



DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM, MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION

# POLITICS OF(F) STAGE

Investigating the mechanisms of political theatre

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# Abstract

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Purpose:

Theory:

Method:

Result:

## Summary

This thesis takes its point of departure in the argument that theatre as a medium has largely been overlooked by the field of political communication. The focus of this study is therefore to place attention on theatre from a political communication perspective.

Theatre is here looked at both as a medium with political potential, and as a medium subject to political decision making. On the one hand there is a need to investigate theatres' role as communicators of political content, as this seems to have been largely overlooked by other fields than that of theatre and drama studies. On the other hand, as theatre (as well as culture generally) is shaped by its politico-cultural conditions, contemporary theatres' relationships to cultural and financial policy need to be investigated to understand the context in which their messages are shaped.

This study aims at investigating whether and how political theatre is used in Sweden and whether and how the field is influenced by the politico-cultural context of funding and cultural policy. This is looked at through the perspectives of 1) how creative-executive teams at prominent Swedish theatre institutions view (their own and others') use of political content within the theatre field and 2) how theatre institutions' work is affected by Swedish cultural policies and funding authorities.

The thesis consists of a qualitative case study of five prominent theatre organizations in Sweden, using interviews with eight of their creative-executive decision-makers. The interviews are contrasted to theory from the fields of political communication, theatre studies, cultural policy and public governance of the arts.

The results show examples of how contemporary Swedish theatres use theatre for political purposes, of current political themes on Swedish theatre stages and of how financial and political conditions influence the field. This paints an emergent picture of the mechanisms behind political theatre in Sweden. The conclusion is that theatre is a medium used for a diversity of political purposes, but with an openness that makes it uncomparable to more direct political media. It is first and foremost an art form, that can be seen as a political medium when it is used to communicate political ideas or used for political practices, as for example a democratic arena or discursive space. It is also a politically governed medium, which makes it sensitive to influence from political decision-makers, with the arm's length principle needing to be continuously enforced to keep the art free from political tampering. As this study is based on a small sample, large generalizations can not be made. However, the combination of experiences of informed professionals from the field with current policy and interdisciplinary theory, offers an emergent picture of a medium and its supporting mechanisms that can be added as a research topic to the field of political communication.

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# Why political theatre?

## No theatre in political communication

Blumler (2017; p.2) writes that “lines of empirical political communication research are often specifically focused, aiming to generate cumulative knowledge from closely and carefully studied ‘parts.’” The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication (Mazzoleni et al 2015), presents a collection of these ‘parts’, by assembling acknowledged international researchers from the field of political communication. It is an international and interdisciplinary summary of research topics relevant to the field. Among these topics, different types of media are represented; print, news media, television, radio, broadcasting, online media, social media (and some sub-genres). The same types of media are mentioned in other summary works from the field (for example Norris, 2004; Scannell, 2007).

The only artistic media mentioned in The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication (Mazzoleni et al, 2015) is political cinema. Neither theatre nor performance is included (Mazzoleni et al, 2015), which indicates that interest in theatre from political communication has been scarce. An initial research review on political theatre (Boris-Möller, 2019) similarly found no research concerning theatre published from the field of political communication.

Why is this? Theatre has not only been around for far longer than any of the media types listed above but also has a broad history of tackling political and societal issues (see next "The political potential of theatre"). One explanation might be political communication's large preoccupation with mass media; media that reaches the many (as shown by among others Norris, 2004; Scannell, 2007; Mazzoleni et al, 2015). Compared to television, radio, news, and social media, theatre obviously can't attract as many viewers per “show”. Latter-day small drama theatres seat between 50 and 300, and large ones between 300 to 900 with an upper limit of about 1,100 (Theatre Projects, 2020). This view is supported by Kirby (1975), who writes that theatre seems to have little political effectiveness compared to other media, but that the political quality of a theatre project lies in the intent of the creator. The intent of the creators is thus an important perspective to research. Although theatre probably has a smaller reach than many other media types, researchers from many academic fields have pointed out theatre's political potential of creating impact or change (more on this in “Theory, Research Review”).

## The political potential of theatre

Aiello and Parry (2015) write that the relationship between aesthetics and politics has been full of tension. As an example, they use Walter Benjamin, who in his ground-breaking work "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), voiced concern over the use and role of aesthetics in the political sphere. Benjamin worried that fascist forces used aesthetics to engage the masses for political purposes, and thought that socialism would reply by politicizing art (Scannell, 2007). Scannell (2007) connects Benjamin's thoughts to Brecht (1978), a famous political theatre theoretician, to show that theatre was used by Brecht for political purposes of the kind Benjamin had observed. Some writers from The Frankfurt School also took an interest in questions on the culture

industry (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944; Scanell, 2007) and Adorno (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944; Aiello & Parry, 2015) expressed deep suspicion over openly political art and popular culture.

The political theorist Hanna Arendt saw theatre as "the political art par excellence" (Craven, 1998; p. 19). According to Craven (1998), Arendt believed that "the political sphere of human life [is] transposed into art" only in theatre because theatre "is the only art whose sole subject is man in his relationship to others" (Arendt, in Craven 1998; p. 19). By this, Arendt meant that the theatre's foundation is human beings in direct communication with others.

This shows that several influential thinkers see the powerful political potential that art can have, and how it can be used for both democratic and undemocratic purposes. The examples of how theatre has been used for different political purposes are many. An example from later decades described by Goodman (de Gay & Goodman, 2002) is that theatre in the 1960s to 1980s was used both as an art form and as a platform. She explains how in Britain during the Thatcher years (1979-1990; BBC, 2013), theatre and politics went separate ways, and "political theatre" became less fashionable and/or harder to fund. By the end of the twentieth century, many thought that political theatre as an art form was dying (de Gay & Goodman, 2002).

However, interdisciplinary research from both earlier and later dates have shown how theatre can be used for practical political purposes. The perspectives range from theatre studies to political science and many subfields of social studies, where writers argue for the beneficial use of theatre within their respective fields. Some examples are; as a tool for community organizing, for democratic participation or activism (Hillman, 2015; Sloman, 2011; Dolan, 2001; Kennelly, 2006; Kershaw, 2002). A large focus in the literature about political theatre is different theatrical *methods* (Fischer, 2011; Boal, 1979, 1998; de Smet et al, 2018; Chou, Gagnon & Pruitt, 2015; Neelands, 2007; Brecht, 1949; Boal, 1979, 1998), of which *participatory theatre* (generally meaning where the audience is more active than as passive viewers) seems to be the most common overarching term used in articles on theatre's political role. Research that investigates theatre's effects argues that participatory theatre can act as support of the audience's beliefs (Chou, Gagnon & Pruitt, 2015; Pratt & Johnston, 2007; Kirby, 1975).

Many of the above-mentioned articles conclude that theatre can, or should, function as an arena for discussion, participatory democracy, and/or for reinforcing beliefs (Hillman, 2015; Sloman, 2011; Dolan, 2001; Kennelly, 2006; Kershaw, 2002; Chou, Gagnon & Pruitt, 2015; Pratt & Johnston, 2007; Kirby, 1975). Theatre's power to affect or change politics is often treated with a hopeful tone in this research and together show a common belief that theatre holds political potential in more than one way.

### **Academic relevance**

The little attention given to theatre from the field of political communication, combined with theatre's large interest in politics, is an argument for investigating the topic further from the perspective of political communication. The links between theatre and politics have been studied in many ways, but mostly within the fields of theatre, drama, or literature studies or as interdisciplinary research between theatre studies and for example political science (see "Theory; Research review"). Research on political theatre tends to focus on either the content of specific plays, on specific theatre methods, or

politically engaged practitioners' legacy (see "Theory; Research review"). To find research on the political context of theatre, one must turn to the fields of cultural policy studies or cultural governance (further detailed in "The infrastructure of culture" and "Theory"). As will be argued further on, theatre is a relevant medium for political content, and theatre institutions and groups are part of a larger politico-cultural context, a system made up of artists, institutions, politicians, and audiences (see "The infrastructure of culture"). There is a research gap in depicting how theatre is linked to politics on several levels simultaneously, as it is both a (sometimes) political medium and part of a politically governed system.

## **Societal relevance**

On a societal level, the topic of theatre's relationship to politics should be of interest to stage arts practitioners, to politicians making decisions on culture and funding, as well as to the public. Kangas and Vestheim (2010) write that the development of cultural institutions is an issue of democracy and thus of concern to citizens, not just to professionals. To the public, both as an audience and as tax-paying citizens, it matters to know how and by whom cultural institutions' agendas are set. As a theatre-goer, I wonder whether there is a cultural agenda, and if in that case, it is shaped (purposefully or not) by politically motivated forces.

The rise in Western Europe of populism and nationalism (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018), heightens the urgency of such issues. In Sweden populist nationalism is manifested in the rise of the Sweden Democrats, who won 17,53 percent of the electorate in the Swedish election of 2018 and became Sweden's third-biggest party (Valmyndigheten, 2018). Of specific relevance to the culture field is that it has been an ongoing debate for some time, not *if* but rather *how* and *how much* the Sweden Democrats are interested in controlling culture for political purposes. The Sweden Democrats were the subject of big headlines in 2019 (Anesten, 2019) when they stated that they would not allow tax money to go to "provocative contemporary art" in the municipality of Sölvesborg where they are in majority. The controversy started with party officials wanting to replace so-called "menstruation art" in the subway of Stockholm in 2018. In Sölvesborg, they decided that they would instead use municipal funds to buy art that was "classic and timeless", or what one Sweden Democrats official equated to "art that appeals to the vast majority of citizens" (Anesten, 2019). This is just one example, but it has stirred worry in cultural sectors. Already in 2016, Teatertidningen published concerned articles about the Sweden Democrats' cultural policies (Hoogland, 2016). Hoogland (2016) writes "It is clear that SD sees the cultural heritage as unproblematic and probably as a way of instilling national values in the citizens, values that must be defended against multiculturalism and questionable contemporary culture". The Sweden Democrats are a contemporary example of how undemocratic forces realize the political power of art and are interested in controlling it, much in the way Benjamin (1936) observed. To know whether there is an agenda behind the art that we see and if so; to understand how it is then constructed and by whom, is a matter of democracy.

I have been interested in both politics and art for a long time. This combination of interests has got me invested in the use of art as a channel for advocacy and opinion-shaping. As a theatre practitioner, this has resulted in a growing interest for what I call political theatre; theatre that has a purpose of challenging beliefs and instigating change. My interest in politics and opinion-shaping is what led me to study a master's program in political communication, where I quickly noticed how seldom art media



are discussed in the curriculum. As art, and theatre not least has a long history of discussing political issues (exemplified throughout this thesis), I thought it would be an important subfield to political communication, especially with today's growing access to art and entertainment media. I therefore decided to investigate what has been written on theatre from the perspective of political communication.

Previous research and changes in society point to the usefulness of placing attention on theatre from a political communication perspective. The present study approaches theatre both as a medium for political communication *and* as a potential political actor shaped by political conditions. Because of the need for knowledge of context and limitations of scope, this study will focus on political theatre and its politico-cultural context in Sweden. The interdisciplinary nature of this topic has the potential to bring new perspectives of relevance to both political communication and theatre studies, as well as to democratic discussions about theatre's role in society.

## **The infrastructure of culture**

Bourdieu (1993, in Günes, 2012) defines a field (for example the cultural field) as a structured sphere with its power relations and rules. The structure is defined by the relationship between the individuals or groups operating in the field, and should these positions change, the structure of the field would change as well. According to Bourdieu (1993, in Günes, 2012), art and artists always depend on the institutional frames that enable and legitimize it.

In Sweden, most theatre organizations rely largely on public funding (further detailed below). Hugosson (2008, in Beckman & Månsson) writes that “funding is governing” and that funding, as well as issues of competency and education, have a large impact on the cultural and regional fields supported by the state. The Swedish public authorities that many theatres get their funding from are politically governed, which implies that theatres are subject to politically shaped policy. Based on these insights, both funding policy and cultural policy are important features to understand when investigating the conditions of a cultural field.

### **Financial infrastructure**

Swedish theatre organizations rely largely on public funding, of which the largest part comes from the authorities The Ministry of Culture (Kulturdepartementet), The Swedish Arts Council (Kulturrådet), and Swedish regions, municipalities and cities (Kulturdepartementet, 2020; Kulturrådet, 2020). The organizational relationship between these authorities forms the Swedish cultural funding landscape.

### **The Ministry of Culture**

The highest instance in charge of Swedish cultural policy is the government, through the governing body The Ministry of Culture (Kulturdepartementet, 2020). The Ministry of Culture is in charge of issues on culture, democracy, media, the national minorities, the Sami people's language and culture, sports, youth policy, civil society, faith communities and burial services. The Ministry of Culture in turn governs several government agencies, of which the ones concerned with (among other things)

theatre are The Swedish Arts Council (Kulturrådet). The Ministry of Culture also governs several (wholly- or partly) state-owned companies. Among these are the theatre organizations Riksteatern, Unga Klara (cases used in this thesis), and Dramaten, as well as the opera house Kungliga Operan (Kulturdepartementet, 2020).

### **The Swedish Arts Council**

The Swedish government created a new head authority for culture in 1974; The Swedish Arts Council, while at the same time giving local authority to municipalities (Hugosson, in Beckman & Månsson, 2008). The Swedish Arts Council operates under The Ministry of Culture as the central agency for culture and the arts. Its task is to distribute state funds to culture, as well as to provide the government with information for cultural policy decisions and to inform about culture and cultural policy (Kulturdepartementet, 2020). The Swedish Arts Council thus partakes in the implementation of national cultural policy (Kulturrådet, 2020). Theatres and other cultural organizations apply to The Swedish Arts Council for grants, which are used for financing organizations, projects, or tours (Kulturrådet, 2020).

