

Programming by public theatres: a complex system for new producers

Master Thesis Cultural Economics & Entrepreneurship



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Date: 8 June 2015

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Preface

During my pre-master and Master Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship at the Erasmus University Rotterdam I have developed and diversified my interest in the arts. I have developed a particular interest in performing arts and theatre especially, during the module "Economics of the Performing Arts" led by Dr. Cees Langeveld and Dr. Anna Mignosa. The module did not only provide an interesting understanding of the performing arts industries, it also enabled and encouraged the group to experience different types of Performing Arts during evenings out to the theatre. Unfortunately this module only lasted one term, reason for me to continue my understanding of this sector by writing my graduation thesis on theatre.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the organisations who have enabled my research by taking the time to answer my questions, even though my thesis period was planned during hectic times for the theatres and festivals in the Netherlands. Chassé Theatre Breda, Parkstad Limburg Theatres, Rotterdamse Schouwburg, Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam, Festival Noorderzon, Festival Boulevard: A great thank you!

I would also like to thank my supervisor Dr. Anna Mignosa for all her guidance with my thesis. Thank you to George Webb for his patience and proofreading another thesis, I promise this was the last one! Thank you to my parents and friends who have been very patient with me and my stressful moods. Thank you to my granddad who has been on top of my research from start to finish. Thank you to Leonie Kalkman for her time and support and to Sofie Post who has helped to keep up my motivation during the final thesis phase. Thank you to everyone, you have been of great help and made my thesis to the final result that I am happy to present now.

Abstract

In the performing arts industries, gatekeepers play an important role due to the experience goods that are exchanged of which also potential audience struggle to determine the opportunity cost. Vital stakeholders for public theatres are funding bodies, such as local city councils. Due to a financial downturn the available subsidies have decreased, suggesting a shift from artistic quality to a more commercial approach within theatres in order to generate more income. This thesis was written with the aim of exploring the public theatres' programming process, the involvement of funding bodies, room for experimentation with new types of theatre, and the chances of new producers. The following research question forms the guideline of this study: ***What is the role of governmental funds in the programming of public theatres in the Netherlands, and does this influence the possibility for experimentation and new makers in the theatre programme?***

The research question has been approached by means of five qualitative, semi-structured interviews with renowned theatres in the Netherlands, which have been selected after sampling public theatres that receive both local city council next to programming funding from the Performing Arts Fund (Fonds Podiumkunsten) in the period 2013-2016. Further on in the research process, two festivals have been included through correspondence. The final sample consisted of: Chassé Theatre Breda, Parkstad Limburg Theaters, Rotterdamse Schouwburg, Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam, Festival Noorderzon and Festival Boulevard.

All collected data has been analysed and structured according to: *Council involvement, theatre's goal, freedom of programming, programming steps, popularity among public and generating income, quality of productions, and risk taking*. It turned out that the expected shift from artistic quality to commercial productions has not been evident in the included theatres, however funding bodies do take a prominent role. Due to the high risk that comes along with programming unknown experience goods, public theatres are cautious and selective during their programming process such as focusing on performances by theatre groups they are familiar with. This emphasised the importance of developing a network in the industry and the challenge new producers face when trying to enter the theatre market. Also the relevance of cooperation and young talent initiatives have been emphasised to encourage development of the theatre industries, leave room for

performances offered outside the theatre's networks, next to offering new producers the opportunity to develop themselves within the theatre industries.

The purpose of the results is to provide a better understanding of the public theatres' programming process and potential pitfalls caused by risk reduction and stakeholder involvement. The recommendations at very end can be used by theatres to ensure room for experimentation and diversification of their programme. For new producers who are trying to enter the complex theatre market, an overview of potential solutions has been drawn up to provide them with a starting point.

Key words: Performing arts, public theatres, gatekeepers, funding bodies involvement, programming considerations, entering the theatre market.

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1. Introduction

As part of graduating from the Master Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, a master thesis has been carried out. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the public theatre programming system by understanding the funding bodies, whether public theatres can experiment with their programme and the chances of new producers to enter the theatre market.

Having a relative who is active in producing (amateur) theatre performances, a personal interest has been developed in how this system works in the Netherlands. I learned that even though finances can be arranged and many people become part of the project, it is still a challenge to actually enter the programme of theatres as an unknown producer. This made me wonder how decision-making in theatre programming works and what aspects are taken into consideration. Are theatres interested in programming unknown or experimental performances or do they prefer to programme well-known plays? Are there things new producers can do to increase the chance of entering the market? The theoretical framework will explore these topics by reviewing and comparing the current academic literature available, resulting in the formulation of the following research question to guide the research process: ***What is the role of governmental funds in the programming of public theatres in the Netherlands, and does this influence the possibility for experimentation and new makers in the theatre programme?***

To answer this research question, five semi-structured qualitative interviews have been conducted with public theatres in The Netherlands. These have been selected after a sampling public theatres that, next to local city council funding, receive programming funding from the Fonds Podiumkunsten in the period 2013-2016 (Performing Arts Fund). This sampling process has been explained in the chapter "Methodology", also discussing further research methods.

The chapter "Analysis" provides the main body of the thesis, summarising and analysing the qualitative data collected. It is structured according to seven topics: *Council involvement, theatre's goal, freedom of programming, programming steps, popularity among public and generating income, quality of productions, and risk taking*. As part of the analysis, the discussed theories and literature from the theoretical framework that reoccurred during the data collection will be compared to the interview outcomes. As part

of the final analysis topic *risk taking*, "experimentation" and "entering the market" as a new producer have been discussed into more depth, to provide recommendations on both topics at the very end of the thesis.

Understanding these aspects will contribute to understanding public theatres' current programming behaviour, next to determining whether there is potential for diversifying current planning and assessment criteria. It identifies potential pitfalls caused by risk reduction and stakeholder involvement and offers new producers a starting point of which an overview of potential solutions can be found at the very end.

Whereas the commercial arts focus on maximising profit, the fine arts focus on the maximisation of cultural value (Langeveld, 2014). Therefore, commercial theatres are likely to have a different programming strategy as publically funded theatres, thus this thesis will focus on theatres that in some way receive public funding only.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Theatres in the Netherlands: an overview

The Netherlands consisted of 522 theatres and stages in 2013 (CBS, 2014). In total, 2,554,000 visits have been paid in the same year of which 14,115 visits of these were theatre plays (CBS, 2014). Most theatres are located in the provinces North-Holland (135 theatres) and South-Holland (93 theatres), followed by North-Brabant (63 theatres) (CBS, 2014b). Depending on the performing arts genre, different types and sizes of halls are used. Generally, in the Netherlands, theatres are used for dance, experimental drama, repertoire drama, cabaret, musical, and popular music (Langeveld, 2012). Per genre, a certain pattern of chair capacity per used theatre can be drawn. The general chair capacities per genre are as follows: dance 0-1500, experimental drama 0-800, repertoire drama 0-1000, cabaret 0-2000, musical 500-3500 and popular music 0-3500 (Langeveld, 2012 p.6). These different capacities of halls can be divided into small-scale, middle-sized and large, having a local, regional and beyond regional range (Langeveld, 2012). Generally speaking, the total income of theatres in the Netherlands consists for 60% of own income and 40% of governmental subsidy (VSCD, 2011). The Dutch ministry of education, culture and science (Onderwijs, Cultuur & Wetenschap) included eight main theatres in its general culture plan referred to as the "BIS" (Basis Infrastructuur, Ministerie van OCW, 2012). However, these theatre companies develop their own productions, thus programming an external performance is rather unlikely. The Dutch government also provides a significant amount of funding to the Fund of Performing Arts (Fonds Podiumkunsten or FPK), which in turn divides this amount over several aspects of performing arts of which festivals, music and theatres. In case of the theatres, they provide funding for regular programming per individual theatre, next to funding for incidental, small-scale programming. These types of funding will be further explored in the theoretical framework.

2.2 Theatre as experience goods

Within the performing arts industries, the products consumed are mostly experience goods (Towse, 2011; Langeveld, 2014). Although different definitions exist (Towse, 2011; Hutter, 2011; Langeveld, 2014), in the creative industries experience goods are referred to as goods that are often intangible and can only be experienced during the consumption. This makes the assessment of for instance quality and price difficult for the parties involved. To start

with the audience, wanting to purchase an experience good makes it difficult for them to determine beforehand whether it will be worth the ticket. Also, their opportunity and travelling cost need to be taken into consideration (Towse, 2011; Langeveld, 2014). Also, it is difficult for consumers to collect information about the quality of these goods, thus consumers' tastes are not fully formed yet until they consume the product (Towse, 2011; Hutter, 2011; Langeveld, 2014). This means that, even though consumers have differentiating tastes, people may not be fully aware of these and is continuously developing by participating in the arts (Towse, 2011; Foster, Borgatti & Jones, 2011). Therefore, before potential audience decides to visit a performance, many considerations are taken into account.

Dealing with an experience good also brings challenges for the theatres who are presenting these goods, next to the artists or producers who try to present their product. As it turned out, the theatre's audience are already struggling with the assessment of the offered productions. This means that selling their product can be a challenge for theatres. However, theatres' own assessment of productions is not as straightforward. When programming performances to sell to the audience, they have to assess the performance each time and decide whether they will be presented by their theatre (De Roeper, 2008). During this assessment, not only personal and organisational visions regarding the content of a performance are considered (Fox & Dickie, 2010), theatres often also have to consider the commercial potential that generates income (Kotler & Scheff, 1997).

Lastly, for public theatres, government funding bodies or other cultural funds play an important role. In contrast to the commercial theatre sector where the performing arts organisations seek to invest in productions or projects that will generate a significant amount of profit, public theatres need governmental funding bodies and cultural funds to place cultural investments on their behalf (De Roeper, 2008). However, these governmental subsidies are usually provided along with a cultural and social agenda that is politically based (De Roeper, 2008 p. 53).

From the public theatre's perspective, three main stakeholders need to be dealt with: the audience, the artist and the financial stakeholders (e.g. government funding bodies) by means of gatekeeping. The theatre takes the role of the cultural gatekeeper; a gatekeeper can be seen as an intermediary between the market and the consumer, effectively influencing the nature of the arts supply (Towse, 2011. p. 129). In this process,

the one presenting the product to the consumer is the one who needs to decide whether a product that has been offered has potential for their organisation. In theatre, the director is the most important gatekeeper (Fox & Dickie, 2010). This means that directors of theatres, both for profit and not-for-profit act as filters, to a certain degree, when it comes to artists' and producers' careers and the cultural output that is being presented (Towse, 2011).

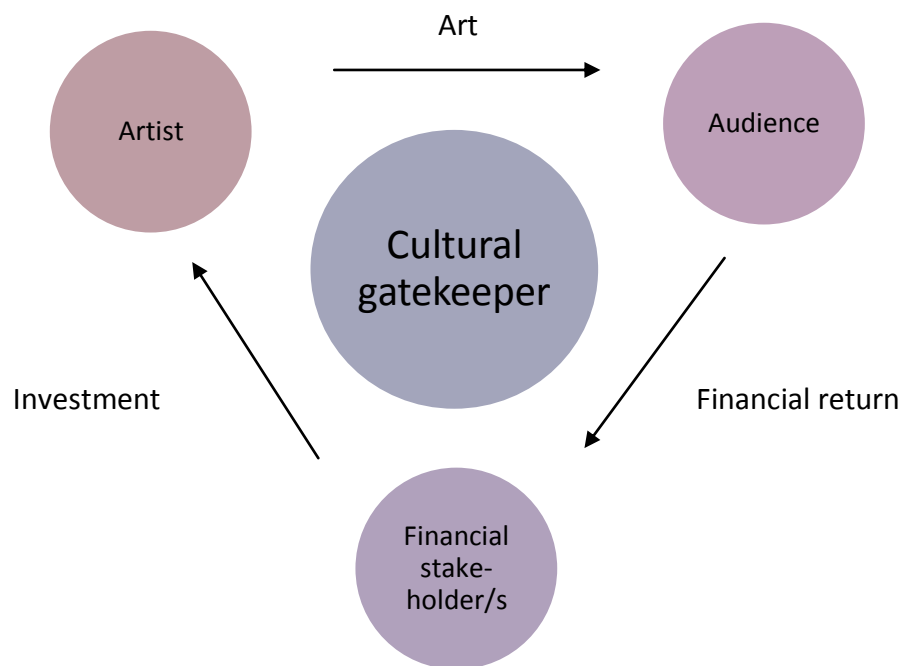


FIGURE 1: SERVING THREE MASTERS: THE CULTURAL GATEKEEPER'S DILEMMA (DE ROEPER, 2008)

The position of the cultural gatekeeper in between the three main stakeholders has been illustrated by De Roeper (2008 p.53) and can be found in figure 1. The figure shows the stakeholders that the cultural gatekeeper is continuously dealing with, while generating the values aside each arrow: *art* produced by artists, *financial return* generated by the audience when purchasing the art, financial returns turned into *investment* that again supports the artists. It does not show the goods exchanged by the cultural gatekeeper, it solely shows the three stakeholders the gatekeeper has to satisfy. Since the financial investors provide their support along with their own agenda, which they want to achieve with their investments, this stakeholder also fulfils a gatekeeping role.

