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This article is meant as a starting point in the process of researching how theatre systems influence the functioning of theatre. The notion "theatre system" is understood as the set of organisational relationships within and between the domains of production, distribution and reception of theatre. Because the hypothesis of the Project on European Theatre Systems (STEP) is that the differences in these organisational patterns at least partly determine the types of theatre offered to city populations and their use of the supply, the present article attempts to make a start with a comparison between the theatre systems in Aarhus (Denmark), Bern (Switzerland), Debrecen (Hungary), Groningen (The Netherlands), Maribor (Slovenia), Tartu (Estonia) and Tyneside (United Kingdom). One of the findings of this comparison is that the structures of financial support for theatre by the various authorities do not differ very strongly among the countries on the European continent. However, the so-called city theatres in Central and Eastern Europe seem to have a more dominant position than in the Western European countries. For smaller, independent theatre organisations this is the other way round. In addition, the position of Bern is remarkable, because of the exceptional number of venues and theatre performances in this city. In Debrecen and Maribor, cultural centres appear to play quite an important role in the theatre life of these cities.

Keywords

theatre systems, theatre venues, subsidisation, international comparative theatre survey, STEP

Theatre Systems Compared

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"Theatre system", a complex notion

Using the term "theatre systems" creates a theoretical problem that has to be addressed in one way or another. In the first place, the notion is used in very different ways by a number of authors who use other terms for related concepts. In the second place, even if we were to solve the terminological problem, we would be left with the question of what we ought to consider as part of a certain system and what should be seen as connected to it without being part of it.

To tackle these problems, we fall back on the General System Theory,[1] which not only enables us to *choose* what is considered part of a system and what is not, but also makes a useful distinction between *entities* of a system on the one hand and *relationships* between them on the other. This helps for a great part to avoid a debate around the different meanings of terms like "worlds" (Becker), "fields" (Bourdieu) and "systems" (Luhmann). Too much focus on these terminological differences would distract from the purpose of the present study: to understand how the organisation of theatre influences the functioning of it in given urban societies.[2]

When we refer to a theatre system, we mean the ways in which the production (the making), the distribution (the making available) and the reception (the making use) of theatre are organised, including the relationships between these three areas.[3] A comparison between these components in the cities researched does

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1 General System Theory (GST) was developed in the first half of the twentieth century by the biologist Von Bertalanffy, who had the idea that the concept would enable scientists to describe all types of systems. Talcott Parsons made use of GST to develop his sociological approach, and also Luhmann can be understood as a more distant heir.

2 For a comparative study of the various terms and theories on this issues, see Van Maanen, *How to Study Art Worlds*.

3 Andreas Kotte makes an interesting distinction between system and organism. The first points out the internal self-regulation of theatre (theatre forms, their interdependence and aesthetic reception by the audience) and the self-regulation of the whole theatre landscape. The latter focuses on the external regulation of theatre by the state and various organisations ("Theaterlandschaft. Stadttheater – Freie Szene – Volkstheater").

not demand a very sophisticated theory; it will particularly concern a description of institutions and other organisations. However, the study of the *relationships* between production, distribution and reception on the one hand, and between them and the worlds outside the "system" on the other, is a much more complex and analytical process which, in addition, directly touches the question of what is *inside* and what is *outside* the system.

When considering the entities of theatre systems, the organisations which produce theatre and/or make it available for a population first come to mind. Questions concerning different organisational aspects are at stake here, ranging from basic questions such as the size of institutions and how many organisations are active in a city, to the more complex issues such as the relationship between venues and companies and what different types of institutions there are. These questions of theatre infrastructure will be discussed in the next section of this article.

In addition, (groups of) spectators, seen as (potential) audiences and their formal and informal organisations can be considered entities in a theatre system as well. Here, we stumble upon the fundamental problem whether they ought to be seen as part of this system or rather as entities of other social systems making use of the theatre system. When Bourdieu (*The Field of Cultural Production* and *The Rules of Art*), for instance, describes a cultural field, the different types of audiences seem to exist outside the boundaries of the field, as economic factors which impinge on it, rather than elements inside it (see *The Field of Cultural Production* 49). In other words, Bourdieu sees a field as a structure of relationships between the entities of makers and facilitators. This approach emphasises the internal dynamics of a field, albeit seriously influenced by surrounding forces such as audiences. On the other hand, Howard S. Becker (*Art Worlds*) considered that the economic impact of buyers and visitors on what could be made and offered was so important that those who make use of art would definitely be seen as members of the collective of co-operators which enables art works to come into being. Also, in Luhmann's *Art as a Social System*, audiences take part in the process of artistic communication, because they observe art works and communicate about them in terms of the system of communications which Luhmann calls the art system.

In our own choice to see theatre audiences as part of the theatre system, we appeal to the traditional argument that theatre does not have a form of existence without on-lookers, and also make use of the newer concept of the theatrical event in which the sociological and psychological environments of the spectators are essential in their act of completion of a performance (Bennett, *Theatre Audiences*; Sauter, *The Theatrical Event*; Cremona et al., *Theatrical Events: Borders, Dynamics and Frames*).