### **The culture budget**

Each year The Swedish Arts Council distributes around 2,5 billion SEK to arts and culture; with the majority going to the Swedish regions (Kulturrådet, 2020). According to Bohm Bohm Room, a culture production company in Stockholm, 0.84 percent of the state budget went to specific culture categories in 2018; of which “theatre/dance/music” is one category (Bohm Bohm Room, 2020). The Swedish Arts Council states that independent theatre organizations are their biggest budget expense (Kulturrådet, 2020). Their latest financial report (Kulturrådet, 2019) shows that the amount of *granted* applications to such organizations is less than half of the received applications in 2019. The number of granted applications has dropped between 2017 and 2019.

The Swedish Arts Council states that it wants to protect the diversity of the field of stage arts and that the applicants have very different situations, which is a challenge for the Council as a financial contributor. Some applicants that receive organizational grants have stages, guest performances and collaborations, while others mainly tour. The ones that have their own stage are affected by increasing rent and related costs. The Swedish Arts Council therefore states that it's hard to increase the number of organizational grants within stage arts. As stages for dance and circus are still limited, grants to infrastructure within those fields are prioritized (Kulturrådet, 2020). This might be an explanation to why the number of granted applications within theatre seems to have dropped for a few years (Kulturrådet, 2019).

### **Theatres and independent groups**

Since 1974 the number of state funded theatre institutions in Sweden has more than doubled. Some of them have started out as independent theatre groups and have become institutions that have been given the mission of organizing stage arts in their region. Some independent groups are well-established and function in a similar way to institutions. The state financing of theatres make up around 30-35 percent of the public funds they receive (up to 50 percent in some cases). The rest comes from regions, municipalities, cities and other grants. The independent groups are often dependent on resources and other job possibilities that larger cities can offer, which makes for a higher concentration of such

groups in the larger cities. In 2010, 36 out of a total of 48 independent groups receiving public funds were located in one of the larger city regions (Kultursamverkansmodellen, SOU 2010:11).

## Cultural policy

### **The national cultural policy**

The current national cultural policy objectives for Sweden were last reviewed in 2009 (Kulturrådet, 2020). They are formulated as follows:

*"Culture is to be a dynamic, challenging, and independent force based on the freedom of expression. Everyone is to have the opportunity to participate in cultural life. Creativity, diversity, and artistic quality are to be integral parts of society's development.*

*To achieve the objectives, the Swedish cultural policy is to promote:*

- *Opportunities for everyone to experience culture, education and develop their creative abilities*
- *Quality and artistic renewal*
- *A dynamic cultural heritage that is preserved, used and developed*
- *International and intercultural exchange and cooperation in the cultural sphere*
- *Equal access to arts and culture for children and youth"*

(Kulturrådet's web page, 2020)

Günes (2012) points out that the current Swedish national cultural policy states that culture shall be able to work freely and be both dynamic and challenging. Creativity, diversity, and artistic quality are lifted as important to society's evolution. It states that the legitimacy of cultural policy should not have to be based on the eventual societal impacts that art might generate (Günes, 2012). However, Günes (2012) points out that the policy *also* states that art's intrinsic value holds positive values for society in the shape of "freedom of speech, creativity, education, humanism, and openness", and that culture's competency should contribute to societal and economic development (Günes, 2012).

### **The regional and municipal cultural policy**

In 2010 a regionalization of Swedish cultural policy began through what is called "Kultursamverkansmodellen" (approximately "The cultural interaction model"). Through this model funds are funneled from the state level to regional and municipal levels (Kultursamverkansmodellen, SOU 2010:11). It is meant to increase the influence of regions and municipalities over local culture. The purpose is to develop the cultural infrastructure in Sweden, to give citizens in all parts of the country access to varied and qualitative culture. The local levels write their own cultural plans, but have a responsibility of implementing national cultural policy (Kultursamverkansmodellen, SOU 2010:11). This can be seen in cultural policy from regions and cities relevant for this study; Region Stockholm, Västra Götaland region, Region Skåne, Stockholm City, Gothenburg City and Malmö City. Local policy contains a mix of the national policy's focus and local goals; some recurrent points found are focus on youth, accessibility, democracy, equality, artistic quality and innovation. The contribution of culture to regional or municipal development, issues of financial viability and

digitalization are other points mentioned (Region Stockholm, 2020; Västra Götaland region, 2020; Region Skåne, 2020; Stockholm Stad, 2020; Göteborg Stad, 2020; Malmö Stad, 2020).

## Theory

The study of political theatre has often been treated with an interdisciplinary approach (see next “Research review”). This study uses an interdisciplinary combination of theory as well; from the fields of theatre studies, political science, media and communication, cultural policy and public governance of the arts.

## Research review

### Politics and theatre

The relationship between theatre and politics has been researched in many ways, making it clear that the subject is largely interdisciplinary, and therefore can't be entirely detailed here. In an initial research review of research articles (Boris-Möller, 2019), it was found that the *larger* part of articles on political theatre available online are of North-American or European origin and written in the 1990s to later 2000's.

Most of the research found investigates politics in theatre as either the *theme* of specific plays, or focus on the legacy of specific theatre *practitioners* or *playwrights*. When it comes to discussing theatre used for political purposes, researchers tend to focus on specific theatrical *methods*. The results come mostly from departments of Art & Humanities or Social Sciences databases; more specifically from the fields of theatre, drama education, or literature studies, as well as collaborations between researchers from theatre studies and for example political science, social science, psychology, philosophy or community development. The research found is rarely written from a communication perspective (Boris-Möller, 2019).

It seems most texts linking theatre and politics are better found in books, almost exclusively published within the field of theatre and performance studies (Boris-Möller, 2019). Some such books focus on how theatre has often been preoccupied with political themes, by analyzing historical examples of plays or theatre companies (de Gay & Goodman, 2002; Kelleher, 2009) or of politically invested playwrights (Morgan, 2013), as well as giving historical backgrounds on political theatre (Itzin, 1980). Several texts consider theatre's political role or its political potential to *for example* create action, display political messages or create cultural intervention (Brecht, 1949; Love & Mattern, 2013; Dolan, 2005; Stourac & McCreery, 1986; Woodruff, 2008; College, 2010; Kershaw, 1992; Lev-Aladgem, 2015). There are specific forms or methods for theatre that are exemplified as used in political contexts; such as applied theatre (Neelands, 2007), community-based performance (Haedicke & Nellhaus, 2001), interactive theatre (Gillinson, 2013), playback theatre (Dennis, 2007), and legislative theatre (Boal, 1998). The theatre practitioner Boal's work on theatre as a means of promoting societal change, specifically his *Theater of the Oppressed* (Boal, 1979) is the basis of several articles and books. Some works focus on the audience and reception (Bennett, 1997; Thompson, 2009), where some are from a feminist perspective (for example Dolan, 1988). Yet other books touch the topic

through the relation between politics and aesthetics (Rancière, 2000; Benjamin, 1936).

As the combinations of theoretical fields that investigate the link between theatre and politics are manifold, so are the definitions and concepts used. An analysis of the most recurring concepts found gives a hint of what concepts can be deemed more central. Some political terms are recurring; of which the most common are *political participation*, *democratic processes*, *public sphere*, *deliberation*, *dialogue* or *discursive practice*, *education*, *policy*, and *legislation*. Audiences are referred to in theatre studies as *audiences*, *spectators* or *spect-actors*, and in political theory also as *civil society*, *mini-publics*, and *community* (Boris-Möller, 2019).

Among the large range of different theatrical methods discussed (Fischer, 2011; Boal, 1979, 1998; de Smet et al, 2018; Chou, Gagnon & Pruitt, 2015; Neelands, 2007; Brecht, 1949; Boal, 1979, 1998), the term *participatory theatre* (generally meaning theatre that engages the audience in active ways), seems to be the most common overarching term used in articles on theatre's political role.

In the reviewed research, theatre is described as used for a multitude of democratic purposes such as; empowerment, representation, civic dialogue, community development, social change, activism, citizenship education, participatory democracy, public consultation, deliberative process, and more. The writers argue different roles for theatre, some focusing more on action while others focus more on its philosophical function, but they largely seem to agree on theatre as being specifically significant as a space for democratic dialogue. Several researchers agree that theatre can or should function as an arena for discussion and participatory democracy, and together display a large range of fields where such practices might be useful. There is no lack of examples of how theatre has been used to gather people, make them participate, and discuss political issues, get inspired, or reinforced in their beliefs (Boris-Möller, 2019).

Scannell (2007) somewhat summarizes the dual political use of art and theatre, when he contrasts the thoughts of Benjamin (1936) to those of the famous political theatre practitioner Brecht (1978): “*Against the aestheticization of politics by Fascism, socialism responds by politicizing art. That was the objective of Brechtian theatre, and the final point of Benjamin’s essay.*” (Scannell, 2007, s. 47).

This review shows that the possible links between theatre and politics can be found both in theatre's *content*, in the *intent* of its creators, in the way theatre methods open up for *participation* and how it sometimes has a political *impact* on communities or even legislation. However, few articles on political theatre seem to focus on the political *infrastructure* that enables theatres as institutions. For that, we must turn to yet other fields; those of cultural policy, institutional theory, public funding and public governance of the arts, as seen in “The infrastructure of culture” above and in “The cultural field” in this chapter.

## Political concepts

### Definitions of “political”

Craven (1998) writes that in general talk, “political” is an adjective used in relation to issues of government or state. The Oxford English Dictionary (Simson & Weiner, 1989; p. 32-33; in Craven, 1989) defines “political” as follows:

- “1. a. Of, belonging, or pertaining to the state or body of citizens, its government and policy, esp. in civil and secular affairs; public, civil; of or pertaining to the science or art of politics.
2. Having an organized government or polity.
3. Relating to, concerned or dealing with politics or the science of government.
4. Belonging to or taking a side in politics or in connexion with the party system of government; in a bad sense, partisan, factious. Also (freq. in derogatory use), serving the ends of (party) politics; having regard or consideration for the interests of politics rather than questions of principle.”

Kelleher (2009) instead describes the term “politics” as having several meanings. It can either refer to the activities of governments, social systems, or organizations, or to the study of such activities, or to the processes by which power is distributed or struggled over in society.

### **The “ontic” and the “ontological” level**

Mouffe (2005) makes the distinction between “politics”, what she calls “the ontic level”, and “the political”, what she calls “the ontological level”. Using Mouffe’s (2005) distinction, the Oxford dictionary’s focus on the practical level of politics would be called “politics” or “ontic level”. The latter of Kelleher’s (2009; p. 2) examples; “the processes by which power is distributed - and struggled over - in society more generally” seems to fit Mouffe’s definition of “the ontological level”, which she calls “the political”. Mouffe (2005, p. 9) explains that “the political” or “ontological level” is concerned with the philosophical, or “the very way in which society is instituted”.

Using Mouffe’s distinction, one might think that the way theatre as an *art form* relates to politics should be mainly on the “ontological level”, as it is probably more concerned with philosophy and the workings of society than with practical governing. However, theatre as *institutions* are affected by the “ontic” level, as they are often publicly funded and thus publicly governed in some way. Therefore, both the “ontic” and “ontological” levels are useful for analyzing theatre.

### **The left-right scale**

Hooghe et al (2002) explain the traditional left-right scale as one that political scientists use to classify parties based on their ideological stance on economic issues. “Parties to the right on economic issues tend to emphasize a reduction of the economic role of the government; they want lower taxes, less regulation, privatization, reduced government spending, and a leaner welfare state that poses fewer burdens on employers. Parties to the left on economic issues want the government to retain an active role in the economy.” (Hooghe et al, 2002, p. 967).

### **The GAL-TAN scale**

Hooghe et al (2002) explain the GAL-TAN scale as a new political dimension used to classify ideological stances on more than economic issues. “One pole combines ecology (or Greenness), alternative politics (including participatory democracy), and libertarianism. We summarize this as the Green/alternative/libertarian (GAL) pole. The opposite pole combines support for traditional values,

opposition to immigration, and defense of the national community. We summarize this as the traditional/authoritarian/nationalism (TAN) pole.” (Hooghe et al, 2002, p. 976).

## Media and communication

### **Theatre as a medium**

Hjarvard (2008) writes that the term ‘media’ is in media and communication studies used in plural; to designate technologies through which people can communicate over space and/or time. Each medium has its own characteristics and has different uses and content depending on cultural context (Hjarvard, 2008). He describes three functions of the media in society; “to serve as a nexus between institutions, as an interpretive frame for understanding society, and as an arena in which members of a society can discuss and decide matters of common interest” (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 114).

His points of media as an interpretive frame for understanding society, and as an arena to discuss and decide matters of common interest, are very much in line with the arguments held by many of the writers on theatre presented in the earlier chapter “Research review”. Therefore, it should be possible to think of theatre as a medium capable of performing some of the functions explained by Hjarvard (2008).

### **Theatre as an interactive medium**

Hjarvard (2008, p. 108) differs between face-to-face communication and mediated communication. The latter can be in the form of mass communication, where senders usually have control over the content of their message, but less over the receiver’s reception of it. Mediated communication can also be through interactive media, where both sender and receiver have influence over the content (Hjarvard, 2008).

Kershaw (1992, p. 16) describes theatre as an “ideological transaction” between a theatre company and its audience. He writes that he views performances as transactions because communication in performance does not simply happen from performers to the audience. The audience's reactions influence the nature of a performance, and the audience is actively engaged in the construction of meaning during a performance. Therefore, performance is an ongoing transaction of meaning between performers and audience (Kershaw, 1992). Kershaw's description is in line with Hjarvard’s description of interactive media. Theatre can thus be seen in the light of interactive communication where the sender delivers a message (in the form of a play) and the reaction of the receiver has some influence over the content while it is played out on stage.

