



ZENTRUM FÜR AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT | ZAD |

**Institut**  
**für**  
**Kultur**  
**und**  
**Medienmanagement**

# **Audiences for European Theatre**

**Results on Audiences and Audience Development**

**from Research in Theatres of the European Theatre Convention**



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# 1 Motivation and Objectives

The overall objective of the research project “Audiences for European Theatre” commissioned by the European Theatre Convention (ETC) was to provide knowledge about the ability of theatres to contribute to the integration and development of European societies.

To do so, the ETC commissioned the Center for Audience Development (ZAD) at the Institute for Arts and Media Management of the Freie Universität Berlin to conduct a two-part study: The first part consisted in collecting data from ETC member theatres on the nature and size of their venues, programming, budgets and staff on the one hand (Level 1) and on activities in audience development, marketing and Audience research (Level 2) on the other hand. The research results from Levels 1 & 2 have already been presented in a prior report. They constitute an overview of the structures, resources, strategies and programmes the theatres in Europe bring to bear in order to reach out to audiences.

The second part of the study consisted in performing audience research that establishes a standard for audience research to be adopted by other theatres, and also to identify common audience trends in European theatres (Level 3). Furthermore, the factors of success in addressing specific challenges in audience development that could be applied to other theatres were assessed (Level 4).

Seven ETC member theatres set out in the research Levels 3 & 4, of which one left the group in the course of the project. While the results and recommendations for each theatre are summarized in individual reports, the report at hand presents results that can be generalized, either as general trends or as a reaction to specific contextual factors.

The following chapter gives a short overview of the specific focus points of the research in the individual theatres. Chapter 3 coagulates core results from the individual surveys. It reflects on how these findings support or challenge the objective of theatres to integrate the society of their city or region into their audience. In final Chapter 4, the report suggests strategies and measures that have been found viable to reach and relate to new audiences.

## **2 Research Focus and Design**

### **2.1 Joint Preparation of Common Research Subjects**

The research should provide generalizable results that on the international level could be aggregated across all theatres and at the same time be adapted to the individual needs and regional contexts of the different theatres. Also quantitative figures on general patterns should be combined with qualitative understanding of specific contexts and interdependencies. To develop a common framework that fulfilled these requirements and to establish a joint working method allowing for a procedure to collect comparable data, the theatres that took part in the research in Level 3 & 4 were invited to a preparatory workshop in Berlin on May 29, 2013. As a starting point the informational needs of the participating theatres were collected and grouped into the following categories:

- Socio-demographics
- Visiting behaviour
- Patterns of cultural and leisure activities
- Communication and ticketing
- Expectations, satisfaction, suggestions
- Image

From these research topics, ZAD formulated core questions for each category to be included equally in all research in the same manner and proposed complementary questions that the individual theatres could adopt in order to analyse topics in more in-depth.

### **2.2 Profiles and Research Focus of Participating Theatres**

On the basis of the questionnaire modules, ZAD and the participating theatres individually agreed upon the set of questions for each theatre. The selected questions were then translated into the languages of the different countries and put into a layout provided by ZAD. Based on the theatres' programmes, ZAD set up the research schedules to conduct interviews. Except for one case, ZAD visited all theatres to set the basic rules for distributing, completing and recollecting the questionnaires. On these occasions, the distributing staff was enabled to perform the task according to quality standards securing the representativity of results. One of the theatres initially participating left the project in the course of the research. The following gives an overview of the six surveys included in this report and their specific focuses. The theatres are ordered according to the start of data collection:

#### **Theater Dortmund, Dortmund, Germany**

From October 18, 2013 to January 31, 2014, the visitor research was performed at Theater Dortmund. 2.429 completed questionnaires were returned. The specific focus was the perception of Theater Dortmund, especially among students and citizens with migrant background. The research was complemented by qualitative interviews with visitors and non-visitors from these target groups and with theatre staff responsible for the strategy and activities. The differences between the audiences of the different genres presented by Theater Dortmund (Opera, Drama, Ballet, Concert, Theatre for Younger Audiences) were specifically analysed.

