

The Process of Programming in the Performing Arts An Empirical Research in Spain

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Abstract

Programming is the core activity for theatre managers. Research into this topic still presents a lack of empirical studies nowadays. To fill this gap the authors undertake a survey focused on performing arts organisations in Spain. Hirschmann's (1983) model for the artistic production process is considered to state the research questions. The research methodology comprises both qualitative and quantitative techniques. A questionnaire was designed after reviewing previous studies in this field and with primary information obtained from in-depth interviews with performing arts managers. A battery of 28 items relating programming was included in the questionnaire. The audience profile is considered as a key factor for programming. However, Spanish theatres are more product oriented than audience oriented in general terms, reflecting a slight adoption of marketing principles and techniques in this context.

Keywords

Performing arts, programming, marketing, survey

Introduction

Programming is without doubt the keystone of performing arts management. It is the core activity for theatre managers and the foundation stone for all other managerial decisions. Each play requires different sources of finance, the targeting of specific groups, different promotional campaigns, and also different pricing, among other strategies.

However, research into the programming process of performing arts organisations is a challenging subject and there is still a significant lack of empirical studies. The literature has scarcely treated this issue either theoretically or empirically. The studies already published basically deal with the concept of new product development.

With this paper, we try to fill the gap in the literature on the programming process. After revising some relevant contributions, we have undertaken an empirical survey focused on performing arts organisations in Spain. This study is part of a wider research project funded by the Universidad de Valencia focused on relationship marketing and theatres.

From our point of view, this is a really important research area due to the circumstances of performing arts organizations in Spain, and also in the European context. Most of them are publicly owned and managed which means higher funds and a larger choice set but some public intervention, among other distinguishing features. Conversely, private organisations generally

have less freedom to decide their programme, more financial difficulties and seems to be more market oriented. This obviously has a direct effect on not only programming but also on marketing strategies.

This paper starts by reviewing some relevant contributions that helped to design the empirical survey. It then goes on to describe the performing arts arena in Spain for a better understanding of this sector's main features. We explain the survey developed focusing on the methodology undertaken and the main results obtained. Finally, there is a discussion of the results.

The Performing Arts Sector in Spain

The performing arts sector presents distinctive features in different countries. These differences are related to economic, financial, marketing or creative conditions. Although there is a general lack of economic profitability in this context as a consequence of ever increasing production costs, other aspects such as the dependence on government support versus private funds, the managerial style, or the evolution of the theatre industry vary across countries. As our study focuses on one specific country, Spain, we consider important to analyse this context.

The performing arts context in Spain is currently in a unique situation due to the substantial evolution of the sector since the 70s as the SGAE annual report describes (Vallejo, 2004). In the seventies Spain had a successful stage industry. Within this context, people used to attend theatre plays regularly, some of them being produced by fringe companies that flourished in that period. Probably, the showing of these plays also on television stimulated substantial interest in the consumption of this cultural activity. However, the following decade, the 80s, saw a serious backward step for the performing arts. Several venues closed or were converted into cinemas, clubs or shopping centres. In spite of that, important international productions were programmed in different festivals. The situation changed yet again in the 90s. *The National Theatre Restoration Plan* (Plan Nacional de Rehabilitación de Teatros) supported by the Central Government allowed almost every large city to house a public theatre. It was also a time for the creation of new, small and privately owned and managed but publicly funded theatres (fringe theatres).

In the present decade, music shows, imported directly from Broadway or London, have succeeded on large private stages as well as lyric and commercial plays. At the same time, lots of very small theatres placing new off productions have emerged. Drama Schools have also flourished. However, there has been a significant lack of new plays. Most of them are revivals of classic and contemporary plays. Local cultural centres that are able to house performing arts productions still remain inactive. Finally, few plays go on tour, most of them being distributed in a limited area.

Table 1: Performing arts in Spain 1998-2003

Indexes	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	%
Number of venues	4,567	4,973	4,721	5,106	5,692	5,869	-
Number of plays	42,751	44,372	42,777	46,220	53,971	57,259	100
Professionals	-	-	27,832	30,082	38,293	41,728	72.9
Amateurs	-	-	14,945	16,138	15,678	15,531	27.1
Number of attendees	11,289,560	12,294,230	12,605,270	11,648,035	13,522,900	14,341,450	100
Professionals	-	-	6,680,191	7,942,106	10,447,941	11,629,160	81.1
Amateurs	-	-	3,925,079	3,705,929	3,074,991	2,712,290	18.9
Income (cur. euros)	90M	104M	121M	122M	163M	175M	100
Professionals	-	-	103M	108M	155M	172M	98.4
Amateurs	-	-	18M	14M	8M	3M	1.6
Ticket price (euros)	11.64	12.75	13.46	15.50	17.80	17.58	-