## The cultural field

### **The logic of cultural institutions**

von Wright (1991, in Kangas & Vestheim, 2010) writes that institutions act based on logic made up of institutional history, values, culture as well as tradition such as rules, norms, identity, shared meanings. Hugosson (2008, in Beckman & Månsson) argues that the cultural sphere is governed not only by laws and regulations but also by different art forms' norms and traditions. According to

Kangas and Vestheim (2010), public cultural institutions must balance different interests. One is the expectations of the cultural field. These are shaped by the above-mentioned logic, and expectations from professionals, academics, and influential journalists in the field. Many of these have a culture rooted in the humanities. A second is government policies, like cultural and economic policy. A third is the different publics. Vestheim (2007, in Kangas & Vestheim, 2010) means that cultural institutions must thus work in an "overlap zone" between culture, politics, and money. This means that the context in which theatres operate is made up of a mixture of the cultural expectations of the professionals in the field, political decision making on things like cultural and financial policy, as well as expectations from the audience.

## Cultural policy

### **The arm's length principle**

"The arm's length principle" is a concept often mentioned in relation to public funding of the arts. According to Lindqvist (2007), one interpretation of the arm's-length principle is that funding of arts and culture should be independent of political preferences so that public bodies can make their own choices, within an overall policy framework. Regardless of claims about practicing the arm's-length principle, research in the Nordic countries has shown that political management exerts control over the arts sector (Gjessing 2004; in Lindqvist, 2007) and that there can be tensions between public administration and arts organizations in such settings (Statens kulturråd, 2000; in Lindqvist, 2007).

### **Instrumentalism, and the criteria of social utility**

Vestheim (1994; in Belfiore, 2004) defines "instrumental cultural policy" as the tendency to use culture and cultural investments as a means towards goals in other than cultural areas - as opposed to seeing culture as a means in itself. According to Günes (2012), an instrumentalist view within cultural policy developed in the 1980s. This idea is supported by Kangas and Vestheim (2010), who write that from the 1990s the concepts of new public management, technology and innovation, globalization, and creative industries showed up in cultural policy discourses. The economic rationale and the idea of competitiveness forced cultural institutions to legitimize themselves in relation to such concepts.

Belfiore (2004) writes about the instrumentalist cultural policy in Britain. She says that the arts, as a traditionally "weak" policy sector, have been encouraged this way to "attach" themselves to other political agendas that are deemed more politically important. The main such policy objectives attached to art are economic development, urban regeneration, and social inclusion. She writes that there is a current trend towards social goals of inclusion, cohesion, and/or community development. She finds explicit demands made on the arts by the British government to contribute to tackling social problems. The discourse of arts as having a positive impact on society has also become one of the most crucial arguments when justifying public investment in arts (Belfiore, 2004). Belfiore (2004, in Günes, 2012) relates this evolution to a critique of public funding of the arts related to neo-liberalism. Belfiore (2004) problematizes this evolution; because while expectations of measurable economic or social impact might be used to legitimize public subsidies, such impacts might be hard to measure or prove.

Duelund (2003; in Lindqvist, 2007) writes that result-focused contracts between arts organizations and the government could eventually lead to an instrumentalist cultural policy, according to him similar to



what Belfiore (2004) describes. Lindqvist (2007) writes that she did not find a directly instrumental view of art in her Swedish cases, but says that parts of Duelund's (2003) descriptions of changes in Nordic cultural governance can be recognized.

### **L'art pour l'art**

Another perspective on art and thus cultural policy is that art should exist for itself, the “l'art pour l'art” (art for art's sake) idea. Aiello and Parry (2015) point out Kant (1790/2007), as the one who formalized aesthetics into a philosophical branch. Kant maintained that art is not to be judged by social or moral norms such as those imposed by religion or state. His ideas of art as a unique and autonomous form of knowledge contributed to the development of the idea of “art for art's sake”, that was developed by the artistic movement Aestheticism into the doctrine that art should not be used for practical, pedagogical or political purposes (Aiello & Parry, 2015). According to Johannisson (2010, in Günes, 2012), Swedish cultural policy is focused on an institutionalized version of this aesthetic concept of culture. Johannisson (2010) and Günes (2012) mean it is perceived in Sweden that art and culture should be autonomous from other areas of society and not have to “prove” itself based on how it can help reach other political goals.

### **The Swedish dichotomy**

Günes (2012), argues that there is a dichotomy in Swedish cultural policy between the idea of art for art's sake and a more instrumentalist approach, seeing art as having a positive impact on society. Günes (2012) argues that Swedish cultural policy is indeed affected by a desire for evidence-based legitimizing of public funds for culture. Political and economic efficiency as well as research and measuring results are used to legitimize the art sector. Günes (2012) also uses Belfiore's (2004) problematization of measuring art's impact in economic or other quantitative terms.

### **The difference between national and regional policy**

According to Johannisson (2010, in Günes, 2012), cultural policy on the municipal and regional levels is more integrated with other political goals (hence more instrumentalist) and things like regional development are prioritized over the arm's length principle. This is due to political representation is closer to the art institutions, instead of going through more remote authorities. Günes (2012) sees this as proof that power structures within the cultural policy are being decentralized in Sweden. A difference between the national and regional cultural policy is also mentioned by Hugosson (2008, in Beckman & Månsson) who writes that the government is simultaneously trying to follow traditional cultural principles and achieving regional development. Beckman & Månsson (2008) write about “Kultursamverkansmodellen” that the model pushes the arm's length principle as one of the cornerstones of the model's implementation. However, the arm's length principle is often downplayed in some of the Swedish regions' cultural propositions. Some don't mention it, and none specifies how organizations can ensure it.

### **The relation between cultural policy and cultural institutions**

Hillman-Chartrand and McCaughey (1989, in Kangas & Vestheim, 2010) propose four 'ideal types' of cultural policy explaining the extent of government involvement in the cultural sphere; the facilitator state, the patron state, the architect state, and the engineer state model. Noting that pure versions of any

model are unlikely, Hillman-Chartrand places the Nordic countries in the "architect type" model. This typically means that the government has a more direct role in shaping the cultural environment, by being more interventionist and connecting national cultural policy to issues of social welfare. The "architect type" model has been criticized for encouraging artists to conform to what the state promotes instead of being independently creative.

## Aim & research questions

This thesis takes its point of departure in the argument that theatre as a medium has largely been overlooked by the field of political communication. The focus of this study is therefore to place attention on theatre from a political communication perspective.

Theatre is looked at in this study as both a medium with political potential, and as a medium subject to political decision making. On the one hand there is a need to investigate theatres' role as communicators of political content, as this seems to have been largely overlooked by other fields than that of theatre and drama studies. On the other hand, as theatre (as well as culture generally) is shaped by its politico-cultural conditions, contemporary theatres' relationships to cultural and financial policy need to be investigated to understand the context in which their messages are shaped.

### **Aim**

This thesis' aim is to investigate whether and how contemporary Swedish theatres use theatre for political purposes, and to investigate whether and how the theatres are influenced by politico-cultural conditions of financing and policy. This is looked at through the perspectives of 1) whether and how creative-executive teams at Swedish theatre institutions use theatre for political purposes 2) how they perceive the use of political theatre in Sweden and 3) whether and how their work is influenced by Swedish funding authorities and cultural policy.

The study is made from a sender perspective; by investigating theatre practitioners' intent and experiences around the topic of political theatre. The variables looked at in this study are thus professional theatre practitioners' own experiences of their field, in relation to contextual variables (financial, institutional and political) thought by researchers to have an impact on the theatre field.

### **Research questions**

The aim is expressed in the following research questions:

**A -How and for what purposes is political theatre used in Sweden?**

**B -How are Swedish theatres influenced by funding and cultural policy?**

The anticipation is to identify what political elements are present in the Swedish theatre field on several levels: how and for what purposes theatres handle political issues on stage and off stage (as opinion-shaping or other politically motivated efforts); as well as how politico-cultural conditions

influence theatres' work. By collecting and analyzing new data from the Swedish theatre field, and contrasting it to pre-existing theory from several fields, an emergent picture of theatre as a political and politically governed medium can be drawn and added as a research topic to the field of political communication.

## Method & considerations

### Approach

The process of this study started with defining a vast problem area, followed by a literature review that led to a narrowing of the problem area and defining of research questions. The method and some of the theories were then chosen. A hermeneutic approach is used to analyze the data, as the study aims to gain an understanding of a system of institutions, through the interpretation of data gathered from individuals that are part of this system. As hermeneutic analysis needs to take into account the background environment of the research during the data sampling phase (Myers 2004; Boland 1985; in Alhojailan, 2012), research on the cases and their institutional context was made before the data collection process. As recommended by Eisenhardt (in Huberman & Miles, 2002), who stresses the importance of being open to new data and methods throughout the research process, some additional literature and slight alterations to the research questions were added when the data sampling process was completed, inspired by the findings. In this chapter, methodological approach and research design are detailed, ending with considerations regarding the process and findings.

### Research design

This thesis uses a qualitative case study design with semi-structured interviews, which is related to theory on the field's context (financial, institutional, political).

This study aims at getting a deep understanding of the cases and their context, rather than large-scale generalizability, which is why the method of case studies was chosen (George & Bennett, 2005). According to Eisenhardt (in Miles & Huberman, 2002), research needs a strong focus not to be overwhelmed by the volume of data, which is an argument for small number case studies. Both Eisenhardt and George and Bennett (2005) stress the importance of studying literature on the subject before starting the research, which is why the literature on political theatre and the Swedish theatre context were reviewed before starting the data sampling process.

The case study (George & Bennett, 2005) comprises five well-known Swedish contemporary theatre organizations, who have been engaged in producing plays with political content for several years. The sampling method used is semi-structured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Kvale, 2011; Rapley, 2001; Huberman & Miles, 2002) with the creative-executive teams.

### Sampling process

### The "political" in this thesis

Goodman (de Gay & Goodman, 2002) writes in the introduction of the anthology “The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance” that there is no sole definition of “theatre”, “performance” or “politics” that the various theatre professionals and researchers represented in the book use.

The view of the term “political theatre” in this thesis is in line with Goodman's interpretation of the phrase "politics and performance". Goodman writes "I tend to admire and respect theatre and performance work which attempts to reach out to inspire ideas as well as feelings, and which affects its audience in some way and urges social change. That's what I mean by 'politics and performance'." (de Gay & Goodman, 2002; p. 5). When using the term "political" in relation to "theatre", Goodman's view is that theatre or performances that have an intention of creating an impact or change can be called political theatre. This is the interpretation held by the writer of this study when choosing cases and constructing interviews. In the interview situations, this attitude to the terms “political theatre” and "political" was explained to the interviewees, to allow them to speak freely on the subject and to use the terms and concepts familiar to themselves. As will be shown later (see Results) the ways that politics are considered present (or not) in the world of theatre are manifold, just as Goodman (2002) explains, and therefore will be allowed to be.

### **Case sampling**

The cases were chosen based on a mix of criteria, meant to ensure that the theatres in the sample are relevant examples of the Swedish theatre field that have a relationship to political theatre, as well as can represent different organizational types, audience types, sizes and locality.

The first two criteria were used to identify cases relevant to the Swedish theatre field:

- 1) They receive state funding, which means they are professional organizations  
*and*
- 2) They are well-known among Swedish theatre practitioners (known locally or nationally, which is proven by being reviewed by local newspapers, and/or being showcased at the Swedish performance arts biennial; Scensverige, 2020).

The next two criteria were used to ensure that the cases have a link to political theatre:

- 3) They have produced several plays with political content (for example on issues of human rights, feminism, racism, economy, politics) in the past three years  
*and/or*
- 4) They state ideological motives or aspirations towards change in their mission statement.

(Based on criteria 3-4, theatres that focus mainly on entertainment or traditional/classic theatre were not considered for this study.)

Criteria 1-4 were combined with criteria 5-7 for a diversity of:

- 5) organizational type (national theatre, municipal theatre or independent theatre group)
- 6) size (the cases have a range of 5 up to 120 full-time employees)

7) orientation (youth audience, adult audience, touring company or specific political orientation)

8) geographical placement (Malmö, Gothenburg or Stockholm)

Nine relevant theatres were thus identified and contacted. Six theatres were interested in participating, of which five were able to participate within the time frame for this study.

These are:

- Unga Klara, recently named Swedish national stage for youth theatre, Stockholm (2 respondents)
- Backa Teater, the youth stage of Gothenburg City Theatre, Gothenburg (2 respondents)
- Potato Potato, an independent stage arts group, Malmö & Stockholm (1 respondent)
- Teater Tribunalen, an independent socialist theatre, Stockholm (2 respondents)
- Riksteatern, a touring national stage arts company, with member organizations around Sweden and the core organization based in Stockholm (1 respondent)

The present case study consists of these five theatres with one to two respondents at each theatre; which gave a total of eight interviewees. The interviewees were chosen as representatives of their organizations, as they all have either an executive-financial or an executive-creative decision-making role. Their titles are either CEO, head producer, creative director, or dramaturgist. All interviewees have long careers within their theatre profession and have been at their current organization for several years (see next “The cases”). They can thus be considered informed professionals within the Swedish theatre field.

## The cases

Fig. 1 Case information

<b>THEATRES</b>	<b>UNGA KLARA</b>	<b>BACKA TEATER</b>	<b>POTATO POTATO</b>	<b>TEATER TRIBUNALEN</b>	<b>RIKSTEATERN</b>
Interviewees (8)	CEO & Creative director (2)	Dramaturgist & Head producer (2)	Founder/ Creative director (1)	Creative director & Head producer (2)	CEO (1)
Organization	Institution based on an independent group	Institution based on an independent group	Independent group	Independent group	Institution based on member associations

Type	Youth theatre, national stage	Youth theatre, of Gothenburg City Theatre	Performance arts group	Socialist theatre	Touring & arranging theatre, national stage
Office/stage	Stockholm	Gothenburg	Malmö (+ office Stockholm)	Stockholm	Stockholm
History	Started 1975	Started 1978	Started 2008	Started 1995	Started 1933
Size (employees/year)	Middle: 5 full time + 25 contracts	Middle: 20 full time + 20 contracts	Small: 5 full time + 0-15 contracts	Small: 5 (not full time) + 20-40 contracts	Big: 100-180 full time + 100 contracts/season)

### Unga Klara

At Unga Klara, the interviewees are: Stefan Hansen, CEO at Unga Klara for a few years and have 12 years of experience as a producer. Farnaz Arbabi, one of the two creative directors for 6 years, with 17 years of experience as a theatre director.

