

When speculating on how theatre functions in a society, the most obvious questions are how many people make use of the theatre that is on offer and, subsequently, which parts of the population make use of what types of theatrical events. In this article, both questions are answered for the cities of Debrecen in Hungary, Groningen in the Netherlands, Tyneside in the United Kingdom and Tartu in Estonia. After explaining the research design within the *STEP City Study* and some methodological difficulties, we attempt to present a precise picture of the different audiences, their preferences and frequencies of theatre visits. Based on the data collected in these four cities, comparative conclusions may be drawn about the parts of the population which make use of the theatre supply in general and in more detail. One remarkable outcome is that in Groningen, 8.4% of the city population makes use of the professional theatre supply for adults, whereas in Tartu, this percentage is 20.7%.

Keywords

theatre audience, international comparative theatre survey, Debrecen, Groningen, Tartu, Tyneside, STEP

Spectators, Who are They?

A demographic analysis of theatre audiences in four European cities

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Research design and methodological justification

This part of the *STEP City Study* has been executed in the long tradition of audience research (Baumol & Bowen, “The Audience, some Fact-Sheet Data”; Throsby & Withers, *The Economics of the Performing Arts*; Gourdon, *Théâtre, public, perception*; Gardiner, “From Bankside to the West End: a Comparative View of London Audiences”; Bennett *Theatre Audiences*, to mention only some of the pioneers). In the questionnaire used here, however, we not only questioned demographic backgrounds, but we also asked for remarks about the respondent’s experiences during or after the performance, remarks that are more connected with reception research and are often collected through more qualitative approaches. The results of this reception research as well as the insights gathered by focus group sessions and personal interviews will be discussed in the article on experiences of theatre in this special issue. In the present article, we firstly scrutinise the demographic characteristics of the spectators as well as what can be summarised as their “theatre background”.

For this part of the research in each city, we selected a number of productions that could be considered representative for the theatre supply as a whole.¹ This

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¹ This happened in Debrecen, Groningen, Tyneside and Tartu. In Bern, Switzerland, some data on audience backgrounds have been gathered by using already existing research outcomes; in Aarhus, Denmark, only qualitative research in the form of so-called theatre talks took place. Neither city was included in the present article’s analysis.

number could vary substantively, because of the variation in the amounts of different productions per city and in the numbers of performances per production, as outlined in the article on theatre supply in this issue. In Tartu, for example, of the 137 different professional productions, 650 performances were played in a year; whereas in Groningen, almost the same number of performances was based on 350 different productions. Consequently, in Groningen more productions had to be used in the research than in Tartu.²

We collected the data about audiences with the help of all of the venues that play a substantive role in the city's theatre landscape.³ We asked spectators at the performances of the chosen productions to fill out a small card or give their email address to permit the research team to send them a questionnaire by email.⁴ The digitally returned questionnaires were automatically processed per performance; then, all the results per city were put together and processed by SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), or other comparable software. In Debrecen, Tyneside and Tartu, some respondents opted to send in the questionnaire by post. In all cities, we chose only publicly accessible productions for the audience survey. For this article, we have particularly selected the data related to professional theatre *for a general audience*.

Table 1. Ratio of productions, visits, and numbers of respondents in supply and sample (including amateur and semi-professional theatre)

	Debrecen	Groningen	Tyneside	Tartu
Research period	Apr. 2012 - Jun. 2012	Sep. 2010 - Jul. 2011	Feb. 2014 - Jun. 2014	Sep. 2012 - Oct. 2012
Productions within the research criteria during the season	174	342	unknown	117
in the sample	8	52	24	13
Visits within the research criteria during the season	135,413	160,013	unknown	106,380
in the sample	7660	18,486		7,490
Respondents, in absolute numbers	1,139	2,773	1,804	1,401
in % of visits in sample	15%	15%	unknown	19%

Table 1 shows the differences in research periods, numbers of productions, visits of the performances surveyed and numbers of respondents. Whereas

2 The numbers of productions, performances and visits mentioned and used here can differ from the totals presented in the article on theatre supply, because the types of productions used for the surveys do not cover all the genres and types of theatre presented in the overview of the total supply.

3 For a complete list see Appendix.

4 Some theatres also used their own mailing list to reach the spectators of some performances. One problem with this way of collecting audience data is that it is somewhat self-selecting; people who have the time to and/or like to answer questionnaires are favoured in proportion to people who are less interested. The research team could only accept this problem and hope that the number of respondents would temper the effect of it.

the research on theatre supply mostly concerned a whole calendar year or a full season, the audience research was executed during a shorter period of time, except in Groningen, where it covered an entire season. Obviously these differences in periods available for research resulted in different numbers of productions used for the audience research. In all of the cities, we selected a cross-section of productions for a general audience, based on the proportions of the various types of theatre⁵ during the regular season. Unfortunately, however, it was not possible to collect valid data of the theatre supply during a season in Tyneside, because of the short period of research in relation to the size of the area.⁶ This limitation has resulted in the absence of Tyneside data in a number of tables, also with regard to the number of performances and visits paid to them.⁷

Table 2. Comparison of ratios of productions in supply and in the sample with ratios of visits/respondents according to the researched types

	Debrecen ⁸	Groningen	Tyneside	Tartu
Productions in supply / in the sample	100%	100%	100%	100%
Spoken Theatre	49.8 / 62.5	41.3 / 50.0	- / 58.3	70.0 / 61.5
Dance	30.7 / 12.5	13.0 / 19.2	- / 16.7	12.0 / 15.4
Musical Theatre	10.4 / 12.5	12.5 / 11.5	- / 8.3	14.0 / 23.0
Kleinkunst	7.5 / 12.5	29.0 / 19.2	- / 12.5	- / -
Other types	1.6 / -	4.0 / -	- / 4.2	4.0 / -
Visits in supply / respondents	100%	100%	100%	100%
Spoken Theatre	50.3 / 63.7	27.0 / 42.5	- / 35.8	56.6 / 56.5
Dance	13.0 / 2.0	11.5 / 18.8	- / 27.3	7.0 / 12.3
Musical Theatre	29.0 / 30.0	28.1 / 17.5	- / 34.0	32.0 / 31.3
Kleinkunst	7.0 / 4.2	24.0 / 21.2	- / 2.3	- / -
Other types	0.7 / -	9.5 / -	- / 0.5	5.0 / -

