

# From Institutional Fatigue to Creative Communication: Audience Development in Lithuanian Theatres

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## **ABSTRACT**

A considerable decreasing number of visitors to artistic and cultural institutions, which in certain European countries has dropped 50%, the unfavourable demographic situation, receding public finances, the growing competitive ability of user-oriented, interactive entertainment industries, and the new technology sector, which is especially disturbing for artistic institutions in post-Soviet countries, where they are used to limit competition – these are the major issues that are forcing the decision makers of cultural politics to focus their attention on art audiences at the topmost institutional level. In the context of these transformations, the concept of audience development, denominated by Nobuko Kawashima “a conflicting term” almost two decades ago, is becoming even more complex. Placed at the centre of the political and financial agenda of the European Union (EU) by its cultural policy makers, it is, on the one hand, born out of the desire to place part of the financial burden of support for cultural institutions on the shoulders of the public, but on the other hand, it also signals the wish to shake up the passive European citizen, to activate his/her civic sense through artistic practices, or even to help “combat social exclusion”. The article focuses on the theoretical and practical implications as well as the effectiveness and limitations of various forms of audience development employed by publicly funded theatres in Lithuania. Empirical research is based on qualitative interviews with managers and art directors of Lithuanian theatre companies as well as focus group audience research. The larger questions about the possible outcomes of various audience development strategies – whether during these developments, Lithuanian theatres will become places of creative cooperation open to diverse audiences or simply fields of aggressive marketing – will be addressed as well.

## **KEYWORDS**

Audience development, audience research, Lithuanian theatre, public theatres, participatory culture

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# From Institutional Fatigue to Creative Communication: Audience Development in Lithuanian Theatres

## INTRODUCTION

The principles of participatory culture have offered the contemporary audience wide possibilities to create content (or to participate in creating it): the functions that were once monopolized by cultural institutions and the media are now dispersed throughout the vast communication spaces; the networks and channels of easily accessible technologies produce new universes of personal interests and collective ambitions. New technologies and social media platforms successfully multiply new forms of creativity, offer innovative channels of distribution and win the hearts of ever younger audiences. According to Hillary Glow, how performing arts organizations respond to this challenge of co-creation is a complex question and requires new ways of thinking about not just the presentation of works, but audience engagement and enhanced opportunities for interaction.<sup>1</sup> “Arts organizations cannot afford to continue to think of themselves as producers or presenters of cultural product, rather they are the ‘orchestrators of social interaction’ with communities who are seeking opportunities for interactivity, participation, access and engagement.”<sup>2</sup>

In this context, theatre institutions are forced to rediscover the spectators and try to “lure” them by employing not only aesthetic, but also innovative audience development strategies: they persistently invite audiences to actively participate, co-create, communicate, striving to spread the message about the engaging and participatory nature of theatre among its loyal fans and future followers yet to be discovered. It is, nevertheless, still difficult to answer the question, paraphrasing Jen Harvie, is the “consumer-friendly” interactive audience development strategy a contribution to the development of an inclusive and democratic society, or rather a “communication spectacle” offering just the illusion of social egalitarianism?<sup>3</sup>

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1 Glow 2013, 38.

2 Glow 2013, 39.

3 Harvie 2014.

In the context of these transformations, the concept of audience development, denominated by Nobuko Kawashima “a conflicting term” almost two decades ago, is becoming even more complex.<sup>4</sup> Placed at the centre of the political and financial agenda of the European Union (EU) by its cultural policy makers, it is on the one hand born out of the desire to place part of the financial burden of support for cultural institutions on the shoulders of the public, but, on the other hand, it also signals the wish to shake up the passive European citizen, to activate his/her civic sense through artistic practices or even to help “combat social exclusion”.<sup>5</sup> The article will focus on the theoretical and practical implications as well as the effectiveness and limitations of various forms of audience development employed by publicly funded theatres in Lithuania. The larger questions about the possible outcomes of various audience development strategies – whether during these developments, Lithuanian theatres will become places of creative cooperation open to diverse audiences, or simply fields of aggressive marketing – will be addressed as well.

