

From Permanent Positions to Visiting Jobs

The Changing Working Culture in Finnish Theatres

MARJATTA HÄTI-KORKEILA & LAURA GRÖNDAHL

ABSTRACT

The transition to a freelance employment policy from permanent working contracts has had various repercussions on artistic practices in Finnish theatres. This article examines the changes that have taken place in the working culture of statutory funded institutional theatre since the early 1990s, focusing on the shifting roles and positions of directors, dramaturges, producers, and artistic managers. The research material consists of theatre statistics, interviews, and public discussions in the theatre field presented mainly in trade magazines and seminar minutes. Although the theatres still have a significant number of permanently employed artists, the percentage of short-term visits has steadily increased. This goes especially for directors and dramaturges, who mainly focus only on their own productions and do not participate in the long-term development of the theatres' repertoires or artistic strategies as a whole. It is hard to create ongoing ensemble work and a spirit of a working community when a significant part of the artistic staff keeps constantly changing. In small and medium-sized theatres, the managers are now responsible for the artistic leadership without any collegial support of permanently engaged directors and dramaturges. They usually have to direct plays or undertake dramaturgical work without compensation, even if they do not have a proper education or experience in that field. In the changing economic conditions, the role of a producer has gained importance in planning and leading theatre activities and production work. This puts more emphasis on organizational, financial, and marketing issues than previously. Current priorities are now focussed on a high standard of artistic programming and the nurturing of public interest.

KEYWORDS

Freelance work, Finnish institutional theatre, theatre management, theatre professions, working culture

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INTRODUCTION

The working culture in Finnish theatres has been changing since the late 1980s. Freelance work and short-term contracts have become more and more usual. For example, ninety percent of directors worked as visiting artists in the 2000s,¹ and only twenty-one directors had a long-term contract in 2015.² Until the 1990s, they were an inherent part of the theatres' permanent staff. In this article we take a closer look at the development since the 1980s, and ask how it has influenced the artists' positions, the contents of their work, and the management of the theatres. What were the reasons for the change, how did it take place, what kind of reactions has it awakened, and what has happened to artistic ensembles? We limit our discussion to the institutional theatres subsidized by law, called VOS-theatres. In 2016, there were fifty-nine VOS-theatres, out of which forty-seven were drama theatres. Their situation and organization is different from small and specialised theatre groups, which have proliferated lately, and should be taken as the subject of other, more extensive research.

Precarious conditions have become more common in all fields of working life since the 1980s. According to Richard Sennett, the most important characteristics of the newest phase of capitalism are flexibility and constant change. Teamwork and collaborative skills are emphasized, but professional identity and personal bonds to colleagues are often weak. An individual worker moves from one task and position to another without committing to any community for long. Routine tasks are devalued, and risk taking is

1 Krogerus and Saveljeff 2007, Korhonen 2001, Helavuori 1999.

2 Tinfo Theatre Statistics.

encouraged.³ Citizens must manage temporary relations in all areas of life and be constantly ready to move from one place to another. They must be able to learn new things quickly, adapt to unforeseen situations, let go of the past, downplay their previous experiential knowledge, and always be ready to switch old practices into new ones.⁴ It seems that all the above listed attributes can be applied to the 21st century theatre, if we consider it as a working place. Short-term jobs have been favoured as part of an efficient and innovative working culture. However, theatre making is always teamwork, and it is not easy to create a good ensemble when the team members change for every project.

Traditionally, institutional theatres have been led by a manager assisted by permanently engaged directors and dramaturges. They have outlined the long-term artistic guidelines and strategies together, building them primarily on the theatre's fixed ensemble. As a result of the freelance policy, theatre managers have been left without the support of a long-standing artistic team. The change in artistic teams has influenced programme planning, which is the most important work that a theatre manager has. If the financial manager is the closest partner in planning and deciding the programme, it may also have many kinds of effects on the artistic programme as well as on the theatre manager's work. This affects mainly the provincial theatres, especially at times when monetary funding is decreasing. However, the question of financial matters in artistic programme planning deserves separate research.

In this article, we base our research on three sources. Firstly, we have accumulated various statistics showing the ratio between permanently engaged and freelance artists in institutional theatres and the changes in the ratio since the early 1990s. Secondly, we charted theatre makers' discussions on the changing working condition in trade magazines and seminars. Thirdly, we carried out interviews with theatre managers about the contents of their job in 2017.

BACKGROUND

The current Finnish theatre system, established in the 1960s and 1970s, is exceptional by global and even European standards because it has been based on permanent working contracts. There were at least three historical reasons for it. Firstly, Finland has a strong tradition of theatre as a popular culture and enlightening activity. According to the Nordic welfare state policy, every citizen should have access to high-quality culture regardless of their wealth and where they live. Large theatre buildings have been constructed all over the sparsely inhabited country offering positions for actors, directors, dramaturges, designers, and technical staff.⁵ However, it has not always been easy to fill the big auditoriums of the theatres and attract and satisfy

3 Sennett 2002.

4 Sennett 2006, 3–5.

5 Koski and Vaittinen 1998, 168–169; Koho 1991.

growing audiences in the regions. For example, in Lahti City Theatre, the biggest auditorium has been made smaller and the seats have decreased from over nine hundred to seven hundred. The key reason was that financial requirements were not realistic in comparison to the surrounding population.

Secondly, and following from the above-mentioned cultural policy, theatre is strongly subsidized by the state and municipalities. There are very few commercial theatres in Finland, and private sponsoring of theatres is very low. In the context of a broader statutory subsidy reform in 1993, museums, theatres, and orchestras were included in a new “formula-based” subsidy system (VOS).⁶ Public financing is based on full-time equivalent person years, covering all personnel costs, not only salaries. As the municipalities often own the theatres, the local government has a say in their decision making, which may influence artistic policy. The austerity policy after the recessions in the early 1990s and after 2008 has affected theatres’ artistic and personnel management significantly. Artistically, the theatre field in Finland has changed a lot and is more diverse since the law of the formula-based subsidy system was established.⁷

Thirdly, Finnish theatre makers have very firm collective labour agreements, which go back to the early 1970s, and give them strong protection. Although artistic employees have often had two-year contracts, they have usually been able to renew their contract automatically unless they have been guilty of severe misconduct. The so-called “grave-stone agreements” have guaranteed a permanent position and fixed salary for the employees of institutional theatres, regardless of whether they have work or not. The rules and agreements in artists’ organizations and in the business world have been quite different. For example, Jyväskylä City Theatre tried to lay off some of its artists during the deepest recession in 1992 at the same time as big enterprises gave notice to hundreds of their employees. The court confirmed that the production and financial matters of the theatre cannot be a reason to fire artists.⁸ To avoid so-called “grave-stone agreements”, theatres have begun to make mainly one or two-year employment or freelance contracts.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW WORKING CONDITIONS

Most of the directors in institutional theatres at the end of the 1980s still had permanent contracts, although their ways of working did not satisfy all of them.⁹ The situation began slowly to change in the late 1980s when young di-

6 In this system central government subsidies are calculated on the basis of certain cost criteria (salary cost of a manpower year, average library maintenance cost, etc.) and transferred – either directly or through the mediation of municipal cultural administration – to the institutions. Heiskanen 2000, 96.

