
PROGRAMMING PROCESS OF DANCE PERFORMANCES IN DUTCH SUBSIDIZED THEATERS

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ABSTRACT

There is little literature addressing the function of intermediaries in the performing arts. This research explores the programming processes of dance performances in Dutch subsidized presenting theaters. The programmatic choices of eleven theaters have been analyzed by conducting semi-structured interviews to their respective dance programmers. This research takes a stakeholder perspective on the programming process and contributes to literature introducing mechanisms to reduce incomplete information in terms of quality and demand uncertainty. Furthermore, a new model of stakeholders' goals' tensions is suggested to better understand the conflicts that dance programmers in presenting theaters need to manage.

KEY WORDS: cultural economics, performing arts, Dutch subsidized theaters, presenting theaters, dance programming, stakeholder management, quality uncertainty, demand uncertainty

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1. Introduction

The performing arts value chain can be roughly divided into production and presentation. In the Netherlands, the production is usually separated from the presentation, as opposed to other countries like Germany; in which public theaters own a company and a venue, and are able to produce and present their performances within their own organization (Langeveld, & Hoogenboom, 2012). Presenting organizations in the Netherlands, i.e. theaters, own venues in which guest performances are programmed. Theaters invite performing companies for a performance or hire out their venue to these companies (Langeveld, & Hoogenboom, 2012).

Programmers are employees of the theater that are responsible for the performances that the theater hosts at its venue. This research aims at studying how the programming process of dance performances is developed by the programmers of some Dutch subsidized theaters. Due to its lack of attention in the existing literature, this research will be focused on the programming of dance performances. From the studies addressing this issue in some perspective¹, only two of them consider dance performances partly (Bhansing, Leenders, & Wijnberg, 2017; Kawashima, 1999).

Throsby (1990) argues that, when economists are to throw any light on how decisions related to the production and consumption of the arts are made, the quality question (quality judgements) cannot be avoided. Therefore, it is essential, for this study on the programming process of performances in subsidized theaters, that the quality question is addressed.

Quality judgement is an issue with which many actors in the cultural sector are involved. How quality is defined is an issue that has been addressed previously in the literature². Theater programmers when choosing performances, need to value the quality of the possible options; especially in a context of oversupply (programmers receive many requests) (Bhansing *et al.*, 2017). Many cultural products, especially performing arts products, are experience goods (Abbé-Decarroux, 1994; Nelson, 1970).

¹ See Abbé-Decarroux (1994); Bhansing, Leenders, & Wijnberg (2017); Boerner & Jobst (2011); Castañer & Campos (2002); DiMaggio & Stenberg (1985); Kawashima (1999); Krebs & Pommerenhe (1995); Throsby (1990); Urrutiaguer (2002); Werck & Heyndels (2007); and Werck, Stultjes, & Heyndels (2008).

² See Dekker (2015) for a literature review on the topic.

Therefore, theater programmers need to deal with a situation of incomplete information.

In the literature we can find different studies that assist the programming of performances by theater programmers. There is one approach that addresses the characteristics of a performance that influence audience demand (Abbé-Decarroux, 1994; Throsby, 1990; Urrutiaguer, 2002; Werck & Heyndels, 2007). This approach informs about the preferences of the audience. If considering that the aim of programmers is programming the performances of highest quality, these studies provide several characteristics to value the quality of performances in relation to audience demand. There is another approach that addresses programmatic choices as a complex interrelation of interests from several stakeholders, and addresses quality by classifying performances in two different categories, 'highbrow' or artistically innovative and 'lowbrow' or popular (Bhansing *et al.*, 2017; Boerner & Jobst, 2011; Castañer & Campos, 2002; DiMaggio & Stenberg, 1985; Krebs & Pommerenhe, 1995; Werck, Stultjes, & Heyndels, 2008). This approach analyzes the restrictions that programmers face when making programmatic choices, mainly caused by governments' and audiences' interests. This stakeholder management issue arises tension between *artistic excellence*, *entertainment* and *economic efficiency* (Boerner & Jobst, 2011). Moreover, this second approach introduces the concept of artistic innovation to the quality discussion. Innovation is a recurrent objective of cultural policies (Throsby, 2010). Subsidized theaters are supposed to take the risk of programming innovative performances, because that is partly why they are subsidized for (Bhansing *et al.*, 2017).

This research intends to contribute to the latter discussion, from a qualitative and innovative perspective. Theater programming is an underexplored area in arts management literature, and there is little academic knowledge on how programmatic choices are made (Bhansing *et al.*, 2017). To the extent of my knowledge, to date there has been no study addressing how theater programmers define quality, and the mechanisms they use to reduce quality uncertainty and demand uncertainty, when making programmatic choices on dance performances conditioned by stakeholders management.

The research question to be answered is, therefore: How is the process of Dutch public theater programmers when programming dance performances in terms of quality and stakeholder management? The issues of quality, incomplete information and stakeholder management must be addressed by answering the following sub-questions: How is quality defined by Dutch public theater dance programmers? What mechanisms are used to reduce incomplete information on quality of dance performances? What mechanisms are used to reduce incomplete information on demand uncertainty? How do Dutch subsidized theater dance programmers manage the *artistic excellence-entertainment-economic efficiency tension* that arises from balancing stakeholders' interests when selecting dance performances?

In order to answer these research questions, semi-structured interviews have been conducted to a selection of eleven dance programmers from a variety of Dutch subsidized theaters. The programmatic choices of city theaters from both big and smaller cities and small theaters are analyzed in this research.

This research, apart from filling a gap in the literature, is also socially relevant. Subsidized theaters are financed by taxpayers, i.e. the citizens. It is in the interest of the population to understand how subsidized institutions function. Furthermore, citizens are expected to attend the performances that are supplied by subsidized theaters, so it is relevant for the citizens to know how and why those performances have been selected. Moreover, this study will be of relevance for the dance community. Dance companies, production houses, choreographers and dancers are concerned with the fact of getting selected by theaters to get the chance to perform and share their work with the audience. It is of interest for them to know how the programming process is, and what they can do to better position themselves to get selected.

This research addresses professional dance for adults. Other segments of dance performances, such as youth (dance) theater or amateur dancing are not addressed in this research. This research is not concerned with a specific genre. However, it is acknowledged that most dance performances presented in Dutch subsidized theaters could be broadly labeled as modern or contemporary dance. Ballet, urban, and flamenco dance performances are also programmed, even if they represent a lower

proportion. All professional dance performances for adults have been considered, regardless of their genre.

This research contributes to better understand the dance programming process of Dutch subsidized theater by introducing mechanisms that are used to reduce quality uncertainty and demand uncertainty among dance programmers, and suggests a new model of stakeholders' goals' tensions particularly design to better understand the conflicts that dance programmers in presenting theaters need to manage.

2. Theoretical framework

This paper takes stakeholder management literature as a point of departure to organize the complex process that dance programmers develop when programming performances. The stakeholder management approach to the study of programmatic choices considers the points of view and interests of different parties in the theater environment (Boerner & Jobst, 2011). Boerner and Jobst (2011) consider the government, the theater management, the audience, and the artistic employees as the stakeholders of German (producing and presenting) theaters. Boerner and Jobst (2011) present the conflict between *artistic excellence*, *entertainment* and *economic efficiency* when making programmatic choices. *Artistic excellence* is the interest of the government, the theater management, and the artistic employees. *Entertainment* is the interest of the audience (Boerner & Jobst, 2011). *Economic efficiency* is presented as a restriction that affects programmatic choices, both for *artistic excellence* and *entertainment*; and it is the interest of the government as well as of the theater management (Boerner & Jobst, 2011). Boerner and Jobst (2011) also present a conflict between *artistic excellence* and *entertainment*; suggesting a balance between both types of performances in order to satisfy the different stakeholders. Other studies present this conflict mirroring *artistic excellence* with artistically innovative performances and *entertainment* with popular performances (Bhansing *et al.*, 2017; Castañer & Campos, 2002; DiMaggio & Stenberg, 1985). Whichever the conceptualization, this literature presents an existing conflict between *artistic excellence*, *entertainment* and *economic efficiency*.

Programmers' main interest is *artistic excellence*. Since their income is not subjected to economic success, reputation between their peers is the interest of

programmers (Joy and Sherry, 2003; Krebs & Pommerenhe, 1995). Since such reputation is only acquired by programming highbrow innovative performances (Boerner & Jobst, 2011; Krebs & Pommerenhe, 1995), it could be assumed that dance programmers have an intrinsic interest in programming high quality performances. Therefore, programmers will always aim for programming the performances they consider of highest quality, and high quality in terms of artistic value is related to highbrowness and artistic innovation.

Given that the aim of programmers will be to program as many innovative performances as possible, audience's and government's interests can act as constraints to their programmatic choices. The theoretical framework is therefore divided into three sections. The first section addresses the constraints that audience interests provoke, while the second section addresses the government's constraints on programmatic choices. The third section addresses the actual programming process that subsidized theater programmers perform in order to make their programmatic choices considering what is exposed in the first two sections. At last, the fourth section discusses the strategies to manage the tension between *artistic excellence*, *entertainment* and *economic efficiency*.

It is acknowledged that the theater management, the reminding stakeholder mentioned by Boerner and Jobst (2011), is not explicitly taken into consideration in the theoretical framework. The interest of artistic excellence is embodied in the programmer, as has been previously addressed. The interest of economic efficiency is also the concern of the programmer; since it is a condition to maintain the subsidies received from the government, and the programmer's income depends on it. Therefore, this research will focus on audience and government as the most relevant stakeholders that influence the programmatic choices of Dutch subsidized theater dance programmers.

2.1. Audience

This section analyzes what are audiences requiring from their theaters. Evidence on the preferences of Dutch audiences regarding dance or theater performances is, to my knowledge, not available. There are, however, studies on other territories (Abbé-Decarroux, 1994; Throsby, 1990; Urrutiaguer, 2002; Werck &

Heyndels, 2007). These are useful to summarize the characteristics of performances that have been considered by scholars as influencing the demand of theater performances in general. These characteristics are possibly considered by programmers when making their programmatic choices.

Performance characteristics

Throsby (1990) considers the time a performance was created, the popularity of the author, and the type of play as follows: "A: Play written before 1900 ("classic"); B: Play written after 1900 by well-known author; C: Play written after 1900 by little-known or unknown author; D: Entertainment, revue, musical" (Throsby, 1990, p. 72). Abbé-Decarroux (1994) considers the same elements in a slightly different way, as he changes reputation by whether the author is dead or alive: "A: 'classic' play (written before 1900); B: 'modern' play (written after 1900 - deceased author); C: 'contemporary' play (written after 1900 - living author); D: 'atypical' play (circus, revue, collective creation...)" (Abbé-Decarroux, 1994, p. 104). Urrutiaguer (2002) still follows a similar classification but adds the element of language in performances: "A for "classics" whose author died before the twentieth century; B for plays written before 1980 by an author who died in the twentieth century; C for plays written in French by an author who is still alive, and those written in French by an author now dead, but published after 1980; D for plays written in a foreign language by an author belonging to the contemporary category" (Urrutiaguer, 2002, p. 189). The language may not seem a relevant characteristic for dance performances. However, some dance performances use voices either live or recorded. It is also a useful characteristic for dance performances whether the choreographer is based in the theater's country or is an international company or choreographer. Lastly, Werck and Heyndels (2007) consider previously mentioned elements as well as the number of performers and whether performances have been performed in the past or are new creations (remakes; adaptations; new performances): "The original language of the play; the age of the playwright; whether the play is an adaptation or not; the number of actors; whether the production is new or a remake" (Werck & Heyndels, 2007, p. 31).

The effect on demand from the performance characteristics considered in these studies is of little relevance to identify what is the effect on Dutch audiences, because they define the preferences of populations from other countries. However,

these characteristics of performances that have been previously considered in the literature can be compared to the characteristics that Dutch dance programmers consider.

The effect of artistic innovation on demand

Part of the discussion on the characteristics of performances is also the distinction between lowbrow and highbrow arts. From the aforementioned studies on demand, Werck and Heyndels (2007) were the only ones to consider this distinction. Other studies researching the relation between innovation and organizational behavior (managers' or programmers' behavior) have addressed the distinction between highbrow (or artistically innovative) and lowbrow (or popular) performances (Bhansing et al., 2017; Boerner & Jobst, 2011; Castañer & Campos, 2002; DiMaggio & Stenberg, 1985; Krebs & Pommerenhe, 1995; Werck *et al.*, 2008).

Innovativeness cannot be directly measured because art scholars themselves do not agree on what is or not innovative (DiMaggio & Stenberg, 1985). Therefore, innovativeness is not easily operationalized in economic studies. Previous studies have proposed different options.

DiMaggio and Stenberg (1985) consider 'nonconformity' innovativeness. They operationalize 'nonconformity' as "the extent to which a theatre's repertoire diverges from that of the other nonprofit theatres" (DiMaggio & Stenberg, 1985, p. 111). Therefore, they consider that innovation occurs when new works and adaptation of old works are programmed by only few theaters. Instead, innovation in stage design or performance style is not addressed by DiMaggio and Stenberg (1985).