Unga Klara is an institution based on an independent theatre group, founded by Susanne Osten in 1975. It is based in Kulturhuset in Stockholm and has been focused on producing high-quality stage art for children and youth since its start. In 2018 it was appointed the Swedish national stage for youth theatre, which means it is financed directly by the Ministry of Culture. They are 5 full-time employees, with an estimated total of about 30 employees during 2019.

### Backa Teater

At Backa Teater, the interviewees are Stefan Åkesson, dramaturgist (works with repertoire together with creative director and writes/adapts plays), who has an experience of about 12 years, of which 11 at Backa. Lisa Nowotny, head producer, previously worked with communications and production at other theatres and has been 7 years at Backa.

Backa Teater started as an independent group founded within Gothenburg City Theatre in 1978. Today, it is the independent youth stage of Gothenburg City Theatre, and one of Sweden's leading youth stages. Its funding is included in the City Theatre's budget. The City Theatre is owned by Gothenburg City and is financed by Gothenburg City, Västra Götalandsregionen and the Swedish Arts Council. They are about 20 full-time employees, with around 20 other employees on different contract types per year.

### Potato Potato

The interviewee Freja Hallberg is one of the founders and one of five creative directors at Potato Potato. She has worked there since its start, about 12 years ago. Potato Potato is an independent stage arts group. They have acquired a stage in Malmö, and recently an office in Stockholm. They are funded by the Swedish Arts Council and Malmö City, as well as Stockholm City and Stockholm Region, and formerly Skåne Region. They are 5 full-time employees and hire 0 to 15 employees depending on the project.

### **Teater Tribunalen**

The interviewees are Henrik Dahl, who was one of the founders of Teater Tribunalen in 1995. He has been working on and off at Tribunalen since its start and is currently its creative director and runs the theatre's school of political stage arts. Hanna Melanton Appelfeldt (here on called Hanna M-A) is currently the executive producer and has worked at Tribunalen since 2014.

Teater Tribunalen is an independent socialist theatre group in Stockholm, focused on political stage arts. They are funded by the Swedish Arts Council and Stockholm City, sometimes also Stockholm Region. They are 5 employees and hire another 20 to 40 employees per year, plus teachers at the school.

### **Riksteatern**

The interviewee Magnus Aspegren has been CEO at Riksteatern for almost 7 years. He previously worked in executive roles within the opera field since 1996. Riksteatern was founded by the Swedish parliament in 1933, as a popular movement to diffuse qualitative stage arts to all parts of Sweden. It is a member association with 40.000 members in different associations all over the country. Its role is to produce and tour with stage arts productions, as well as to support the member associations to arrange productions, both by Riksteatern and other stage art companies. The office in Stockholm has 100-180 employees, with another 100 employees on contract per season. Riksteatern is a national stage and is thus funded directly by the Ministry of Culture, while member associations also receive different levels of funding from their respective municipalities. Member associations are together part of regional associations, that in turn receive regional funding.

### **Funding partners**

Information on the theatres' main funding partners was found on the theatres' web sites (and controlled in interviews). The funding partners are the Ministry of Culture, The Swedish Arts Council and the cities and regions where the theatres are active (Stockholm City, Region Stockholm, Gothenburg City, Västra Götalandsregionen, Malmö City, Region Skåne). Information on policy relevant to theatre funding was found on these funding authorities web pages and in previous research (detailed in "Background").

### **Data collection**

### **Semi-structured interviews**

As the purpose of the interviews is to extract knowledge about the current situation in Sweden, an "interview-data-as-resource" approach (Rapley, 2001) was used. According to Seale and Silverman (1997), it is believed that open-ended questions are the most effective route when the aim is to get an authentic understanding of the interviewees' experiences. As it is also important that the interviews follow a similar structure for later comparison of the findings, the choice fell upon using semi-structured interviews. This approach provides the opportunity to follow up on interesting topics that might arise through the conversation (Conway, 2014) while keeping a similar structure in all interviews.

## Interview guide

A mixed-method approach called "Interview guide approach" by Tashakkori & Teddlie (2003) was used (Figure 2) to construct an interview guide. The interview guide centered around three main themes; aimed at getting a broad picture of political elements in the theatre cases' work and in the Swedish theatre field. Each theme had multiple follow-up questions that were used to follow up on the interviewees' accounts.

Interview themes:

- 1) The interviewees' views on theatre's role in society, political theatre and opinion-shaping
- 2) The interviewees' attitudes and aims related to their work
- 3) The interviewees' experiences of their funding partners, cultural policy and political decision-making

Fig. 2 Types of research interviews

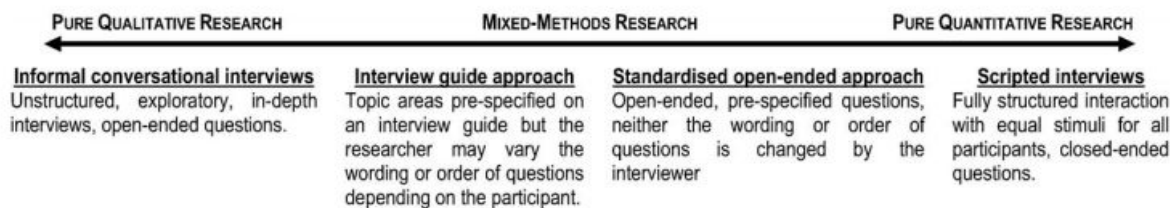


Fig. 1. Types of research interviews [Data from Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003)].

## Interview process

The interviews were held in Swedish over the digital video conference tool Zoom, during April and the beginning of May of 2020. They were recorded (video and audio) directly on Zoom, as well as audio on a phone for back-up. To ensure that all interviewees had the same information, the themes (without the follow-up questions) were sent beforehand to the interviewees so that they would know what would be discussed. The interviewees were also informed that the interview would be recorded and that they were welcome to read the findings before publishing.



Each interview started with an introduction; about the aim of the thesis, the structure of the interview, and clarifications around what was meant with "political" in this study. Following recommendations by Kvale (2011), the questions were asked in more or less the same order and the interviewees were allowed to talk freely. As the interviewees then could discover new relationships on the topic these were followed up as well.

## Data processing

### Records and field notes

As Poland (1995) recommends, records (audio-video records made on Zoom) of the interviews were kept, to make it possible to check the transcripts to the records. Also as recommended by Poland (1995), field notes of initial thoughts were made after interviews to strengthen the validity and to help the analysis process. As the interviews were sometimes conducted in a row, field notes on first impressions were written on a total of three occasions. After completing the analysis, the field notes were consulted and were deemed very close to the analysis results.

### Transcription

Halcomb and Davidson (2006) write about how the common usage of in extenso transcription in qualitative research has been questioned by several writers (Seale & Silverman, 1997; Silverman, 1993; van Teijlingen & Ireland, 2003; in Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). Poland (1995) writes that the importance of in extenso transcripts is more assumed than it is empirically verified and that all transcription carries the risk of wrongly interpreting the interviewee. When the analysis techniques aim at identifying common ideas from the data, Halcomb and Davidson (2006) argue that in extenso transcription isn't always necessary, as the benefits of lessening costs of time, physical and human resources might matter as well. For this thesis, a simpler version of verbatim transcription was used, based on Halcomb and Davidson's (2006) thoughts. This meant leaving out from the transcriptions: topics that were not linked to the research questions, and some communicative details such as laughter, breathing, and detailed pausing. The purpose was to focus the data on topics valuable to the research questions. The interviews were transcribed manually in Swedish and relevant quotes were later translated into English.

### Coding for meaning

When analyzing data, Kvale (2011) describes how one can either focus on bringing out the meaning hidden in an interview or text (what he calls a miner metaphor of interviewing), or focus on the way the meaning is communicated, through language. The focus in this study is to extract *meaning*, that is to gain access to facts and opinions expressed by the interviewees, rather than looking at how they communicate. Kvale (2011) writes that meaning coding can be used for this purpose, which he describes as assigning one or several keywords to a text segment.

Kvale's (2011) idea of coding can be found similarly but more practically described by Tracy (2012), who's specific coding method was used in this study. Tracy's model (2012) contains the two-step process of primary and second cycle coding. According to Tracy (2012), the purpose of primary cycle coding is to identify words or phrases that carry meaning that might help shed light on the research

question. In this phase, one examines the data and can for instance assign words or phrases that catch their meaning. Tracy writes that secondary cycle coding is the phase where one goes deeper into the data and tries to examine and structure the codes from the primary cycle, for instance by grouping them under themes. The second-level coding is used to try to identify patterns or cause-effect relationships (Tracy, 2012).

### **Coding process**

In the primary cycle coding phase (Tracy, 2012) the interview transcripts were read thoroughly and one or several descriptive words (codes) were assigned to blocks of text, together with a summary of the text block. The codes were chosen to correspond to the themes of the interview guide, to classify the information that came up in the interviews. Purely organizational information was also written in a codebook (see Appendix: Code book 1), for comparison of the theatre organizations.

In the second cycle coding phase (Tracy, 2012), the codes were grouped to form themes. The transcripts were re-read one by one, and the codes assigned in the primary cycle were used to categorize information under the themes. The results were written in a matrix (see Appendix: Code book 2). If two interviews at one organization had been conducted separately, the results of the interviews were looked at separately, and interwoven in the matrix, to give an overall picture of the organization. The names of the themes were changed a few times to give an accurate description of the content found in the interviews.

### **Analysis**

The hermeneutic analysis approach focuses on interpreting data and is suitable to generate theory (Bryman 2008; Miles and Huberman 1994; Myers 1997; Hayes 2000; in Alhojailan (2012)). According to Boland (1985; in Alhojailan, 2012), hermeneutic analysis is useful to understand an organization or institution as a whole, by understanding its parts (personal experiences). The analytical principle of hermeneutic analysis can in part be explained as moving between the understanding of a text as a whole and the interpretation of its parts (Myers 2004; in Alhojailan, 2012). Applying this analytical method to the data meant looking at cases separately, looking for cross-case patterns, as well as looking at the "whole"; the cases' connection to the Swedish politico-cultural context.

### **Analysis process**

After transcription and subsequent coding, the results from the coding were compared in both within-case analysis (George and Bennett, 2005) when there are two interviewees, and cross-case analysis (George and Bennett, 2005), where the cases are compared to each other. The purpose is to find out whether patterns exist between the cases, and in relation to theory, to get an understanding of the theatre field's current situation.

Poland (1995) recommends ending the analysis process with a thematic review; where the analysis and the themes it has originated are reviewed by relistening to the interview recordings to find useful examples to demonstrate the themes found in the material. A version of this practice was used in this study. Through a thematic review of the transcripts, information was checked again and illustrative quotes were chosen to be used in the presentation of findings.

## Considerations

### **Validity**

On the topic of validity, George and Bennett (2005) write that the chosen variable must matter for the outcome. The variables looked at in this study are individuals' own experiences of their work field, in relation to contextual variables thought by researchers to have an impact on the theatre field (financial, institutional, political).

It is argued here that the individuals interviewed in this study are informed professionals whose experiences are valid to the purpose of understanding the Swedish political theatre field. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) mean that valid data is data that comes close to the "lived experience" of the interviewees, which was used as an argument for choosing semi-structured interviews. The structure is needed to be able to compare the interviews from different cases, while a certain amount of openness is important to gather data that is in line with the interviewees' own experiences. To ensure validity, Kvale's (2011) method of extracting meaning was used when there was a need for clarification. It means that the interviewer checks that the perceived meaning is correct, by sending the answer back to the interviewee and making sure it has been perceived correctly. Thereafter, the interviewer further tries to confirm or reject their interpretations, and so the perceived meanings are followed up with further questions. Perceived meanings from one interview were sometimes checked with other interviewees as well, to see whether more people had experienced similar things.

State funding and cultural policy are deemed variables of importance to the outcome (George & Bennett, 2005) because they form the basis for many theatre organizations' mere existence. The studying of policy thus offers important insights into the context in which the theatres operate. The funding authorities and cultural policies used in this study were chosen because of their links to the cases. The policy is looked at from two perspectives, on the one hand, it is read as a part of this study, and on the other hand, it is a theme in the interviews to get the interviewees' perspectives. At least one person interviewed at each theatre was chosen because their role includes working with the theatre's financing and thus with funding policy, to ensure getting valid information on this topic.

### **Validity of transcripts**

Poland (1995) critiques how transcripts are often laden with interpretational mistakes and how audio recordings leave out important non-verbal and emotional communication. Poland (1995) refers to several cases of errors occurring when using transcribers that are unfamiliar with the interview. In this study, the same person that planned and performed the interviews also transcribed and coded them. This method can both be a way to ensure validity (Poland, 1995), but has the weakness of transcripts not being double-checked by a second person. The ability to check for mistakes was in this study instead ensured by re-visiting the audio-video recordings of the interviews.

### **Generalizability**

On the topic of generalizability, George and Bennett (2005) write that one should not strive to generalize to larger populations from a small sample, which is an argument for not trying to construct theory from such a small sample, but rather to gain in-depth knowledge that can answer the research

question. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) argue the importance of being sensitive to subjectivity and context, which is why this case study is set in Sweden, where the researcher's knowledge of the theatre field is the strongest. The findings will not be general but can say something about how theatre agendas are constructed in a Swedish large-city context. However, the Swedish theatre scene is limited in the sense that most larger organizations depend on funding from the same public funding authorities. Swedish theatres are operating in the same national cultural policy context, and due to the funding structure, it's also possible that the way interviewees are affected by this context says something about other theatre organizations' conditions as well. However, interpreting George and Bennett (2005), more research would need to be made to be able to make an empirically valid generalization.

