

CURRENT STARTING POINTS TO AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT IN SLOVAK THEATRES

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Abstract: The term “audience development” is entangled with a number of definitions that differ in their meaning. While working with the audiences was considered to be primarily a marketing tool to ensure an increase in the number of spectators and lead to the economic stability of cultural institutions, in several European countries and, particularly, at the level of the cultural policies of European institutions, the perspectives of working with the audiences gradually developed into a more inclusive approach and people began to talk about access to culture for all. In this study, the author zooms in on a number of definitions of audience development formulated by theoreticians and culture managers prevalingly in English-speaking countries (Steven Hadley, Nobuko Kawashima) and national and European cultural policy makers. Based on the identification of several aspects of audience development, she also ponders whether discussions about audience development are taking place in Slovakia just like in other European countries, what direction the issues of audience development follow in the field of theatre culture in Slovakia, and who is their initiator.

Keywords: audience development, cultural policy, audience research, audience taste, theatre education, theatre audience in Slovakia

Most of the current definitions understand audience development as a long-term, planned process of the development of the relations between cultural and arts organizations and their existing and potential visitors. The vision of building these relations is ideologically framed also by the strategies and goals of cultural policies and, in practical terms, represents various forms of the cultural institutions’ work with the audiences (implementation of non-art and educational projects, their own audience research, setting specific dramaturgical plans, etc.). All these activities are naturally performed to achieve certain goals. On the one hand, these might be formulated with the aim to change the beliefs and attitudes of potential (yet non-existing) visitors, to diversify the audience with a focus on its new segments or solidify relations with the already existing audience. It is in fact a multiple-meaning, inherently dubious concept, which nevertheless opens up a broad range of meanings and definitions that emphasise its various functions. Steven Hadley, a prominent figure in the field of both the theory and the practice of audience development in European English-speaking environments, amusedly notes that there are as many definitions as people working in the field of culture¹.

¹ HADLEY, S. *Audience Development and Cultural Policy*. Cham : Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, p. 156.

From Marketing Tool to Culture for All

Theories about the origin of the above-mentioned polysemantic meaning concept say that it was born as a response to certain dilemmas and phenomena currently faced by the cultural sector – ageing audience, declining attendance of cultural organizations,² and an imbalance in the representation of broader population strata in the structure of visitors. That is why the number of projects working with specific target groups, such as children, senior citizens, foreigners, or ethnic minorities, is growing.³ On the whole, in the context of Western European countries, discussions about audience development are nourished primarily by the idea of an accessible culture for all. Steven Hadley notes that, initially, working with the audiences was considered to be a marketing tool and it was to ensure a higher attendance of cultural institutions to achieve their financial stability and profitability. When criticism was raised by the specialized public that the increase in the number of the visitors of cultural institutions and cultural events, and in profits, was achieved without a substantial change in the audience structure, the originally commercially and pragmatically (managerially) oriented strategy developed into a socially inclusive approach and only the latter began to be termed “audience development.” It turned out that market-oriented solutions contribute little (if anything at all) to the solution of problems with respect to access to culture for people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds (people with low income) or people professing different values than the ones offered by the arts, for example.⁴

Steven Hadley therefore strongly rejects understanding audience development as a purely marketing tool and his reasoning about this concept is oriented towards a socially and politically broader discourse. He sees audience development as a path to a so-called emancipated audience. In his opinion, the cultural sector has a self-referential character. It is too enclosed and the language it speaks ceases to be comprehensible to potential visitors or spectators. By this, the cultural sector declares its power and, according to Steven Hadley, this asymmetry in power, with respect to a hierarchy of values and systems in public funding, should be overcome. A change in this mechanism, i.e. a change in the setting of the communication of the cultural sector and its behaviour with the public, would disrupt this power imbalance and lead to audience emancipation.⁵

² MØLL LINDELOF, A. Audience Development and Its Blind Spot: A Quest for Pleasure and Play in the Discussion of Performing Arts Institutions. In *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 2015, Vol. 21, Issue 2, p. 201. DOI 10.1080/10286632.2014.891585.

³ KAWASHIMA, N. *Beyond the Division of Attenders vs. Non-attenders: A Study into Audience Development in Policy and Practice*. Coventry : Centre for Cultural Policy Studies, University of Warwick, 2000, p. 7.

⁴ HADLEY, S. *Audience Development and Cultural Policy*. Cham : Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, p. 96.