Castañer and Campos (2002) argue that the traditional way of conceptualizing and measuring artistic innovation only in terms of new performances is incomplete. They instead suggest that "innovation by arts organizations consists in the programming of an activity that radically departs from existing art conventions, whether locally or globally" (Castañer & Campos, 2002, p. 46). When distancing from existing conventions, a referent is needed. They differentiate between cosmopolitan (or global), local and self-referent. The cosmopolitan referents are "all other organizations in the field around the world"; the local referents are "all other organizations in the local field"; and the self-referent is "the local organization's own past" (Castañer & Campos, 2002, p. 31). Programming different (new) performances

from the own theater's past programs cannot be considered programming innovative performances. For performances to be considered innovative, it is required that they depart from the existing conventions in the local or global dance field. Artistic innovation in performances can both happen in the content dimension as well as the form dimension (Castañer & Campos, 2002). A common innovation in content is multidisciplinary, i.e. combining different art forms in one performance (Castañer & Campos, 2002), while a common innovation in form is interactivity, i.e. exploring an interactive relationship between the audience and the performers (Castañer & Campos, 2002). It could be also argued that interactivity is part of the content innovation.

Castañer and Campos (2002) acknowledge that artistic innovativeness in terms of content and form is difficult to measure in economic analysis. However, programmers, when selecting performances, may take these kinds of artistic innovation into consideration, as well as considering multidisciplinary and interactivity in performances.

Evidence from the literature indicates that artistic innovation has a negative effect on demand (DiMaggio & Stenberg, 1985; Krebs & Pommerenhe, 1995; Werck & Heyndels, 2007). Werck & Heyndels (2007) found that, in Flemish theaters between 1980 and 2000, remakes of existing performances attracted bigger audiences than new performances. Therefore, innovation (operationalized as new creations) had a negative effect on demand. DiMaggio and Stenberg's (1985) findings in the US in the 1970's also indicate that innovativeness has a negative effect on demand. Krebs and Pommerenhe's (1995) study does not focus on the effect of artistic innovation on demand. However, when analyzing the behavior of artistic managers in charge of programming, they found that when willing to increase demand, managers would increase the number of lowbrow (popular) performances as opposed to highbrow (innovative) performances (Krebs & Pommerenhe, 1995). From this behavior it can be interfered that innovative performances have a negative effect on demand.

Furthermore, the location of the theater seems to influence the number of innovative performances programmed. DiMaggio and Stenberg's (1985) study on theater 'nonconformity' in the US indicates that theatres located in New York City are much less conformist than theaters located in any other city of the United States.

These scholars point at demand factors as a relevant influencer of this phenomenon. DiMaggio and Stenberg (1985) argue that there are more potential attenders in New York City than in any other city in the US, as well as more highly educated individuals with a taste for artistic innovation. Therefore, cities with bigger and highly educated populations seem more likely to program innovative performances, in comparison to smaller cities with smaller and less well-educated populations. Moreover, DiMaggio and Stenberg (1985) also argue that the seating capacity of the venue influences conformity positively. The higher the number of seats to be filled, the bigger the need for supplying highly demanded performances. Therefore, theaters with bigger venues are expected to program more conventional performances.

Nonetheless, regardless of performance conventionality, demand seems to increase when audiences know what to expect. Arts centers in the UK, as studied by Kawashima (1999), program certain companies on a regular basis, which increases demand for those companies. Therefore, apart from distinguishing between conventional and innovative performances, Dutch audience preferences may distinguish between known or unknown companies or choreographers.

2.2. Government

Dutch public theaters are not subjected to the pressure of commercial success as for-profit organizations are. However, public theaters are subjected to pressure from governments, acting as subsidizing bodies (Krebs & Pommerenhe, 1995). Governments can decide to reduce the budgets of theaters, that can even provoke the closure of an institution. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze in which ways public authorities influence the programmatic choices of subsidized theaters.

When allocating resources, a basic concept that public authorities take into consideration is value. Officials sustain their decisions upon value considerations (Throsby, 2010). They need to consider what is of value to society at large. In order to do so, there needs to be a process of valuation or evaluation. Described by Connor (1992, as cited in Throsby, 2010, p. 17) as the process of “estimating, ascribing, modifying, affirming and even denying value”. Value is defined by Throsby (2010, p. 17) as “the worth, to an individual or a group, of a good, a service, an activity or an experience, with an implied possibility of a ranking of value (better to worse, or higher

to lower value) according to given criteria". Therefore, it is assumed that it is possible to rank dance performances from better to worse, or higher to lower value. Following this, programmers should be able to implement a valuation mechanism by which they can decide which performances are of most value to society. In turn, subsidizing bodies should be able to evaluate the activities and experiences developed by a theater to measure the value that a theater has offered to society.

Interpreting and measuring cultural value is undeniably "complex, multifaceted, unstable, and lacks an agreed unit of account" (Throsby, 2010, p. 18). Governments usually rely on the advice of a group of experts (Throsby, 2010). In practice, experts are asked to consensually judge the cultural worth of the activities developed, in this case, by a theater. These activities should be in line with the cultural policy strategy of that government (Throsby, 2010).

Traditionally, when addressing value in cultural policies, artistic and cultural criteria would lead to value considerations. Nowadays, with the shift towards an economic orientation of cultural policy, the economic value of cultural activities plays a role in such considerations (Throsby, 2010). In relation to the programming of performances, the conflict between artistic and economic valuations can arise in the form of a discussion on what is of most value to society. A frequent objective that governments set for theaters is that of selling a minimum amount of tickets during a season (Krebs & Pommerenhe, 1995, p. 18). That scenario brings us to the question whether the objective of maximizing ticket sales answers to an economic consideration (i.e. tickets revenue), or to a more cultural consideration (i.e. supplying performances that attract a large part of their population; and thus, something that benefits society at large).

Among the economic objectives of governments regarding cultural policy we find efficiency, equity, growth, full employment, price stability and external balance (Throsby, 2010). From this list of objectives, efficiency and equity seem to have the most influence on theater programmers. Governments must ensure an efficient allocation of resources. Theaters must then justify the resources received by ensuring that their activities are of value for society. Moreover, the equity concept concerns questions of the equitable distribution of income and wealth. Most governments accept the ethical proposition of alleviating poverty in society (Throsby, 2010). The

public supply of performances through subsidized theaters allows the lower-income groups to consume a service that only the higher-income groups could consume in a free market.

With respect to artistic objectives of cultural policies, we can find excellence, innovation and access. All these objectives affect the programming decisions of theater programmers. *Excellence* concerns the artistic quality of performances, that will for sure be of concern for programmers. *Innovation* is concerned with extending the artform in new directions. These innovative performances need a space to be presented. Thus, programmers need to answer to the innovation objective of governments giving space to innovative performances in their programs. Moreover, related to the aforementioned economic concept of equity, the objective of widening *access* to artistic consumption in the community is also of concern to theater programmers. Programmers when selecting performances must attempt to attract a diverse audience to their theater that is (fully) representative of the community of a territory.

Balancing artistic innovation and access

If artistic excellence has a negative impact on demand (DiMaggio & Stenberg, 1985; Krebs & Pommerenhe, 1995; Werck & Heyndels, 2007), programmers will face a complex issue when trying to achieve the government objectives of excellence, innovation and access. A balance between these objectives is required, with artistic innovation on one side and access on the other.

It is argued that artistic directors of performing arts organizations, that are usually artists, will slightly bias their decisions towards artistic goals (Krebs & Pommerenhe, 1995). It could also be the case of programmers, that are presumably more artistically driven than economically driven. Therefore, as in the case of directors, they will possibly maximize their reputation in the art world, i.e. among peer groups formed by the artistic community (Krebs & Pommerenhe, 1995). In the system of Dutch subsidized theaters, no profit maximization is required, and the programmer's income is independent of economic success. Therefore, reputation in the art world is what programmers (as well as artistic directors) may aim for (Krebs & Pommerenhe, 1995; Joy and Sherry, 2003). This reputation is built by directors by the excellence of their productions, and by programmers by the artistic excellence of the programmed

performances. Such artistic excellence is judged by experts, i.e. by the peer artistic community. From that, it can be inferred that programmers will pursue their self-interest of programming highbrow performances. However, programmers are restricted to follow the conditions of their managers that in turn are restricted to follow the conditions of the subsidizing bodies (e.g. certain level of demand). It is on their interest as well to maintain their position (Krebs & Pommerenhe, 1995).

Since subsidizing bodies cannot interfere in quality judgements, they set conditions regarding capacity utilization; that are easily measurable (Krebs & Pommerenhe, 1995). Capacity utilization depends on demand, and demand on the number of popular performances. When in need to increase audience capacity, programmers increase the number of lowbrow (popular) performances (Krebs & Pommerenhe, 1995). However, when reaching above-expectations audience capacity in a given season, a programmer will program more highbrow performances in the coming season (Krebs & Pommerenhe, 1995). There is an ambitious reaction rather than a conservative reaction regarding the balance between high- and lowbrow performances programmed. This evidences that programmers are rather inclined to program highbrow performances, as long as the capacity utilization requirements are met. Therefore, in a usual situation, programmers select more lowbrow performances than they desire, influenced by the need of achieving the required capacity utilization.

From the aforementioned in this section, we can infer an existing conflict between cultural policy objectives. There is a conflict between excellence and innovation on one side and access on the other. Access understood as high levels of participation in the arts by a certain population. Programmers seem to mirror this conflict of interests. On one side they aim to develop a reputation in the art world by programming excellent (highbrow) performances; while on the other, they aim to maintain their job position by successfully meeting the audience capacity utilization conditions from subsidizing bodies by programming lowbrow performances. It has been previously assumed that governments must evaluate the activities developed by subsidized organizations according to the set criteria (Throsby, 2010). However, only controlling for capacity utilization seems the most efficient evaluation. It controls for demand and indirectly for artistic excellence, relying on the reputation interest of programmers and artistic directors.

Nonetheless, setting a minimum own revenue that the theater must rise every year is another form of controlling for demand (that brings audience legitimization). It would most probably have the same effect (i.e. offering popular performances to sell more tickets). However, theaters may use a strategy based on subscription memberships. Depending on the taste of the subscribers of each theater, programmers may select more popular or more innovative performances. The number of memberships can be also influenced by benefits attached to the subscription, that have no direct relation with programming (Johnson & Garbarino, 2001). Therefore, changing a government's condition from capacity utilization to minimum own revenue may have a different effect if: (1) there is a sufficient number of subscribers that demand innovative performances, or (2) the benefits of the membership outweigh a program that is not of the taste of that subscriber. In this given case, programmers could program a higher number of innovative performances. They would then achieve the objectives of excellence and innovation but only achieve the objective of access to a limited extent.

Budgetary constraints

Governments are the financing bodies of subsidized theaters, and the ones that decide upon the budget of theaters. They are, therefore, the direct responsible of budgetary constraints suffered by dance programmers.

Several studies have analyzed the effect of governmental subsidies on programmatic choices, in terms of diversity and innovativeness (Werck *et al.*, 2008). The general trend is that public support encourages artistic freedom and experimentation, which in turn broadens the diversity of the program (Werck *et al.*, 2008). On the contrary, private support and dependence on tickets revenues enhances conventionality and reduced diversity (Werck *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, it can be assumed that subsidized theaters will program more innovative performances and will offer a more diverse program than commercial theaters.

Empirical evidence on producing and presenting theaters indicates that theater budgets have direct influence on the number of performances that are programmed and the nature of these performances (i.e. whether they are more conventional or more innovative) (Werck *et al.*, 2008). Bigger budgets will allow for more performances to be programmed and more artistic risk to be taken (Werck *et al.*,

2008). More resources allow for more performances to be produced. Moreover, the bigger the budget, the lower the dependency on ticket revenue to finance those productions. In the case of presenting theaters, we can assume that budget will have the same effect. A higher number of performances will be programmed when the budget is bigger; and riskier choices will be taken when the dependency on ticket revenue is lowered.

2.3. Programming process

The previous sections have informed about the interests of stakeholders that theater programmers can take into consideration when selecting performances. This section focuses on the actual process of programming performances.

Prior to the programming process, programmers receive an oversupply of petitions of performances to be programmed (Bhansing *et al.*, 2017). Programmers do not have the capacity to program such number of performances, neither to get informed about the quality of them, nor to be able to predict audience reaction for all of them (Bhansing *et al.*, 2017).

In this situation, the programming process starts by considering whether a company and its performance is appropriate for the venue (Bhansing *et al.*, 2017). In this part of the process, since performances are experience goods, programmers must rely on signals of quality. Performances will not only be appropriate if they meet the quality standards of the theater, but also if programmers consider that the performance can be introduced in a season's program where all stakeholder interests are balanced. Since stakeholder interests have been addressed in previous sections, this section will address the incomplete information issue that programmers face, both quality uncertainty as well as demand uncertainty.

Quality uncertainty

Dance performances are experience goods, i.e. goods the quality of which can only be determined after purchase (Ekelund, Mixon, & Ressler, 1995). Individuals do not possess complete information when choosing what performance to attend (in the case of individual consumers) or what performance to program (in the case of theater programmers). The quality of performances is uncertain in a pre-purchase situation. Only by attending a performance, individuals can assess the quality of a performance.