### **Theatre Organisation of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus**

In the survey conducted from November 15, 2013 until March 31, 2014, a total of 966 visitors returned a completed filled-in questionnaire. Quantitative analysis focused on the variations in audiences for the differently positioned venues of the theatre. Concentrating on the development of future audiences, qualitative focus group discussions were held with students and women aged between 25 and 40 – the decision makers of young families.

### **Théâtre des Osses, Givisiez, Switzerland**

In the Théâtre des Osses, 531 visitors filled in the questionnaire in the survey from November 22 to January 31 2014. In order to complement the very loyal but ageing existing audience focus group discussions with young adults and people living in families with small children were held, focusing on their perception, prior experiences and the importance of theatre within their other culture and leisure activities. By confronting visitors in these target groups with non-visitors it was explored what could motivate the non-visitors to come to a performance of this theatre.

### **Zagrebačko Kazalište mladih (z/k/m/), Zagreb, Croatia**

820 visitors of z/k/m/ completed the questionnaire distributed between November 27 2013 and February 2014. The analysis focuses on visiting, planning and ticketing behaviour to support the attempt of the theatre to develop a more stable and long-term ticketing basis. Results of the survey shall be used to set up qualitative interviews with young visitors and non-visitors and job descriptions for the department for marketing and sales.

### **Teatrul National Timisoara, Romania**

The survey period at the Teatrul National in Timisoara ran from January 1 to February 28 2014, motivating 491 visitors to complete the questionnaire. In the individual analysis the results are used to assess whether in comparison to prior research the theatre has achieved to broaden its visitor base. In particular the development of more classical theatre goes and a deeper interest in contemporary theatre aesthetics is reviewed.

### **De Toneelmakerij Amsterdam, Netherlands**

The Amsterdam-based company for theatre for younger audiences De Toneelmakerij was a specific case in the research as it is a touring company so that it is difficult to speak of one audience in the same sense as in the case of theatres with an own venue. Also it is difficult to achieve representative results for research with younger audiences because of the limitations to obtain reliable information from young people. Yet the challenge was taken up and 92 specifically adapted questionnaires to capture the decision behaviour, perception and satisfaction were collected, 68 from parents or other adults and 24 from children. Qualitative interviews further investigated the factors and actors that influence the decision on attending a performance of a touring company in this specific genre.

### 3 Results on Common and Individual Patterns

This chapter presents patterns that became visible in the comparison between theatres. The results shall serve a dual function: In the first place, they represent points of reference for theatres that thus are able to assess whether a figure they find out about their audience corresponds with the findings of other theatres, or whether they are rather specific for their theatre – either signalling a need for action or causing satisfaction about attained objectives.

In addition, they establish a baseline for theatres, cultural politicians and other stakeholders. By referring to it, they can set up realistic objectives for audience development instead of building on assumptions or ideals.

#### 3.1 Audience Structure

##### Age

The representation of age groups in audiences of theatres has been subject to intense debate in cultural policy. It was observed that the age structure of audiences in many theatres is shifting towards older age groups, as the existing audience gets older and younger people are not visiting theatres to the same extent as previous generations did. Reasons were seen in the declining cultural relevance of classical theatre and the priority of individual experience and benefits instead of expectations from society.

In the past years, many theatres have taken up that challenge and have tried to win younger audiences. So did most of the theatres that participated in Levels 3 & 4. The research results suggests that **theatre still can successfully attract younger audiences, even in societies where social and economic development has led large parts of the younger population to focus on materialistic and non-cultural values**. Theatres that developed programmes, aesthetics and atmosphere that are in line with the preferences of young people in their cities, achieved a share of **up to 58% of people aged 30 and younger**.

These high percentages may only be achievable in theatres that can concentrate on the specific aesthetic preferences of younger target groups in their societies. For theatres like city, state or national theatres that are obliged to act as **theatres for the whole population, a share of approximately 20 to 25% for age groups up to 30 years of age seems to be attainable**. Yet, this is not a given and demands comprehensive efforts combining content, communications and atmospheric quality into an integrated strategy. The theatre with the “oldest” audience still had a share of 46% of people over the age of 60.

##### Education

The European Union tries to foster the integration of European societies. For the cultural field, this means in the first place that all parts of society participate in cultural life. Concerning the work of theatres, it translates into attracting not only people with academic background but also people with only primary education.

