

THE STRATEGIES OF THE PUBLIC THEATRE ACADEMIES AND THEIR INFLUENCE UPON THE CUSTOMERS ON THE CULTURE MARKET

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Abstract

The main goal of this paper is to show the specific operating environment of the public theatre academies in Poland and to try to assess their importance for the development of culture in Poland. In addition, the article contains an analysis of the impact of the academies on shaping the customer profile on the culture market and the cultural education of society.

Key words: culture, customer, market, theatre academies

Introduction

Culture and the participation in culture have a huge impact on the socio-economic development of the country. It is, therefore, necessary to consider how to create the most favourable conditions for the largest possible number of citizens to receive and understand culture. Participation in cultural events and projects undoubtedly enriches and sensitizes people, while the presence of culture in human life makes people more open, tolerant and creative, which translates into a more sophisticated way of thinking, an improved ability to overcome barriers and, in consequence, their personal development, which results in tangible economic benefits. The so-called *life-long learning*, which can be defined as cultural education at every stage of life, is the development of a conscious consumer of high culture.

The article deals with the issues regarding the functioning of public theatre academies in Poland and their impact on the cultural education of the public. In addition, the analysis of academies activities related to the formation of the cultural consumer market will be conducted, based on the strategic documentation of the researched entities.

1. The characteristics and specificity of functioning of theatre academies

In Poland there are three state theatre academies: The Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw, PWST National Academy of Theatre Arts in Krakow and The Leon Schiller Polish National Film, Television and Theatre School in Lodz. Moreover, there are the Faculties of Acting and Puppetry in Wroclaw and the Faculty of Dance Theatre in Bytom, which is a branch of the Academy of Krakow. There is also the Faculty of Puppetry Art in Bialystok, representing a local branch of Warsaw Academy. All in all, state theatre academies educate in six locations all over Poland, in the faculties of acting, dance theatre, puppetry, drama direction, theatrical direction and theatre studies. According to the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, in 2012 the theatre and film schools in Poland boasted 1,761 students (excluding foreigners). It is worth mentioning here, however, that the vast majority of those are students of the film faculties of the Film School in Lodz.

The Law on Higher Education Act of 27th July 2005 is an essential document regulating Polish higher education. According to the Act, all art academies and universities, including theatre schools, are under the jurisdiction of the minister responsible for the culture and national heritage protection. Therefore, any state subsidies for tasks related to the education of full-time students of first, second and third degree, the education of academic staff and the maintenance of facilities and premises come from the budget at the disposal of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage. In addition, art schools and academies receive subsidies for tasks related to the cultural activities as defined in provisions regarding the organisation and conduct of cultural activities (Law on Higher Education: 2005). As it turns out, however, the subsidies merely cover the cost of the maintenance of premises, salaries and educational activities, but they are insufficient for conducting activities associated with the creation and dissemination of culture.

Annually, acting faculties may take in only 20 to 30 first year students each. Such a small number of people to be admitted to academies not only creates highly competitive enrolment conditions, but also enables the development of an individualized educational process based on the master and pupil relationship. This form of education facilitates the individual approach to each student in the process of developing their talent and skills, and offers students a regular opportunity to stay in close touch with the artists who are, at the same time, academic teachers. The process of education in the abovementioned conditions must be comprehensive, which requires intensive effort, on both the part of the teachers and the students. In contrast

to other art schools, the training of actors starts at the level of higher education, since in Poland there are no primary and secondary theatre schools that would serve as a prelude to higher degrees of acting education.

Theatre academy graduates are, in principle, not only educated actors, but also people of great cultural awareness, which means the diploma they receive is both evidence of their professional acting skills and their legitimacy to promote cultural values, national identity, the care of their native language and awareness of cultural heritage. Undoubtedly, the role of theatre schools is to transform students into broadly educated and creative people who will constitute the core of the cultural society in Poland.

Theatre schools create the opportunity for the development of diversity in the field of performance arts. They are places where experimenting, and the trying and testing of new solutions in theatre becomes possible. Therefore, this is where two trends meet: the stream of modern, avant-garde art faces the need to cultivate and maintain tradition. Naturally, they both have their supporters and opponents, which is reflected in the statutes and development strategies of the academies.