There is another relevant question concerning the borders of the theatre system: as soon as people start talking about theatre systems, they often tend to discuss the ways in which national or local authorities regulate the theatre supply, in particular, the ways in which they finance companies and venues. However, authorities may be better understood as entities in the political system which influences the theatre system, because theatre can also function without any political backing. The benefits of such an approach are threefold: 1) the internal "languages" and dynamics of each social system can be discerned and differentiated; 2) the specific goals and interests of both the theatre system and the other systems related to it can become visible and 3) the types of influences on a theatre system and the ways in which these influences operate might better brought to light. The influences that the political system inserts into the theatre system, for example, money and rules, obviously do become elements of the theatre system itself, because they play a role in the organisation of the relationships internal to the theatre system. In Figure 1, below, the theatre system, composed of production, distribution and reception areas, is surrounded by other societal systems which influence it in various ways.[4]

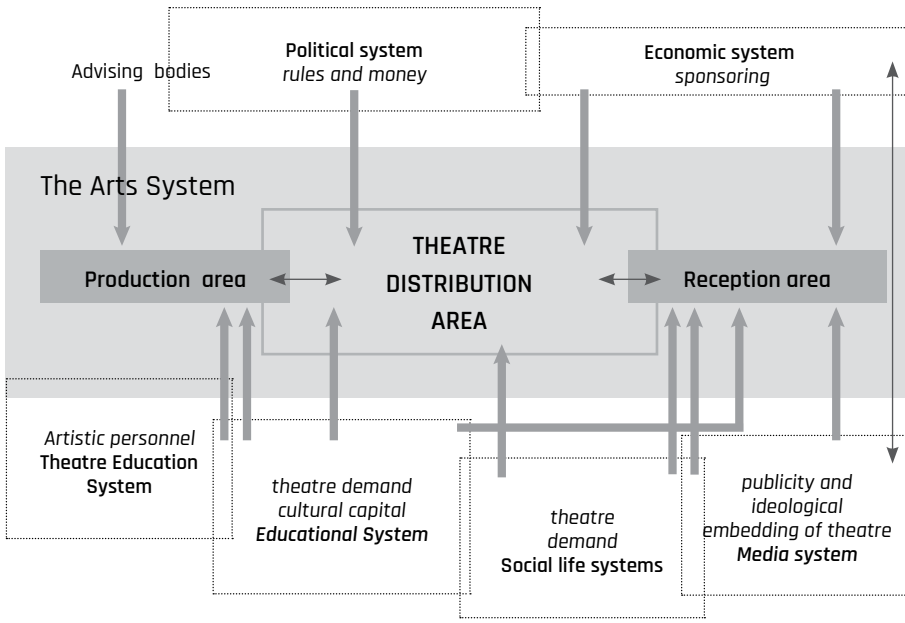

Figure 1. *The theatre system, surrounded by other societal systems.*

4 In a sense the theatre system can be considered part of a bigger arts system, as shown in Figure 1. The relationships between theatre and other aesthetic systems are too complex, however, to be briefly presented here.

In the present article, the theatrical infrastructure of the cities (understood as the sets of entities active in the system and the relationships between them) will be discussed, as well as some data concerning the financial relationships between the political and the theatrical systems. A more thorough analysis of the relationships between both systems clearly requires more space than is available here. We plan to make such an analysis on the basis of the outcomes as presented in this issue of *Amfiteater*.

Theatre infrastructures: entities of the system and relations between them

In the opening article about the *STEP City Study*, we mentioned seven cities as participants in the project. Although in some of the cities we emphasised the audience research, and in others we thoroughly investigated only the theatre supply, we studied the features of the theatre systems in all of the cities. The result is that a certain insight into similarities and differences between theatre systems in a number of cultural regions in Europe could be found, from the Anglo-Saxon area to the areas of Central and Eastern Europe, and from the Scandinavian and Baltic regions to the German-speaking countries.

Distribution: the role of venues

City theatres

The backbone of each theatre system consists of the venues which make theatre available for the population. This can vary from a marketplace to a central city theatre or to a set of many different venues all over the city. In all seven cities, the core institution of theatre life appears to be an institution which can be called a "city theatre" although it often has a specific name, such as the Slovene National Theatre in Maribor (Slovensko narodno gledališče Maribor), Aarhus Theatre (Aarhus Teater) in Aarhus, Theatre Royal in Tyneside, or Csokonai Theatre (Csokonai Nemzeti Színház) in Debrecen.[5] Many of the main buildings of these institutions were built in the second half of the nineteenth century, typically as an expression of the cultural power of the "bourgeoisie" at the time.

5 The city theatre in Debrecen was included in the so-called featured category of theatres brought to life by the Decree 5/2012 to the Performance Art Act of 2008. The theatre was renamed the Csokonai National Theatre. The Slovene National Theatre in Maribor was established after WWI (1919) in a building that had belonged to the German city theatre since 1852. Naming it "national" had a strong political connotation. For a discussion on the historical emergence and social role of national theatres, see Sušec Michieli "National Theatre, Identity and (Geo) politics".

