

Hedi-Liis Toome

How political values influence the functioning of theatre?

The example of Tartu in Estonia in a comparative European perspective¹

Abstract

The paper introduces the results of an empirical research studying the functioning of theatre (the production, distribution and reception domain and their relationships) in the city of Tartu. All public theatrical events during one year were counted and categorized into types and genres. In addition, quantitative and qualitative audience and reception research was carried out. The methodology was developed by an international research group STEP (Project on European Theatre Systems) and comparative aspects of the study are also presented. Even though theatre systems have cultural roots and clearly are the outcomes of particular cultural, political and social history, it is also the priorities in theatre politics and the structure of the theatre system that have a direct influence on the functioning of theatre.

Keywords: functioning of theatre, reception research, audience research, values, empirical study

¹ This paper is a short overview of my PhD (Toome 2015). My aim to attend the conference was not to published, but to introduce the results of my PhD research that in full capacity have only been published in the thesis (different parts of the results have been published in articles that the PhD contains of).

10.56044/UA.2024.1.2.eng

Introduction

Theatre—be it the theatre venue or institution, theatre as a cultural phenomenon or theatre as a particular act of communication between the stage and the spectators—does not exist in a vacuum, but is a part of society, reflecting its past and its present, sometimes maybe even its future. Especially in a neoliberal market society where theatre as an art form cannot survive without state support, the impact of theatre on the society is often under observation. This is not so much the case in Estonia. Questions like “what is the social role of theatre?” or “what are the aims of theatre from the perspective of theatre makers themselves, from the perspective of policy makers and from the perspective of theatre spectators or even from the perspective of people who never attend theatre at all?” are rarely asked by policy makers or even theatre makers themselves. However, these kinds of questions should be asked by theatre researchers.

Estonian Ministry of Culture executes a bottom-up policy when it comes to performing arts institutions. Although theatres do not have any prescriptions what they should do, the subsidy system and legislation affect the functioning of theatres all over Estonia. This paper provides a unique and empirically based analytic overview of a theatre system of a city of Tartu in a comparative perspective.

The data presented in this paper is based on study of analyzing the functioning of theatre in the cities of smaller European countries that are not the capital cities, but regionally important cultural hubs of the country, in addition being all university cities: Groningen (The Netherlands), Debrecen (Hungary), Maribor (Slovenia), Aarhus (Denmark), Tyneside (United Kingdom).² The research presented in the article is conducted by an international research group STEP (The Project on European Theatre Systems) that consists of sociologically minded theatre scholars from smaller European countries.

Using empirical data as much as possible to support the argumentation of the research was important already in the first publication of STEP (Van Maanen et al. 2009) in which the economic and political effects on the theatre system both on

² Tyneside area is an exception—UK is undeniably not a small European country, but as the project was supported by the Arts Council England, this enabled to include this particular area of UK comparable to other STEP cities to the research.

the global and the local levels, as well as case studies of realisation of values on the local level were discussed (Van den Hoogen and Wilders 2009, 528).

This paper focuses foremost on the functioning of theatre in the city of Tartu, but also analysis the comparative aspects where necessary. The following questions—1) what influences the production, distribution and reception domain and their mutual relationships in the theatre system of Tartu 2) what kind of differences and similarities are there in the production, distribution and consumption of theatre in the STEP cities and what are the influential reasons 3) what kind of differences or similarities are there in experiencing different types of theatre in the STEP cities—will be under scope in this paper.

Theoretical background

The paper follows Hans van Maanen's definition of theatre system. According to the Dutch theatre researcher the theatre system is considered to consist of the production domain (the producing organisations and productions they offer to the audiences), the distribution domain (the amount of different types and genres of performances available for the audiences), the reception domain (the number of visits gained by different types and genres as well as the experiences the types and genres are able to elicit in the spectators) and context and of the relationships between these domains (see *Figure 1*). Even though the figure seems linear, the domains affect each other mutually as is pointed out by the arrows that show the relationships between different domains. There are three levels (individual, institutional and societal) at which these domains could be studied (Van Maanen 2009, 11–12). The domains of operations that should be analyzed on these levels are organisational structures, processes and outcomes (Van Maanen 1999, 722–726; Van Maanen 2009, 11).