⁵ Hadley's reasoning is clearly marked by left-wing and anti-elite streams of thought and should be viewed in this context. The term “emancipated spectator” may sound familiar also from the publication of the same title of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière. However, while Hadley understands spectator emancipation more in a political sense, as a process of disrupting the hierarchy of relations between a cultural institution, as a certain form of establishment, with the audience, Rancière looks at this issue primarily from the perspective of the reception of the work of (dramatic) art and its effect on the spectators, in the artistic plane. He sees audience emancipation as a process of changing the spectator from a “passive voyeur” to an active participant. See RANCIÈRE, J. *The Emancipated Spectator*. London, New York : Verso Books, 2009, p. 4.

Many current definitions of audience development waver between an emphasis on the social aspect – equal access to culture for all social groups – and the mantra to reach the broadest possible audience to ensure the financial stability of a cultural institution. Nobuko Kawashima, professor at the Faculty of Economics of Doshisha University in Kyoto, Japan, identifies four major areas of audience development: cultural inclusion, extended marketing, taste cultivation, and audience education, with aims varied according to the target group. While the principle of cultural inclusion is applied wherever the vision to work with audiences with limited experience with arts and audiences from socially marginalized groups (population groups with low education and low income, disabled people, minority groups etc.) is enforced, taste cultivation and audience education are, according to Nobuko Kawashima, meant for the existing visitors, whose artistic horizons are to be broadened. Extended marketing strategies focus on the group of so-called self-excluded individuals, who participate in cultural events sporadically despite being able to afford them, or on rare visitors.⁶ At the same time, Nobuko Kawashima emphasizes that, in practice, these functions – the economic/marketing, social integrative, educational, and aesthetic one – are not mutually exclusive and audience development is often used as an umbrella term for all these meanings, whether they figure in the efforts of cultural participants separately or in synergy.⁷ Therefore, even the goals of audience development with respect to the visitors themselves vary, and art institutions may enforce ideologically different attitudes with an emphasis on quantitative or qualitative results, in ideal cases both, in their work with audiences.⁸

Similar theoretical starting points, with an analogous categorization of the aspects of audience development, can be found in the final report of the *European Audiences: 2020 and beyond* conference organized by the European Commission in October 2012. It defined working with the audiences briefly as a “strategic and interactive process of making the arts widely accessible by cultural organisations”⁹ and identifies three pillars of audience development. One of these is increasing the number of visitors who have an equal or similar socio-demographic profile as the existing audience. As a primarily marketing-oriented and commercial effort regardless of the specification

⁶ KAWASHIMA, N. *Beyond the Division of Attenders vs. Non-attenders: A Study into Audience Development in Policy and Practice*. Coventry : Centre for Cultural Policy Studies, University of Warwick, 2000, pp. 25–26.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁸ From among the European specialists and scientists, Pier Luigi Sacco, a professor of culture economics at the University of Milan, senior advisor of OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) on culture and local development, and author of several books and studies, has been focusing on cultural participation and its influence on social and economic changes in the environment for many years. See e.g. SACCO, P. L. Power to the People: When Culture Works as a Social Catalyst in Urban Regeneration Processes (And When It Does Not) In *European Planning Studies*, 2017, Vol. 25, Issue 2, pp. 241–258.

SACCO, P. L. Cultural Policies and Local Planning Strategies: What Is the Role of Culture in Local Sustainable Development? In *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, 2009, Vol. 39, Issue 1, pp. 45–63.

SACCO, P. L. Beyond the Rhetoric of Participation: New Challenges and Prospects for Inclusive Urban Regeneration. In *City, Culture and Society*, 2016, Vol. 7, Issue 2, pp. 95–100.

Sacco also authored An Open Method of Coordination (OMC) Working Group on Cultural and Creative Industries. See SACCO, P. L. Culture 3.0: A New Perspective for the EU 2014-2020 Structural Funds Programming. European Expert Network on Culture (EENC), 2011. [online]. [cit. 4 August 2022]. Available at: <http://www.interarts.net/descargas/interarts2577.pdf>.