Most of these theatres have a large hall of 700 or 800 seats and several other additional halls, often four or even more, sometimes located in different buildings. The two exceptions here are the Stadsschouwburg of Groningen, which, besides its main hall, had another backside hall with 100 seats, which was closed in 2013, and Tyneside, where the Theatre Royal has a single 1300-seat space. More importantly, these two theatres are exceptions because they do not produce performances themselves as the city theatres in the other cities do, but instead host performances of visiting companies. In Bern, Debrecen and Tartu, Spoken Theatre, Opera and Ballet are provided by the city theatre; the Slovene National Theatre in Maribor adds symphonic music as a fourth unit.[6] The fact that Groningen does not have a producing city theatre is clearly reflected in the number of performances per production (1.6). This is in strong contrast with the averages in the other cities, as will become clear in the article on theatre supply in the cities concerned.

But it is not only these core institutions that provide the populations with theatre. A look at the number of theatre productions and performances of these main venues, in comparison with the entire professional theatre supply shows some remarkable results (Table 1).

Table 1. *Professional productions and performances in the various cities*

	Aarhus	Bern	Debrecen	Groningen	Maribor	Tartu
City Theatre supply in a year*	*13*	*38*	*30*	*100*	*41*	*47*
	287	**310**	**340**	**160**	**286**	**423**
Performances per production	22.0	8.16	11.1	1.6	7.0	9.0
Other professional theatre supply in a year	*158*	-	*117*	*274*	*97*	*89*
	816	**1982**	**458**	**498**	**392**	**232**
Performances per production	5.2	-	3.9	1.8	4.0	2.6
Total professional supply	*171*	-	*147*	*374*	*138*	*136*
	1103	**2322**	**798**	**658**	**678**	**655**
Performances per production	6.5	-	5.4	1.8	4.9	4.8

Notes. *Numbers of productions in *italics*, of performances in **bold**. Figures for the Tyneside area are not available.

6 Since the 2012/2013 theatre season, the Stadttheater Bern has also added symphonic music as a fourth artistic form and changed its name to Konzert Theater Bern.

The role of the city theatre within the total theatre system varies in different countries. One interesting feature is the enormous number of professional performances in Bern, twice as many as in Aarhus (which has, as an urban agglomeration, the same number of inhabitants) as well as three times the number of performances in the other cities. Obviously, the very vivid theatre life in Bern is not only fed by the Stadttheater, which provides only 14% of the professional supply in the city, whereas the city theatres of Maribor and Debrecen provide 40% or more of the total supply and the city theatre of Tartu a full 65%.[7]

The other venues

In Debrecen, Maribor and Tartu, the quantitative role of the city theatre in theatre life appears to be much larger than in Bern, where the independent companies and venues present five times the number of performances of the city theatre. Aarhus and Groningen lie somewhere in between, with Aarhus Theatre presenting 26% and Stadsschouwburg Groningen 24% of the performances. So, in general, a considerable number of performances are presented by an amount of other venues of very different types, such as cultural centres, smaller autonomous venues, specially-built commercial halls or certain locations.

The remarkable number of 171 venues counted in the city of Bern and its direct environment cannot be explained very easily. At the very least, it suggests to a strong theatrical interest among the Berners based on a long tradition (Gyger, "Stadt und Land. Was wird gespielt?"). So-called *Kleinkunst* forms, many of which are quite Swiss-specific, produce a high number of professional performances which take place in various venues around Bern (Veraguth, "Kleinkunst. Im Zelt und an der Börse"). Apart from the city theatre, the independent theatre and the commercial theatre, there is a huge amateur theatre sector which makes use of the numerous venues as well. Across Switzerland, there are over a million tickets sold annually for the so-called folk theatre, consisting of amateur and open-air theatre together, whereas the city theatres sell one and a half million tickets yearly and the same amount of tickets is also sold by venues for independent theatre (Kotte, *Bühne & Büro. Gegenwartstheater in der Schweiz*).

In general, however, the numbers of regular venues other than the city theatres do not differ that much from city to city. Besides the five halls of its city theatre, Aarhus has five smaller autonomous venues presenting theatre on a regular

7 While the figures for Tyneside are not available, our incomplete sampling would suggest that the Theatre Royal, the "unofficial" city theatre of Newcastle, provides a quantity of professional theatre similar to that of Maribor or Debrecen, though the fact that the house is so much larger means that it provides a larger percentage of total available seats. While the Theatre Royal is also a receiving venue, not a producing one, it also runs each performance for approximately the same number of times as in Maribor or Tartu, rather than the one or two nights of Groningen.

basis, among them two for children's theatre. Maribor has a cultural centre with eight halls – Narodni Dom, used for innovative forms of theatre as well as for more traditional forms – and an extra venue with two halls for puppet theatre. And in Debrecen, apart from the city theatre and the puppet theatre, many performances take place in the multi-functional halls of the Fönix event organisation or in the six branches of the Debrecen Community Centre, spread over the city. In Bern, three relatively small venues (100–400 seats) are particularly important for contemporary and new forms of theatre. Together they provide about the same number of performances as the city theatre (350). However, the number of different productions is much higher in their case (70 to 100 different productions) as compared to the city theatre (38).[8] In Groningen the innovative sector of the theatre scene is played in three halls of two venues. Apart from this, a theatre company for children used to have its own small venue.[9] The Tartu New Theatre (Tartu Uus Teater), finally, is on its own for innovative theatre forms, although one of the venues of the city theatre, the Harbour Theatre (Sadamateater), presents topical forms of theatre as well.