Apart from regular classrooms, all academies have school theatres within their infrastructure. This allows tutors and students to prepare and stage diploma performances to a wider audience and also enables the conduct of other cultural activities. School theatres are integral parts of both the academies themselves and the learning process they provide. They operate as repertory theatres, mainly staging diploma performances, participated in by students in their final years of study. Without any doubt, the theatres constitute a part of the learning process conducted by the academies, but they also play an important role in the creation and dissemination of culture. It must be emphasized that they are by no means commercial theatres and, thus, they do not compete with other local stages. They offer a different, often bold and innovative repertoire, a new outlook on art, and a direct contact with the audience, which makes them unique. School theatres are of great importance to local communities, for whom they are an alternative form of entertainment and a chance to participate in high culture. On the one hand, they link academies with audiences and, on the other, citizens with high culture.

Theatre academies can be perceived as a very specific type of cultural institution, as they combine the academic function, related to education and science resulting from their university status, with the mission to create and disseminate culture as institutions closely associated with cultural activities.

2. The impact of academies upon cultural education

The vital role of cultural education in society had been recognised for many years, as it was one of the most important areas of education for those of higher social background. Developing an interest in music, painting, literature, as well as national heritage was highly desired and, in some circles, even perceived as a must, constituting one of the most crucial elements of general education. At the same time the participation in high culture was reserved for the wealthy with appropriate social status.

Nowadays the pressure on the development of cultural and culture competence is omnipresent in modern methodology and education (Torowska 2008: 29). Today, it is generally believed that cultural education should be widely available, which is an extensively discussed subject in literature, at conferences and in government publications. The majority of 21st century authorities seem to realize the nature and the need of cultural education of both young and mature citizens. However, there is still the question of how it should be performed. The issues related to cultural education include the scope, objectives and methods of its implementation and the competences of the teachers and learners in regard to the determination of its effectiveness (Olbrycht 2003: 28).

Through cultural education, we want to support the personal development of individuals, stimulate their creativity and also build the foundations for the conscious participation in culture. This should, in turn, translate into the formation of a creative society, the competitive advantage of cities and regions and, finally, into economic growth.

Among other things, cultural education is viewed as a factor facilitating the growth of the conscious consumer of culture, including high culture, and stimulating the creative potential of individuals (Grad, Kaczmarek 2005: 141). At the same time, an educated participant of culture is a person who creates demand for cultural services and, therefore, generates both the need for and the appreciation of artists' work. Consequently, it seems natural that art academies face existing issues and become involved in the cultural education of the public. This may have a real impact on the position of artists and future graduates on the job market.

The existence and maintenance of school theatres within theatre academies is one of the main tools supporting cultural education. Conducting this type of activity is, on the one hand, part of educational process and, on the other hand, an opportunity for the students to face the audience and open themselves up to the outside world. The staged performances are an element of mutual learning process for the artists and the audience. The greatest asset of art is the ability to evoke feelings and emotions in the audience.

The plays staged with great commitment by the people just entering the art market are often received in a much more emotional fashion. The presence of very young people on stage may render even an extremely difficult performance more approachable to their peers.

Theatre academies are the promoters of high culture, and thus the performances staged in school theatres must be very ambitious. Apart from the cultivation of traditions, they also offer experimental art and innovative forms of artistic expression, which can rarely be seen elsewhere. It is in their studies when the young have time to search, explore and discover, which translates into the artistic diversity of their repertoire. For audiences, such a repertoire is an introduction to and a great lesson on an innovative approach to theatre and some pioneering acting trends. Undoubtedly, this is a form of cultural education, which later facilitates contact with various artistic forms which may often be quite difficult for an unprepared viewer.

The lack of participation in culture is frequently justified by the exorbitant prices of cultural services. For their non-commercial and educational nature, school theatres are able to offer lower and, therefore, more affordable ticket prices. In Table 1 below the prices of various, selected Lodz theatres have been compared.

Table 1. The comparison of ticket prices in the selected theatres of Łódź

Theatre name	Average regular ticket price (PLN)	Average reduced ticket price (PLN)	Admission fee (no designated seats)
The Grand Theatre	39.5	32	–
The Stefan Jaracz Theatre	33	27	–
The New Theatre	34.5	26.5	15
The Powszechny Theatre	53.5	43.5	–
The Music Theatre	50	40	–
The School Theatre	25	15	6

Source: Own elaboration based on the pricing lists available in the selected theatres on 15/05/2014.

The lower ticket prices in the school theatre creates a unique opportunity for those who are less well off to experience real theatrical art. This also creates a new audience who, for financial reasons, would normally not stand a chance of experiencing this form of art and, consequently, may never have developed the desire to experience theatrical art. The financial aspect is also extremely important for students from other universities, for whom the cost of several dozens of zlotys per ticket well exceeds their financial capabilities. The offer to the visit theatre for a noticeably smaller amount of money may be, therefore, extremely tempting, especially when the play is populated with their peers.