Empirical research is based on qualitative interviews with managers and art directors of Lithuanian theatre companies as well as focus group audience research.<sup>6</sup> Three to five staff members at four Lithuanian publicly funded theatres were interviewed: general managers, managing directors, and employees working in communication, education, and marketing departments. Four focus groups, consisting of five to eight participants and representing various audience segments of particular theatre were conducted in Kaunas and Klaipėda in 2013–14. In addition to qualitative interviews and focus group discussions, data from the survey *Participation of the Population in Culture and Satisfaction with Cultural Services*, commissioned by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania and carried out by two companies – “ESTEP Vilnius” and “Centre for Social Information” – in 2014 was analyzed and various national and regional policy papers and evaluation reports, concerning the regulations of state funded theatres and audience development strategies, were examined.<sup>7</sup>

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4 Kawashima 2000, 25.

5 Kawashima 2000, 17.

6 There are 13 state funded theatres in Lithuania: 8 drama, 2 puppet and 3 musical theatres. Three of them have received the status of National Theatre after Lithuania regained its independence: Lithuanian National Drama Theatre, Kaunas National Drama Theatre and Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theatre. The sector of publicly funded theatres is complemented with 12 municipal theatres, partly or entirely funded by Lithuanian municipalities.

7 *Survey of Participation of the Population in Culture and Satisfaction with Cultural Services Guidelines of the Lithuanian Cultural Policy 2010*, *Law on Theatre and Concert Institutions of the Lithuanian Republic 2016*.

## CREATING THE DEMAND FOR PARTICIPATION: AUDIENCE AS CONSUMER

The concept of audience development integrating various strategies of creativity, communication, and education aimed at the expansion of the field of cultural consumers became the focus of the political and financial agenda of EU decision-makers in recent years.<sup>8</sup> A considerable decreasing number of visitors to artistic and cultural institutions, which in certain European countries has dropped 50%, the unfavourable demographic situation, receding public finances, the growing competitive ability of user-oriented, interactive entertainment industries, and the new technology sector, which is especially disturbing for artistic institutions in post-Soviet countries, where they are used to limit competition – these are the major issues that are forcing the decision makers of cultural politics to focus their attention on art audiences at the topmost institutional level.

Described as “a strategic, dynamic and interactive process of making the arts widely accessible and aiming at engaging individuals and communities in experiencing, enjoying, participating in, and valuing the arts through various means available today for cultural operators, from digital tools to volunteering, from co-creation to partnerships”<sup>9</sup> within the framework of the guidelines of the EU’s cultural policy as well as the theoretical discourse of sociology, art research, marketing, and communication, the term “audience development” does not merely indicate an integrated approach towards the cultivation of the demand for the arts, but also presupposes a shift in the understanding of the recipient of artistic production – the spectator. The growth of participatory culture and personal content creation fostered by new media technologies manifested the importance of the audience in the processes of content creation and distribution. Consumer as “prosumer” (Alvin Toffler); the terms “co-creation”, “co-design”, “co-production”; DIY art strategies; “Culture 3.0” (Pier Luigi Sacco); “amateurs as experts”, etc. – all of these concepts presume active audiences participating in the production of cultural facts and meanings. Moreover, it turned out that not only are audiences participating in content construction, they themselves can also be built or ‘created’ as spontaneous communities using various methods of audience development. To rephrase Hilary Glow, this “democratisation of both artistic production and the means of artistic distribution has catalysed” not only a “redefinition of authorship and the cultural market”,<sup>10</sup> but also the rethinking of audience development.

In many European countries, the issue of audience development emerged among the political priorities in the last decades of the twentieth century. In the UK the importance of audience development was recognized primarily

8 Bamford and Wimmer 2012.

*Policies and Good Practices in the Public Arts and in Cultural Institutions to Promote Better Access to and Wider Participation in Culture* 2012.

9 *European Commission opens call for tenders for study on audience development* 2015.