⁹ European Commission. *European Audiences: 2020 and Beyond*, 2012, p. 3. [online]. [cit. 21 May 2022]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/culture/library/reports/conference-audience_en.pdf.

of target groups, this dimension is joined by the second value framework: audience diversification in terms of increasing the social and age diversity of the audience. The third aspect is the deepening of the relations with the existing visitors, i.e. intensifying their artistic experience and encouraging them to discover new or yet unknown forms of art.¹⁰

Some definitions directly point out the importance of approaching the dramaturgy and constructing the programme in relation to the audience. The artistic programme and its contents can be defined as essential influences on the composition and structure of the audiences and the definition of the term itself emphasizes the role of individuals responsible for the programme and the dramaturgy. The complexity of not only the term itself but also of its meaning in practice is noted also by the Arts Marketing Association, drawing on the definition used by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. It points out that audience development is not just a marketing function but should be a process in which all components of the organization are involved, including its artistic (dramaturgical) section, because part of the objectives of audience development is to “affect a change in the attitudes, understanding and behaviour of both existing and potential audiences.”¹¹

The branched set of audience development goals formulated by different philosophies presupposes a diversity of the attitudes of the cultural actors in practice. However, the culturologist Miroslava Kobrtková claims that, in practice, this lack of clarity and the vague definitions of the goals (pointed out also by Steven Hadley – author’s note) may lead to “unrealistic project goals and, ultimately, to a failure of the efforts to build relations with the audience beyond the projects.”¹² Steven Hadley draws on several statistics in the UK and concludes that the impact of audience development practices on the attendance of art organizations is poor. Although research shows that social inequalities in the attendance of art institutions (in terms of education, social status, ethnicity, poor health, etc.) have been eliminated to a certain extent through projects aimed at audience development, there is still a substantial part of the population that would choose not to engage or participate in culture.¹³ Another factor thus enters the discourse on audience development – the need to remove barriers, a set of physical or psycho-physical, geographical, social, cultural, linguistic or psychological obstacles that prevent a potential audience from becoming a real audience or visitors of a cultural institution. However, it is necessary to distinguish between those who are excluded by their own decision not to participate and those who would like to participate but are prevented from it by various external or internal circumstances. According to Steven Hadley, the key issue is the access of the general public and, therefore, the priority of the governments and cultural participants should be to enable access to culture so that low income or education are no longer obstacles.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

¹¹ Arts Marketing Association. Putting Audience Development at the Core of Your Organisation. [online]. [cit. 13 May 2022]. Available at: <https://www.culturehive.co.uk/resources/putting-audience-development-at-the-core-of-your-organisation/>.

¹² KOBRTKOVÁ, M. *Divák v centre pozornosti: práca s publikom súčasného tanca vo vybraných kultúrnych organizáciách* [The Spectator in Focus: Working with the Audiences of Contemporary Dance in Selected Cultural Organizations]. [MA Thesis]. Brno : Masaryk University, 2017, p. 21.

¹³ HADLEY, S. *Audience Development and Cultural Policy*, p. 69.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 65.

This socio-humanitarian dimension, dominantly present also in the approach and rhetoric of the representatives of European cultural policies, determines the nature of the strategies adopted in the field of culture in the European Union. In the language of cultural policy makers at the European level, terms such as democratization of culture, participatory art, and accessible and inclusive culture, have become quite the main driving slogans. Based on the officially declared values on which the European community ideologically stands (e.g. equal access and opportunities), the fundamental idea and motivation behind audience development is legitimized here by the need to make culture accessible to all, regardless of gender, ethnicity, and other cultural and social differences.¹⁵ The principles of social cohesion and social inclusion are ranked among the top-priority topics of the cultural policies formulated by the bodies of the European Union.¹⁶ However, culture is perceived here as a competence area of the member states, and the strategic documents issued by the respective European bodies have a recommendatory rather than prescriptive character with respect to the cultural policies of the member states. On the other hand, it should be noted that all these European theories and ideological starting points, which conceptually frame the projects and initiatives of European programmes aimed at the support of audience development in culture, sound too idealistic. It is therefore justified to ask whether such ambitious and humanistically conceived goals can be fully achieved by the many diverse projects created and promoted by the instruments of European cultural policies and whether they can also have the desired impact on a wider scale.