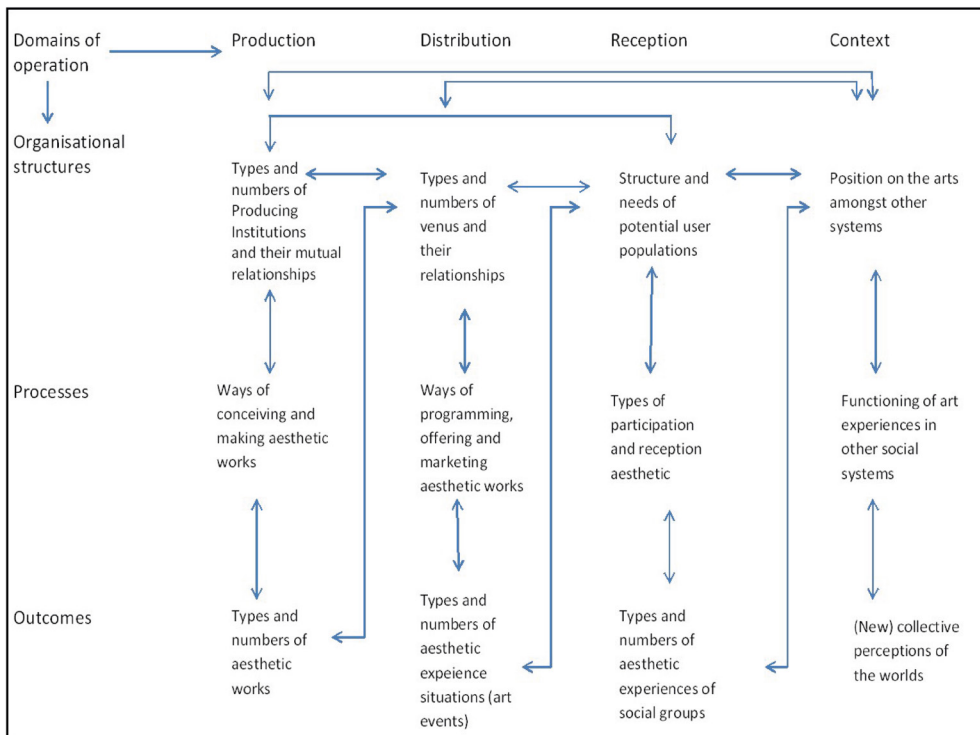


Figure 1. Fields and relationships to be studied, concerning the functioning of an art world on the societal level (Van Maanen 2009, 12)

From the point of view of the STEP research group, functioning refers to the “values and functions that can be related to aesthetic experience, in this case, the experience of performing arts” (Van den Hoogen 2009, 266). Hans van Maanen proposes distinguishing between values and functions of art: “It seems to be more useful, however, to separate the production of aesthetic values from the intrinsic and extrinsic functions to be fulfilled through the realization of these values by users” (Van Maanen 2009, 9). This means that the arts can have values that bring fourth functions that are intrinsic, i.e. specific to the arts, or extrinsic, i.e. those that can be also achieved through other types of experiences than arts (like sports etc.) (Van den Hoogen 2010, 41).

Reception research in the context of the functioning of theatre is much influenced by the concept of the Theatrical Event (Bennett 1997; Martin and Sauter

1995; Sauter 2000; Sauter 2008; Cremona et al. 2004) that means that the specific encounter between the stage and the audiences is seen in a wider context that influences the reception act. This implies that the focus is not on the reception process—studying only identification or being interested in the aspects that determine the overall satisfaction with the performance—but the enquiry is about whether the different values are realized by the spectators and whether theatre has or should have any impact in society by producing and distributing different values that are realized by different audience members. Therefore, it is necessary to include the spectators in the research in order to understand how theatre is experienced and what aspects are valued most by the spectators and whether and how these experiences can be related to or seen as outcomes of the production and distribution domain.

Methodology

The methodology used in this research has been worked out with a joint effort of the members of the international working group STEP. However, the challenge lay in comparing the systems to one another based on empirical evidence (Hoogen and Wilders 2009, 537; Edelman et al. 2015, 224).

Therefore, a comparative methodology was needed for a more advanced study of the functioning of theatre. Four types of data were gathered between years 2010–2014:

- 1) short descriptions of a city, with an emphasis on its cultural and theatrical infrastructure (Van Maanen et al. 2015a);³
- 2) data about the theatre supply in the city (Toome and Saro 2015);
- 3) quantitative data that include both audience and reception research (Van Maanen et al. 2015b; Wilders et al. 2015; Edelman and Šorli 2015; Toome 2015);
- 4) qualitative data that include reception research (Wilders et al. 2015).

It was not possible to carry out the three-step research in all these cities (see *Table 1*).

³ There is a description of the city available for all the cities and therefore it is left out of the table.

City	Data about theatrical events	Quantitative audience and reception research	Qualitative reception research
Aarhus (Denmark)	X	–	–
Tartu (Estonia)	X	X	X
Groningen (The Netherlands)	X	X	X
Maribor (Slovenia)	X	–	–
Debrecen (Hungary)	X	X	–
Tyneside (UK)	–	X	X

Table 1. The data gathered from the STEP cities between 2010–2014

The data about the supply makes it possible to describe the production and distribution domain of the theatre system, the data about audiences and their experiences allows analyzing the reception domain. The description of the city forms a context for the analysis and facilitates the understanding of the cultural life of the city. In general, the different levels of data collection can be related and depend on one another. Knowing the supply of theatre in a city makes it possible to choose representative productions suitable for audience and reception research; the qualitative data collected alongside the quantitative data helps to carry out a more in-depth analysis of the experiences of the audience members. The description of the city gave a necessary understanding of the cultural infrastructure that formed a base for the analysis of the supply.

The data about the public theatrical events was collected and categorized as follows: 1) name of the production; 2) the number of performances of the production, 3) the number of theatre-visits it attracted during the period under research; 4) the type of production and, if necessary, also the 5) genre of the production. The following seven main types of theatre were used in categorizing the productions and performances shown in the cities: 1) Spoken Theatre; 2) Musical Theatre; 3) Dance; 4) *Kleinkunst*; 5) Puppet and Object Theatre; 6) *Cirque Nouveau* and Show; and 7) Physical Theatre. Three of these types—Musical Theatre, Dance and *Kleinkunst*—are also divided into genres (Toome and Saro 2015, 261).

Quantitative audience and reception research were conducted in the cities of Debrecen, Groningen, Tartu and Tyneside (see *Table 2*). In all the cities the aim was to choose a variety of performances that could be considered a representative sample of the supply available to the spectators during a season, also trying to consider the different companies or venues present in the city (for the short overview of the venues and/or companies see Wilders et al. 2015, 309–310).

Performances of Spoken Theatre, Dance Theatre, Musical Theatre and *Kleinkunst* were included in the sample. An exception is performances of *Kleinkunst* in Tartu due to the lack of this type of theatre during the period of research.