2.3 Theatres as gatekeepers

It is clear that within the creative industries and the performing arts specifically, gatekeepers play a crucial role. In the case of theatres, the gatekeepers are the ones who decide what creative products eventually reach the audience (Foster, Borgatii & Jones,

2011). It is also clear that it can be difficult for the audience to determine the value of the performances, since not all information they need to make this assessment is available (Towse, 2011; Hutter, 2011; Langeveld, 2014). This lack of information can partially be covered by advertising in which the producers can provide information about the good, however these can be seen as repeated claims that again do not provide the full picture (Hutter, 2011). Pricing is also of importance when consumers try to conduct quality assessment of an experience good, as consumers anticipate for a certain quality that matches the price (Urrutiaguer, 2002; Towse, 2011; Langeveld, 2014). Also the image of the directors or managers of the productions are taken into consideration (Urrutiaguer, 2002). Another way consumers try to collect information about the good is by trusting opinions of people they know, for instance by the word of mouth, next to taking experts' opinions into account. The experts consumers are relying on consist of several parties, such as critics well established artists, but also bloggers and other forms of social media presenters (Urrutiaguer, 2002; Hutter, 2011). Alongside that, frequent performing arts visitors develop such a knowledge in this field that they can serve an expert role in the word of mouth scene (Urrutiaguer, 2002). Yet, it is clear that a very important expert in this matter is the theatre director, or the ones in charge of the selection of performances that are presented.

Being such an important player on the theatre market, cultural gatekeepers serve as co-producers, tastemakers and selectors (Foster, Borgatti & Jones, 2011). The role of a co-producer refers to supporting the production of performances by becoming part of the artists, enabling them to select those they feel has potential and potentially shaping them (Foster, Borgatti & Jones, 2011). The gatekeeper role as tastemakers, refers to evaluating those cultural products that are relevant to the audience and promoting them in a way that the audience would participate in them (Foster, Borgatti & Jones, 2011). Being a selector refers to selecting subjectively the most valuable or relevant products among a broad range of oversupply (Foster, Borgatti & Jones, 2011).

As a cultural gatekeeper, trust and developing a social network can be of high importance. In order to understand the quality of artistic products, colleagues and other previously mentioned experts can all be used to determine the quality of a product and in case of theatres, to decide whether to programme the performance (Foster, Borgatti & Jones, 2011). As the performing arts scene is such a small industry, it is important to maintain a good image among these networks as a bad image is easily spread (McCarthy,

2006). Also within the theatre directing field, networking and trust are important, as decisions are not only based on abilities (e.g. during auditions for a new play) (Fox & Dickie, 2010). The reason why performing arts organisations take their role so seriously could be explained by them feeling responsible for the transaction between the audience and the artist (De Roeper, 2007), indicating the importance of trust amongst the stakeholders in figure 1 as well.

The performing arts industry revolves around cultural gatekeepers. Within the theatre scene, the most important stakeholders the gatekeeper has to deal with are the audience, artist and financial investor(s). Programming unfamiliar performances is not only risky for theatres, as visiting these also brings a risk for the consumer. They have to decide whether it is worth their time and money, which can be a challenge when it concerns an experience good of which the quality is difficult to determine. Different pieces of information are being collected in order to conduct a so-called quality assessment of the good, in which the gatekeepers play an important role. So far, theatres have been discussed as one of the main gatekeepers, however figure 1 referred to another important stakeholder that, in case of public theatres, can have a significant impact of the role of the gatekeeper: The financial investor(s).

2.4 Governmental funding bodies as gatekeepers

In order for theatres to exist and carry out their day-to-day activities, sources of income have to be generated. A significant part of non-commercial theatres is based on governmental subsidy. Due to a changing economy, these subsidies have decreased which means that the financial stability of public theatres has changed throughout the years. These funding restrictions have been evident through subsidy cuts, stricter rules when receiving subsidies and the encouragement to become more efficient financially (Kotler & Scheff, 1997.; Boerner & Jobst, 2011). In these new funding schemes, governments want the organisations to become more aware of their environment, cultural engagement and education (Van der Ploeg, 2006). Next to that, organisations are encouraged to generate income themselves, for instance through ticket sales, in addition to finding sponsors for part of their expenses. This is also necessary as the public funding is insufficient to cover all fixed costs (Langeveld, 2014). This increase in generating one's own income, suggests that public theatres now need to focus more on the sales aspect of their organisation, rather than the

artistic or aesthetic aspect. This is simply because selling more means generating a greater income, leading to increased financial stability.

As cultural organisations have been urged by the governments to become more self-sufficient, the approach of many cultural organisations has shifted from a solely artistic excellence perspective, to a more market oriented approach (Kotler & Scheff, 1997). This suggests that currently, theatres are less able to experiment with renewing and unknown productions that are different to their usual programming, as these would simply bring too much risk when trying to generate income. This also suggests that for the same reasons young talent and new producers may find it a challenge to enter the theatre market. Next to that, within the creative industries information problems regarding the production and the consumption of the product cause that "nobody knows" how successful a production will be (Towse, 2010. p.154), which makes the programming of unknown performances extra risky.

However, the change to a market oriented approach has not been easy for all organisations, as they felt like this "marketing mind-set" would have to compromise their artistic goals when trying to engage a larger audience (Kotler and Scheff, 1997). Thus, increasing income and becoming more self-sufficient is often linked to expanding and diversifying performing arts' audiences (Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, 1996). In order to build these audiences, cultural organisations have developed strategies and conducted market research to include customers' interests when making programming decisions (Kotler & Scheff, 1997.; Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, 1996). Thus, programming seems to have become a way of marketing.

2.5 Programming funding

Subsidy cuts may have caused a reduction in the programming of new and unknown performances, as theatres require more commercial certainty. However, to enable theatres to programme performances that contribute to what they perceive as artistic excellence, a different fund that receives subsidy from the Dutch government has been designated to support this goal. The Performing Arts Fund (Fonds Podiumkunsten or FPK), as mentioned in the first section, provides a set amount of money for the programming of a great variety and quality performances (FPK, 2015). Anyone in charge of the theatre or music hall programme with at least one hall with a visitor capacity of 200 people can apply for funding, if a set amount of the current programme has been financed by the government and has an

international focus (FPK, 2015). Next to that, the fund finds the environment and the function of the performing arts centre important, next to the diversity of the productions' characteristics and geographical spreading they generate, thus theatre producers are expected to perform across the country (FPK, 2015). For the year 2014-2015, total funding per location has varied between €15,000 to €45,000, of which 20 music halls and 28 theatres or combinations including theatre. As this thesis focuses on theatres only, music halls have been excluded from this list. Since this type of funding is directly aimed at diversifying theatres' programmes, these theatres will be a focus of this study. Therefore, the funding overview will also be used to make a selection for further research, which will be further explained in the "Methodology".

After looking into the financial background of public theatres in the Netherlands, it became evident that these organisations are partly depending on governmental funding. It also showed that the two cultural gatekeepers of theatre directors and government funding bodies play a crucial role in selecting and presenting cultural products to the audience. In case of theatre, this suggests that a relative small number of people or organisations are responsible for the eventual programme. This also suggests that artists or producers trying to get access to theatres to present their artistic product have to rely on these gatekeepers, potentially making it difficult for them to enter.

Due to new stricter rules in order to be eligible for funding, and to increase the overall income, theatres have altered their focus from solely artistic excellence to a more commercial focus. Their programme is aimed at attracting visitors, suggesting that their audience play an important part in the decision-making process. Now it has become clear *why* public theatres programme the way they do, it will be interesting to find out *how* this process takes place.

2.6 Programming considerations

The following section will further explore what considerations and steps are taken into account when programming decisions are being made. Several studies have been devoted to exploring how the programming process of public theatres works. According to a study by Boerner & Jobst (2011), five decisions when developing a season's programme for theatres can be recognised. The first decision is related to *the season's theme*, indicating that theatres often use a particular motto or topic that will form the thread between all

performances during that season, such as a certain country or composer (Boerner & Jobst, 2011). *The selection of plays* is the second decision that contributes to the programme, referring to a mix of genres of already programmed performances next to referring to the popularity of the performance. The latter is linked to the following two decisions, being *the selection of stage directors* and *the cast*. Both matters are related to the popularity of the production members, next to the personal characteristics of the cast (Boerner & Jobst, 2011). Lastly, *the chronological order of productions* comes into play to try and create a mix of genres and popularity. This can be achieved by creating alternation among the types of plays as indicated by the aforementioned decisions such as the theme and timing as part of the season.

As part of the five identified decision criteria, the popularity of directors, cast and the production itself have been mentioned in the previous section. This suggests that part of the programming decision-making is influenced by the appreciation of the programmed performances by potential visitors. According to Boerner & Jobst (2011) the most important stakeholders that influence programming decisions are the theatre management and artistic employees as the internal stakeholders, and the local government and audience as external stakeholders. The importance of these external stakeholders has previously been explained by the level of funding by governmental bodies. The importance of the audience can be explained by growing importance of selling tickets, thus generating income. Being dependent on these external stakeholders can lead to fewer risks being taken when making programming decisions, because the external stakeholders are the ones who provide the budget to programme performances (Assassi, 2007).

Instead of focusing on five different decisions as pointed out by Boerner & Jobst (2011), a study by Assassi (2007) focuses on a composition of four parts that are used when deciding on plays to be programmed. The first part is the *reactive* component, which refers to the well-known productions presented by famous artists. The *relational* component consists of shows that are unfamiliar among the public, however do have a good relation with the programming theatre. The *proactive* component is less frequently programmed and affirms artistic values and aesthetic intuitions. Within this component the distributor of the performance takes the initiative of contacting theatres. Lastly, the *strategic* component is quite the opposite of the previous as the performances are aimed at meeting the needs of the theatres and the audience (Assassi, 2007). Although Assassi's study emphasises the

importance of popularity of an artist or director among the audience in the *reactive* component and meeting the needs of the theatre and the audience in the *strategic* component, she also analyses the potential of unknown productions. Whereas the study by Boerner and Jobst (2011) is mostly based on reviewing each potentially programmed performance by a set of criteria, Assassi emphasises the relationships between the performance, audience and the theatre rather than the content of the plays. This suggests that Assassi's approach leaves more room for experimental performances as she claims that for instance the theme, genre and selection of plays are less important.

To continue on the four components as introduced by Assassi (2007), a difference in volume can be detected between the number of programmed performances within each component. It becomes clear that *reactive*, *relational* and *strategic* based performances are programmed most, with only few *proactive* performances (Assassi, 2007. p. 57).

Interestingly in this matter is the comparison between the high amount of *relational* and low amount of *proactive* acts that are programmed. This indicates that theatres are more willing to take the risk with unfamiliar performances when they have established a relationship with the producers. This can be explained by potential financial risk, especially in case of musically or artistically demanding productions (Pierce, 2000). If theatres are familiar with the producing organisation, they will know better what to expect, thus the risk of investing in the "wrong" production decreases.

In terms of risk taking, also the opera scene is known for having a lack of variety in its programming (Pierce, 2000). Most productions in the United States turn out to stick to "a small core of operas which are popular and easy to produce" (Pierce, 2000. p.49), indicating that also in the opera sector the management budget plays an important role when planning the season's programme. Popular performances thus seem to be preferred and usually have an important entertainment aspect and/or famous artists involved with the production (Assassi, 2007.; Boerner & Jobst, 2011). This is because meeting audience's expectations contributes to ticket sales, thus resulting in an increased audience attendance (Boerner & Jobst, 2011). It has once again been confirmed that this safe kind of programming strategy is directly linked to budgetary reasons, as theatres want productions to sell out (Pierce, 2000). Choosing unfamiliar productions or of a genre that is less popular may turn out to be a risk in terms of income generated, thus becoming more costly (Pierce,

2000). On the other hand however, programming famous productions or artists would be quite an investment because these are usually more expensive (Boerner & Jobst, 2011).

A way of structuring performances is to use figure 1 which is based on the theory of Ganzeboom (1989) and implemented by Verhoeff (1993). It divides the content of performances into four sections; conventional/not complex, unconventional/not complex, conventional/complex, unconventional/complex. A visualisation of this division can be found in the figure below. Within this division, complexity refers to the extent prior knowledge is required in order to understand the performance. Conventionality refers to the design and entourage, and the principles a performance is based on (Ranshuysen, 2012). These parameters are closely related. Especially in theatre, complex performances are often experimental, not complex performances are often traditional (Ranshuysen, 2012 p.1).

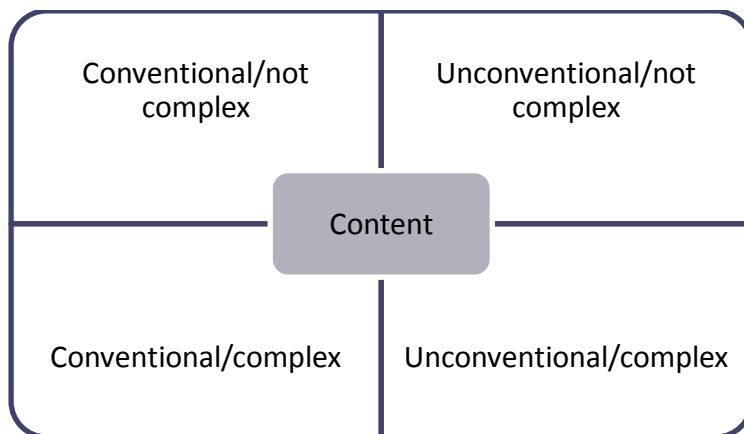


FIGURE 2: THEATRE CONTENT TABLE, CONVENTIONAL/COMPLEXITY (GANZEBOOM, 1989, IMPLEMENTED BY VERHOEFF, 1993).