A more detailed look at the division of productions, visits and respondents over the various types of theatre (Table 2) makes it clear that the numbers

5 For explanation on the choices of theatre types and genres, see the article on theatre supply in this issue.

6 Tyneside consists of the cities of Newcastle and Gateshead, which stand across from each other on opposite banks of the River Tyne, and the less urban areas of North and South Tyneside. For funding reasons, the research on Newcastle specifically included the surrounding area, known as Tyneside, which has a population of about three times that of Newcastle proper. The larger area known as Tyne and Wear adds the city of Sunderland (population 275,000), which lies to the south. None of the research for this project included Sunderland.

7 In addition, the numbers of respondents per theatre type in Tyneside will probably not exactly represent the numbers of spectators, because 26.4% of the respondents were present at a ballet performance of *Swan Lake*, and 31.6% at a performance of the musical *Dirty Dancing*.

8 In Debrecen, Puppet Theatre, with its 300 performances and 33,000 visits, makes up the greatest part of "Other theatre types", but could not be represented in the sample because almost all Puppet Theatre is made for children and is therefore not considered "theatre for general audiences".

of productions used in the survey as well as the numbers of respondents are representative up to a different extent in the four cities. Such differences could be caused by the availability of certain types and genres during a specific research period or by the differences in the amount of spectators present at the various events. Whereas in the Debrecen sample, Dance productions are heavily under-represented, in the Groningen sample, this type of theatre is somewhat over-represented; the same holds for Spoken Theatre in the Groningen and Debrecen samples and Musical Theatre in the Tartu sample. Besides this, in the Groningen sample, *Kleinkunst* is under-represented. The same imperfections more or less appear in the relationship between the total numbers of visits paid to the investigated types and the numbers of respondents per theatre type during the research, although in the Groningen sample the spectators for Musical Theatre are under-represented.

In general, these variances could be considered acceptable, not only because of the amount of respondents in total, but particularly because most of the results of this research will be presented primarily per type and genre. But care will be required in drawing conclusions for all genres together.

One of the difficulties in this type of research is how to know whether the cross-section of respondents represents the people present at the performances. One issue here is the fact that, if heterosexual couples were asked to participate in the research, it was mostly the woman who answered the questionnaire. This might distort the view on the gender composition of the audience, which can be the case in all four cities. Women are over-represented by 10% or more in the sample in proportion to what may be expected, based on statistics of theatre attendance by men and women in general (see www.stat.ee; statline.cbs.nl; Antal, "Kik járnak színházba?"). Fortunately, it does not automatically mean that because of this the ways in which the questionnaires were completed would have been different.⁸

Another way of checking if and how the samples are representative is by comparing educational backgrounds of respondents with those of theatre audiences in general, if known from existing research. All along the line, the audiences in the samples were highly educated (on average 70% of the spectators had a higher vocational or university degree).

In proportion to the average composition of theatre audiences, the highly educated are over-represented in the samples, at least in Debrecen and Groningen (see Table 4). A reason can be that the research took place in cities where, on average,

⁸ In her dissertation, Marline Lisette Wilders did not find significant differences between the ways men and women judged theatre performances and evaluated the evening out as a whole (*Theaterbeleving in het belevenistheater* 299).

the population is highly educated. In addition, it may be caused by the fact that the figures presented in Table 4 (and further) concern professional forms of theatre only.

Table 3. Female and male respondents in comparison with theatre attendees in general in the city or the country (in %)

	Debrecen	Groningen	Tyneside	Tartu	Totals and averages
Number of respondents	1,139	2,773	1,815	1,401	7,128
Female respondents	62.9%	68.8%	77.0%	79.0%	71.9%
Male respondents	37.1%	31.2%	23.0%	21.0%	28.1%
Female and male theatre attendees in general	Female: 60.6%	Female: 58%	Not available	Female: 63.6%	Female: 60.7%
	Male: 39.4%	Male: 42%		Male: 36.4%	Male: 39.3%

The questions that the respondents had to answer focused on two fields: 1) Demographic data of spectators: their gender; age; level of education; residence; and 2) Data about their theatre-visiting habits, of which the most important for this article were the types and genres they attended and the frequency of their visits during the last twelve months. By linking these relatively few issues, a number of insights into the composition and behaviour of audiences were evident, as will be shown in the next pages.

Table 4. Level of education of respondents in comparison with theatre attendees in general in the various cities or countries (in %)

	Debrecen		Groningen		Tyneside		Tartu	
	N = 941		N = 2017		N = 1521		N = 1345	
	Sample	General audience	Sample	General audience	Sample	General audience	Sample	General audience
No higher education	32.7	46.9*	22.2	35.0**	27.2	-	31.9	-
Higher education	67.3	53.1*	77.8	65	72.8	-	68.1	-
Higher Vocational Education	21.1		36.5		18.3		10.4	
University Education	46.2		41.3		54.5		57.7	

Notes. * See Tárki. ** No recent percentages are available for Groningen. These figures are based on Maas et al. (*Podiumkunsten en publiek*) and Ranshuysen ("Op maat gesneden publieksonderzoek").

Results

Debrecen and Tartu have young audiences, Groningen and Tyneside have older ones

To determine the composition of audiences, two aspects have to first be considered: the divisions as regards to ages and educational levels. Looking at age, interesting differences between the cities can be found. Bearing in mind that only performances for a general audience are at stake here, the small amount of youngsters in the audiences is not very remarkable.

