

## Staging Inclusion: A Systematic Review of Sustainable Inclusive Theatre Production within the Framework of the SDGs

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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:**

Inclusive Theatre,  
Sustainability,  
Theatre Production,  
SDGs

*Inclusive theatre production remains largely incidental and limited to short-term projects, lacking a well-established model of sustainability. In many cases, inclusion is reduced to technical accessibility rather than genuine creative participation. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to map the practices, strategies, and sustainability orientations in inclusive theatre production and to examine its contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The research employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) based on the PRISMA 2020 protocol, with data retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar (2020–2025). Out of 50 initial publications, 23 studies met the inclusion criteria and were analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings reveal four key insights. First, conceptually, inclusive theatre is no longer viewed merely as an accessibility tool but as a social practice that negotiates identity and power relations through co-creation rather than symbolic representation. Second, in terms of production methods, approaches such as disability-led theatre, applied theatre, and community-based performance emerge as dominant models that foster equitable participation. Third, integration with the SDGs is reflected in the implementation of ecotheatre, dramatherapy, and arts-based pedagogy, which align with SDG 3, 4, 10, 11, and 12. Fourth, ongoing challenges include policy reform, the equalization of artistic authority, and the strengthening of collective leadership. In conclusion, inclusive theatre holds a strategic position as a transformative instrument for sustainable development, provided it is supported by a consistent and participatory cross-sectoral ecosystem.*

### INTRODUCTION

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize the importance of development oriented toward social inclusion, equitable access, and cultural sustainability as the foundation of modern civilization (Lily & Sharma, 2025; Wiktor-Mach, 2020). In this context, Goal 4 on Quality Education and Goal 10 on Reduced Inequalities not only demand equal learning opportunities but also imply a value transformation within educational systems to accommodate diverse abilities, social backgrounds, and cultural identities (Liu et al., 2022). The arts—particularly theatre—hold a strategic position as a pedagogical and social medium capable of bridging these gaps through collaborative experiences, empathetic expression, and inclusive empowerment (Hole & Schnellert, 2024; Nijkamp & Cardol, 2020). The inclusive theatre approach not only expands access to cultural participation but also strengthens collective awareness of human rights, equality, and social sustainability in alignment with the principles of the SDGs (Di Giovanni & Raffi, 2022; Muñoz-Bellerín & Cordero-Ramos, 2021).

The existence of theatre in inclusive spaces functions as more than an artistic medium; it serves as a platform for social learning that cultivates equality, empathy, and cross-ability collaboration. Within the contexts of education and cultural practice, theatre creates participatory experiences where individuals of different physical, cognitive, and social backgrounds engage equally in creative processes (Giera, 2025). Inclusive theatre productions, which involve both disabled and non-disabled participants within a single artistic ecosystem, foster collective awareness that differences are not limitations but

rather sources of expressive richness and social innovation (Seko et al., 2022; Worthington & Sextou, 2025). Through these practices, SDG-aligned values such as empowerment, participation, and social inclusion are actualized, positioning theatre as a transformative instrument in shaping a more inclusive, adaptive, and equitable society.

Sustainability in inclusive theatre production has emerged as a crucial issue requiring serious attention both in Indonesia and globally. The main challenges are not limited to funding limitations and access to facilities but also involve program continuity, which often ends at short-term project stages without mature sustainability strategies. Sustainability, however, is a fundamental aspect of realizing true inclusion—ensuring ongoing participation for all individuals within the artistic and cultural ecosystem (Cardol et al., 2025; Lee & Jenifer, 2025). Therefore, inclusive theatre production must be systematically examined by emphasizing the application of sustainability principles in every stage, from planning and collaboration to the evaluation of social and cultural impact. Integrating SDG principles into theatre production management not only enhances the social legitimacy of artistic practice but also generates ethical, participatory, and socially beneficial production models.

Although awareness of inclusive theatre is increasing, academic studies in Indonesia still show a significant gap, particularly in sustainable production. Most previous research in Indonesia (Sampurno, 2019; Sampurno et al., 2024; Siregar et al., 2022; Yasin et al., 2024) has focused on pedagogical and therapeutic dimensions, such as theatre as a tool for social learning or psychological rehabilitation for persons with disabilities. However, discussions on integrating sustainability principles into theatre production, management, and distribution remain limited. Therefore, this study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to identify patterns, strategies, and challenges in applying sustainability within inclusive theatre practices. The findings aim to build a conceptual framework for sustainable inclusive theatre production aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in promoting quality education, equality, and inclusive social development.

In response to this urgency, the present study contributes by systematically mapping practices, methods, and sustainability values embedded in inclusive theatre production. Through an in-depth analysis of international literature, this research seeks to identify how sustainability principles are translated into various production aspects—from artistic planning and resource management to community participation in creative processes. The findings are expected to serve as a foundation for developing evidence-based inclusive arts policies and strengthening arts education curricula to be more responsive to diversity and social sustainability. Practically, this study contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by reinforcing the role of theatre as an equitable, participatory, and sustainable learning space.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to comprehensively examine practices, strategies, and sustainability principles in inclusive theatre production that contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This approach was chosen as it enables a structured and systematic process of identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing scholarly literature (Tranfield et al., 2003). The entire research procedure follows the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews

and Meta-Analyses) protocol as developed by Page et al. (2021), ensuring transparency, systematic rigor, and replicability throughout the stages of literature search, selection, and synthesis (Moher et al., 2009).