Within the theatre discipline the following examples for different levels of conventional and complex performances apply, based on Verhoeff (1993. p.26) and Ranshuysen (2012). In the last column, the barriers for the audience to visit such a performance has been reflected on.

Conventional	Complexity	Genre example	Barrier for the audience
Conventional	Low	Comedy/musical	Low
Conventional	High	Repertoire/traditional	Medium
Unconventional	Low	New cabaret	Low
Unconventional	High	Experimental	High

TABLE 1: DIVISIONS OF CONVENTIONAL AND COMPLEX THEATRE (BASED ON VERHOEFF, 1993. P.26 & RANSHUYSEN, 2012)

This theory can not only be used for structuring performances according to the conventionality and complexity, it can also be used to study progress in the performing arts scene. Theatre programmes can be structured accordingly which, if repeated over a longer period, can potentially show developments in the theatre programmes. It is also possible that theatres use this structure as part of their programming process, for instance to keep track of the type of performances programmed so far and to use as a guideline for yet to be programmed productions.

After exploring why funded theatres programme performances the way they do, it became clear how theatres go about doing this. Whereas Boerner and Jobst (2011) presented five different aspects that are taken into account during the decision-making process, such as theme, genre and popularity of the producer, Assassi (2007) focused more on the relationship between the performance, the audience and the theatre. In the first study unknown theatre producers would have little chance to present a new and perhaps experimental play, whereas the second study provided an opportunity to those they had built a relationship with. Also performances that were both unknown and did not have a relationship with the theatre were programmed, however on a very little scale. Both studies however, made clear that due to financial restrictions, funded theatres continuously try to limit the risk when programming a performance. Choosing performances their audiences are more familiar with would increase the probability of selling out. Another theory showed how theatre productions can be structured and can be used in several ways by theatres to support their programming process (Verhoeff, 1993; Ranshuysen, 2012). Yet, no studies have been found that show that theatres actively use this theory and can be further explored during the field research phase.

2.7 Forecasting ticket sales

Although it is challenging to predict how much a performance is going to sell as "nobody knows" how successful a work will be (Towse, 2011), there are studies and models that enable to forecast ticket sales. For instance "The Arts Plan", by Weinberg and Shachmut (1986, original plan 1978), provides a forecasting system that predicts attendance at one particular planned event. Next to that it provides an interactive planning model managers can use to test the impact programming several different performing arts events have on the total attendance over a year (Weinberg, 1986). The model uses a regression analysis

based on the characteristics of the performance, such as the theme, genre and the season it is programmed. Interestingly, the model is only applied to performances that have already established some type of familiarity with the audience, thus new and unknown performances are not included (Weinberg, 1986). This suggests that the model can only be applied to performances that fall in known categories, thus new and experimental plays cannot be entered into the model. Next to that, the model only predicts sales for a single performance, thus not a production with several performances (Putler & Lele, 2003). Also, the model does not include the potential effect promotional activities can have on the total ticket sales.

A simplified and more recent model has been developed, covering multiple performances as part of a production and promotional activities. The formula is based on the total amount of consumers in the theatre's service area and the probability they will visit a performance. This will lead to an expected total amount of visitors (Putler & Lele, 2003). The model also acknowledges different characteristics of the plays, by giving a score per characteristic for that play. For instance, the characteristic "difficult" has been graded by reviewing the complexity of a story's plot, and "boring" by reviewing the length of the play and whether it involves a historical drama (Putler & Lele, 2003). Also this model includes the timing of the production and the performances. Although this model seems to be a simplified and improved ticket sales forecasting model, one could say the involvement of the characteristics is rather subjective. Also, the model depends heavily on promotional efforts that are both registered, next to unregistered promotions such as the word of mouth, which seem difficult to rely on in such a statistical measurement.

Another mean of predicting the commercial success of a play is by calculating the willingness-to-pay (WTP) of consumers. As has turned out that the main risk of programming an unknown performance is linked to the likelihood of selling tickets, calculating the height and frequency of people's willing-to-pay could take away part of this risk. A study by Grisolia and Willis (2011) uses the WTP calculation to measure the influence of the characteristics (e.g. the author, artists and genre), and the information about the production (e.g. critics' reviews) on demand. Next to that, "it measures the heterogeneity of tastes for these attributes among theatre consumers" (p. 379), thus whether their audience have similar or a variety of interests in theatre. This is achieved by taking a "goods characteristics" approach, to define each performance and to describe it by means of its

measurable characteristics or attributes (Lancaster, 1966, adjusted by Grisolia & Willis, 2011 p.379). Then, by using the discrete choice model, people's willingness to pay can be determined. The study in question has indicated that there is a significant heterogeneity in preferences for the attributes of theatre performances, which is also reflected in the audience's WTP in relation to these attributes (Grisolia & Willis, 2011). For example, it became clear that the WTP for drama productions (mean = £63.21) was higher than for comedy productions (mean = £59.71). Interestingly, experimental theatre is slightly higher than comedy with a mean of £60.17 (Grisolia & Willis, 2011.p. 393). When referring back to the division of conventionality and complexity (Ganzeboom, 1989 in Verhoeff, 1993. p.26. & Ranshuysen, 2012) in the section "Programming considerations", it became clear that the barrier of entry of experimental theatre is high. A higher WTP for experimental theatre can therefore be rather unexpected as the characteristics of experimental theatre can be unknown and vague compared to, for instance, comedy where visitors know better what to expect and the barrier of entry is low (Verhoeff, 1993).

This study has suggested several matters. It offers the ability to create more certainty around programmed productions as the popularity and people's willingness-to-pay can be measured per characteristic. The outcome of this study shows that theatregoers' preferences are heterogenic, thus a diverse programme is recommended. Lastly, one specific outcome of the study showed that in the case studied, people's WTP of experimental theatre does not differentiate much of the popular and low barrier themes comedy and drama. Although several methods that could contribute towards reducing programming risks by predicting ticket sales, popularity and people's willingness-to-pay for specific theatre productions, the applicability of these models is doubtful. Using the model takes a certain degree of statistical knowledge and skill, next to the time and effort a theatre has to put in registering the data that need to be entered into the model. Therefore, these models would contribute to programme manager's decision-making, however it is doubtful whether these programmers would actually attempt to use them.

2.8 Overall conclusion

The theoretical framework has explored the performing arts industries, pointing out that it is made up by experience goods, which bring along risk when purchasing them as the quality and potential success are difficult to determine. It soon became clear that due to these

experience goods the industry provides, cultural gatekeepers play a crucial role. As a gatekeeper, three stakeholders are most important during their decision-making process: audience, artist and financial stakeholder(s). The most important cultural stakeholder in case of theatre is the theatre director or others in charge of the programme, however in public theatres also governmental funding bodies serve part of the gatekeeping role. Since the theatres studied are public theatres, government funding bodies and other public funds (e.g. Fonds Podiumkunsten) provide theatres and theatre groups with financial support in return for meeting criteria on the council's social and perhaps financial agenda.

Governments and funds influence the general approach and decision-making process of theatres, however theatres are the ones who will make a selection from the broad range of artistic products offered. After looking into the financial background of theatres in the Netherlands, it turned out that due to financial restrictions, there has been a shift from solely artistic excellence in performances to a more commercial approach in order to generate more income. It was suggested that this development has made it more difficult for theatres to programme renewing and less known productions due to the risk of not generating enough income. It was also suggested that new, unknown producers therefore might find it a challenge to enter the theatre market.

Due to the important role of cultural gatekeepers and theatres specifically, theatres have gained a rather strong position on which artists and producers who want to enter the performing arts scene are reliant. Gaining trust and developing a network could help as this is something gatekeepers use during their decision-making process. Yet, understanding *how* theatres make decisions between available cultural performances would also contribute to this understanding. The final section has provided insights into programming steps and the decision-making process of theatres. It became clear that theatre performances can be divided into several components, running from conventional to unconventional and complex to not complex. Next to that, one study claimed that theatres find practical indicators such as genre, timing and actors of importance when programming whereas another study pointed out the importance of relationships between the players of the performing arts scene. The section also suggested that low boundary performances that the audience is familiar with are programmed more often than experimental productions. This balance has to do with the limitation of risk theatres have to deal with, as they also want to generate income.

Finally, to further support risk reduction, several mathematical calculations called “forecasting ticket sales methods” have been discussed. These have pointed out people’s willingness to pay for certain types of performances, next to predicting the total number of sales of a particular performance based on its characteristics. It was also pointed out however, that a certain degree of statistical skill is required in order to regularly carry out these calculations, therefore it is doubtful that theatres actively use these.

3. Methodology

The theoretical framework has provided several insights and opportunities to further research regarding the governmental funds' involvement, the ability of theatres to renew and experiment with their programme (thus take risk if necessary) and linked to this, whether new makers can be programmed. This has led to the following research question: ***What is the role of governmental funds in the programming of public theatres in the Netherlands, and does this influence the possibility for experimentation and new makers in the theatre programme?***

This research question will serve as a guideline throughout the research. In order to further explore the opportunities raised in the previous chapter's conclusion, further research will be carried out. This chapter provides an overview of the research design, elaborating the planned desk research and field research that will form the main body of this thesis.

3.1 Qualitative field research

The most important part of the research phase is field research. Since the main research question deals with why and how theatres make programming decisions and to what extent their programmes have potential to experiment with, this can only be found out by asking them (Veal, 1997). Therefore, theatres in The Netherlands that are relevant to the study have been contacted.

3.1.1 Sampling

The focus of this research is on those theatres that receive governmental funding and therefore only public theatres are included in the study. In the theoretical framework it has been pointed out that a number of Dutch theatres receive different types of governmental funding, either direct or through a designated fund. It has been explained that the Fund for Performing Arts (Fonds Podiumkunsten) provides funding which is especially aimed at programming performances of artistic excellence and variety. Also, in 2009 two thirds of all performing arts institutions funded by the Dutch government have been transferred to the Fund of Performing Arts (FPK), emphasising the importance of including this fund (Ministerie van OCW, 2013). Studying theatres that receive both a form of governmental funding next to support by the Performing Arts fund will enable to study the influence of two main national funds. Next to that, it is assumed that theatres who receive this type of funding have a larger budget to experiment within their programme, as this is what the fund strives

for with their subsidies. The fund believes that reducing the financial risk of programmers enables them to choose from a greater variety of productions, for instance to choose performances that are less popular (Fonds Podiumkunsten, 2015). Table 2 provides an overview of all theatres receiving such funding, after eliminating all other stages and halls that do not programme theatre performances (e.g. concert halls). From this list, only theatres receiving funding of €35,000 per year or up have been selected first, reducing the list to a total of 21 theatres. To make a further selection of most relevant theatres, each theatre's current programme and goals have been reviewed. During this review those theatres serving as the main theatre in their area (n.b. Schouwburg in Dutch) are preferred. Lastly, attention has been paid to the location of the different theatres, with the aim of getting in touch with a variety of theatres that are spread across the country and not located within the same area. As the theoretical framework pointed out that the theatre director is an important gatekeeper of the theatre industry, next to the research question that is mostly aimed at theatres' programming, the directors or those involved with the programming process have been contacted specifically. In total, 15 theatres have been contacted after which interviews have been planned with five theatres: Chassé Theatre Breda, Parkstad Limburg Theatres, Rotterdamse Schouwburg, Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam and Toneelschuur Haarlem. An overview of all public theatres receiving FPK funding between 2013-2016, their relevance and whether they have been contacted can be found in table 2, structured according to their form of contact that can be found in the last column. The column "Type of theatre" is based on disciplines some theatres have an emphasis on and does not imply that other theatres do not offer these genres in their theatre. Although De Toneelschuur is not the main theatre in the area, this theatre is used to gain a different point of view, that of the producing theatre and will be explained in the next section.