7 A proposal for renewing the government financing system was made in January 2018, but it is still in the process of development.

8 Söder 1992, 13.

9 Vesala 1989, 9.

rectors and actors did not want to commit themselves to permanent jobs. They argued that the “gravestone agreements” hampered creative work. Jotaarkka Pennanen stated in his opening speech at the National Day of Theatre in 1984: “Directors do more and more temporary work. They naturally look for artistically inspiring environments.”¹⁰ It took a while before the new ideas and thoughts were openly and officially spoken about. Raimo Söder, the manager of the Theatre and Media Employees, recalled in 2003 that no official decision was made: “It has been a slow and not very noticeable process.”¹¹

The following graph summarizes the process of transition from permanent positions to visiting directors according to Kaisa Korhonen’s experiences introduced in a Finnish theatre-magazine 2001.¹²

1970s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost everyone doing artistic work in theatres had a permanent contract. • Visitors were highlights in the programmes.
1980s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directors wanted to withdraw from “gravestone agreements”. • The use of visiting directors increased. • Director vacancies were not always refilled, if they left. • The aim of the visits was to create artistically richer performances, especially in countryside theatres.
1990s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to the recession, the directors’ vacancies largely disappeared. • The exception had become the rule.
2000s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 85 % of performances are directed by visitors. • Only 20 directors have a permanent contract in 58 institutional theatres, which produce over 400 premieres every year.

During the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s, the two-year contracts of city theatres were renewed in all theatres simultaneously, which allowed some exchange in the artistic staff. However, older actors in provincial theatres were often reluctant to leave their posts because they had settled down with their families, or they were afraid of unemployment. This often led to a distorted age structure. For example, the youngest male actor in a small

10 STOHL (The Finnish Union of Theatre Directors) board, 5/84, 2.

11 Häti-Korkeila 2003, 6.

12 Korhonen and Grönblom 2001, 9.

provincial theatre in 1993 was 53 years old.¹³ Young actors, who had graduated from the theatre academy, had plenty of working opportunities in the big cities even during the recession of the 1990s. They only seldom wanted to go to provincial theatres, which were located far from the additional working opportunities in film and TV productions. The ageing ensembles and the lack of educated young actors restricted the choice of play-texts and the possibilities for unconventional staging. The provincial theatres thus became even less attractive for ambitious directors and actors.¹⁴ Theatre managers tried desperately to attract educated artists to their ensembles.¹⁵ This also caused a financial problem for the theatres: if they wanted to maintain their artistic standards, they had to pay both to interested guest artists as well as to their permanent staff, who may not have had enough work to do.

The recession of the 1990s marked a turning point after which the theatres were no longer willing to hire permanent artists, even if the financial cuts did not hit theatres as badly as some other public institutions.¹⁶ In 1993, the biennial exchange of artists tailed off.¹⁷ If a permanently engaged employee left a theatre, nobody was hired in his/her place and the money was saved for visiting artists. On the other hand, many directors, actors and designers preferred one-year-contracts or freelance work, not wanting to commit themselves for a long time. The professional field segmented as some people had more work than they could handle, while others were out of a job.

The figure 1 shows how the numbers of permanently engaged and visiting artists in all theatrical disciplines have statistically changed between 1992 and 2015.¹⁸ It seems that the new freelance working culture had more or less stabilized by the 2010s.¹⁹ A seminar arranged by the theatre workers union in 2007 ended with the conclusion that short-term working contracts had to be accepted as a permanent condition, but the freelancers' position had to be improved.²⁰ Many theatre makers have solved the situation by having a second occupation that subsidizes their artistic work.²¹

13 Pesonen 1993.

14 Helavuori 1999, Korhonen 2001, Kanto 2000, Paunu 1987.

15 Paunu 1987.

16 Ruuskanen 1993.

17 Pesonen 1997; 1993.

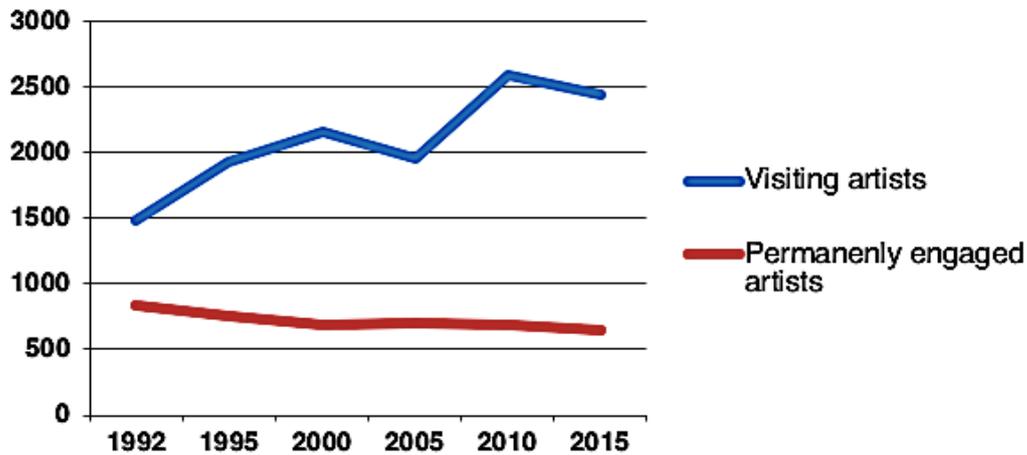
18 Tinfo Theatre Statistics 2015.

19 The Finnish theatre statistics of 2015 cover 59 theatres subsidized by law, the so-called VOS-theatres. It includes 46 drama theatres, 11 dance companies, the Finnish National Theatre and the Finnish National Opera. In this article we are thus considering only the biggest and most established theatres (including the National Theatre but not the National Opera), leaving out roughly 200 smaller companies and free groups, the number of which keeps growing...

20 Lavaste, Saana 2009.

21 Krogerus and Saveljeff 2007.

FIGURE 1. The development of permanent posts and visitors' tasks in the VOS-theatres (theatres subsidized by law) between 1992 and 2015. This statistic includes only drama theatres.



The number of permanently engaged artists in person years has gradually diminished from 831 to 642 between 1992 and 2015. The number of visiting artists has increased from 1403 to 2445 within the same period. The figures are not directly comparable, since the permanent posts are counted in person years, while the number of visitors refers to singular assignments, like the direction of one production. It must also be noted that in many cases, "permanence" means a fixed-term contract for a couple of years, not necessarily a perennial post.