	Debrecen	Groningen	Tartu	Tyneside
Research period	2012	2010–2011	2012	2014
Productions in the sample	8	52	13	24
Performances in the sample	23	52	23	105
Respondents of the quantitative survey	1139	2773	1401	1808

Table 2. Research period, number of productions and performances and number of respondents included in the quantitative audience and reception research

The quantitative audience research was conducted mostly through electronic means. In general, the spectators answered an electronic questionnaire which they got through e-mail in a few days after the performance. The e-mail addresses were collected before the performance or during an intermission; in Tyneside also audience lists were used to distribute the questionnaire. In Tartu, a small number of print questionnaires with stamped envelopes were also distributed to the people who did not have e-mail accounts but were willing to participate in the survey.

The questionnaire distributed to the spectators mostly through e-mail, consisted of five types of questions: 1) the overall evaluation of the performance, the venue and the evening in general and the reasons for coming to the theatre; 2) the frequency of theatre attendance as well as attending different types and genres of theatre (both professional and amateur) during last twelve months; 3) the expectations for the evening, if and from where the spectator had gained

information before coming to the theatre and if and from where the spectator got information after seeing the performance; 4) the questions about the experience of the theatre; 5) questions concerning the socio-demographic data (Toome 2013, 66).

In this paper only the questions concerning the overall evaluation of the experience of the theatre are discussed. Other parts of the collected data have been used by other STEP members (for example Van Maanen et al. 2015b; Šorli and Toome 2019) or will be used in the future for individual and joint scholarly papers.

Question 1 asked to evaluate the performance, venue and evening in general on a six-point scale from (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree. Question 2 presented a list of statements, question 12 a list of keywords/characteristics to be also rated on the same six-point scale. The list of statements is mostly based on the TEAM model by Hans van Maanen (Van Maanen et al. 2013, 85) so the sentences could be divided between five dimensions: theatrical (concerning the forms and ways of acting), thematic (concerning the themes and characters), immersive (concerning the captivity of the performance), communicative (concerning the communication between stage and spectators) and contextual (concerning the relevance).⁴ The keywords can be divided into six clusters: forms and skills, emotional engagement, cognitive engagement, complexity, entertainment, relevance. The first cluster, Forms and Skills, refers to values such as the experience of beauty, newly experienced images and the level of skillfulness the performers display. The clusters Emotional and Cognitive Engagement have their roots in the emotional and cognitive dimensions of the theatrical experience discerned by Eversmann (2004). The fourth cluster, Complexity, is related to the distinction between comfortable and challenging experiences (Van Maanen 2009, 191–194). Being entertained is often seen as characteristic of more comfortable experiences and therefore used as a separate category. Finally, the experienced Relevance of the performance refers to its relevance for the real life of spectators, either on a personal or on a societal level.

⁴ Differently from the original model, an immersive dimension was used instead of the narrative dimension because the statements refer to the ways the story captivates the spectators and is able to immerse them in the world created on stage.

Results and discussion

In this part of the paper the results of the empirical research will be discussed following the research questions raised at the beginning of the paper. First of all, the relationship between the production, distribution and reception in Tartu will be discussed because it enables to understand the functioning of a theatre system of Tartu.

The analysis of the supply shows a mutual relationship between the number of performances available and the number of visits they collect—it is possible to show more performances of a production if there are enough audiences who are interested in it. Thus, *the number of audiences available for (a certain type of) theatre and the habits of audiences of visiting the theatre, including a certain type of the theatre are important factors in the functioning of the theatre system*. The availability of audiences for a certain type of theatre is a question of cultural policy as well as arts marketing and theatre education. Spoken Theatre is culturally and historically the type most familiar to the audiences and most of the performances shown in Estonian theatres are Spoken Theatre performances, making it the most accessible type for regular and potential audiences. Also, the education system favors Spoken Theatre—the two acting schools in Estonia are focused on teaching Spoken Theatre actors, and to a lesser degree also dancers and opera singer; also, it is mainly Spoken Theatre that is included in the school curriculums.

The preferences of Estonian audiences as well as the existing theatre system are the outcomes of their *cultural and historical background*. Estonian literary culture is rather young compared to most Western cultures, having started flourishing in the second half of the 19th century. Until this time, the literary languages had been German and Russian. The cultural identity of Estonian was, and still is, very much based on the Estonian language. So, the preservation of the language that is spoken only by a million people is an important aim of Estonian culture. Even the Constitution of Estonia states that the state “shall guarantee the preservation of the Estonian nation, language and culture through the ages” (see “Eesti kultuurpoliitika põhialused aastani 2020”). In the Soviet times, especially in the 1970s and 80s that was a time of heavy Russification, Spoken Theatre allowed a way to present Estonian language in theatres. Also, Estonian dramaturgy was, and still is, very much valued by theatres as well by the Ministry of Culture also today: therefore 39% of the texts of the premieres

of Spoken Theatre productions in 2010 were written in Estonian; supporting the staging of Estonian drama is one aim of the state (Kultuur 2030).

Even if there are audiences available for different types of theatre, *the lack of suitable venues* can also be an obstacle. For example, Dance Theatre might need a certain number of square meters or a special dance floor to be able to show the performances. Also, Puppet and Object Theatre might need certain conditions to perform. There is only one suitable venue for Puppet and Object Theatre in Tartu, but for financial reasons the venue has made a contract with the biggest theatre in the city to present mainly their performances. The venue of small private theatre Tartu New Theatre offers basically the only affordable venue for Contemporary Dance groups, the black box of biggest theatre in the city being too expensive for the small private dance theatres and big considering the number of available audiences for this type of theatre in Tartu.