Surveys of cultural participation conducted in countries such as France and Great Britain indicate that access to culture is still unequal according to socio-professional categories, and such results are often interpreted as a certain failure of the European policy of cultural democratization.¹⁷ The Creative Europe programmes currently offer a significant source of grant support for projects in the area of social inclusion. The report evaluating the outputs and the progress of this programme in the 2014-2020 period and establishing the goals of the new programme period of this operational programme indicates that, despite the established goals, the projects implemented to support audience development did not achieve the originally intended impact. The authors of the document point out the need to keep searching for more effective solutions to reach an international audience or to spread and make European works accessible to a broad and diverse audience.¹⁸ They call attention to certain shortcom-

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹⁶ From among all the documents defining the social dimension as a necessary starting points and top-priority orientation of the projects supported through European programmes, let us mention, for example, the summary document issued by the European Commission titled *European Audiences: 2020 and Beyond*, the New European Agenda for Culture adopted in 2018, the guidelines for policy makers and cultural institutions *From Social Inclusion to Social Cohesion: The Role of Culture Policy, Report on the Role of Public Arts and Cultural Institutions in the Promotion of Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue (2012–2014)*, and the Council conclusions on the Work Plan for Culture 2019–2022. Within the social dimension of European cultural policies, the role of culture in supporting the integration of migrants is currently highly emphasised; it is dealt with, for example, in the report *How Culture and the Arts can Promote Intercultural Dialogue in the Context of the Migratory and Refugee Crisis*.

¹⁷ TOBELEM, J. M. *La culture pour tous. Des solutions pour la démocratisation?* Paris : Fondation Jean Jaurès, 2016, pp. 11–13.

¹⁸ EUROPEAN COMMISSION. Regulation (EU) 2021/818 of the European Parliament and of the Coun-

ings, such as the insufficient circulation of European works, the low level of audience reach, and difficulties with reaching the audience and with social inclusion.¹⁹

One of the more successful projects of international cooperation in the field of audience research, supported by the Creative Europe programme in the 2018-2021 period, is ASSET (Audience Segmentation System in European Theatres), a platform initiated by the Department of Arts Management at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague in cooperation with the Arts and Theatre Institute. Its activities consist of designing tools for theatres through which they can learn more about their visitors and use the information obtained to create suitable strategies for working with their audiences.²⁰ Audience research promoted by ASSET is based on the methodology of audience segmentation developed on the basis of audience research carried out in twenty theatres in five European cities (Helsinki, Prague, Sofia, Vienna, and Zagreb).²¹ It focuses on obtaining qualitative indicators and, thus, on a deeper knowledge of the spectators – not only their age and their geographic, demographic, and economic background, but also their cultural habits and values, preferences in genre and artistic form, their previous experiences and motivations as spectators, and the factors based on which they decide on what show they choose, etc. The various phases of research and the logic they follow in considering these, the methodology and the nature of the created segmentation model (audience typology), as well as the specific results of the pieces of research in the theatres of the involved partner countries, are comprehensibly described and analysed in detail in the publication *The Audience in Centre Stage*.²² In addition, the project led to many other outputs,²³ including the international online conference *Theatre Audiences: The Crucial ASSET*, still accessible on YouTube.²⁴

A series of studies published in the double issue of the Slovenian journal *Amfiteater*, which present the results of the international research project City Study, is

cil of 20 May 2021 establishing the Creative Europe Programme (2021 to 2027) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1295/2013, 30/05/2018, p. 2. [online]. [cit. 23 February 2022]. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R0818&from=EN>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Culturmet. ASSET – Audience Segmentation System in European Theatres. [online]. [cit. 3 August 2022]. Available at: <https://www.culturenet.cz/projekty/asset-audience-segmentation-system-in-european-theatres/>.

²¹ An event whose visions draw on the concept of audience development, among other countries popular and, since 2000 annually organized, also in Slovakia, is the Long Night of Theatres. Data collection in the partner countries during the Long Night of Theatres in November 2019 was one of the phases of the project, based on which the authors formulated the research methodology. See ASSET. PROJECT DESCRIPTION. [online]. [cit. 4 August 2022]. Available at: <http://www.asset4arts.eu/project-description.html>.

²² GOODACRE, J. – LÁZŇOVSKÝ, M. – PECKOVÁ ČERNÁ, M. (eds.). *The Audience in Centre Stage*. Prague : The Academy of Performing Arts, 2021, pp. 1–181. [online]. [cit. 3 August 2022]. Available at: <http://www.asset4arts.eu/data/knowledge-base/asset-the-audience-in-centre-stage.pdf>.