The initial stage involved searching for literature across major academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, following the principles of systematic mapping (Petersen et al., 2015). Scopus and Web of Science were selected due to their credibility as internationally recognized indexing databases that ensure validity and traceability of sources (Falagas et al., 2008; Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016), while Google Scholar was utilized as a complementary source to capture relevant local or grey literature not yet widely indexed (Martín-Martín et al., 2018).

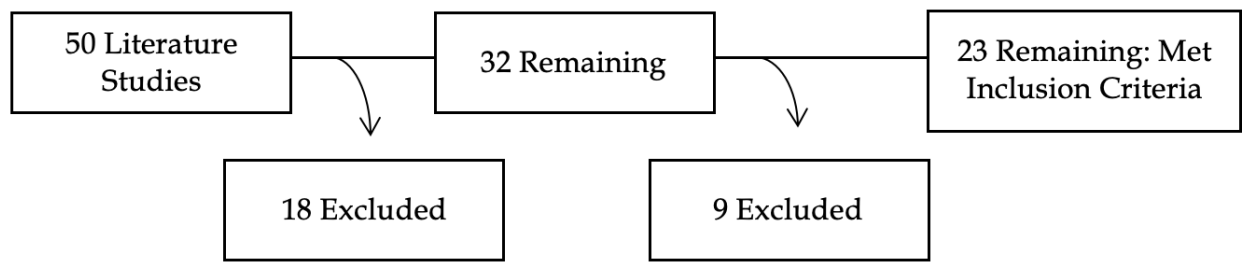
The literature search was conducted using keywords such as inclusive theatre, sustainable performing arts, disability and theatre, and arts for SDGs, restricted to English and Indonesian publications within the last five years (2020–2025) to maintain data relevance and currency. The selection process proceeded through several stages, beginning with general exploration and followed by in-depth screening of studies discussing inclusive theatre, sustainable art production, and the role of performing arts in social empowerment. Non-peer-reviewed publications, editorial opinions, and articles lacking empirical data were excluded from the analysis (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2015).

Data extracted from the selected articles included research objectives, methodologies, key findings, and strategic recommendations related to the management and production of inclusive theatre. Data analysis employed a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to categorize findings into four key themes: (1) concepts of inclusive theatre and social praxis, (2) application of sustainability principles in performing arts, (3) integration of SDG values in theatre practices, and (4) innovations and policy frameworks supporting sustainable production. Through this analytical framework, the study seeks to construct a comprehensive conceptual map of sustainable inclusive theatre production strategies as a cultural practice that concretely advances the realization of the SDGs.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### RESULTS

This study is the result of a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) that comprehensively examines the practices and strategies of sustainable inclusive theatre production in supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The study follows the PRISMA 2020 protocol (Page et al., 2021) to ensure that the processes of literature search, selection, and synthesis are conducted systematically, transparently, and replicably. The PRISMA 2020 protocol consists of 27 core components that guide the reporting of systematic reviews and meta-analyses, covering essential aspects such as literature search strategies, selection criteria, data extraction procedures, thematic analysis, and quality assessment of studies. By adhering to these guidelines, this research aims to produce findings that are valid, unbiased, and scientifically accountable. The following presents the results of the literature selection process that form the analytical foundation of this study:



**Figure 1.** Literature Selection Process

The literature selection process began with the collection of 50 scholarly articles from reputable research journals relevant to the themes of inclusive theatre and sustainability in performing arts. The initial stage involved screening based on Inclusion Criteria I, namely the relevance of the topic to the research focus—covering issues of inclusive theatre, sustainable production, arts education, and their relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). From this first screening, 18 articles were eliminated due to a lack of thematic relevance. The next stage involved a more rigorous selection process based on Inclusion Criteria II, requiring that articles be indexed in Scopus and published within the last five years (2020–2025). At this stage, an additional nine articles were excluded for not meeting these standards. Consequently, 23 articles were deemed eligible and served as the primary sources for this systematic analysis. The following section presents the 23 selected studies that successfully passed all stages of the screening process:

**Table 1.** Literature Studies Meeting Inclusion Criteria

| No | Title                                                                                                       | Method                | Summary of Findings                                                                                                     |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Creating Inclusive Performing Arts Practices for Youth with Disabilities (Le Roux et al., 2021)             | Qualitative           | Performing arts enhance self-confidence and social skills among individuals with disabilities.                          |
| 2  | Inclusive Theatre and Its Role in the Sociocultural Space (Petrov & Zavaritsyna, 2022)                      | Descriptive           | Inclusive theatre contributes to social and cultural integration.                                                       |
| 3  | Inclusive Theatres as Boosters of Well-being (Di Giovanni & Raffi, 2022)                                    | Experimental          | Participation in inclusive theatre improves participants' psychological well-being.                                     |
| 4  | Theatre, Disability and Wellbeing (Worthington & Sextou, 2024)                                              | Phenomenological      | Inclusive theatre fosters empathy and cross-community social connections.                                               |
| 5  | Disability Theatre as Critical Participatory Action Research (Hole & Schnellert, 2024)                      | CPAR                  | Theatre processes empower people with disabilities and promote equal collaboration.                                     |
| 6  | Diversity, Opportunities and Challenges of Inclusive Theatre (Nijkamp & Cardol, 2022)                       | Systematic Case Study | Collaboration between disabled and non-disabled actors promotes shifts in social perceptions.                           |
| 7  | Turning it Sustainable: Implementing Sustainability Goals in Theatre Productions at NTNU (Pérez, 2023)      | Case Study            | Applying 4R principles (Reuse, Reduce, Repurpose, Recycle) achieves sustainable theatre production aligned with SDG 12. |
| 8  | The Role of Arts Integration in Education as a Catalyst for Sustainable Development (Ugiebeme et al., 2025) | Multidisciplinary     | Integrating arts into education enhances creativity, empathy, and cultural literacy to achieve SDG 4.                   |

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                         |                                                                                                                                                      |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 9  | Dramatherapy as a Multidisciplinary Approach to Advancing Human Values in Education and Mental Health (Ranasinha, 2025)                                                          | Qualitative                             | Dramatherapy promotes mental health, empathy, and social peace in line with SDGs 3, 4, and 16.                                                       |
| 10 | Everyone Is Reading and Playing! A Participatory Theatre Project to Promote Reading Competence (Giera, 2025)                                                                     | Design-Based Research (DBR)             | Participatory theatre projects improve reading competence and social interaction among students with special needs.                                  |
| 11 | Igal Ritual Theatre: A Cultural Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Perspective (Rahman et al., 2024)                                                                           | Ethnographic                            | The Igal ritual theatre preserves cultural heritage and enhances spiritual well-being consistent with Cultural SDGs.                                 |
| 12 | Aesthetic Democracy as the Roots of Sustainable Cities and Communities (Juguero, 2023)                                                                                           | Reflective-Critical                     | Aesthetic democracy in performing arts contributes to the development of sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11).                                |
| 13 | Participatory Theatre and SDG10: The Problem of Inequality (Freebody, 2023)                                                                                                      | Policy Analysis & Case Study            | Participatory theatre helps reduce social inequality through collective experience and social justice (SDG 10).                                      |
| 14 | The Use of Applied Theatre Activities for Rural Children's Learning of Cultural Heritage in the ISAN Community (Akkapram, 2024)                                                  | Participatory                           | Culturally-based applied theatre enhances children's awareness and pride in the intangible cultural heritage of the Isan community.                  |
| 15 | Inclusive Theatre-Making: Participation, Empowerment and Well-being (Di Giovanni, 2022)                                                                                          | Social Experiment                       | Participation in inclusive theatre increases well-being and sense of belonging for people with disabilities.                                         |
| 16 | Inclusive Casting Debunked: Towards Holistic Interventions in Staged Performance (Stamatiou, 2023)                                                                               | Critical Analysis                       | Inclusive casting remains largely symbolic; holistic approaches are needed to achieve fair representation on stage.                                  |
| 17 | The Role of Applied Theatre in Social Work: Creative Interventions with Homeless Individuals (Muñoz-Bellerín & Cordero-Ramos, 2020)                                              | Case Study                              | Applied theatre empowers homeless individuals and fosters social interaction through creative and collaborative processes.                           |
| 18 | Applied Theatre: Research-Based Theatre, or Theatre-Based Research? (Busby, 2024)                                                                                                | Qualitative-Ethnographic                | Applied theatre with Dalit communities in India facilitates social, spatial, and cognitive justice through artistic collaboration.                   |
| 19 | The Inside Project: Towards a 'Universal' Inclusive Theatre Devising Framework for Disabled and Non-Disabled Collaborators (Cooper et al., 2023)                                 | Developmental Research                  | Develops a universal inclusive framework for creative collaboration between disabled and non-disabled actors in theatre-making.                      |
| 20 | From Accessibility to Inclusion in the Theatre: Exploring the Spectrum Between Traditional Audio Introductions and Mainstream Theatre Podcasts (Hermosa-Ramírez & Reviers, 2024) | Systemic Functional Linguistic Analysis | Theatre podcasts represent new forms of inclusive access beyond traditional audio approaches, reducing visual bias and expanding audience diversity. |
| 21 | Barriers to Cultural Participation by People with Disabilities in Europe: A Study Across 28 Countries (Leahy & Ferri, 2024)                                                      | Qualitative-Comparative                 | Main barriers to cultural participation among people with disabilities in Europe include weak policies, limited funding,                             |

|    |                                                                                                                                                                        |                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    |                                                                                                                                                                        |                           | negative attitudes, and lack of involvement in cultural institutions.                                                                                                                               |
| 22 | Accessibility and Inclusion at the Theatre: The Inclusive Theatre Project at the University of Hildesheim (Mälzer & Wünsche, 2024)                                     | Case Study                | Differentiates between accessibility and inclusion in theatre practices; the Hildesheim project emphasizes equal access and active participation of people with disabilities in creative processes. |
| 23 | Cultivating Community Through Theatre: A Hermeneutical Exploration of Theatre in Education and Inclusive Pedagogy in Rural Areas (Visky-Varga & Bartalis-Binder, 2023) | Hermeneutic-Participatory | Theatre in education (TiE) in rural areas fosters community engagement, children's identity expression, and collaborative learning rooted in inclusion and critical pedagogy.                       |