Another influential factor is *the cultural policy in programming that values certain types of theatre or certain productions more than others*. Because of that certain highly valued works are kept in repertoire even in the case of mediocre audience interest. In Tartu, this is visible in terms of Opera. Opera in the repertoire is only shown in Tallinn and Tartu. The aim of the music department of the Vanemuine theatre, the biggest theatre in the city, the only three type staging theatre in Estonia, is maintaining and developing the Opera genre, but the emphasis of the department is also on the Musical, targeted at general audiences as well as children, to guarantee a sufficient number of audiences for Musical Theatre and through this the income to be able to maintain Opera in Tartu. The Opera in general is not a very effective genre economically, which is the reason why the state subsidy for both the National Opera and the Vanemuine is larger compared to that allotted to other theatres. Supporting Opera in the Southern part of the country is a decision of cultural policy.

The case of the music department of the Vanemuine also clearly illustrates that *the cost of productions and performances* influences the availability of certain genres and *forces companies to attract more audiences*. Producing Opera, Musical and Classical Ballet is expensive and in order to maintain all these genres, attracting large audience numbers with Musicals is a possible way to earn a box office income that the Opera is not able to do as the number of possible audiences is smaller.

Finally, *the availability of educational input for different types and genres of theatre* directly influences the availability of different types and genres. In Estonia, it is possible to study acting for Spoken Theatre (there are two schools that

both teach acting based on Stanislavsky), directing in Spoken Theatre (some of the graduates have also directed Musical Theatre productions), dramaturgy, set design, Ballet and Contemporary Dance and Opera singing. In addition, light design, visual technology, and theatre theory can be studied. Until the end of the 1980s, the majority of the actors and directors all came from the same acting school. Even now, where there are two acting schools, the teachers of the more recent one is graduates of the older school, carrying on the same ideas. Some of the practical areas of theatre are not taught in Estonia at all—Puppet Theatre actors are either Spoken Theatre actors originally or have studied themselves abroad. New Circus or Urban Dance is usually taught at hobby schools, there is no school for *Kleinkunst* as there is in the Netherlands. Cultural management is taught in Estonia only since 2002. Of course, in a small country like Estonia, it is not useful to teach Puppet and Object Theatre actors or Opera directors, because the demand is minimal for these type of artist in the theatre field.

When comparing the functioning of theatre in STEP cities, specifically Tartu to Aarhus, Debrecen, Groningen and Maribor, the analysis of the production (number of productions), distribution (number of performances) and reception (number of visits) of theatre points at some similarities, but also differences. First, Tartu and Maribor, the two smallest cities among those studied, have the highest number of theatre visits (1.5 visits) per inhabitant. At the same time, the variety of theatre types available for the audiences when considering the number of productions is the narrowest in these two cities. This means that inhabitants of Tartu and Maribor have fewer possibilities of choosing between different types of theatre.

	Aarhus			Debrecen			Groningen			Maribor			Tartu		
	Prod	Per	Vis	Prod	Per	Vis	Prod	Per	Vis	Prod	Per	Vis	Prod	Per	Vis
Spoken Theatre	30%	54%	41%	44%	36%	42%	43%	48%	28%	45%	42%	30%	71%	72%	59%
Musical Theatre	10%	13%	38%	9%	16%	24%	14%	18%	31%	13%	8%	24%	13%	19%	31%
Dance Theatre	15%	7%	3%	27%	11%	11%	12%	9%	11%	9%	6%	17%	11%	8%	7%
Kleinkunst	14%	4%	12%	7%	3%	6%	24%	17%	21%	–	–	–	–	–	–
Puppet and Object Theatre	10%	12%	2%	12%	30%	16%	2%	1%	2%	30%	43%	27%	4%	1%	2%
Other	21%	10%	4%	1%	4%	1%	5%	6%	8%	3%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 3. The percentages of productions (Prod), performances (Per) and visits (Vis) per genre (Toome and Saro 2015, 279)

Tartu stands out by having the highest percentage of Spoken Theatre productions, while Maribor has many Puppet and Object Theatre productions and Groningen has the highest percentage of *Kleinkunst* productions in the supply. While the division of productions by type makes it possible to understand the variety of theatre offered to potential spectators, the division of performances gives a better understanding of the level of availability of the types as well as a more clear-cut picture of what the audiences actually visit. Although there is quite a rich variety of different productions in Groningen and Aarhus compared to other cities, in the distribution domain Spoken Theatre either dominates the supply or shares its leading position with Puppet and Object Theatre as is the case in Maribor) and in Debrecen. There are not so many performances of Puppet and Object Theatre in the supply of other cities. In Groningen, 17% of the performances are *Kleinkunst* which is four times more than in other cities. This means that even in cities with a high variety of different types of theatre available for the audiences, Spoken Theatre still is the most easily accessible type of theatre. Secondly, in terms of percentages in all the cities the percentage of Musical Theatre is a little bit, but not significantly higher as regards performances than is the case with the productions (exception is Maribor where it is the opposite): Musical Theatre productions make up 9–14% of the supply and constitute 8– 19% of the performances. The situation is opposite for Dance Theatre, where productions form 9–27% of the whole supply, but the performances only 6–11% (the highest being there percentage for Debrecen).

This suggests that a theatre or a company is able to give more performances with Musical Theatre productions than with Dance Theatre productions.

