

Buying Behaviour of Theatre Distribution Agents - Case Studies of the Purchase of Performances in Swedish Theatre Associations

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Abstract

The aim was, at an explorative level, to produce knowledge about and understanding of the buying behaviour of theatre distribution agents. A case study consisting of six cases was conducted. The data collection was based mainly on interviews. Findings indicated the need for an extra function in the buying centre: a confirmer. The buying process seemed more informal than the theory indicates. The programme decision did not concern a provider of a product; it was more a choice between different plays. The provider was more to be regarded as a selection criterion. There was a sort of calculation whereby the expected loss was related to the value of the performance. To sum up, the theoretical framework from the organisational buying behaviour could definitely be applied to theatre associations, though some modifications appeared to be necessary.

Keywords

Riksteatern, Non-Profits, Arts, Culture, Services

Background

In the literature about the marketing of arts, a general assumption is that the core product should not be a parameter for the marketing decisions (e.g., Hirschman, 1983). Instead of marketing orientation, product orientation could be the solution (e.g., Colbert, Nantel, Bilodeau and Rich, 2001, p. 16-17). Bourdieu (1986) has also pointed to scepticism about discussing money and a collective denial of commercial interests combined with at least the pretence that nothing besides artistic consideration is at issue.

Some authors discuss marketing of performing arts on a general level. Among others, Kotler and Scheff (1997) have written a traditional textbook on the subject. Diggle (1994), Hilger (1985), Kolb (2000) and Revermann (1985) have discussed the matter from a more European perspective, and the author of the present paper has published a study concerning the planning of the programme of a Swedish theatre (Wahlberg 1997 and 2000). Many authors have dealt with the motives of the audience for consuming performing arts (e.g., Bakke, 1996; Botti, 2000; Heilbrun & Gray, 1993; Kolb, 2000; Throsby & Withers, 1979).

Though there is some literature about marketing of the performing arts, not much has been written about the distribution agents. Still, Colbert et al. (2001, p. 53) state that there is a distribution market in almost all cultural sectors. They describe the functions of the distribution channel, yet the perspective is that of the producer. Heilbrun and Gray (1993) have stressed the importance of large audiences to the agents. In a Swedish study, Gislén (2000, p. 26) has stated that the agents appreciated a low price. In the present author's own studies (e.g., Wahlberg, 2001, p. 204-205), it was evident that producers within performing

arts had little confidence in the agents' ability to make artistic judgements. So far, the perspective was the producer's. In this study, focus will move to the distribution agents and their buying behaviour.

Frame of Reference

Wind and Thomas (1980) identified three areas for academic research concerning organisational buying behaviour: the buying centre, the buying process and the buying criteria. Many authors have modified their model and adapted it to new areas. But no one seems to have used the model for describing the buying of theatre performances.

At a general level, buying behaviour will be influenced by determinants such as environmental, organisational, interpersonal and individual factors (Webster & Wind, 1972a). More specifically, a lot of people could influence a purchase decision. According to Webster and Wind (op. cit., p. 6), the buying centre consists of "all those individuals and groups who participate in the purchasing decision-making process, who share some common goals and the risk arising from the decisions". Johnston and Bonoma (1981) point out that there could be variations in the group during the buying process. Webster and Wind (1972b) identified five roles within this group and Bonoma (1982) later added a sixth role:

- Initiators
- Users
- Deciders
- Influencers
- Buyers
- Gatekeepers

Organisational buying is a process extended over time. Wind and Thomas (1980) talk about "a complex myriad of activities" and they show models with between four and twelve steps. Wind and Thomas claim that the differences could be explained by the fact that the buying process could be more or less complex. According to Day and Barksdale (1994), eight sequential stages could be identified in the organisational buying process for a non-specified service:

- Recognition of a need or problem
- Identification of the initial consideration set
- Refinement of the consideration set
- Evaluation of the consideration set
- Selection of the service provider
- Evaluation of the quality of service delivery
- Evaluation of the quality of the outcome ("product")
- Satisfaction/dissatisfaction

When Day and Barksdale discuss the model, an additional step seems to be introduced: "Defining Purchase Goals". They regard this step as important or even necessary for the valuation of the options. This step seems to be placed between the first two. The authors do not comment on the difference between the graphic model and their text.