²³ Among its results, the Czech online platform culturmet.cz lists fifty to seventy-five trained administrators of the collected data, six thousand five hundred responses from the spectators, a conference and a symposium, five case studies, the construction of the ASSET methodology website, the dissemination of the methodology to seven hundred and ninety-six organizations and four hundred and thirty-eight thousand five hundred spectators, and the involvement of theatre communities from fourteen countries. See Culturmet. ASSET – Audience Segmentation System in European Theatres. [online]. [cit. 3 August 2022]. Available at: <https://www.culturenet.cz/projekty/asset-audience-segmentation-system-in-european-theatres/>

²⁴ The conference took place on 25-26/05/2021/ See ASSET. Conference. [online]. [cit. 3 August 2022]. Available at: <http://www.asset4arts.eu/conference.html>.

also very inspiring. The project was implemented in 2010 to 2014 by the STEP (Project on European Theatre Systems) group. In the articles, the authors compare the theatre systems in selected European small towns (Debrecen, Groningen, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tartu) and introduce the methodology of their qualitative research, focus groups, and interviews, through which they investigate the similarities and the differences in the audience reception of theatre performances in these towns.²⁵ They state, for example, that in the questionnaires meant for the spectators, they asked not only about their demographic data but were primarily interested in their personal observations regarding their individual experiences during or after the shows, i.e. those that are associated with reception research and must be obtained through qualitative approaches.²⁶

Measurability and Quantitative Data as the Path to a New Audience in Slovakia

The above-mentioned examples of projects focusing on the methodology of audience research show that, in the international context, in addition to the issues of access to culture for all, including the poorest, and education about culture and arts, the need for an in-depth knowledge of the value system of the spectators with respect to art comes to the fore. In the past decade, in many countries of Western Europe, the issues of audience development have repeatedly reflected the political priorities of the ministers of culture (although with varied intensity and accents). Policies supporting audience development in arts and culture in Slovakia, including the field of theatres, tend to emphasize the quantitative dimension – i.e. the effort to retain the existing audiences and reach new audiences (increase attendance) and, partly, also the social dimension – to ensure access to the dramatic art for the general public. The issues of social inclusion, to the extent they figure at the level of the cultural policies of other European countries, the European Union itself, or the programmes of UNESCO, are present much less prominently in Slovak cultural policy.²⁷ Similarly, the issues of audience education and the cultivation of its taste, which are essential and crucial aspects of audience development in terms of audience education, have not yet been formulated as essential challenges by Slovak cultural policy makers. The qualitative dimension of working with the audience has found little support from the state's cultural strategy makers in Slovakia, and a purely managerial, quantitative perspective prevails here.

The basic precondition for the concept of audience development is to change how we look at the spectators as an integral part of the life of an artistic organization (theatre) and to put them in the centre of interest. However, the prerequisite for this central position is the necessity to know the audiences and understand their cultural preferences and values, or the barriers that prevent them from going to theatre and

²⁵ WILDERS, M. L. – TOOME, H.-L. – ŠORLI, M. – SZABÓ, A. – ZIJLSTRA, A. "I Was Utterly Mesmerised": Audience Experiences of Different Theatre Types and Genres in Four European Cities. In *Amfiteater, Journal of Performing Arts Theory*, 2015, Vol. 3, Issue 1–2, p. 305. DOI 338.48-53:792.

²⁶ VAN MAANEN, H. – ŠORLI, M. – TOOME, H.-L. – WILDERS, M.L. – EDELMAN, J. – SZABÓ, A. – BALKÁNYI, M. Spectators, Who are they? A Demographic Analysis of Theatre Audiences in Four European Cities. In *Amfiteater, Journal of Performing Arts Theory*, 2015, Vol. 3, Issue 1–2, p. 281. DOI 792.073.

²⁷ A conference under the auspices of the Platform for Cultural and Creative Industries held in May 2022, where the participants and the domestic cultural policy makers introduced the cultural strategy until 2030, presented social inclusion as one of the topics addressed in the conference panels.

the reasons why they do not go there, to understand why they reject certain theatre forms and themes, and to learn to what extent they are open to discover new forms.²⁸ The authors of *The Audience in Centre Stage* emphasise that audience development as “a long-term and mutually fulfilling relationship between audiences and cultural institutions” can take place only if the institution knows its visitors well.²⁹ In the field of theatres, we lack a deeper understanding of the mentality of the audiences and the existing statistics and surveys do not reveal it. Steven Hadley, mentioned and paraphrased several times above, notes that audience development with an emphasis on its integrative and inclusive dimension is active wherever attendance statistics in the form of socio-economic or demographic analyses are most used and valued.³⁰ In Slovakia, such method of data collection and evaluation is absent, there is no comprehensive survey of the participation of the citizens in culture which would be based on a continuous collection of statistical data combined with up-to-date sociological surveys and trends focusing on cultural participation.³¹