The research shows that the **share of visitors holding an academic degree is above 50% in all of the theatres**. This is consistent with knowledge provided by a EU-wide research on participation in culture published by EuroStat in 2006. It shows that across Europe, citizens holding an academic degree attend cultural sites or performances much more frequently than the population with only secondary medium or primary education – despite efforts to diversify audiences in a number of countries.

Another result is noteworthy: **In those theatres that attract a larger share of younger audiences through a combination of contemporary topics and aesthetics, the share of academic visitors is the highest among all theatres.** The two theatres with the highest share of visitors up to the age of 30 have a share of visitors with academic degrees of 64 to 79%. According to this, attracting younger visitors does not automatically go accompanied by a socially diverse audience.

Thus, the research performed in this project confirms findings of other studies performed by ZAD: Audiences for theatre and, more specifically drama, are mostly academically trained. Where the audience is younger, it is rather the students – future academics – who are attracted. In order to attract people with non-academic background, more far-reaching efforts seem to be necessary. In this respect, formats or content that lend from popular culture like sports, rock/pop music and musicians, or that seriously adopt the popular format of musicals and comedies have been successful. Another strategy that has proven successful in attracting larger shares of non-academic audiences is to integrate non-academic amateurs into the theatres in different types of “citizens’ stages”.

### **Local Reach, International Perspective**

The research results from Levels 3 & 4 and other studies of ZAD show that the **reach of average theatres in Europe is mainly local and regional.** The share of audience coming from the city where the theatre is located and the surrounding region combined amounts to 85%-97%. This corresponds to the rule of thumb in tourism that about 90% of one-day-visits comes from distances that are within an hour of door-to-door travel. In established infrastructures this often approximates a radius of 80 km.

The differences in the distribution among individual theatres are mainly due to the size of population of the city and the region where the theatre is located. Where the population of the city is small compared to the population of the region, the share of local visitors is generally lower. Where the population of the city is large relative to the region, the share of local audience in general is higher.

Interestingly enough, results from research in theatres that present several disciplines suggest that the audience for drama contains a larger share of local audience than opera and ballet. This pattern could be related to the fact that visitors to these genres are more often motivated by the wish to “experience something extraordinary”, a special activity that one is willing to make a larger effort to get to.

The predominance of local audiences implies that **international outreach and communication between theatres and audiences in general cannot take place through visitors attending theatres abroad. If international perspectives shall be brought to these audiences it has to be rather through guest performances and co-productions.**

## **3.2 Visiting Behaviour and Culture and Leisure Activities**

### **Delicate balance first time visitors and visiting frequency**

The share of people that visit a theatre for the first time is often used as a key indicator in audience development. In the theatres participating in the exemplary research of Levels 3 & 4, **the share of first time visitors ranged between 10 and 21%.**

Another key indicator in audience development is the loyalty of existing visitors. This is usually operationalized in terms of visiting frequency. The research performed in Levels 3 & 4 revealed a very relevant trait: The theatre with the highest share of first time visitors was also one with a very young audience, widespread visits to other popular types of leisure activities – and the lowest loyalty as expressed in the frequency of visits.

**Thus audience development only focused on first-time visitors from non-typical target groups seems to put pressure on securing attendance because of low visiting frequency.** Thus for a **balanced approach to audience development** three strategic directions should be framed:

- Try to keep or at best intensify the relation to existing audiences.
- Try to develop new core audiences from target groups that from their socio-economic indicators qualify for “theatre audiences” – for instance students.
- Try to develop non-typical-theatre audiences especially within the city and the region where the theatre is located.

### **Culture and leisure activities**

Culture and leisure activities have proven to be a valid indicator to differentiate between subgroups or segments within audiences. They are equally valid for comparing audiences from different theatres in cities with similar culture and leisure opportunities. In the research in this project, the cultural infrastructures of the individual cities were so diverse that a comparison would have reflected the differences between the cities rather than between the theatres.