The research articles selected for this review were carefully chosen based on their thematic relevance to the study's focus—namely, the concept of inclusive theatre, its relationship with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), its production methods and models, as well as its challenges and future directions. The reviewed works encompass both conceptual and practical dimensions, ranging from the theoretical and social foundations of inclusive theatre to its role in advancing the SDGs, including the application of approaches such as applied theatre and community-based performance as forms of creative participation. All selected articles met the inclusion criteria of being indexed research published within the past five years, thus providing a strong theoretical and empirical foundation for analyzing the sustainability and transformative potential of inclusive theatre in the context of cultural participation and social justice.

## DISCUSSION

The discussion in this study is the result of a comprehensive analysis of selected literature based on the central themes of the research: the concept of inclusive theatre, its relationship with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the methods and models of inclusive performance production, and its future developmental directions. Each study was analyzed through thematic synthesis to identify strategies, principles, and practices relevant to developing inclusive theatre as a medium for education, social empowerment, and sustainable cultural participation. Accordingly, the entire discussion presented in this study is grounded in the synthesis of literature that meets inclusion criteria and topical relevance to issues of sustainability, social justice, and the enhancement of accessibility for persons with disabilities through the performing arts. The description of the discussion of this research is as follows:

### Inclusive Theatre: Concepts and Theoretical Foundations

The concept of inclusive theatre refers to a performing arts practice that aims to create participatory spaces where all individuals—regardless of physical, sensory, or cognitive abilities—can contribute equally within the creative process. This approach rejects traditional perspectives that frame people with disabilities as objects of pity or mere symbols of representation, and instead positions them as active subjects with artistic and intellectual capacities equal to other creative practitioners. In this context, inclusive

theatre is not merely an artistic project but also a social practice that embodies values of democracy, justice, and human diversity.

Theoretically, inclusive theatre is grounded in Critical Disability Studies (CDS) and Participatory Art Theory, both of which view art as a tool for social emancipation and cultural transformation. This paradigm asserts that barriers in the performing arts are not derived from bodily limitations but from socially and aesthetically exclusive systems. Therefore, inclusive theatre emphasizes practices of co-creation, shared authorship, and embodied knowledge to produce works that reflect the diversity of human experience. Based on this framework, the following key concepts and theoretical foundations underpin the development of inclusive theatre:

**Tabel 2.** Concepts and Theoretical Foundations Inclusive Theatre

| Aspect                     | Concepts and Theoretical Foundations                                                                                                                   | Supporting Studies                                      |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Engagement                 | Positions persons with disabilities as active subjects in the creative process, not passive participants                                               | Hole & Schnellert (2024); Worthington & Sextou (2024)   |
| Accessibility              | Designs performances with accessible formats (subtitles, sign interpreters, disability-friendly spaces) to ensure equal participation                  | Le Roux et al. (2021); Di Giovanni & Raffi (2022)       |
| Artistic Language          | Develops a performative language that adapts to the physical and sensory capacities of disabled actors through gesture, visuality, and nonverbal sound | Petrov & Zavarnitsyna (2022); Nijkamp & Cardol (2022)   |
| Well-being and Empowerment | Uses inclusive theatre as a means of strengthening identity, confidence, and psychosocial well-being                                                   | Di Giovanni & Raffi (2022); Worthington & Sextou (2024) |
| Social Collaboration       | Builds partnerships between disabled and non-disabled actors through collective work and joint improvisation                                           | Nijkamp & Cardol (2022); Le Roux et al. (2021)          |
| Theoretical Foundations    | Based on Critical Disability Studies and Participatory Action Research emphasizing social justice and cultural change                                  | Hole & Schnellert (2024); Petrov & Zavarnitsyna (2022)  |

One of the most fundamental principles in inclusive theatre is the shift from representation to full participation. Theatre no longer positions persons with disabilities as objects of spectacle but as creative subjects actively engaged in every artistic process. Hole & Schnellert (2024) describe this approach as a democratization of artistic space, where the lived experience of disability becomes a source of both aesthetic and epistemic insight. By granting artistic authority to disabled actors, this practice challenges existing power structures within the performing arts that have traditionally been dominated by non-disabled bodies. Similarly, Worthington & Sextou (2025) emphasize that direct involvement of disabled performers not only enriches theatrical narratives but also provides a platform for articulating identity and resisting social stigma.

This shift in the concept of participation necessitates tangible accessibility across all aspects of theatre production. Equal participation cannot be achieved without systems that ensure everyone can access and experience performances. Le Roux et al. (2021) demonstrate that accessible theatre design—such as the use of subtitles, sign language interpreters, and inclusive stage layouts—is an integral part of inclusive strategies. Moreover, Di Giovanni & Raffi (2022) assert that accessibility is not merely a technical concern but an ethical and social responsibility of artists toward the principle of cultural justice. Thus, every element of production—both artistic and logistical—must reflect

empathy and equality so that the presence of persons with disabilities is not only accepted but genuinely respected.