Table 5. Age groups in audiences of professional theatre for a general audience (in %)

	Debrecen		Groningen		Tyneside		Tartu	
	N = 1057		N = 2146		N = 1376		N = 1401	
	Sample	Population	Sample	Population	Sample	Population	Sample	Population
12-15	12.4	3.3	1.4	3.1	0.4	3.3	1.9	-
16-19	21.5	6.6	5.1	6.3	1.5	7.6	8.4	6.5
20-25	16.7	7.6	15.9	20.0	3.2	7.1	17.1	9.4
26-35	9.0	17.6	15.4	21.2	13.0	13.7	25.3	20.4
36-45	13.2	15.5	14.5	15.0	17.0	15.3	19.7	16.9
46-55	12.0	13.2	23.3	13.7	24.7	18.2	16.1	14.2
56-65	11.6	12.1	18.8	12.5	26.5	15.3	6.9	12.3
66-83	3.5	13.2	5.6	8.2	13.7	18.6	4.5	20.4
	100%		100%		100%		100%	
Average age	33		43		50		36	

Notes. Popul. = in the *researched* population of the city. * Percentages based on population of South Tyneside. (www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk. Area South-Tyneside (Local Authority) Age structure, 2011).

It is striking, however, that in Tartu and Debrecen, the largest age segments in the audience are substantively younger than those in Groningen and Tyneside. In Debrecen, visitors from 16 to 25 years old form almost 40% of the audiences; in Tartu, people from 20 to 35 years old make up more than 40% of the total audience, which is certainly not in line with the outcomes in the other cities, where it seems that “young parents” (who make up part of the age segment 25–35) often stay away from theatre for a period of ten years or more while their children are young.

In Groningen, the biggest group of theatre-goers in the sample is from 46 to 55 years old (23.3%), immediately followed by the next age group from 56 to 65 years old, which represents 18.9%. The last age group, from 66 to 83 years old, is even the biggest in Tyneside theatres (26%). These figures certainly do not correspond to the composition of the populations in these cities. The segments mentioned are clearly, and sometimes strongly, over-represented in the sample, whereas, on the other hand, some groups do not show up in the theatre to the extent of what might be expected. This is the case, for instance, for students in Tyneside and Groningen (20% of the city population, only 15.9% in the theatre) and for the groups between 26–35 in Groningen and even more so in Debrecen, which is in strong contrast with the situation in Tartu where the attendance of the age group of 20–25 years old in theatre is almost twice as high as its percentage in the population. So in Debrecen and Tartu, we see two different groups of “young” theatre-goers. The theatres in Tartu show a more or less equal over-representation of all age segments till age 56, at the cost of a strong to very strong under-representation of people above 56. This latter group forms 33% of the population, but only 11% of the theatre audience. That in Debrecen so many youngsters (between 12 and 19 particularly) seem to be part of the audience, could be explained by the fact that some school classes were present in one of the bigger productions in the sample. But, when asking the total of respondents which types of theatre they had visited in the last twelve months, apart from the one they were attending at that very moment, it became clear that in Debrecen these youngsters (16–19) form a substantive part of the audiences of all genres, the biggest segment indeed, from 20.8% at Spoken Theatre performances to even 30.8% at Contemporary Dance (for details see Table A in the Appendix).⁹ The five of the sixteen season ticket packages available in Debrecen for school students (either for pupils or for organised school trips), seem to be working quite well.

In general, we see the same division of age groups across the genres in the various cities which the general picture showed: in Debrecen about 50% of the audiences is under 26 years old and only around 25% over 45, whereas the over 45 age groups in Groningen are about 48% and in Tyneside even 64%. The figures may be misrepresentative because of the larger number of secondary school students from 16 to 19 years old in the sample from Debrecen, but this certainly does not fully explain the remarkable differences between the cities. Firstly, these youngsters could also have answered that they had not attended other Spoken Theatre, Opera or Dance performances in the last twelve months, but this was

⁹ In this article we are using the same classification for types of theatre and their genres as explained in Toome and Saro in the previous article. In some cases, however, we have combined types (Musical Theatre and Show) and in other cases, when we speak of the *Kleinkunst*, we are actually speaking mostly of its largest genre (Stand-up Comedy).

not the case at all. And secondly, the presence of the next age group (20–25) is similar to the other cities, except for Tyneside, where this part of the population seems to stay away from theatre.¹⁰

Some smaller remarks in the domain of age segment comparison can be based on the figures in Table A in the Appendix: Opera indeed attracts the oldest audience; even in Tartu 55% of the visitors are over 45. Debrecen keeps the balance here, with around 14% attendance per age group, except for 21% youngsters and 7.5% from 26 to 35. Another very small and not unexpected shift in the direction of a younger audience can be found at *Kleinkunst* performances, where particularly the age group of 36–45 – in Debrecen, even 25–35 – contributes slightly more to the audience than in other types of theatre.

All audiences are highly educated, but those of Groningen are the highest

Theatre attendees are quite highly educated; 67% in Debrecen to 78% in Groningen have the highest vocational education or a university degree, or are studying for this, which is 30 to 40% more than for the inhabitants of all cities.¹¹ In Tartu and Debrecen, theatre attracts somewhat more people *without* higher education than in both other cities; they form almost one-third of the audiences. In Groningen, the score of this group is the lowest; only 22% of the audiences do not have a higher education degree or are studying for it.¹² The figures per genre show that many of the types and genres attract even fewer people without a higher educational background (See Table B in the Appendix). In Tartu and Tyneside, only 20 to 25% of these audiences in the sample have been educated on a secondary or lower level, with a slight exception for Musicals, where the figures go into the direction of 30%. The same can be seen in Groningen, where Musicals attract 23% audiences with lower and middle educational levels, which is twice as much as the average for all other genres in Groningen, being 12%. Debrecen shows different figures, with 55% of the total audiences consisting of highly educated people and 45% educated on other levels; for Contemporary Dance and Show, the group of people educated on non-higher levels is 60%. These figures might be partly explained by the presence of many students of secondary schools in all the Debrecen audiences.