Still, comparisons between the audiences confirmed culture and leisure patterns that have to be taken into consideration in audience development. It is commonplace that young audiences, both students and others, frequent popular culture such as discos/clubs and rock/pop concerts more often than others. It is more interesting that especially visitors aged between 30 and 50 years can be differentiated into those who only visit high culture activities (drama, opera, ballet, classical concerts) and those who visit both high culture activities and more popular activities (cinema, rock/pop concerts, monuments).

### **3.3 Motives, Expectations, Satisfaction, Image**

To serve as an instrument of audience development, research should not only provide a status quo of audience structures and hints to parts of the society that are currently underrepresented in the audiences. It shall also describe what makes the current visitors come to the theatre and how satisfied they are with their experience. The following section will summarize results on visiting motives and satisfaction, again helping theatres to assess how to interpret results from own research.

#### **Visiting motives and expectations**

As a basis for sustainable audience development, theatres should understand what motivates visitors to come. Only then they will be able to decide if or how they can accommodate these expectations.



For the research in Levels 3 & 4, a set of expectations was chosen from prior studies. The items are formulated rather generally to enable comparison between visitors in different genres or theatres<sup>1</sup>. Together with results on culture and leisure activities, they form a very informative profile of habits and cultural orientations. Through their general formulation, they can also be used to compare the motives of visitors with the motives of non-visitors with respect to their favourite leisure activities.

To aggregate the results from the different theatres, the motives were ranked according to their frequency of mention for each theatre, the most frequent having rank one. Then, the average rank across theatres was calculated. Afterwards, the motives were ordered according to their average rank. Hence, "Good entertainment" had the second-to-highest average ranking of all motives.

- „Interest in arts and culture“ (average ranking: 1,4)
- “Good entertainment” (average ranking: 3,0)
- „To experience something „live““ (average ranking: 4,2)
- „Pleasant atmosphere“ (average ranking: 4,6)
- „High artistic quality“ (average ranking: 4,8)
- „Improve general education“ (average ranking: 6,4)
- “Surprising impressions / artistic impulses” (average ranking: 6,8)
- „A specific actor / director“ (average ranking: 8,6)
- “Contemporary and innovative performances” (average ranking: 9,0)
- „To be with pleasant people / be in a scene“ (average ranking: 9,4)
- “The feeling of doing something extraordinary” (average ranking: 9,8)
- “Something to tell others about“ (average ranking: 10,4)
- “New stimulus on political issues” (average ranking: 12,8)
- „To get to know new people“ (average ranking: 13,8)

It has thus to be asserted that the audiences of participating theatres were most frequently motivated by a very **general interest in arts and culture**, followed by a group of four motives addressing basic qualities of theatre, **“to experience something ‘live’” combined with entertainment, atmosphere and “high artistic quality”**. From the answers to open questions or from open interviews, it is known that the item “high artistic quality” most often is used to describe the technical performance by artists on stage: the virtuosity of a musician or dancer, the intonation of an actor.

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<sup>1</sup> They are not designed to provide hands-on recommendations. If a theatre wishes to obtain this type of information it will get it with more detail through an additional open question.

Almost at the same level, two motives follow that are oriented either at stabilizing education – often, but not always stated together with high artistic quality – and the desire to get new artistic impulses. The fact that the items “Contemporary and innovative performances” and “New stimulus on political issues” rather appear in the lower rankings underlines the suggestion made in the section on visiting frequencies: **Focusing on contemporary issues and experimenting with formats can attract certain audiences, especially academically trained people or students who are ready and able to follow the theatres in their thinking and innovation. Yet, it will not be of high importance for large parts of the general audience.** Here, experiment and innovation even might work against the desire for classical “artistic quality” with conservative audiences or against “good entertainment” with more hedonistic audiences.

### Satisfaction

It is common practice in audience research to ask for the satisfaction with different aspects of theatre. The answers are highly relevant with respect to audience development as especially repeated satisfaction is supposed to motivate repeated visits and subsequently, lasting loyalty. Yet, the results can be misleading when not interpreted thoughtfully.

Answers on the question about satisfaction are usually tilting towards positive results. Especially concerning something that is as highly valued by society as theatre it is very probable that experiences that are not outright terrible will receive a rating of “satisfactory” reflecting social desirability.