In this respect, the statistics kept by the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic (hereafter MC SR), processed by the research department of the National Cultural Centre, are only aimed at finding out attendance as a quantitative factor of the quality of a theatre or group of theatres, and the obtained data do not enable us to evaluate the way theatres actually approach working with their audiences. Current questionnaire schemes aimed at finding out attendance ask about the number of seats offered in the auditorium, the number of visitors and the number of paying visitors, the number of visitors at performances from the repertoire of the given theatre and at performances of guest ensembles from other Slovak towns, and the number of visitors at performances presented on the domestic stage (or a rented one), outside the domestic stage in the Slovak Republic, and abroad. The interest in the information whether the theatre creates a dramaturgy intended for young spectators is expressed by a purely mathematical question about the number of visitors at performances for children and the youth. The quasi-present social dimension of audience attendance is limited to finding out whether the theatre provides wheelchair access and discounts on tickets for people with disabilities. The questions in the statistical forms examining theatre festivals are formulated in a similar way, the basic questions being the number of visitors and the number of seats offered.

With respect to cultural participation and audience building in theatres, the final report of the Culture Spending Review, published by the Institute of Cultural Policy in 2020, limits itself to the conclusion that the number of visitors is not increasing in

²⁸ For example, with an approach at least partially oriented in this way, the Creative Industry Košice organization carried out audience research aimed at understanding the visitors of cultural events in Košice in 2021. See RÉVÉSZOVÁ, Z. *Publikum kultúry mesta Košice 2020* [The Audience in the City of Košice]. Košice : Creative Industry Košice, 2021.

²⁹ ASSET. KNOWLEDGE BASE. [online]. [cit. 3 August 2022]. Available at: <http://www.asset4arts.eu/knowledge-base.html>.

³⁰ HADLEY, S. *Audience Development and Cultural Policy*, p. 64.

³¹ The survey of the participation of the Slovak population in culture and its spending on culture was carried out by the statistics and research department of the National Cultural Centre. The results of the statistical survey are available in Slovak at the website of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic. See *Ministerstvo kultúry Slovenskej republiky. Výsledky štátneho štatistického zisťovania v oblasti kultúry* [Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic. Statistical Survey by the State in the Field of Culture]. [online]. [cit. 23 May 2022]. Available at: <https://www.culture.gov.sk/ministerstvo/statistika-kultura/vysledky/>.

proportion with the growing number of theatres.³² Although the authors of the report draw attention to the insufficiency of data collection regarding attendance in Slovak theatres and at performances, they still think the problem is only that “the contracts of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic with performing arts organizations do not include requirements for the number of visitors and seat occupancy among the measurable indicators. In their annual reports, the attendance of the organizations is presented in varying degrees of detail and in various structures, which makes it difficult to obtain data to compare attendance. Several organizations do not report occupancy in their annual reports at all.”³³ This pragmatically named problem leads the authors of the spending review to an equally pragmatic measure to “increase cultural participation in performing arts organizations (theatres, music, and music and dance companies) by including attendance and occupancy in the contracts of established organizations with MC SR.” The other proposed measure is to “unify the form in which attendance and occupancy are reported in the annual reports.”³⁴

Although it is a proposal intended specifically for theatres within the scope of MC SR as their founder, i.e. four theatres in particular³⁵, it still points to the general logic of thinking about audience development only as raising the number of spectators, without emphasis on the diversification of audience groups and regardless of maintaining the quality of the dramaturgy and the importance of cultivating audience taste. It supports a marketing and profit-oriented attitude, which can lead to a non-conceptual increase in the number of spectators and to a compromise on the quality of the programmes and the dramaturgy, and which carries the risk of adapting the offer to mainstream audience.