Name	Annual FPK Funding	City	Type of theatre	Form of contact
CHASSÉ THEATER	€ 35.000	Breda	Theatre, Music, Dance	Interview arranged
PARKSTAD LIMBURG THEATERS	€ 45.000	Limburg	Theatre	Interview arranged
ROTTERDAMSE SCHOUWBURG	€ 35.000	Rotterdam	Theatre & Music	Interview arranged
STADSSCHOUWBURG AMSTERDAM	€ 35.000	Amsterdam	Theatre	Interview arranged
TONEELSCHUUR	€ 35.000	Haarlem	Theatre	Interview arranged
DE OOSTERPOORT & DE STADSSCHOUWBURG	€ 45.000	Groningen	Theatre, Music, Dance	Contact, no interview possible
KEIZER KAREL PODIA	€ 35.000	Nijmegen	Theatre	Contacted, no interview possible
ODEON DE SPIEGEL THEATERS	€ 35.000	Zwolle	Theatre	Contacted, no interview possible
PARKTHEATER EINDHOVEN	€ 45.000	Eindhoven	Theatre	Contacted, no interview possible
SCHOUWBURG DE LAWEI	€ 35.000	Drachten	Theatre	Contacted, no interview possible
STADSSCHOUWBURG UTRECHT	€ 45.000	Utrecht	Theatre, Music, Dance	Contacted, no interview possible
THEATER AAN DE PARADE	€ 35.000	Den Bosch	Theatre	Contacted, no interview possible
THEATER DE VEST	€ 35.000	Alkmaar	Theatre	Contacted, no interview possible
THEATER DELFT (DE VESTE)	€ 35.000	Delft	Theatre	Contacted, no interview possible
WILMINKTHEATER EN MUZIEKCENTRUM ENSCHEDE	€ 35.000	Enschede	Theatre, Music	Contacted, no interview possible
SCHOUWBURG & FILMTHEATER AGNIETENHOF	€ 35.000	Tiel	Theatre	Location (other interviews)
STADSSCHOUWBURG EN PHILHARMONIE HAARLEM	€ 35.000	Haarlem	Theatre, Music, Dance	Location (other interviews)
THEATER AAN HET SPUI	€ 25.000	The Hague	Theatre	Location (other interviews)
THEATER AAN HET VRIJTHOF	€ 35.000	Maastricht	Theatre	Location (other interviews)
THEATERS TILBURG	€ 35.000	Tilburg	Theatre	Location (other interviews)
ZAANTHEATER	€ 35.000	Zaandam	Theatre	Location (other interviews)
FRASCATI	€ 25.000	Amsterdam	Theatre	Not enough funding
PODIUM MOZAÏEK	€ 25.000	Amsterdam	Art & Theatre	Not enough funding
POSTHUIS THEATER HEERENVEEN	€ 25.000	Heerenveen	Theatre	Not enough funding
RABOTHEATER HENGLO	€ 25.000	Hengelo	Theatre	Not enough funding
STADSPODIA LEIDEN	€ 15.000	Leiden	Theatre	Not enough funding
THEATER DE LIEVE VROUW	€ 25.000	Amersfoort	Theatre, Film	Not enough funding
VERKADEFABRIEK	€ 35.000	Den Bosch	Theatre, Music	Not the main theatre in the city

TABLE 2: OVERVIEW FUNDING STRUCTURAL PROGRAMMING (FONDS PODIUMKUNSTEN 2013-2016)

3.1.2 Semi-structured interviews

Although a list of relevant theatres to be approached has been developed, this number turned out to be relatively small (15 theatres) to conduct a quantitative analysis, also because the possibility of a low response rate was taken into consideration (Veal, 1997). Therefore, a qualitative analysis seemed more appropriate, as it also allowed to ask for clarification, build upon given answers and because some areas still need to be explored and may not be understood through multiple choice questions. As preliminary research has helped formulating a research question that required for specific questions to be answered during the field research, for instance regarding theatres' programming behaviour and motivations, five semi-structured interviews have been conducted with theatre programmers chosen from the aforementioned list (Bryman, 2008). Also, as multiple interviews have been conducted and compared, it would be more executable with interviews that were somewhat structured (Bryman, 2008). Topic lists have been prepared prior to the interviews, to create a structure however leave opportunity to alter questions according to the situation and provided answers (Veal, 1997.; Bryman, 2008). In order to have been able to focus on the formulation of the questions and the answers provided, next to the "delivery of proof" of collected data by the end of the thesis period, all interviews have been recorded with consent of the participants. These recording have been transcribed afterwards and are accessible upon request. A general topic list that all topic lists were based on can be found in Appendix 1. Since the interviews were planned over a longer timeframe and as certain topics that were discussed became clearer or pushed into a certain direction that required more clarification, the interviews became more structured towards the end of the research process. This enabled the research to only touch upon topics that already had become clear briefly and thoroughly discuss those topics that had become interesting throughout the research.

3.1.3 Five theatres studied

The sampling selection has lead to five qualitative interviews of which four with theatres that are the main programmers of performing arts in their area, which are: Chassé Theater Breda, Parkstad Limburg Theatres, Rotterdamse Schouwburg and Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam. After these interviews, a different point of view on the topic, that of a producing and young talent stimulating theatre seemed appropriate after which an interview with De Toneelschuur (Haarlem) has taken place. To put the interviews and

analyses into perspective, each theatre will be introduced providing brief background information such as the size, location and main organisational goal as presented in their organisational plan.

Chassé Theater Breda

The Chassé Theater is both a theatre and a cinema and located in the centre of Breda, North-Brabant. It has three main theatre halls with capacities of 1430, 665 and 225 seats (Chassé Theater, 2015). In 2014 the theatre had a total amount of visitors of 217,000, next to 98,000 to their cinema (BNdeStem, 2015). Their main goal is to offer and develop the performing arts by having welcoming and thoughtful employees, next to having a cultural and business exploitation of the building. The programme, service and ambiance should be of high quality (Chassé theater, 2012). The Chassé Theater offers several education programmes to primary and secondary schools, such as workshops, meet & greets and discounts. Next to that, they offer workshops and lectures before and after performances to adults. The Chassé Theater does not produce their own productions, however is involved with several young talent programmes.

Parkstad Limburg Theaters

Theatre Heerlen and Theatre Kerkrade joined as Parkstad Limburg Theaters in 1999. Although they remain two separate locations, their organisations and programmes have merged into one main organisation. Location Heerlen has three halls with a capacity of 1,057; 362 and 142 seats. Location Kerkrade has a capacity of 633 seats. Since they have become one organisation, the joint organisation "Parkstad Limburg Theaters" has been studied as one theatre in this research. Their main goal as presented on their website is to present a programme which has variety, is catchy, regional and international that invites anyone to enjoy an evening out. They strive to find new opportunities to make steps in their programme (Parkstad Limburg Theater, 2015). The theatre offers an educational programme for primary and secondary school that is mostly based on visiting selected performances. Next to that they can arrange a meet & greet and guided tours. Parkstad Limburg Theaters does not produce their own productions.

Rotterdamse Schouwburg

The Rotterdamse Schouwburg is a large theatre in the centre of Rotterdam. It consists of three theatre halls with a capacity of 879, 170 and 80 seats. Although the total seating

capacity of the theatre halls is smaller than the other theatres, De Rotteramdse Schouwburg has many other facilities such as a meeting, congress and office areas to rent, a large hall and café. The theatre has recently renovated their building creating a meeting place for anyone in the city, while aiming to programme for a broad audience. Next to that the Schouwburg produces their own productions regularly. The theatre claims to be focusing on artistic quality, inspiration and adventure (Rotterdamse Schouwburg, 2015). What is interesting is that, as mentioned, next to the main theatre hall, the building also consists of a small hall only taking 170 visitors and a studio with room for 80 seats. These are used for small-scale, experimental productions next to their own productions.

Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam

Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam is a nationally renowned theatre located in the capital of the Netherlands. The theatre has had 359,000 visitors in 2010 and has two halls with a seating capacity of 500 and 900 seats. Also other facilities such as an education room, meeting and event space, and a theatre bar can be found at the Stadsschouwburg. The mission of the theatre is to offer their audience the ability to connect with the performing arts in a pleasant and thoughtful way, next to offering a place people can relax and enjoy the arts. Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam works with many organisations in the city such as De Melkweg, which is a pop music venue. Also, several nationally known (and some broadcasted on TV) theatre festivals take place at the theatre annually. The theatre does not produce performances independently, however they do co-produce with other theatre organisations in the area.

Toneelschuur Haarlem

Toneelschuur Haarlem is a theatre, cinema and production house and located in the city centre of Haarlem. The city has 155,200 inhabitants and is the capital of the province of North-Holland (Gemeente Haarlem, nd). The theatre characterises itself as a place where inspiring, innovative, open and controversial theatre and film performances are presented. They aim for high quality, renewal and progressive theatre (De Toneelschuur, 2015). Next to that, they work closely with small productions and new producers of which premieres take place in their theatre regularly. Compared to the previous theatres, De Toneelschuur is relatively small, with two theatre halls of 266 and 110 seats, next to two cinemas with 110 and 75 seats. Other facilities are a library for meetings and congresses and a café for

meetings and refreshments. The current season, 2014/2015, they have produced seven productions themselves, next to presenting productions by other organisations, (un)known producers and with both known as unknown artists (De Toneelschuur, 2015).

3.1.4 Expert interviews

After all interviews had taken place, two theatre festivals have been contacted to gain an expert view on programming and presenting unknown performances. Theatre Festival Boulevard ('s-Hertogenbosch), next to International Performing Arts Festival Noorderzon (Groningen) have been contacted through correspondence and telephone of which proof is also available upon request due to privacy reasons.

Ethics

As all interviews were to be recorded, participants have been asked for permission prior to the interview. They have also been offered to remain anonymous if they would wish to. Next to that, the interviewees have been assured that the recordings are kept only during the thesis period and are erased afterwards. Transcriptions are kept in a safe environment and only provided to those from the Erasmus University Rotterdam who need to have access to them and if needed will ensure anonymity. Finally, the participation of interviewees has been voluntary and they were able to stop the interview at any point in time, as they needed to feel comfortable to share their information.

3.2 Desk research

Although qualitative field research forms the most important part of this research assignment, the collected qualitative data has been supported and expanded by minor desk research. To ensure the relevance of the collected data through the interviews, annual plans, theatre websites, funding plans and other relevant documents have been reviewed. This has also been used to further understand the information provided by the interviewees and to increase the *validity* and *reliability* of the study. According to the *management data method* (Veal, 1997).

3.3 Analysis of data

After collecting all data, the information has been structured to enable analysis of them. This enabled the connection of the desk research to the field research, next to creating an overview and finding similarities and contradictions in the different interviews conducted.

3.3.1 Coding and categorising

After all transcriptions were completed, a structure was created by *coding* important subjects that were mentioned by the interviewees (Saldana, 2009). As the purpose of the interviews with five different theatres was to compare the results, colour coding has been used to identify reoccurring topics. First, sections in the interview that were not relevant to the study, for instance the introduction and extensive explanations that were not linked to the research question, have been identified in order to reduce the amount of text to be coded. Then, for each answer provided that was relevant to the study, a colour that coincides a code or topic has been added. For instance, answers provided that were linked to the topic "programming steps" have been coloured green/brown. Answers that were related to council plans were coloured yellow, et cetera. An overview of all topics and colour coding are to be found at the start of each transcription and are available upon request due to the aforementioned privacy considerations.

3.4 Limitations

Although great care has been put into the selection procedure to end up with a representative sample as much as possible, only five theatres have been included in the research. This was appropriate for the qualitative type of research, and as a starting point to further understand the topic at hand. However to generalise the outcomes, further research on a larger scale is recommended. A suggestion is to base quantitative research on this qualitative study. Furthermore, the research period happened to be timed at the same time as programming deadlines for all theatres in the Netherlands, causing a busy time for the theatres that were contacted. Therefore, it is likely that the response rate of the contacted theatres has been lower than if the research was planned in a different part of the year.

4. Analysis and findings

The following chapter provides an overview and analysis of the collected data through interviews and additional sources such as organisational plans. The analysis has been divided into seven topics according to the colour coding approach as explained in the "Methodology": *Council involvement, theatre's goal, freedom of programming, programming steps, popularity among public and generating income, quality of productions, and risk taking*. Each topic will be briefly explained prior to the results per topic. Whereas some of the provided answers per topic turned out to be self-explanatory and straight forward, some answers may need further exploration. Also, some topics were agreed upon among the interviewees, whereas some had contradicting opinions. All insights that needed further exploration or academic review have been studied aiming to answer the research question at the very end. The first topic to be discussed involves the goals the programmers try to achieve, which have become evident during the interviews.

4.1 Theatres' goals

To understand what the interviewed theatres want to achieve with their operations, they have been asked to explain their main goal. It became clear that theatres have similar goals, of which the priority sometimes differed per organisation. Most theatres pointed out to be wanting to stand out and differentiate themselves, for instance by means of the theatre building, theatre halls, marketing, but the main means to differentiate is by programming exclusive and special performances. This coincides with Boerner & Jobst (2011) who point out that "the main interest of a theatre's management lies in implementing its artistic vision by staging productions of high artistic quality" (p.69). Some theatres also pointed out to wanting to add something to the city and take a prominent position in the area. Although in differing degrees, each theatre also expressed an interest in the development of young talent and the future theatre development in general. De Toneelschuur however, is the only theatre which expressed this as its main goal whereas the others named this as one of many. Also, some theatres expressed a desire to add to this development, however do not have all the means to do so more than they are doing at the moment. Linked to this matter, the Parkstad Limburg Theaters added that it seems like there is currently a shift from people's known, economic values towards the exploration of new, experimental values. This shift requires theatres to be able and willing to adapt to the present developments that are

happening around them. If theatres are not willing to act accordingly, they run the risk of digging themselves in with their organisational policy and with this, lose a sense of innovation. Something else Parkstad Limburg Theaters mentioned to find important is to programme productions that are relevant to their area, and the present time and recent occurrences.

Most theatres that are subsidised by the FPK do not receive arts education funding anymore. They have expressed concerns about this matter as they find covering the costs of this education, alongside meeting the criteria of performing a set amount of times across the country, a challenge (Langeveld & Koppenberg, 2015). There are however, other funds that provide educational funding, such as city council funds and the culture participation fund (nb. Cultuur participatie fonds). Most of these funds are focused on the arts education for primary and secondary schools. The theatres that were interviewed all present similar youth education activities such as workshops, selected performances and brochures. Although these are part of their general operations, they do not seem to have a high priority of their programme based on the limited amount of information shared on this. What seems to be an upcoming theatre education matter however, is to build a group of audience who are interested to expand their theatre knowledge and experience and follow the suggestions of the theatre. This means that the theatres working on this strive for personnel and institutional reputation that guides the audience (Boerner & Jobst, 2011 p.69). An example is the "Vlakkevloer serie" (nb. Black box theatre series) by Parkstad Limburg Theaters, in which the programmer of this series has an expert role and explains her decisions and motivations for programming these performances. One could say that this type of theatre guidance is a form of arts education for adults.