Albeit that shortcoming of the scale, this way of measuring satisfaction is widely used as it is intuitive for the surveyed person and provides results that are comparable with the huge body of studies already performed using this methodology. To adapt to the known tilt towards positive results the ZAD has established strict thresholds for results to be regarded as “acceptable”, “good” or “very good”:

Very good      95 - 100% have checked “satisfied” or “very satisfied” („Top 2“).

Good            90 - 94% have checked “satisfied” or “very satisfied”.

Acceptable    85 - 89% have checked “satisfied” or “very satisfied”.

When judging results from research it should be taken into account that not for all aspects of a theatre’s work satisfaction is equally easy to achieve. The following table gives an overview of the average share of “satisfied” or “very satisfied” for the most relevant aesthetic/artistic categories.

	Average share of “satisfied” and “very satisfied”
Satisfaction with the theatre overall	87%
Performance of directing	80%
Performance of artists on stage	89%
Programme diversity	73%
Atmosphere	85%

These general pattern validates the results from prior research by ZAD. Among the central dimensions of artistic quality, the **performance of actors usually receives the highest satisfaction** levels. **Directing and programming usually reach lower levels.** In-depth analysis in other studies suggests that in these quality dimensions the aesthetic preferences of the audience come into play. As these preferences usually cover a broad range, the theatre can only meet a certain range of them and risks disappointing considerable parts of the audience.

**Although lesser satisfaction in the area of directing and programming is a common pattern, it should not be neglected. It should rather be an impulse to intensify the attempts to communicate about aesthetic and programme decisions through post-performance discussions, active response to comments in social media or other activities.**

Finally the **relevance of the dimension “atmosphere”** shall be underlined. Satisfaction with this dimension often shows strong statistical relation to satisfaction with the theatre overall. This is **consistent with the finding that “good atmosphere” holds the forth rank of visiting motives.** These patterns indicate that a **holistic atmospheric quality can attract and keep different types of visitors that might otherwise have different aesthetic preferences.**

### 3.4 Information and Communication

Up to now the analysis has mainly focused on the connection between a theatre’s offers and the preferences of existing or potential audiences. It is evident that in addition, the theatres’ communication has to be suitable for the habits of their audiences.

Patterns of communication and information differ among regions with different media traditions and offers. In addition, the information channels used by the existing visitors can only rely on existing media provided by the theatres. A number of theatres in this study have no separate budget for marketing and communication so that they have to work without print media like monthly programme leaflets or season programmes. Nevertheless, the next section tries to describe some basic patterns and combine it with findings specific for different types of theatres.

As a basis, the following two tables show the average ranking of information channels based upon the share of people that got information about the play visited on the night of the data collection and, respectively, about the theatre in general. In order to give a rough operational benchmark for the reach of the channels, the approximate average usage is stated in brackets<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> For this, the arithmetic mean of the rates of use in each theatre was calculated. As the surveys differ in sample size, this average is rounded to steps of five. A value of 7% will thus be transformed to „ca. 5%“, a value of 8 to „ca. 10%“.

Channel for information about the production visited on the day of the survey	Average ranking and approximate rate of use
Partners / friends / acquaintances / relatives	1,4 (ca. 40%)
Season brochure (2 theatres)	2,0 (ca. 30%)
Website of the theatre	3,0 (ca. 25%)
Prior visits	4,6 (ca. 20%)
Internet in general	5,2 (ca. 20%)
Subscriptions (3 theatres)	6,0 (ca. 20%)
Monthly programme (3 theatres)	6,7 (ca. 20%)
Articles in newspapers	6,8 (ca. 20%)
Posters billboards at the theatre and in the city	7,2 (ca. 15%)
Advertisements in newspapers / magazines	7,8 (ca. 10%)
Facebook page of the theatre	9,8 (ca. 10%)
Newsletter of the theatre	10,4 (ca. 5%)
School / teachers / university	10,8 (ca. 5%)
Report on the radio	11,6 (ca. 5%)
Report on TV	12,8 (ca. 5%)
Youtube	14,4 (< 5%)
Twitter	15,4 (< 5%)