## **Ethics**

Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) write about ethics concerning interviews, that it is important for an interviewer to be aware of the power asymmetry that an interview implies. As the individuals interviewed for this study are professionals with a larger knowledge of the field than the interviewer, as well as public persons with at least some experience in being interviewed, that type of power asymmetry in the interviews was not deemed a problem. As recommended by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) on informed consent, the intent and conditions of the interviews were explained beforehand, and the interviewees were offered to see the questions beforehand, as well as to see the transcripts and final material if they wish to. Another ethical aspect according to Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) is to allow interviewees to remain anonymous if they want to. All interviewees were offered this option, but all declined. Ethical considerations regarding consent and confidentiality (Swedish Research Council, 2007) were further handled by giving the interviewees all information on how and when the information from the interviews was going to be used. They were informed that the interviews were going to be recorded and used solely for the purpose of transcription, not for publication, and that they would be able to revise the full material, including quotes, before publishing. All interviewees gave their consent to the above detailed conditions.

## **The interview situation**

Some of the topics of interviews were deemed possibly sensitive by the interviewer, as the interviewees were asked about their relationship to important funding partners. The interviewees participate as professionals and thus there is a risk that some personal opinions were not shared with the interviewer. This consideration was discussed openly with the interviewees, who said they were not worried about voicing their opinions. They were also encouraged by the interviewer to define when they were speaking from their personal stand-point and not that of the organization. Some interviewees were more outspoken than others, but generally the interviewees were able to voice both criticism and appreciation toward the funding partners and cultural policy.

Due to the covid-19 pandemic, the interviews took place on Zoom instead of in person. This probably affected the interview situation in the sense that they were shorter than if the meeting had taken place in person. However, in all interviews there was time allowed for more personal small talk in the beginning and at the end of the interviews, where personal backgrounds and anecdotes were shared by both interviewer and interviewees, which gave an informal and personal character to the interviews. The interviewees were also asked if there was anything they wanted to add at the end of the interview.

## **Knowledge of the field and bias**

George and Bennett (2005) write that good knowledge of the studied field is useful when choosing cases. The author of this study has previously both studied and worked within the Swedish theatre field. The thus acquired knowledge of theatres that are well-known and politically engaged helped inform the sampling of the cases. This can be seen as both an asset, as it meant a level of familiarity with the subject that contributed to more in-depth discussions with the interviewees. However, it could also mean a possible risk for bias as the interviewer has some preconceptions of the field. To avoid bias, criteria were set to better ensure a diversity of theatre types, and both theatres that the author has been in previous contact with and not were included in the case sample.

## **Limitations**

One limitation in this study is that the interviews were conducted in Swedish; the native language of both interviewees and interviewer. Therefore the findings later had to be interpreted and translated to English, which adds a risk of misinterpretation. The writer of this thesis is proficient in English and has professional experience of translation work, which means the translation was not deemed a large issue. Regardless, this means there is a level of interpretation of the results that has to be accounted for.

This study depends heavily on the cooperation of relevant theatres and as this is a master thesis, there wasn't time to wait too long between contacting theatres and conducting interviews. As the covid-19 pandemic caused most theatres in Sweden to close right around the time they were contacted for this study, some extra time was allowed before contacting those who did not answer directly. The pandemic also resulted in the postponing of some planned interviews (on request by the theatres), to later in the spring, which meant the writing period had to be extended. Two interviews had to be canceled due to increased workload for the interviewees (one creative director at Potato Potato and the theatre director of Riksteatern). As a result, there is only one interviewee in these two cases. However, the participating interviewees have central roles in their organizations and were able to answer all the interview questions.

As the sample is non-random (Flick, 2013) and quite small, some aspects considering large differences in organizational or funding types might be missing. The case sample represents a diverse mix of theatres, but only has 1-3 examples of theatres in each category of type, size, and orientation. This study should, therefore, be seen as an in-depth study rather than a generalized one (George & Bennett, 2005; Flick, 2013). The sample has theatres from three Swedish cities, as the study was originally planned to be made on-site. This limits the scope of this study to larger cities in Sweden (that have a higher concentration of professional theatres). It would however have been interesting to also get insights from theatres located in smaller cities or countryside locations in Sweden, as it is possible that the findings would have been different including that perspective.

It is important to bear in mind that both theatre practitioners as well as funding authorities' policy used in this study are mere informants and samples and do not represent all of Sweden's politically engaged theatres, nor all political attitudes behind funding decisions. However, the sample encompasses

well-known theatres as well as funding authorities that have a large impact on the Swedish politico-cultural field.

## Results & analysis

In this chapter, all findings presented originate from the case interviews. The findings are presented in three parts, each followed by an analysis. The findings are further discussed in “Discussion”.

### About the cases

The theatres in the sample proved to be of several different types. Unga Klara and Backa are youth theatres which started as independent groups around the same time. They also represent the middle-sized organizations in this sample; they thus have some similarities. Potato Potato and Teater Tribunalen are smaller, independent groups that started a bit more recently, with Potato Potato being the youngest organization in the sample. They thus have some similarities, but differ in that Tribunalen is a pronounced left-wing political group, while Potato Potato calls its theatre experimental. Riksteatern stands out in the sample as being the oldest and largest organization, but also with its specific organizational form with member organizations. Although Riksteatern’s CEO compares them in size to Dramaten and half of Kungliga Operan, both other national stages, there is no other theatre of Riksteatern’s organizational type in Sweden.

The theatres in the sample attract quite different audiences; either through school, via interest in the topic or the values held by the theatre. Backa and Unga Klara primarily have school children and youth, as well as young adults. Their audience is generally not very experienced with theatre, and both theatres point out that school audiences are not there by choice, which makes the theatres very focused on inclusiveness and communication. As Stefan Åkesson says, it becomes important to “get them to *want* to be there”.

Tribunalen describes their audience jokingly as “a lot of random leftists”, and thus has an audience that tends to agree with their values. Potato Potato and Riksteatern attract a combination of audiences, that come because they are interested in specific topics. Potato Potato also attracts what Freja Hallberg calls “the snobs”; people with a lot of knowledge and interest in theatre, an audience that Freja thinks there should be room for as well.

### Part 1: The many uses of theatre

#### **Theatre as an art form**

The interviewees describe theatre primarily as an art form, not as a medium. Theatre is a unique art form because it is a combination of many others, according to Unga Klara. A commonly mentioned trait of theatre is its impermanence, or “here and now” quality. Both Unga Klara and Backa, who work with young people, lift theatre's live quality as opposed to forms of screen-mediated communication.

*"(...) a transient art form, it arises, and it exists only in that moment".  
(Stefan Hansen, 2020)*

Freja Hallberg exemplifies the powerful emotional qualities that this gives theatre:

*"(...) people can say they hate theater, and I can agree with that, because it's so emotional, so if it's bad, it's painful in a different way than if it's a bad movie. So there is a point in letting people practice going to the theater, and having low thresholds because of it."  
(Freja Hallberg, 2020)*

Theatre's live component, mixed with its qualities of dream and fiction make for a very unique art form that several describe as magical.

*"I think it can be both magical and non-magical, at the same time, in a great way. That it is so very real, there are real people of flesh and blood standing there, it isn't possible to fast-forward them or turn them off or pause them. And that's exactly why it can, when it's good, be so magical really."  
(Farnaz Arbabi, 2020)*

### **Theatre as interactive communication**

Even though the theatres attract audiences of different age and interest groups, they share an attitude of respect and large focus on the relationship to the audience, and all stress ways that a play interacts with the audience.

The interest in the audience can be seen in how many of the theatres use participatory methods, specifically those who work with young audiences. Both Unga Klara and Backa use so-called reference groups; groups of, in their case young, people that they meet with during the writing and/or rehearsal process. Both Unga Klara and Backa say they trust that the audience can handle complex issues no matter their age and reference groups are a way to understand their point of views and do research.

*"The audience is different, but we try to have meetings and reference audiences before and let our material wrestle with a young audience all the time."  
(Lisa Nowotny, 2020)*

Unga Klara has a lot of methods in place to make the audience feel seen and heard. To "lower the threshold" for un-experienced audiences, they start the plays in the lobby, and talk to the audience afterwards. Farnaz Arbabi describes it as a way to get the audience to understand the mechanics behind a play, which creates involvement and thus greater respect for the art. They encourage the audience to take part in the play, and use conscious methods to un-dramatically pause a play if the audience becomes too loud or if someone acts disrespectfully.

*"It always has an effect, they often don't think we hear them, so it becomes like this "huh, help", they are really affected, they think that everything is like on screen (...)"  
(Farnaz Arbabi, 2020)*

## Theatre as a discursive arena

An idea that is expressed by all interviewees is that of the theatre as a space to meet and discuss issues.

Stefan Åkesson at Backa exemplifies it both as a ritual and a social arena, where people come together to explore dilemmas and existential issues, to experience emotions, and get mirrored by the ensemble and audience. He describes the theatre as a space to think and feel around what we are unsure about, together, and to pose questions without serving answers. This general approach is shared by all theatres in the sample.

*“I see the theatre as an arena, an artistic and social arena, a place where people come together to experience something artistic, for a limited time. It's based on that kind of agreement, you can not come and go whenever you want, it's not TV or streaming, you have to get somewhere, it's bound in time and space when the theatre event takes place, that's also what makes it a social arena, that you actually meet there. I try to protect and emphasize the theatre's origins in the rite, that you experience something emotional together, and that the audience not only reflects themselves or experiences what happens on stage, but also reflects itself in the other audience's reactions. I think the stories we should deal with are the ones that explore dilemmas. When you don't know what's right or wrong, or good or evil. (...) Art's task is to explore, think, feel about what you don't really know. I think it gives the best theatre when it's a real dilemma, when I as a sender don't know what I think. And also hand over that uncertainty to the audience. So with theatre, you're not left alone with it.”*

*(Stefan Åkesson, 2020).*

## Theatre as utopia

One way to use theatre, that could be considered both political and existential, is to criticize and challenge norms, something all interviewed theatres do to some extent. A way to do this, mentioned by Farnaz Arababi as well as Henrik Dahl, is to create a utopia, by using theatre to show an alternative world. Henrik Dahl thinks this is possible because theatre's fictional status makes it a place where one can be drastic.

*“We can allow ourselves to say almost anything, we don't really have to be careful, because everyone knows that it's still just theatre, so to speak. And there is a certain 'safety mat' to land on there, which means that you can push quite hard and be quite drastic, and in that way fast.”*

*(Henrik Dahl, 2020)*

Unga Klara has the hope of being an alternative space in a young persons' life, where they can feel seen and heard, and discover other values.

*“I sometimes think that the hour they are with us, that it can be an opening to another life, maybe that was what Stefan also meant, that we can be like a breathing hole, or an opposite pole. I think it's so clear but for example when we do theatre for teenagers, for high school, when they come to us, or when we visit them and you hear; it's an everyday life of abuse as well, different sexist, racist ... it's such a harsh tone, and so brutal. And just coming to a place like Unga Klara where we don't accept*



*that and actually react if it happens, is also a way of saying "there is another world, and there is another time" and like "it doesn't have to be like it is for you now."*  
(Farnaz Arbabi, 2020)

## **Attitudes and intent**

Common ideas about theatre's role in society among the theatres is that theatre has the power to create new life or new direction, by opening up new doors within a person, and giving people, especially youth, tools to form opinions, and some lift how it can be used to educate oneself. Most aim at inspiring as well as problematizing, commenting on and discussing issues with the audience. Potato Potato for example, wants to pass on the doubt they feel about an issue to the audience. They believe that a performance is only the starting-point, and that much of the art experience actually happens afterwards, as an idea can travel outside the context of a specific performance through the audience.

The majority of the theatres have an intent of influencing the audience in some way, but not of getting the audience to think any one specific thing. As Stefan Hansen says; the goal is never to convert anyone, but he believes many are surprised and changed by their theatre experience.

Lisa Nowotny similarly says that they don't aim at confirming the audiences' world views, and since they have a very diverse audience this would be impossible. Which is a good thing, Stefan Åkesson adds; "the best discussions come when some are provoked by the same things that others agree with".

Tribunalen stands out by wanting to create a change of mind in people towards political goals, which is why they aim at addressing both people affected by an issue, as well as those with power over said issue. They want to inspire and motivate people "towards resistance and revolution". They wish to get people to reflect on themselves and their role in society, but as they express it, through a moving and entertaining experience.

*"The intention is to change people's way of thinking, definitely."*  
(Henrik Dahl, 2020)

## **Analysis**

Although the theatres express their views in different words; a general view of theatre as an art form first and foremost is expressed by the theatres. It is possible to see theatre as a medium as described by Hjarvard (2008), as theatre is used to communicate over space and time. However theatre's specific characteristics, as described by several interviewees, lie in its focus on space and *limitation* in time. The view of theatre as a space to meet and discuss issues, which creates both existential and democratic value, is expressed by all of the theatres. The theatres in the sample thus use theatre in two of the three functions of media described by Hjarvard (2008); "as an interpretive frame for understanding society, and as an arena in which members of a society can discuss and decide matters of common interest" (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 114). The theatres express a common feeling of respect and curiosity towards the audience, where communicating *to* the audience often is inferior to the idea of sharing thoughts *with* the audience. This shows that the way theatre is used by the cases is largely as an interactive medium (Hjarvard, 2008), in the sense that both sender (theatre) and receiver (audience) have influence over the content. This aspect of theatre is also in line with Kershaw's (1992) view of

theatre as a “transaction of meaning” which engages both performers and audience. The interactive quality of theatre can also be seen in the participatory aspect that is present in several of the theatres’ work. This is used most prominently at the youth theatres Backa and Unga Klara, who use participatory methods like reference groups as a general approach. This shows that the participatory use of theatre often exemplified in previous research (see “Research review”) is often present in the theatres’ work.

