspectives on the strategies and initiatives opera company managers believe are crucial for sustaining the economic and cultural relevance of opera in South Africa, along with their perceptions of the role of public funding: Participant A states:

The managers stress strategic collaborations and partnerships with educational institutions and businesses. They believe public funding plays a vital role in making opera accessible through these initiatives.

Participant B mentions:

Managers prioritise fostering local talent, creating production reflecting South African narratives. Public funding is perceived as a catalyst for training programs, commissioning diverse works, and supporting outreach projects.

Participant C asserts:

The emphasis is on innovation and cross-disciplinary collaborations. Managers see public funding as essential for pushing artistic boundaries, engaging with local communities, and making opera dynamic and appealing.

Participant D ascertains:

Managers advocate for cultural representation in production, emphasising the importance of incorporating local stories and themes. Public funding is seen as crucial for supporting initiatives that contribute to a vibrant and culturally rich opera scene.

Participant E states:

Community engagement and outreach are highlighted as key strategies. Managers stress the role of public funding in organising workshops and events in underserved areas and making opera accessible to diverse audiences.

Participant F says:

The perception is that public funding serves as a vital catalyst for various initiatives. Managers stress their role in promoting accessibility, supporting training programs, and commissioning diverse works that contribute to the economic and cultural relevance of opera in South Africa.

The insights provided by participants underscore the multifaceted strategies advocated by opera company managers to sustain the economic and cultural relevance of opera in South Africa. Strategic collaborations and partnerships with educational institutions and businesses are emphasised as crucial components, aligning with existing literature that highlights the importance of forging connections to enhance the cultural impact of opera (Spies, 2015). The emphasis on innovation and cross-disciplinary collaborations align with literature highlighting the dynamic nature of the arts and the necessity for pushing boundaries to keep opera dynamic and appealing (Yende, 2023). Advocating for cultural representation in production and incorporating local stories and themes aligns with existing discourse on the importance of diverse narratives in sustaining a vibrant and culturally rich opera scene.

Community engagement and outreach, coupled with the role of public funding in organising workshops and events in underserved areas, echo scholarly discussions emphasising the significance of making opera accessible to diverse audiences (Spies, 2015). Lastly, the perception of public funding as a vital catalyst for various initiatives, promoting accessibility, supporting training programs, and commissioning diverse works aligns with literature on the crucial role of financial support in fostering the economic and cultural relevance of opera in South Africa. These responses collectively reinforce the interconnected nature of these strategies and highlight their importance in the broader context of sustaining opera in the South African cultural landscape.

### **DISCUSSIONS**

The findings from both opera company managers and opera artists align with social constructivism theory, emphasising the collective construction of knowledge within the opera industry. Opera company managers collaboratively navigate challenges, showcasing shared understanding (Yende, 2023). Meanwhile, opera artists, facing tangible impacts, collectively call for inclusive funding models (Roos, 2010). This reflects the interactive and socially constructed nature of knowledge, as individuals collectively shape and interpret their experiences within the evolving funding landscape (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). The shared perspectives underscore the dynamic interplay of ideas, reinforcing the collaborative construction of knowledge within the South African opera context.

In line with social constructivism, the managers collaboratively construct their understanding of the financial viability of South African opera by actively interpreting economic trends, audience preferences, and governmental policies (Participant A). This shared analysis reflects a social negotiation of meaning within the opera management community, where contextual factors are considered collectively to shape their perspectives (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). The acknowledgement of challenges such as evolving audience demographics and competition for funding demonstrates a shared awareness of the socio-cultural influences impacting their artistic practices (Participant 1). This collective recognition of challenges aligns with the social constructivist view that knowledge is co-constructed through shared experiences and interactions (Agius, 2013; Kim, 2001; Robbins, 2001). Furthermore, the reframing of challenges as opportunities, such as diversifying revenue streams and collaborating with local businesses, showcases a collective effort to adapt and innovate within the changing cultural landscape (Participant 1). This reflects the social constructivist idea that individuals actively shape their understanding of challenges and opportunities through shared discourse and negotiation (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978).