A strong emphasis on accessibility also leads to the development of a new artistic language capable of accommodating diverse physical and sensory abilities among performers. Petrov & Zavarnitsyna (2023) highlight that inclusive theatre requires an expansion of expressive forms beyond verbalism, employing gesture, visual imagery, breathing rhythm, and nonverbal sounds as aesthetic communication tools. This approach enables the creation of an “alternative bodily language” that does not imitate normative physical standards but instead presents a new form of beauty emerging from difference. Nijkamp & Cardol (2020) further note that such an artistic language enriches the aesthetic horizon of modern theatre by treating difference not as deviation but as a source of artistic originality. Thus, inclusive theatre not only broadens artistic expression but also deconstructs dominant aesthetic norms often biased toward non-disabled bodies.

Beyond aesthetics, inclusive theatre carries profound social and psychological functions, particularly in the context of empowerment and individual well-being. Through the process of creation and performance, participants not only engage as artists but also rediscover their sense of self and identity. Di Giovanni & Raffi (2022) found that active participation in theatre enhances confidence and reduces social isolation. Worthington & Sextou (2025) support this finding, emphasizing that theatre serves as a social healing space, where artistic experiences facilitate psychosocial recovery and personal transformation. Such inclusive creative processes benefit both disabled performers and the broader social environment by fostering empathy and adaptability toward diversity. Ultimately, all these processes converge on social collaboration as the core of the inclusive theatre ecosystem. Collaborative practices between disabled and non-disabled actors create interactive spaces that enrich aesthetic experiences and expand the meaning of humanity. Nijkamp & Cardol (2020) explain that through collective work, joint improvisation, and shared experiences, artistic solidarity emerges—dissolving the boundaries between “normal” and “abnormal.” le Roux et al. (2021) add that this collaborative model also acts as a form of cultural intervention, challenging exclusive social structures and fostering egalitarian relationships both on and off stage. Therefore, collaboration in inclusive theatre not only generates more dynamic performances but also reinforces the humanistic values at the core of artistic practice.

The conceptual foundations of these approaches are rooted in Critical Disability Studies (CDS) and Participatory Action Research (PAR). Both frameworks position art as a site of social struggle, not merely a medium of expression. Hole & Schnellert, (2024) explain that CDS views disability as a social construct to be critiqued and transformed through cultural action. Meanwhile, Petrov & Zavarnitsyna (2023) argue that the PAR paradigm emphasizes the active role of persons with disabilities as co-researchers, rather than as research subjects. The integration of these two frameworks establishes inclusive theatre as an emancipatory practice, merging aesthetic, ethical, and political dimensions in balance.

In summary, inclusive strategies in theatre are not only concerned with the inclusion of persons with disabilities on stage but also with dismantling the social and aesthetic structures of exclusion. Through active engagement, comprehensive accessibility, the creation of new artistic languages, and equitable social collaboration, inclusive theatre emerges as a cultural movement advocating justice, humanity, and bodily diversity. The

theoretical foundations based on CDS and PAR affirm that every artistic practice is simultaneously a social one—where aesthetic transformation progresses hand in hand with the transformation of human values.

### Methods and Models of Inclusive Theatre Production

The methods and models of inclusive theatre production refer to diverse creative approaches, techniques, and frameworks used to realize inclusivity, social justice, and community empowerment within the theatre-making process. This approach positions theatre not merely as a performing art, but as a medium for social transformation that brings together individuals of different identities, backgrounds, and physical abilities into a collaborative space. Through practices such as Applied Theatre, Disability-Led Theatre, and Community-Based Theatre, inclusive theatre production creates participatory spaces where everyone has equal opportunities to contribute to creation, performance, and social reflection.

This paradigm focuses on dismantling traditional hierarchies in theatre that often position persons with disabilities, marginalized groups, and non-urban communities merely as objects of representation. Instead, inclusive theatre empowers them as active subjects leading the artistic process, expanding the meaning of accessibility toward genuine participation and social empowerment. Through various production methods and models, inclusivity emerges not only as a matter of representation but also as a way of building equitable relationships between artists, communities, and their social environments. The following table summarizes key methods and models of inclusive theatre production relevant to principles of sustainability and social justice:

**Tabel 3.** Methods and Models of Inclusive Theatre Production

| Aspect                                         | Methods and Models of Inclusive Theatre Production                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Supporting Research                   |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Applied Theatre for Cultural Learning          | Utilizes <i>applied theatre</i> through the folk mural practice ( <i>Hoop Taem</i> ) to enhance cultural heritage learning among rural children in Isan, Thailand. This approach fosters pride in local identity and strengthens cultural literacy. | Akkapram (2024)                       |
| Inclusive Theatre-Making for Well-Being        | Shifts the paradigm of accessibility from eliminating barriers to celebrating human participation as the center of theatre practice. It enhances social well-being by engaging actors with disabilities as equal creative partners.                 | Di Giovanni (2022)                    |
| Disability-Led Theatre Model                   | Empowers persons with disabilities as artistic leaders, writers, and directors. This model challenges non-disabled dominance and promotes authentic representation in collaborative theatre-making.                                                 | Cooper, Copeman & Holman Jones (2023) |
| Applied Theatre for Social Work                | Critiques tokenistic <i>colour-blind casting</i> and emphasizes quality representation and authorship for marginalized groups, including disability, race, and gender.                                                                              | Stamatiou (2022)                      |
| Research-Based / Theatre-Based Applied Theatre | Integrates theatre into social work with homeless individuals as a means of capacity building and community development, creating shared spaces between vulnerable and general populations.                                                         | Muñoz-Bellerín & Cordero-Ramos (2020) |
| Universal Inclusive Theatre Devising Framework | Encourages long-term collaboration between artists and marginalized communities (e.g., Dalit in India)                                                                                                                                              | Busby (2024)                          |

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through *site-specific storytelling* to achieve social, spatial, and cognitive justice.

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One of the key directions in the development of inclusive theatre is the shift from viewing theatre production merely as a performative space toward understanding it as a medium for social and cultural empowerment. This is evident in Akkapram (2024) Applied Theatre for Cultural Learning model through the Hoop Taem folk mural practice in rural Thailand, which positions theatre as a tool for cultural education that fosters local identity and intangible heritage literacy. Thus, theatre functions not only as entertainment but also as a community-based learning strategy that promotes socio-cultural sustainability. In this sense, cultural sustainability is realized through active community participation, where artistic expression becomes a means of preserving identity and local values amid globalization.

The dimension of social well-being in inclusive theatre is strengthened by the Inclusive Theatre-Making for Well-Being model (Di Giovanni & Raffi, 2022), which redefines accessibility from removing obstacles to celebrating equal participation. This model positions actors with disabilities as co-creators rather than objects of representation, turning the creative process into a site of social and psychological recovery. Similarly, the Disability-Led Theatre model (Cooper et al., 2023) expands empowerment by granting artistic leadership roles—such as directing, writing, and conceptualization—to disabled artists. This practice challenges dominant aesthetic norms, cultivates authentic representation, and constructs new narratives of equality within performing arts.

On the social and ethical level, Applied Theatre for Social Work (Stamatiou, 2022) and Research-Based Theatre (Muñoz-Bellerín & Cordero-Ramos, 2020) emphasize theatre as a means of social intervention. These approaches reject tokenistic Colour-Blind Casting and promote genuine participation of marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities and the homeless, in creating narratives that reflect their lived experiences. Meanwhile, the Universal Inclusive Theatre Devising Framework (Busby, 2024) highlights long-term collaboration between artists and marginalized communities such as the Dalit in India through Site-Specific Storytelling to achieve social, spatial, and cognitive justice. Altogether, these approaches demonstrate that inclusive theatre is not merely a form of performance, but a social strategy affirming representational justice, community empowerment, and the integration of disability issues into broader discourses of cultural and human sustainability.

### **Inclusive Theatre and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

The integration of inclusive theatre with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is rooted in the understanding that performing arts function not only as a form of aesthetic expression but also as an instrument for social transformation and sustainable development. In this context, inclusive theatre serves as a collaborative space that facilitates participation across abilities, cultures, and social backgrounds—supporting values of humanity, education, health, and environmental awareness. Through practices such as Ecotheatre, Arts-Based Education, and Participatory Theatre, the performing arts contribute directly to global efforts in realizing a more just, healthy, and sustainable society as envisioned in the SDG agenda.

Conceptually, the integration of inclusive theatre and the SDGs underscores the close relationship between creativity and social sustainability. This paradigm positions art as a medium for empathetic learning, intercultural dialogue, and psychosocial healing that

strengthens individual and community resilience. It also seeks to eliminate social disparities by ensuring equitable access to cultural participation, aligning with the “No One Left Behind” principle of sustainable development. Thus, inclusive theatre becomes a multidimensional practice that unites aesthetic, ethical, and ecological values within a single framework of social action. Based on this understanding, the following table summarizes various aspects and strategies of sustainable inclusive theatre that support the integrated implementation of the SDGs:

**Tabel 4.** Inclusive Theatre and the Sustainable Development Goals

| Aspect                                          | Inclusive Theatre and the Sustainable Development Goals                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Supporting Research    |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Sustainable Production Design                   | Integrates the 4R principles ( <i>Reuse, Reduce, Repurpose, Recycle</i> ) in theatre production design to support SDG 12 ( <i>Responsible Consumption and Production</i> ) through environmentally conscious creative practices.                          | Pérez (2025)           |
| Integration of Arts in Education                | Utilizes theatre as part of arts integration in formal education to support SDG 4 ( <i>Quality Education</i> ) through creative, inclusive, and empathy-based learning.                                                                                   | Ugiebeme et al. (2025) |
| Dramatherapy and Mental Health                  | Applies dramatherapy as an interdisciplinary approach to achieving SDG 3 ( <i>Good Health</i> ), SDG 4 ( <i>Quality Education</i> ), and SDG 16 ( <i>Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions</i> ) by reinforcing humanistic and psychosocial well-being. | Ranasinha (2025)       |
| Inclusive Participation and Literacy            | Employs participatory theatre projects to enhance reading skills and social interaction among students with special educational needs (SEN), aligned with SDG 4 ( <i>Quality Education</i> ) and SDG 10 ( <i>Reduced Inequalities</i> ).                  | Giera (2025)           |
| Cultural and Spiritual Preservation             | Promotes traditional ritual theatre such as <i>Igal</i> as a model for preserving cultural and spiritual heritage, supporting the Cultural SDGs focused on social well-being and community identity.                                                      | Rahman et al. (2024)   |
| Aesthetic Democracy and Sustainable Communities | Develops the concept of <i>aesthetic democracy</i> in arts and theatre education as a foundation for SDG 11 ( <i>Sustainable Cities and Communities</i> ), fostering empathy and civic participation.                                                     | Juguero (2023)         |
| Participatory Theatre and Social Justice        | Implements participatory theatre to support SDG 10 ( <i>Reduced Inequalities</i> ), emphasizing representation, lived experience, and equality within social discourse.                                                                                   | Freebody (2023)        |

One of the most significant directions in the evolution of sustainable inclusive theatre is the transformation of the stage from a purely aesthetic space into an arena for ecological and social reflection. This is particularly evident in the concept of Sustainable Production Design, where Pérez (2023) emphasizes integrating the 4R principles (*Reuse, Reduce, Repurpose, Recycle*) into artistic processes. Such practices not only minimize production waste but also reshape how artists perceive sustainability as an integral part of performance aesthetics. In other words, beauty is no longer defined by visual luxury but by ecological ethics and social responsibility embedded within creative processes. Similarly, Integration of Arts in Education (Ugiebeme et al., n.d.) positions theatre as a creative learning medium contributing to SDG 4 (*Quality Education*). This approach promotes empathy-based, collaborative, and socially just learning, where artistic experience becomes part of a holistic and sustainable pedagogical strategy. In the context of human well-being, Dramatherapy emerges as a bridge between art and mental health. Ranasinha (2025) illustrates how dramatherapy supports SDG 3 (*Good Health*), SDG 4 (*Quality Education*), and SDG 16 (*Peace and Justice*) by enhancing human

values, empathy, and psychosocial healing. Through embodied practices and narrative exploration, theatre becomes a space for individuals to process trauma, build resilience, and reconnect socially. This approach aligns closely with Inclusive Participation and Literacy, as examined by Giera (2025) where participatory theatre is used to develop reading and social skills among students with special educational needs (SEN). Here, art functions not merely as expression but as a tool of inclusion—granting students with disabilities active participation in creative and meaningful learning processes. This demonstrates that inclusivity and sustainability are inherently interconnected, both rooted in the principle of equal access and participation.

The cultural and social dimensions of sustainable inclusive theatre also hold broad significance. Cultural and Spiritual Preservation, as demonstrated by Rahman et al. (2024) through the study of Igal Ritual Theatre, emphasizes that traditional performance plays a vital role in maintaining balance between cultural heritage, spirituality, and social well-being. This approach expands the notion of sustainability beyond environmental concerns to encompass the preservation of identity and collective memory. Meanwhile, Juguero (2023) introduces the concept of Aesthetic Democracy, which highlights community participation in artistic processes as a foundation for building sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11). Through participatory aesthetics, art becomes a site of social learning that cultivates empathy and civic responsibility. Finally, Participatory Theatre and Social Justice, as discussed by Freebody (2023), underscores theatre as a form of cultural politics that challenges inequality and advocates for the representation of marginalized voices, in alignment with SDG 10 (*Reduced Inequalities*).

Grounded in theories of Ecotheatre, Arts-Based Pedagogy, and Participatory Theatre, these approaches collectively reveal that sustainable inclusive theatre is not merely an artistic project but a social strategy that unites ecological, educational, and ethical dimensions. Within this context, disability occupies a central position—since the principles of inclusion, access, and equitable participation mirror the essence of sustainability itself. Through collaborative processes, innovative artistic languages, and ecological consciousness, sustainable theatre builds a new paradigm: art as a shared living space where human diversity and the planet's sustainability coexist in creative harmony.

### **Challenges and Future Directions in Sustainable Inclusive Theatre**

The challenges and future directions of sustainable inclusive theatre highlight the dynamics, obstacles, and opportunities in developing practices that are genuinely inclusive and sustainable. Inclusive theatre is not only understood as a space of access for persons with disabilities, but also as a social ecosystem that negotiates power relations, representation, and human diversity within artistic practice. Emerging challenges include shifting the paradigm from mere technical accessibility toward meaningful participation, restructuring cultural policies, and establishing equitable artistic leadership for artists with disabilities.