Audience Development Support Tools in Cultural Policy on Theatre in Slovakia

One of the ways to motivate the audiences to participate in culture are grant funds, tools whose programmes contain, more or less implicitly, the requirement to put the principles of audience development into practice. The programme of cultural vouchers, introduced by MC SR in 2006, is one such tool. It is primarily understood as a means to increase the cultural participation of young citizens (elementary and secondary school students), making cultural values accessible to this target group and educating them in the field of arts and culture. Whether they do fulfil this educational purpose is not really known. Even in this case, the effectiveness of the utilized tool is evaluated primarily based on quantitative data. The information focuses on the number of students and school teachers participating in the project, the number of cultural

³² Among other things, the authors compare the attendance of independent theatres and established theatres; they (naturally) conclude that the results of independent theatres show a significantly lower number of visitors and performances offered. See *Revízia výdavkov na kultúru. Záverečná správa* [Culture Spending Review. Final Report]. 2020, p. 79. [online]. [cit. 24 May 2022]. Available at: https://www.culture.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Revizia_vydavkov_na_kulturu_-_zaverecna_sprava_compressed.pdf.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

³⁵ The Slovak National Theatre, the Košice State Theatre, the State Opera in Banská Bystrica, and the Nová scéna Theatre. The rest of the theatres in Slovakia are founded and run by their respective district or town or are so-called independent theatres.

organizations registered in the project, i.e. organizations authorized to accept these cultural vouchers, the number of vouchers redeemed, and their monetary value.³⁶ Despite the fact that the system of cultural vouchers in Slovakia has been in use for sixteen years and should be a tool not only for building a relationship between young spectators and the arts as such but also a means of refining their taste and enabling them to become familiar with the forms and genres of contemporary art, we are unaware of the deeper sociological and aesthetic impacts of this supplementary educational programme. We do not know, for example, what percentage of the redeemed vouchers goes to the theatres. The selection of shows for students of primary and secondary schools is largely influenced by the programmes offered by the theatres, which usually include titles dramaturgically intended primarily for young spectators, or by the theatres whose productions are directly addressed to groups of young spectators. There are no underpinning pieces of sociological research that would answer the question of whether the programme of cultural vouchers to increase participation has some qualitative advantages, i.e. artistic and social benefits, and whether it contributes to education about arts (theatre) and to the formation of audience taste.

Just as the emphasis on working with the audiences becomes one of the criteria for providing grant support at the level of European subsidy support schemes, this measure also has a place at the local or national level. The requirement of working with the audiences, with an emphasis on the educational nature of this work, is part of the support policy of the Slovak Arts Council (Fond na podporu umenia, hereafter FPU). In 2018, for example, one of the main programme priorities in the structure of the FPU's support activities was "to support projects aimed at expanding and cultivating audiences in all areas of arts;" in 2021, it was "innovative forms of working with the audiences in the field of contemporary art" and, in its activity structure for 2022, the emphasis on audience development was formulated by the members of the Council in the programme priority "Live Art in Schools – Innovative Work with Young Audiences."³⁷

These goals, and the success criteria set for the projects of domestic and foreign grant schemes, are naturally reflected in the programme and dramaturgy profiles of cultural organizations, including theatres. However, it is not only external pressure in the form of grant policy tools that prompts cultural organizations in Slovakia to putting the qualitative principles of audience development into practice. To a large extent, the issues of audience development as a form of educating the spectators and shaping their taste are initiated by theatre makers and organizers active in theatres and cultural organizations, even if this does not happen in a concentrated way, lacks well-defined visions and strategies by cultural policy makers as well as comprehensive knowledge of the theatre audiences and their potential, and takes place only in the form of self-initiated projects. Realizing the importance of the posi-

³⁶ Information from 2018 indicates that a total of 836.650 students and 66.363 teachers had participated in the project by that time. 453 cultural organizations applied for registration into this project and 527.194 vouchers with a total value of SKK 105.5 million (EUR 3.1 million) had been redeemed. See *Compendium. Cultural Policies and Trends. Cultural Participation and Consumption Slovakia*. [online]. [cit. 24 May 2022]. Available at: <https://www.culturalpolicies.net/database/search-by-country/country-profile/category/?id=36&g1=6>.

³⁷ Fond na podporu umenia [Slovak Arts Council]. Dokumenty [Documents]. Základné dokumenty [Basic Documents]. Archív dokumentov [Documents Archive]. Štruktúra podpornej činnosti [Support Activity Structure]. [online]. [cit. 4 August 2022]. Available at: <https://www.fpu.sk/sk/archiv-dokumentov/>.