The emphasis on inclusivity, cultural richness, and the need for more inclusive funding models (Participant B) aligns with the social constructivist emphasis on cultural and social influences in shaping perspectives. The managers collectively advocate for a shift in perception and highlight their shared commitment to redefine opera's relevance in the South African

context. Moreover, the acknowledgment of the multifaceted process of evaluating financial viability, potential collaborations with international organisations, and leveraging technology (Participant C) reflects shared understanding of the complex and interconnected factors shaping the opera landscape. This aligns with the social constructivist notion that knowledge is context-dependent and emerges through social interactions (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). The strategic approach outlined by Participant D, which includes cultivating private patronage, community outreach, and emphasising the socio-cultural impact of opera, showcases a collective effort to address the financial challenges and contribute to the long-term vision of opera's growth and relevance (Participant D). This shared commitment to strategic planning and long-term vision aligns with the social constructivist idea that knowledge is actively constructed through collaborative efforts and shared values (Kim, 2001).

Opera artists, as the creative force within the industry, navigate the changing funding landscape with a shared acknowledgment of the tangible impact on their artistic practices. The cautious approach to project selection and compromises in artistic freedom are not isolated experiences but collectively constructed responses to financial uncertainties (Yende, 2021; Roos, 2010). The limitation in exploring diverse themes and voices within South African opera due to funding constraints becomes a shared challenge among artists (Spies, 2015). The resonance of these challenges across participants signifies a socially constructed understanding of the impact of funding dynamics on artistic expression.

Participants advocate for more inclusive funding models and equitable distribution of funds, emphasising the need for collective change in the industry's approach to financial support (Yende, 2021; Roos, 2010). This aligns with social constructivist principles, as the call for systemic change represents a shared narrative among artists, collectively shaping their response to financial challenges (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). The artists' emphasis on the preservation of cultural richness and the representation of diverse narratives within South African opera aligns with broader discourses on cultural identity and diversity (Nomcweya, 2018; Spies, 2015). These shared values underscore the socially constructed nature of the opera community's priorities, reflecting a collective commitment to cultural preservation and representation.

The strategies and initiatives proposed by both opera company managers and artists are interconnected, highlighting the collaborative construction of knowledge within the South African opera landscape. Managers stress strategic collaborations and partnerships as essential components of sustaining opera's economic and cultural relevance (Spies, 2015). Opera artists, in turn, highlight the importance of community engagement and outreach, reinforcing the interconnectedness of strategies aimed at making opera accessible to diverse audiences (Dollman, 2023). The perceived role of public funding as a vital catalyst for various initiatives is a shared perspective among both managers and artists. This shared understanding reflects a socially constructed narrative within the opera community about the instrumental role of public funding in sustaining the art form's economic and cultural significance.

The findings from both opera company managers and opera artists within the South African opera context align with the principles of social constructivism. The shared recognition of challenges, the collective construction of strategies, and the interconnectedness of responses underscore the socially constructed nature of knowledge within the industry. The collaborative shaping of narratives reflects a dynamic and interactive process where individuals collectively contribute to the understanding and navigation of the complex funding landscape. Embracing a social constructivist lens provides valuable insights into the shared experiences and responses that define the evolving South African opera scene.

### ***Recommendations***

Based on the comprehensive findings from the study involving both opera company managers and opera artists, several recommendations emerge to enhance the financial viability and cultural relevance of opera in South Africa.

#### ***For Opera Company Managers:***

- a) **Foster Strategic Collaborations and Partnerships:** Opera company managers should actively seek and foster collaborations with educational institutions, businesses, and community organisations. These partnerships cannot only deepen cultural connections but also provide avenues for diversified funding sources. Engaging with local stakeholders aligns with existing literature that emphasises the role of collaborative networks in enhancing the cultural impact of opera.

#### ***For Opera Artists:***

- b) **Advocate for Inclusive Funding Models:** Opera artists should collectively advocate for funding models that prioritise inclusivity and support diverse narratives. This recommendation aligns with the expressed need for more inclusive funding models to overcome constraints that hinder the representation of diverse voices in South African opera. Collaborative efforts among artists can contribute to reshaping funding allocations to better reflect the richness of the cultural landscape.