10 Glow 2013, 37.

due to the changes in social politics: New Labour emphasised the ability of culture to achieve wider social inclusion and redirected funds to attract new audiences from traditionally non-attending minority groups, striving to create “the impression of social inclusion”. Hence, artistic organizations were turned into missionaries, on a crusade for “attracting new audiences” and the whole idea of attracting non-attenders was metaphorically called the “conversion of infidels”.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, these “political and cultural imperatives around social inclusion” represented, according to Hilary Glow, “a significant move away from the conventionally patrician and elitist role of arts organisations as the arbiter of culture towards a new role in facilitating active community participation and responding to the diverse publics [...] it serves.”<sup>12</sup>

Marketing experts, however, soon discovered that equating the search for new audiences to a conquest of new lands is not just a metaphor – high expenses, unpredictability, and the scope of work needed for such practice often proved to be unsustainable for the artistic organization, at least in the short run. Moreover, the artistic organizations are well familiar with their loyal public, but know much less about the needs of those who have never participated in their activities. Consequently, in order to be knowledgeable about non-attenders, the organizations have to find new resources, time, and personnel.<sup>13</sup> As the research of the audience in the UK demonstrates, the number of those who have never attended any art event varies from 30 to 50 percent of the total population, which unquestionably is an alluring bait for any art organization in the face of a diminishing audience.<sup>14</sup> Similar research commissioned by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania in 2014 indicates that around 22 percent of respondents are not willing to participate in cultural events, 36 percent are the users of mass entertainment, 6 percent are senior citizens who have limited possibilities to participate in art events, 12 per cent are young people who participate in cultural activities sporadically from time to time and only 24 percent are active participants of culture.<sup>15</sup> Not surprisingly, in spite of all the difficulties, cultural institutions are inclined to submit themselves to the fever of the search for new audiences, especially if they receive political and financial support.

However, detailed analysis of existing audience development strategies and their underlying premises showcase not only the challenges embedded in audience development practices, but also the complex or even contradictory nature of the term itself: audience development is seen by many researchers as a concept with internal tensions. According to Nabuko Kawashima, on the one hand the discourse on audience development is permeated with an ideology of universal cultural values that mirrors the Liberal Humanist

11 Hutton, Bridgwood and Dust 2004; Danielsen 2008.

12 Glow 2013, 37.

13 Hand 2011; Hayes and Slater 2002, 2–5.

14 Keaney 2008.

15 *Survey of Participation of the Population in Culture and Satisfaction with Cultural Services*, 2014.

tradition of thought, “which insists on the rights and potential of all individuals to benefit from culture.”<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, a sociological approach argues that culture in practice reproduces cultural divides and social stratification. “Culture is in fact a powerful tool for marking divisions between groups of people, and often functions even if unconsciously to institutionalise social inequality.”<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, according to Richard Butsch, the intrinsic distinction between “passive” and “active” embedded in the concept of audience development falls into the schematic dichotomies that persist throughout the history of audience research.<sup>18</sup> As with any other dichotomy, this schematic separation of audience types can be interpreted as the division between good and bad theatre-goers. Paradoxically, during different historical periods the labels of “good” and “bad” shifted: “in the nineteenth century, critics feared active audiences; in the twentieth, their *passivity*.”<sup>19</sup> Such distinctions, moreover, form a basis for other distinctions between citizens capable of informed judgment and incapable citizens requiring guidance and guardianship from art institutions or mentors.<sup>20</sup> Exactly the same idea is expressed by Jacques Rancière in his seminal book “The Emancipated Spectator”, stating that the binary of active/passive is an allegory of inequality: “this is because the binary of active/passive always ends up dividing a population into those with capacity on one side, and those with incapacity on the other.”<sup>21</sup>

In turn, these contradictions are transferred into differences in the strategies of audience development as applied by art institutions: according to Kawashima, these can be differentiated as product-led and target-led approaches.<sup>22</sup> The product-led approach strives to offer the core product to the segments of audience that would be interested in it, including new audiences, while the target-driven approach tries to “identify the kinds of benefit the target group is seeking and to match the product to it.”<sup>23</sup> However, the target-driven approach, although more inclined to achieving cultural inclusion, may require, according to Egil Bjørnsen, a different type of “cultural leadership”: “if the core product has to be set aside in favour of engaging new and culturally excluded audience groups on their own terms, this involves great challenges in relation to the arts organisations’ strategies and their approach to cultural leadership.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore the call for the “holistic approach to viewing the public and its diverse involvement in cultural life” is mainly seen as a tool for combating the contradictions embedded in the notion of audience

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16 Kawashima 2000, 19.