Thirdly, in all cities, except for Groningen, Spoken Theatre collects the most visits. This can be explained by the fact that Spoken Theatre is probably the most cognitively accessible type of theatre and it is also the most familiar theatre type for different kinds of audiences. However, in Groningen and Aarhus the number of visits to Musical Theatre is almost equal to the visits to Spoken Theatre, in Maribor the Spoken Theatre visits are quite comparable to the visits to Puppet and Object Theatre.

The differences and similarities of the supply can be explained by four aspects:

- (1) the influence of cultural traditions;
- (2) the structure of the theatre system;
- (3) the policy aspects of the theatre system;
- (4) the economic factor of theatre production (Toome and Saro 2015, 275).

Denmark and the Netherlands have been in a different social-political situation during the second half of the 20th century compared to Estonia, Slovenia and Hungary that either belonged to the Soviet Union or were in its sphere of influence. The political and social changes in the West at the end of the 1960s influenced the relationship between theatre and cultural politics in the 1970s that led to an increased acknowledging and supporting of smaller and new agents in the theatre field by the states (Van Maanen et al. 2015a, 247). On the other side of the iron curtain, theatre was seen more as a means of state propaganda and departures from the mainstream were less supported or more denied (depending on the political conditions in the countries). Lelkes (2009), Saro (2009) and Sušec Michieli (2009) have also pointed out that even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the existing theatre systems were largely maintained in Estonia, Slovenia and Hungary. Next, the structure of the theatre system, as well as the theatre policy, has a direct effect on the theatre supply. The presence of a company in a city, the availability of venues for certain types and genres and educational aspects are often a result of cultural history, but at the same time they are also constantly being re-negotiated. The subsidy system, the cultural programming, the use of venues, the educational priorities—all these features have to be taken into consideration as potential factors determining the functioning of a theatre system. In addition, the economic aspects have to be considered. The costs of some types or genres force theatres to attract wider audiences and might therefore influence the artistic decisions of the theatre in general. Finally, the size of the country also plays a role. In small countries like Slovenia and Estonia, number of potential audiences who would be interested in different type of productions is limited and therefore some types or genres can be quite marginal and attract spectators only in the capital city. Genres like Opera or Contemporary Dance in particular might require that the audience have certain competences to be able to follow them and derive pleasure from them. In addition, the size of the country also affects the possibilities of available training required for certain occupations, which can affect the availability of certain genres in its turn.

From the perspective of functioning it is relevant to know whether different types of theatre create different values for the audiences; if yes, where the biggest differences lie and if these differences can be explained by how the production and distribution domains function. In general, all types of theatre in the cities of Tartu, Groningen, Tyneside score high in the theatrical dimension, which means that spectators are especially content with the quality of the performing, but

also with the forms of the performance (set design, costumes etc.) and value it if the performance is well directed (*Table 4*). However, this is not the case in Debrecen, where the highest scores in the theatrical dimension are only given to the Musical Theatre. In case of *Kleinkunst* and Dance, it is the immersive dimension that is valued the highest, which means that the spectators feel they have been drawn into the world of the performance, and the play has made them use their imagination.

In general, Dance scores the highest averages in all the dimensions everywhere except Groningen where *Kleinkunst* is rated the highest. The other exception is Debrecen, where *Kleinkunst* has the highest averages for the thematic dimension instead of Dance. Musical Theatre is rated lowest in all the dimensions in Debrecen and Tartu; in Groningen and Tyneside the results are more varied. In all the cities, the lowest scores are given to the communicative dimension meaning that the spectators do not feel that the performers expect something from the audiences or that they had established a direct connection with the performers on the stage. However, these results are not in accordance with the qualitative research that tends to show that people are more content with the performance if they feel a personal connection either to the themes or the characters (compare with the example of *Kleinkunst* in Groningen). This is also seen in the quite high averages for the immersive and the thematic dimensions which make it possible to assume that spectators are captivated by the performance and like the themes of the performance, while finding the behaviour of the characters interesting as well. However, the contradiction between the low scores on the communicative dimension and the higher scores for the thematic and immersive dimensions can also result from the infelicitous phrasing of the sentences in the questionnaire: "Experiencing something very directly, almost physically" can be understood as the performance evoking physical reactions (trembling, crying etc.) that can be the result of so powerful experiences that may occur only a few times during a lifetime.

When considering which dimensions are the most important ones in terms of the overall evaluation of the performance, the immersive and the theatrical dimensions are the most essential for Spoken, Dance and Musical Theatre audiences. This also confirms the importance given to a captivating world created on stage that is brought to the audiences by competent performers when rating a performance.

	Groningen				Debrecen				Tartu				Tyneside			
	D	S	M	K	D	S	M	K	D	S	M	K	D	S	M	K
Theatrical	4,79	4,72	4,86	5,03	5,37	4,75	4,94	5,03	5,21	4,88	4,80	–	5,95	5,44	5,58	5,42
Thematic	4,28	4,47	4,53	4,81	4,74	4,74	4,30	4,83	4,70	4,56	4,38	–	5,51	5,0	5,0	5,01
Immersive	4,34	4,18	4,14	4,51	5,45	4,67	4,47	5,09	4,86	4,52	4,35	–	5,50	5,09	5,09	4,72
Communicative	3,37	3,53	3,53	3,80	4,58	4,06	3,61	4,54	4,06	3,79	3,43	–	4,70	4,20	4,42	4,52
Contextual	4,24	4,43	4,1	4,47	5,3	4,81	4,34	4,87	5,06	4,67	4,41	–	5,68	5,22	5,15	5,12

Table 4. The averages of different dimensions by types and cities (Wilders et al. 2015, 336–337). D – Dance Theatre, S – Spoken Theatre, M – Musical Theatre, K – *Kleinkunst*.