Source: From SGAE (2004)

Hence, there is a growth tendency in this sector as the performances, attendees and income indexes in Table 1 show. In 2003, these magnitudes increased by 3.1%, 7.5% and 10.7% respectively. Regarding the number of performances, more than two thirds, 72.9%, come from professional companies. The remaining 27.1% can be attributed to amateur companies. This difference between types of companies increases when referring to the number of attendees, 81.1% of the shows are offered by professionals versus 18.9% by amateurs. Similarly, box office revenues were even higher in the case of professionals, 98.4%, than those generated by amateurs, only 1.6%. This shows that the performing arts activity in Spain is mainly professional, although the criteria to distinguish between these two types are not sufficiently clear. Thus, there is increasing activity in the performing arts sector in Spain, as the data on production (the number of performances) and exhibition (the number of attendees and revenues) reported above show.

Review of the Literature

The literature review reveals some articles which marginally consider the topic under scrutiny: programming in the performing arts sector. They present analysis of different marketing strategies with only a passing reference to theatre programming. Within this approach, Hardy (1981) describes an empirical study based on assisting theatres in the development and implementation of marketing plans; Bengozhi (1995) analyses the current phenomenon of cultural product diversification and its management consequences; Cuadrado, Mollá and Gil (2000) develop a survey aiming at analysing the application of marketing principles and techniques by theatre managers. A second group of contributions has included some more references to this subject. Some of them have been published in the International Journal of Arts Management. The paper by Bennett and Kottasz (2001) is a pioneer study focused on the influence of lead users on new product development decisions of theatre companies. The work by Crealey (2003) examines the application of new product development models to the performing arts. Although in the television and film industry, Brunet (2004) describes the social production of creative products.

Thus, there are no theoretical models or empirical studies with this aim. However, we have considered a well-known contribution to use as a framework for our empirical research. So, Hirschmann's (1983) model for the artistic production process and its implications will help us to state some research questions. This author argued that an artist can be either oriented to self (self-oriented creativity), to peers and professionals (peer-oriented creativity), or to the public at large (commercialized creativity). Thus, the marketing exchanges in this field begin with one's self production to satisfy personal criteria, and then this product may achieve peer and mass audiences. This model can be translated to theatre programmers instead of artists. In doing so, two main orientations can be considered: product approach (the play as the core of programming) versus market approach (the audiences as the core of programming). It would therefore appear extremely relevant to know whether theatre managers or programmers are more product oriented or audience oriented when designing their programmes.

Artists' performances are influenced by many different internal and environmental variables that condition their work. Not only artists but also theatre managers or programmers can be influenced by many different variables when doing their jobs. Within this idea, Bergadaà and Nyeck (1995) found out some motivations for theatre producers after developing an exploratory and qualitative study. Thus, it is relevant to know the main factors programmers take into account when designing their programme, or the existence of different groups of theatres according to the importance they place on these factors.

Empirical Survey

Methodology

The research methodology comprises both qualitative and quantitative techniques to obtain the information from the performing arts exhibitors in the Spanish arena. We first designed a qualitative exploratory study to find the different factors which might influence programming. In this part, we used in-depth interviews targeted to performing arts programmers or managers.

Then a descriptive quantitative study was undertaken. Telephone interview was the quantitative technique employed. Data were collected from performing arts exhibitors in Spain. Their contact and classification data were included in an electronic database belonging to SGAE (MIRE, 2002). After considering those with a regular programme the final size of our universe was 848. Random sampling was used to obtain the 206 sampling elements (sampling error=6%; confidence level=0.95). Each exhibitor was contacted by telephone to answer a questionnaire.

This questionnaire was designed after reviewing previous studies in this field and with primary information obtained from in-depth interviews with performing arts managers. This was the basis for determining a battery of 28 items relating programming variables. These items were included in a questionnaire with some classification variables. The main questions were addressed to assess different variables considered or not in the programming process. The response categories for each item (variable) were anchored by 1 (strongly disagree) and 10 (strongly agree). Data were collected in September 2004. After obtaining the information different statistical techniques are being applied including univariate, bivariate and multivariate factorial analysis using SPSS 11.5.