17 Kawashima 2000, 71.

18 Butsch 2000, 3.

19 Butsch 2000, 2.

20 Butsch 2008, 118.

21 Rancière 2009, 16.

22 Kawashima 2000, 23.

23 Ibid.

24 Bjørnsen 2014, 8,

development. Consequently, audience development should be perceived as a sustained, creative and integrated development of the demand for art, incorporating not only marketing campaigns, but also a necessity to provide people with competences and the knowledge needed for effective aesthetic communication as well as developing “the co-creative capabilities of customers.”<sup>25</sup>

Researchers make it absolutely clear that artistic values are not obvious or self-evident. Egil Bjørnsen argues, referring to sociological research since Pierre Bourdieu, that “the ability to appreciate art and become an active consumer of ‘professional’ art presupposes knowledge that can help to decipher the artistic message. [...] People who have not had role models who appreciated art and culture have little ability to appreciate art and will generally either be negative or indifferent to publicly-funded culture.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Laura Zakaras and Julia F. Lowell state that, if children do not encounter art in their early years, there are very few chances that they will develop the need for aesthetic experience in the future, unless the perceptual barriers were effectively eliminated by the use of special tools of audience development.<sup>27</sup>

Results of almost all audience research point out that there are two kinds of barriers to arts involvement: practical barriers and perceptual barriers.<sup>28</sup> Contrary to popular belief, the practical barriers such as costs, location, convenience, lack of information, and scheduling are not so important and become the “threshold” only for already existing attenders. According to Zakaras and Lowell, “marketing campaigns are typically designed to promote access to arts events by mitigating the practical barriers that prevent individuals who are inclined to participate from doing so.”<sup>29</sup> The perception-related barriers, on the other hand, including the lack of experience, social stigmas, and the lack of sociocultural skills, which impede participation in culture, can only be effectively eliminated through holistic and inclusive audience development strategies integrating programming, communication, marketing, and education.

### **BETWEEN POLITICAL STRATEGIES AND QUOTIDIAN REALITIES: AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT IN LITHUANIAN THEATRES**

Discussing European cultural policy and culture institutions, Dragan Klaić offers the concept of “institutional fatigue”. According to the researcher, on the one hand, the models of European institutional culture that have continued their existence without substantive changes for 200 years are now experiencing a “nervous” period due to the growing competition in the field of cultural industries and the dominant model of mass consumption. On the other hand, “traditional” institutions are not always able to take into account to what

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25 Boorsma 2006, 87.

26 Bjørnsen 2014, 5.

27 Zakaras and Lowell 2008, 18.

28 Zakaras and Lowell 2008, 13.

29 Zakaras and Lowell 2008, 13.

degree communication with the public has been affected by the revolution of information and communication technologies as they do not understand “that this communication is not only about cultural products but is a cultural product itself.”<sup>30</sup> There are also a lot of signs of “institutional fatigue” and ignorance of new communication processes related to audience development in the field of Lithuanian theatre institutions. The institutional memory and well-established models of administration do not allow Lithuanian state sponsored theatres to keep pace with cultural innovations and social changes. Consequently, an active position in the cultural field is often taken by other agents.

The consideration of the demands of the audience as well as the “prioritizing of better access and wider participation in culture and arts” are highlighted not only in the Guidelines of the Lithuanian Cultural Policy, milestones of project-based financial support on the national and municipal levels, but also in the regulation documents of theatrical institutions. However, a closer look at the activities of publicly-funded Lithuanian theatres demonstrates that the theoretical priority of audience development does not always translate into practical actions of theatre institutions.

The analysis of state funding principles for Lithuanian theatre institutions can, at least partly, explain the discrepancy between theoretical postulates and reality. According to the authors of the research on the efficiency of the Lithuanian theatre system, the priority of better access and wider participation in culture is not embedded in the logic of Lithuanian budgetary funding for theatre institutions.<sup>31</sup> In Lithuania, the reports on audience attendance are submitted annually by publicly-funded theatres to the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania. However, the rates of audience participation are neither decisive factors in administering public subsidy for theatre institutions, nor important elements in considering the size of subsidy. Furthermore, neither data on the constitution of the audience, nor the number of attracted new segments of theatre-goers are requested from publicly-funded theatres by their subsidizing body. Consequently, activities taken to improve audience development in Lithuanian public theatres are not the result of political will sustained by financial means or of shifts in sociocultural policies of the state, but rather of the needs of individual theatre institutions or artists. Therefore, one can state that the tools for political and financial support for audience development activities in Lithuania have yet to be designed.