10 However, two big stand-up comedy clubs in Newcastle upon Tyne seem to attract this age group indeed.

11 The comparison might be slightly distorted because in the figures concerning the population, only the people who have completed an education level are counted; in the sample, people who are still studying are also counted.

12 The Groningen figure may be slightly distorted by the under-representation of visitors to Musicals (and Shows) in the sample.

Table 6. Level of education in audiences of professional theatre for a general audience and in the city population (in %)

	Debrecen		Groningen		Tyneside		Tartu	
	N = 941		N = 2017		N = 1521		N = 1345	
In the sample / in the population (%)	Sample	Population	Sample	Population	Sample	Population	Sample	Population
No higher education	32.7	72.4	22.2	52.0*	28.2	64.9**	31.9	61.8
Higher education	67.3	27.6***	77.8	48.0	72.8	35.1	68.1	38.2
Higher Vocational	21.1	-	36.5	-	20.0	-	10.4	21.4
University education	46.2	-	41.3	-	52.8	-	57.7	16.8

Notes. * Based on the figures at www.os-groningen.nl about the population concerning the number who have obtained certificates of higher education. **Based on www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk. Area South-Tyneside (Local Authority), Qualifications and Students, 2011 ***Based on census 2011.

Spoken Theatre is the most preferred type among theatre-goers in all cities

From the figures in tables A and B in the Appendix it will be clear already that many spectators not only visit their favorite type of theatre, but visit other genres as well: for, the figures show three times more visitors than there are respondents. Table 7 shows how many theatre-goers either visit or do not visit the various theatre types and genres.

Spoken Theatre appears to still be the most popular type of theatre; on average, less than 30% of theatre-goers do not visit Spoken Theatre; Debrecen is with 11.9% a deviation to one side, Tyneside with 36.5% to the other. It holds that in most cities, 70 to 80% of the spectators do not visit Opera and the different genres within the type category of Dance, at least they had not done so in the twelve months before the questionnaire was filled out. But there are also some notable exceptions. In Tyneside, for example, Classical as well as Contemporary Dance is visited by 35% of the theatre-goers, likewise in Groningen, Contemporary Dance is substantively more popular than in other cities. These differences are caused by the fact that one genre is more present in one city and another one in the other cities as presented in the article on theatre supply.¹³ This will also explain the relatively high popularity of *Kleinkunst* in Groningen, where only 43% of the theatre-goers never go to this type.¹⁴ The popularity of Musicals in Debrecen,

13 For Tyneside, see footnote 6.

14 The direction of the causal connection between the presence of supply and the demand of a population has not been investigated here.

however, cannot be explained in this way, because only half as many performances of this genre as compared to other cities, take place in Debrecen. Maybe it is a form of spin-off of the Operetta attendance from the past, because the Musical genre in Debrecen is clearly influenced by the Operetta tradition.¹⁵ After Spoken Theatre (22% did not visit it), the genres within Musical Theatre (not visited by 42% on average) seem to be the most popular in this city, including Opera, which is, with 77 professional performances, much more on offer in Debrecen than elsewhere. But an even more precise picture can be painted of the attendance behaviour of theatre-goers, because we have asked which genres spectators visited during the last twelve months, which enables us to see the mutual relationships between the various types visited by theatre-goers (see Table C in Appendix).

Table 7. Percentages of the total audience of professional theatre for a general audience that have visited or have not visited the selected professional theatre types/genres in the last twelve months before the research

	Debrecen		Groningen		Tyneside		Tartu	
	N = 1139		N = 2146		N = 1415		N = 1401	
	%Visited	% Not	%Visited	% Not	%Visited	% Not	%Visited	% Not
Spoken Theatre	88.1	11.9	69.6	30.4	63.5	36.5	73.2	26.8
Classical Dance	27.4	72.6	18.3	81.7	36.1	63.9	26.5	73.5
Contemporary Dance	22.9	77.1	38.2	61.8	34.7	65.3	17.4	82.6
Opera/Operetta	57.1	42.9	18	82	22.4	77.6	20	80
Musical*	59.4	40.6	43.6	56.4	68	32	42.3	57.7
Show*	24.2	75.8	n.a.**	n.a.**	24.9	75,1	n.a.**	n.a.**
Kleinkunst	33.4	66.6	57.2	42.8	37.2	62.8	n.a.**	n.a.**
Puppet Theatre	n.a.**	n.a.**	n.a.**	n.a.**	n.a.**	n.a.**	7.2	92.8

Notes. * In Groningen, Musical and Show were combined in the question of how often people had gone to a Show and/or Musical during the last twelve months. ** This type/genre was not part of the questionnaire in that city.

Again, it is clear that Spoken Theatre is also popular with visitors of all other types and genres; 75 to 92% go there. The second most popular is Musical; 62 to 87% of the various audiences appears to visit Musicals as well, except for Groningen and Tartu, where this holds true for respectively 44% and 61% as an

¹⁵ The number of Musicals in the city theatre in Debrecen was reduced by Attila Vidnyánszky, who was the director of Csokonai Színház in the period of research.

average of audiences of the various theatre types. The attendance of Classical Dance and Opera in Groningen is lower than in the other cities, which is clearly due to the lack of supply in these genres. In Tyneside, all audiences visit Musicals substantively more than elsewhere. In general, it can be said that on average, each visitor of a particular genre can be counted as a visitor of at least two other genres as well.