Channel for information about the theatre in general	Average ranking and approximate rate of use
Prior visits	1,8 (ca. 30%)
Season brochure (2 theatres)	2,5 (ca. 25%)
Website of the theatre	3,0 (ca. 25%)
Internet in general	4,0 (ca. 20%)
Partners / friends / acquaintances / relatives	4,0 (ca. 20%)
Articles in newspapers	5,4 (ca. 15%)
Subscriptions (3 theatres)	6,3 (ca. 15%)
Monthly programme (3 theatres)	6,7 (ca. 15%)
Posters, billboards at the theatre and in the city	7,6 (ca. 15%)
Advertisements in newspapers / magazines	8,2 (ca. 10%)
Facebook page of the theatre	10,4 (ca. 10%)
Newsletter of the theatre	10,8 (ca. 10%)
School / teachers / university	11,2 (ca. 5%)
Report on TV	12,6 (ca. 5%)
Report on the radio	12,8 (ca. 5%)
Youtube	14,8 (< 5%)
Twitter	15,8 (< 5%)

**Information and recommendation from the personal environment was the most relevant channel for the production** visited on the night of the survey. This lead passes on to **information gathered during a prior stay at the theatre when it comes to information about the theatre itself**. The latter fact encourages to systematically providing the visitor with onsite information about both plays and the theatre as a whole.

Also, across all theatres, basic digital communication via the own website and via the internet in general are core communication means. The design of the own website should therefore always receive extra attention.

For the remaining communication channels a rather sharp distinction can be made: In theatres that can finance a season brochure and monthly programmes, those are still relevant. The **season brochure is more frequently used by older and more academic visitors**. It often goes hand in hand with higher visiting frequencies and holding subscriptions.

On the other hand, the **theatres with younger audiences** had sometimes **substantially higher usage rates of facebook, namely between 12 an 14%** – the same level as season brochures in the theatres that provide those. It cannot be asserted whether the usage rate of facebook is as high because the young audience of these theatres prefers this channel, or whether the audience is as young because other audiences are not reached as a result of the lack of classical print media in these theatres.

Another interesting feature is that communication via **posters and billboards proves very efficient (with a use rate of up to 27% for information and the visited production)** in the theatres that have large shares of local visitors.

Together with a significantly higher rate of word-of-mouth from social contacts in these theatres, the results combine into a picture of **younger audiences informing themselves through a number of segmented bits of information collected on- and offline, combined with exchange with friends that probably also takes part both offline and online via social media**.

## **4 Generalizations and Recommendations**

The individual research focuses of theatres participating in Levels 3 & 4 have been described in Chapter 2. Many of them can be condensed into the attraction of young audiences – as young adults, students or young families – and the subsequent intensification of loyalty. In this concluding chapter, selected strategic approaches are discussed that have proven to be viable to address the respective target audiences either in this research or in other studies by ZAD.

### **4.1 Local Content**

Devised theatre that builds on site-specific topics has been widely adopted as an artistic practice in the past years. The motivation was both an artistic means to refrain from reproducing old pieces that are considered to be diminishingly relevant for today's life, and audience-oriented to relate to the concerns of the people of the cities or regions. Qualitative interviews and group discussions hint to a certain effect on the audiences expressed as the observation that "the theatre is doing something". Yet, it was already pointed out that reflecting on political topics in itself is a relevant visiting motive for only a small part of the audience.

Thus the empirical results of this and other research to a certain extent caution the expectations of a lot of theatres to establish new bonds through working with topics developed from the theatre's contexts. There is evidence that they can raise identification with visitors that are open and used to reflect about their society through the means of theatre. Yet results also suggest that this is not automatically so with people who do not already have a habit to look on their reality through theatre. For these non-typical theatre audiences it could support openness and identification if the approach of documentary or biographic theatre is combined with the adoption of formats and aesthetics of popular culture. Another way to enlarge the effect of local content on stage is the systematic inclusion of amateurs as described below. This way, the reflection does not only take place between the theatre itself and the audience but the theatre becomes a forum for exchange among the citizens.

### **4.2 Integration – Amateurs on Stage and Community Projects**

As pointed out in the section on educational degrees, experimental and innovative theatre seems a viable option to attract young audiences. Yet, these uncommon formats tend to result in an audience that is even more „academic“ than for more classical theatre aesthetics and topics. One way to effectively win non-typical audiences is to integrate them into theatre productions. The range of organizational formats is vast. It can range from one-time activities like amateur choirs for specific productions up to full-scale programme lines with own brands ("people's theatre", "citizens' stage").