Another huge advantage of school theatres over their commercial counterparts is, in regard to cultural education, their lower formalization, as casual clothes with no apparent dress code and intimate interiors help eliminate the fear of a real, mature theatrical experience. This offers an opportunity to invite completely new audiences to participate in higher culture.

It is also worth mentioning that the diploma plays are staged not only in school theatres but also elsewhere, which gives audiences the chance to see them outside the walls of academies.

Cultural education is also supported by theatre school students and graduates themselves, regardless of the fact whether they remain faithful to their profession. Those with a theatre school diploma are not only culturally educated people, but also conscious participants and promoters of culture. Theatre schools provide them with a theoretical background, which enables them to understand and create art. The students of acting faculties often engage in different activities aiming at the dissemination of culture. An exemplary project is an initiative to encourage people to read by organising professional public readings of poetry for children.

Another factor which has an impact on cultural education and the development of customer market is the organisation of artistic events by academies. A theatre school is an ideal venue for discussions on theatre. Open and free conferences, workshops and subject meetings with theatre people allow audiences to get to know and experience high culture first hand. The festivals organised by each theatre school have been another effective way to stimulate local communities. For 32 years the Polish National Film, Television and Theatre School in Lodz has been organising the Festival of Theatre Schools, where diploma performances from all state academies are staged. Being such a unique event, it has become the celebration of students and theatre. For young actors this is the first opportunity to confront the demanding festival audience and theatrical critics, while the audience is presented with a chance to experience and see the diverse artistic programme (www.festiwalszkolteatralnych.pl).

The National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw is the organiser of the International Theatre School Festival, whose main objective is to promote theatrical culture and young talents, to share experiences, and to bring cultures closer by gathering artists together. The organisers declare their willingness to present Poland as a country which supports culture and appreciates its impact on the development of societies (www.festiwal.at.edu.pl).

The State Drama School in Krakow organizes the Forum of Young Film Directors, whose aim is to improve the artistic competence of the participants and to promote young directors by presenting artistic the achievements

of students from directing faculties (Rules of Forum of Young Directing: www.pwst.krakow.pl).

The Puppetry Department in Wrocław also offers an opportunity to participate in the International Meeting of Theatre Schools called *The Puppet Theatre of Tomorrow*. Its programme is filled with a variety of activities, such as theatrical performances, workshops, concerts, exhibitions, as well as official and programme debates.

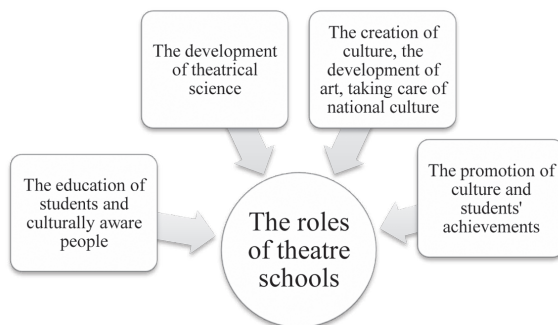
It is also worth mentioning that each abovementioned event is open to the public and constitutes a cultural event on the national or international scale, whose educational, cultural and artistic value is greatly appreciated. Therefore, they are regular positions in the local cultural policies and frequently benefit from the financial support of the local authorities.

3. The roles and policies of theatre academies in relation to the formation of a culture consumer market

Theatre academies in Poland play a number of roles that can be divided into four categories. The first two stem from their statuses as university. The first one is to educate and prepare students to perform a specified job. While discussing this role, one must not forget to mention that it also involves educating culturally aware people and audiences, who upon graduation will promote high art. The second role is the development of theatrical science. It would be difficult to imagine a better place for a scientific discussion about theatre than theatre schools which bring together theatre supporters, practitioners and theorists.