Dance Theatre is considered the most skillful, beautiful to look at, full of new images, impressive, inspiring, exciting and least superficial. Together with Spoken Theatre these two types can be considered the most complex ones based on the higher scores for such keywords as complicated, demanding for you personally and lower scores for easy to follow in comparison with Musical Theatre and *Kleinkunst*. Spoken Theatre is also considered the least relaxing and less amusing than other types of theatre. This means that Dance and Spoken Theatre offer the best possibilities for emotional and cognitive engagement and are considered more complex and are experienced as the least entertaining. Musical Theatre and *Kleinkunst* are experienced less complex and more entertaining, scoring higher on keywords such as relaxing, good fun, funny and having lower scores for complicated and demanding for you personally. Musical Theatre is also found to be the most conventional type of theatre except in Tyneside where this position is taken up by *Kleinkunst* that is also considered as the most entertaining and least complex. This means that Musical Theatre and *Kleinkunst* are in general considered to be easier types of theatre compared to the two other types. In general, all four types of theatre are considered to be more relevant on the social than on the personal level. *Kleinkunst* and Spoken Theatre are experienced as the most socially relevant, and *Kleinkunst* the most personally relevant type of theatre.

As was shown above, the aspects of immersion (the ways spectators are captivated by the story and feel drawn to the performance) and theatrical dimension are the most influential when evaluating the performance as a whole. Also, impressive is one of the most significant keywords in defining the overall evaluation given to a performance. However, qualitative research shows that impressive is interpreted rather differently by the spectators of Musical and

Spoken Theatre. For Musical Theatre audiences, impressive is connected more to the skills of the performer, the vocal crafts, the articulation; the ability to act and sing credibly is pointed out as a skill not all opera singers share.

Spoken Theatre audiences are impressed if the performance has made them think about the themes presented on stage and they have been able to relate this to their own personal experience. In addition, they also admire the acting skills, especially if the role is an obvious challenge for the actor (such as playing children's roles) or a perfect fit (good casting for the role). The most influential keywords determining the overall evaluation of the performances are skillful and impressive.

First of all, it has to be pointed out that the focus was on the comparability between cities, which is why types like Puppet and Object Theatre, Cirque Nouveau etc. that were available in some cities and not available in the others, were deliberately left out of the research. This means that it is not possible to say on the basis of this research whether theatre systems that have more alternative types of theatre in the supply, are also able to deliver different kinds of experiences. Nevertheless, the research does point out some variation in the data that can be interpreted as a result of the differences between the systems. For example, even though Musical Theatre is generally experienced as more entertaining than Spoken and Dance Theatre, in Tartu and Debrecen, where there are fewer Musicals in the supply, Musical Theatre is experienced as less relaxing and more complex. In Tyneside and Tartu where the Dance Theatre sample consists of Classical Ballet, the type is more admired for the skills involved in it, while in Groningen with more Contemporary Dance in the supply, it is admired for being more engaging, more surprising, less recognizable and more complicated. Whether conceptualization of the theatre is based on cultural conventions or emerges as more universal is one of the most relevant questions in the light of the results presented in this chapter. It can be seen that in all the four cities, theatre is most valued for its external quality (the performing, the set design, the way performance is directed). Secondly, being immersed in the world of the performance is as relevant for the audiences as is being impressed by the skillfulness and by the themes and characters presented.

	Groningen				Debrecen				Tartu				Tyneside			
	D	S	M	K	D	S	M	K	D	S	M	K	D	S	M	K
Skillful	5,07	4,81	4,75	4,83	5,62	4,89	4,98	5,37	4,97	4,3	4,44	–	5,79	5,05	5,16	4,85
Beautiful to look at	5,04	4,51	4,94	4,93	5,06	4,14	4,36	3,25	5,32	3,87	4,6	–	5,6	3,58	4,7	3,97
Full of new images	4,40	3,69	3,34	3,69	4,56	4,18	3,71	2,93	4	3,42	3,33	–	5,18	3,43	3,56	3,53
Impressive	4,51	4,09	4,01	3,86	5,06	4,24	4,22	4,68	4,78	4,22	4,15	–	5,74	4,86	5,18	5,44
Exciting	3,43	3,13	2,91	3,23	4,37	4,31	3,78	4,34	3,85	3,23	3,25	–	5,53	4,22	5,14	5,14
Comforting	2,43	2,52	2,66	2,42	3,12	3,05	2,76	2,75	4,17	2,49	2,41	–	3,28	2,83	3,91	4,47
Satisfyingly complete	–	–	–	–	5,06	4,19	4,11	4,81	4,35	4,25	4,23	–	5,11	4,3	4,94	5,41
Painfully surprising	2,6	2,99	2,17	2,84	2,19	3,24	2,75	1,43	2	3,39	2,31	–	2,81	3,14	1,99	1,97
Inspiring	4,39	4,1	3,86	3,99	4,88	4,23	3,81	3,26	4,27	3,7	3,4	–	5,32	4,24	4,25	4,26
Recognizable	2,84	3,28	4,2	4,23	4,75	4,44	4,59	4,16	2,92	3,15	3,73	–	4,7	4,23	5,32	4,97
Confrontational	2,96	3,53	2,41	3,07	3,06	4,47	3,64	4,68	–	–	–	–	3,3	3,08	1,81	1,51
Challenging	–	–	–	–	3,06	3,16	2,38	1,68	3,43	3,39	2,99	–	4,09	3,76	2,09	2,53
Conventional	2,13	2,29	2,71	2,19	2,81	2,48	3,17	2,65	3,12	2,58	3,26	–	1,86	2,5	2,7	3,54
Superficial	1,91	2,1	2,59	2,14	1,44	2,03	2,21	1,68	1,97	2,11	2,3	–	1,52	1,85	2,2	1,61
Boring	1,89	1,95	1,63	1,54	1,25	1,81	1,85	1,22	1,56	1,92	1,88	–	1,15	1,44	1,3	1,23
Complicated	3,43	2,96	1,7	1,84	2,37	3,09	2,24	1,47	32,5	2,98	2,45	–	2,49	2,5	1,3	1,26
Easy to follow	3,55	4,1	5,08	5,06	4,93	4,24	4,56	5,34	3,71	4,06	4,23	–	4,95	4,76	5,55	5,68
Demanding for you personally	2,75	2,75	1,71	1,89	2	2,86	2,25	1,66	2,05	2,21	1,91	–	2,7	2,79	1,52	1,53
Relaxing	4,08	3,87	4,9	4,8	4,13	3,35	3,86	4,47	4,17	3,37	3,79	–	3,76	3,05	3,89	4,94
Amusing / good fun	3,51	4,05	4,64	5	5,56	4,47	4,57	5,85	3,75	3,62	3,65	–	4,85	4,2	5,5	5,83
Funny	3,19	3,95	4,38	5	4,63	3,47	2,57	5,53	2,54	3,46	3,12	–	4,05	4,38	4,56	5,66
Relevant for you personally	3,19	3,23	2,66	3,57	4,06	3,79	3,01	4,31	3,12	3,09	2,58	–	3,67	3,5	3,96	4,88
Socially relevant	3,1	4,04	3,04	3,91	4	4,46	3,51	4,93	3,28	4,25	3,44	–	4,39	4,5	3,82	4,56