Spectators visit the various genres twice a year, but Spoken Theatre somewhat more

After having tried to gain insight into who the theatre-goers in the various cities are, regarding their ages, education levels and preferences, in this section the main question is how many people actually make use of theatre in the various cities, per type or genre and in total. Because we asked all the respondents how often they went to the various forms of theatre during the last twelve months, we could calculate the numbers of visits they all together paid to a genre in that period and consequently the average of visits paid by one theatre-goer to a genre during that year.¹⁶

With respect to the genres, it appears that almost always and everywhere a theatre-goer visited about two performances of a genre in these twelve months. Spoken Theatre, however, was visited by spectators more than three times a year on average and in Debrecen and Groningen almost four times. Finally, in Groningen a slightly higher visiting rate to Contemporary Dance and to *Kleinkunst* can be seen in relation to the other cities. The two professional Contemporary Dance companies based in Groningen in the season 2010/11 seem to have a slightly more loyal audience and the supply of more than 100 *Kleinkunst* performances of 85 different productions points to a big popularity of the genre among the population.

¹⁶ Per genre the percentage of respondents who said to have been there 1-2, 3-5 or 6+ times in the last twelve months was calculated, so that the minimum and maximum numbers of visits paid to theatre by incidental, regular and frequent visitors in the group of respondents could be found and added together (for 6+ times we used the number 7). The total number of visits was divided by the number of respondents, which made the average number of visits per genre visible. The minimum number is the most probable, if we take into account the tendency of respondents to give desirable answers.

Table 8. Use made of various types/genres in professional theatre for a general audience during the last twelve months before the research

Visits	Debrecen	Groningen	Tyneside	Tartu
	N = 1057	N = 2146	N = 1815	N = 1401
Spoken Theatre	N=977	N=1824	N=904	N=1020
1-2	35.0%	40.0%	47.5%	50.8%
3-5	44.2%	33.8%	32.9%	32.8%
6+	20.8%	26.2%	19.6%	16.3%
average of visits yearly/spectator	3.2-4.4	3.2-4.4	2.8-3.9	2.6-3.8
Classical Dance	N=343	N=462	N=511	N=368
1-2	79.9%	86.6%	87.7%	84.8%
3-5	17.2%	11.6%	10.5%	13.3%
6+	2.9%	1.8%	1.8%	1.9%
average of visits yearly/spectator	1.5-2.7	1.4-2.4	1.5-2.7	1.4-2.5
Contemporary Dance	N=286	N=970	N=491	N=241
1-2	85.7%	67.5%	85.6%	92.9%
3-5	11.2%	24.3%	12.8%	5.4%
6+	3.1%	8.2%	1.6%	1.7%
average of visits yearly/spectator	1.3-2.5	2.0-3.1	1.4-2.5	1.2-2.2
Opera/Operetta	N=714	N=452	N=317	N=421
1-2	78.6%	79.6%	89.0%	82.6%
3-5	17.1%	16.2%	9.1%	10.8%
6+	4.3%	4.2%	1.9%	6.5%
average of visits yearly/spectator	1.5-2.7	1.6-2.7	1.3-2.4	1.6-2.6
Musical*	N=742	N=1105	N=965	N=599
1-2	80.6%	77.3%	64.1%	89.5%
3-5	16.0%	19.9%	27.2%	8.8%
6+	3.4%	2.8%	8.7%	1.7%
average of visits yearly/spectator	1.5-2.6	1.6-2.7	1.5-3.3	1.3-2.3
Show*	N= 312	n.a	N=353	n.a.
1-2	84.0%		90.6%	
3-5	14.1%		7.4%	
6+	1.9%		2.0%	
average of visits yearly/spectator	1.4-2.5		1.3-2.3	
Kleinkunst	N= 377	N=1377	N=526	n.a.
1-2	79.6%	67.5%	76.1%	
3-5	17.0%	25.4%	18.6%	
6+	3.4%	7.1%	5.3%	
average of visits yearly/spectator	1.5-2.7	1.9-3.1	1.7-2.8	
Puppet Theatre	n.a	n.a	n.a.	N=108
1-2				90.7%
3-5				8.4%
6+				0.9%
average of visits yearly/spectator				1.2-2.3

Notes. *In Groningen, Musical and Show were combined in the question of how often people attended a Show or Musical during the last twelve months. See note 16 for an explanation of the calculations.

Although the average of visits per genre paid by a theatre-goer was almost always around two, some differences can be found between the numbers of incidental and more frequent visitors. It looks like a kind of “standard” that more than 80% of the visitors attend one or two performances in a genre yearly and the other 20% three or more, including 2 to 5% frequent visitors with more than six visits per year. But this general picture also knows some exceptions. It is clear that the higher the visiting rate of a genre, the higher the impact of the frequent visitors is. This can most clearly be seen in the domain of Spoken Theatre, where from 32.8% to 44.2% of the audience of the audience consists of people who attend three to five performances yearly and 16.3 to 26.2% even more than six performances. In Tyneside the same logic holds true for Musicals. In Groningen, where the visiting rate of *Kleinkunst* is slightly higher than in Debrecen and Tyneside, also a somewhat greater proportion of more frequent visitors can be noticed.

So, it can be concluded that in all cities, Spoken Theatre has, with more than 50% of the spectators visiting the genre three times or more per year, quite a loyal audience. Groningen distinguishes itself by having a loyal audience for Contemporary Dance and *Kleinkunst*; in both cases, one-third of the audience attends three or more performances yearly. This holds true for even a little bit more (36%) of the Musical audience in Tyneside.

Thinking about the functioning of theatre in a city in terms of numbers of inhabitants who participate in theatre-going, the proportion of incidental, regular (3 to 5 visits a year) and frequent (6 or more visits a year) theatre-goers is not unimportant, because knowing the total number of tickets sold for a genre, the more people visit it on a regular or intensive basis, the fewer persons participate in this genre.

In Tartu, many more city inhabitants go to the theatre than in the other cities

On the basis of the figures collected in Table 8 and the numbers of tickets sold during a season or a year, the number of individuals who actually made use of the theatre supply in the various theatre types and genres can be calculated, as has been done in Table 9.¹⁷

¹⁷ As said before, figures of productions, performances and visits could not be collected in Tyneside.