Even if individuals will always remain in an incomplete information situation, they can attempt to reduce it. This context is both given for individual consumers and for theater programmers. There is a positive correlation between information about the quality of a performance and the demand (of individuals) for that performance (Abbé-Decarroux, 1994). It is expected that programmers will rather program a performance from which they have more information.

A difference between usual consumers and programmers is that programmers may be able to attend a performance prior to taking the decision of programming it. This way programmers can make their own quality judgement. Festivals are often used by performing arts programmers to scout new performances (Friedman, 2014). Festivals concentrate a large number of performances in the same place during a concrete period of time. They are, therefore, more convenient than attending a single performance in a venue's regular program. However, it is assumed that other venues are also visited by programmers to discover and judge the quality of new performances. Yet, due to the oversupply of performances, both in festivals and regular venues, programmers need to make a selection of the ones they will attend. This decision is based on the advice of trusted colleagues that know and share their taste; usually non-competing peers (Friedman, 2014). Moreover, programmers get invitations from artists and their agents (Kawashima, 1999; Friedman, 2014). But this is a less-followed strategy, as these individuals are clearly not objective and the number of requests is usually overwhelming (Friedman, 2014).

Signals of quality

Since quality is uncertain, it is the perception of quality that determines consumption (Abbé-Decarroux, 1994); or selection, in the case of programmers. Perception is then shaped by signals of quality that individuals rely on to reduce quality uncertainty about the available performances (Abbé-Decarroux, 1994). Theater programmers are also expected to use signals of quality in the selection process of performances. Therefore, companies and choreographers need to produce signals of quality in order to get selected by theater programmers. Abbé-Decarroux's (1994) research results point out that reviews of the performance as well as the reputation of author, producer, and cast, are signals of quality that individuals use to judge the

quality of a performance. These could also be taken into consideration by programmers.

Research focusing on intermediaries, like theater programmers are, argue that they rely on suggestions and recommendations from their informal network (Kawashima, 1999; Friedman, 2014). Moreover, critical reviews and awards are also used by intermediaries (Friedman, 2014). Other research suggests that either positive or negative critical reviews calls for the attention of programmers (Bhansing *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, critical reviews are not only signals of quality but also signals of legitimacy. Furthermore, being programmed in certain theater venues is a signal of quality (Urrutiaguer, 2002). It plays a valorization effect (Klamer, 2004). The fact that a theater has programmed a certain performance is a signal of quality for some consumers; and may it be for some programmers as well. Dance production houses, that select which choreographer they support and produce, may also function as *valorizing* institutions (Klamer, 2004). Public authorities may also be considered by programmers when valuing the quality of performances; since they are also *valorizing* institutions (Throsby, 2010). It is probable that programmers consider where public resources have been allocated. Since subsidies are given to institutions (companies or choreographers) that have been evaluated by their quality.

Another mechanism to reduce quality uncertainty is programming certain companies or choreographers regularly, every season (Kawashima, 1999). In this case, quality is judged upon the last performance of that same company or choreographer.

Demand uncertainty

Continuing with the programming process, once programmers consider that a performance is appropriate for their theater, they need to decide in which hall (if the venue has multiple) it will be programmed; as well as the number of times it will be performed (Bhansing *et al.*, 2017). These two considerations (hall and times performed) are decided upon the expected audience (Bhansing *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, programmers need to make demand predictions for each programmed performance. Since the season's program is usually organized long in advance, unexpected high demand for a performance cannot be satisfied until the next season (Bhansing *et al.*, 2017). Such predictions are highly difficult in nature; but difficulty is increased when programming performances that are to be premiered. Theaters often

program performances that will be performed for the first time at their venue. In such cases, programmers know little about the performances. It is expected that programmers base the decision of blind-programming on previous performances from that company or choreographer. The regular programming of certain companies or choreographers decreases the difficulty of demand predictions, and it is a commonly used strategy by performing arts venues (Kawashima, 1999).

In relation to innovative performances, research indicates that programmers expect lower demand, and thus program them in smaller halls or lesser days, than conventional performances (Bhansing *et al.*, 2017). This goes both for established and emerging companies or choreographers (Bhansing *et al.*, 2017). When only considering established companies, the relation between innovation and audience capacity is the same. The more conventional the performance the more audience is expected by programmers (Bhansing *et al.*, 2017). However, when considering emerging choreographers, programmers expect bigger audiences for their innovative than for their conventional performances (Bhansing *et al.*, 2017). Programmers seem to assume that when willing to attend a conventional performance audience will rather rely on established companies. While programmers expect that, when willing to attend an innovative performance, audiences will less likely differentiate between established and emerging creators.

Moreover, the calendar is also considered by programmers when scheduling performances. It must adjust to the leisure time preferences of the audience, that may vary among the seasonal periods (Boerner & Jobst, 2011; Kawashima, 1999). Programmers avoid scheduling performances in periods in which they predict low audience demand.

Having presented all the parts of the programming process of dance performances, it could be summarized in the following way: Dance programmers taking into consideration the characteristics of the performance, the company or choreographer, the expected demand, and the impact on stakeholders, decide if, when, on what stage and for how long a dance performance will be performed at the venue.

2.4. Tension between stakeholders' interests

Governments, audiences and programmers have different interests, which arises tension between *artistic excellence*, *entertainment* and *economic efficiency* (Boerner & Jobst, 2011). Boerner and Jobst (2011) present four strategies used in German (producing and presenting) theaters.

The first strategy is *Setting Priorities* (Boerner & Jobst, 2011). Theaters will consider which is their main goal and make decisions focused towards the realization of this goal. Theaters whose goal is audience maximization will prioritize audience interests, while theaters whose goal is quality maximization will prioritize government's or their own interests. Priorities are also connected to economic dependency. Theaters dependent on tickets revenue will prioritize audience interests, while the ones that are less dependent will prioritize artistic quality.

Another strategy is *Combining Stakeholder Interests* (Boerner & Jobst, 2011). The main output of this strategy is offering a diverse program. Some performances will meet audience interests, while others will meet government interests.

The third strategy consists on *Focusing on Neutral Goals* (Boerner & Jobst, 2011). When making calendar considerations, the only stakeholder with an interest is the audience. The other stakeholders do not have interests in this respect. Programmers will schedule performances focusing on the audience's leisure time preferences. It is questionable to consider focusing on neutral goals a strategy to manage conflicting interests. Neutral goals are by essence not conflicting. Moreover, the example given by Boerner and Jobst (2011), adjusting to audience leisure-time preferences, has mainly an impact on audience attendance, which is the interest of the theater, not of its audience.

The last strategy presented by Boerner and Jobst (2011) is *Developing the Audience*. The interest of the theater and the government is to program high artistic quality performances, but only a reduced number of audience members attend those performances. This conflict can be solved by engaging, educating, and motivating diverse communities to attend those performances (Boerner & Jobst, 2011). Theaters may then invest in educational activities, relationship-building techniques or marketing efforts (Boerner & Jobst, 2011).

3. Method

There has been little academic interest on the programming process in theaters (Bhansing *et al.*, 2017). Only few studies address the intermediate stage in which venues decide their program (Bhansing *et al.*, 2017; Boerner & Jobst, 2011; Kawashima, 1999). Boerner and Jobst (2011) and Kawashima (1999) studies take a qualitative approach, implementing semi-structured interviews. While Bhansing *et al.* (2017) developed a quantitative research. Besides, only Bhansing *et al.* (2017) and Kawashima (1999) take dance performances into consideration among the analyzed programmatic choices. Therefore, there has been no study addressing the particularities of dance programming. Contributing to this gap in theory requires an inductive and qualitative strategy, as it is the most appropriate to theory building.

Therefore, the aim of this research is to contribute to the area of dance programming by answering the following research question: How is the process of Dutch public theater programmers when programming dance performances in terms of quality and stakeholder management? Moreover, the issues of quality, incomplete information and stakeholder management are addressed by answering the following sub-questions: How is quality defined by Dutch public theater dance programmers? What mechanisms are used to reduce incomplete information on quality of dance performances? What mechanisms are used to reduce incomplete information on demand uncertainty? How do Dutch subsidized theater dance programmers manage the *artistic excellence-entertainment-economic efficiency tension* that arises from balancing stakeholders' interests when selecting dance performances?

Since this research intends to understand *how* theater programmers select dance performances, the most convenient is to use a qualitative research strategy (Bryman, 2012). The programming process is highly complex due to the stakeholders' interests that programmers must take into consideration. Therefore, deep understanding of the reasonings programmers go through is necessary to make a good analysis of the programming process. The most suitable research design is a multiple case study (Eisenhardt, 1989). Case studies are of particular value when studying decision-making (Durose *et al.*, 2014), as they allow for individual perspectives to be heard (Yin, 2009). This research develops multiple case studies in order to listen to several voices. Comparing two or more cases allows understanding social phenomena

better (Bryman, 2012). The researcher is in a better position to establish the circumstances in which a theory will or will not hold when comparing several cases (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009). Thus, this design improves theory building (Eisenhardt, 1989), which supports the inductive and explorative approach of this research. Therefore, the most appropriate research design to contribute to the existing gap in the literature regarding dance programming is a multiple case study.

This study addresses Dutch subsidized theaters because they are a clear example of presenting theaters; as opposed to German theaters that are both producing and presenting theaters (Langeveld, & Hoogenboom, 2012). Theaters in the Netherlands have no control of what performances are produced, and have the responsibility to program performances from producing companies. Boerner and Jobst (2011) have addressed the programming process in a German producing and presenting theater. However, there is no research addressing the programming process of dance performances in the Netherlands; nor in any other country with a system of presenting theaters.

3.1. Data collection

This research focuses on non-for-profit theaters subsidized by governments. This choice is based on the fact that dance performances are only programmed in subsidized theaters in the Netherlands. Additionally, there exists an academic interest on exploring the influence of governments in programmatic choices.

In order to select which Dutch subsidized theaters would be studied, a purposive sample has been used (Bryman, 2012). The goal of using purposive sampling was to select cases in a strategic way, so that the chosen theaters differed in characteristics relevant to answer the research questions (Bryman, 2012). Exemplifying cases have been sought to form the sample (Bryman, 2012). The chosen cases exemplify a broader category, not extreme or unusual, but of which they are part of (Bryman, 2012).

The required basic characteristics of a theater to be selected for this research was programming dance performances and receiving subsidies from their local government. However, within this group of theaters, other characteristics were considered when making the sample. DiMaggio and Stenberg (1985) pointed

differences on the degree of conformity of theaters based on their location and the seating capacity of the venue. For this reason, location and size have been taken into consideration when selecting Dutch subsidized theaters. The analyzed theaters are located in 10 different cities. Three selected theaters are located in big Dutch cities (Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht), and other 7 theaters in smaller cities (Tilburg, Groningen, Breda, Nijmegen, Arnhem, Maastricht and Heerlen). Out of these eleven theaters, eight are city theaters (“schouwburg”) or the theater of reference in their city. The other three are institutionally smaller and they cohabit with city theaters in their cities. These 3 theaters have been selected to explore the existing differences to the city theaters in terms of dance programming. In regard to audience capacity, six big theaters are able to program both in a big and a small hall. Two big theaters are only able to program in a big hall. While the three smaller theaters program only in a small hall. Such variate sample focused on characteristics was only possible implying a purposive sampling method.

Defining the sample size in qualitative research is complex (Bryman, 2012). It is impossible to know how many dance programmers from how many theaters should be interviewed before theoretical saturation is met (Bryman, 2012). This is due to the fact that the criteria for establishing when saturation is met is rather vague (Bryman, 2012). The main factor that has defined the sample size of this research has been time. Eleven is the number of interviews that the researcher was able to conduct within the limited time available to develop this research. The second factor was the availability of the contacted dance programmers. Three programmers argued they had no time available to contribute to this research, while other three did not give any answer. Following these considerations eleven case studies have been developed. The selected theaters are the following: Theater Rotterdam, Zuiderstrandtheater (The Hague), Theater Kikker (Utrecht), Theaters Tilburg, SPOT Groningen - Stadsschouwburg Groningen, Grand Theatre (Groningen), Chassé Theater (Breda), Stadsschouwburg Nijmegen, Theater aan de Rijn (Arnhem), Theater aan het Vrijthof (Maastricht), Parkstad Limburg Theaters (Heerlen, Kerkrade).

Name of the theater	Name of the programmer	Size of the institution	Available halls
Theater Rotterdam	Dave Schwab	Big	Big and small hall
Zuiderstrandtheater (The Hague)	Geesje Prins	Big	Big hall
Stadsschouwburg Groningen	Henk Kuiper	Big	Big and small hall
Theater aan het Vrijthof (Maastricht)	Fons Dejong	Big	Big and small hall
Parkstad Limburg Theaters (Heerlen, Kerkrade)	Janneke Schmeitz	Big	Big and small hall
Chassé Theater (Breda)	Fabian Piluka	Big	Big and small hall
Theaters Tilburg	Marjolein Fischer	Big	Big and small hall
Stadsschouwburg Nijmegen	Lieke Jordens	Big	Big hall
Theater Kikker (Utrecht)	Jolie Veerburg	Small	Small hall
Grand Theatre (Groningen)	Judith Blankenberg	Small	Small hall
Theater aan de Rijn (Arnhem)	Eve Hopkins	Small	Small hall

The best way to get in-depth understanding of the programming process developed in these theaters is to perform semi-structured interviews to the programmers responsible for programming dance performances (Qu & Dumay, 2011). With a multiple case study design, first the cases must be selected and, subsequently, units within these cases must be sampled (Bryman, 2012). In this research this has happened automatically because there was only one programmer in each theater responsible for programming dance performances. Therefore, each dance programmer of each selected theater was interviewed.