On average, roughly fifty percent of the artistic employees have been visiting artists in the Finnish city theatres in the 2000s.²² The numbers have, however, varied significantly from one theatre to another, and also within singular theatres from year to year. There are probably many local and occasional reasons for the fluctuations. The trend towards freelance work basically affects all theatre professions, but fixed working contracts have decreased mostly among directors, actors, dramaturges, set designers, and musicians,²³ as exemplified in the diagrams in figures 2 – 5 and 7. The number of both permanently engaged and visiting lighting and sound designers has, for its part, grown drastically, thanks to new stage technologies and tertiary education. For all practicable purposes, lighting and sound design did not exist as artistic occupations before the 1990s.

From the perspective of an employee, the theatre field has segmented into three layers, which has put the permanently engaged and freelance artists in different positions concerning their economic security: (1) the statutory funded institutions, which still offer a few permanent vacancies, although the number of visitors is growing; (2) the more or less established free groups, where

²² Tinfo Theatre Statistics.

²³ Tinfo Theatre Statistics.

most work is done by visitors, and (3) the artistic teams assembled only for single productions, which are highly dependent on occasional grants.²⁴ The VOS-theatres and the biggest theatre groups usually pay the permanent employees according to the rates defined by trade unions. The visiting artists, however, have to negotiate their contract in every production. It is not always guaranteed that they will get as much salary as they legally should.

The financial situation is most insecure in small groups and the teams assembled for single productions, but the public subsidy for big and medium-sized institutional theatres has also gradually diminished since 1990.²⁵ The number of new theatre groups and free productions keeps growing all the time, which means that there are more and more artists who want to share the same pot. The critical questions are, how the money and working opportunities are distributed and who is allowed to choose his/her way of working. Recent enquiries show that most freelancers in the cultural field have not chosen their precarious positions voluntarily.²⁶

It is not only artists who keep travelling from theatre to theatre. Touring groups have always been an essential part of Finnish theatre history; visiting performances make an increasing part of the city theatres' repertoires today. This happens especially in small and medium-sized theatres. It has even been suggested that provincial theatres should give up their own productions and only host touring plays mainly created in Southern Finland.²⁷ This would mean a fundamental change in the institutional theatre system: instead of being an active local art-producer, a city theatre would become a kind of broker who supplies cultural services made elsewhere by others.

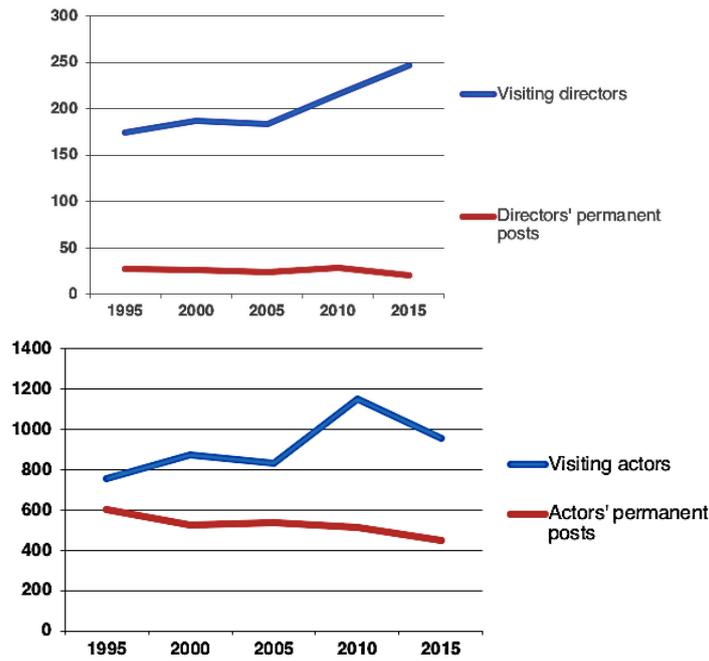
24 Klintrup-Elomaa and Saarakkala 2011.

25 Matti A. Holopainen in *Meteli* 2008:4, 10–11.

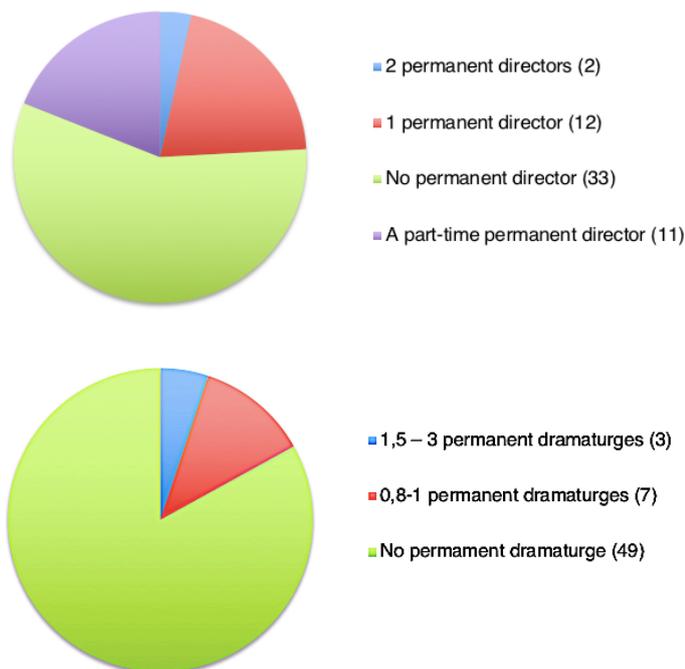
26 Mattson 2014.

According to a comprehensive poll carried out by Tilastokeskus (Statistics in Finland) in 2013, over 70 % of the people who work as their own employers in the cultural field thought that they had been forced or driven into that situation.

27 Häti-Korkeila 2010, 234.

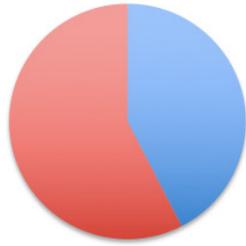


FIGURES 2–3. *The development of permanent posts and visiting jobs. Above: The development of directors' employment in VOS-theatres 1995–2015. The number of the directors' permanent posts has varied between 18 and 29 man-years. The number of visiting jobs has steadily increased from 156 (in 1996) to 247 in 2015. Below: The development of actors' employment in VOS-theatres 1995-2015. The permanent posts have steadily diminished from 601 (1995) to 448 (2015). The number of visitors' tasks has oscillated between 752 (1995) and 1150 (2010). Unlike directors, the actors have lost visiting opportunities in VOS-theatres since the recession started in 2008.*



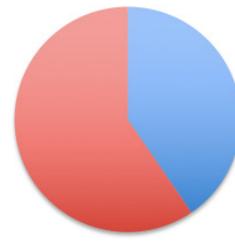
FIGURES 4–5. *Above: The Number of permanent directors in 59 VOS-theatres in 2016. Below: The Number of permanent dramaturges in 59 VOS-theatres in 2016.*

FIGURE 6. The ratio of permanent and visiting artists in VOS-theatres. Five exemplary cases of different VOS-theatres.