On the level of the smaller venues used for theatre performances in particular, some differences can be noticed as well. Whereas the city theatres, except in Groningen and Tyneside, have in-house production companies, this is not the case for the smaller professional theatre venues in general. In Aarhus, apart from Musikhuset Aarhus, the large, semi-commercial venue, all of the other five professional venues are producing as well, some with an in-house permanent ensemble, some with an in-house artistic director and freelance actors. Neither the three main venues for theatrical innovation in Bern nor the many cultural organisations in Maribor nor the Tartu New Theatre operate in this fashion.[10] In Debrecen, there are no dedicated venues for experimental or explicitly innovative theatre. However, MODEM (Modern and Contemporary Arts Centre) does programme quite a few theatre events, often interdisciplinary and performed by artists from outside Debrecen, in its various spaces. Also, at the university theatre, more innovative performances are presented by student companies. Apart from this, both Debrecen and Maribor do have a special house and company for puppet theatre.

8 The number of 350 performances is estimated on the basis of 3-4 performances per week in each of the three smaller venues during the course of 40 weeks per year.

9 It was closed in January 2013 when the company lost its subsidy. A new company is housed in one of the remaining smaller theatres.

10 In Groningen, the primary venue for innovative theatre (Grand Theatre) yearly hosts 10 to 12 groups or artists to produce their shows, which will tour these productions after their Groningen openings. Besides this, it functions as a presentation stage for touring groups. The same is true for the venue belonging to the Noord Nederlands Toneel (NNT) Theatre Company, the so-called city company of Groningen, albeit on a smaller scale.

Table 2 gives an overview of the numbers and types of theatre venues in each city. To give an idea of the position of theatre in its cultural environment, some other figures of the cultural infrastructure of these cities are added as well.

Table 2. *Cultural venues in the various cities*

	Aarhus	Bern	Debrecen	Groningen	Maribor	Tartu
Venues used for theatre (including for amateurs)	16	171	17	28	46	8
City theatre	1	1	1	1*	1	1
Other important theatre venues	4	3	4	3	2	2
Commercial theatre venues	2**	2	-	1**	3	-
Bigger museums	3	3	2	1	3	2
Smaller museums	12	17	1	3	15	16
Music venues, pop music included	4	1	5	4	1	1
Main cultural festivals	10	11	6	8	3	5
Cinemas / screens	4/26	16/37	2/7	3/25	3/20	4/9

Notes. Because of difficulties of definition, this table does not include data for the Tyneside area. *In Groningen the city theatre does not produce but receives touring companies on a daily basis. ** Musikhuset Aarhus and Martiniplaza in Groningen work on commercial terms, but are owned by the city.

Production: companies in the city

Listing and characterising venues is one clear analytical need – and perhaps the first to be addressed as venues take such a central role in making theatre available for the public and thus in making theatre functioning in a city – but our analysis also requires us to make an inventory of the companies based in a city. With regard to the experience of theatre by a population, the actual presence of companies in a city is important, because companies play a role in the life of the city through their buildings, their employees who live in the city, their relationship with other institutions or fields and their presence in the (local) media.

In this respect, the number of companies and their sizes can substantially affect a local theatre system. In Groningen, for example, the city company has about 35 employees, among them seven artists with a permanent contract; another ten to fifteen actors, musicians and designers are contracted for one or more

productions yearly. The two dance companies are substantively smaller and the company for children and youth theatre employs about ten people during a year. All together just under 100 persons work for the professional companies settled in Groningen many of whom do not live in Groningen. This is a very different story from the other cities, where 350 to 500 people are employed by the city theatres alone. This large difference is clearly caused by the fact that, in Groningen, the Stadsschouwburg (city theatre) is a separate entity from the producing companies, while in most other cities, opera and/or ballet are parts of the supply of the city theatres, which includes the presence of choirs, a huge technical staff and possibly a *corps de ballet* and an orchestra. In any case, the presence of such huge organisations, also in terms of employment, will have quite some influence on the life of a city and the feeling about theatre as an institution.

Table 3. *Categories and numbers of professional companies based in the cities*

	Aarhus*	Bern	Debrecen	Groningen	Maribor	Tartu
Multi-branch city theatre						
Spoken Theatre (ST)	**1**	**1**	**1**	-	**1**	**1**
Opera	-	**1**	**1**	-	**1**	**1**
Ballet	-	**1**	**1**	-	**1**	**1**
Large(r) organisations**	-	**1**	-	**1**	-	-
Smaller organisations***	**2**	-	-	**1**	-	**2**
	8	*25*****	-	-	-	-
Smaller Dance Companies	**1**	-	-	-	**2**	-
	8	*10*****	-	*2*	-	-
Autonomous opera companies	**1**	-	-	-	-	-
	1	-	-	-	-	-
Theatre companies for children and youth	**2**	-	-	**1**	-	-
	8	*5*****	-	-	-	-
Puppet theatre	**1**	**1**	**1**	-	**1**	-

Notes. **With venue** in bold; *without* in italics.* Numbers based on a presentation made by the Aarhus Performing Arts Center regarding 2014. ** Large(r) ST producing organisations for adults, apart from the city theatre **with** and *without* a venue. *** Smaller theatre producing organisations for adults **with** and *without* a venue. **** These figures are taken from the city of Bern's annual Tätigkeitsbericht for 2012 *(Präsidialdirektion der Stadt Bern)*. These figures refer only to those companies which received funding from local authorities that year.