Since the aim was to explore and understand the process that programmers develop when programming dance performances, interviews needed to be sufficiently flexible to adapt to the explanation of the programmers. The same interview guide³ was used in all 11 interviews. This guide was structured in topics based on the existing literature, but semi-structured interviews allow for asking further questions that are not written in the interview guide in response to the interviewees replies (Qu & Dumay, 2011). This type of interview allows for comparison between interviews (as all

³ The interview guide can be found in Appendix A.

interviews are structured the same way), and for exploring the specificities of each theater (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

The 11 interviews were held via Skype, due to the restricted mobility caused by a health crisis occurred in Spring 2020. Interviews took place between April 20th and May 20th (April 20th, 21st, 23rd, 24th, 28th, 29th and May 1st, 4th (2), 6th and 20th). All interviews lasted 1 hour approximately. The content of the interviews is available under request.

In the Results section, interviewees are treated anonymously. Any possible compromise caused to the participating programmers wants to be explicitly avoided. The characteristics of the theater for which each programmer works are relevant for this research. However, the identity of the individual expressing the cited words is of no relevance for this research. Therefore, in the coming section, programmers will be numbered to keep their anonymity⁴. Moreover, the quotations of the interviews cited in this study have been slightly adapted with the aim of making them more understandable for the reader, as well as keeping the anonymity of the interviewee. The meaning of the interviewee has always been respected. The literality of the quotations can be found on the recorded interview transcriptions.

3.2. Data analysis

At last, thematic analysis is the method chosen to analyze the qualitative data provided by the interviews (Bryman, 2012). The qualitative data analysis program Atlas.ti was used to develop the coding process in a structured and controllable manner. The first step was to label sentences and parts of the text with codes. The used codes were based on the topics (themes) addressed in the interview guide. Other codes were also used to label parts of the text that did not seem yet linked to any of the topics. The next step was to identify links between these extra codes and the main topics, or to create new topics⁵. This analytical procedure has allowed to analyze the data by topics, which facilitates an in-depth comparison between the 11 theaters analyzed. These same topics are addressed in the results section and conclusions from those are drawn.

⁴ The link between each programmer number and their identity can be facilitated to other researchers under request with the aim of further analyzing these results.

⁵ The code book can be found in Appendix B.

3.3. Limitations

It is acknowledged that the purposive sample used, and the sample size of this research, does not allow to generalize about the population of Dutch subsidized theaters that program dance performances. It is acknowledged that 11 theaters are not the full population and that eight big theaters and three small theaters cannot represent all big or small theaters. The limited external validity of this multiple case study is therefore acknowledged. The aim of this research was to explore a new area in arts management literature. This research serves as the first academic steps to build theory on the programming process of dance performances in Dutch subsidized theaters, in terms of quality and stakeholder management. This first attempt to building theory in this area needs further research to validate the results and conclusions of this research.

4. Results

The selection process and criteria for dance programming of eleven theaters have been analyzed in this research. These theaters are spread around the Dutch territory in 10 different cities. The results are concluded from the interviews with the programmers responsible for selecting the dance performances in each theater.

4.1. Mission and Signature

Since the missions of theaters influence the programmatic choices that are made by programmers, it is necessary to acknowledge what are the missions of the analyzed theaters. The missions are extracted from the interviews. The perception about what the mission of each theater is from the programmer itself is more relevant for the research than the official missions from the theater's website or annual reports. The influence that the mission has on the program will be based on the programmer's perception, not on the official discourse of the theater.

Among the eleven theaters analyzed two main groups can be found in terms of mission. Eight of these theaters are considered city theaters; they are the referent theater in their city. The missions of this group of theaters are very similar. Their mission is to welcome all their citizens to their theater. Their strategy to achieve this is offering a very diverse program, from conventional to innovative performances. The following examples are representative of this group of theaters:

“The mission of the theater is to be [a place] where people feel at home, where they can relax, where they can meet. [...] Personally, I always say that the theater is contributing to the mental life of a city. That's the mission in mind. And so that is what we intend to do. That's why we offer a broad scale program with cabaret, opera, classical music, pop music, shows, dance, youth, all disciplines, [...] in order to reach out to as many persons as we can.”
(Programmer 9)

“We intend to bring the biggest possible audience to the best performances. We have as a mission that we have a very broad program. [...] We're not really specialists. We try to reach a very diverse group of people with a big diversity in income, social background, education. So that means that we do everything from the highest artistic quality, classical performances until the super mainstream, common, and everything in between.” (Programmer 5)

The other three theaters do not aim at offering performances for all citizens, they are specialized in innovative performances. Furthermore, there is special emphasis on emerging artists in these theaters. Their aim is also to give new makers a performance opportunity. Two programmers of these three theaters expressed it the following way:

“In [the theater] we mostly do experimental work, most of all from young makers trying to push the boundaries of the arts.” (Programmer 4)

“Our raison d'être, if you like, is very much to program experiment. To experiment, to research, to build bridges, to present the yet unknown.”
(Programmer 8)

Theater missions draw the programming signature of each theater. The type of performances that they program are in accordance with their objectives. Big theaters program a broad spectrum of dance performances, from conventional to innovative performances, because they aim to attract audiences with different preferences. While small theaters program a specific part of this spectrum, innovative performances, because their aim is giving opportunities to innovative and emerging artists. When focusing on innovative performances, small theaters may present performances that are at the extreme of the spectrum; placed further away from the most innovative performance programmed in a city theater.

This distinction in mission between big and small theaters is relevant in order to explain the programming process of Dutch subsidized theaters and will be mentioned along the results section.

4.2. The influence of the audience

Dance theater programmers, when making their programmatic choices, take into consideration whether a performance is going to attract a big number of audience members or not, or the type of audience that it will attract. Some performances attract more audiences than other. And some performances attract specific segments of the population.

Audience preferences

Several quantitative studies have previously used performance characteristics to define audience preferences in different countries. Considered characteristics are the time a performance was created, the popularity of the author, whether the author is dead or alive, the used language, the number of performers, the type of play (Entertainment, revue, musical; or 'atypical' play: circus, revue, collective creation), and whether performances have been performed in the past or are new creations (remakes; adaptations; new performances) (Abbé-Decarroux, 1994; Throsby, 1990; Urrutiaguer, 2002; Werck & Heyndels, 2007). These performance characteristics have not been specifically chosen for dance performances, and they do not seem to be accurate to predict which dance performances are more demanded by the Dutch audience. Most of them were not mentioned by the interviewed programmers. Whether the company or choreographer is known by the audience of their theater is highly considered by all interviewed programmers, which is considered by Throsby (1990) but always linked to the time period in which the performance was created. While the other scholars do not consider popularity of the author in their studies (Abbé-Decarroux, 1994; Urrutiaguer, 2002; Werck & Heyndels, 2007). The type of the performance is also considered by Dutch dance programmers, but not in the way Throsby (1990, p. 72) (Entertainment, revue, musical) and Abbé-Decarroux (1994, p. 104) ('atypical' play: circus, revue, collective creation) do. Dutch dance programmers rather consider if the dance performances are more conventional or more innovative; the latter type also defined as experimental or conceptual. The operationalization of conventionality by dance programmers is then closer to Castañer and Campos (2002) definition, considering content and form. An innovative performance is then a performance that distances itself from the current conventions in the dance field. Rather than a performance that has been recently created as opposed to a

performance that was created years or decades ago. Moreover, whether the company or choreographer are based in the Netherlands or in a foreign country is also considered by dance programmers and had not been previously addressed in the literature. Only Urrutiaguer (2002) and Werck and Heyndels (2007) had considered the language used in the performance, which could be indirectly linked with the characteristic of performances of being performed by national or international companies or choreographers.

The degree of conventionality of a performance and the origin of the company or choreographer was always linked by the interviewed dance programmers to whether a company or choreographer is known or unknown by the audience of their theater. It is coincident that big established companies, that are more known, are the ones that offer more conventional performances. However, some local makers attract relevant numbers of audience even if not being as conventional, and some international companies do not attract such big audiences even if performing conventional work. Therefore, the popularity of a given company or choreographer among the population of their city is, to the judgement of programmers, the major factor influencing demand. This research does not aim at defining which characteristics of a dance performance influence audience attendance. However, since the programmers' perception in this respect will affect their programmatic choices, defining the perception of the analyzed programmers is highly relevant for this research. Programmers 5 and 8 expressed their perception the following way:

“I think in dance it's really a lot about the name, and the branding of the company is really important. I think in dance, a lot of audience members do not necessarily realize, when they go to Scapino Ballet, if they see an Ed Wubbe performance or a young dance maker performance, they just want to go to Scapino Ballet. Because that's a name that they know and that they support.” (Programmer 5)

“Sometimes I can predict [that if] there's a certain actor in it that has quite a following in [this city], [...] or went to the [dance academy here], he or she is going to take a lot of their own community with them.” (Programmer 8)

Since popularity is perceived as the most relevant factor influencing demand, programmers 1 and 7 explicitly emphasized the importance of marketing:

“It's important that a company has a very good marketing strategy. [...] Because small dance companies, they don't have a big marketing budget, and

so for them it's very difficult to [attract] quite enough public for the big room.” (Programmer 1)

“Then on this page, we have a specific text written by myself where I recommended this performance, and [...] no one has heard about and there were about 400 people in the end. But these highlights in the brochures. We have to be very careful, because [...] it's difficult to get the trust of the audience, but it's very easy to lose them.” (Programmer 7)

“For instance, somebody like Akram Khan, [if] we put a physical poster in the city, you can see it directly, selling all the tickets.” (Programmer 1)

Considering that the main factor is whether the company or choreographer is known to the audience of their city, all programmers argue that the first time they program a company or a maker, the number of audience members that attracts is low. Their expectation is that every time this company or maker comes back to the theater, the audience will keep on increasing. The emphasis on the importance of building a sustainable relationship with the makers is a shared argument by all programmers, both big and small theaters. Two examples are given by programmers 10 and 3:

“With new things, the expectation is lower. [...] The first time they were there, all the people that were there loved it. [...] It helps if you try to build something more. Then you see if people like it, they come back, and then people come additionally.” (Programmer 10)

“You get into a relationship with a company for a longer period of time. [...] We try to make an agreement that we will book them for three or four years minimum. You need that period of time to build a relationship with the audience.” (Programmer 3)

This strategy of a sustainable programming was introduced by Kawashima (1999) regarding diverse performing arts disciplines in the UK. This research supports this argument and extends it to dance programming in the Dutch territory.

This sustainability is so important that when it is interrupted for a few seasons, audience awareness needs to be built again. Programmer 10 expressed it in the following way:

“We didn't have Conny Janssen for a few years. We used to have them all the time and then a few years not and then they came back. And you saw that the audience was gone as if they didn't know the company anymore. So we rebuilt it all over new.” (Programmer 10)

Therefore, the preferences of the audience are a relevant factor that influence the programmatic choices of dance programmers. This is shared by all interviewed programmers. Evidence can be extracted from the following paragraph:

“I intend to program them [subsidized companies] all. But it's not very easy because how much I love the work of Nicole Beutler, there is only a very small audience, in [this city], for that work.” (Programmer 9)

Audience characteristics

In terms of audience characteristics, programmers from big theaters see a distinction between the audience attending more innovative performances and the audience attending more conventional performances. The audience for conventional performances is more conservative and wants to reduce quality uncertainty to the most and attend to performances from well-known and reputational companies. While the audience that attends innovative performances is more adventurous and is continuously looking for something new. Programmer 5 explains it in the following paragraph:

“I definitely think that there's not really a lot of overlap in these groups. Because the one type of audience member just wants to be reassured, wants to know that they have made a good decision in choosing for this type of performance. Because last year they had a good experience, so they will definitely have a good experience this year. And the other audience member is just looking for excitement and is looking for a surprise and it's just more interested in the way the dance has been made, is more interested in the story of the choreographer, is just more an arts lover.” (Programmer 5)

Being aware that conventional performances attract a different audience than innovative performances do is relevant since the mission of big theaters is welcoming all the citizens of their city. Only offering both conventional and innovative performances, theaters will be able to attract a broad audience to their theater.

As perceived by the interviewed programmers of big theaters, the proportion of the audience willing to attend more conventional performances is bigger than the one attracted to innovative performances. That is shared among all eight big theaters. This perception of Dutch dance programmers is in line with the empirical evidence found in the literature in other territories (DiMaggio & Stenberg, 1985; Krebs & Pommerenhe, 1995; Werck & Heyndels, 2007). Moreover, the audience proportion for innovative performances seems to be higher for bigger cities (e.g. Rotterdam). This seems to support DiMaggio and Stenberg's (1985) findings in US cities. Dutch audiences seem to support the argument that bigger cities have higher demand for innovative performances than smaller cities do. Once again, this research does not aim to analyze the audience preferences of the audiences of the analyzed theaters.