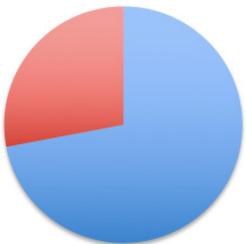
Visiting (red) 100,8 Permanent (blue) 74,3

Example 1. Big theatre in the capital:
Helsinki City Theatre
(327 employees)



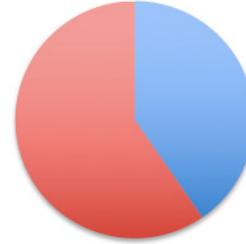
Visiting (red) 50,6 Permanent (blue) 34,4

Example 2. Big theatre outside the capital
region: Tampere Workers Theatre
(164 employees)



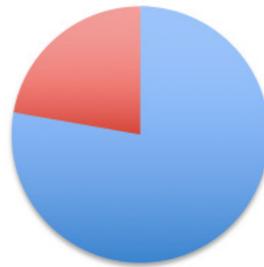
Visiting 9,1 (red) Permanent (blue) 23,4

Example 3. Medium-size theatre in a central
provincial city in Middle Finland:
Jyväskylä City Theatre
(79 employees)



Visiting (red) 11,8 Permanent (blue) 8

Example 4. Small provincial theatre in
a town in south-western Finland:
Rauma City Theatre
(36 employees)



Visiting (red) 5,2 Permanent (blue) 18,2

Example 5. The northernmost city theatre in Finland:
Rovaniemi City Theatre (53 employees)

The tables show the average ratio between permanently engaged and visiting artists in 2007–15 in five exemplary city theatres representing typical cases of big, medium-sized, small theatre in geographically central and remote areas.

The total number of the person years of all employees including artistic, technical, and administrative personnel is given in brackets. The artists in this table mean the artistic personnel consisting of actors, directors, dramaturges, scenographers, lighting and sound designers, choreographers, dancers, and musicians.

REACTIONS AGAINST THE CHANGING WORKING CULTURE

As the figures above show, the majority of VOS-theatres do not have a permanent director, and only a fraction of them has a permanent dramaturge. How does this influence the artistic quality, the theatre management and the interests of audiences at theatres? This has been frequently discussed in many seminars and articles since the 1990s.²⁸ Great hopes have been put on visiting directors, but serious questions have also been raised about their commitment to the ensemble. Would the competition lead to a situation where the director offers four or five ready-made productions to theatres, like conductors or opera singers do? Would the directors avoid taking artistic risks, as a failed production might jeopardize the next working opportunity? Could the theatres rely on the loyalty of visiting directors? Who would be the theatre managers' closest collaborators now? Will proper ensembles exist anymore in the future? How should an ensemble be determined and put together in the new circumstances: for single productions or for its artistic development in the long run? Could big theatres include several smaller ensembles? Would the permanently engaged directors and dramaturges disappear completely?

Many critical voices were heard in the early 2000s as communal atmosphere and personal commitment seemed to be lacking.²⁹ Without a permanent director, the actors easily felt that they were left on their own. Ville Sandqvist, the chair of the Finnish Actors' Union, noted in 2003 that the actors still thought that the directors should be their superiors, even when they were visitors, and even if the directors themselves and the theatre managers did not share this idea.³⁰ In a seminar arranged by the Union of Finnish Theatre Directors in 1991, Anita Myllymäki emphasized the importance of the directors' participation in decision making as permanent members of the artistic staff. However, Vesa-Tapio Valo argued for his part that a temporarily hired director has to set his artistic goal high, and when the job is completed, s/he has to move on to the next place.³¹

The dramaturge Satu Rasila summarized the situation in the *Teatteri*-magazine in 2003 [the citation is somewhat shortened from the original Finnish text]

Why did we want to dissolve permanent jobs? Because people would get lazy when they got a 'gravestone agreement'. The struggle for one's position would be the only way of keeping artists vital. We also believed that visiting stars would promote marketing. We wanted freelance contracts because we earned more money that way; and because we did not want to move to the regions. We wanted freelance contracts to make theatre breathe, blood circulate, oxygen flow and skills move. However, have we thus violated the most vital property of theatre: the spirit of community? Does the breaking of traditional ensembles

28 Memo 15 Nov 1999.

29 Memo 2002.

30 Sandqvist 2003.

31 Vesala 1991, 4–5..

*cause homogeneity: are the repertoires alike because they do not reflect the inside community of a particular theatre, but a general audience of the field?*³²

“Theatre is becoming a part of the entertainment industry where the artist has to be ready to sell herself/himself”, was written on the www-pages of the Union of Finnish Theatre Directors in 2004. Kaisa Korhonen, one of the most prominent and experienced Finnish directors, published several polemical articles in the *Teatteri*-magazine and the trade union’s magazine *Meteli* in the 2000s. She strongly criticized the individualization and commodification of contemporary theatre,³³ and cited the manifesto launched by the Swedish director Ragnar Lyth. He claimed that directors have become like travelling salesmen who have to turn themselves into commodities and compete with each other. According to him, theatres have become entertainment businesses, which exploit the artists’ creativity, but do not take care of the artistic content and the renewal of the ensemble. Some artists are stars, some just fill-ins, but everybody is a solo artist lacking a community.³⁴

THE DIRECTOR’S POSITION IN THE ARTISTIC ENSEMBLE

As a director herself, Kaisa Korhonen valued the artists’ commitment to a long-term ensemble, led by a competent, individual director as the basis of theatre making. She thought that a visionary director should be responsible for the content and artistic quality. The managers of the institutional city theatres seemed to share this notion at the beginning of the 2000s. Directors were considered as the most important artistic agents, and their personal interest and motivation were the primary preconditions for a successful production. “The theatre gets its unique profile via the director’s work. Artistically, the director is more important than the manager”, said, for example, Aila Lavaste, a dramaturge and the manager of the Jyväskylä City Theatre in 2003.³⁵

Along with the proliferation of freelance artists, the director’s personal style has become even more significant in the planning of the repertoire.³⁶ Previously, when directors were permanently engaged, the manager started by selecting the play-text. Now, according to Lavaste, s/he must at first consider whether a visiting director fits the theatre.³⁷ Maarit Pyökäri, an experienced theatre manager, says that she first finds the director, and then chooses the play together with him/her.³⁸

The visiting system has also influenced the directors’ employment. They must market their services to theatres and run after jobs. A theatre usually

32 Rasila, 2003, 7–8.

33 Korhonen 2001, Korhonen 2005, Krogerus and Saveljeff 2007:1.

34 Korhonen and Grönblom 2001.

35 Lavaste, Aila 2003.

36 Häti-Korkeila, 251.

37 Lavaste, Aila 2003.

38 Kanto 2000.

hires a director for only one production at a time, although sometimes they might use the same visiting artists regularly. Well-known and appreciated directors can present their own demands. Usually, they want to work with the theatre's best and well-known actors, or they want to bring their trusted collaborators with them – otherwise they won't come at all. Only the biggest theatres can afford to hire such a large team. For these reasons, the northern and the eastern provincial theatres cannot use visiting directors very often because the long distances raise the costs. (see Figure 6.)