The research paper, *Audience Building and the Future Creative Europe Programme* developed by the research team of the European Expert Network on Culture (EENC), points out seven factors that determine effective audience development: education; outreach and accessibility; partnerships; user engagement; pricing; geography and audience segmentation.<sup>32</sup> The

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30 Klaić 2008, 88–89.

31 *Research and Guidelines of Modernisation of the System of Drama Theatres in Lithuania* 2010, 18.

32 Bamford and Wimmer 2012, 11–21.



comparative analysis of the cases of application of the strategies defined by the EENC in the activities of Lithuanian theatre institutions demonstrates that even though almost half of these factors are formally present in the activities of Lithuanian theatre, the good practices of effective audience development are rather rare.

In Europe, nobody questions the significant role of education and arts learning in the process of increasing the participation in arts and culture. On the other hand, effective educational programmes are understood as laboratories of creativity, where interactive and creative collaboration between artists and new audiences are established for the first time. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that compared to other factors described by the EENC, education, as part of the audience development curriculum, is given the biggest attention in Lithuanian theatre institutions. However, it is important to note that Lithuanian theatres are inclined to understand educational projects rather narrowly – the most frequent educational activity is performances for children in the theatre’s repertoire. There are several educational festivals targeting young theatre professionals that can only partly be defined as platforms of audience education (for example, “Silence!” – a festival showcasing debuts of young theatre professionals, organised by the Vilnius Small Theatre and festival “Days of Young Theatre” initiated five years ago by Klaipėda Youth Theatre). Furthermore, there are only a few examples of systematic educational audience development strategies: a continuous approach towards theatre education can be found in the programming of the festival “Theatre Diving” in Kaunas National Drama Theatre; the educational activities of the Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theatre; Kaunas State Puppet Theatre, “Arts Printing House” Vilnius, etc.

The most effective and innovative approaches towards theatre education are developed by Kaunas National Drama Theatre with the educational festival “Theatre Diving” and Kaunas State Puppet Theatre and its festival “Children and Puppets Are Smiling”. “Theatre Diving” has received numerous awards as the best educational and audience development practice in Lithuania as the festival strives to combine classical educational activities such as workshops, lectures, excursions, discussions, and meetings with theatre artists with an innovative and collaborative approach that befits the notion of ‘open education’: creative laboratories “Theatre Shorts”, “Night of Anxiety with Hedda Gabler”, etc., where children and young audiences can participate in the process of co-creation.

“Children and Puppets Are Smiling”, however, is a classical puppet theatre festival for children and young adults; but its most innovative educational activities are the workshops in the Theatre’s Puppet Museum and a parade of puppets and masks along the main street of Kaunas’s Laisvės Avenue. The participants of a focus group interview have confirmed that the inclusive nature of the puppet street parade and the possibilities to “touch the actual puppets in the museum and see how they are made” are effective tools for

engaging with the youngest audience segment.<sup>33</sup> An overview of the educational activities of Lithuanian theatres demonstrates that they are most often designed for children and young audiences, while other audiences like seniors or different segments of new audiences are still being ignored by public theatres. It seems that publicly funded theatres in Lithuania are not eager to initiate educational activities designed for the segments other than their “core audiences” as their long term audience development strategy, primarily because of the lack of knowledge, human resources as well as financial support.

Outreach and accessibility mean directing one’s efforts towards audiences of exclusion and various new audience segments, which, for one reason or another, are unable to make use of the advantages of artistic practices. In the context of Lithuanian theatre so far the most effective means of improving accessibility and outreach are theatre tours in the regions. However, paradoxically the regional theatres are touring more actively (the leaders are the regional Klaipėda, Panevėžys and Šiauliai State Drama Theatres) than theatre institutions from Kaunas or Vilnius.<sup>34</sup> It is obvious that such uni-directional touring trajectories go against the grain of providing better access to and wider participation in theatre culture, since Vilnius and Kaunas theatres are not willing to send their best productions to the regions, thus only strengthening the centralized model of culture concentration in Lithuania.