Table 3 shows that opera companies, if present, are part of multi-branch city theatres, except in Aarhus, where the touring Danish National Opera plays in the concert hall (Musikhuset Aarhus). A similar difference between Aarhus Theatre and the other city theatres applies to dance. In the other cities, the only

theatre dance genre offered by the city theatres seems to be ballet productions.[11] Regarding this, Aarhus is more similar to Groningen. In both cities, ballet is rarely shown, but contemporary dance companies are based in both cities and present their productions there before going on tour around the country and abroad.

The companies based in the city are responsible for most – and in some cities nearly all – professional performances, apart from what is presented in the festivals. In Bern, only 5% of the performances are played by touring groups from elsewhere; the figure is 15% in Tartu and about 40% in Debrecen. In Groningen, however, this pattern is reversed: only 20% of professional theatre performances are played by companies based in the city itself.

Reception: audience organisation(s)

In most cases, the organisation of theatre reception is primarily in the hands of the venues. Their marketing efforts are directed to attract spectators (buyers, in economic terms) to their supply. Venues analyse their potential audience via quantitative (and, increasingly, qualitative) methods; they think about the relationships between the types of performances they want to present and the needs of the potential audiences; and they organise the circumstances under which performances can be experienced by spectators, particularly in terms of time and space. With regard to space, while the features of venues and the performance time slots available within them are largely set, locations can be searched or developed for site-specific performances and their particular theatrical experiences, particularly in the independent part of the theatre system (see Van Maanen, *How to Study Art Worlds* and "How Theatrical Events"). Except for some efforts to promote the theatre supply as a whole by cultural agencies or to organise group ticket selling, none of our cities demonstrated a great deal of cooperation between venues or theatre companies in this domain.

In considering audiences as part of theatre systems, it is important to realise that those who give theatre a place in their lives and decide to participate in theatre events enter the theatre system from the other systems that make up their lives. At the very moment that people become spectators and members of an audience, their relationships with the other spectators, with the performers, with the

11 Because of the difficulty of defining the limits of the Tyneside area, it is not included in Table 3 above. However, Tyneside has the equivalent of a city theatre, which does not produce its own work. It is largely a commercial enterprise that hosts work of Spoken Theatre, Dance and Musical Theatre. Newcastle has one large and one small subsidised theatre production company with venues, as well as a venue-based dance production institution which both hosts other dance companies and produces its own work. While there are a number of other smaller companies in the area making work in a variety of genres, most of them do not have their own venue. There are no professional children's theatre or puppet theatre companies in the area.

company and with the venue – that is, with entities within the theatre system – will become dominant for the duration of the event over their relationships within the other systems in their lives. Following General System Theory, it is precisely this (temporary) strength of certain relationships over other relationships that we should look to in order to decide how to understand an entity – in this case the spectator or the audience – as part of a system (See De Leeuw, *Organisaties; management, analyse*). And indeed, theoretically speaking, much of the organisational activities of the venues, such as their marketing, are designed to bridge the gap between the theatre system and the other systems from which people come and to make potential spectators into co-participants in the theatrical event. This directly touches on the audience's self-organisation on the part of the city population.

The most well-known institutional entity on the side of the audience reception used to be the visitors organisation: a union of individual members who pay an annual fee and receive tickets to a number of different performances during a season, chosen and purchased for members by the organisation's board. In the Netherlands, this model was so dominant that, until the 1960s, almost 70% of all theatre tickets were sold through these so-called "buy-out unions". And in Germany, through the 1980s, so-called spectator organisations had a serious (and often criticised) influence on the repertoire of the city theatres, because of the influence they derived from their hundreds of thousands of subscribers (Hofmann, *Kritisches Handbuch des westdeutschen Theaters*). Nowadays, this phenomenon has completely disappeared in all of the cities under research. Even its successor, the subscription model, in which spectators buy a season ticket for four, six or eight performances directly at the venue, is only of importance for the city theatres in Bern, Debrecen and Maribor. In Debrecen in particular, the city theatre's subscription system plays a strong and very important role in theatre attendance. About 80% of the visits to the city theatre in Debrecen (Csokonai National Theatre) are paid through season tickets; the figure is 58% for Maribor and 25% for Bern. The Debrecen system provides the population with a variety of such packages, each designed for a different target group, including youngsters, pensioners, students, fans of certain genres and even those who enjoy opening nights. In the other cities, tickets are bought before or in the course of the season but are also offered by the venue in the form of season packages. Once a year, the city theatre of Tartu offers the possibility to order tickets for the rest of the season for half the normal price. It will be clear that the autonomous (or at least differently-organised) position of audience collectives has disappeared, and that subscriber models can be considered a means of the venues to market their productions and to create customer loyalty.

More than for adults, however, theatre visits for children can be organised for groups by schools and other institutions in cooperation with venues or companies. Closed performances at theatre venues or schools make up a great part of the work of some theatre companies. But this effect is small; in general, it can be said that the difference in attracting young audiences in cities with special venues for children and youth theatre (Aarhus, Debrecen, Maribor) and cities without (Bern, Groningen and Tartu) is not very large.[12] Each of these theatres present 30% to 40% of their publicly-accessible professional performances to young audiences specifically, and receive between 20% and 30% of their total attendance from this group. Unfortunately, it remains unknown how many of these visits are brought by groups and arranged by schools or other organisations.