In 2001 the Director's Union and the Theatre Academy launched a project called "Lowering Thresholds", supported also by theatre managers.³⁹ The idea was to help young theatre directors find positions in city theatres outside Helsinki. However, the new generation responded by asking whether the old institutions had anything to offer them anymore: "New modes of production are emerging all the time. The area is splintering – and it is good".

Young theatre makers, who are committed to the so-called contemporary theatre movement (*Nykyteatteri*), have clearly different ideas about the production process than their older colleagues. They are looking for new kinds of organizational models based on collective creation.⁴⁰ Before the 2000s, the division of work used to be rather clear within the institutional theatre. The director directed and the actors acted, although it could happen that actors now and then directed in their home theatres or made their own productions touring around the country. Some of them were also very successful as directors.

Since the turn of the Millennium, professional boundaries have blurred more drastically. The term "dramaturgization" (*dramaturgisoituminen*) has come to mean that the dramaturgy emerges out of all stage elements, not (only) from written texts.⁴¹ All segments of the performance (e.g. movement and dance, lighting, space, costumes) can have their own dramaturgy. The members of the artistic team have started to work more autonomously, following and mastering their own processes instead of submitting their work to a common, holistic idea. It is possible to do a performance without a director and trust the team's capability of systemic self-direction. Many young directors are willing to give up their authoritarian positions and re-think their professional identities. For example, the dramaturge and director, prof. Pauliina Hulkko stated provocatively that anybody could direct a play since it is not hard to learn the required technical skills.⁴² She wanted to respect all theatrical materials and encounter other team-members as equal artists. The director Minna Harjuniemi put it: "It is not enough that things happen in the director's head. Theatre is a team sport."⁴³

39 Korhonen 2001.

40 e.g. Ruuskanen 2010.

41 Hulkko 2013.

42 Hulkko 2013, 31.

43 Moring 2012.

So far, these methods have mainly been restricted to the fringe, and it has proved hard to apply them in institutional city theatres. This is not only a matter of attitudes. The organizational structure of city theatres, based on the repertoire system, tight scheduling, technical and financial requirements, does not allow enough time for free-floating processes. The contradictions between experimental aspirations and institutional guidelines have been commonplace ever since the present city theatre system was established in the 1970s. Yet, ideas from the “contemporary theatre” do infiltrate the mainstream and challenge the given order there. Collective devising is in fact congruent with the freelance working culture, since the non-hierarchical production team is not a fixed, structured ensemble, but rather a loose network of changing participants.

DISAPPEARING AND EMERGING PROFESSIONS?

It is not only the directors’ position and attitudes that have changed. A lot has been written about the disappearance of dramaturges from permanent positions. There were only fourteen dramaturges working permanently at VOS-theatres in 2015,⁴⁴ although traditionally they had been important agents in city theatres, developing the artistic profile in collaboration with directors and theatre managers. According to the dramaturge Satu Rasila, the profession of dramaturges was originally born in Finnish theatres in the 1970s because someone was needed to do the brainwork that required education and a wide knowledge about past and present dramatic literature, cultural history, and current theatrical trends.⁴⁵

Besides expertise of national and international literature, permanently engaged dramaturges knew the taste of local audiences, as well as the pros and cons of the particular artistic ensembles. All this happened in close collaboration with theatre managers. Rasila notes that the disappearance of “reading dramaturges”⁴⁶ leaves the theatre managers alone with the planning of the repertoire, which does not only affect the audience attendance but also the spirit of the working community inside the theatres. The casting, which is the most important task of the theatre manager, is not only a matter of finding the right actor for each role. It is also important that every actor now and then has an opportunity to take leading roles, and that the local “stars” are not exhausted by too much work.

However, taking a statistical look, the profession of dramaturges seems to be fully alive. While the number of permanently engaged dramaturges has diminished, the number of visiting dramaturges has increased drastically between 1995 and 2015.⁴⁷ The difference between these two positions be-

44 Tinfo Theatre Statistics.

45 Rasila 2003.

46 The task of a “reading dramaturge” is to read plays for the purposes of repertoire planning.

47 Tinfo Theatre statistics, see table 1.

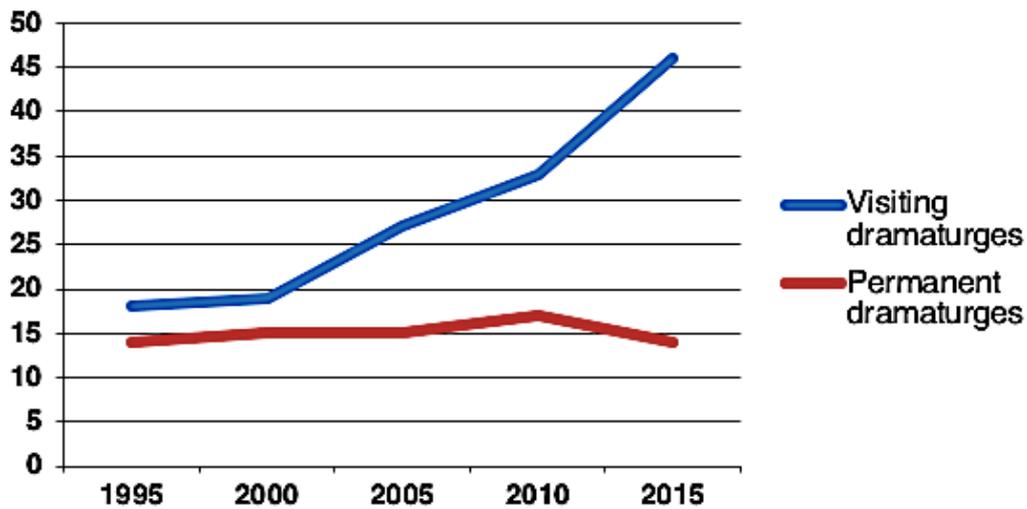


FIGURE 7. The development of dramaturges' employment in VOS-theatres 1995–2015. There were 18 permanent posts in 1995 and 14 in 2015. The number of visiting dramaturges has grown from 14 (1995) to 46 (2015).