On the other hand, guerrilla-marketing campaigns and interventions into public spaces can at least be partly qualified as a tool for enhancing outreach and accessibility. Compared to other Lithuanian theatres, Kaunas National Drama Theatre is the leader in the area of non-conventional and inclusive marketing: for the première of Anton Chekhov’s ‘The Cherry Orchard’ (directed by Artūras Areima, 2013), the theatre placed an advertisement in the major city newspaper, “Kauno diena”, announcing that they were selling some private land with a cherry orchard in it, or, for example, before the opening night of the performance “Together” (based on the book “Depeche Mode” by Ukrainian writer Serhiy Zhadan, directed by Artūras Areima, 2014), the theatre publicly invited everyone to get rid of all their soviet heritage and burn it on the spot in Laisvės avenue near the main theatre building. These strategies are also recognized as effective by the participants of the focus group, who state that the “marketing campaigns of Kaunas National Drama Theatre sometimes are even more interesting and inclusive than the performances they advertise.”<sup>35</sup>

Partnerships point to a collaboration of artistic organizations with various institutions that may be helpful for audience development, such as research centres, educational institutions, enterprises, private partnerships, and funding bodies. Among analysed theatres, Kaunas National Drama Theatre has

33 Focus group on Kaunas State Puppet Theatre.

34 In 2009, among Lithuanian state-supported theatres, Klaipėda State Drama Theatre showed the biggest amount of touring performances: 57, Panevėžys Drama Juozas Miltinis Theatre: 45 and Šiauliai Drama theatre: 22. *Research and Guidelines*, 29.

35 Focus group on Kaunas National Drama Theatre.

the most numerous network of partners, ranging from universities to private businesses. The example of an audience development tool born out of such a partnership is the online initiative, “Theatre ONLINE”, created on a volunteer basis by students from a partnering university, where all archival information about the theatre, performance recordings, interviews, and other materials are uploaded and can be freely accessed online via the theatre’s internet site.<sup>36</sup> As a unique platform in the landscape of internet sites of Lithuanian theatres, “Theatre ONLINE” strives to make theatre appear more accessible and caters to the needs of various audience segments: it offers possibilities of a first encounter with a theatre experience in the form of performance recordings, interviews, opportunities to see the inside processes of performance creation (recordings of rehearsals) as well as information that can be useful for the “core audience” segment.

Participation in international professional networks and associations can also be useful for sharing the best practices of audience development. Kaunas State Puppet Theatre participates in many international networks such as UNIMA (Union Internationale de la Marionnette), ASSITEJ – International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People and NEECPA (The Northern and Eastern European Centre of Puppet Arts), and these partnerships quite often facilitate theatre internationalization and participation in various international projects. Thus, theatres in Lithuania are quite actively involved in collaboration with private sponsors or state enterprises, and educational institutions (mostly schools), while less active, or non-existent in some cases, regarding cooperation with research centres or international organisations.<sup>37</sup>

Another useful strategy of audience development - user engagement - relates to the experiences of user-oriented content made possible by digital technologies. According to Hilary Glow, contemporary audiences are increasingly seeking a level of engagement with theatre companies that is informed, active, reflexive, and empowered.<sup>38</sup> A similar conclusion can be drawn from focus group discussions with audience members: they are eager to experience user engagement in theatre settings and agree that this type of audience development strategy is the most attractive: “I think that the possibility to see theatre “from the inside”, to participate in performance production or other forms of co-creation helps better understand the processes of contemporary theatre for audiences of all ages.”<sup>39</sup>

Lithuanian theatres approach user engagement activities as part of marketing projects and are less willing to initiate the activities of creative collaboration or co-curation: all interviewed representatives of marketing or communication departments offered examples of more or less successful

36 <http://dramosteatras.lt/teatro-uzkulisiai/>

37 According to authors of the Research on the Efficiency of Lithuanian Drama Theatre System three out of eight state theatres in Lithuania had no partnerships in 2007–2009, *Research and Guidelines*, 54–55.