Relationships within the theatre system

In general, it can be concluded that the relationship *between the production and distribution* areas in most cities is very similar: the core institution is a city theatre, where the making and the making available of theatre are held by the same body. Only in Tyneside and Groningen the two functions are separated. The role the city theatres play, however, is quite different. In Aarhus, Bern and Groningen, the city theatres provide the population with respectively 25%, 15% and 25% of the supply of professional performances; in the other cities, this figure ranges from 40% to 65%. In addition, smaller venues sometimes show more innovative forms of theatre and performances for children by either guest companies visiting for a 3–5 night run or by in-house companies (this latter is particularly the case in Aarhus, as well as the puppet theatres in Debrecen and Maribor).

With respect to the relationship *between the distribution and the reception* areas, it will be clear that, in all the cities studied, the two are loosely connected. The venues now take a leading role because strong audience organisations have disappeared. The venues not only organise the types of theatrical events, but also look for audiences for their supply and try to bind them to the theatre (by season tickets) and, possibly to the company (by supporter clubs and similar programmes). The relationship *between the production and the reception* areas, finally, has two different sides. On the one hand, this relationship is of importance in some parts of amateur theatre in particular, where players and on-lookers often know each other and where watching a performance cannot always be separated from watching a neighbour or a relative. Personal acquaintance, as a form of relationship between the production and the reception area, can be considered an organising strength as well, because it encourages people to attend performances and influences their experiences and understandings of

12 For further details, see Van Maanen, Zijlstra and Wilders, *How Theatre Functions in the City of Groningen.*

the performances substantially. With regard to this, it is interesting that in Bern, Aarhus, Debrecen, Maribor and Tartu, most of the companies (and professional theatre makers) reside in the city. In Groningen, in contrast, most companies reside in other parts of the country and come to perform only one night in the city. While Tyneside has a number of resident groups, the large commercial "city theatre" is mostly populated by visiting groups from around the UK who spend from a few nights to a week in the city.

On the other hand, a considerably more direct relationship between the production and the reception areas is created by the media. Television, radio, written press, Internet and social media comment on performances and often particularly on performers in previews, reviews and interviews, but rarely say more about the venue than its name and location. Following Luhmann, these "medial communications" can be understood as elements of the theatre system as soon as they are used between agents in that system, even though they were originally produced in the media system. This mediation between the production and the reception areas has changed over the recent decades in all cities, which might have influenced the societal position of theatre as a whole, or of parts of it, in the minds of populations. This role of the media has not been investigated in the present project, but Pia Strickler documented these developments for Bern ("Kritik als Kundendienst?", "Produktion und Rezeption von Theaterberichterstattung").

Theatre systems in a political-financial context

In Figure 1 above, we placed the theatre system in the environment of other systems, of which the political system was already mentioned as the most important for the present project. Political inputs, in the form of rules and money, have a direct and essential influence on all researched theatre systems.

After World War II, all Western European countries decided to strengthen their support for the arts, particularly to raise the cultural and intellectual level of their populations and hence – it was thought – to preserve Europe from new disasters. The means the authorities used consisted, initially, of subsidising existing companies and other institutions, and later, of the imposition of more complex sets of rules and regulations. In the 1970s, the rather clear and relatively simple structures of companies, venues and audience organisations within the theatre systems were partly turned upside down by the cultural revolution that had started in the 1960s. The political systems reacted in line with this development and gave more attention to smaller and newer agents in the theatre system (see Van Maanen and Wilmer, *Theatre Worlds in Motion*).

In Eastern Europe, state subsidisation of theatre also received its structural form after World War II, but this development was less tied to an open dialogue between the theatre and the political systems than was the case in Western Europe. In both parts of Europe, the development of the mindset of the population was at stake, but in the eastern part, the education of the population had a more state-propagandistic intent and hence a more controlling character. In addition, the flowering of new forms of theatre in the 1960s and 1970s was certainly present in rehearsal rooms, on stage and even sometimes subsidised in Eastern European countries, but did not find the structural support of the authorities as was the case in Western Europe. Saro, Lelkes and Sušec Michieli have demonstrated that after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in Estonia, Hungary and Slovenia the cultural political structures were largely maintained (these chapters appeared in Van Maanen, Kotte and Saro, *Global Changes – Local Stages*).

As discussed above, one of the two instruments that the authorities use to support and influence a theatre system is subsidy. Perhaps "financial investment" would be a slightly better term, as some of the institutions discussed here are not so much subsidised as *owned* by the authorities, whether the state or by the city.

Aside from Tyneside, all city theatres are chiefly financially supported by the state. The state provides 90%, 82% and 70% of the total income of the city theatres in Maribor, Aarhus and Tartu respectively. The total level of subsidy is about the same for Debrecen's Csokonai: 80% of its total budget is subsidised, but the subsidy comes from both the state and from the city. The puppet theatre in Debrecen receives twice as much subsidy from the state as from the city. In Maribor, the only other city with a puppet theatre with its own in-house company, the situation is about the same. Vanemuine, the city theatre of Tartu, attracts attention by having the highest proportion of its budget – 30% – derived from its own income, rather than subsidy. The Stadttheater Bern approaches that figure with a subsidy of 75% of its budget, shared between the canton, the city and some smaller municipalities in the area. In Aarhus, venues are subsidised by the municipality, apart from the Danish National Opera, which is a national touring company and as such gets its primary subsidy from the state, with an additional subsidy from the city earmarked for special local productions. But looking behind the simple accounting, the city has parts of its subsidy reimbursed by the state, so again a mixed model of subsidy functions here.