However, these indications are taken into consideration by programmers when programming performances and making predictions on audience attendance. Programmers try to balance their programming on similar proportions to the audience that is attracted to each type of performance. Theaters in bigger cities will program a higher number of innovative performances than smaller cities.

Big theater programmers, however, argue that it is not a demand-driven process. It is important for them as a theater to supply a diverse program to their citizens, even if only a low number of audience members will attend those performances. Welcoming all different segments of the population is part of their mission. One of them expressed it the following way:

“You can definitely make a division between the more standard quality, the what you-see-is-what-you-get style of performance. If you like the performance this year, [there’s a] very big chance that you will love the performance next year, because it doesn't change that much. [...] And then we, of course, try to mix that with the more interesting, artistically interesting work. That's harder to communicate to people and that has more of a surprise element that needs an audience that's willing to pay for experiments.”
(Programmer 5)

The audience characteristics of small theaters, that focus on innovative performances and new makers, are similar to the audience attending innovative performances in big theaters (i.e. more adventurous and continuously seeking for something new). One of the analyzed small theaters is located in rather big city (Utrecht), while the other two in rather small cities (Groningen and Arnhem). Utrecht’s small theater has a bigger audience capacity than the other theaters in smaller cities, which seems to support again DiMaggio and Stenberg’s (1985) argument that smaller cities have lower demand for innovative performances. It is acknowledged that drawing such conclusions on the number of innovative performances programmed in relation to the size of the population of a city would only be possible when conducting a quantitative research on Dutch theaters, following a similar structure to DiMaggio and Stenberg’s (1985) study. For this research, it is relevant to acknowledge that dance programmers from big theaters located in bigger cities program more innovative performances than programmers from big theaters located in smaller cities.

4.3. The influence of the government

As mentioned in the introduction of this study, the production and presentation functions of the performing arts value chain are divided in the Netherlands (Langeveld, & Hoogenboom, 2012). This division is also given in the subsidizing bodies responsible for supporting each function. The production of dance performances is a responsibility of the national government, while their presentation is a responsibility of the local governments. Therefore, all Dutch theaters analyzed are financed by their respective local government. These subsidies are meant to cover the basic expenses of the infrastructure of the theater. The performance fees that are paid to performing companies, are supposed to be covered by the ticket revenue. This business model, a priori, provokes that only the performances that attract a sufficient number of audience members to cover the fee would be programmed. This is, however, not the case. The national government, responsible of supporting dance producing companies, give subsidies to presenting theaters to avoid that only popular performances are programmed in Dutch theaters. This way, the national government indirectly support producing dance companies by partly financing the performance fees that theaters pay to these companies. The import of these subsidies is to be fully spent on covering performance fees. Every time theaters present a dance performance and transfer a fee to a performing company, theaters create a deficit. This deficit is then covered by the budget received from the national government in form of a subsidy. Therefore, programmers have a budget that covers the deficit created by dance performances. As expressed by the interviewed programmers, ten out of the eleven theaters, regardless of their size, receive a programming subsidy from the national government.

This financing mechanism thus allows Dutch subsidized theaters to program lesser demanded performances (i.e. innovative performances and performances from new makers and international companies), and consequently offer a diverse program. This supports the argument of Werck *et al.* (2008) that public financing encourages diversity and innovativeness.

This subsidy is, however, not the only resource to cover the deficit created by the fees of dance performances. The only programmer that did not mention receiving a programming national subsidy argued that part of that deficit is also covered by the profits generated by other performances of other disciplines. This programmer works

for a big theater that programs diverse disciplines. Popular drama was pointed as a discipline from which the theater makes profit, and that can be used to cover the deficit generated by dance performances. Another big theater programmer argued that this same mechanism was used by them in the past. This programmer currently uses a national subsidy to cover the deficit created. Smaller theater cannot use this strategy, because their programmers argued that no profit is ever generated from the performances programmed at their theaters.

4.3.1. Conditions from the subsidizing governments

Dutch theaters receive these subsidies under certain conditions. Theater and governments come into agreements on what tasks theaters must develop. This research is focusing on the conditions that have an influence on dance programming. It must be acknowledged that local governments set conditions to their programming in its broadest sense. These conditions are not specific for dance programming. While the conditions set by the national government are specific to the dance programming. An accurate plan on the dance programming is required when applying.

In regard to big theaters, conditions from local governments are very similar from city to city. The main condition is offering a diverse programming that attracts the diverse segment of the population of a city. In terms of programming this means offering diverse disciplines and a wide spectrum within each discipline. Therefore, city theaters are asked to offer a diverse programming along the spectrum of dance performances. In order to use measurable indicators to evaluate this task, governments set a minimum number of performances that need to be presented during a season and an indication of audience attendance during a year, by number or percentage. Furthermore, theaters must be alert to their finances and respect the budget that has been agreed. Two examples of big theaters are the following:

“They have no prescription on what we should offer, but they want that we offer a broad program. And they have indications, so they want at least 250 shows a year. [...] There's an agreement on how many people you should [receive], not exactly, but so an indication.” (Programmer 9)

“They want every single citizen of [this city] to feel welcome and to have the idea that there's something there for them. So we programmed in a pretty broad way. [...] There are also very simple conditions. For instance, we need to program approximately 350 performances every year. That's just a number we have to meet. Because if you would spend all their money on only 100 performances that will be a bit strange.” (Programmer 3)

Therefore, big theaters programmers receive the task from local governments to program a minimum number of performances, make a program that attracts a diverse audience, and achieve that with a specific budget. As part of this diverse program, there is an emphasis from local governments on programming local makers.

The tasks that smaller theaters receive are very similar. However, it is acknowledged that these theaters focus on the more innovative part of the spectrum of dance performances. Nonetheless, they are asked to offer a diverse programming of innovative performances. There is high interest from local governments in the strategies that these theaters develop to attract audience. It is also acknowledged that a lower number of audience members is expected in comparison to city theaters. There is as well an emphasis on local makers and on giving opportunities to young makers. Lastly, the budget needs to be respected by small theaters as well. The following example is representative of the conditions that governments require to small theaters:

“Well, they have like a very large dossier we have to read. And they ask us to make a plan. [...] We have to say how many, how many shows, why this many shows, how many [city]-based shows, how many audience members, and for us, it's sometimes kind of low. Because we do so much experimental work, we have to have a good story of why it is low, then we say: *“well, it's because it is not like a big show, which is nationally known, it's small, we have to still work to build it up. It's experimental, it's like pushing the edges of art. So that's why it's not always full”*, that we have to explain ourselves more. [...] For this last round of plans, they did very make explicit the wish that we would be more inclusive and diverse not only on the stage, because that's quite well, but especially in the audience members that they're afraid that our audience members are too much of an inner city, intellectual, white, not male but female. That they're too much alike.” (Programmer 4)

The conditions are slightly different regarding the subsidies that theaters, both big and small, receive from the national government. These subsidies are programming subsidies, therefore a detailed plan on the programming choices is required when applying. This plan needs to be agreed by the committee responsible for allocating subsidies, and must be precisely followed by the programmers. These plans may contain innovative performances or international performances, the types of performances that receive less audience attendance. Programmer 5 expressed it in the following way:

“This is from that national government, and [they are] very keen on knowing who you are booking and what is your distinct vision about the program. [...] So they specifically want to know what you're booking and why, and which audience you think you will get.” (Programmer 5)

The condition of the number of performances programmed by a theater seems to answer to the economic objective of governments of efficiency (Throsby, 2010). Local governments require theaters to efficiently use their budget and program a minimum number of performances that justify the investment and has an impact on society. Moreover, cultural policies are concerned with three cultural objectives, excellence, innovation and access (Throsby, 2010). Excellence and innovation are required by the national government, and access especially by the local government. The main concern of the local government is giving access to performances to the different segments of the population. Whereas the national government is mostly concerned with giving an opportunity to innovative makers to present their work, as well as to give the Dutch audience an opportunity to discover international performances. Therefore, programming subsidies are meant to support the distribution of innovative and international works, and there is a committee of experts valuing the excellence of these programmatic choices.

4.3.2. Conflicts between governments' objectives

Governments are partly managing to achieve their three cultural objectives (excellence, innovation and access). Excellence is achieved by the choices of programmers as dance experts and the control of subsidizing bodies on the subsidized companies. Innovation (giving a chance to innovative performances to be presented) is only partly achieved. Only the theaters with bigger budgets can afford programming innovative performances. Access is directly affected by this restriction. If only part of the spectrum of the dance performances is offered (excluding innovative and international performances), only part of the population (the ones with conventional interests) will attend dance performances.

This situation is especially given in two big theaters analyzed, the ones that only program dance performances in a big hall, and in the small theaters. Being able to program in both a big hall and a small hall is essential to be able to offer that diverse program. Because some performances are suitable for the big hall, with a big stage, and other for the small hall, with a small stage. When the full spectrum wants to be

offered, from big conventional productions to small innovative productions, both halls are needed. The theaters that are not able to program on one type of hall or the other miss a part of the spectrum of performances. The number of innovative performances is then very restricted in theaters in which only a big hall is available to program dance performances. It was expressed by programmers 5 and 11 the following way:

“We only have a big auditorium. So if we would have also a smaller one, then we could show the more experimental work over there.” (Programmer 5)

“Yes, it does affect. [We have a] 1000 people capacity. To have a good atmosphere in your venue, you need about four or 500 people. [...] So this I think is also why in the past [this theater] didn't present choreographers like Meg Stuart or De Keersmaecker or Wandekeywus, for example, because it's quite difficult to get the 1000 spectators.” (Programmer 11)

Therefore, the mission that those theaters receive from their local governments of offering a diverse program is limited to the more conventional part of the spectrum of dance performances. There may be, however, smaller theaters placed in the same city that fulfill the mission of giving presentation space to innovative performances and new makers. The access objective of local governments would then be achieved by combining the performances that are offered in different theater venues of the city. Small theaters by themselves also do not achieve the access objective of the local government. Example of it are the three analyzed small theaters focusing on innovative performances and new makers. Assessing the achievement of the access objective should be then addressed from the broad perspective of the city.

Furthermore, as has been previously addressed in this study, artistic innovativeness has a negative impact on demand (DiMaggio & Stenberg, 1985; Krebs & Pommerenhe, 1995; Werck & Heyndels, 2007). Therefore, programmers are faced with a conflict between artistic innovation and access. Generally, dance performances, regardless of their type, do not attract big audiences. Therefore, achieving the access objective is always complex for dance programmers. Moreover, this objective of attracting audiences becomes more difficult to achieve when innovative performances are programmed.

It is then expected that there is a certain concern from dance programmers on how to achieve excellence, innovation and access at the same time. However, only a little concern from the eleven interviewed programmers was perceived to this respect.

It can be assumed that the goals are agreed with the subsidizing body, and as long as these are met, a desired balance between these three objectives is met. Certainly, these objectives are met thanks to the subsidies that are received from both local and national governments. Performances need to be artistically interesting but reaching a high number of audience members is not of big concern for programmers, as long as they do not exceed the deficit that has been agreed. An example of the little for demand is the following:

“We never really think in terms of [having] to have a sold out. That's rarely happens that I also don't think that would be our biggest concern. [...] If it's more than 80 people, or 70-80 people, that is a lot, and that will probably never change also. [...] They're very conceptual makers, and we just kind of have to accept that it is very tough to get a crowd. [...] But I still like to give them the *kleine zaal* with those 70. I mean, I do lose money but, that's also why we get money from the Gemeente and from Fonds Podiumkunsten sometimes. To also give those makers a chance.” (Programmer 2)

Therefore, it can be inferred that the programming process is a rather supply-driven process in Dutch subsidized theaters. This characteristic is emphasized in those theaters in which more innovative performances are programmed, such as small theaters.

Additionally, programmers did not seem overly concerned about predicting audiences for innovative performances. That may be explained by the fact that the audience attending innovative performances is not very keen on what performance they are going to attend, because their intention is to be surprised. An example of the interest of innovative performances audiences:

“These people are really interested, they really want to see new stuff. So that's really great because then when we show a new maker, there will always be like, at least, 60 people, it's never really a big, big question.” (Programmer 2)

However, also this segment of the audience is more likely to attend performances from makers that are known to them. Therefore, programmers try to balance makers that have previously performed in that theater (and are, therefore, known by their audience), with performances from new makers that are presented to that audience for the first time. An investment on sustainability may be implemented to increase popularity, that results in an increase of audience attendance. Programmer 2 expresses in the following paragraph:

“We can choose: “okay, this maker might not get a lot of audience at once, but maybe we can build on that in the next coming years”.” (Programmer 2)

Therefore, a strategy that programmers use to get closer to the desired objective of attracting bigger audiences while supporting artistic innovation is developing the audience for innovative performances, introduced by Boerner and Jobst (2011). This is also intended to be achieved by offering discounts, investing in marketing efforts and facilitating the attendance to innovative performances to the audience that attends conventional performances. Programmer 1 explains an example of such strategies:

“This [festival] is a week for public. We want to present different kind of performances. And what we are doing is, for instance, we have Rosas in the big room. And then I program in the small room quite a new name. And the public of the big room. They can buy ticket for 5€ to see it before [they attend the performance at] the big room. And that's a very big success. Then it's full the small room. So we tried to mix the public. That is very difficult, but we try to do that anyway.” (Programmer 1)

4.4. Programming process

4.4.1. Acknowledging the available performances

In order to know what performances they can program, programmers use different mechanisms. All of them agreed that the first action is addressing the companies or choreographers they have an ongoing relationship with. There is communication between them about the next performances that are being produced. Programmers also receive many emails from makers offering their performances. Makers may send their work on video, a text informing about their artistic work, or an invitation to their next performances. Ongoing relationships between venue programmers and companies, and invitations from those to attend performances had been mentioned by Kawashima (1999) and Friedman (2014) in other performing arts disciplines. This research supports their arguments in regard to performing arts adding the dance discipline to this list.