comes visible in the job descriptions of dramaturges from distinct age groups and organizations.⁴⁸ Merja Turunen, the long-standing dramaturge of Helsinki City Theatre, and Marita Jama, the now retired dramaturge of Kuopio City Theatre, listed their most important tasks as the following: reading plays and planning the repertoire with the theatre manager; undertaking background research; being test-spectators who give feedback to directors; writing informative hand-bills and lecturing about theatre to wider audiences. They both emphasize their commitment to the theatre and its long-term development. On the other hand, they considered themselves as outsiders in relation to the working-teams of single productions. Two young dramaturges, Maria Kilpi and Vappu Kuuluvainen, both of whom studied their profession in the beginning of the 2000s, rather wanted to be an inherent part of the individual production teams, participating in the collaborative work based on all kinds of materials. In their view, the practices of dramaturgical work are constantly redefined by the individual production processes.⁴⁹

At the same time, as permanent dramaturges vanished, a new occupation emerged in the Finnish theatre field. The need for a producer first arose in the late 1980s when freelance actors founded lots of new theatre groups, which then moved to bigger venues, and more coordinative work and marketing was needed.⁵⁰ Producers became common in all kinds of theatre

48 Kilpi 2014, *Meteli* 2013:1, 32-37, Jama 1998.

49 An additional relevant question beyond this article is how playwrights are related to the theatre ensembles, but it deserves separate research.

50 Junttila 2000.

companies during the 1990s, and today most theatres have at least one producer or production secretary.⁵¹ According to the salary statistics, their number in VOS-theatres has grown from thirty-one to fifty between 2007 and 2015. However, the total amount of administrative staff has not significantly increased during that time.⁵² This indicates that the producers are doing jobs that were previously distributed to other employees, like budgeting, scheduling, agreements, marketing, publicity, and licenses.

The need to distinguish a specialized producer taking care of these tasks arose when new requirements and functions were addressed in theatres. The recession of the 1990s forced theatres to intensify their activities and evaluate their outcome in economic terms. Since public funding had been diminishing, the theatres had to increase the ticket sales, which required more marketing skills. Managerial work also increased when the money came from several sources and the organizations became more complex. Collaboration with different partners outside theatre had become necessary. The theatres were not only creating performances, they were also expected to offer different kinds of audience outreach work, projects of applied art and other services.⁵³ The growing use of visiting freelancers had complicated the coordination of the production process, as everybody had their own schedules.

While the permanently engaged directors and dramaturges have disappeared, the producers' significance has increased in the everyday work of theatres. They have become members of the executive teams, and the managers' close collaborators. Since they focus on pragmatic issues like marketing, budgeting, scheduling, and coordination, their input moves the emphasis of discussions from artistic to financial and organizational questions. Yet, the producers' job descriptions vary a lot depending on the working context and they have very diverse skills and educational backgrounds.⁵⁴ There is not a single university program that trains specialized producers for theatre in Finland.⁵⁵

THE INFLUENCE OF THE NEW WORKING CULTURE ON THEATRE MANAGEMENT

As they have traditionally been the core person in Finnish professional theatres, theatre managers were a major research focus for us. According to a study by Marjatta Häti-Korkeila in 2010, their work can be divided into four

51 According to the homepages of 59 VOS-theatres in 2017, there were 42 employees with the title producer, and 17 with more vague, similar titles like production secretary (5), production planner (7), production coordinator (1), production assistant (1), and combined posts of production and marketing or economy (3).

52 Tinfo Theatre Statistics 2007–2015.

53 Hytti, 2012, Vuori 1997, Häti-Korkeila 2010, 232.

54 Vuori 1997, Hytti 2012.

55 An MA-program existed at the Theatre Academy in the 1990s, but it was terminated. More wide-ranging culture producers are trained in several universities of applied science, while film and TV-producers are trained at Aalto University.

categories. First, they plan the repertoire, which is their main artistic task today. Secondly, they supervise the artistic personnel. The third category is publicity, marketing, and PR-work, and the fourth is economic negotiations with the municipalities.⁵⁶ The manager's work is largely influenced by the mode of ownership and financing as well as the structure of the artistic ensemble.

Alongside all of this, the theatre managers carry out artistic work, mainly directing. This has been the customary practice in the Finnish professional theatre system throughout history, and it still continues. In her research on the management of five big and medium-size city theatres in 2007, Häti-Korkeila showed that the managers' own productions were clearly linked to their artistic aims and strategies by strengthening their personal visions, and fulfilling their ambitions.⁵⁷

To update the situation, we made a small inquiry among theatre managers in 2017. We asked how much artistic work the managers were doing, and how this work was facilitated. Thirteen members of the Union of Finnish Theatre Managers from small and medium-size theatres were interviewed. Seven of them were male and six female. The number of female managers in small and medium-sized theatres has rapidly increased. This may indicate a growing equality between the sexes, or that the male artists do not take an interest in the work because it has become unattractive.

As can be seen in Figure 5, directing was included in the working contract of eight managers out of twelve. Only two of them were paid extra for that. They were managers of the big city theatres in southern Finland, who could mainly choose how many productions they wanted to direct. A manager of a big city theatre stated in 2017:

To manage a theatre is a profession, which cannot be made beside the artistic work. It is, however, good every now and then to direct a production or have a role in a performance. Yet, there is not very often time, strength or possibility for that.

However, directing was a part of the manager's work in many provincial small and medium-size city theatres without any financial compensation. This is against the instructions given by the Union of Finnish Theatre Managers: when they direct a play, they should be paid fifty per cent of a visiting director's usual fee in addition to their salary as managers. The terms of the extra work should always be individually negotiated.⁵⁸ Yet, the director of a small city theatre confided:

In principle, [I make] one artistic work per year; traditionally I have directed a production. In practice I have also had to do the main part of the dramaturgical work as the theatre has no permanent dramaturge now. During the first one

56 Häti-Korkeila 2010, 29.

57 Häti-Korkeila 2010, 201–209.

58 Bragge (Chair of the Union of Finnish Theatre Managers) 2017.

and a half years I have directed one production, acted in two roles (one small and one big), undertaken two dramaturgies of my own and other dramaturgical work.