38 Glow 2013, 45.

39 Focus group on Kaunas National Drama Theatre.

attempts of audience engagement via Facebook or other social media platforms (for example, Kaunas National Drama Theatre initiated the competition “Tell us your story” on their Facebook account, offering free theatre tickets as a prize for the best theatre related stories), online questionnaires about performance, etc. However, no examples of participative audience engagement were mentioned in the interviews.<sup>40</sup>

Audience engagement in traditional art institutions has its limits, however. The example included in the EENC research report showcases the efforts of Thalia Theatre in Hamburg, one of the first stages in Germany that offered their audiences the possibility to co-decide on the group’s repertoire for 2012 by using the internet as well as traditional mail. However, the troupe had to abandon the idea as the final results came nowhere close to the artistic standards of the Thalia Theatre, thus igniting public debates on the limits of “democratization” of the artistic decision-making process.<sup>41</sup>

Another tool for attracting audiences can be pricing: discounts, special invitations or projects are specifically needed in the countries with the highest rates of social inequality and exclusion. Most of Lithuanian theatres employ discounts for seniors or students. However, in most cases the reduction of ticket prices is done on account of budget finance rather than using private funds or private-public initiatives for this purpose. According to participants of focus group discussions, pricing and special discounts can be one of the effective instruments attracting audiences with special needs. Furthermore, several participants remarked that various initiatives such as last minute ticket discounts can also help attract younger audiences into theatres.<sup>42</sup>

Geography (or place) points to the problem of the concentration of art in major European cities, which is seen by EENC as both a challenge and an opportunity. International festivals or transnational artistic projects taking place in the major cultural centres surely encourage audience mobility. However, according to Anne Bamford and Michael Wimmer, it is rather local artistic community events that are most likely to become the places of the “first encounter” with art and the first steps towards major international artistic highways.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, for the best results, international initiatives and local community activities should be run in parallel with one another. An analytical look at Lithuanian theatres from this point of view makes it clear that, so far, international development on the institutional level is not a frequent activity. Almost half of the publicly funded theatres are involved in some kind

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40 Interviews with Laura Udrienė, Agnė Burovienė, Donatas Medzevičius, Rima Kazlienė, Public Relations, Marketing and Audience Relations Officers at Kaunas National Drama Theatre, Kaunas, 20 Sept 2013; Interview with Head of Information and Sales Department of Klaipėda State Musical Theatre Vita Petrauskienė, Klaipėda, 24 May 2013; Interview with Public Relations Officer of dance theatre “Aura” Edita Kiznienė, Kaunas, 13 May 2013; Interview with Public Relations Officer of Kaunas State Puppet Theatre Kristina Baguckaitė, Kaunas, 4 June 2014.

41 Bamford and Wimmer 2012, 14.

42 Focus group on Klaipėda State Musical Theatre.

43 Bamford and Wimmer 2012, 20.

of international cooperation activity and co-productions: Lithuanian National Drama Theatre, Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theatre (from two to one co-productions per year); dance theatre troupe “Aura”, Kaunas State Puppet Theatre, Klaipėda Drama Theatre (on average one co-production or international guest stage-director per year; all three are organisers of annual international festivals), Kaunas National Drama Theatre (on average one co-production biannually).

Audience segmentation implies the will of the art organization to differentiate its audience and to answer individual demands of its members.<sup>44</sup> The heterogeneity of the audience can be approached and understood only through thorough research. All interviewed representatives of marketing or communication departments indicated the lack of reliable audience research in their respective theatres: they admitted to mostly using electronic questionnaires, which are voluntarily filled in by the visitors of theatre websites or offering the possibility for audiences to place their opinions about performance on Facebook. All the interviewed staff members agreed that such an approach is very limiting and the knowledge they receive from these questionnaires is rather incomplete. According to the representatives of Klaipėda State Musical Theatre, they use paper questionnaires in order to survey their audience members once a year. The information they receive helps them to segment their public by genre preference or age group.<sup>45</sup> However other methods of research (focus groups, interviews, statistical data), that would allow theatres to gain an in-depth knowledge of their audience experience are employed only by independent scholars for their research purposes.<sup>46</sup> Audience surveys, examination of their social possibilities, and aesthetic demands are, currently, not a frequent practice of Lithuanian theatres. However, it is precisely a systematic and complex audience research that is imperative in order to identify not only the demands of the individual spectator but also the thresholds keeping audiences from engaging more actively with theatres as well as the effectiveness of audience development strategies already in use.