Nine out of the 11 programmers interviewed use another strategy to get to know which performances are available to be programmed. This strategy is scouting performances in festivals or other theater venues. Friedman (2014) had pointed at this mechanism for other performing arts disciplines. This research indicates that dance programmers use it as well. This strategy is especially useful to discover international

performances. Programmers select some venues in other countries with which they share a similar signature in terms of programming. Moreover, there are festivals in the Netherlands that focus on international performances. The programmers of those festivals invest more time and resources in discovering performances from around the world. Thus, attending those festivals is a substitute of investing time and resources in scouting abroad.

Festivals are also used to discover innovative performances and new makers. There are festivals specialized in innovative and emerging artists. The programmers of those festivals also invest resources in scouting young makers and theater programmer use the festival program to acknowledge new makers. Which festival to attend is decided based on the programmer of the festival or on the intention of seeing some performance programmers are already interested in. Programmers 11 and 9 give two examples:

“You follow interesting festivals or other foreign theaters who you think maybe could be interesting. And that's a way you can spot new choreographers.” (Programmer 11)

“Sometimes you choose festivals to scout. Like the festival [...] in Paris. [...] The programmer there [...] travels a lot. She scouts a lot and the fruit of her scouting is concentrated in their festival. So, I know if I go there, I can perhaps discover something very interesting.” (Programmer 9)

The remaining two theaters that do not use the strategy of discovering performances in festivals or other venues, are two big theaters that do not program international dance performances. Besides, one of these theaters does not program innovative performances that are not subsidized by the national government, while the other only adds some local makers to the program, together with the subsidized innovative companies or choreographers. Therefore, there is no need by these theaters to discover further makers from the ones from which they have an ongoing relationship.

Another mechanism to discover performances that has not been previously mentioned in the literature is checking what companies or choreographers are being supported by production houses or subsidizing bodies. Acknowledging choreographers supported by production houses is especially useful when programming innovative performances from young makers. All programmers, except the two theaters that

cannot program small-sized productions, are in contact with production houses, whether local or national. This mechanism is broadly used by both big and small theaters, but especially by the ones that program innovative makers. Companies supported by subsidizing bodies are always known by programmers, most of them are part of these companies they have an ongoing relationship with. However, companies or choreographers that receive subsidies for the first time receive programmers' attention as a consequence of it.

Furthermore, programmers participate of networks with other programmers, and they advise new performances to each other, as introduced by Friedman (2014). Advises are especially useful to discover performances of disciplines that are more unknown to most theater programmers, such as urban dance or flamenco. An interesting example in this respect is the group of people from a diverse background, and thus have diverse preferences, that advises the programmer of one of the small theaters analyzed:

“[I discover performances from] the Programma Raad, that I introduced about a year ago, which is the table of people who live in [the city], who work in the arts, in a broad sense of the arts. And who have either a different cultural background or a different age or different gender or different whatever than me because I thought it's very nice that I'm programming but I'm white, I'm over 40, I'm highly educated, I'm a woman, so I'm in a bubble.” (Programmer 8)

4.4.2. Quality uncertainty

Quality criteria

Quality considerations are certainly developed by interviewed dance programmers. All 11 programmers considered quality as being a requirement to be programmed at their theater.

It can be easily assumed that the high technical level of the dancers is a required element of a high-quality performance. However, the characteristic that was mostly emphasized by programmers when judging quality is the capacity of the performance to communicate with the audience, also phrased as the capacity to move the viewers. Therefore, the latter seems more relevant than the former. In the field of professional dance, dancers' quality is required and may be assumed. What seems to make the difference, regarding the quality of a performance, is its capacity to

communicate with the public. Two examples of how important this element is for the interviewed dance programmers are the following:

“I take into consideration the ability to tell a story, in whatever way. It can be very abstract. It doesn't necessarily need to be a narrative story it can also be an abstract or more an emotional story, or whatever, but that I understand what the artist is talking about. And they understand why they want to present this particular work. I think that's a very important element for me.”
(Programmer 6)

“[In that performance] the technical quality of the dancers was okay. But the, the performance itself was quite clinical, [...] there was not much emotion in it. [...] It always has to do something for the mind and something for the heart. For that specific project [that's] the reason [why] I didn't select it.”
(Programmer 7)

To a lesser extent, other elements that are considered indicators of quality for some programmers are: an interesting subject; the coherence between the content of the performance and its subject; the presence of live music; charismatic performers; and the uniqueness of the artistic proposal. These are elements that were only mentioned by one or two programmers. Any generalization would be too ambitious.

The aforementioned indicators are characteristics of a performance that define its quality. Beyond the quality consideration, whether the performance attracts an audience and the kind of audience it attracts are highly considered by dance programmers. It is highly valued by programmers that a performance attracts a certain segment of the population of their city. Two examples of these considerations are expressed by programmers 5 and 11:

“Each year I work in this business, I find it harder and harder to define the term quality. Because first I thought: “*oh, it has to do with the technique of the dancers and the creativity of the choreographer*”. [...] And the further I come, [...] I think that it is a combination of just things that you can measure, like the technique of a performer, the creativity in a choreographic concept. But then there's also a quality that has very little to do with what's shown on stage and it's the quality of what kind of people do you reach with this type of performance. And the further I get, the more I'm interested in which people are interested in this type of work, and I'm less and less interested in how well exercised this dance step is.” (Programmer 5)

“We like to present choreographers that combine two worlds together. So for example, [...] [there is] a Chinese choreographer [...] [that] in her performances you see the West modern dance, but also from China, that are traditional martial arts, and she combines that in an eclectic way. And [...] it's a high-level quality. It attracts people from [the city] with a Chinese background. [But] it

also attracts people who love to see dance. So it combines two worlds.”
(Programmer 11)

These considerations could be labeled as value considerations. Rather than the artistic quality of the performance, what is being assessed in these cases is the contribution that these performances make to the theater’s mission. The missions of big theaters are attracting a diverse audience, and their strategy to achieve that is offering a diverse program. Therefore, highly relevant considerations that will be made by dance programmers of big theaters is whether they attract audience interest, and what audience it attracts. Directly connected with these considerations, programmers avoid selecting performances that are too similar to other performances programmed for that week, month or season. Whether a performance adds to the variety of their programming will then be a determinant consideration.

Therefore, the previously mentioned distinction between innovative and conventional performances is also useful for the programming process. Big theaters aim at offering a diverse program with both conventional and innovative performances; if programmers would not make this distinction, the variety in the program could not be defined. In addition, performances from foreign companies also contribute to the program diversity of big theaters. Small theaters, that aim at only supplying innovative performances, also need to make this distinction to define their program’s signature. An example of how important the degree of innovativeness by small theaters is, even beyond quality considerations, is the following paragraph:

“It has a lot to do with the vibe or the tone, or the type of work. Sometimes I think the performance in itself isn't that great. But what they're trying to do is very interesting and experimental. So it's not [about if] I think it is good or I think it's not good.” (Programmer 4)

Moreover, also in line with each theater objectives, programmers feel a responsibility to program local makers. This is clearly expressed by a small theater programmer:

“When you [maker] are based [here] in [this city], I think as a programmer, I have to see you. So they [local makers] get a little bit of a priority above others. Because if [we] don't show them or book them, how will someone in [another city] do, so I have like a responsibility to really look at my own local makers.” (Programmer 4)

Once again, beyond quality considerations, programmers make a choice based on the value that decision will make in their city's dance scene.

Another element broadly mentioned by the interviewed programmers is the issue of sustainability. Programmers program companies or choreographers rather than single performances. This means that they start a relationship with the makers that is to be sustained in time. Therefore, an element that is taken into consideration is whether they see the possibility to start a long-lasting relationship or not. This consideration is expressed by programmer 5:

"I know which dance makers I like and would be suitable for making such a long line, would be able to make big performances every year. So we could work on an audience instead of: *"We'll do this one year, and then you'll be off to festivals or smaller theaters"*." (Programmer 5).

Therefore, very often the fact that a company or choreographer is programmed one season in a theater means that that same maker will be programmed the next season. However, programmers may not be able to keep a sustainable relationship with all the companies or choreographers that they program. Sometimes, another objective that theaters aim to meet is offering a program that varies from season to season. Nonetheless, such case was only mentioned by programmer 2:

"Sometimes, like I may be pretty enthusiastic to reprogram a maker. But we have those 15 performances in the *kleine zaal*. And our audience [...] really loves new stuff. So then I have to make sure that I, at least, have some new makers, and that might be a reason why I can't program a maker that's has its second performance or third performance. That's really difficult sometimes because I would love to invite everyone back, but I just don't really have the audience [...] to show that much dance performances." (Programmer 2)

Since quality judgements are relevant but not crucial, it can be concluded that the criteria determining whether a performance is selected or not by Dutch subsidized theater programmers is the contribution of this performance to the theater's mission.

Lastly, apart from quality and value considerations, programmers also make decisions based on practical considerations. The 3 interviewed small theater programmers mentioned whether the performance size (i.e. size of the scenography or number of performers) is suitable to the size of the theater hall.

Quality assessment and Signals of quality

The quality (or value) of a performance is judged by the programmer of each theater. Programmers are performing arts experts that are able to make quality judgements on performances thanks to their experience in the performing arts field.

All programmers agreed that the best way to assess whether the performance meets the quality standards and the signature of the theater is to see the performance live. Other times, this assessment is also done by watching the performance in video format. However, that is not always possible. Since theaters make their programming around one year and a half in advance, many of the performances that they select are not created yet. In that case, the quality of the performance that they program cannot be assessed by seeing it. Therefore, programmers base their decisions on the previous work of that company or maker. Either they have seen them live or they have seen videos from them. The programmer of a big theater explains it this way:

“When you program Dutch companies you can never see the performance before, so you have to book it, but the creation will be later. So you can only book it with your track records in your mind. If you have trust or confidence that it will be a good program” (Programmer 11)

Moreover, three of the eleven interviewed programmers find it also helpful to have a conversation with the creator on how the performance is going to be.

Whether programmers are able to see the performance or not, different signals of quality can be found in the programming process of dance performances. Throsby (2010) argued that subsidizing bodies act as valorizing institutions. This argument is highly supported by this research. The quality of all subsidized companies or choreographers is assumed by all theater programmers. It is assumed because there is a national committee of dance experts that certify the quality of these performances. Programmer 9 expressed it in the following way:

“For the big four [dance companies] there is no question about standard of quality, you have to trust that it will be quality. And it's the same for the shows of these Fonds Podiumkunsten [national subsidizing body] supported companies.” (Programmer 9)

All eight big theaters analyzed program the 4 big Dutch dance companies (Het Nationale Ballet, Nederlands Dans Theater (NDT), Introdans and Scapino Ballet Rotterdam). These companies are also known as the BIS companies, because they are financed by the “basic infrastructure” of the national government. When programming

performances from these companies, programmers are never able to see the performance in advance. Sometimes, they may not have even seen any previous work from the choreographer that the company has commissioned that production to. However, programmers program them in a sustained manner. On one side, no interviewed programmer doubts of the high artistic quality of the productions of these companies, nor of their capacity to attract large audiences to their theaters. On the other, they feel the responsibility to program subsidized companies; and some programmers accept that they are directly or indirectly required by the government to program them. For one reason or the other there is never a discussion on Dutch city theaters whether to program this 4 big companies or not. Notwithstanding, these companies create and tour around 2 to 4 productions every season, and theaters do not program all performances of all these companies. Therefore, there exists a discussion of which productions will be programmed. Some theaters express bigger interest for some companies than for others. Het Nationale Ballet is a classical dance company, while the other three are modern dance companies. However, these last 3 are differently placed in the spectrum of contemporary dance, from more conventional to more innovative. This is the reason why some theaters are keener to program more productions of one or another; based on their mission and signature.

There is another group of companies that are also subsidized by the national government (from which Conny Janssen Danst and Club Guy&Roni are good examples), that are also usually programmed by the big theaters analyzed. Programmers also feel the responsibility to program these companies, and their quality or their capacity to attract audiences is not questioned either. These companies also attract a relevant number of audience members, even if not as high as the BIS companies. Theaters feel freer to program them or not in comparison to the BIS companies, but they are usually programmed.