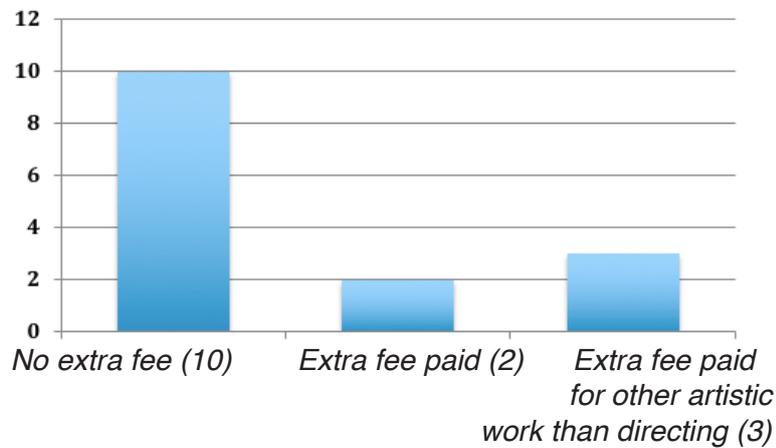
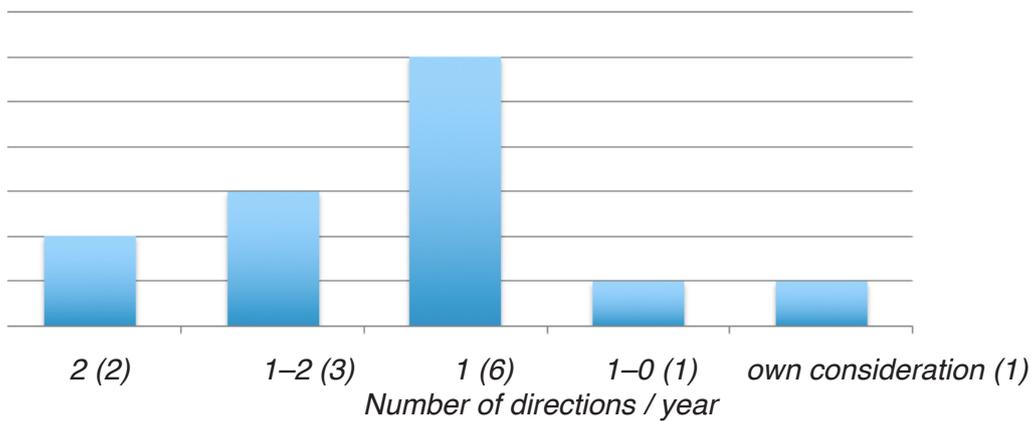
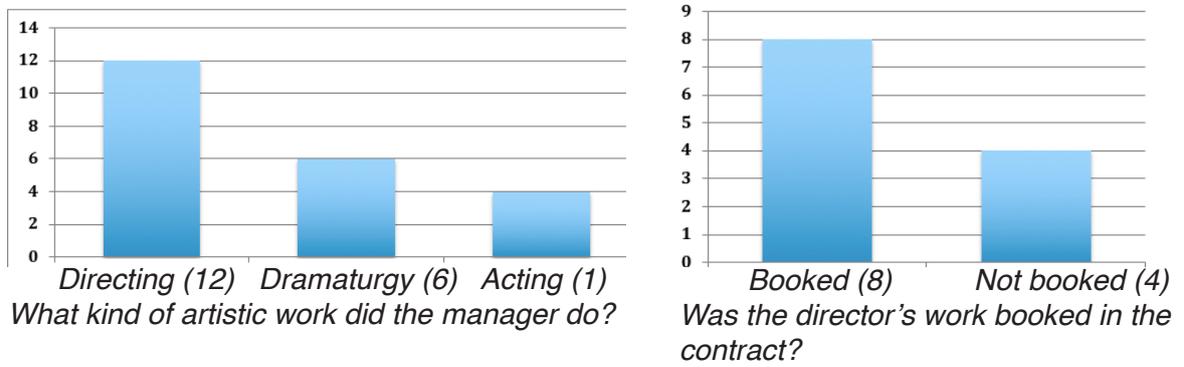
Basically, the managers' professional duties are rather similar in big and small theatres, but the number of administrative, artistic, and technical personnel at the theatres varies. The managers in small theatres are very often artistic handymen, who do all sorts of jobs. The inquiry showed that they were planning the repertoires, conducting political and financial negotiations, guiding the staff, and making organisational and technical decisions. Almost every manager directed one or two plays per year, and half of them worked also as dramaturges or actors, and some of them composed music or choreography. The reasons for this amount of artistic work are probably at least partly financial: the theatres do not pay extra salaries for it.

The inquiry also revealed that the background of theatre managers was more heterogeneous than before, including occupations such as director, actor, theatre pedagogue, dancer-choreographer and producer. Their education varied from practical experience without any formal degree to an MA at the Theatre Academy or University of Tampere or even a PhD. Previously, it was almost a given that the manager was a director, but recently the majority of VOS-theatres' managers have been actors. Yet, all of them directed – even those who had no education or previous experience in professional directing.

Although our survey is only tentative, it suggests that the managerial culture in Finnish theatres is changing. The managers have more work than before, and it is more versatile. There are new activities, like audience outreach work and applied theatre projects. At the same time, there are fewer artistic personnel who would be committed to the development of the theatre beyond individual productions. The question is: do the managers have enough time, support and skills to manage with all their duties within the present circumstances? Problems may occur if the managers have no experience of leading an institutional ensemble; if they do not know how to supervise a working community, or how to negotiate with the municipal, political, and administrative decision makers. Some difficulties can be seen also if they come from outside of the region and do not have contacts with the local audiences.

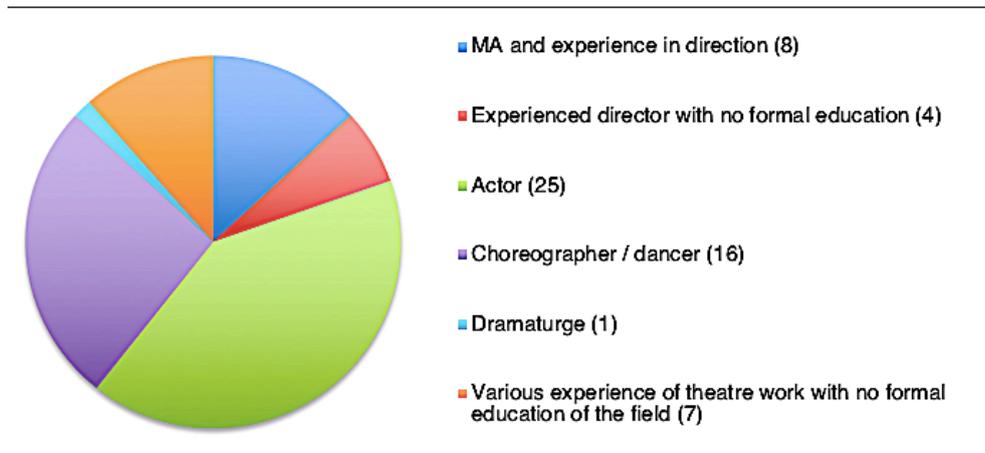
Traditionally directors have wanted to advance their career as managers without leaving their main profession as artists, mainly as directors. Is this still possible? It seems that only a few ambitious directors are interested in managerial work anymore. Several young, talented directors, who started to work as managers in provincial city theatres, have left their posts after only two or three years. The combination of their artistic ambitions, the interests of the local audiences that might diverge from their own, and the financial demands were too challenging. Lasse Lindeman, a retired theatre manager and former Chair of the Union of Finnish Theatre Managers commented: "The balance is important. When a manager decides to direct, s/he has two questions to answer: what s/he wants to direct, and what s/he has to direct."