The next two roles have their origin in the artistic nature of the theatre academy, and namely in the creation and dissemination of culture. Theatre schools are often the cradle of bold and brand new ideas, which automatically makes it the birthplace of innovative art. This state of affairs stems from the fact that the learning process there is a very creative one, for both tutors and students. The promotion of culture is a natural consequence following the creation of new art in theatre schools. For their students it is part of the learning process of their future profession and, at the same time, an opportunity to present themselves and their skills. For the audience it is a chance to learn about and to get familiar with high culture. What is more, theatre schools participate in the cultural life of their cities, organising free concerts, shows, festivals and exhibitions, and they try to be important art and culture centres for local communities. Such activities help to grant easier access to culture and shape future audiences by forming a link and a good relationship between actors and audiences. The various roles of theatre schools are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The various roles of theatre schools



The discussed roles should be reflected in the academy's development strategy, whose main objective is to increase the level of all activities taken by the academy, including cultural education. Among other things, it also comprises the major directions of development and the planned changes aimed at the improvement of quality of operation and the provided services. Table 2 presents the analysis of the strategies and missions of theatre academies in terms of planned activities aimed at promoting and conducting cultural education which will help create the culture consumer market.

Table 2. The promotion of culture in the strategies and missions of theatre academies

The State Drama School in Krakow	The Polish National Film, Television and Theatre School in Lodz	The National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw
– The main reference to the role of a culture promoter can be found in the document describing its mission. It assumes the schooling of graduates for the needs of the national culture and the shaping their attitudes towards responsibility and openness to cultural diversity in the world. – Furthermore, the mission refers to the development of responsibility for culture, the distribution and transmission of these attitudes to future generations by creating best practices, an ethical value system and the freedom of artistic and scientific activity.	– Among the numerous efforts to promote culture, the school strategy includes points relating to the modernisation of the school theatre. The school authorities plan to transform it into a city theatre, with regular performances and an ambitious repertoire that could become a permanent spot on the cultural map of the city. – In addition, the emphasis is on intensifying the promotion of festivals organized by the school in order to increase their rank and importance for the local community.	– The reference to the promotion of culture can be found in the point regarding the need for a change in thinking about school theatre. A radical change in the philosophy of communication about the places of theatrical presentations is assumed, as they are to be used not only for staging performances, but also for the active discussion of young people about the theatre and the world. The theatre has become a place to share views, experiences and results of experiments and intergenerational disputes.

– The school strategy, however, also includes the intention to develop a system for the promotion of its graduates and to take actions to obtain additional funds for project activities, including the promotion of culture.	– Referring to the non-theatrical activities of the academy, there are intentions to try to transform the „school cinema” into a dedicated forum for exchanging ideas, open to people from outside the school. Organized meetings with prominent cinema personalities and intellectuals should have a refreshing influence on the school and the local community. – At the school a club and cafe is also being developed, which is intended to become a meeting place for the academic community, a showroom for literary, musical and artistic achievements, and a place of intellectual ferment.	– The school authorities plan to intensify the activities between the academy and the professional environment, including the commercialisation of research results and public presentations of end-of-term exam performances. – Changes in the syllabus have been scheduled. Following the guidelines of the strategy, it must respond to the implicit social needs, in order to avoid the alienation of theatrical students from the outside world, and to facilitate the existence of the theatre in public space.
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Table 2 shows that in their statutes or missions each public academy includes activities aimed at the development of the role of creator and promoter of culture. The existence of these entities as cultural institutions is crucial, both to ensure “a refreshing impact” upon local communities and to develop future audiences. The declarations included in the strategic documentation prove that the academies’ authorities are well aware of the impact they have on the formation of art consumers, and of the obligation to educate the public in the field of higher culture.

Conclusions

Art academies, including theatre schools, have a significant impact on the state of culture in Poland. Firstly, they significantly increase the human capital that will be involved in the development of culture. The people leaving the walls of the art schools will be largely responsible for the level and quality of culture in Poland. Secondly, the academies enrich the cultural offer available to local communities. School theatres, which exist within the academies, offer their own, very interesting and ambitious repertoire. They give people the opportunity to get to know a variety of artistic forms, they teach people to understand art and implement the intricacies of high culture. In addition, other initiatives undertaken by the academies such as the organisation of competitions and festivals help to make the cultural offer more alluring. Thirdly, it is also the role of academies to educate the young culturally and introduce them into the world of art and culture, which has an

impact on shaping future theatrical audiences. This is carried out not only through the educational process, but also via the extraordinary activities undertaken by the academies, implemented in the form of projects which often require a separate funding.

The academies declare their role in the cultural education of the public and take it into account in their development plans, as specified in the documentation describing their missions and strategies. It seems that the education of culture consumers is an integral part of their operation. On the one hand, it is extremely important for the regional cultural policy, which, among other things, includes the preparation of local communities for the reception of art. On the other hand, the development of educated market customers is also crucial for the theatre academies. By doing so, they prepare and increase the number of audiences, and consequently create demand for the work of actors and create workplaces for their future graduates.

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