The role of the city theatre in Tyneside is played by the Theatre Royal, a magnificent 19th-century structure seating almost 1300. It is run commercially by a not-for-profit foundation which, though independent, has strong ties to local dignitaries. It programmes a mix of popular musicals (34% of attendance), spoken theatre

(20%), panto (24%), dance (6%), children's performance (4%), opera, stand-up comedy and so on. While the Theatre Royal receives virtually no public money directly – only 5% of its operating income comes from grants, while the rest comes from earned income – many of the companies it hosts, such as the Royal Shakespeare Company, are regular recipients of state support. Most English arts are supported by Arts Council England (ACE),[13] which has five theatre companies in Tyneside as part of its national portfolio. The largest of these is Northern Stage, which receives approximately £1.56m (€2.15m) annually from ACE. Northern Stage, which has its own venue on the campus of Newcastle University, offers a wide variety of theatre from a range of genres, but our research found that it was the Theatre Royal, not Northern Stage, that Tynesiders saw as their "city theatre". The portfolio also includes the smaller, innovation-minded Live Theatre (which also has its own venue) and a trio of smaller specialist production companies who work in Tyneside and around the country.

While in Groningen, the city theatre is part of the municipal organisation, in Maribor since 2003 the state is the founder and owner of the Slovene National Theatre. In Groningen, however, the city covers the theatre's operating deficit, which amounts to about 50% of the total budget of this municipal organisation. In addition, the city is the only shareholder of the Martiniplaza, a commercial theatre with an attached congress centre, which costs the city €1.5m annually to run. However, the company that could be considered the "city company", Noord Nederlands Toneel (NNT) Theatre Company, is fully funded by the state, including its own small venue. It functions as a touring company based in Groningen. This is also true for the other three professional companies in the city. This means that in total, the state and the city share the costs for having theatre in the city. This situation is comparable to that of most other cities, but the important difference is that the city and the state do not share the costs for the whole, but divide the responsibility for the *making* and the *making available* of theatre between each other. Such a situation in which the city is financially responsible for the venue(s), while the state takes financial responsibility for the companies, is common with respect to the independent organisations in all cities. If this type of venue receives a subsidy, it is almost always from the city, whereas the companies get their money mostly from the state or can apply to national cultural funds.

However, the total subsidy that the city of Bern gives to its independent theatre, including venues, companies and projects, is about a third of the amount it provides to the Stadttheater.[14] Of that third, a little more than half goes to the

13 Note that Arts Council England has the responsibility for the arts in England only. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all have separate arts authorities that answer to the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish governments, respectively.

14 This does not include the subsidies provided by the canton of Bern and other municipalities.

three venues for innovative theatre, which, like the city theatre, work on multi-annual contracts. The remainder goes to smaller venues, an annual theatre festival, independent companies and guest performances, the latter two on the basis of applications evaluated by a panel of theatre experts (*Präsidialdirektion der Stadt Bern*).

For the independent scene in Debrecen, the situation is less rosy, as it receives no financial support from the city at all, aside from the free (or nearly-free) use that a selected group of amateurs and semi-professional groups can make of municipal facilities such as Fönix or the Debrecen Community Centre. These venues, in turn, are subsidised by the city for 54% and 84% of their costs, respectively. In addition, independent companies can apply for financial support from the National Cultural Fund for special projects or work for specific target groups. In Slovenia, the same type of funding is available for independent venues or companies, which takes up 8% of the total state budget for the performing arts. In the period 2010–2013, three initiatives from Maribor benefited from a three-year grant from this budget.

Two professional theatres in Tartu, Tartu New Theatre (TNT) (a venue to host innovative theatre companies) and the Emajõe Summer Theatre (a project organisation for open-air summer productions), are subsidised by both the state and the city, but in opposite proportions. The venue receives 20% of its costs from the Estonian Cultural Endowment but only 6% from the city. For the summer theatre, the figures are reversed. A full 70% of these theatres' revenue derives from their own income.

As discussed above, the three companies in Groningen receive funding from the state, either directly (for two) or via the Performing Arts Fund NL (for one dance company).[15] For local projects and semi-professional or amateur activities, a moderate amount of money is available from provincial and municipal funds via the Arts Council Groningen.

In Table 4, the general financial relationships between the political and the theatrical system are summarised. It appears that the *city theatres*, except in Groningen, are subsidised for 80% to 90% of their total costs (TC), money mostly paid by the state. Almost all other subsidised organisations get between 60 to 80% of their TC funded by the state and/or the city. *Venues without a company* are financed by the cities for the greater part (except in Aarhus), *companies without a venue*, however, by the state (through national funds in general) or on a fifty-fifty basis, as is the case in Debrecen and Bern.

15 In Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague, the state and the city each pay 50% of the subsidies of the larger, so-called city companies. This is not the case in other Dutch cities and towns.