FIGURE 8. Artistic work as a part of the manager's job description.



Did the manager receive a fee for his/her work?

FIGURE 9. The professional background of theatre managers in VOS-theatres 2015



The questions arise from the needs of the repertoire, and according to Lindeman, to be a real manager means partly to give up the ambition of directing.⁵⁹

Heikki Mäkelä, another experienced theatre manager noted in 2003 that the new working culture has remarkably influenced the ways of doing theatre: “Today, managers are more like producers.”⁶⁰ Emblematically, productions are increasingly called “projects.”⁶¹ Managers do not only accept and welcome visiting theatre groups, but are actively searching for suitable performances for the repertoire. Besides working with their own ensembles, managers must network and follow the work of other theatres in Finland and abroad.⁶² They are also responsible for many practical questions, such as financing the visits or finding an appropriate stage for the performance.

TO CONCLUDE

Our research suggests that the working culture in Finnish theatres has been and still is in transition. It has become harder to get a secure, long-term working contract in any branch of theatre. Artists – directors, dramaturges, actors, and designers – do not commit themselves anymore to institutions, but to individual productions or looser freelance teams. Producers have become key agents in the planning of the repertoire and performances, but they usually have no artistic education, and they tend to focus on short-term planning, marketing, and other financial issues. The manager’s role has become more challenging: there is more work and it requires more versatile skills than before. S/he has to cooperate with more external partners than before and negotiate with municipal politicians, sponsors, and other possible financial

59 Lindeman 2017.

60 Mäkelä 2003.

61 Häti-Korkeila 2010, 234; 250.

62 Häti-Korkeila 2010, 238.

sources. Lacking support from permanently engaged artistic co-workers, the manager “often sits alone as in an ivory tower, and this is a matter of atmosphere at the work place,” according to Raimo Söder of the Theatre and Media Employees Union.⁶³ There is no proper artistic community or common working culture anymore, or it has changed. This makes it also harder for employees to talk with the manager when problems occur in everyday work, as often happens.

It was, in fact, the artists who originally started to favour the short-term working contracts and freelance conditions during the rich years of the 1980s. They considered the institutions as obstacles for creative work and artistic renewal, but the freelance culture in the present circumstances has not proved as successful as they expected. When the amount of money diminished, and the number of theatre makers grew, it became harder to make a living through art, even when one had a professional education and experience. If there is not enough work for everybody, the creative freedom and the circulation of artists easily turn into a competition and struggle for economic survival.

It seems that there is no return to generous public funding. Theatres are not prioritized when the state and the municipalities finance their institutions. Since the recession of the 1990s, the austerity policy has forced theatres to re-think their strategies and everyday practices. Theatre makers have, more or less voluntarily, adapted to the situation. New working methods and theatrical activities are developed frantically. Different social projects and entrepreneurship proliferate in all fields of art, while the permanent ensembles seem to have been largely disbanded in city theatres.

Now, in the 2010s, teamwork and the spirit of community are generally praised among theatre makers. How can they be supported in the new-liberalist culture – would that even be possible? There are many different and contradicting notions about creative co-work and what it could mean in the present theatre. Several proposals have been made to improve the production system by joining forces with other theatres or social institutions.

Theatrical activities have expanded beyond conventional performances, for example, by the members of Theatre 2.0, founded by director Saana Lavaste, producer Saara Rautavuoma and theatre pedagogue Kati Sirén in 2010.⁶⁴ In a project called Open Platform (Avolava) at Lahti City Theatre in 2015, they experimented with forum-theatre, baby-theatre, participatory productions with teenagers, and co-operated with schools. According to their project report, the experiences were positive and the theatre’s structure “started to show signs of flexibility.”⁶⁵ One of the project’s key conclusions was the notion that a leading figure, who works permanently in the theatre organization, was absolutely needed:

63 Häti-Korkeila 2003, 6.

64 Lavaste, Rautavuoma and Sirén 2015. Sirén and Rautavuoma 2017.

65 Rautavuoma and Siren 2017, 130.

[...] someone, who would be at the core of the artistic planning of the theatre, and always easily accessible for discussions. [...] The work at a big theatre is so dependent on continuous communication and discussion based on physical presence; this is hard to achieve through random visits, via phone or email.⁶⁶

By contrast, Vapaa teatteri (The Free Theatre), led by director Mikko Roiha produces about one performance a year in co-operation with other theatres, mostly provincial city theatres. The productions are often rehearsed in Berlin, where Roiha is based. After the premiere, the performance goes touring in all the theatres that are involved in the production. Roiha also advises young directors that they should not go alone into the theatre field, but take a team of similarly-minded co-workers along.

Yet, the co-operation between theatres does not always go smoothly. In 2007, seven city theatres in the middle of Finland started a joint planning of repertoires and mutual visits. The aim was to increase the diversity of performances, to avoid overlaps, and enable specialization. Problems, however, emerged as the artistic standard of the theatres was not considered equal, and some theatres refused to collaborate with those that they considered as less qualified.⁶⁷

Of course, no employment policy can guarantee good artistic quality – but the one-sided favouring of a unilateral system may cause severe difficulties. Circulation and mobility is certainly needed to keep a theatrical community alive. New impulses, contacts and challenges are necessary for all creative work. Yet, too much insecurity and mutability may cause as much artistic stagnation as the “gravestone agreements”. If the artists constantly change, the ensemble has never enough time to experiment, brainstorm and rehearse together, which is a precondition for collective creativity. If there is no continuity between productions, bold ideas cannot be elaborated, refined, expanded, and cultivated further. A long-lasting tight-knit team, whose members have learned to know and trust each other, may work more innovatively than a loosely connected network. How to make that possible is the critical question of today’s theatre.

66 Rautavuoma and Siren 2017, 134–35; 143.

67 Häti-Korkeila 2010, 242–3.

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AUTHORS.

Marjatta Häti-Korkeila, PhD. Her practical research experience comes mainly from two art universities. At the University of Arts and Design (Aalto University), she developed the Research Institute and led its activities. At the Theatre Academy (University of the Arts Helsinki), she worked as the manager of the Continuing Education Centre as well as on many international projects and international organisations. She wrote her thesis about theatre management at the University of Helsinki. Marjatta has been the chair of the Theatre Research Society and the editor-in-chief of its research journal *Teatteri ja media* (*Theatre and media*). She has also led and taken part in several editorial boards, edited books, published articles, and presented papers in seminars and conferences mainly about theatre, arts education, industrial arts, and continuing education.

Dr of Arts Laura Gröndahl works as a university lecturer at the Performing Arts Research Centre in the Theatre Academy of the University of Arts, Helsinki. She holds the title of docent in theatre research at Helsinki University. Besides *Nordic Theatre Studies*, she has edited books and published several articles mainly in the fields of scenography and documentary theatre. She has worked in different positions at many Finnish universities and as a stage and costume designer at various Finnish theatres.