Research objectives

The general aim of the study we present is to analyse the process of programming within the performing arts context. In other words, we attempt to know which factors are more relevant for Spanish performing arts exhibitors when designing their programmes and how this influences the marketing process. Specifically, the study aims at analysing the following research questions:

1. Which are the most important factors (play, reviews, box-office, audience, etc.) for programmers when designing their offerings?
2. Are performing arts organizations product oriented or market oriented when programming?
3. Is there any difference in programme design between public and private performing arts organizations?
4. Can we find different groups of performing arts programmers according to the importance they give to different programming factors?
5. Does the size (number of seats/stages) of the organisation influence programming?

Sample features

There are 175 theatres public organizations and 31 private ones in the final sample. Although they were selected because they were theatres, these organisations sometimes undertake production and intermediate functions (37.4% and 14.6% of surveyed organizations respectively). Spanish theatres tend to be small in size given that 61.2% have one stage and 29.1% two stages. The remaining 8.7% of the surveyed theatres have three or more stages. In this sense, most of the theatres have less than 500 seats (48.1%) followed by those with up to 1200 (37.4%). Only 12.1% offer more than 1200 seats.

Most of the performing arts organizations considered offer music shows (204 theatres out of 206) and plays (203) although dance, cinema and other activities are quite usual too (see Table 2).

Table 2: Sample features

	N	%
Property and management		
Public	175	85.0
Private	31	15.0
Total	206	100.0
Number of stages		
One	126	61.2
Two	60	29.1
Three or more	18	8.7
Missing	2	1.0
Total	206	100.0
Number of seats		
Less than 500	99	48.1
Between 500 and 1200	77	37.4
More than 1200	25	12.1
Missing	5	2.4
Total	206	100
Offering		
Music	204	99.0
Theatre	203	98.5
Dance	198	96.1
Cinema	155	75.2
Others	185	89.8
Other functions assumed		
Producer	77	37.4
Distributor	30	14.6

Results

Influence of different aspects on programming

Both univariate and multivariate analysis were used to obtain the first objective “to know the main variables for programming performing arts”. Descriptive statistical data are shown in Table 3. The table contains the results for the relevance of the variables proposed according to their particular influence on the programming process ranging from 1=None to 5=A lot.

Table 3: Variables Considered for Programming Performing Arts

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Variable	Mean	Standard deviation
Our audience profile	4.20	0.847	Programme schedule	3.67	0.951
Varied programme	4.14	0.707	Style of play	3.63	0.947
Cost of play	4.08	0.853	Director's career	3.52	1.062
Language of play	4.02	0.987	Reviews	3.46	1.042
Someone I trust's advice	3.93	0.680	Promotion by distributor	3.33	0.855
Achievement of social objectives	3.89	1.066	Agreements whit agents	3.27	1.115
Cast	3.87	0.989	Producer's career	3.21	1.113
Genre of play	3.86	0.891	Distributor's career	3.18	1.068
Audience success elsewhere	3.86	0.682	Belonging to a performing arts network	3.15	0.957
Crew	3.85	1.008	Programming specific cycles	3.14	0.970
Prior knowledge of play	3.84	0.940	Nationality of play	3.14	1.229
Preview of play	3.82	0.881	Awards won by play	3.09	0.907
Concordance with our mission	3.78	0.829	Competitors' programme	2.79	0.844
Plot	3.78	0.969	Economic profitability	2.35	1.092

It seems that performing arts organizations are quite involved with their audience in so far as they consider the variable "Our audience profile" as the most important one (4.20 out of 5). Managers also emphasize the goal of having a varied programme (4.14) and different features of the play such as its cost (4.08), language (4.02), genre (3.86), cast (3.87) and crew (3.85). Spanish theatre managers are more concerned with social objectives when programming (3.89) than economic ones (2.35). They also consider quite relevant the variable "Audience success elsewhere" (3.86). Furthermore, derived from watching the play in festivals and so on, theatre managers place importance on the "Prior knowledge of the play" (3.84) and the "Preview of play" (3.82). However, they consider less important the "Awards" won by the play (3.09) and the "Competitors' program" (2.79).

Factorial analysis of principal components was developed to simplify the data obtained. KMO and Barlett's statistics confirm the convenience of this technique for the current data. Table 4 contains the nine factors produced which explain 64.15% of the total variance.

The factorial analysis suggests that there are nine general factors determining programming in performing arts organizations derived from the 28 variables proposed (see Table 4). In a general sense, some of them are related to the play's features (credits, core features, social goals, success, knowledge and origin) and others to the theatre management process (programme, diffusion and economic issues).