4.2 Council and funding involvement

The second topic that has been discussed forms an important part of the research question, namely the involvement of governmental funding bodies or other funds, of which the latter is mostly related to the aforementioned FPK fund. The form of governmental funding that all included theatres receive is from (local) city councils. Therefore, the term "council" refers to the theatre's funding city council. Also nationally funded organisations are discussed, however are not the same theatres as the ones that have been interviewed.

The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (nb. Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap) supports eight theatre organisations on a yearly and structural basis (Het Zuidelijk Toneel, Ro Theater, Toneelgroep Oostpool, Noord Nederlands Toneel, Het Nationale Toneel, Toneelgroep Amsterdam, Toneelgroep Maastricht, Tryater, from 2013-2016). All of these organisations produce their own performances with which they travel through the country. This touring through the country is a requirement by the council in order to spread theatre accessibility to anyone in the country (Ministerie van OCW, 2013). The government used to subsidise more performing arts organisations, however in 2009 two third of all institutions have been transferred to the Fund of Performing Arts (FPK), emphasising the importance of this fund.

Next to these national funding bodies, also local city councils subsidise arts organisations in their city. When city councils provide theatres subsidy, they set specific requirements that theatres have to meet in order to continue receiving the funding. Depending on the council, these requirements can be both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative requirements refer to a set amount of performances per theatre type (e.g. the theatre needs to programme at least a set amount of dance performances in a year). Qualitative requirements refer to the content of the productions, such as traditional, experimental or abstract. During the interviews it was mentioned that the specificity and extent of these requirements differs per city council, whereas some can be seen as rather precise and others only set ultimate goals (e.g. "a diverse programme that is accessible for anyone" in Rotterdam).

Most theatres agreed that, as part of these quantitative and qualitative requirements, theatres in the Netherlands each work on a different cultural and artistic assignment, which is linked to the cultural plans of the council. This means, that some councils see artistic development, for instance by using the performing arts, within their city as a high priority and try to stimulate for instance arts education, innovation and young talent. These are then translated into the "artistic assignment" that those who receive council subsidy are expected to fulfil. Some goals as part of the artistic assignment can be rather challenging to combine as funds require theatre organisations to both encourage renewal and to reach a broader audience than they did before (e.g. RRKC, 2015). Yet, some theatres have claimed that there are also many councils across the country who do not prioritise this type of cultural development, therefore the artistic assignment of theatres in

these areas are much different causing these theatres to be more commercially and entertainment focused.

It became clear that each theatre has drawn up artistic plans and goals that comprehend the plans and goals of their local city council. Although all involved theatres acknowledged to have to meet certain requirements with their work and the councils indeed have an influence on their organisation, none of the theatres expressed any major issues fulfilling these or with meeting their own artistic objectives. Some did suggest however, that there are other councils who do not have the same artistic priorities and in their opinion focus more on commercial outings for their inhabitants. Cultural council plans of other cities from this list have been reviewed (e.g. the city councils of Nijmegen, Arnhem, Drachten, Zwolle) to generate a broader perspective on this matter. All cultural plans show an interest and financial support in cultural development. It is possible however, that the agreements between the councils and their theatres are less artistically focused. A few of the interviewees however, indicate that whether this is the case is not that relevant, as it has more to do with the theatre accepting the requirements and implementing them as they are. This means that even if a council only requires certain commercial and quantitative goals, it is more important to reflect how theatres are dealing with these.

Whereas subsidised theatres are directly involved with their local councils, especially since 2009 artistic funds have become an important factor in theatre's organisation (Ministerie van OCW, 2013). A study conducted for the Fund Performing Arts reflecting on the quantitative changes theatre groups has shown a change in the way they operate, the amount of performances and their position towards theatres (Langeveld & Koppenberg, 2015). The fund requires theatre groups to perform a set amount of times at different sized locations, similar to the requirements by the Dutch Government. This means that, whereas city councils require organisations to add meaning to their area, the performing arts fund requires them to increase the total amount of performances and spread them across the country. These different requirements are expected to have an influence of the quality of productions, the negotiating position of theatres, education, overall income, and increases the power of theatres (Langeveld & Koppenberg, 2015). These will be further reviewed in the next section.

4.3 Freedom of programming

The previous section has emphasised the prominent role city councils and funds play in public theatres' programming. This section will further discuss to what extent theatres feel that, although the council and fund involvement is large, they still have the freedom to programme performances they want and do not necessarily meet the council criteria.

Although the interviewed theatres have all pointed out that the council involvement in their organisation and programming is visible, none of them felt restrained in their plans. It was pointed out that although qualitative and quantitative rules are set up, these only refer to part of the programme. Thus, it leaves enough room for them to programme extra performances that do not necessarily meet the council requirements. On the one hand this can be seen as a "win-win" situation as both the council and the theatre organisations are achieving their goals by assisting each other. On the other hand one of the theatres suggested that theatres could always expand their horizons by questioning the current system and continuously trying to stretch the possibilities. Some theatres also expressed concerns regarding the council rules as to their understanding these have only been increasing. However, one theatre also pointed out that it seemed like the more a relationship and trust has been built up between the theatre and the council, the more freedom the theatre gets with their organisation. This confirms the importance of trust within the performing arts sector that was pointed out in the theoretical framework (Foster, Borgatti & Jones, 2011).

It became evident by the aforementioned study for the FPK that although theatres may not feel constrained as such, theatre organisations that supply productions do (Langeveld & Koppenberg, 2015). First of all theatre groups have to commit to a particular quantity of performances as agreed with the fund, next to planning these well ahead in small, medium, and large sized theatres. They have expressed that having to play a set number of performances has put quite a constraint on them as they are not always able to make this number if they would not reprise or produce simpler performances just so they meet the requirements (Langeveld & Koppenberg, 2015). The requirement to having to perform a set number of times is not a secret, thus theatres are aware of this arrangement. Theatre groups have experienced that their negotiating position has weakened quite strongly as theatres know groups struggle to find enough performance halls, thus they offer

less money and are willing to take fewer financial risk (Langeveld & Koppenberg, 2015). This has also been confirmed by a few interviewees.

Theatres have gained power in terms of programming and deciding which makers will be shown and which will not. Next to that, the weak negotiation position suggests a financial risk producers have to cope with as they may not always gain enough revenue with a particular performance to cover all the costs. This also suggests that producers who have not established familiarity and produces with a small budget, are not always able to meet the tough negotiation requirements of theatres. For the theatres on the other hand, it can be seen as quite a positive development as they can now choose from a large amount of performances and perhaps experiment with new productions as they can easily refrain themselves from the financial risk of programming these.

Two somewhat contradicting points of view became evident during the interviews, as one theatre felt like most large theatres lack a national view and focus solely on their direct surroundings. Another theatre thought theatres should focus on their surroundings and ensure that performances comprehend with the city and wider area they are located. Although they seemed to contradict at first, a closer look reveals that both opinions can go hand in hand. Whereas having a national view and seeking relevance to a particular area seem the opposites, one can support the other. Creating a national view can be interpreted as focusing on nationally interesting performances, thus seeking audience all over the country. However, theatres can also stand out by being different and take a prominent position in their area. Instead of being another good quality theatre, they offer people elsewhere in the country a different experience that goes with the area they are located in. Also, ensuring the relevance of performances to the theatre's area creates a basis of local visitors that might be able to visit more often than those who live further away. Therefore, a combination of the two seems most effective. Yet, producing theatre groups claim that due to the high amount of set performances they have to meet each year, it is difficult to create a so-called anchoring in their area, something Parkstad Limburg Theaters has emphasised to be of high importance in their year plans (e.g. Schoonderwoerd, 2013.; Langeveld & Koppenberg, 2015. p. 21).

Finally, one of the theatres felt that although they are satisfied with the freedom they have within their subsidy and artistic assignment, many other theatres do to not attempt to stretch this assignment enough to make the most out of the subsidy. They

referred to the acceptance of the required artistic task within the area, and do not try to push out frontiers to continue renewal and development.

4.4 Programming steps

The role of government funding bodies and funds has become clear, as these parties have a significant influence on the programme, however theatres also feel like they have freedom to add to the subsidy requirements. The next step is to understand the programming process of public theatres and the role of subsidies in these. To understand how the decision-making process of selecting performances that can perform at their theatre works, each theatre has been asked which programming steps and considerations are taken into account at the start of a new programming season. None of the theatres made use of a strict step-by-step method, however a certain structure of steps taken could be identified. Note that the order of steps may differ per theatre; this overview solely provides a general overview of the main considerations taking place.

First of all, those who produce their own performances will start by programming these. Then, all theatres allow theatre groups that receive national governmental funding (nb. Basis Infrastructuur or BIS in Dutch) to perform at their theatre. After that, all theatres receive many applications, suggestions and requests from theatre makers causing an overflow of supply (Towse, 2011). This involves both nationally known and reoccurring productions by famous organisations, as those of unknown makers. Therefore, a first selection is made with the offered productions, while meeting the earlier setup requirements such as a particular amount of FPK-subsidised performances. Most subsidised performances are provided by theatre groups with whom most theatres already have developed a relationship. Then certain aspects are taken into consideration, of which the genre, artists and producers involved, timing of the production, production costs, relationship with the makers and the content of the play. After that, the programme is expanded with exclusive, differentiating and high artistic quality performances which are selected by the theatre by actively searching or "scouting" for performances. This happens nationally and internationally, at for instance festivals where programmers view new productions to find out whether it is suitable for their theatre. Also the offer of commercial productions are reviewed, however do not happen at a particular time in the process, however alongside the process of programming the aforementioned subsidised

performances. To provide an overview of the most important steps taken by the interviewed theatres, table 3 has been drawn up.

Programming steps	Activity	Comments
1	Own productions	<i>Only if applicable, not all theatres produce their own performances</i>
2	BIS performing arts groups	<i>Usually all "BIS" groups can play at least one performance</i>
3	Performing arts groups with whom the theatre has established a cooperation or relationship and receive funding by the FPK	<i>E.g. Rotterdamse Schouwburg and Het Ro theater</i>
4	National/commercial productions	<i>These are mostly offered by the production company, e.g. by phone or e-mail</i>
5	Exclusive/international performances of high artistic quality	<i>To stand out theatres seek for exclusive, often international productions themselves e.g. by visiting festivals</i>
6	Review of any other offered productions	<i>Unlike the earlier considered performances, these are not produced by makers that have established a cooperation or are nationally known/commercial productions. These performances are considered to have potential and have built up any other form of relationship/familiarity with the theatre.</i>

TABLE 3: PROGRAMMING CONSIDERATIONS AFTER INTERVIEWS

Next to the main steps that are taken by the public theatres, a few theatres in particular pointed out a few criteria they find important during this programming process. Whereas the Rotterdamse Schouwburg and De Toneelschuur emphasised the necessary quality of the production, Parkstad Limburg Theaters emphasised the required relevance to their area, such as performances that inhabitants are interested in and coincides with the general artistic offer in the area. All theatres agreed that before they programme any performance,

they want to be aware of the content. This means they will not programme performances of producers they do not know and have not seen before. They want to have an established relationship with the producer, have visited performances in the past or have heard from them in the media.

In the theoretical framework it was explained that according to Boerner and Jobst (2011) *the season's theme, the selection of plays* (referring to variety and popularity of the performances), *the selection of stage directors*, and *the cast* of the performances were the most important considerations in the programming process. Lastly, it was pointed out that *the chronological order of productions* are of importance, again referring to a mix of genres and popularity while keeping timing into consideration (Boerner and Jobst, 2011). All steps were referred to in the interviews, however they did not turn out to be the first steps taken. The study by Assassi (2007), is more related to the theatres interviewed as that study suggested that the relational factors are of a higher importance, referring to the *reactive* (well-known productions with famous artists), *relational* (unknown performances who have established a relationship with the theatre), *proactive* (searched and selected performances of high artistic quality) and *strategic components* (meeting the needs of the audience). This means that this study is quite closely related to the interviews and the factors described by Boerner & Jobst (2011) are of a later concern in the planning process of the interviewed theatres. For these theatres, the relation or familiarity with the producers is of importance first (also in Foster, Borgatti & Jones, 2011). After selecting upon these, the criteria such as *genre* and *chronological order* (Boerner & Jobst, 2011) are assessed. This means that not one of the studies has been proven or disproven; it suggests a combination of the two studies resulting in a more detailed programming considerations overview. Yet, as mentioned in the theoretical framework (e.g. Assassi, 2007 & Foster, Borgatti & Jones, 2011), the relational factors seem to be of a higher importance. To understand the similarities and differences between the studies and conducted interviews and which consideration is linked to which step, a comparison can be found in table 4. Note that the studies by Boerner & Jobst (2011) and Assassi (2007) do not suggest a particular order of the considerations, thus are structured according to the interview results.