Table 9. Actual use of various types/genres per city

	Debrecen (125,365 tickets sold for professional theatre for a general audience)	Groningen (124,174 tickets sold for professional theatre for a general audience)	Tartu (96,594 tickets sold for professional theatre for a general audience)
Spoken Theatre	74,870 tickets: 3.2 = 23,396 persons	31,636 tickets: 3.2 = 9,886 persons	70,377 tickets: 2.6 = 27,068 persons
Classical Dance	7,416 tickets: 1.4 = 5,297 persons	396 tickets for <i>only one performance</i>	4,373 tickets: 1.4 = 3,123 persons
Contemporary Dance		10,398 tickets: 2.0 = 5,199 persons	1,407 tickets: 1.2 = 1,172 persons
Opera	12,122 tickets: 1.5 = 8,081 persons	3,806 tickets: 1.6 = 2,378 persons	5,941 tickets: 1.6 = 3,713 persons
Operetta	7,191 tickets: 1.5 = 4,794 persons		
Musical	15,116 tickets: 1.5 = 10,077 persons	44,353 tickets: 1.6 = 27,720 persons	14,496 tickets: 1.3 = 11,150 persons
Show	2,150 tickets: 1.4 = 1,535 persons		Type not available
<i>Kleinkunst</i>	6,500 tickets: 1.5 = 4,333 persons	33,585 tickets: 1.9 = 17,676 persons	Type not available

Notes. Numbers show estimated numbers of individuals of the adult population who actually made use of the various genres per city (professional theatre for a general audience) in the twelve months before the research. Calculations are based on the minimum average number of visits per spectator (see Table 8).

Because of different traditions and developments of theatre supply, it is not surprising that in Tartu about 1000 people more go to Opera or Operetta performances than in Groningen, or that almost five times as many persons make use of the Contemporary Dance supply in Groningen. But remarkable is the fact that only 20% fewer theatre tickets are sold in Tartu as in Groningen (and twice the number of tickets for Spoken Theatre), whereas the city of Groningen has twice as many inhabitants.¹⁸

It seems that in Groningen the number of people who visit Musical, Show and *Kleinkunst* has strongly increased at the expense of attending Spoken Theatre: these “entertainment” genres represent more than 60% of all tickets for professional theatre for a general audience.

To know how many persons are making use of the total theatre supply in each city, one cannot simply add the numbers found for the genres, because, as we have seen, many people visit more genres and are consequently part of the actual audiences for these various genres.

¹⁸ (Stand-up) Comedy, which makes up the greater part of *Kleinkunst* in some other cities, was hardly offered in Tartu before 2013. Nowadays it is a growing genre.

For this reason, we have also counted the total of visits the respondents of each city have paid to professional theatre all together and divided these totals by the numbers of respondents, to get the average numbers of visits paid to theatre as a whole during a year. Subsequently, the numbers of sold tickets have been divided by this average number of visits to get the total of actual number of theatre-goers in the various cities. The results are shown in Table 10.

Table 10. *The use made of the total professional theatre supply for a general audience by populations of the various cities*

	Debrecen	Groningen	Tyneside	Tartu
Total of visits of respondents to all genres together	6,161-10,194	13,360-20,485	9,179-15,445	4,928-7,851
Number of respondents	1,057	2,548	1,815	1,389
Average number of visits per respondent	5.8-9.6	5.2-8.0	5.0-8.5	3.5-5.7
Total number of tickets sold for professional theatre for a general audience in the researched genres	125,365	124,174	-	96,594
Number of persons who made use of the theatre supply in the year of research	13,000-22,000	15,500-24,000	-	17,000-27,000

Debrecen and Groningen have, with a maximum of 22,000 to 24,000 persons, about the same amount of visitors of the professional theatre supply for a general audience.¹⁹ In Tartu, a maximum of 27,000 theatre-goers are counted.²⁰ Whereas the number of tickets sold does not differ very strongly between the cities, it is remarkable that in Tartu with 50% fewer inhabitants than Debrecen and Groningen, many more people go to the professional theatre, albeit at the expense of the frequency of their visits. However, theatre-goers are not always the city's own inhabitants; 35 to 45% of the people making use of the theatre supply are non-residents. Consequently, the numbers of theatre-goers mentioned in Table 10 should be reduced if only the real inhabitants of the cities are at stake. This would lead to a theatre audience consisting of 8 to 9% of the population of the cities of Groningen and Debrecen (probably also of Tyneside), whereas Tartu serves about 20% of its own population above 18 years old with its theatre supply.

¹⁹ If respondents have answered about the number of their visits in a wishful way, the maximum amount of theatre-goers is more probable than the minimum.

²⁰ Debrecen, however, has a much bigger semi-professional scene than the other cities. Thus, 25% of all visits brought to theatre for a general audience are paid to semi-professional theatre. If these numbers are included, the maximum of adult theatre-goers in Debrecen will be 28,000.

Table 11. *Places of residence of theatre audiences and the use of professional theatre supply for a general audience by city populations*

	Debrecen	Groningen	Tyneside	Tartu
Inhabitants in the year of research 18+	168,000	155,000	640,000	82,000
	%	%	%	%
The City	71.4	53	54	64
The Province	14.1	24	38	18
The Country	13.1	23	7	18
Abroad	1.4	0	1	1
city inhabitants in absolute figures and in %	15,000 ²¹	13,000		17,000
	8.9 %	8.4 %		20.7 %

Notes. Calculations are based on the minimum of the average visits per respondent as presented in Table 10.