The intent behind the productions varies between the theatres but has a lot of common values; the hope of creating new thoughts, insights, reflection and discussion is very commonly shared by all theatres. They mainly use theatre to innovate, motivate, inspire, to challenge and criticize norms and to discuss difficult topics. All theatres strive towards being an urgent and/or challenging force in society; which can be called “political” by Goodman’s standards (de Gay & Goodman, 2002), but not necessarily political on the ontic level (Mouffe, 2005). The aim is often to change *something*, but rather within a person on an existential level, than to convince or convert people towards any political alignment. Thus they all try to create change in different ways, the most ontic-oriented being Tribunalen, as they aim more often to create change on the “politics” level (Mouffe, 2005).

## Part 2: The political use of theatre

### Ideologies

When asked whether they have an outspoken ideology or manifesto, Unga Klara, Riksteatern and Tribunalen answer yes. Unga Klara works from a set of values; to be norm-creative, anti-racist and feminist. Riksteatern has its roots in a socialist era and is often perceived as left-wing, but is rather a libertarian movement today, according to Magnus Aspegren. They work with values of equality, human rights, and accessibility. Tribunalen is the only case that has an outspoken classic political ideology; as left-wing socialist and anti-capitalist.

Backa and Potato Potato oppose the idea of having a manifesto. Backa because they think that it would be too limiting, however, they say they are a value-based organization. Potato Potato has adopted a stance where they say no to being political, as they have been “accused” of being political although they don’t claim to be, or called on to participate in different forms of opinion work on culture.

*“I remember that we wrote a few years ago in our business plan, which is sent to grant applications; ‘We are not doing politics.’ And that was because it was triggered by the fact that there were some politicians who argued in the Culture Committee, in Malmö, that Potato Potato should not receive support because we were engaged in politics.”*

*(Freja Hallberg, 2020)*

### Careful with the politics

All theatres except Tribunalen have a careful stance when it comes to being overly political, for different reasons. Backa is owned by a municipality and therefore is supposed to stay politically neutral, and Unga Klara calls themselves politically independent. Potato Potato also claims that one “is not supposed to be party political”. Both Unga Klara and Backa make it very clear that the theatre itself does not push political ideas, however, the individual creatives are free to do so, which means it

happens that they do very political plays at times. Both these theatres say that playing for a young audience comes with a responsibility not to push opinions on the audience since they often come during school and thus are not there by choice. Riksteatern also shares this attitude regarding their young audience.

*"For us, the main thing is that it should be art, and it should be that it is an art form, rather than like a political meeting, or wanting to convert your audience in that way."*

*(Stefan Hansen, 2020)*

Stefan Åkesson thinks that dealing with opinions, and clear right/wrong differentiation, is a task that belongs to politics or journalism, and that opinion shaping is better done via mass media such as tv or radio. This view is shared by the other theatres. Riksteatern points out that theatre is a slow medium, and therefore not best suited for creating change.

However this does not mean that the interviewees do not believe in theatre's ability to instigate change. According to Freja Hallberg, theatre has been shown to have more audience than all sports combined, even without counting amateur theatre, and she means that theatre therefore has a much stronger impact than what is commonly thought. She has heard many stories from theatre goers of how people's lives have changed with the help of a theatre performance. Hanna M-A explains how this is possible:

*"Even though it's a fairly long process on one level, it's incredibly fast when you think about the encounter with the audience, you can change someone's mind, or heart, in 2 seconds, in that way it's a very fast medium, if it's done in the right way or at the right time."*

*(Hanna M-A, 2020)*

Even though many of the theatres are careful in calling what they are doing "political", all of the theatres in the sample have worked with societal and political themes in plays many times, which shows a complex relationship to what "political" means. At Unga Klara, Stefan Hansen makes it clear that the theatre is not aiming to be political, while Farnaz Arbabi is famous for doing political work. This duality might stem from their very clear focus on children's rights and norm creativity, anti-racism and feminism, themes that may be perceived as very political by some but not all. Riksteatern has a large repertoire where they have among other things covered HBTQ issues, equality and mental health according to Magnus Aspegren. Backa and Potato Potato are interested in topics that contain dilemmas or uncertainties, which might sometimes be perceived as political and sometimes not. Tribunalen focuses a lot on criticism of capitalist and neoliberal systems, departing from socialist values and taking a stand for vulnerable groups in most of their plays.

### **L'art pour l'art the dominant wish**

Most of the theatres have a l'art pour l'art attitude, meaning they are much more concerned with the artistic quality than with communicating certain ideas.

All theatres oppose themselves to what is commonly called agitational theatre or "plakat"-theatre in Swedish, because it's, in Farnaz Arbabi's words, "often flat". Backa, for example, has a small

repertoire and opt out on anything they consider too "plakat". They think that it can give quite bad theatre, and Lisa Nowotny gives the examples of educational theatre from the 70's and "plakat"-theatre (meaning theatre that pushes a strong idea or serves answers) from the 2010's, where the idea matters more than the artistic quality.

*"I might not be as fond of educational, political theatre, which existed in the 70's, 'plakat'-theatre has existed now in the 2010's, with pretty strong identity politics or other big issues, which are important, but where maybe the idea has been more influential than the artistic expression."*  
(Lisa Nowotny, 2020)

Farnaz Arbabi means that this is specifically problematic to some artists, as she for example has made a lot of political work and therefore is always expected to give a political twist to what she does.

*"I can also feel; I'm a little tired of talking about ... it would be so nice to just talk about art, and existentially maybe more than politically, but I don't know if that's possible either, because different things are expected of different artists as well."*  
(Farnaz Arbabi, 2020)

Freja Hallberg also dreams of being allowed to just do art. She and the other creatives at Potato Potato are all women, and she guesses this is why they have several times been labeled as feminists against their will. She gives an example from when she participated in a podcast:

*"(...) so I explained that; we make art, we make performances about all sorts of issues, and the reason why people call us feminist, without any further analysis, is because we are women. And it ended with them editing it out in this podcast, so that what is heard is "you call yourselves a feminist theatre", and then it continues. They left out that I questioned it."*  
(Freja Hallberg, 2020)

The exceptions in this sample are Riksteatern and Tribunalen. Magnus Aspegren describes Riksteatern as "quite political". As a member association they take up their members' wishes, and as many members are also involved in other societal issues, like human rights, migrants' rights, environmental issues, such considerations can be represented in Riksteatern's work.

Tribunalen have had a manifesto with a clear political motive from the start; bringing in-class analysis and socialist critique in all that they do. Henrik Dahl explains that they used to call themselves "ideology producers". They value the art form, but combine it with a strong political mission.

*"All the performances we put on have a political basis, we have focused on class reading of plays and so on. In a way everything we do is based on that type of reading."*  
(Henrik Dahl, 2020)

More than the other theatres, they aim at being seen as a political force in society, and to reach outside of the cultural realm.

*“Then Henrik always says when we talk, that the intention from the beginning was probably always to end up, not on the cultural pages but on the editorial pages, reaching a little further with things. Which has also happened.”*

*(Hanna M-A, 2020)*

### **Theatre as political practice**

All interviewees give examples of how many aspects of theatre *are* political in themselves. Potato Potato thinks that the act of making or seeing a play is political in itself, as it is not productive in the capitalist sense. Also in that theatres are run much like companies, but without being profit-driven.

*“But I also think that just getting people to spend a few hours in like; outside of how the ordinary world is, that it is very political in itself. Like no matter what you play, and I think that applies to any theatre, that just the act of being gathered in one room, focused on something other than, well the capitalist structure. And one isn’t useful in that sense, as a theatre.”*

*(Freja Hallberg, 2020)*

Stefan Åkesson means that theatre can absolutely be used for political purposes and that many independent groups have that as their motive, which he sees nothing wrong with. He says theatre can be used to create identity and motivation within a group, as theatre has for example been used successfully within the workers’ movement historically. Freja Hallberg reminds that another side of this is that that theatre has also been used for propaganda purposes historically.

Several of the interviewees share the idea that everything can be perceived as political.

*“(…) I think that even making a classic Shakespeare performance in 17th century clothes and thinking that you won’t comment on the present at all, will also be a comment. No matter how you do it, it isn’t separated from the context of society, I think.”*

*(Farnaz Arbabi, 2020)*

*“(…) I mean that when you ask questions, you bring up topics, you understand that when something is discussed on stage that the answers don’t exist, but it helps me to formulate an answer; where I stand on this question - then it becomes political. Because it has affected me in some direction, even if on the stage it isn’t clear, but is a problem.”*

*(Magnus Aspegren, 2020)*

*"I think that everything is politics; existential issues are politics, theatre is politics, who we put on stage, which bodies, that is politics."*

*(Lisa Nowotny, 2020)*

Almost all the interviewees say they have a conscious use of representation, which means they make conscious choices of who or who’s story they put on stage. This practice can by some be considered political.

*"But is it politics, yes it is, it is representation. It is also self-evident in Sweden; if we look at what today's youth looks like, we must be able to reflect ourselves in them, or they must be able to reflect themselves in us."*

*(Lisa Nowotny, 2020)*

However, Unga Klara sees the use of representation as a social and artistic choice, rather than a political stance. For them, it is important that the young audience can feel mirrored by the ensemble and recognize themselves on stage. It goes the other way as well, says Stefan Hansen; the ensemble feels represented by the audience. Backa has the same type of reasoning; the audience comes from all socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds around Gothenburg, and it is important to Backa that the audience can identify with someone on stage. Since Backa works a lot with devising (a method which among other things uses actors' own experiences to create a play) and documentary material; a diverse ensemble enriches the stories they create. As Lisa Nowotny puts it; "the polyphonic is more interesting". She says they have the power to problematize norms by what they show on stage, (an attitude that Unga Klara shares), which is another argument for representation. Farnaz Arbabi has experimented with ways to challenge norms at theatres:

*"(...) I've experimented with some different ways of being, like sometimes when I've done performances, I've consciously gone in like 'okay my secret mission here is this; I will break the whiteness norm in this particular theatre that I'm now at as a freelancer.' So then I bring in as many actors of colour as possible, or kind of. Or 'now I do this play but really I want to show children and young people that it's totally okay to be transgender', or something like that."*

*(Farnaz Arbabi, 2020)*

Some of the institutions, like Unga Klara, Backa, and Riksteatern, have a consciousness of representation as part of their organizational philosophy. For example, Lisa Nowotny says, the employees at Backa might come from similar backgrounds, and thus when a new employee is hired, comes a chance to analyze what is missing to enhance representation. Tribunalen and Riksteatern think about these different levels of representation, but feel they have succeeded better with their representation on stage, both in the ensembles and choices of stories to put up.

### **The making of on stage "trends"**

When asked whether they perceive any political trends in theatre plays made in Sweden, almost all interviewees replied yes. They offer several explanations for this.

Stefan Hansen says that artists comment on each other's work and this can create the impression that there is a trend, however, these changes all the time. Stefan Åkesson at Backa says there are definitely trends, and relates it to values held by many people in the field.

*"Oh God, yes, it absolutely exists. And I think it partly comes from us who have chosen to work with theatre. I would say that the vast majority have some kind of left-wing attitude. If you put it on a GAL-TAN scale, we are on the GAL bit. The vast majority has some kind of liberal left-wing attitude, and that comes from that if you choose to work with this, you don't do it for the salary, and not for the status. I would say that's probably a big part of what the causal connection looks like."*

*(Stefan Åkesson, 2020)*

Farnaz Arbabi at Unga Klara says the same thing, that most people in the theatre field are left-wing oriented and that this affects what themes theatre works with. She adds that theatre in itself comes from a popular tradition and that there is no real right-wing theatre tradition. Some themes she has noticed are racism, feminism, human rights, gender roles. This can be *perceived* as left-wing, but might as well be liberal themes according to her. For a while stories from a transgender, non-binary or queer perspective were prevalent.

*“For a while there was a lot about ... trans or non-binary perspectives, and queer questions that included the trans perspective. There has been a lack of that for a very long time and for a few years it felt like there was a lot of performances about that, or that included that experience.”*

*(Farnaz Arbabi, 2020)*

These themes have been noticed by several others. Lisa Nowotny has seen that common themes have been what can be called feminist, as well as "identity political", and that Backa has worked with such topics as well. Tribunalen has also noticed "identity political" themes of oppression versus inclusion, revolution, and similar. However, it is important to criticize the term identity politics, says Farnaz Arbabi.

*“I think that of course you can choose, I've done quite a few performances that could be classified as that, which are about racism, or racialization, which you could definitely say like ‘ah that's identity politics because you're personally affected by it’, but at the same time it's a societal problem; both a medical, a political, social and legal problem. So it depends ... I mean what is not identity politics, it's like feminism or the women's issue, which there has also been a lot of performing arts about over the years, it has somehow been allowed to stand free from that concept. But when it comes to LGBTQ or racism, people like to talk about identity politics ... it can be a bit diminishing, I think.”*

*(Farnaz Arbabi, 2020)*

Magnus Aspegren has noticed historical or futuristic themes, criticizing populism, nationalism, and environmental issues.

*“There has been a lot now that has criticized some kind of populism and nationalism, there have been many plays that want to describe the world we live in historically but also forward-looking. And I think that when one interprets classics, one likes to choose those who have something dystopian about them. Somewhere you understand that they are based on the climate problem, or the nationalism problem..”*

*(Magnus Aspegren, 2020)*

Lisa Nowotny is critical of a tendency since the 2010s of making straight forward plays where the idea is more important than the artistic concept, and where answers instead of questions are given to the audience. Magnus Aspegren says something similar, that for a few years now, he has seen a tendency to do very straightforward, documentary pieces that focus on content and less on dramatic situations or

interactions. He thinks this lessens the presence of dramatic/poetic content and like Lisa Nowotny, he criticizes the tendency of being overly clear, doing "plakat"-theatre.

Freja Hallberg at Potato Potato does not see a political trend, but rather that it might *seem* that way because many plays are “sprinkled” on the surface with current themes. She thinks this might be a politically correct move to make a play pass as socially or existentially “urgent”, rather than actually being urgent.