The table shows that the relational aspect is rather important as only own productions, commercial productions and exclusive/international productions, which the

theatre searches for themselves, are usually not based on this indicator. Both in the interviews as in the study by Assassi (2007 p.57) it was pointed out that the proactive-

Programming steps	Interviews	Assassi (2007)	Boerner & Jobst (2011)
1	Own productions (if applicable)	Proactive	- Theme - Selection of stage directors - Cast selection
2	BIS performing arts groups	Relational	- Chronological order of productions - Theme
3	Performing arts groups with whom the theatre has established a cooperation or relationship and receive funding by the FPK	Relational/ Strategic	- Chronological order of productions - Theme - Selection of stage directors
4	National/commercial productions	Reactive/ Strategic	- Selection of stage directors - Cast selection
5	Exclusive/international performances of high artistic quality	Proactive/ Strategic	- Theme - Selection of stage directors
6	Review of any other offered productions	Strategic/ Relational	- Selection of plays - Chronological order of productions

TABLE 4: COMPARISON PROGRAMMING CONSIDERATIONS

Explanation of table 4: The approaches *relational*, *proactive*, *reactive* & *strategic* by Assassi (2007) have been linked to the interviews by first reviewing the left column (interviews) and using the explanation of the Assassi considerations as explained in the theoretical framework. The considerations by Boerner & Jobst (2011) are used in the process of the interview and Assassi column. In example phase 1 from left to right: Own productions (if applicable) come first, which falls under the *proactive* approach, while taking this approach the theme, selection of stage directors and the cast selection are taken into consideration (based on the interviews).

This suggests that new makers trying to enter the market have a greater chance when they attempt to establish a relationship with theatres when trying to be programmed.

Unlike the other theatres that have been interviewed, Parkstad Limburg Theaters uses a specific structure during the programming process. They make use of a figure based on the theory of Ganzeboom (1989) and implemented by Verhoeff (1993) and Ranshuysen (2012), which has been introduced in the theoretical framework. It divides the content of performances into four sections; conventional/not complex, unconventional/not complex, conventional/complex, unconventional/complex. In order to structure and monitor their programme, Parkstad Limburg Theaters makes use of this conventional/complexity division, which they call "Matrix programming". They also use this figure to offer a continuing programme and to encourage and build upon renewal and development within and outside their area, for instance to increase the amount of complex performances (Schoonderwoerd, 2013). They have chosen a basis with a majority of easily accessible performances ($\pm 70\%$) and the remainder ($\pm 30\%$) with complex performances. The precise division of performances the Parkstad Limburg Theaters uses can be found in figure 3 and has been translated from Dutch (Schoonderwoerd, 2013 p.43)

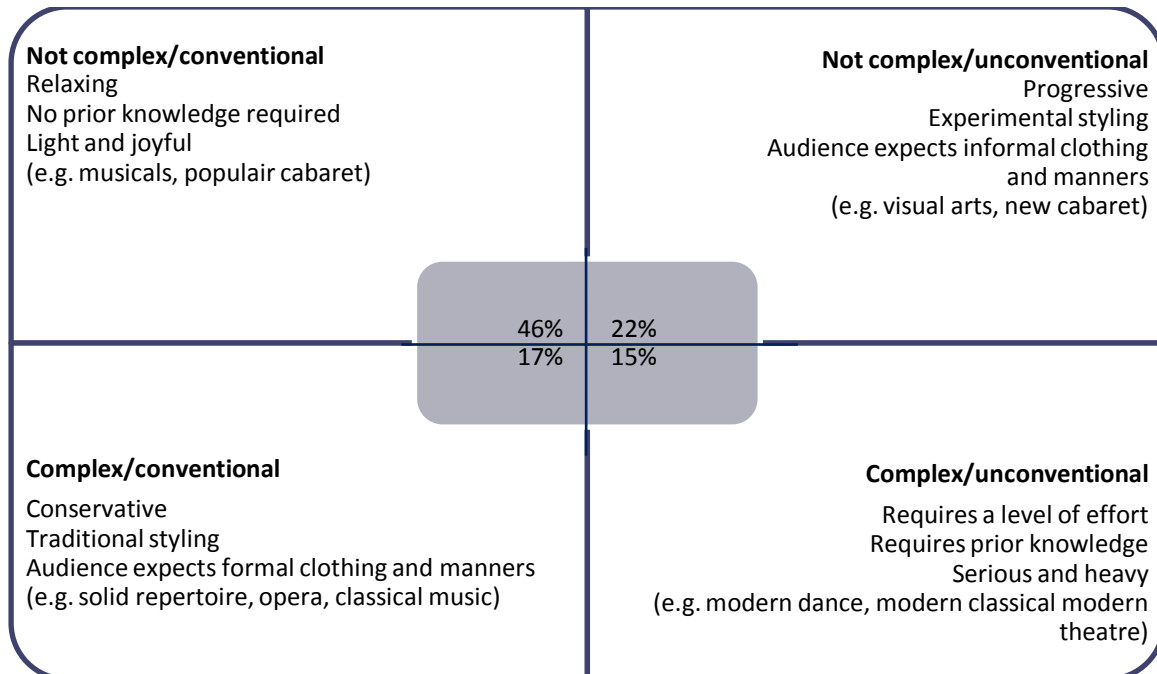


FIGURE 3: MATRIX PROGRAMMING BY PARKSTAD LIMBURG THEATERS (SCHOONDERWOERD, 2013 P.43, BASED ON GANZEBOOM, 1989)

Although it may seem that Parkstad Limburg Theaters makes use of a different approach during their programming decision-making, the programming matrix only refers to the contents of the performance. The matrix is used as a guideline and to structure the performances. The process of finding performances and searching for these themselves have been similar to the aforementioned summary in table 4 and have thus been included in this overview. Only the final column, considering the theme and content of the performance, is more structured for this theatre. Whereas other theatres may assess these final content criteria individually, Parkstad Limburg Theaters always refers to the matrix and the earlier decided division between complexity and conventionality.

4.5 Popularity & generating income

Against literature claims in the theoretical framework, the interviewed theatres do not feel like they need to choose popular and of less quality performances due to financial restrictions. They did recognise an overall change in funding and income, however they felt like the audience for performances of artistic quality has been more stable compared to the total number of visitors for commercial productions. All theatres mentioned that theatres can plan for short-term success by programming commercial "cash cows", however prioritising quality will offer them a more durable success. They also emphasised that especially artistic productions are the type of performances that they receive funding for. This can be explained by the local government's interest to assure ambitious productions and variety (Boerner and Jobst, 2011). By claiming productions of high artistic quality, the local council strives to develop a strong image of the theatre at hand while reaching a broad audience, all within economic limits (Boerner and Jobst, 2011).

Some did however point out that the absolute visitor numbers have decreased leading theatres to programme fewer performances in total. Still, absolute reductions seem to have been stronger in the entertaining offer (e.g. musicals and cabaret) rather than the fine arts (e.g. theatre and dance). This has been explained by Dr. C. Langeveld, director of the Chassé Theater, who suggested that this might have been caused by the entertainment industry mostly being unsubsidised, thus more market dependent. The fine arts on the other hand are mostly subsidised, thus less affected by poor financial times as they can still rely on funding. Next to that, he explained that commercial performances are usually quite expensive, attracting visitors that do not perceive theatre as one of their main activities or

needs. The subsidised and high quality productions, however, do often receive funding ensuring affordable tickets and are mostly visited by loyal theatre goers that are less likely to change their visiting behaviour due to a financial crisis.

The claims that have been made by the theatres have been confirmed by an overview made by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (Ministerie van OCW, 2013), which shows the development of visitor numbers to dance, youth dance, youth theatre, music, opera, orchestras and theatre of governmentally subsidised organisations between 2009 and 2012. The bar chart in figure 4 shows that, unlike the other disciplines, that for theatres the amount of visitors has increased since 2009.

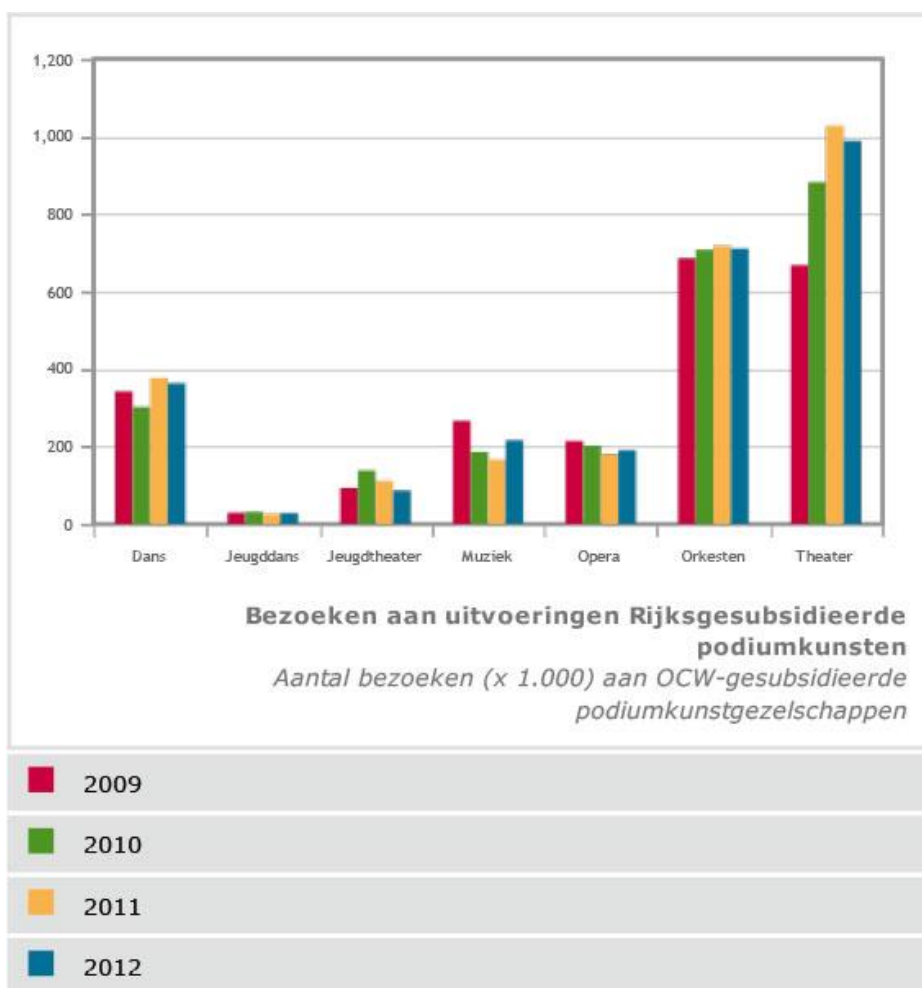


FIGURE 4: VISITS TO GOVERNMENTALLY SUBSIDISED PERFORMING ARTS ORGANISATIONS (MINISTERIE VAN OCW, 2013)

When reviewing the visitor numbers per performing arts genre in figure 5, it again confirms the claims made by the interviewed theatres. Whereas the total visitor numbers to music, musicals, cabaret and amusement have decreased between 2007 and 2011, only dance and theatre have stayed rather stable throughout the years. These insights suggest that theatres

are right at focusing on less commercial productions as it is likely that this will offer them more stability. This also suggests that for new makers in the fine arts who do not consist of commercial potential (yet) there is a greater chance that they will be selected as part of theatre's programme.

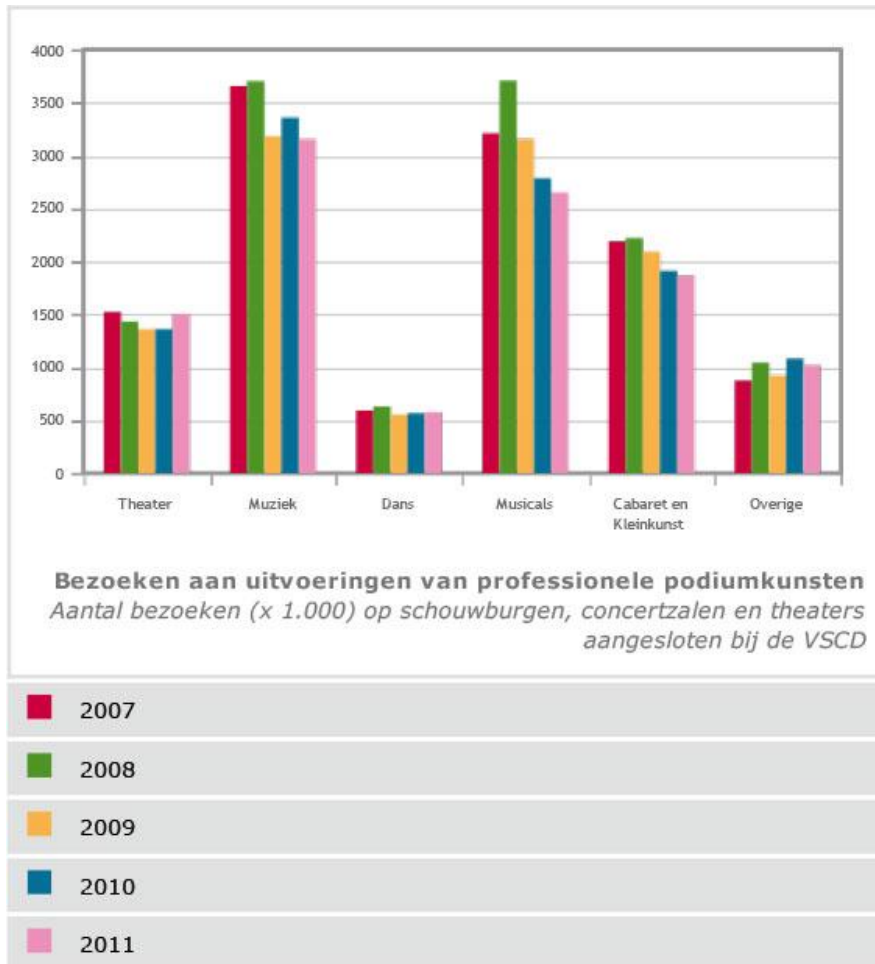


FIGURE 5: VISITS TO GOVERNMENTALLY FUNDED PERFORMING ARTS ORGANISATIONS PER GENRE (MINISTERIE VAN OCW, 2013)

Theatres were also asked to what extent they still find the popularity of a production of importance during their programming process. Whereas De Toneelschuur mentioned to find it relevant, however not letting this influence their decision-making, other theatres did agree that programming well-known and perhaps commercial performances are also part of the agenda and generates income. Parkstad Limburg Theaters emphasised the aforementioned necessity of programming accessible performances in order to build upon these to stimulate curiosity and development. All theatres agreed that there are many theatres that have been tempted by quick success through programming famous performances, which would sell well but would not classify as high artistic value. They all

thought that this approach can be seen as rather dangerous, as in the long run this may have a bad effect on the theatre itself, its image and the theatre world as a whole. They believe that in the long run people will be more interested in quality, that the performing arts are continuously changing and theatres with solely a commercial approach will not be able to adapt accordingly in time. They, and especially De Toneelschuur, think that for this reason talent development and the support of new makers is of high importance. De Toneelschuur explained that "this enables theatres to get in touch with new audience and to secure their future as an operating theatre. Next to that, the development is necessary for the future of the theatre sector as a whole".