Different selection criteria could be used in these stages. Examples of possible criteria are: quality of past services, costs, reputation, references, personal contacts, etc. (cf. Wallström, 2002, p. 74-78). But there are also rejection criteria. Day and Barksdale (1994) stress that clients often search for reasons to disqualify some options. The evaluation of services, including theatre performances, can hardly be done in full assurance of having put the right

value on every component (cf. Edvardsson, 1990). Therefore, cues could be used as a surrogate measurement (Crane & Clarke, 1988, p. 56).

Together with this theoretical framework from organisational buying behaviour, other areas contribute to a foundation for discussion of buying behaviour in the area of performing arts. Important elements are found in the literature about arts-related subjects (e.g., Bourdieu 1986; Eberstein, 1976; Vikström, 1978) and the author's previous study on the programme planning of a Swedish theatre (Wahlberg, 1997, 2000).

Distribution agents for theatre performances probably differ from one country or culture to the next; but still, there ought to be similarities. Nonprofits are common, and this study only concerns that type of distribution agent. The reason for this limitation is that distribution agents aiming for profit are supposed to work in the same way as ordinary companies (cf. Colbert et al., p. 17). In a British study about the market planning of the theatre, Hardy (1981) divides theatres into two groups: "receiving theatres" and "touring theatres". The former are distribution agents, but the distinction could become somewhat blurred, as the touring theatres often present performances from other theatres in their own venues. This blurredness is quite common in Sweden too, but this type of receiving theatre is not the focus of this study. The focus is instead on specialised organisations that only work with the receiving of performances. In Sweden, there are approximately 225 of these; in this paper, they are called "theatre associations". These theatre associations, which are financed by local-government grants, are spread all over Sweden and at a local level, their position is sometimes monopoly-like. Some of the theatre associations are small and all their work is done by a board of volunteers. Others are larger, with a staff of up to ten, yet they still have a board consisting of volunteers.

Aim and Research Questions

The overall aim of this paper is, at an explorative level, to produce knowledge about and understanding of the buying behaviour of theatre distribution agents. The project also aims at developing theory in the field of organisational buying behaviour when the product is of an artistic character. More specifically, three research questions are posed:

- RQ1 What do the buying centres of Swedish theatre associations look like?
- RQ2 What do the buying processes of Swedish theatre associations look like?
- RQ3 Which buying criteria could be found in Swedish theatre associations?

Methods

The author has a degree of pre-understanding of the field, having served on a voluntary basis as a board member of a theatre association during the early-1990s. Previous research concerning theatres (Wahlberg, 1997 and 2001) was also useful for this study. The starting point was a pre-study during September 2002. This took place at Riksteatern and Rikskonserter, the two most important performing arts touring organisations in Sweden. Representatives from two music distribution agents were also interviewed. In total, eight people contributed information for the pre-study. The pre-study resulted in a concentration of the main study on the theatre side. The situation on the music side was more fragmented and would have called for more detailed research than was possible.

The study was a case study, as the primary interest was on mapping a process. The case study consisted of six cases, which were chosen in order to show at least some mutual diversity. The cases are not presented under their real names. The studied associations

were of different sizes. Three of them were small (cases 4, 5 and 6), with less than 10 performances a year, and they were managed by boards of volunteers. The other three organised more than 35 performances a year; they had staffs of 2–7 employees and boards of volunteers (cases 1, 2 and 3). For practical reasons only theatre associations located in the northern half of Sweden were selected. The cases were mainly based on interviews, four at the smaller ones and three at each of the larger. Normally, the president and the secretary of the board were interviewed; when there were employees, the manager was also interviewed. In two of the smaller associations, no additional significant data seemed to be available after the interviews with the presidents. The interviews took place during October and November 2002. The cases were subsequently subjected to within-case and cross-case analysis.

The Six Cases

Case 1 – Volgsjo

The Volgsjo theatre association is a very active distributing agent in a chief municipality in a sparsely populated rural district in northern Sweden. The main reason for this activity was that the local government had chosen to place so much of the responsibility for cultural matters on the association. The grant of €50,000 made it possible to organize about 100 performances, out of which approximately 40 were for the school. Besides the grant, there were some contributions from sponsors. The total turnover was far more than €100,000. The association had a staff of one half-time and two fulltime employees. One of them was regarded as a manager. All the costs for personnel and office premises were paid by the local government and were not part of the grant. The venue, which was considered too small for many purposes, was situated in the same building as the office.

Volgsjo – Buying Centre and Buying Process

The programme was formally decided by a board of volunteers. The planning of the programme was ongoing. The necessity of being well informed was emphasised and different information activities of Riksteatern were an important contribution. The technical specifications of the performances and the touring intentions determined the possible choices.