Research on success factors suggests that the precondition for sustainable effects are that the activities do not stand alone but are part of conceivable, lasting strategies. Also, it is important that the results of the work get a platform for presentation, ideally as an integral part of the "normal" theatre programme. Set up like this, it will motivate participants to mobilize as many people as possible to see "their" production. By working with target groups that are attractive for the theatre, one can reach out to networks that would otherwise not have considered to come to the theatre at all.

### **4.3 Lending from popular culture – Video, Music, Comedy and Musical**

When asked what type of performing art could make them come to the theatre, the standard answer from young non-visitors in the focus groups within this project was: Something entertaining and funny that still has something serious to it. In qualitative interviews in other studies people often referred to stand-up comedy, impro-theatre or musicals as points of reference when they wanted to describe the type of performing arts that might make them come to theatre. In a research performed by ZAD a programme that combined live rock/pop music with scenic performance (“music theatre”) achieves to bring a significantly more male, less educated audience into the theatre.

Yet, these activities should be part of a strategy that engulfs more than just one event or performance. In-depth analysis of audience research data on the basis of single productions suggests that the satisfaction with programme diversity is lower than average in productions that are a one-off experiment. The audience seems not to appreciate the experiment but to complain about the lack of more comparable performances. The embrace of more popular culture has to be meant seriously and not as a trick to gain audiences for the “real” theatre programme.

### **4.4 International Presenting and Co-Producing**

All of the theatres that took part in this project were mainly producing theatres where presenting, especially international, is significantly less prominent in the programme than own productions. Accordingly they also played a smaller role in the comments made by people in the qualitative interviews and group discussions performed in the theatres. Still there were some contributions where guest performances were cited as incentives to event-oriented audiences for visiting theatres more often. They were seen as offering impulses that were new or unusual to the city or region. Yet the results on visiting motives suggest that the fact of being from the outside in itself will be of specific relevance only to people who are driven by the desire for new impulses – which are not so frequent. If guest performances and co-productions shall, among other aims, serve to attract more audiences, it has to be clear what additional value they provide with respect to the visiting motives cited above – a specific artist, especially good entertainment or other.

### **4.5 Integrated Communication**

As described in the section on visiting frequencies, non-typical visitors and younger audiences tend to have lower visiting frequencies. Often they have been attracted to the theatre by specific marketing activities or programmes. Thus, theatres that have to rely on these target groups face substantially higher marketing needs to convince new audiences anew and again. The challenge is aggravated by the segmented communication patterns described in the previous chapter. Knowledge about loyalty-building with younger audiences is still developing. Examples collected in this research and other studies stress the importance of entering personal communication networks.

Efforts to do so can and should be as diversified as the media used: Specific campaigns to gain more facebook-followers; in parallel working in the digital sphere – e.g. through newsletters; through print media – e.g. through flyers; inviting to join facebook or other online platforms of the theatre; and on site – e.g. through banners in the theatre.

All theatres that took part in research Level 3 & 4 had a clear consciousness about the importance of collecting as much information about their visitors as possible (contact data, productions visited, dates of visit). Where theatres did not have the financial resources to collect these data automatically via their ticketing system, they tried to do so through simple databases in standard software. While CRM-software allows setting up algorithms that trigger specific sets of communication, theatres can develop standard communication patterns that are followed with a certain routine – such as standard emails following any visit that you know of or a reminder to anyone that has not been to the theatre for at least a year. These efforts to integrate visitor data and to use them systematically are very much encouraged by the results at hand.

On a strategic level, the last remarks lead to a need for a unifying concept that can merge the rather diverse activities into a general approach. Probably the most viable concept for this is the concept of (cross media) storytelling. On the basis of more long-term agendas theatres can link different formats, different media and different types of information from backstage reports to classical production announcement to narratives about the theatre and its activities. It can thus become an active communication partner for their existing and potential visitors. Thus the role changes from mainly advertising different productions to telling stories about the theatre - and theatre in general – that bind people and will motivate them when a specific production is announced.