Although the interviews disconfirmed literature that claimed that theatres are taking a more commercial approach, the interviews have confirmed literature that cultural organisations are now seeking for other ways of generating income due to a decrease in funding. For instance the Rotterdamse Schouwburg pointed out that they are also searching for events that can be held at their theatre next to meetings and conferences, thus they rent out their spaces. Also keeping track of consumer data and their interests has been suggested as a means of working more efficiently and effectively. Other means of generating income or to deal with the financial restrictions were to collect customer data to get to know the audience and better track people's interests and what they are visiting.

One of the theatres pointed out that within the theatre scene, social media has not developed as well as in other sectors. No studies specifically on the developments of social media in the Dutch public theatre scene have been conducted at this point, however after reviewing the interviewed theatres it became clear that all do keep track of at least a few social media pages such as Facebook and Twitter. Yet, these are mostly aimed at sharing updates and promoting performances that have yet to come, whereas the interviewee pointed out that reviewing and discussing previous performances, as they used to do extensively in newspapers, is not happening to the same extent at the moment. Therefore, this theatre tries to stimulate this media by having their own web blogger uploading blogs about their performances. They also emphasised that there is still plenty of room for further development of this matter.

4.6 Quality of productions

Quality may be a term that is hard to define and rather subjective, however when asking the theatres about artistic quality in the performing arts they all referred to more complex, perhaps experimental, often less known performances of which the content is of high importance. Next to that, they all find international productions rather important to represent artistic quality in their theatre, next to renewing productions. In the previous sections it became clear that the theatres that were interviewed did not feel like they were programming more commercial and less artistic quality performances in order to generate more income. In fact, they pointed out that especially performances of artistic quality offered stability in their visitor numbers and resulted into more funding (Boerner and Jobst, 2011). This suggests that public theatres still find the quality of performances important and are not that much led by the market as the literature originally implied. It was suggested that they play a gatekeeping role between the available performances and the audience by, what they referred to, ensuring artistic quality (Foster, Borgatti & Jones, 2011).

This focus on artistic quality emphasised by all theatres to be of very high importance as they all expected the future of theatres to collapse if they would not live up to these aforementioned quality standards. De Toneelschuur's main focus is in offering a stepping stone for young talent and presenting performances that consist of artistic quality. They point out that in the long run, this vision has many benefits. One of these is that many, now famous, artists have once started their career with De Toneelschuur. Therefore, these actors still have a relationship with the theatre and are willing to work with them on new productions that, in return, enables the theatre to sell their product better as it involves actors the audience is familiar with.

In the section "programming steps" it became clear that two factors stand out when programming decisions are being made, after those who produce their own performances. The first one is the relational aspect, that indicates that if the theatre has developed some kind of a relationship and familiarity with the work of a theatre group these are programmed first. Secondly, it became clear that a large portion of the programme consists of performances by theatre groups that receive some form of subsidy or funding. These two factors indicate that the gatekeepers of theatres, often also the programmers, are using the relational and funding aspects to ensure their understanding of quality. This suggests that funding also serves as a gatekeeper as theatres view this as an indicator of quality.

Relying on the aforementioned aspects is understandable as within the performing arts the exchange process concerns an experience, thus is difficult to put into a material transaction and to draw up a complete contract (McCarthy, 2006). Therefore, trust between the production and the theatre is important, next to trusting colleagues and other so-called experts in the scene that all contribute to indicating the quality of a production (Foster, Borgatti & Jones, 2011). This implies that developing and using a (social) network is of importance for both the theatre as the producer or theatre organisation. Having a social network enables programmers to manage the complex search and decision-making process by limiting the oversupply of creative products (Foster, Borgatti & Jones, 2011).

There are also a few factors that may influence the quality of the programmes or leave little room for diversity and the entry of young talent. To start with the funding requirements set for instance by the Fund Performing Arts (FPK) who, in return for subsidy, require theatre groups to perform a set amount of times throughout the country (Langeveld & Koppenberg, 2015). As theatres in the study by Langeveld & Koppenberg (2015) felt that this set amount is rather high and challenging to achieve, some of them noticed that their overall production quality has decreased. For instance because they would provide extra, low cost performances next to their regular ones, only to meet the quantitative criteria. The aforementioned relational, networking and funding aspects used by gatekeepers as indicators of quality could lead to a limited view and openness to new developments (McCarthy, 2006; Foster, Borgatti & Jones, 2011). Those engaged in the programming process may get stuck in their network and miss out on developments and other talents that are happening outside their network.

4.7 Risk-taking

In the theoretical framework it became clear that public theatres play an important gatekeeping role between artists and government funds (e.g. De Roeper, 2008). This means that during their operations they will have to be taking the needs of these stakeholders into consideration, next to achieving their own goals. Therefore, during the programming process theatres continuously are dealing with risks of selecting certain performances. The model "Serving three masters: the cultural gatekeeper's dilemma" developed by De Roeper (2008) as introduced in the theoretical framework (figure 1) has been confirmed by the literature to represent the theatre as a cultural gatekeeper. In this case, the theatre

director or programmer is the cultural gatekeeper that is located in the middle of the artist, audience and financial stakeholder(s). During the programming process the theatre programmer (which is often also the theatre director) is evaluating the risk of programming the, by producers offered, performance and the satisfaction this will bring to the theatre visitors, while meeting the criteria of the government funding bodies or other funds. Since this study deals with public theatres only, the councils and funds are the financial enablers of the theatre groups. Although the model provides a proper representation of theatres' gatekeeping role in between the three most important stakeholders, this is also the only role it represents. This means that the model of De Roeper (2008) does not illustrate the products or values exchanged between the stakeholders. Therefore, the model has been adjusted to the theatre industries, after which the products and values exchanged have been added and can be found in figure 6.

Within this gatekeeping process, two main types of risk are taken into consideration by the theatres, after meeting the criteria set by their city council or fund. On the one hand theatres are, by programming performances, taking a risk as with live performances the exact content and quality is difficult to determine. On the other hand the visitors run the risk of visiting something they may not be familiar with and will not know whether it was worth spending their money on until after the performance (Towse, 2011.; Hutter, 2011.; Langeveld, 2014). The second type of risk is not only a risk for the visitor, but also indirectly for the theatre. If potential visitors decide that the risk of visiting a particular performance is too high, this can negatively influence the total tickets sold for that performance. Next to the financial risk theatres take when programming a performance, they also run a quality risk, which in turn represents their image. A few of the theatres pointed out that having an image of quality towards their (potential) visitors is of high importance. Since the arts sector is a small community, information on a theatre's reputation is spread easily (McCarthy, 2006). Programming a performance that is unknown to the theatre, for instance because it is produced by a new maker or theatre group the theatre has not established a relationship with, brings along even more risk. Therefore, theatres try to reduce this risk for both themselves as the audience as much as possible.

On the theatre side, risk reduction takes place by limiting their programming to producers or theatre groups they are familiar with, as explained in the previous section "Quality". This confirms the earlier literature claims that trust is an important asset in the

performing arts industries (e.g. McCarthy, 2006.; Assassi, 2007.; Fox & Dixie, 2010). Also, theatre groups who receive public funding or are supported by the Performing Arts Fund (FPK) are trusted with the content of the performance more. This has led to a large portion of the performances at the public theatres to be by funded theatre groups.

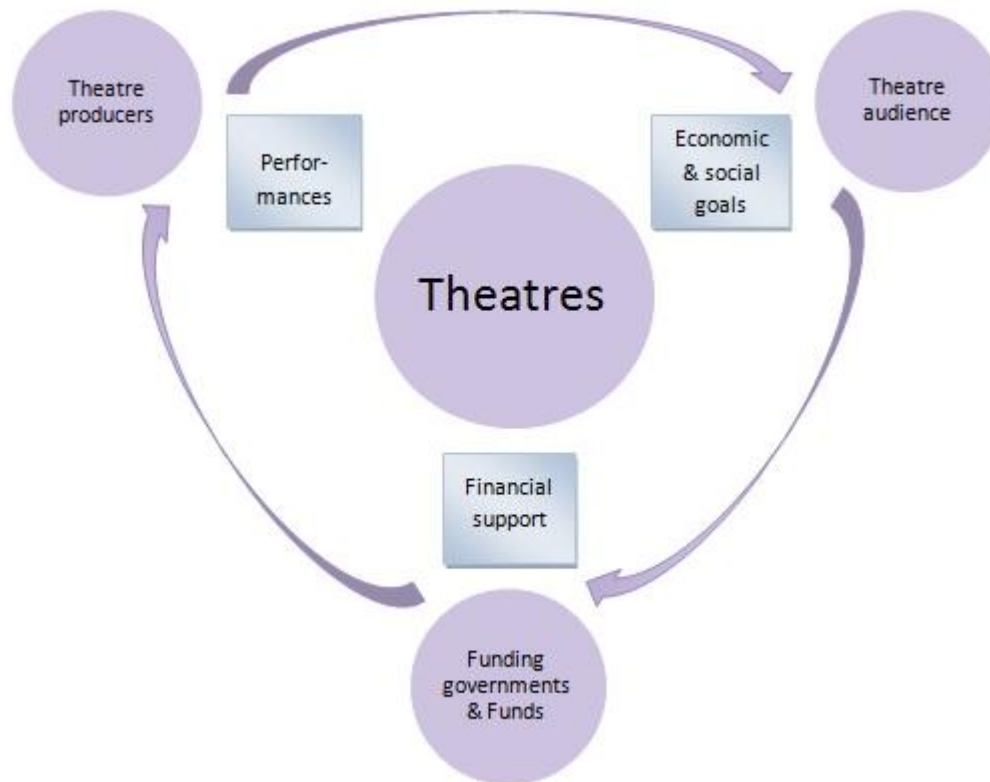


FIGURE 6: SERVING TREE MASTERS: THE CULTURAL GATEKEEPER'S DILEMMA IMPLEMENTED TO THEATRE (ROEPER, 2008)

Explanation of figure 6: The inner circle represents the most important gatekeeper of the theatre industries: the theatres' self. Although it became clear that funding bodies also serve a gatekeeping role, theatres are the ones who connect the three stakeholders and make final decisions. The furthest outer circles (purple) represent the three stakeholders gatekeeper theatres have to deal with: Theatre producers, theatre audience, and funding governments & funds. The products and values generated by the stakeholders are represented by the inner (blue) squares. These are both the added values to the gatekeeping theatre in the middle, next to products and values added to the stakeholder on the other end of the arrow, leading to the next product of value that can also be found at the end of the arrows.

A few of the interviewees also mentioned to barely if not never programme independent productions that are not adjoined with some type of theatre organisation. This means that new, unknown producers who have not established a relationship yet and do not receive similar funding may struggle to sell their production to the theatres. It could also mean that the performance selection made by theatres is not as diverse as it could be, as theatres choose to mostly or only include those theatre groups they are familiar with.

Larger halls have to deal with a greater risk when programming an unknown performance, due to the many seats they have to sell. This is also reflected in the content of the performances, as complex/unconventional theatres (e.g. experimental), thus those of which potential visitors find it difficult to predict the content, mostly take place in smaller halls. Yet, all theatres indicated to be working or wanting to be working on talent development and to programme renewing productions of artistic quality. This means that a significant amount of the programme (yet in varying degrees) consists of performances of which the content and quality are difficult to communicate to potential visitors.

On the visitor side, risk reduction regarding unknown performances takes place in several ways. The marketing department plays an important role by raising awareness and explaining the content of these performances. Next to that, to the audience unknown productions are often programmed in a series or theme. These performances are also communicated to loyal customers first, as these are familiar with the theatre and have built up some level of trust in the quality of the performances. Therefore, this group of visitors is more willing to take a risk. Some theatres have started a small-scale project with experimental performances which are both programmed and promoted by the same member of staff. This enables the theatre to bring across the enthusiasm and explain why certain performances have been programmed. The purpose of this approach is to develop an audience that trusts the theatre programmer with the quality of the performances and are willing to take the risk of trying something new, which in turn enables the theatre to experiment and expand their theatre programme. When seeking for loyal public that is willing to trust the theatre with the quality of the performances, Bernstein (2007) suggests that especially mature adults are interested in this. She also added that when trying to find new audiences, another approach to achieve this is to not focus on why potential audience would attend performances, but what keeps them for doing so at the moment (Bernstein, 2007). When collecting customer data as was mentioned by several interviewees, this is

something they can take into consideration. The following section provides a further analysis of potential limitations theatres face when expanding their programming selection with renewing and unknown performances.