The manager had a substantial influence. It is true that she tried to discuss programme matters with members of the board, but she thought it regrettable that she so seldom met with opposition. Both the president and the secretary were aware of the problem, but they saw this as a consequence of the manager's knowledge in the field.

The supply of different plays determined whether any money would be left for new offers later on. If everything was spent, there was a possibility of receiving assistance from educational associations, other organisations or companies. The president esteemed the manager for her cooperation with these organisations.

Volgsjo – Buying Criteria

In the president's mind, a good performance was a performance that was sold out. Due to this, it was impossible to concentrate on plays far from the mainstream. The manager talked about things that were easygoing and of interest for young people. Of course, well-known actors would have been attractive for the audience, but that was normally not possible. Though the Volgsjo association wanted to reach a large audience, the president wanted plays that encouraged reflection. Humour could not be the sole criterion. The secretary was uncertain as to whether it was possible to proceed from someone else's taste.

When selecting the plays it was valuable to have knowledge about the quality of the producers, but it was also a question of intuition and experience. As a result, there was a tendency to discriminate against unknown producers. Especially when plays for children were at issue, references were sometimes required. When Riksteatern distributed plays from other theatres this was regarded as a sign of quality. The president was aware that there was no simple method for estimating quality. However, some producers were regarded as not being locally relevant; the frames of reference were wrong and unfamiliar to the audience.

Personal contacts could be important for the manager – but only when the initiative was her own. She stressed the importance of believing in the quality of what was bought. This was also true when it concerned a genre of minor personal interest.

The price for a certain size of performance was not that important, but normally, prices exceeding €3,000 were too high. It was also very important that the performances were available at the right time.

Case 2 – Frosta

The Frosta association works in a regional centre in the middle of Sweden. The grant from the local government was approximately €55,000. Besides that, the association's office costs and the salaries of a staff of two to three people were paid for by the government.

Frosta – Buying Centre and Buying Process

When the producers' information material arrived at the office no screening took place, but specific plays were sometimes recommended. If producers telephoned the office, they were asked to send material by mail.

Staff members were present at the meetings of the board; on which occasion the president read from the prospectuses and then let them circulate. The secretary regarded the material as insufficient and said that she wanted demos or at least information about the cast. The information activities of Riksteatern were, however, helpful. It was never necessary to decide by vote. The president meant that it was possible to know intuitively when consensus had been reached. When the board felt uncertain, the staff was asked to provide more material for the next meeting.

Frosta – Buying Criteria

The supply side was limited by the technical requirements, not least concerning the size of the venue. The producers' demands for help with carrying stage props, etc. was regarded as a minor problem. The programme should be broad, with different types of performances, and the level of risk had to be acceptable. Most of the plays were bought from Riksteatern. For the rest of the programme, it was more important to have well-known actors than a well-known producing theatre. Well-known actors encouraged ticket sales.

Before the decision was taken to order a specific play, calculations were made to establish the necessary ticket price. There was no absolute rule for the decision; it was simply a means of clarifying the economic situation. Performances for young people were regarded as problematic from an economic point of view as it was impossible to price the tickets in accordance with normal income for the association.

The saleability of the tickets was important. If the association had once failed to reach a sufficient audience for a performance of a specific theatre company, the board would become more cautious the next time that company was up for discussion. Some

performances were accepted even when there was a substantial calculated loss. According to the president, a serious problem was that the preferences of the audience were unknown and not even the audience knew what it wanted. What was known, however, was that it was difficult to find an audience on Saturdays – and the association therefore tried to avoid Saturday performances.

The president pointed out that quality was important, but at the same time, the association had to have a programme that made the audience laugh and having a good time. The intention also was to avoid unjustified violence and sex; totally forbidden was what could be interpreted as a Nazi flirtation. This last point alluded to a controversial play. Classics were appreciated. Things that did not appeal to board members had little chance of finding their way onto the programme.

When it was a matter of deciding the number of performances of a specific play, there were first and foremost intuitive considerations about the size of the potential audience. The least risky method was of course to buy a small number of performances; but then, many Frosta residents would be disappointed and the association could be accused of not doing a good job.

No one outside the board had any obvious possibility to influence the programme. The local government gave its grant on a yearly basis and was satisfied if the association gave approximately 35 performances during the year. No sponsor was said to have had any influence, and if someone had tried, they would have been opposed.