There is still another group of companies that is also subsidized by the national government, but that attract less audience due to their high degree of innovativeness (e.g. WArD/waRD Ann van den Broek and nb (NicoleBeutler)). The quality of those is again not questioned, but their capacity to attract audiences is lower. This last element makes some theaters, that program a lower number of innovative performances, not

to program all of them every year. They may program some of them in alternate seasons. Programmer 9 explains it in a clear way:

“I intend to program them all. But it's not very easy because how much I love the work of Nicole Beutler, there is only a very small audience, in [this city], for that work. Which is the same for Ann van den Broek, for example. So I guess that one year I invite Ann van den Broek, and the other year I invite Nicole Beutler.” (Programmer 9)

Smaller theaters sometimes also program performances from this last group of nationally subsidized companies that are more innovative.

Six of the eight big theaters analyzed also program international performances. In order to assess the quality of these performances, the programmers from these six theaters use the same mechanisms as to acknowledge them. They receive advice from other programmers or dance experts and attend to international festivals and foreign theaters. When attending performances in those festivals, programmers can make their own quality judgements and compare them to the received advice. Programmer 9 expressed it the following way:

“You go to a festival like [the one] in Bruggines, every August. And Les Bruggines is a dance house in Brussels. And Patrick Bonté, who is the artistic director, has, as we say in Holland, a nose for talent. So I just discovered many shows there.” (Programmer 9)

Therefore, Friedman's (2014) arguments about the role of festivals in other performing arts disciplines can be extrapolated to the dance scene. Moreover, Urrutiaguer (2002) argued that being programmed in certain venues can be a signal of quality, which is also supported by this research. The same mechanisms are used to assess the quality of innovative performances and emerging artists, both in bigger and smaller theaters. Programmers receive advice and attend festivals that focus on innovative performances and new makers. This extended mechanism among programmers that program innovative performances is explained by programmer 2:

“I also talk a lot to programmers in the professional field, there's actually a lot of chains. And that's really good of course, because when I'm enthusiastic about a maker I talk to [other theaters], and sometimes like it creates some kind of network, for the [maker]. And also, [...] I get like some other professional or presenter that might hit me up: *“it's a cool artist, you should see this performance”*.” (Programmer 2)

Therefore, there is a big emphasis from dance programmers on the relevance of advice from peers, as argued by Friedman (2014). Moreover, for emerging makers,

6 programmers expressed rely on the advises of the production houses that support those makers. Production houses then act as valorizing institutions (Klamer, 2004), as expected in the theoretical framework. The programmer of a small theater explains it in the following way:

“What I always look at is where an artist comes from. In the sense that I am curious where, if it's really an emerging artist, are they attached to, for example, [production houses like] Dansateliers or Korzo. And then, of course, some of these production houses I trust more than others, because I know that Kristin, for example, [the artistic director of] Dansateliers, I really, really appreciate [her work], I think she does a great work and most of the choreographers who work there, I really enjoy. So definitely if an artist is working with Dansateliers, I will have a closer look.” (Programmer 6)

Only two programmers out of 11 mentioned that they sometimes use reviews to get informed about the quality of a performance. It thus can be stated that reviews are not a relevant signal of quality for dance programmers, as opposed to other performing arts sectors (Bhansing *et al.*, 2017; Friedman, 2014).

From the perspective of a theater, when a company or a choreographer has never been previously programmed by the theater, the quality assessment process takes some time until the programmer decides to program that choreographer or company. There is a process of getting to know the work of the choreographer or company before the programmer gives them the first opportunity in their venue. This process of building a relationship between the maker and the theater is broadly extended among all theaters programming innovative makers. This relationship building is explained by programmers 2 and 6:

“Most of the contacts they kind of take some time, because like somebody emailed in spring, and then we talk further a year later, and then maybe I see some space in the program for the year after. And [...] I think that's actually the best way also to kind of see if it fits.” (Programmer 2)

“If it's an artist that I know already and he presents an artwork for next season, then it's very easy: “*yes, I want to present it*”, and then it's very quick. But in cases of artists that I don't know yet, it's never really quick.” (Programmer 6)

4.4.3. Demand uncertainty

Mechanisms to predict audience attendance

As has been previously addressed, Dutch dance programmers argue that the most influencing factor determining audience attendance is whether a company or

choreographer is known or unknown. Therefore, all interviewed programmers, both in big and small theaters, based their predictions of audience attendance on the whether the company or choreographer is known or unknown to the audience of their city.

The main mechanism that programmers use to predict how many audience members are expected for a given performances is checking the previous attendance of that dance company in their theater. The differences in marketing efforts and ticket price in comparison to previous experiences is also added to this prediction. This strategy is shared by all 11 interviewed programmers. A clear example of this mechanism is described by programmer 10:

“I look back in history and experience. What have we done last year? And you also have to anticipate if you're going to do extra marketing efforts and if you give a discount. We have to take that into consideration already before you start the year. And hopefully you get it right.” (Programmer 10)

However, there are some companies or choreographers that have not been previously programmed in their theater. In those cases, programmers base their predictions on their own marketing efforts and the ones of the dance company, as well as on their knowledge of the preferences of their audience. An example of the audience attendance prediction based on audience preferences is the following:

“We're very lucky to have a subscription on our small hall. So these people are really interested, they really want to see new stuff. So that's really great because then when we show a new maker, there will always be like, at least, 60 people, it's never really a big, big question.” (Programmer 2)

Boerner and Jobst (2011) and Kawashima (1999) argued that programmers adjust the time period in which performances are scheduled to the leisure-time preferences of the citizens. Dutch subsidized theater programmers can hardly control when to schedule a performance during the season. Most dance performances have a limited touring period. Producing companies inform about their touring period and dance programmers program those performances in those periods. This is the case for all eight big theaters analyzed. The three smaller theaters argued that some small productions have longer periods of touring and a bigger choice can be made. One small theater programmer also argued that she does not program any performances in certain periods of the year, because the competition with other cultural activities in the city is too high to achieve sufficient audience attendance levels. However, this

research can hardly support Boerner and Jobst's (2011) and Kawashima's (1999) arguments, because little choice is on the hand of theater programmers.

Nonetheless, even if they have little range of choice, all interviewed programmers, from both big and small theaters, are alert not to program many dance performances in a short period of time, and intend to spread those performances along the season. This research, again, introduces a different consideration that had not been previously mentioned in the literature.

Choice of hall

Big theaters usually have two halls to program dance performances. These halls differ in size, one has a bigger audience capacity and the other a smaller one. Big halls can receive between 650 and 1000 people, while small halls have an audience capacity of 150 to 170, some are smaller and can only receive 100 people. There is a tendency that the bigger the city, the bigger the audience capacity of both big and small halls. Small theaters have only a small hall to host performances.

Bhansing *et al.* (2017) argued that programmers decide in which of the halls a performance is going to be presented, based on the expected audience attendance to those performances. This argument is supported by this research. The 6 dance programmers interviewed that are able to make a choice between two halls, partly chose in which hall each performance is going to be placed based on the audience attendance expectations. However, this is not the only element programmers take into consideration. These same six programmers argue that the size of the production is determining the hall choice as well. Smaller halls are not only smaller in audience capacity, they are also smaller in stage measures. Therefore, programmers have actually little choice on the hall a performance will be presented. The company or choreographer is the one deciding in the creation phase of the dance production, if it will be performed in a smaller or bigger hall. Programmers 9 and 2 explain it in the following way:

“The production scale is one of the elements of course.” (Programmer 9)

“That's actually not that difficult because the stages are so different. One is 190, the other is 650. [...] And yeah, the decision kind of it's been made by itself.” (Programmer 2)

Choreographers usually start producing performances for smaller stages. Sometimes makers decide to develop their career and create big-hall performances. Programmers argue that making this step is of high difficulty, because a choreographer taking this step need to be supported by a larger audience. Therefore, the choice of programming a maker that has done this step is considered risky by programmers. However, some programmers take this risk because part of their mission is supporting the development of emerging makers. This process is described by programmer 1:

“So they [makers] start in the [very small hall we have] upstairs. And then if they're big enough, they go to [the small hall]. And if the [small hall] is too small for them, then they can do the last step to the big room. We build it up together with the companies. [...] The most difficult thing is to make the step from the small room to the big room. Because small dance companies, they don't have a big marketing budget, and so for them it's very difficult to [attract] quite enough public for the big room.” (Programmer 1)

Within this spatial consideration, artistic choices are relevant as well. The size of the scenography and the number of performers may be suitable for a small hall, but the maker may take the artistic choice of having empty space on stage. Whether the choreography requires big distances between performers, or the makers wants the audience to feel far from the performers. In any of those cases, makers will argue that their performances need to be programmed in bigger halls. An example of such artistic choice is described by programmer 9:

“There was a company [that] wanted to present a show on the big stage, [and] there was only one dancer. And this dancer was on a metal platform of one by one meter and hardly moved. So it was a very small show, production wise. [...] And why did they need the big stage? Because there was a total loneliness of this person. And they needed the distance from the stage to the audience. So could be a reason to present a show on a big stage.” (Programmer 9)

Therefore, programmers make their hall choices based on the stage characteristics of the performances, whether it is a practical or artistic choice; and on the expected audience attendance.

Therefore, as argued by Bhansing *et al.* (2017), programmers make their hall choices based on the expected audience attendance. However, this research has introduced to the literature new considerations when choosing the appropriate hall. The stage characteristics of the performances, whether it is a practical or artistic choice, are also relevant when making hall choices for dance performances.

Choice of number of shows

Bhansing *et al.* (2017) argued that also the expected audience attendance is the factor that determines the number of shows of a given production that are going to take place in the theater. Most commonly, dance performances are only programmed once in each theater, since the attendance for dance performances tends to be low. However, in some cases, a performance is programmed few days in a row. This research supports Bhansing *et al.* (2017) partly. Four out of the eight big theaters analyzed have agreements with certain companies to program them more than one evening. These are usually their local companies and the BIS companies. The main reason is the capacity of these companies to attract bigger audiences, either selling out all the tickets every evening they are programmed or selling a sufficient number of them, based on each programmers' standards. However, one interviewed programmer introduced two other reasons. When programming international companies, theaters cover the travel and accommodation expenses of these companies, and these are usually higher than the performance fee. Therefore, given the high investment on inviting foreign companies, programmers may consider that it is worth it giving the change to bigger audiences to attend the performance. Offering more than one day, there is a bigger chance that the performance time fits the schedule of a higher number of citizens. The second, and most interesting reason, is the signal that is sent to the audience when the same performance is programmed several days in a row. Theaters can emphasize the relevance of the company or performance by giving extra weight on their programming. These considerations were expressed by programmer 11 in the following way:

“Sometimes with international programs, you do more days because the travel costs and the hotel costs, you have to pay them anyway. You see that most of the time the companies [fees] are not that high. So sometimes it's better to present it twice. And the last consideration is also, [what] you say about your signature, you show that we think this is important. But you see that in the Netherlands you see many one-night stands. Many, many one-night stands. [...] I think also [in terms of] your marketing efforts, you can better do your marketing efforts for one performance, than for three one-night stands. [...] Also in the consideration of potential spectators. Sometimes it's just an easy decision: oh, tonight, I can't go to the theater because it's my sport club. But I can go tomorrow evening” (Programmer 11)

There are some benefits from using this strategy. However, it would also reduce the number of different performances, having a direct effect on the diversity of the program. It is to be recalled that the main mission of big theaters is to offer a diverse program that welcome different segments of their city population.

Therefore, there are different reasons why a programmer schedules one performance few days in a row. The expected audience attendance is only one of them, as argued by Bhansing *et al.* (2017). Taking advantage of a situation or increasing attention to that performance could be other reasons, that are introduced to the literature by this researched.

4.5. Budgetary constraints

As it has been previously mentioned, the business model of the eleven analyzed theaters consists on covering the performance fees with the ticket revenue. Since dance performances hardly get to a breakeven situation, Dutch theaters receive programming subsidies aimed at covering the deficit that is generated. Nevertheless, it is to be acknowledged that some performances attract higher numbers of audience members than other, thus some performances generate a bigger deficit than others. Therefore, the budget that programmers can manage determines the number and the type of performances that can be programmed. The bigger the budget is, the bigger the number of performances, but specially the bigger the number of innovative performances and international performances.