Table 5. The averages of keywords by types of theatre and cities (Wilders et al. 2015, 340–342). D – Dance Theatre, S – Spoken Theatre, M – Musical Theatre, K – Kleinkunst.

Conclusion

Despite the availability of different types and genres of theatre in different cities Spoken Theatre is the most accessible type of theatre in all the cities in Northern, Western, Eastern and Central parts of Europe as the largest numbers of performances offered to audiences is Spoken Theatre. It is also the most visited type of theatre everywhere; however, it shares the position with either Musical Theatre or Puppet and Object Theatre. The almost equal number of visits to Musical Theatre in Northern and Western cities is a result of a theatre system that consist of much more commercial theatre than Estonian theatre.

Even though theatre systems have cultural roots and clearly are the outcomes of particular cultural, political and social history, it is also the priorities in current theatre politics and the structure of the theatre system in general that have a direct influence on the functioning of theatre. The emphasis that in Western cultural politics has been put on supporting more alternative theatre types is visible in the variety of theatre that is on offer in Aarhus and Groningen. At the same time the system has created a basis for a lively commercial theatre scene that more often produces entertaining genres (like Musicals) in big venues for large numbers of audiences. So, the subsidizing or non-subsidizing (who is subsidized and who is totally dependent on their own box-office income) of certain types or genres determines the functioning of theatre. In Estonia, commercial theatre is almost non-existent and therefore almost all professional theatre is subsidized. This means that even the more entertaining genres like Musicals are produced by subsidized theatres. In the context of Tartu, this can be seen in a positive light for the income from Musicals enables the Vanemuine to stage Opera and Classical Ballet in South Estonia, while these genres would never collect so many visitors as to cover their productions costs by themselves.

What it is maybe more striking, though, is that the ways in which people consume and experience theatre in these countries have more similarities than differences despite the fact that the theatre systems are rather different. Spoken and Dance Theatre are experienced as more serious types of theatre, Musical Theatre and Kleinkunst as more entertaining and relaxing. In general, spectators everywhere value what they see on the stages very highly. The quality of acting, set design, costumes, the good work of the director or choreographer are rated high for all the types of theatre. The ability to immerse spectators into the world

of the performance as well as the satisfaction with the quality of acting, directing and forms of the performance in general are the most influential aspects when evaluating the performance as a whole.

References

- Bennett, Susan. 1997. *Theatre Audiences: A theory or production and reception*. London – New York: Routledge.
- Cremona, Vicky Ann, Peter Eversmann, Hans Van Maanen, Willmar Sauter, John Tulloch eds. 2004. *Theatrical Events: Borders, Dynamics, Frames*. IFTR/FIRT Theatrical Event Working Group. Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi.
<https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004502888>
- Edelman, Joshua and Maja Šorli. 2015. "Measuring the value of theatre for the Tyneside audiences". *Cultural Trends* 24(3): 232–244. Online access: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09548963.2015.1066074> (last visited: May 13, 2024).
- Edelman, Joshua, Maja Šorli, and Van Maanen, Hans. 2015. "STEP into the Provinces: The theatre systems and audience experiences of smaller European cities". *Amfiteater: Journal of Performing Arts Theory* 3(1–2): 220–233.
- "Eesti kultuurpoliitika põhialused aastani 2020" heakskiitmine. RT III, 14 February 2014. *Eesti Vabariigi Põhiseadus*. Online access: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/633949> (last visited: June 2018).
- Eversmann, Peter. 2004. "The Experience of Theatrical Event". In *Theatrical Events: Borders, Dynamics, Frames*. Eds. V. A. Cremona, P. Eversmann, H. Van Maanen, W. Sauter, J. Tulloch, 139–174. Amsterdam – New York: IFTR/FIRT Theatrical Event Working Group – Routledge.
https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004502888_012
- Lelkes, Zsafia. 2009. "Changes in Hungarian Theatre System". In *Global Changes – Local Stages: How Theatre Functions in Smaller European Countries*. Eds. Hans van Maanen, Andreas Kotte, Anneli Saro, 90–124. Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi.
https://doi.org/10.1163/9789042026131_008
- Martin, Jaqueline and Willmar Sauter. 1995. "Understanding Theatre: Performance Analysis in Theory and Practice". *Acta Universitatis Stocholminensis*. Stockholm Theatre Studies 3. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International.
- Saro, Anneli. 2009. "Interaction of Theatre and Society in Estonia". In *Global Changes – Local Stages: How Theatre Functions in Smaller European Countries*. Eds. Hans van Maanen, Andreas Kotte, Anneli Saro, 41–62. Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi.
https://doi.org/10.1163/9789042026131_006