## **CONCLUSION**

The exploration of funding for South African opera within a changing cultural landscape reveals a nuanced and complex narrative. As opera company managers and artists grapple with evolving economic trends, audience preferences, and governmental policies, the question of whether opera should be funded or accepted as a fading culture emerges as a pivotal point of reflection. This conclusion delves into the insights gained from the study, highlighting the challenges faced, the strategies proposed, and the broader implications for the future of South African opera. Opera in South Africa faces multifaceted challenges, from shifting audience demographics to fierce competition for funding within the broader arts sector. Limited corporate sponsorships, perceptions of opera as an elitist art form, and economic uncertainties compound the obstacles. However, amid these challenges, the study reveals a resilient spirit within the opera community,



viewing difficulties not as insurmountable barriers but as opportunities for innovation and growth.

The changing landscape necessitates strategic adaptations by opera company managers. Diversifying revenue streams, collaborating with local businesses, and exploring innovative funding models are identified as crucial strategies. These initiatives not only address financial challenges but also contribute to the broader cultural tapestry by fostering inclusivity and highlighting the cultural richness of opera. Such responses align with global trends in the arts, where adaptability and innovation are essential for the survival and relevance of cultural forms. Central to the discussions among opera company managers is the notion of inclusivity and the preservation of cultural richness. The recognition that opera should not be confined to elitist perceptions but should resonate within diverse communities underscores a commitment to cultural preservation. Collaborations with educational institutions, community organisations, and the emphasis on community engagement initiatives reflect a desire to integrate opera into the fabric of South African society.

Public funding emerges as a linchpin in these efforts. It is seen as not only a financial resource but as a tool for promoting accessibility, supporting educational outreach programs, and subsidising tickets. This resonates with the broader discourse on the role of public funding in fostering cultural participation and ensuring the arts are accessible to all layers of society. Opera artists, as the custodians of cultural expression, provide invaluable insights into the impact of the changing funding landscape on their artistic practices. Their voices echo concerns about compromised creative freedom, cautious project selection, and challenges in representing diverse voices. Yet, in their narratives, there is a consistent thread of resilience and adaptability.

The call for more inclusive funding models, a shift toward prioritising cultural diversity, and leveraging digital platforms underscores the artists' commitment to preserving the soul of South African opera. Despite tangible challenges, opera artists view funding not only as a means of financial support but as a catalyst for telling unique stories and contributing to a more inclusive operatic landscape. The overarching question of whether opera should be funded or accepted as a fading culture presents a false dilemma. The study reveals that opera in South Africa is far from fading; instead, it is undergoing a metamorphosis, adapting to the dynamics of a changing cultural landscape. Rather than an either-or scenario, the focus should be on how to navigate the funding challenges to ensure the continued vibrancy and relevance of opera.

Opera's intrinsic value as a cultural expression should not be overshadowed by financial considerations alone. While funding is crucial for sustaining the economic and cultural relevance of opera, acceptance of its cultural significance is equally vital. The dichotomy between funding and acceptance dissolves when one recognises that financial support is not merely about sustaining a form of art but is an investment in the preservation of cultural heritage and the enrichment of societal tapestry.

As South African opera moves forward, the insights gleaned from this study offer valuable guidance. Opera company managers, artists, policymakers, and cultural institutions must orchestrate a symphony of collaboration and innovation. Strategic collaborations, diversification of revenue streams, and the leveraging of public funding are not just responses to challenges but are essential notes in composing a resilient and dynamic future for opera. The study's implications extend beyond the realm of opera; they touch upon broader themes of cultural sustainability, diversity, and accessibility in the arts. The lessons learned from navigating the funding landscape of opera can inform the approaches taken in supporting and preserving other cultural forms facing similar challenges.

In conclusion, funding South African opera should not be viewed as a choice between financial support and cultural acceptance. Instead, it is a harmonious interplay between these elements that will ensure the continued vibrancy, accessibility, and cultural richness of opera. The symphony of voices, from company managers to artists, resonates with a collective commitment to preserving the soul of South African opera, ensuring that its cultural legacy thrives in the ever-evolving landscape of the nation's artistic expression.

### Limitations

Limitations identified in the article include:

Scope Limited to South Africa: The study focuses exclusively on opera companies in South Africa, potentially limiting the generalisability of the findings to other regions or countries with different cultural, economic, and institutional contexts. Due to the focus on South Africa, the findings may not be easily generalisable to opera companies in other countries or regions, where funding mechanisms, cultural contexts, and challenges may differ significantly. Overall, while the article provides valuable insights into the funding challenges faced by opera companies in South Africa, its focus on a single country limits its broader applicability and highlights the need for future research to explore opera funding and cultural sustainability from a more global perspective.

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