tion of the spectators with respect to their activities, theatres try to put into practice various principles of audience development, probably drawing on their own needs and motivations, and the situations in which they find themselves in the environment of their operations. The activities performed by theatre makers and organizers range from supplementary educational activities (classic workshops and discussions, theatre camps for children), through various community and socially inclusive projects making productions available to selected, socially disadvantaged groups, to working with the dramaturgy itself. Their programmes focus on specific groups (children or the youth), for example, and they look for a theatre language that would shape their taste in a sensitive way. Alternatively, they promote “bolder” dramaturgical plans to present new theatre forms to the existing groups of spectators and a different type of aesthetics than what they are used to in the theatre they attend. Also, theatres organize various conferences about working with the audiences and about audience development (*Trendy v kreatívnej práci s divákom* [Trends in Creative Work with Audience] – the international conference at Pôtoň Theatre, *Cesty k novému publiku* [How to Find New Audiences] – the international conference organized by the City Theatre Žilina), joint seminars (Anténa workshops on audience development) or carry out their own internal audience research (the Slovak National Theatre, or the *Apel lokality* [Locality Appeal] project at Pôtoň Theatre). Efforts to educate the audiences are also demonstrated by some of the activities of the Centre for Research and Education at the Theatre Institute in Bratislava (workshops on theatre tutoring methods, workshops aimed at educating child audiences, etc.). The Theatre Institute also organizes the Long Night of Theatres, an event that works on the principle of making theatre productions accessible to wider segments of the population and increasing the number of spectators.

In the area of working with the audiences, the neighbouring Czech Republic has come much further than Slovakia. There, the position of a so-called theatre educator, a mediator of the exchange of ideas between the theatre and the audience, who uses various methods to develop the themes of the productions and helps to make the dramatic art accessible even to less experienced spectators, has become well established.³⁸ In the Czech Republic, theatre educating has an institutional backing, there is an Association of Theatre Educators, and several theatres employ a theatre educator (e.g. the National Theatre in Prague, the South Bohemian Theatre in České Budejovice, the Moravian Theatre in Olomouc, etc.).³⁹ Several publications reflecting on the challenges of the concept of audience development have also been published there, for example the *Divadelní lektor: inspirace pro práci s publikem* [Theatre Educator: Inspirations for Working with the Audience], published by the Association of Theatre Educators in 2021, and the *RE: PUBLIKUM. Možnosti spolupráce s publikem ve 21. století* [RE: THE AUDIENCES. Possibilities of the Cooperation with Audiences in the 21st Century], the published proceedings of the conference organized by the Arts and

³⁸ Association of Theatre Educators. Theatre Educators. [online]. [cit. 4 August 2022]. Available at: <https://divadelnilektori.cz/divadelni-lektori>.

³⁹ In March 2022, the Theatre Institute in Bratislava organized a workshop focused on the forms and possibilities of educating theatre audiences, led by a theatre educator from the National Theatre in Prague. See *Newsletter of the Theatre Institute*. [online]. [cit. 3 August 2022]. Available at: https://mailchi.mp/99994397d024/du-bratislava_09_2021-14173488.

Theatre Institute in Prague in 2013, the anthology from symposium *Cesty ke spolupráci divadel a škol* [Path to Cooperation between Theatres and Schools], published by the National Theatre Prague in 2013, or the book *Publikum – Tucet inspirativních příkladů práce s publikem v kultuře* [The Audience – A Dozen Inspiring Examples of Working with the Audience in Culture], which includes methods of working with the audiences in non-theatre institutions (e.g. museums and galleries), published under the auspices of the Creative Europe programme in 2014.⁴⁰

Conclusion

While in the countries of Western and Northern Europe, participants in several areas of cultural and artistic life, representatives of cultural policies and government departments, and research groups and marketing agencies (e.g. The Audience Agency, the Audiences Europe Network) actively lead relatively lively discussions about working with the audience, in Slovakia, debates about audience development tend to be initiated by theatre makers and organizers of the dramatic art, rather than the cultural policy makers, i.e. they take place “from below,” without strategic frameworks defined “from above.” In foreign countries, the urgency of the need for art education has led to networking between individuals and organizations active in the field of culture and education and government departments, to the establishment of special teams at the ministries of culture and education, to collaborations between departments of culture and education whose initiatives give rise to various projects and programmes to support art education, and simultaneously also to revisions of the functionality of the political instruments in the field of culture education as one of the important qualitative planes of audience development. In Slovakia, this crucial key to the formation of the audience’s taste remains in the hands of theatre makers, who rely on support from public sources.

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⁴⁰ Association of Theatre Educators. Welcome to the Library! [online]. [cit. 4 August 2022]. Available at: <https://divadelnilektori.cz/node/110>.

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