Case 3 – Botea

Botea is one of the largest towns in the north of Sweden. There is an opera but no regional theatre. The theatre association in Botea, however, has a large-scale activity. The annual local grant is €275,000 and the total turnover is close to €900,000. The staff consisted of 6.5 employees. In contrast to many theatre associations, this one always had to consider the number of performances to buy, usually ten or more. Performances for schools were not included in the mission.

The president, who was an influential labour politician in Botea, was rather new to the position. The vice president was more experienced, with ten years on the board.

Botea – Buying Centre and Buying Process

The board did not want to concern itself with details and the president was happy that the staff could take care of practicalities. There was also an executive committee consisting of the president, the vice president and some staff members. That committee discussed the overall mission and any changes were a matter for the entire board.

The staff worked as a sort of buying group led by a manager with a long experience from a regional theatre. The buying process could start with someone's reading a review of a play. But there were also many prospectuses, some of which the manager simply discarded. Others were discussed by the staff. It was quite common that theatre companies phoned the office. Sometimes, staff members found it difficult to decline offers, and the manager herself meant that it could be embarrassing when old acquaintances phoned about something for which there was no room in the programme.

The manager pointed out the importance of being informed about developments in the performing arts. Therefore, the buying group travelled quite a lot in order to see what was available in Sweden. Suggestions from personal contacts could be regarded as important.

The manager, herself, could decide on the programme, but normally the informal discussion in the buying group was essential. The manager's decision was then presented to the board, which approved it if it was within the budget frames. Alternatives were hardly possible once formal agreements had already been made. The exception from this way of handling the decision-making was when the estimated loss for a single project was more than €11,000. In such cases, the executive committee made the decision. Such losses could come into question when discussing guest performances from other countries. Other large or controversial projects were normally discussed in the executive committee or in a more informal way with the president or the vice president. Ultimately, the relation between the board and the manager was a matter of trust.

On a local level, there was cooperation with other organisations that sought minor economic contributions. However, there was no cooperation with the opera. The vice president thought that the opera did not want to cooperate. No sponsors could have had an influence on the programme. The programme was actually not even discussed with the members at the annual meeting.

Botea – Buying Criteria

As the grants were unchanged during the last three years, the price of the performances and the other costs connected to them had some significance. When calculating it was assumed that 70 percent of the tickets would be sold. From that calculation, it was possible to discuss the relation between economic outcome and the value of the performance.

The statutes of the association stated that the programme should be characterized by diversity. According to the president, there should be a balance between what was commercially interesting and offerings that were out of the mainstream. As Botea was a university town with a low average age, it was possible to reach an audience even for more exclusive performances. In the manager's opinion, the value of the experience of a performance could not be estimated and a large audience did not automatically mean that a performance was better. Sometimes, the anticipated preferences of the audience were regarded, even though the manager herself was not enthusiastic.

The manager differentiated between the assessment of quality and what the audience might come to appreciate. In her mind, playwrights, producers and actors gave an indication of quality. She did not explicitly mention the actual play in question. For the audience, well-known actors were an important matter and that influenced the number of performances that ought to be bought. This type of decision was grounded in earlier experience.

If components of the programme were to be offered at an unsuitable time of the year, a good project could turn out badly. Performances must be spread out during the season and an appropriate venue must be available. During May, it was very difficult to find an audience, but during the hunting season in September, this was no problem, as it might have been in a more rural location.

Case 4 – Vassvik

Vassvik is part of Botea and is situated 18 kilometres from the urban centre. This fact influenced the conditions for offering theatre performances. The competition from the association in central Botea was apparent. Another problem was that Vassvik had no real venue; it was necessary to use the canteen at a local school or the church. The annual grant from the local government in Botea was approximately €5,000, which was sufficient for 7 or 8 minor performances. In Vassvik it was possible to do things that were not practical in Botea. The system with some snacks at tables in connection to the performances was a popular example.

Vassvik – Buying Centre and Buying Process

At the annual meeting with the members in the association, members could present their ideas about the programme. All decisions of that kind were, however, up to the board. The president prepared the board meetings by picking out things that could be of interest and met the technical specifications. Her starting point was the prospectuses the association had received. When someone phoned she requested that information be sent by mail. At the board meetings, she informed about what was available. Someone could have seen, read or heard something. Then, the content of the programme was discussed. When possible, some funding was reserved for special offers later on.

Besides the prospectuses, information activities from Riksteatern could provide some guidance, but it was difficult to assess small theatre companies. Personal contacts with presidents in other associations could be useful.