Table 4: Rotated Factor Matrix

	Factor 1 Credits	Factor 2 Theatre programme	Factor 3 Core Features of play	Factor 4 Social Goals of play	Factor 5 Success of play	Factor 6 Knowledge of play	Factor 7 Origin of play	Factor 8 Diffusion	Factor 9 Economic issues
1.Producer's career	0.881								
2.Director's career	0.810								
3.Distributor's career	0.788								
4.Crew	0.587								
5.Cast	0.520								
6.Agreements with agents		0.688							
7.Belong. to a P.A. network		0.660							
8.Program. specific cycles		0.563							
9.Varied programme		0.559							
10.Concordance our mission		0.445							
11.Genre of play			0.856						
12.Style of play			0.837						
13.Plot			0.526						
14.Achieve. social objectives				0.755					
15.Our audience profile				0.716					
16.Reviews				0.523					
17.Someone I trust's advice					0.735				
18.Audience success					0.597				
19.Awards won by play					0.562				
20.Competitors' programme					0.532				
21.Prior knowledge of play						0.891			
22. Preview of play						0.880			
23. Nationality of play							0.813		
24. Language of play							0.795		
25. Promotion by distributor								0.800	
26. Programme schedule								0.691	
27. Economic profitability									0.654
28. Cost of play									0.641

In order to assess their relevance, the average of responses for the items composing each factor is shown in Table 5. "Social goals of play" obtains the highest score (3.85). Other characteristics of the play such as "Knowledge of play" (3.83), "Core features of play" (3.75), "Origin of play" (3.58) and "Credits" (3.53) are also appreciated whereas the factor "Economic issues" is less important for programmers (3.22).

Table 5: Statistical Descriptives for Each Factor

	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
Factor 4: Social goals	1	5	3.845	0.749
Factor 6: Knowledge of play	1.5	5	3.830	0.849
Factor 3: Core features of play	1.33	5	3.758	0.744
Factor 7: Origin of play	1	5	3.579	0.932
Factor 1: Credits	1.6	5	3.528	0.786
Factor 2: Theatre program	2	5	3.500	0.569
Factor 8: Diffusion	1	5	3.500	0.739
Factor 5: Success of play	1.5	4.75	3.419	0.506
Factor 9: Economic issues	1	5	3.223	0.754

Product Orientation Versus Audience Orientation

The second research question aims at analysing whether performing arts organisations are product oriented or audience oriented when programming. For this purpose we grouped the proposed variables in two categories according to their close relation to the product or the audience considering Hirschman's model as presented before. Then we obtained a measure of their reliability although only the items for product orientation had an alpha higher than the 0.7 recommended (Nunnally, 1987; Peterson, 1994). The low result in the audience focus can be explained by the heterogeneity of the eight items included as they refer to the audience, the competition, sector conditions, the critics and so on (table 6).

Table 6: Audience and Product Orientation Analysis

	Alpha	Min	Max	Average	Standard deviation
Product orientation: items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 23, 24, 25, 28	0.721	2.36	4.73	3.63	0.440
Audience orientation: items 6, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20	0.557	2	4.75	3.56	0.456

The results state that Spanish performing arts organisations are more product oriented than audience oriented when programming, that is, they give more importance to the play's features rather than audience and other external aspects. Although the variable "Our audience profile" is very important on its own (4.20 out of 5), it diminishes in relevance when added to other external influences, producing a lower score in the new variable "Audience orientation" (3.56) .

Differences between Public and Private Performance Arts Organizations

The third objective tries to discern if there is any difference between public and private performing arts organizations when they design their programmes. We have obtained the mean for each programming variable and different classification features but T-test for independent samples reveals a significant relationship only with the item "Economic profitability" (table 7).

Table 7: Descriptive statistics and T test related to "Economic profitability"

Management	N	Mean	Standard deviation	T	Sig.
Economic profitability	173	2.25	1.018	-3.139	0.002
Public	31	2.90	1.326		
Private					

Therefore there are no significant differences between the programming variables proposed depending on the type of ownership and management save those related to economic aspects. Private organisations place much more importance on profitability (2.90) than public ones (2.25). This is quite logical as private organizations are more concerned with the profitability of the play they select.