International performances are more costly than national performances, because the travelling and accommodation costs are covered by the theater. Moreover, international companies are less known by the audience, therefore, audiences are not big and they create a bigger deficit. Programmers may choose to start a sustainable relationship with some foreign companies, so that the audience for those companies can gradually increase. This strategy is implemented only by the theaters that can afford the strategy of investing in a number of international companies for which they will attempt to build an audience for. In order to achieve that, the same foreign company needs to be programmed few seasons consecutively. This way, the audience is expected to increase season per season, and the deficit for that performance is expected to decrease season per season. Programming different

international companies every year does not allow building an audience that increases the ticket revenue year after year. This argument was expressed by all eight big theaters, even if only five of these theaters program some international performances, due to their budget size. One programmer of a city theater that does not program international performances explain why in the following paragraph:

“We do not have a really big history in doing international performances. Because we see that it's really, really expensive, and that the audience doesn't necessarily recognize that this is really special that these Chinese dancers are visiting. I think, partly because the dance world is international on its own even if you booked a Dutch company. So for us international programming isn't really an option and it's a budget question. [...] It's only good to start with international programming if you have the budget to make at least in a five-year plan. And then with the same company on repeat, but that's really difficult. (Programmer 5)

The eight big city theater interviewed programmers also use a strategy based on sustainability for innovative and new makers to increase audience attendance. Again, this strategy is restricted by the available budget. This situation is described by programmer 2:

“We can choose: “okay, this maker might not get a lot of audience at once, but maybe we can build on that in the next coming years”. But we can maybe do that for two dance makers maybe, each two years. Because unfortunately we don't have the ability to do that for a whole lot.” (Programmer 2)

This programming system influenced by the audience attendance and budget restrictions is mirrored by the programming priorities of Dutch big theaters. The eight programmers from Dutch big theaters argue that the program is build following a priority order. Programmers always program the BIS companies, even if they choose which of their productions will be programmed. The next step is programming the first group of Dutch subsidized companies that are still rather conventional. Further, programmers may have agreements with some local makers to program them, regardless of their degree of innovativeness. At a later stage, programmers select performances that are more innovative or that are performed by foreign companies, depending on the signature of the theater. Following that order, the budget of some big theaters will allow them to program only the subsidized performances and the local makers. Therefore, only the city theaters with a bigger budget will get to program performances with a high degree of innovativeness or from foreign companies.

The three analyzed small theaters do not follow this priority order because they do not program conventional performances and specifically focus on innovative performances and new makers, and sometimes program innovative performances. However, the budget size has the same effect on them. Their budget restricts the number of performances program, as well as their riskier choices.

Therefore, this research supports the arguments of Werck *et al.* (2008) on Flemish producing and presenting theaters, even if adapted to Dutch presenting theaters. Werck *et al.* (2008) argued that bigger budgets allowed for a bigger number of performances produced and more risky choices taken in those productions (i.e. more innovative performances). The same effect in all eleven Dutch presenting theaters analyzed has been found regarding budget size. These budget restrictions are clear determinants of the programmatic choices of Dutch subsidized theaters. Budget availability clearly conditions the ability to program a higher number of innovative performances or any innovative performance at all. There is a high dependency on the audience preferences, even if it is already reduced by those budgets. Subsidies attempt to turn a demand-driven process into a supply-driven process, and certainly it does, but to a limited extent. The necessity to program performances that attract a sufficient number of audience members that create an affordable deficit makes programmatic choices highly dependent on demand fluctuations.

It can be argued that the programming process is not a demand-driven process because theaters fully financed privately would not be able to program most (virtually all) of the dance performances that are currently being programmed. Only very few dance companies would be able to perform and receive their full performance fee. However, the current system is still highly reliable on the audience preferences. Only bigger budgets transferred from the governments to the theaters would allow programmers to make freer choices, especially regarding the number of low-demanded performances (i.e. innovative and international performances).

4.6. [Discussion on the strategies to manage stakeholder's interests](#)

This research took as inspiration the study by Boerner and Jobst (2011) on the stakeholder management tensions generated in German subsidized producing and

presenting theaters. Existing tensions between artistic excellence, entertainment and economic efficiency are argued in their research.

As suggested by Boerner and Jobst (2011), there is an existing tension in (producing and presenting) theaters between artistic excellence and entertainment. This tension is appropriate when choosing what to produce, thinking of the necessary ticket revenue to cover the cost of the production. Since Dutch theaters are not producing theaters, this tension is not of relevance for them. Interpreted for presenting theaters, this tension occurs when choosing a performance over the other because it attracts bigger audiences, even if the latter is of higher artistic excellence than the former. This situation would be given when programmers are willing to achieve a certain degree of capacity utilization. The eleven interviewed programmers are not concern with this tension as the dance companies that attract a bigger number of audience members are the subsidized companies from which quality is given and controlled by the subsidizing body.

Moreover, Boerner and Jobst (2011) argued that there is a tension in (producing and presenting) theaters between entertainment and economic efficiency. This tension is again appropriate when making production choices, since popular performers are usually more costly (Boerner & Jobst, 2011). For Dutch presenting theaters this tension is not existing, entertainment and economic efficiency go rather in parallel directions. The bigger the audience attracted, the lower the deficit generated.

At last, Boerner and Jobst (2011) present a tension between artistic excellence and economic efficiency. For producing and presenting theaters, this tension is explained by the fact that respected stage directors are usually more costly (Boerner & Jobst, 2011). Even though they also attract bigger audiences (Boerner & Jobst, 2011). Adapted to Dutch presenting theaters, this tension is given by the low capacity of all dance performances to attract sufficient audience members to cover the cost of their fee. However, this tension is intensified when riskier choices are taken, i.e. programming innovative and international performances. The distinction between risky choices and conventional choices is due to the different capacity of innovative and international performances in comparison to conventional performances to attract audience members and cover the cost of their fees. Therefore, when programming

innovative and international performances, programmers assume a greater deficit generated by a rather low box office income. Programmers must consider that deficits generated by dance performances can only be assumed to the limit of the available budget.

Therefore, Boerner and Jobst's (2011) model of tensions between stakeholder goals is rather not appropriate to define the existing tensions in Dutch subsidized presenting theaters. A tension between risky choices (i.e. innovative and international performances), conventional choices (i.e. conventional performances) and economic efficiency (i.e. budgetary constraints) is suggested by this research to be a more accurate model to define the existing tensions in Dutch subsidized presenting theaters. In this model, conventional choices are the interest of the audience, while risky choices and economic efficiency are the interests of the government. In relation to Boerner and Jobst's (2011) model, conventional choices substitute *entertainment*, while risky choices substitute *artistic excellence*.

In Boerner and Jobst's (2011) model, *artistic excellence* is connected to highbrow performances, and *entertainment* to lowbrow performances. This distinction is not appropriate for dance performances, because all dance performances presented in Dutch subsidized theaters are considered to be highbrow. Therefore, a distinction between conventional choices and risky choices is more appropriate when classifying dance performances.

The major factor that influences audience attendance, as perceived by the interviewed programmers, is the popularity of a company or choreographer among the audience of their respective theaters. From the perspective of the audience, quality uncertainty is low when attending known companies or choreographers, and quality uncertainty is high when attending unknown companies or choreographers. Programmers also perceived that popularity is rather connected to conventional performances than to innovative and international performances. For this reason, conventional choices are linked to conventional performances, while risky choices to innovative and international performances. Nonetheless, it is suggested that, when using this model, researchers take into consideration that there may be exceptions; i.e. innovative performances (in content and form, as defined by Castañer & Campos (2002)) or international performances that are known by the audience, or conventional

performances that are unknown by the audience. Since the knowledge about a given company or choreographer, and thus the level of uncertainty, differs among the respective audiences of each theater, the popularity of a company or choreographer must be defined taking the regular audience of a given theater as the referent.

Boerner and Jobst (2011), besides suggesting a model of stakeholders' goals' tensions, also suggested strategies to manage these tensions. One of the strategies introduced by Boerner and Jobst (2011) is *setting priorities*. This strategy consists on satisfying the interests of the stakeholder that the theater is more dependent on. Dutch subsidized theaters are totally dependent on governments to be able to program virtually any dance performance. Theaters are only able to cover the performance fees with the budget received by governmental subsidies. All eleven interviewed theaters were highly concerned with developing the mission they had agreed on when receiving subsidies. These missions aim at achieving the economic (i.e. efficiency) and cultural objectives (i.e. excellence, innovation and access) of governments (Throsby, 2010). The audience interest of attending conventional performances is embodied in the government interest as government require to offer a diverse program in order to welcome all the different segments of the population. However, governments interest on innovation is not embodied on the audience interest. This provokes a tension between risky choices and economic efficiency. In order to increase audience interest for innovative as well as international performances, and reduce this existing tension, Boerner and Jobst (2011) suggested the strategy of *developing the audience*. It has been previously mentioned that the regular booking of a company or choreographer and extra marketing efforts are strategies that are being broadly developed by all analyzed theaters to encourage audience attendance to those performances.

The strategies suggested by Boerner and Jobst (2011) to manage the existing tensions are appropriate for Dutch presenting theaters and are currently being developed. Dutch subsidized theaters prioritize the interest of the government because they are financially dependent on them and the audience interest is embodied. Moreover, presenting theaters attempt to reduce the deficit generated by innovative and international performances by developing strategies to increase audience attendance to these performances.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this research was to explore the process of Dutch subsidized theater programmers when programming dance performances in terms of quality and stakeholder management.

It has been evidenced that artistic quality is not the only criteria determining programmatic choices in Dutch subsidized theaters. Dance programmers also base their choices on the ability of a performance to contribute to the mission of each theater. Big theaters value attracting a diverse audience and, therefore, program a wide range of performances; from conventional to slightly innovative. While small theaters value innovativeness and newness and, therefore, program highly innovative performances and give opportunities to emerging makers.

Programmatic differences among the theaters of these two groups are explained by budget restrictions and audience preferences. Theaters with bigger budgets program a higher number of performances. Moreover, bigger budgets allow theaters to program a higher number of performances that attract smaller audiences, i.e. innovative and international performances. Furthermore, the location of the theater also seems to influence the programming of these risky choices. Bigger cities seem to have more diverse audiences and can afford programming innovative and international performances. However, in order to clarify if programmatic choices in Dutch theaters are influenced by their location further research focusing on this factor needs to be conducted.

There is a gap in the literature regarding the mechanisms used by dance programmers to reduce quality uncertainty. This research contributes to this literature by identifying the mechanisms used by dance programmers in Dutch subsidized theaters. The most relevant mechanism is the role of subsidizing bodies acting as valorizing institutions. The quality of subsidized companies is not questioned. Moreover, production houses also act as valorizing institutions for the innovative performances they produce. Another frequently used mechanism is receiving advice from trusted peers. At last, attending festivals that program either innovative or international performances is a recurrent mechanism that dance programmers use to reduce quality uncertainty.

The importance of advices may indicate that quality standards are created commonly by dance experts. Since quality in dance performances is a subjective judgement (especially whether a performance touches people or not), it is the aggregation of expert opinions what generates a consensus upon the quality of a given performance. The relevance of subsidizing bodies and production houses as signals of quality would then also indicate that these institutions play a relevant role in generating expert opinion. It is suggested that future research on how programmers value the quality of dance performances further explores the role of expert opinion. The introduction of the psychological and sociological perspectives in this exploration may allow a better understanding of this process.

The mechanisms to reduce quality uncertainty are similar between big and small theaters. However, due to the nature of their programmatic choices, theaters use certain mechanisms more than others. Theaters programming conventional performances will rely more on the valorizing role of subsidizing bodies, theaters programming international performances will rely more on attending festivals, and theaters programming innovative performances will rely more on attending festivals and the valorizing role of production houses.

Moreover, this study has exposed the mechanisms that Dutch dance programmers use to reduce incomplete information on demand uncertainty. Predictions of audience attendance are mainly developed on previous experiences. Conventional performances are expected to attract bigger audiences, while innovative performances smaller audiences. However, whether the company or choreographer is known or unknown by the local audience is the factor that influences the prediction of audience attendance the most. Therefore, the most used mechanism to reduce demand uncertainty is maintaining long-term relationships with companies or choreographers. Continuity in programming allows the audience to get to know the programmed companies and choreographers and, thus, increase demand over the seasons. Differences in the mechanisms to reduce demand uncertainty have not been found between big and small theaters.

Boerner and Jobst's (2011) study on stakeholder management in German producing and presenting theaters was useful to structure the research. However, their model of stakeholders' goals' tensions is rather not appropriate to define the

existing tensions in Dutch subsidized presenting theaters. This research suggests using a model based on risky choices (i.e. innovative and international performances), conventional choices (i.e. conventional performances) and economic efficiency when analyzing Dutch subsidized presenting theaters' stakeholders' goals' tensions.

These conclusions have been drawn from the analysis of eleven Dutch subsidized theaters. However, the limitations of a multiple case study are acknowledged and further research on the programming process of Dutch subsidized theaters is required to build reliable theory.

From the eleven analyzed theaters 5 different types of theaters have been noticed: (1) big theaters that program conventional, international and innovative performances; (2) big theaters that program conventional and international performances; (3) big theaters that program conventional and innovative performances; (4) big theaters that program conventional performances; and (5) small theaters that program innovative performances. When conducting further research, it is suggested that researchers take these programming differences into consideration. Moreover, this research has only analyzed 3 small theaters. Programming differences within the group of small theaters may be found when a broader selection of small theaters is made. Therefore, further research on a broad selection of small theaters is highly recommended.

At last, even if this research has given a better understanding of the supply of dance performances in the Netherlands, it has been focused on the presenting side of the performing arts value chain. It is suggested that further research on the supply of dance performances combines the analysis of programmatic choices of presenting theaters with the analysis of programmatic choices of producing companies. Special emphasis on the BIS companies is recommended, since they are often blindly programmed by big theaters.

6. References

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