*“(…) for example, there is a lot of the type of performances that are like ‘Elin Wägner’, or ‘a hundred years since women got the right to vote’ and so on, but where the show itself is like a traditional love story, like what you can see in whatever cheap series on Netflix.”*

*(Freja Hallberg, 2020)*

Many of the interviewees see the trends they have noticed fading. Farnaz Arbabi sees no current trends but thinks it looks as if theatre practitioners are moving towards trying to be less political. Both Lisa Nowotny and Magnus Apspegren think that the tendency to be overly clear or "plakat" might be retreating. Magnus Apspegren thinks that theatres might now interest themselves in more written drama, both new and classical, based more on dramatic situations and interactions.

### **Off stage politics**

One way that one might not expect theatres to be politically active is in the off-stage realm. However, all theatres participate in opinion shaping outside of their stage work, most often related to cultural issues and in line with their mission. Both Unga Klara and Backa have as part of their mission to represent children and youth, and participate in cultural debates and forums with these perspectives.

*“(…) because we also have a child perspective on everything we do, and we are not children, we have been children, we have forgotten what it is like to be a child ... and children are the ones who have the least power in society, and we have a power advantage as artists and as adults (...)”*

*(Stefan Hansen, 2020)*

*“(…) that you work for children and young people, then it automatically becomes that you are interested in politics in a different way than if you do theatre for adults I think. Because we are interested in children's conditions, and then you think about school policy, education policy, how children are doing. Now that the climate issue is huge among children and young people, then it also becomes part of our field of interest and work. It's hard not to be out in the world when you work with children and young people.”*

*(Farnaz Arbabi, 2020)*

Potato Potato and Riksteatern have become voices for independent culture; Riksteatern because it is part of their mission to represent their member associations, and Potato Potato out of the necessity of enhancing local cultural infrastructure. Both are active through debate articles and meetings and more.

*“I wrote a text that was published in Teatertidningen last year, regarding cuts in Region Skåne, which I tried to write regarding not working to defend one's place as an artist. There I discussed demands of*



*developing the region, and how weird that is, and what kind of development. As if development in itself, or influence in itself, is always good.”*  
(Freja Hallberg, 2020)

Tribunalen is the theatre that works most actively towards politics outside of the cultural realm. They participate in activist events, street performances and protests and have performed at lectures and party meetings. They aim their protests at both corporate and political leaders.

*“(…) we as a theater can want a lot of things, but you don’t always reach out. You don’t always get everyone you want to come; for example we’ve invited companies, or politicians, but you can still work towards what you want. A conversation, or a debate, is what we usually try to get.”*  
(Hanna M-A, 2020)

## **Analysis**

The theatres in the sample are shown to have a varying attitude to being political and/or doing plays with political content. Most theatres in the sample work based on values that can be perceived as “political” (de Gay & Goodman, 2002) or ontological (Mouffe, 2005), of which three call it a manifesto. Of these three; Unga Klara’s and Riksteatern’s values can be placed on the GAL-side of the GAL-TAN scale, while Tribunalen adheres to a left-wing ideology (Hooghe et al, 2002). All theatres in the sample believe in theatre as a force for change but some are cautious about calling their work political or doing theatre with a specific motive, specifically in relation to young audiences. However, all theatres say they have produced very political plays at times, although most of them do this because the issue seems interesting or because a specific artist wishes to engage in a certain topic. Several of the theatres however voice a negative view of theatre that is overly political; meaning trying to serve answers and convincing the audience to adhere to any one specific opinion. Their attitude towards doing political theatre is commonly characterized by an openness and respect for the audiences’ differences. Their interest lies more in bringing up topics for common discussion and thought than coming to specific conclusions. The ways that these theatres use theatre politically, can be related to the practices of participation, public sphere, deliberation, dialogue or discursive practice (as exemplified in “Research review”). They are to a lesser degree linked to education, policy and legislation (as exemplified in “Research review”).

All theatres can be said to operate on the ontological level (Mouffe, 2005), as they display a strong interest and concern for different philosophical aspects of society, both as an organization and in their artistic work. Many discuss theatre as having inherently political dimensions, as well as affiliations to anti-capitalist and left-wing (Hooghe et al, 2002) culture. The theatres are also generally aware of power-asymmetries related to audience groups, issues of inequality and human rights, feminism, racism and so on; values that adhere to the GAL-side of the GAL-TAN scale (Hooghe et al, 2002). These values are among other things visible in the theatre’s general consciousness and/or practice of representation.

The only theatre that is persistently political both in its ideology and motive is Tribunalen, who works on the ontic level to a larger extent than the other theatres; that is with a mission to affect people’s opinions and to create change on the ontic (Mouffe, 2005), or political level (Simson & Weiner; in

Craven 1998), related to issues of government. They are the theatre in the sample that is most clearly engaged in what Scannell (2007) would call “politicizing art”, using art as a protest against political ideas they disagree with.

Being able to do and speak of their work as art, a *l’art pour l’art* (Aiello & Parry, 2015; Günes, 2012) attitude, is strongly present among the interviewees. The logic of the field made up of professional expectations (von Wright, 1991, in Kangas & Vestheim, 2010) can thus be said to contain varying degrees of similar ideological values, as well as a shared idea of art being important for its own sake.

The interviewees stories about trends of political content that they have noticed over the past few years, indicates that the theatre world like many others is subject to different motivations of the people working in the field, and current socio-political trends in society, which might be increased as artists comment on and are inspired by each other's work. The trends change with time, but as of the past years, all interviewees have noticed similar types of themes that could be perceived as political. As described earlier, many are more motivated by artistic quality than straight forward messages, which might be an explanation to a commonly shared criticism among the cases towards making overly clear political plays that serve answers to the audience. As they display quite a lot of content that could be perceived as political themselves, it seems to be a question of how one presents issues to the audience. All in all, there is a lot of evidence pointing towards political content from many theatres, however the intent behind these productions are given many different explanations. The way that expectations from the field, other professionals and shared ideologies interact to create an institutional logic as mentioned by von Wright (1991, in Kangas & Vestheim, 2010) which also takes in the needs and interests of the public (Kangas & Vestheim, 2010), seems to be at play in the theatre field, creating a complex interplay of societal and political issues meshed with artistic expectations and regards for the audience, that the theatres navigate.

### Part 3: The influence of the political context

#### **Financial situation**

All of the theatres in the sample receive what is in Swedish called “*verksamhetsstöd*”, a sort of organizational support received on a one to three year basis. This is a fairly stable form of financing compared to occasional project funds.

The theatres deemed nationally important enjoy a more stable financial situation, and then it changes gradually. The middle sized and stable stages can receive organizational support from higher cultural instances, while small independent groups have to work their way to a certain level of recognition before they can receive a stable form of financing. Thus the smaller theatres in the sample still rely to a higher degree on project funds from their cities and regions. The strongest example of financial insecurity in this sample is actually that of Riksteatern’s member associations who, as Magnus Aspegren describes it, receive very varying amounts of support locally. However they are merely arranging stages and not stage art producers, and thus can’t be compared to small independent theatres. This sample lacks examples of theatres that rely completely on occasional project funds, which means

we are here looking at the situation of theatres that can be counted as quite stable even in the independent theatre world (which Potato Potato and Tribunalen belong to).

### **Renommé = autonomy?**

A hint that the bigger theatres are more financially stable is seen in how and how often they have to apply for funding.

Unga Klara and Riksteatern don't apply for funds, but rather have to account for what they have done with the received funds, as well as argue for their eventual need for more money. Backa does the same thing but through Gothenburg City Theatre.

All interviewees in the sample perceive their relationship to their funding partners as stable. Magnus Aspegren at Riksteatern says that funds can go up and down, but the risk of any greater cuts feels unlikely. When it comes to the feeling of being politically governed, Unga Klara, Backa and Riskteatern feel that they share a general agreement with their financiers on what they are expected to do.

*"There is a great consensus (...) a commonality in our mission (...) So we feel that we have a great audience and a good dialogue and a good reputation."*

*(Magnus Aspegren, 2020)*

Both Unga Klara and Riksteatern have been able to give their opinion on their mission. Stefan Hansen at Unga Klara thinks this is due to a unique position in Swedish theatre.

*"It is probably a good description, that the expectation that politicians, and officials, reference groups that regulate money in different ways, that expectation of what Unga Klara is, isn't because politicians have educated us, but rather that Unga Klara has been successful in communicating its legitimacy, and its work."*

*(Stefan Hansen, 2020)*

Backa similarly feel their own success might be a reason they feel trusted by their financiers, however it could change.

*"It's also about the fact that we are a fairly successful theatre; we get very good reviews, we have many sold-out performances, a strong brand, like a stamp of quality, but you can't really rely on that, because you don't know what can happen."*

*(Lisa Nowony, 2020)*

Potato Potato feels more free today, and confirms that they have worked their way to a certain level of acknowledgment which gives them more freedom. Freja Hellberg says they have more audience than all the other independent groups in Malmö together, and have had for quite some time. However, they still put in a lot of work trying to influence local funding policy and cultural investment.

### **The unstable ground of project funding**

Being more free with more stable financing could imply that one is *less* free when the financing is more unstable, which project funds are, as they have to be applied for separately. All interviewees have experienced problems in relation to the more unpredictable project funds. They put in a lot of work and feel that there are more opinions and demands related to these applications.

The smaller theatres say that they need project funds to make ends meet and thus have to make several applications, which in turn means they rely on more than one financing authority. Potato Potato and Tribunalen apply once a year for their organizational support, but also to project funds. When they apply for organizational support, they have to provide a plan for the upcoming year.

*“(...) you send in and plan a year in advance. That is, 1.5 years in advance. In March, the planning for the entire next year's calendar year must be in place. So then you draw up all guidelines, both in terms of productions and operations. What we would do, if we get this organizational support.”*  
(Henrik Dahl, 2020)

For Potato Potato, applying for project funds means a lot of work, as they apply 15 to 20 times a year and have to explain their idea for each application. They only get 3 to 5 of the applications granted, and Freja Hallberg says it's hardly worth it economically, but is needed to prove endorsement.

Tribunalen has encountered some problems with their financiers lately. They have been told several times by Stockholm City that they should work more with businesses. That is specifically hard for an organization that calls itself anti-capitalist, Henrik Dahl says, and therefore it feels political.

*“For a while, it started to become like ‘you have to look for sponsors’, ‘find a symbiosis with companies’. They have cut back on that a bit now, but it seems it may be on its way back, with the current leadership in Stockholm (...) And you can say that it's economic, but it's political; the effect becomes political. If we are to be sponsored by a company then it's a political statement, in that. Except I don't know which companies would like to sponsor an anti-capitalist theatre. That would be suicide.”*  
(Henrik Dahl, 2020)

They also run the risk of losing their stage, as many buildings around them have been turned into private property. Hanna M-A explains how they are asked many things at once.

*“But now that we last had a meeting with the Cultural Administration about that we might lose our stage, because the tenant-owner association wants to increase the rent by 100%, we get the advice that we have to find our own stage, and we have to make sure that we collaborate with the business community, but they also think it would be great if we could collaborate with a little dance, and preferably people from the suburbs. Which then becomes like; I have no problem with that, but the purpose. That's what's weird, then it's about something else. I would love to work a lot in the suburbs, I shouldn't say I don't want to do it on their terms, but it gets a little weird with these application forms. We always think that we want to reach out and do different things, but now it's like ‘this is probably what you should do’, there is nothing else. So it's clear that it's a new political situation. It could get worse, I don't know.”*

*(Hanna M-A, 2020)*

On the local level, Riskteatern knows that member organizations sometimes struggle to get the funding they need, as well as to be taken seriously by local officials. Magnus Aspegren is critical of the fact that so much of the national budget for culture, about 70% according to him, goes to reproducing and preserving classic art forms. He thinks there is quite little space for new and provocative art.

### **The content of cultural policy**

When asked what they perceive the current cultural policy goals to be; most interviewees mention goals that apply to themselves, and these mostly go well with their missions. Goals that the interviewees mention are; promoting ideas of democracy, human rights, equality, as well as prioritizing youth, reaching new groups, creating infrastructure, working more with dance, and the criteria of artistic quality. The mentioned goals are in line with the goals of national and regional policy (see “The infrastructure of culture”). The theatres are generally happy with these goals. Stefan Åkesson, when asked, says that he thinks that when one agrees with one’s mission, as is the case for Backa, one might feel less influenced. Magnus Aspegren says something similar:

*“(...) I think that cultural policy should be involved; we should reach more young people, we should reach more people from other backgrounds, we should make sure that it reaches out, we should be everywhere in the country - that's politics. (...) That they say "our analysis is that there is too little dance in Sweden", and then we are commissioned (...) to invest more in it, I think that's okay.”*  
*(Magnus Aspegren, 2020)*

Freja Hallberg thinks a lot of cultural policy lifts working with innovation and new thoughts, which she both criticizes and thinks works well with Potato Potato’s artistic vision.

*“But one thing that is interesting is that there should always be such fucking development and innovation, new and fresh in every possible way. For our part, it generally fits very well because we think it's fun to try different things and new forms, but projects that we have that are very slow, where you dig deeper, they are generally much more difficult to get support for.”*  
*(Freja Hallberg, 2020)*

### **The arm’s length principle**

The theatres that feel financially stable and that experience agency over their expected mission, are also the ones that state that they feel like the arm’s length principle works.

Both Unga Klara, Backa and Riksteatern say that they feel like they have freedom of expression and experience no political influence or censorship regarding their repertoire. Stefan Åkesson for example says that their very free formulated mission at Backa feels very luxurious. All three theatres say they aren’t expected to “prove” anything to their financiers, except their work related to their mission; for example like producing qualitative stage arts and reaching their target audiences.