Vassvik – Buying Criteria

It was necessary to choose plays in accordance with public interests. The participation of local residents was desired. The president pointed out the importance of the fact that the audience had a personal relation to the performers. It was risky to “venture into the unknown” and the president thought that it was easier to reach a sufficient amount of spectators if the audience had liked what they saw the last time these performers were on stage in Vassvik. The time for the performances was important. Sunday was the preferred day of the week. The early summer and the hunting season in September were out of question.

Low prices were necessary and normally the association could not buy performances at prices higher than €1,000 due to the size of the venue. There was almost no chance of finding sponsors. However, some cooperation took place with the library, the school or the church. At those events, the costs were divided. The president stressed that no one but the association influenced the programme.

Case 5 – Vattede

Vattede is a chief municipality in a sparsely populated rural district in northern Sweden. Many years ago, the Vattede association organized performances of different kinds in at least three other places. Nowadays, the association is languishing. This was partly due to the aging population of the municipality and the fact that the school was no longer in a position to give the students free tickets to the performances. During the palmy days of the 1980s, the association had a grant of approximately €15,000. The amount was lowered and was no longer forthcoming by the end of the 1990s. But still, there was a small economic buffer, so there were some possibilities to organize performances.

Some performances were not arranged via the association, as the producers went directly to the community centres; they were supposed to be the target group and could apply for money for activities of that kind. Sometimes, the association joined as a partner in such projects.

Vattede – Buying Centre and Buying Process

There is some doubt as to whether there was a planned buying process in the association. The president belonged to what was left of a board that was more of a paper construction. Any activity that took place was initiated by community centres in need of economic support. On those occasions, the president was always contacted, and he decided on the contributions.

Vattede – Buying Criteria

Quality meant a lot of things to the president. Content had to be true in some respect. It could be intellectual, but at the same time, it must evoke imagination. It must not be foreseeable. Well-known actors could be important for the size of the audience, and plays from Riksteatern could be regarded as a guarantee of good quality. But Riksteatern's larger performances were far too expensive for the Vattede association.

Case 6 – Botnia

The supply of concerts and theatre performances is good in Botnia. The regional theatre produces performances for its own venue and for touring purposes. Sometimes it receives performances from other theatres. The non-independent theatres in the town do not normally sell tickets to a paying audience; they use distribution agents, mainly in their own region.

The Botnia association is a distribution agent with no specific bonds to the local producers. It receives a grant of €15,000 from the local government. When working with larger performances the association has to use the venue at the regional theatre. The theatre and takes care of everything concerning the performances, except paying the bills from the touring theatres. Minor performances can be organized by the association on its own or be handled in cooperation with community centres.

Botnia – Buying Centre and Buying Process

The board consists of volunteers with an interest in theatre. The main function of the board is to decide about the programme. The process begins when the executive committee (president, secretary and treasurer) discusses what to propose to the entire board. The discussion has its starting point in the prospectuses from the producers, especially Riksteatern. The secretary normally informs the committee about what is available. She tries to think about the association's different target groups when she delivers her recommendations, but sometimes she meets with opposition. The president regrets that so few people participate in the discussions.

If the association wants to use the venue of the regional theatre, there must be an acceptance of the play from the theatre. In fact, the theatre once refused, saying that the play was not serious enough. The board presents a list of the plays that are wanted. There is, however, no guarantee that the association's wishes will become realised. In addition, it is desirable to have surplus funds available for later offerings. On these occasions, the executive committee decides.

Botnia – Buying Criteria

The association normally orders from companies with which they are familiar. Price is important. €1,100 is the limit without a partner. Caution is necessary, for instance, in avoiding unsuitable days for performances. Other important considerations are the playwright and subject of the plays. The marketing manager at the regional theatre may provide advice about audience potential. Telephone calls from producers have a low degree of influence on the decisions. Normally, the producers are only asked to send written material.

In spite of the fact that the Botnia association wanted to reach everyone and especially people not accustomed in going to the theatre, the focus was on the traditional middle-aged audience. Both the president and the secretary knew that it all was about buying performances that they in some way liked themselves. The secretary meant that one ought to give people "what they ought to want".

The local government contributed an annual grant and that there was no interest in evaluating specific projects in order to add more money. Sponsoring was not common and when it occurred, the consideration of a potential sponsor came after the choice of the play.

Findings and Conclusions

The main findings are presented as answers to the research questions:

Research Question 1: What Do the Buying Centres of Swedish Theatre Associations Look Like?