All the analysed theatre institutions use the simple means of segmenting their audiences by age groups (children, young audiences, adults, and seniors) or by the frequency of their attendance. Loyal audiences are the main target of theatre audience development strategies in Lithuania: they usually are invited to join theatre clubs, offered various membership programmes, long term subscriptions for theatre tickets, and newsletters. Employees of the marketing and communication department of Kaunas National Drama Theatre describe their main “target audience” in the following way: “employed, from 25 to 40 years old, with higher education and annual income corresponding

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44 Smith 2012.

45 Interview with Head of Information and Sales Department of Klaipėda State Musical Theatre Vita Petrauskienė, Klaipėda, 24 May 2013.

46 An interesting example of such research is the dissertation of Egidijus Stancikas, general manager of Kaunas National Drama Theatre, *Self-Education of Adult Drama Theatre Spectators' Cultural Awareness*, defended in Kaunas, Vytautas Magnus University, in 2016.

to the countries' average."<sup>47</sup> A similar situation can be found in other Lithuanian theatre institutions. Therefore, one can conclude that at the moment, Lithuanian theatres are able to recognize only very generalized demands of their audience and are unable to apply personalized audience development techniques.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Research in audience development strategies of Lithuanian theatres indicates that although audience development has increasingly become an important part of the activities of publicly funded theatre institutions, it is still seen rather narrowly as a "product-led" rather than "target-led" approach. It is obvious that the "top down" political pressure on art organizations will only increase and will force Lithuanian theatres to engage in more complex strategies of audience development, not only in order to "prove" their significance for the community but also as part of a political agenda of social inclusion. Whether in the course of these developments publicly funded Lithuanian theaters will become places of creative cooperation open to diverse audiences and emancipating their creativity or fields of simulated participation and primitive marketing will depend on all the players in the Lithuanian cultural field.

Almost all experts cited in this article agree that an integrated approach towards audience development will be successful only if it stems from the inner demands of public art organizations, rather than being imposed from the outside by cultural policy instruments.<sup>48</sup> However, the complex mission of audience building requires various partnerships and long-term engagements that demand political and financial backing. It is obvious that the synergy between these two factors can be achieved only through carefully crafted strategic dialogue between art organizations and policy makers.

All analysed theatres are involved in educational activities and acknowledge their importance in attracting new audiences and cultivating the demand for art. It has to be noted, however, that in the publicly funded theatres, the understanding of this educative cultivation of an audience is often limited and incoherent: the major part of the responsibility of education falls on the productions for children in repertoire and there are but a very few continuous and systematically developed educational projects. It seems that publicly funded theatres in Lithuania are not eager to initiate educational activities designed for the segments other than their "core audiences", primarily because of the lack of knowledge, human resources as well as financial support.

Although audience surveys and research of their social potentials or aesthetic needs are rather rare in Lithuanian theatres, it is obvious that eventually they will become inevitable. Systemic and complex audience research is a necessity not only for identifying what prevents the audience from more active and numerous participation in theatrical life, but also for evaluating

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47 Interview with Laura Udrienė, Public Relations Officer at Kaunas National Drama Theatre, 20 Sept 2013.

48 Glow, Bamford, Keane, Wimmer, Zakaras, Kawashima, Lowell, Bjørnsen, etc.

the efficiency of the means of audience development that are already in use. In European countries cultural organizations investigate and get in-depth knowledge about their existing as well as potential visitors by using the help of other institutions and partnership networks. All the discussed Lithuanian theatres develop some networks of cooperation. However, the lack of partnerships with research centres and international organisations results in difficulties in developing audience research and improving the skills of employees in the field of integrated audience development. It is possible to conclude that, as opposed to artistic organizations in other European countries, theatres in Lithuania recognise only a very abstract portrait of their spectator. Consequently, theatres in Lithuania cannot segment their audiences in a qualified and comprehensive manner or respond to their individual needs by using specialized means of audience development.

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