Conclusion

In terms of representation some problems on the methodological level could be noted. In the first place, the way of collecting data might have caused some forms of self-selection among the possible respondents. Theatre-goers with more time and/or interest had a bigger chance to be included than people with less time and/or interest. The over-representation of female respondents in some cities may have seriously influenced the data, but rather, the over- and under-representation of certain types or genres in the cross-sections and consequently of their specific audiences, might have been of more significance. For instance, the audiences of Musicals have in general a somewhat lower educational level than those of Spoken Theatre and the visitors of Opera can be a little bit older. This might cause a certain bias in the numbers of actual theatre-goers, because the visitors of Spoken Theatre, who are overrepresented in some samples, attend the theatre somewhat more frequently than the visitors of Musicals, Shows and (Stand-up) Comedies. This means that the actual number of inhabitants making use of theatre might be slightly higher than calculated above. In general, however, the differences are relatively small and, in addition, only of importance if the audiences of total supplies are compared.

Apart from these kinds of methodological questions, some remarkable outcomes became visible. With respect to the composition of the audiences, it can be

²¹ If for Debrecen the visits to semi-professional theatre would be added, the number of inhabitants of the city who made use of the theatre supply would become almost 20,000, which is 12% of the researched population.

concluded that in the two cities of Western Europe, Tyneside and Groningen, the audiences are much older than those in the Eastern European cities, Debrecen and Tartu, also in proportion to the composition of the populations. That in these two cities more young people were among the respondents does not seem to be accidental, because they confirmed their visiting of the various genres on quite a regular basis.

Although in general, theatre audiences appear to be quite well-educated, the same two “eastern” cities attract a broader audience in this respect. Whereas 80% of the audiences of the various genres in Groningen and Tyneside were highly educated, in Debrecen and Tartu, highly educated audiences were about 55 and 75% on average, respectively.²²

Considering the preferences of theatre audiences, it appears that all theatre-goers attend two performances of a genre on average, but that they also visit three or more different genres. This brings about an average number of 5 to 8 visits per theatre-goer annually. Further investigation of this outcome reveals the following: with regard to genres, Spoken Theatre appears to have a clearly more loyal audience with more than three visits yearly, in Debrecen and Groningen almost four. In Tartu and Debrecen, Spoken Theatre is by far the most visited type of theatre; 73% and 60%, respectively, of all tickets for professional theatre were bought for Spoken Theatre. In Groningen, however, only 25% of all theatre tickets are sold for this type of theatre. With respect to the various cities, the theatre-goers of Tartu pay considerably fewer visits to theatre per year (at least 3.5) than those in Debrecen or Groningen (at least more than 5). These figures have direct consequences for the numbers of individuals who make use of the total theatre supply and of the various genres. The amount of actual theatre-goers varies from 8.5% of the number of city *inhabitants above 18* in Groningen to 20% in Tartu. On average these citizens make up 60% of the total number of visits paid to the theatre supply in the various cities.

So, speculating on how theatre functions in terms of the numbers and the backgrounds of spectators, it can be concluded that Tartu has the broadest and the largest audience with respect to numbers, ages and educational background. The figure of 1.5 theatre visits per capita in Tartu, instead of 1.0 in the other cities, is in line with this and might indicate that theatre has a relatively higher significance in the city. In other words, theatre life in Tartu seems to be somewhat

²² Differences between the average education level of the samples and those of the audiences per genre as presented in the Appendix is caused by the absence of the people who did not visit performances in the last twelve months and by the presence of many secondary school students in the Debrecen sample.

more important for the overall *general population*, but in Debrecen and Groningen for the *theatre-users*.

How these outcomes can be related to differences in theatre systems and the results of the research on supply and experiences, will be discussed in the concluding article, but some questions can be raised already. Why, for instance, are the audiences in Debrecen and Tartu of a broader composition, age-wise and education-wise in particular, than in the other cities? Are these findings linked to the social position of theatre in these countries of the former Eastern Bloc, where people were quite familiar with theatre-going, because their visits were socially organised to a great extent and competing forms of public leisure activities were less present during the Soviet period? And why are so many more inhabitants of Tartu making use of the theatre supply in comparison with the other cities? Is this despite or because of the smaller variety in the city's theatre supply? Spoken Theatre is the most popular type of theatre here, maybe because more than other genres, it is able to express people's experience of daily life and their own identity in times of oppression or ideological conflicts. Finally, for now, how is it possible that the general audience figures for Debrecen and Groningen, as presented in tables 10 and 11, are so similar, although their theatre systems and historical backgrounds are so different?

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Appendix

Table A. Age groups in audiences of professional theatre for a general audience per type/genre in the various cities

	Spoken Theatre				Classical Dance				Contemporary Dance				Opera/Operetta			
	Debrecen N= 798	Groningen N= 1649	Tyneside N= 879	Tartu N= 1020*	Debrecen N= 263	Groningen N= 415	Tyneside N= 492	Tartu N= 386	Debrecen N= 220	Groningen N= 871	Tyneside N= 479	Tartu N= 241	Debrecen N= 595	Groningen N= 406	Tyneside N= 308	Tartu N= 421
	%				%				%				%			
15-15	8.8	1.2	0.5	1.3	12.9	1.7	0.6	2.7	13.2	1.5	0.8	2.5	8.8	1.5	0.6	
16-19	19.4	4.9	1.5	6.2	26.2	5.1	1	11.4	31.8	4.5	1.7		22.2	2.7	1	
20-25	15.8	15.3	2.4	16.8	13.7	19.3	2	20.7	16.8	19.2	2.5	24	15.5	13.5	2.9	12.6
26-35	8.4	13.1	9.8	25.3	10.6	11.8	11.4	25.2	8.6	12.9	13.6	25.3	8.1	9.1	12.7	13.9
36-45	15.2	13.6	14.4	23.3	10.3	10.4	13.2	18.2	8.6	12.1	13.4	19.4	13.9	13.8	13.6	19.5
46-55	13.8	25.3	23.9	20.2	8.7	21.9	25.6	18.5	7.3	24.1	25.5	18.4	13.6	19.5	21.8	26.3
56-65	14.5	20.4	30	9	12.5	20.5	32.1	9.7	9.5	18.9	29.2	7.4	15.3	24.6	29.2	15.6
66-83	4	7	17.5	5.4	4.9	9.4	14	7.6	4.1	6.9	13.4	5.5	4.7	15.3	18.2	12.1
	100%				100%				100%				100%			