Table 4. *Subsidy percentages of total costs of organisations and division among state and city contributions*

	Aarhus	Bern	Debrecen	Groningen	Maribor	Tartu
	State / City	State / City	State / City	State / City	State / City	State / City
City theatre, including company	*82% of TC**	*80% of TC**	*80% of TC*	-	*90% of TC*	*70% of TC*
	100 / -	50 / 30	58 / 42	-	100 / -	100 / -
Other important venue/ company combinations (on average)	*71% of TC*	*60% of TC*	*70% of TC*	-	*80% of TC*	-
	24 / 76*	varying	70 / 30	-	65 / 35	-
Most important venues without a company (on average)	*65% of TC*	*70% of TC*	*70% of TC*	*50% of TC*	*unknown*	*27% of TC*
	70 / 30	1 / 85	- / 100	- / 100	2 / 98	23 / 77
Most important companies without a venue (on average)	*80% of TC*	*60% of TC*	*70% of TC*	*75% of TC*	*unknown*	-
	96 / 4*	50 / 50	50 / 50	97 / 3**	100 / -	-

Notes. This data is not available for Tyneside for reasons of confidentiality. TC = total costs.*In addition, 11% of the total subsidy of the Stadttheater Bern is subsidised by some smaller municipalities in the canton. In Switzerland "state" refers to the canton of Bern, not the Swiss national government. In Aarhus, the subsidies of the municipality for so-called small city theatres are reimbursed by the state for 35%. **Including some money from the province.

Conclusion

Eastern European city theatres dominate their systems more than those in Western Europe

With regard to the differences between the various theatre infrastructures, it can be concluded that Debrecen, Maribor and Tartu have a large central theatre institution with an in-house company which provides the city with 42%, 40% and 65% of its professional performances respectively. Aarhus and Bern also have such an institution, but these are only responsible for 25% and 14% of the professional supply respectively, due to the larger number of smaller venues in these cities. With around 300 per year, the number of performances presented by these city theatres does not differ very much, although Vanemuine in Tartu provides the population with 431 performances per year. In Groningen and Tyneside, the city's central venue does not have a company of its own, but instead receives guest performances, 160 per year in the case of Groningen and 400 in Tyneside.

In Debrecen and Maribor, a number of cultural centres with a number of halls play an important role in presenting (semi-)professional theatre. Bern, on the other hand is an absolute exception with regard to the number of venues, having 171 of them active within the theatre system.

Aarhus, Debrecen and Maribor have specific venues for children and youth theatre

All the studied cities have one or more venues for small-scale theatre and a number of places where theatre is presented on a less regular basis, such as cultural or community centres and locations for site-specific work. But in line with our conclusions above, the Western European cities, particularly in Bern and Aarhus, have far more of these smaller organisations. In Debrecen, professional independent venues and companies dedicated to innovative theatre seem to be lacking. On the other hand, semi-professional companies deliver 15% of all performances in this city and attract 25% of all spectators.[16] In Aarhus, Debrecen and Maribor, theatre for young audiences have a more autonomous place in the theatre system than in the other cities, thanks to the specific venues for this group. In the other cities, theatre for children and youth is largely spread over a number of "general" venues. In Debrecen and Maribor, about 50% of visits to professional theatre are within this sub-system, particularly in puppet theatre. In Aarhus, Groningen and Tartu, this figure is about 30% (Van Maanen et al., *How Theatre Functions*).

Debrecen is the champion of selling season tickets, Tartu of box office income

Forms of self-organisation of audiences have been disappearing in recent decades. With some exceptions in Debrecen, Maribor and (to some extent) Bern, subscription systems are also not very much in use anymore, which means that theatre organisations have to find their spectators on a more individual and incidental basis then was formerly the case. Particularly in Debrecen, however, a variety of types of season tickets bind the audiences to the city theatre to a great degree. This does not necessarily mean that Csokonai Theatre earns more money from its box office than theatres elsewhere. Rather, it is the Tartu theatres which appear to cover the highest percentage of their costs from their own income. The Theatre Royal in Tyneside operates as a commercial entity, of course, and thus it earns over 90% of its income from box office and concession sales.

16 It is important to know that during the period of research Attila Vidnyanszky was director of the city theatre Csokonai National Theatre, where he strongly developed the theatre landscape of Debrecen. In 2013, he left Debrecen to become the director of the National Theatre in Budapest.

In general, the state pays for the city theatres, the city for the independent venues

In general, city theatres are largely financed by the state (although the Stadttheater Bern receives half of its subsidy from the city and some smaller municipalities together). Independent venues tend to be supported by cities, but independent companies are most often subsidised from state funds. If venues and companies are two parts of the same organisation, this separation of financial streams is not generally a problem. Theoretically speaking, a problem is more likely to arise between a venue supported by one authority and a company funded by another, because different authorities can have different interests in supporting the organisation. In the Netherlands, for instance, the state aims to subsidise the making of theatre on a high artistic level, while the cities fund the venues to serve the needs of as many audiences as possible.

But here we already encounter the need for a thorough comparative analysis of the relations between the theatre system and the political systems in the various cities and countries. The articles following this first overview of the various theatre systems give some more detailed information which is subsequently used in the summarising article to formulate some hypotheses on the relationship between theatre systems and the functioning of theatre.

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