- Sauter, Willmar. 2000. *The Theatrical Event: Dynamics of Performance and Perception*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- Sauter, Willmar. 2008. *Eventness: A Concept of Theatrical Event*. Revised 2nd edition. Stockholm: Stiftelsen för utgivning av teatervetenskapliga studier.
- Šorli, Maja and Hedi-Liis Toome. 2019. "Is Theatre Personally and Socially Relevant? Empirical Insight into Theatrical Experience". *Nordic Theatre Studies* 30(2): 115–132. Online access: <https://tidsskrift.dk/nts/article/view/112955> (last visited: May 13, 2024).
- Sušec Michieli, Barbara. 2009. "Between Inertia and Cultural Terrorism: Slovenian Theatre System in Times of Crisis and Change". In *Global Changes – Local Stages: How Theatre Functions in Smaller European Countries*. Eds. Hans van Maanen, Andreas Kotte, Anneli Saro, 63–89. Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789042026131_007
- Toome, Hedi-Liis. 2013. "Teatrist Tartus, rahvusvaheliselt: Metodoloogilisi küsimusi rahvusvahelises võrdlusruuringus". In *Eesti teatriteaduse perspektiivid: Studia litteraria Estonica*, Vol 13. Ed. A. Saro, 55–82. Tartu: Ülikooli Kirjastus.
- Toome, Hedi-Liis. 2015. "Do you feel the same? Different dominants of aesthetical experience". *Nordic Theatre Studies* 27(2): 22–36. <https://doi.org/10.7146/nts.v27i2.24248>
- Toome, Hedi-Liis and Anneli Saro. 2015. "Theatre Productions and Distribution in Different European cities". *Amfiteater: Journal of Performing Arts Theory* 3(1–2): 257–279.
- Van den Hoogen, Quirijn Lennert. 2009. "Functioning of Performing Arts in Urban Society". In *Global Changes – Local Stages: How Theatre Functions in Smaller European Countries*. Eds. Hans van Maanen, Andreas Kotte, Anneli Saro, 265–299. Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789042026131_015
- Van den Hoogen, Quirijn Lennert. 2010. *Performing Arts and the City: Dutch municipal cultural policy in the Brave New World of evidence-based policy*. Dissertation University of Groningen: Groningen.
- Van den Hoogen, Quirijn Lennert and Marlike Lisette Wilders. 2009. "STEP on Stage: Studying Theatre Systems in Glocal Contexts". In *Global Changes – Local Stages: How Theatre Functions in Smaller European Countries*. Eds. Hans van Maanen, Andreas Kotte, Anneli Saro, 527–537. Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi.
- *Vanemuise arengukava 2014–2018*. Online access: <http://www.vanemuine.ee/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Teater-Vanemuine-arengukava-2014-2018.pdf> (last visited: June 2018).
- Van Maanen, Hans. 1999. "How to Describe the Functioning of Theatre". In *Theatre Worlds in Motion: Structures, Politics and Developments in the Countries of Western*

Europe. Eds. Hans van Maanen, Steve Wilmer, 721–758. Amsterdam–Atlanta: Rodopi.

https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004647121_023

- Van Maanen, Hans. 2009. *How to Study Art Worlds: On the Societal Functioning of Aesthetic Values*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.5117/9789089641526>
- Van Maanen, Hans, Andreas Kotte, and Anneli Saro eds. 2009. *Global Changes – Local Stages: How Theatre Functions in Smaller European Countries*. Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi.
<https://doi.org/10.1163/9789042026131>
- Van Maanen, Hans, Antine Zijlstra, and Marlike Lisette Wilders. 2013. *Hoe theatre functioneert in the stad de Groningen: Aanbod en gebruik in het seizoen 2010–2011. How theatre functions in the city of Groningen. Supply and use in the regular season*. STEP research. Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, Faculteit der Letteren.
- Van Maanen, Hans, Joshua Edelman, Magdolna Balkanyi, Mathias P. Bremgartner, Louise Ejgod Hansen, Anneli Saro, Beate Schappach, Maja Šorli, Hedi-Liis Toome, and Attila Szabó. 2015a. „Theatre Systems Compared”. *Amfiteater: Journal of Performing Arts Theory* 3(1–2): 234–255.
- Van Maanen, Hans, Maja Šorli, Hedi-Liis Toome, Marline Lisette Wilders, Joshua Edelman, Attila Szabó, and Magdolna Balkányi. 2015b. „Spectators, who are they?” *Amfiteater: Journal of Performing Arts Theory* 3(1–2): 281–303.
- Wilders, Marline Lisette, Hedi-Liis Toome, Maja Šorli, Attila Szabó, and Antine Zijlstra. 2015. „I was utterly mesmerised: Audience experiences of different theatre types and genres in four European cities compared”. *Amfiteater: Journal of Performing Arts Theory* 3(1–2): 305–343.