Grouping Performance Arts Organisations

In order to achieve the fourth objective “to find out different groups of performing arts organisations according to the importance they give to different programming aspects” a cluster analysis is made, derived from the factors obtained previously. Firstly a hierarchical clustering method is used in order to observe the dendrogram and decide the appropriate number of clusters. Then a non-hierarchical clustering is applied for a two-group solution. The results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Cluster Analysis

	Cluster 1	Cluster 2		
	Mean	Mean	F	Sig.
Factor 1	3.78	3.01	54.533	0.000
Factor 2	3.60	3.29	14.502	0.000
Factor 3	4.03	3.17	86.611	0.000
Factor 4	4.14	3.25	85.783	0.000
Factor 5	3.53	3.19	22.498	0.000
Factor 6	3.98	3.50	15.363	0.000
Factor 7	3.84	3.06	36.996	0.000
Factor 8	3.62	3.26	10.886	0.001
Factor 9	3.25	3.10	1.766	0.185
N	132	67		

Apart from the fact that organisations in cluster 2 give less importance to the programming factors produced, we try to describe cluster composition through additional cross-tabulations (see Table 9). Results show that there is almost the same proportion of private and public companies in both clusters, 15.2% of private ones are included in cluster 1 and 16.4% of them in cluster 2.

Table 9: Cluster Composition

		Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Total
Property	Public	112	56	168
		84.8%	83.6%	84.4%
	Private	20	11	31
		15.2%	16.4%	15.6%
	Total	132	67	199
		100%	100%	100%
Number of stages	One	76	44	120
		58.5%	65.7%	60.9%
	Two	42	17	59
		32.3%	25.4%	29.9%
	Three or more	12	6	18
		9.2%	9%	9.1%
	Total	130	67	197
		100%	100%	100%
Number of seats	Less than 500	60	34	94
		46.5%	52.3%	48.5%
	Between 500 and 1200	52	23	75
		40.3%	35.4%	38.7%
	More than 1200	17	8	25
		13.2%	12.3%	12.9%
	Total	129	65	194
		100%	100%	100%

Furthermore, 58.5% of theatres in cluster 1 have one stage and 32.3% two stages. Organizations in cluster 2 are smaller because 65.7% of them have just one stage and 25.4% two stages. Again the companies are smaller in cluster 2 if the number of seats is considered. 46.5% of theatres in cluster 1 have less than 500 seats and 40.3% have up to 1200 seats. By contrast, 52.3% of theatres in cluster 2 have less than 500 seats and only 35.4% of them have between 500 and 1200 seats.

Organization Size and Programming

The fifth objective refers to the influence of organization size on the importance given to the proposed programming variables. First, we obtained Pearson's bivariate correlation between each proposed programming aspect and the variables "Number of stages" and "Number of seats" offered. The significant correlations are shown in Table 10 revealing that the bigger the theatre the more importance given to "Producer's career" and the "Economic profitability".

Table 10: Pearson's Bivariate Correlation

	Producer's career	Distributor's career	Reviews	Economic profitability	Programme schedule
Number of stages	0.169 P=0.017		0.152 P=0.032	0.164 P=0.020	
Number of seats	0.213 P=0.034	0.158 P=0.026		0.224 P=0.002	0.168 P=0.018

Conclusions

Spanish theatres mainly consider three aspects when programming: the audience, a varied programme and the cost of play. Competitors and the search for an economically profitable play in this context are clearly not very relevant. This may well be due to the high proportion of public organizations operating in this sector. As they are usually funded by public authorities they are not so concerned with box-office revenues.

We also tried to find out if Spanish performance arts organisations are more focused on their product or on their audience. Individually, the audience is the most important aspect for programming. However, when all the programming variables are grouped, results show quite a balanced orientation between product and audience. More precisely, the variables related to the product are assessed slightly higher. This conclusion is also in line with the ownership and management of performance arts organisations. Due to the fact that most of them are publicly run they place more emphasis on the play as has traditionally been the case.

The differences between public and private performing arts organisations when designing their programme concern only economic profitability. Again, the lower assessment of this item by public theatres shows their commitment with the play itself and with its cultural value.

Spanish theatres can be grouped in two clusters according to the importance they give to different programming variables. There is almost the same proportion of private and public

companies in each cluster although theatres in cluster 2 are smaller according to the number of stages and seats.

Thus, we can conclude that a certain shift is taking place in the performing arts arena. The audience profile can be considered as a key factor for programming. Fortunately, this reflects that the adoption of marketing principles and techniques in this context is slow but sure.

Acknowledgments

This study has been financed by Servei d'Investigació de la Universitat de València in Spain

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