Table B. Levels of education of audiences of professional theatre for a general audience per type/genre in the various cities

	Spoken Theatre				Classical Dance				Contemporary Dance				Opera/opereta			
	Debrecen N= 894	Groningen N= 1442	Tyneside N= 793	Tartu N= 1028	Debrecen N= 310	Groningen N= 374	Tyneside N= 415	Tartu N= 368	Debrecen N= 259	Groningen N= 791	Tyneside N= 404	Tartu N= 241	Debrecen N= 656	Groningen N= 357	Tyneside N= 230	Tartu N= 421
No higher education	43.2	14.4	21.4	26.7	50	10.2	19.5	24.4	56	9.2	20	24.1	43.5	10.4	20	23.5
Higher education	56.7	85.6	78.6	73.3	50	89.8	80.5	75.6	44	90.8	80	75.9	56.5	89.6	80	76.5
	100%				100%				100%				100%			

Musical*				Kleinkunst				Show*				Puppet Theatre			
Debreceen N= 613	Groningen N= 985	Tyneside N= 986	Tartu N= 599	Debreceen N= 300	Groningen N= 1251	Tyneside N= 513	Tartu	Debreceen N= 242	Groningen	Tyneside N= 337	Tartu	Debreceen	Groningen	Tyneside	Tartu N= 108
%				%				%							
9.8	1.9	0.5		10	0.8	0.2	-	15.1		0.6					4.6
21.9	6.8	1.5		23.3	4.6	1.6	-	24.8		1.5					6.5
16.8	18.8	2.5	13.5	24.3	14.9	3.9	-	18.2		3.9					9.3
7.3	15	12.4	22.5	12.3	17.5	19.9	-	9.1		20.2					32.4
12.6	13	16.7	24.1	9	16.8	20.5	-	12.8		21.4					21.3
13.7	25.4	24.1	21.4	9	23.2	24.2	-	9.9		22.3					14.8
14	15.4	27.7	10.8	9.7	18	22.2	-	7.4		21.1					5.6
3.9	3.7	14.6	7.7	2.3	4.2	7.6	-	1.7		9.2					5.6
100%				100%				100%							

Notes. * In Groningen, Musical and Show are used as one category in the questionnaire.

Musical*				Kleinkunst				Show*				Puppet Theatre			
Debreceen N= 682	Groningen N= 835	Tyneside N= 855	Tartu N= 590	Debreceen N= 300	Groningen N= 1095	Tyneside N= 436	Tartu	Debreceen N= 281	Groningen	Tyneside N= 260	Tartu	Debreceen	Groningen	Tyneside	Tartu N= 108
46.9	23.2	25.9	30.2	54.1	16.8	25.7	-	55.2	-	26.5	-				24.5
53.1	76.8	73.1	69.8	45.9	83.2	74.3	-	43.8	-	73.5	-				75.5
100%				100%				100%							

Notes. * In Groningen Musical and show is used as one category in the questionnaire.

Table C. Visitors of professional theatre for a general audience per type/genre who also visit other genres

% of spectators of these genres who also visit these genres	Spoken Theatre				Classical Dance				Contemporary Dance			
	Debrecen N= 977	Groningen N= 1824	Tyneside N= 904	Tartu N= 1020	Debrecen N= 368	Groningen N= 462	Tyneside N= 511	Tartu N= 368	Debrecen N= 286	Groningen N= 907	Tyneside N= 491	Tartu N= 241
Spoken theatre					85	84	83	85	87	82	82	87
Classical dance	30	21	45	31					68	38	68	63
Contemporary dance	22	44	43	21	57	77	65	41				
Musical	68	42	80	50	72	46	85	62	71	38	84	65
Show	-	-	31	-	-	-	41	-	-	-	43	-
Opera/Operetta	65	21	29	26	66	33	46	45	40	23	41	40
Kleinkunst	27	57	45	-	40	55	48	-	42	48	54	-

Venues involved in the research

DEBRECEN

Csokonai Színház nagyszínpad
 Csokonai Színház Víg Kamaraszínház
 Vasutas Művelődési Ház
 Lovarda
 Vojtina Puppethat - Vojtina
 Bábszínház

GRONINGEN

Stadsschouwburg
 Oosterpoort
 Kruithuis
 Grand Theatre
 Machinefabriek
 Martiniplaza
 Prinsentheater
 Aatheater
 OUTtheatre

Musical*				Show*				Opera/operetta				Kleinkunst			
Debreceen N=742	Groningen N=985	Tyneside N=965	Tartu N=599	Debreceen N=312	Groningen	Tyneside N=353	Tartu	Debreceen N=714	Groningen N=452	Tyneside N=317	Tartu N=421	Debreceen N=377	Groningen N=1377	Tyneside N=256	Tartu
92	70	75	85	-	82	79	-	99	84	91	88	79	75	77	-
31	19	45	38	-	50	59	-	28	33	74	49	37	18	47	-
31	33	43	21	-	47	60	-	22	48	63	30	31	34	50	-
				71	86	-	-	73	45	87	67	66	48	81	-
30	-	31	-					-	-	57	-	46	-	47	-
71	19	29	32	55	51	-	-					54	17	37	-
31	61	44	-	55	70	-	-	25	52	62	-				

Notes. * In Groningen Musical and show is used as one category in the questionnaire.

TARTU

Tartu New Theatre - Tartu Uus Teater

Vanemuine, big hall - Vanemuise suur maja

Vanemuine, small hall - Vanemuise väike maja

Vanemuine, Harbour Theatre - Sadamateater

TYNESIDE

Theatre Royal

The Customs House

Live Theatre

The People's Theatre

Northern Stage

Dance City

Alphabetti Spaghetti Theatre

Mill Volvo Tyne Theatre

Tynemouth Priory Theatre

Westovian Theatre Society at the Pier Pavilion