4.7.1 Experimenting

It became clear that theatres' programming process is relying on many aspects and parties. To name but a few, theatres have to consider funds, governmental policies, generating their own income and indicating quality. These many aspects and parties involved raises the question whether, under these circumstances, theatres are able to be open to renewal and experimentation. Since theatres' programmes consist for a large part of theatre groups the theatre has developed some form of relationship with and/or those who receive funding, this can result into two effects. Since the theatre groups have gained trust from the theatres that are presenting their productions, it means that these groups can implement renewal and experimentation in their work. This means that by programming these theatre groups the theatres trust that the content is of the required quality, the exact content is less relevant and with this the theatre enables renewal and theatre development. On the other hand, it could be that focusing on theatre groups they know, they lock themselves into the productions by these groups. Thus, in this oversupply of creative products (Towse, 2011), theatres choose to select mostly from the ones they know and with this potentially leave out valuable productions by others and overall theatre development. Next to that, this structure may make it even more difficult for a new maker to enter the market. Also, it became clear that public theatres have agreements with their funding council regarding quantity and quality, next to meeting the needs of their visitors. Therefore, the question remains to what extent theatres are able to experiment with performances that are not part of their usual repertoire, while being the cultural gatekeeper in between these stakeholders.

Several theatres have explained that the aforementioned "cultural assignment" theatres agree upon with their city council depends on other facilities and venues in their area. Whereas a larger city such as Rotterdam or Amsterdam has many venues next to the main theatre (Schouwburg), smaller cities such as Breda only possesses one main theatre, apart from a pop music venue and a black box theatre. Parkstad Limburg Theatres pointed out that due to the many different types of venues in larger cities, it often occurs that each venue specialises in a certain type or discipline of the performing arts. During the

interviews, Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam has confirmed this as they have made an agreement with other facilities in the city, such as with commercial theatre "DeLaMar". The Stadsschouwburg barely shows commercial productions, as these are first referred to by DeLaMar and vice versa for non-commercial productions. Many smaller theatre groups and stages are also present in the city, taking care of the smaller scale or black box theatre, something that is too small for a location such as the Stadsschouwburg with halls starting from 500 seats. In Breda, one black box theatre and a pop venue are the only other venues present next to the main theatre Chassé. This means that only a small part of the broad spectrum of the performing arts is covered in the city, leaving Chassé theatre with the option or even responsibility of trying to cover a variety¹. Thus, theatres in larger cities are likely to specialise in a particular discipline or genre of performing arts and with this programme a broader selection of performances, whereas theatres in smaller cities are likely to offer an overall selection of all types of performing arts. This suggests that experimenting within the performing arts with renewing performances and unknown producers is more likely to happen in larger cities than smaller areas.

In the section "Council and funding involvement" it became clear that some goals as part of the artistic assignment can be rather challenging to combine as funds require theatre organisations to both encourage renewal and to reach a broader audience than they did before (e.g. RRKC, 2015). It became clear that larger theatres have a greater risk of programming performances that are renewing, experimental and/or unknown to their audience. It was mentioned that smaller cities that only have one main theatre, can often only represent a selection of the performing arts offer (e.g. in comparison with Amsterdam and Rotterdam). All in all, theatres felt like there are opportunities to experiment with their programme, however due to the many considerations they have to continuously keep in mind this ability can be improved. To increase the possibility of both adding renewal and experimenting with the theatre programme, as reaching a broader audience, working together with other organisations in the area might support this.

An alliance Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam has been working on is a cooperation between several theatres, festivals and theatre groups of varying sizes. They want to adapt their plans and policies to each other. This cooperation is meant to create a diverse

¹ Chassé Theater Breda has only been used as an example and is solely based on logic reasoning. This has not been suggested or discussed with the theatre at hand.

performing arts offer, to further stimulate the performing arts infrastructure in Amsterdam, next to working more effectively and efficiently. The alliance also enables young talent who have been involved with one of their partners to perform at the Stadsschouwburg "when they are ready" (Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam, 2012). The Stadsschouwburg did emphasise during the interview however, that this is a new initiative that needs to be developed still. This initiative provides an example of how theatre development can be stimulated next to working efficiently. Since this alliance does not only work with theatre groups but also non-producing festivals (e.g. Frascati and Nederlands Theater Festival with Fringe as part of the event), this group is also provided with new talent that has not necessarily been involved with a theatre group yet. Such a cooperation can be beneficial for both larger theatres and theatres in smaller cities. Larger theatres then have the ability to be involved with smaller scale theatre, thus be involved with a greater variety of performing arts production. Working together with festivals especially enables them to get in touch with new makers that they would perhaps not get in touch with otherwise. It also enables people in the area to explore the performing arts while being in a low boundary environment. If theatres are connected to these festivals, these visitors might also be interested in visiting the theatre in the future. The involvement of festivals will be further explored in the next section.

Theatres in smaller cities can involve organisations from a broader region to achieve the same theatre development purpose next to reaching a broader audience.

Also other theatre cooperation initiatives have emerged, such as "Get Lost", which is an initiative of several theatres and funds in the Netherlands. Their aim is to present a series of a few performances that the public are not familiar with yet such as international performances.

4.7.2 Entering the market and experimenting suggestions

It became clear that the amount of risk unknown performances bring along for theatres causes them to be rather cautious and selective during the programming process. Since theatres want to know what they are presenting, they try to find indicators of quality and success, such as using their network, trusting known producers and groups they have established a relationship with. This way of selecting performances and gatekeepers that are involved in this process suggests that it can be difficult for new producers to enter the market if they are not involved with an established theatre group. Therefore, this subsection

seeks to find a succinct overview of potential solutions for those who try to enter the theatre market.

Theatre groups: since all larger theatres pointed out to prefer working with established theatre groups of which they have or can develop a relationship with, it is highly advisable to a new producer or artist to consider joining such a group. This will not only allow them to develop their talent, it will also broaden their network (which turned out to be of high importance) and develop a portfolio. Thus, it will generate familiarity in the scene that they can use when trying to sell a performance to a theatre.

Young talent programmes: Most theatres are involved in some type of a young talent, or experimental development programme such as small festivals or co-productions. An example is Gloednieuw (nb. translation Brand new), which is a mini-festival organised by a cooperation of several theatres and festivals in the province of Noord-Brabant in the south of the Netherlands. For instance Festival Boulevard and Chassé Theater are part of this arrangement. Another theatre that is involved is Podium Bloos, which is a small theatre located in Breda and completely focuses on talent development by projects led by young artists and producers. Next to the mini-festival do Bloos and Chassé have another relationship which enables the small theatre to have access to a larger stage. Projects and initiatives such as these are another way of increasing one's chances of entering the performing arts market.

Festivals have often been referred to during the interviews as both a way for programmers to "scout" for exclusive performances and new talent, next to an opportunity for young talent to have a stage and show their skills. Whereas theatres organise festivals indoors themselves of which occasionally the theme revolves around new makers, this section is referred to those festivals that are organised separately from theatres. An example is festival Boulevard ('s-Hertogenbosch) and Noorderzon Festival (Groningen) of which interviewed theatres have pointed out to be visiting these in particular when they are seeking for additions to their programme. Through correspondence, both theatres have pointed out to be able to reach a different audience than theatres due to the low boundary access people have to their festival opposed to a theatre. Also, the motivations of their

audience might be different to those of theatres, as part of the festival audience visit the event "to have a nice day out in the park with friends" (Noorderzon). Also, both included festivals offer room in their programme for young makers to present their productions, which is possible due to the aforementioned reasons (Festival Boulevard and Festival Noorderzon).

Strong identity refers to theatre producers who want to (eventually) work independently. Festival Boulevard, who is interested in programming new and unknown performances, pointed out to be especially keen to programme performances by producers that have a strong identity and theatre style that stands out from the other productions available. Linked to the earlier discussed oversupply of productions within the performing arts, striving to develop a strong identity seems like good advice to new producers.

Funding can serve as a quality indicator as it became clear throughout the research that, apart from commercial performances, theatres mostly programme performances by theatre groups that receive some form of funding (e.g. national governmental funding or FPK). It also became clear that there are many national and local funds available. Therefore, it is suggested to producers who want to increase the probability of being selected for a theatre's programme to apply for nationally renowned funding.

5. Conclusion and final remarks

This thesis was written to answer the research question: *What is the role of governmental funds in the programming of public theatres in the Netherlands, and does this influence the possibility for experimentation and new makers in the programming?* The theoretical framework emphasised the importance of gatekeepers in the industry due to the products of theatres being experience goods. Whereas the city council and funding involvement turned out to be of high importance, theatres play the most important gatekeeper in this matter. It was indicated that many theatre producers (e.g. theatre groups) are reliant on theatres and that new producers may struggle to enter the theatre market. Also the programming process of theatres has been explored, suggesting two different approaches (Boerner & Jobst, 2011 vs. Assassi, 2007).

The qualitative data provided by the five semi-structured interviewees showed that the council and funding involvement is indeed visible, however none of the theatres felt restrained in their operations. Although quantitative and qualitative requirements were setup, translated in an "artistic assignment" the theatre had to fulfil for the city, the theatres felt like they still had enough freedom to programme performances that would enable their artistic values and goals. Programming considerations have been discussed after which it became evident that publically subsidised theatre groups take up a large portion of the theatre programme. Also the importance of being familiar with the producer or having established a relationship with the supplier was pointed out. A combination of the interviews, the study by Assassi (2007) and Boerner & Jobst (2011) has been developed, of which the latter turned out to be taken place at a later point in time as the relational aspect was of higher importance. This relational aspect has raised concerns regarding the variability in the performance offer, due to the focus of theatres on theatre groups they are already familiar with.

The claims made in the theoretical framework regarding a shift from an artistic approach towards a commercial approach has been disconfirmed as all theatres felt like especially in times of financial constraints the fine arts and quality performances offered them visitor stability and funding. Still, most theatres confirmed to find the commercial potential of performances of importance during the programming process, next to finding other ways of generating income. Unknown performances are often presented in a series or

theme, promoted extensively and shared with loyal consumers first. Thus, the quality of the performances was of considerable importance as all theatres wanted to maintain an image of presenting high quality arts. Linked to this is the trust that loyal visitors have in the theatre when visiting unknown performances as it has been selected by the theatre. Also renewing and international performances were perceived as artistic quality.

The gatekeeping role in between the three aforementioned stakeholders explained the risk taking that theatres try to reduce as much as possible. Having to deal with many stakeholders' interests makes programming unknown performances, even the theatre is not familiar with, risky decisions. Also the audience feels the risk of visiting something of which they cannot properly assess whether it is worth their opportunity cost. For both the theatre as the potential audience, several steps are taken to reduce the risk such as focusing on programming productions theatres are familiar with, predicting the popularity of performances, next to explaining the content and motivation of programming certain performances to the audience. Because the current approach may cause a narrow selection, potentially limiting theatre development, it is highly recommended that theatres create a system that allows productions from outside their network..

Finally, exploring the chances of new producers has led to an overview of suggestions makers can take into consideration. The necessity of having developed a network within the theatre scene, being part of a theatre group, receiving funding, a strong and distinguishing identity and having shown performances on for instance festivals are of high importance. Since it was frequently pointed out that the oversupply of the performing arts products make it difficult for a new producer to enter the market, next to the power of the theatres and limited risk they want to take, the overview of suggestions will not guarantee success on the theatre market. Hopefully it will provide new makers with a starting point and the confidence to find a way into theatre programmes in this complex industry.

5.1 Future research

This study served as a starting point to further understand the topic at hand. However, to generalise the outcomes, further research on a larger scale is recommended. This will allow to include a larger selection of theatre types and sizes after which more certain conclusions

can be drawn. For future research, quantitative research involving a larger sample of public theatres in the Netherlands is suggested.

This study focused on the theatre perspective. To further understand the market entry of new producers, involvement of this group would be interesting. Mixed methods to include a combination of quantitative surveys, followed by qualitative in-depth interviews is recommended.

A topic that was pointed out by one of the interviewees was that the social media usage to review performances is underdeveloped in comparison to other industries. Although this was an interesting observation it was not relevant to this particular research. Still, it will be an interesting topic for future research.

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Appendix 1: General topic list (original in Dutch)

Tijdens deze scriptie probeer ik te ontdekken wat theaters belangrijk vinden en welke afwegingen zij maken wanneer zij hun programmering aan het plannen zijn. Hierbij ben ik ook geïnteresseerd in hoeverre theaters willen en kunnen experimenteren met bijvoorbeeld nieuwe, onbekende stukken, of genres die minder populair zijn (bijvoorbeeld dmv speciale sponsoring).

- Introductie

- Algemene doel van het samengestelde programma/agenda
- Verband tussen budget en programmering
 - Rol van sponsors en fondsen
(bijv. Fonds Podiumkunsten structurele programmering)
- Actief/passief
- Afwegingen programma
 - Stappen en overwegingen
 - Betrokkenen
 - Variatie
 - Bekendheid
 - Relatie
- Balans ticket verkoop en artistieke kwaliteit
- Prognose verkoop tickets
- Positie nieuwe, onbekende en/of experimentele stukken
 - Benadering
 - Promotie/marketing
- Huidige situatie/ideale situatie omtrent programmeringsmogelijkheden

- Overige vragen/opmerkingen...