It seems as if the process starts when the prospectuses arrive from different theatre companies. If so, it would be possible to regard this external actor as an initiator. Another possibility could be to look for an internal initiator. That seems to differ, but when there is staff, the process will be initiated there. In the absence of staff, the president or the secretary seem to start the process.

It seems difficult to identify a specific user within the buying centre. But of course, the audience could be regarded as the user. The audience hardly participates in any other role. Perhaps there could be some informal possibility to influence the programme (see case 4).

The decider role needs to be changed somewhat: it is not enough to distinguish between influencers, buyers and deciders. There often seems to be a situation where an informal de facto decider is also the buyer. The formal decision is then more of a confirmation of a decision that had already resulted in formal agreements with theatre companies (see cases 1 and 3); thus, we have a seventh role, the confirmer. This seems to be more or less the normal situation when the theatre associations have employees. But there are exceptions: in case 2 the board, and especially its president, seems to be the actual decider. The reason could be that this association is medium-sized rather than large.

The influencers often seem to be people outside the organisation. They could be colleagues from other theatre organisations or people working in the field at regional or national level. Reviewers in newspapers seem to be important. But sponsors and grant givers seem to have no influence on the programme – this, at least, is what the informants say (cf. Bourdieu's denial of the economic interest within art markets). But there are examples of internal influencers as well. In case 3 there is an interesting situation where the de facto decider discusses both with her staff colleagues and with representatives from the formal decider or confirmer.

The formal buyer looks different depending on the staff situation. With a staff, the manager would be the buyer; without a staff, it would be the responsibility of either the president or the secretary.

Gatekeepers appeared in most of the cases. Sometimes the gatekeeper just checked the technical specifications and struck offerings that would not be practically possible. Sometimes there were recommendations (cases 1, 4 and 6). There could also be a situation where possible things were eliminated from discussion (cases 3 and 4).

Research Question 2: What Do the Buying Processes of Swedish Theatre Associations Look Like?

The buying process seems to be much more informal and perhaps intuitive than the theory indicates. Several of the stages from Day and Barksdale hardly exist. The decision that is to

be taken does not concern a provider of a specific product. It is more a question of a choice between different plays. The provider is to be regarded, instead, as a selection criterion.

In all cases (except case 5) the prospectuses from different theatre companies were a starting point in an ongoing process where the board is a formal decider or confirmer. Sometimes there was some screening before the meetings in the buying centre. At these meetings someone - it could be a manager (cases 1 and 3), the president (cases 2 and 4) or the secretary (case 6) – presented the available plays. Riksteatern had a co-ordinating role at a meeting where the wants of different associations were discussed. Riksteatern's information activities were highly appreciated by the associations. But telephone calls from other theatre companies did not seem to have been estimated. In almost all the cases it was regarded as favourable to have some money left for offers later on. At those occasions the decisions were taken by a small amount of people.

Research Question 3: Which Buying Criteria could be Found in Swedish Theatre Associations?

There is not much formal evaluation, but rejection criteria and cues are definitely being used. Intuition and experience are, however, more important than formal calculation, even if some calculation is done in two of the cases (cases 2 and 3). Good plays seem to be a more important criterion than audience potential or price. But still price had to be considered in some way due to stagnating grants (cases 3, 4, 5 and 6). Well-known actors were also regarded as important as that influenced the size of the audience (all cases). But it could also be a cue indicating quality (case 3). Well-known plays seemed to be attractive to many boards (cases 2 and 6).

Some rejection criteria were also noticed. Bad experience from an earlier performance was important (cases 2 and 4). "Not locally relevant" (case 1) was an argument to reject plays about people in an unfamiliar social context (case 1). Minor personal interest made it difficult for a play to find its way onto the programme (cases 1, 2, 3 and 6). Discrimination against unknown theatre companies were noticed in most of the cases (cases 1, 2, 4 and 6). Wrong time was a very important rejection criteria. (almost all cases). Unjustified sex and violence or Nazi flirtation was stressed by one association (case 2).

It is not evident that the selection criteria differ between the boards and the staffs, even if the staffs tend to have better knowledge. Perhaps it is possible to notice a tendency to think more about the wishes of the potential audience among the boards than among the staffs (see cases 2 and 4). It is evident that many of the informants want, at least to some degree, to give the audience plays other than those the audience actually wants. It seems as if deciders, both staff and boards, prioritise things that they like themselves. But they do not always admit this; instead, they talk about "good quality" or "good plays".

The theoretical framework from the organisational buying behaviour could definitely be applied to theatre associations; however, modifications are necessary.

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