The paradigm of sustainable inclusive theatre also seeks to integrate the principles of social justice, co-creation, and cultural sustainability as future directions. This approach emphasizes the importance of cross-sector collaboration between the arts, education, and public policy to ensure that inclusion does not remain symbolic but becomes a transformative process that expands the right to cultural participation. The following table summarizes the key challenges and future directions of sustainable inclusive theatre

based on recent research emphasizing participation, representation, and ecosystem sustainability:

**Tabel 5.** Challenges and Future Directions in Sustainable Inclusive Theatre

| Aspect                                         | Challenges and Future Directions of Sustainable Inclusive Theatre                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Supporting Studies                                        |
|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| From Accessibility to Inclusion                | The main challenge is the paradigm shift from technical accessibility to meaningful participation. Media innovations such as inclusive theatre podcasts are needed to expand the experiences of audiences with disabilities and reduce the dominance of visual-based practices. | Hermosa-Ramírez & Reviers (2024)                          |
| Systemic Barriers to Cultural Participation    | Structural barriers remain strong, including weak legal enforcement, limited funding, and low disability representation. The future requires policy reforms to ensure persons with disabilities become active cultural actors.                                                  | Leahy & Ferri (2024)                                      |
| The Inclusive Theatre Project Model            | The conflation of accessibility and inclusion remains a challenge. Future directions focus on co-creation and participatory justice rather than the mere provision of technical facilities.                                                                                     | Mälzer & Wünsche (2024)                                   |
| Theatre in Education (TiE) and Rural Inclusion | The lack of trained facilitators hinders the implementation of critical pedagogy in rural areas. TiE must be developed adaptively to foster local identity and social cohesion inclusively.                                                                                     | Visky-Varga & Bartalis-Binder (2024)                      |
| Inclusive Leadership and Representation        | Structural bias in art institutions remains a key issue. The future demands disability-led and transformative – not symbolic – artistic practices.                                                                                                                              | Cooper, Copeman & Holman Jones (2023); Di Giovanni (2022) |
| Policy Integration and Cultural Sustainability | Cross-sectoral integration between the arts, education, and social domains is required to sustain inclusive theatre ecosystems aligned with SDGs 4, 10, and 11.                                                                                                                 | Leahy & Ferri (2024); Busby (2024)                        |

One significant direction in the development of sustainable inclusive theatre is the paradigm shift from merely providing technical access to fostering meaningful participation for all individuals. Hermosa-Ramírez & Reviers (2024) emphasize that inclusion in theatre goes beyond offering assistive tools or audio descriptions; it must also create shared experiences between audiences and performers with disabilities. Innovations such as inclusive theatre podcasts expand participation by connecting theatre experiences with broader audiences beyond visual-based practices. This shift reflects a fundamental value change – accessibility is not the ultimate goal but rather the first step toward genuine participation in the performing arts.

At the structural and policy level, cultural participation barriers for persons with disabilities remain systemic. Leahy & Ferri (2024) found that weak law enforcement, insufficient funding, and underrepresentation of people with disabilities in cultural institutions reinforce inequality in arts access. The future of inclusive theatre requires policy reforms that engage persons with disabilities not only as policy beneficiaries but also as decision-makers and creative leaders. Similarly, Mälzer & Wünsche (2024) warn that accessibility and inclusion are often treated as synonymous, though they differ in orientation. A new direction must focus on co-creation—shared creative practices emphasizing participatory justice where every individual actively contributes throughout the artistic process.

In educational and community contexts, Theatre in Education (TiE) has emerged as a promising model for fostering social awareness and cultural identity. Visky-Varga & Bartalis-Binder (2024) show that TiE in multicultural rural areas can serve as a platform for children to express identity and strengthen social cohesion. However, the lack of facilitators trained in critical pedagogy remains a major constraint. On the other hand, Cooper et al. (2023) and Di Giovanni & Raffi (2022) highlight that the success of inclusive theatre also depends on disability-led leadership. When persons with disabilities are given opportunities to become directors, writers, or producers, theatre becomes a site of liberation that challenges existing power structures and enables more authentic representation.

To ensure sustainability, inclusive theatre practices must be integrated across the arts, education, and social sectors. Leahy & Ferri (2024), along with Busby (2024), affirm that the sustainability of inclusive theatre aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4, 10, and 11), which focus on inclusive education, reducing inequality, and fostering sustainable communities. Thus, inclusive theatre functions not only as an aesthetic expression but also as a cultural strategy contributing to social justice, community empowerment, and human sustainability. Through long-term collaboration among cultural actors, educators, and marginalized communities, inclusive theatre can evolve into a new model of participatory art that cultivates empathy, solidarity, and tangible social change.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study affirms that inclusive theatre plays a vital role as a medium for social and cultural transformation aligned with the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through the implementation of principles such as collaboration, participation, and diversity, inclusive theatre functions not only as a space for artistic expression but also as a form of social education that promotes equality, empathy, and critical awareness. This approach expands the meaning of performing arts from mere entertainment to a social practice that strengthens human values and fosters connectivity across identities and backgrounds.

The linkage between inclusive theatre and the SDGs—particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production)—demonstrates that art can serve as a catalyst for sustainable change. Through practices such as ecotheatre, dramatherapy, and community-based performance, theatre contributes to fostering ecological awareness, enhancing psychosocial well-being, and preserving local cultural values within a framework of global sustainability. Therefore, the future of inclusive theatre requires stronger integration between artistic innovation, social justice, and environmental sustainability so that art truly becomes a living space that is inclusive, reflective, and civilized.

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