Henrik Dahl at Tribunalen feels that the arm’s length principle might be working better now than with the former minister for culture, Alice Bah Kunke from Miljöpartiet (The Environmental Party), who

he thinks was a bit more opinionated on content than the present minister from the same party, something that is recognized by Magnus Aspegren.

### **The shorter arm of regional policy**

Freja Hallberg explains that Potato Potato have created their own stage, against local politicians' opinions, to be able to have more freedom, and that they feel more free since they started getting formal support. However, they have experienced some local officials expressing "very personal opinions" on their art and feel there is a need to cultivate good relationships with them.

*"So the officials, it's not the politicians, because it's not them who go through applications, but it's these fucking officials who also make a lot of decisions. They present a proposal, and the politicians approve it. So in practice, it is they who make decisions, so I feel that you should kind of be friends with the officials, and those who kind of hug them when they meet, they have a greater chance of getting money because they have a personal relationship."*  
(Freja Hallberg, 2020)

Tribunalen has experienced some financiers not wanting to support them because of their political goals, and situations where the Stockholm region didn't want to support the diffusion of a play because of its political content.

*"(...) from time to time, I notice that I get reactions, like from the outside, depending on what the context is. Like about the organization itself 'oh well, we can't support it' or, there is like a view of it that I don't share, but the outside world can have opinions about it sometimes."*  
(Hanna M-A, 2020)

They have also noticed that the political climate in Stockholm has become more neoliberal, as society in general, and this has put more pressure on them.

*Henrik: "What I have experienced, the biggest backlash I think was in Stockholm a few years ago."  
Hanna: "That was when you also had to collaborate with the business community."  
Henrik: "Yeah, and go into some kind of stunt version of culture, it was supposed to be entertainment, period. No fixed structures, so it was completely insane for the type of business that we are. We live on being able to plan a year ahead at least. It was, I think, purely ideological, to ruin the chance to form some kind of political structure around theatres then. Conspiratorial but, they depoliticized the art."  
(Henrik Dahl & Hanna M-A, 2020)*

At Riksteatern they perceive less influence on the national level but hear from their member associations of instances where local politicians, both left and right, have voiced opinions on performances. Lisa Nowotny has heard of politicians, in this case the Sweden Democrats, who have had opinions on theatre's content in other parts of the (Västgöta) region. When discussing the difference between national and regional situations Magnus Aspegren says:

*"I think you are absolutely right that the smaller groups have much more to say about arm's length distance."*

*(Magnus Aspegren, 2020)*

### **Political influence?**

Lisa Nowotny at Backa thinks that there is a possibility that there are political incentives behind some of the trends in themes that have been present on Swedish stages. Magnus Aspegren explains how some elements in policy might change with government:

*"It was interesting when we were without a government, from September to January; then they removed everything that had to do with politics and cleared it. What was it then; well how equality work should permeate (the arts), and when you looked at it, it was very much the Environmental Party that had driven it (...) and there I can probably agree that there is a bit too much of party political (elements)."*

*(Magnus Aspegren, 2020)*

Magnus Aspegren says that parties do place importance on different things in policy, but that the things that relate to the Swedish constitution (such as freedom of expression) stay. In the situation he describes, things related to gender, identity and so on were removed, and these correspond to some of the themes that the interviewees have seen a lot in later years. Stefan Hansen has heard critique from some right-wing political parties saying that cultural goals hold political incentives, and he thinks the discussion in itself is a good one to have.

Most interviewees have experienced how content in fund applications can have an influence, either on themselves or others. Stefan Åkesson at Backa thinks that independent groups might feel more influenced, because of specific questions in project fund applications. Lisa Nowotny says that when one applies for project funds one tries to decode what is asked for. Freja Hallberg thinks that the "sprinkles" of seemingly political content she has observed, could be an effect of perceived expectations that people get from applications.

*"(...) if you are a 'good' person who wants to do the right thing, it is difficult not to be influenced by the political directives, because you can interpret them as such."*

*(Freja Hallberg, 2020)*

Freja Hallberg thinks that many people are able to see that the content of applications are not demands as such, but she believes that *if* artists base their art on expectations from policy, it will result in bad or "flat" art. She thinks financiers are open to new ideas and that it's possible to ignore demands and get money anyway, or formulate one's idea so that it fits.

Farnaz Arbabi at Unga Klara says it is known that project fund applications contain different categories, and she understands that some can interpret this as an attempt to influence content.

*"Before we had that kind of long-term regular support, we had to apply for different types of project money very often, and they are conditional, and that's like no secret to anyone."*

*(Farnaz Arbabi, 2020)*

She remembers feeling more influenced by these things when she had to apply for project money. Specifically smaller institutions might feel this way, she thinks, as institutions with larger repertoires can cover many topics in a year and don't have to choose.

Magnus Aspegren also thinks smaller or local institutions might feel more governed and like they have to adapt their ideas to fit application demands.

*"(...) there is perhaps more control at the regional and municipal level, with the small resources that are available. And if you're applying for money every year, then you have to adapt and think 'we have competition here so then we do this, to reach the money that's available'."*

*(Magnus Aspegren, 2020)*

Tribunalen are not sure that there are any consequences to demands in applications, but also think it could exert some pressure. They think it's good to create awareness around inclusiveness, but are a bit critical regarding such initiatives coming from "above".

*"(...) I think it's a question of wording because different types of representation and such are now included in the applications. Which some, I think, can be intimidated by a little, like 'oh now we have to fulfill the desire of every single group at the same time'. And I think it's because of how the questions are asked 'How have you benefited minorities' etcetera (...)"*

*(Henrik Dahl, 2020)*

Farnaz Arbabi thinks questions in applications are more aimed at creating inclusiveness than to influence content.

*"(...) there is also a somewhat skewed perception among certain artists that only this type of performance art is rewarded, which I don't agree with at all, because we still have the big institutions where not much is happening. In any case, at Dramaten and the City Theatre, there are not very many progressive performances on themes of diversity or the likes (...)"*

*(Farnaz Arbabi, 2020)*

Stefan Hansen at Unga Klara says that questions on inclusiveness are in the applications to make sure inclusive projects are represented. He has heard that some perceive applications as politically guided due to this, but maintains that for the Arts Council where he works, the artistic quality is what is most important.

*"If you interpret those questions as being the dominant questions, and you can easily do that because they take up so much space in the applications - but the first question in these forms is 'What is the artistic vision', and we as a reference group, that's what we're looking for."*

*(Stefan Hansen, 2020)*

Stefan Åkesson also thinks this is the case; that financiers do prioritize artistic quality.



*“(...) They have those questions because they collect statistics. It doesn’t affect the assessment to any great extent. But when you sit on the other end and read the form, you believe it must be included. It’s like a communication failure there, which I believe on one level is as simple as the layout of the form.”*  
(Stefan Åkesson, 2020)

### **Instrumental policy**

Some of the interviewees have noticed instrumental tendencies in expectations from policy. Stefan Åkesson at Backa says they don’t feel any instrumental policy pressures, but they stand their ground on not wanting to be used as a pedagogical “band-aid” on schools. He thinks that some politicians could very well get that idea. Lisa Nowotny says there are such tendencies in society in general; like bonuses for theatres with large audiences, educational goals, and measuring results. Hanna M-A also points out examples of policy imported from Great Britain; the concept “creative schools” being one, which asks artists to do pedagogical work.

Potato Potato and Tribunalen have both felt the need to argue for the existence or “need” for theatre. At Tribunalen they have been asked to work for several different groups, which they aren’t against, but feel that they aren’t supported enough by their funding partners.

*“Of course you somehow want to benefit society, there is nothing wrong with that, I would like to have five different satellite scenes out in different places and so on, but also what is the economy in it, that we should fix all these things? It’s a bit where it starts for us, why we talk to them, how we should manage to survive even.”*  
(Hanna M-A, 2020)

Hanna M-A adds that she thinks art should be allowed to be just art, something the theatres in this sample stand behind, as explained in their view of l’art pour l’art.

### **Political changes a constant risk**

A main worry for all interviewees is a change in government, specifically the possible rise of nationalist/populist forces. Lisa Nowotny says that risk analyses at Backa always include a change in government, as it might entail changes in policy and budgets. Stefan Åkesson says that many people in the theatre field are worried about the Sweden Democrats and their attitude to culture.

*“(...) the Sweden Democrats have an incredibly much more aggressive cultural policy, in wanting to control and direct the content. They are quite open about that.”*  
(Stefan Åkesson, 2020)

Stefan Hansen says he expects the Sweden Democrats to rule at some point, and adds that it should be a worry to all liberal-minded groups in society that illiberal forces could set the agenda. For Unga Klara, the rise of the Sweden Democrats could be a threat to their existence.

*“We are a pronounced feminist and anti-racist theatre and are clearly engaged in norm criticism (...). And what do we do the day the Sweden Democrats, for example, or the Christian Democrats for that matter, control cultural policy. How would that affect our support, or our whole existence.”*

*(Farnaz Arbabi, 2020)*

Riksteatern thinks it would be problematic if the Sweden Democrats were in government, as they want to influence culture, and the government shapes Riksteatern's (and Unga Klara's) mission. Magnus Aspegren already sees a tendency that some people think that Riksteatern is "too left-wing". He does not think the Sweden Democrats would be able to realize some of their ideas because they go against the constitutional freedom of expression. However, if they remain in power for a longer period, he thinks there is a risk of them being able to make more lasting changes. Therefore Riksteatern have launched a debate together with other cultural institutions, demanding legal protection for culture against political tampering.

Even a conservative right-wing government could be a threat to culture, according to several interviewees. Commonly mentioned threats related to recent changes in cultural policy are budget cuts, changes in expectations from funding partners and changes in cultural infrastructure that make it harder to reach for example school audiences. For Tribunalen, the neo-liberal tendencies in Stockholm leading to privatizations is a big worry.

*"It's a big threat, if we have nowhere to play, SD is not a threat."*

*(Henrik Dahl, 2020)*

## **Analysis**

It seems that the stronger a theatre's imprint is on national or local culture, which as we have seen can be in the attraction of big audiences or in a long history of shaping the field; the more likely they are to be able to get stable financing and also possibly to take part in the shaping of the expectations put on them. The theatres in the sample that enjoy this situation report a good functioning of the arm's length principle (Lindqvist, 2007). Especially theatres that receive their funding more directly from the government feel like the arm's length is working. There are several possible explanations to this; one being that when cultural policy fits the mission or vision of the theatre, it is possible they feel less guided or influenced, even when there are some political elements in the policy. As the current policy goals are not in opposition to the theatres' general values of inclusion, equality, human rights and such, they might not be perceived as political. It is also shown in the findings that the arm's length might be working better on the national level than on certain regional or municipal levels. This could explain why theatres that receive funding from national public sources feel less influenced by their funding partners.

The independent groups (Potato Potato, Tribunalen and Riksteatern's member associations) have experienced more opinions from local officials. For example, Tribunalen say they feel less supported by Stockholm City and region than by the Arts Council. A certain difference in how well the arm's length principle is applied on the national and regional levels, is in line with Günes' (2012) and Hugosson's (2008, in Beckman & Månsson) idea that regional government might be prioritizing other goals than on the national level.

According to Johannisson (2010, in Günes, 2012), cultural policy on the municipal and regional levels is more integrated with other political goals, where more instrumentalist goals like regional

development are prioritized over the arm's length principle. There are indeed indications that instrumental expectations are present in the relationship to some local funding partners, most prominently in Tribunalen's experiences with Stockholm City. Expectations that some interviewees mention; of defending the "need" for one's art, of measuring audience numbers and of greater pressure to cooperate with other instances in society, be it schools, businesses or to contribute to social inclusion, are all examples of instrumentalist policy as described by Belfiore (2004). Hanna M-A relates some changes in cultural policy expectations to developments in Britain, where Belfiore's (2004) observations are made. Belfiore (2004, in Günes, 2012) relates the evolution of instrumentalist policy to neo-liberalism, which corresponds to the tendencies of neo-liberalism paired with privatizations and business cooperation that Tribunalen have observed in Stockholm.

The findings support Günes' (2012) argument that there is a dichotomy in Swedish cultural policy between the idea of art for art's sake and a more instrumentalist approach that uses art for creating positive impacts on society. While the artist collective and the national policy seem to be in agreement of a l'art pour l'art attitude (Johannisson 2010, in Günes, 2012), interviewees that deal with regional policy have experienced focus on things like social inclusion and regional development. Therefore there is also support for Hugosson's (2008, in Beckman & Månsson) argument that the government is simultaneously trying to follow traditional cultural principles and achieving regional development. That there can be tensions between public administration and arts organizations (Statens kulturråd, 2000; in Lindqvist, 2007) is in part true, but seems more of a problem on the regional level at this time.

Hillman-Chartrand and McCaughey (1989, in Kangas & Vestheim, 2010) place the Nordic countries in the "architect type" model of cultural policy, which entails that the government has a more direct role in shaping the cultural environment, by being more interventionist and connecting national cultural policy to issues of social welfare. These findings give some support to that idea, as there is evidence pointing to public authorities *sometimes* being interventionist, and more so on the local level. Both on the national level and regional level, there are some connections found between cultural policy and issues of social welfare, such as equality and inclusion. As some interviewees see it, these goals can however also be connected to broader Swedish laws and constitution. If the "architect type" model is used, Hillman-Chartrand and McCaughey (1989, in Kangas & Vestheim, 2010) write that it has been criticized for encouraging artists to conform to what the state promotes instead of being independently creative. This *is* mentioned by several interviewees, as a risk that they fear can apply to some practitioners and thus impact certain choices of themes in plays and so on. However, several interviewees see it as something that is not connected to any consequences or sanctions and can thus be seen mostly as a risk.

Regarding content, all theatres feel like the arm's length principle is generally working. They express that they have freedom of expression and don't need to adapt their content. Therefore there is no evidence of direct influence from political decision makers on the theatres' content. However, there are more problems surrounding the occasional project funds. As well as a greater amount of work and sometimes political relationship-building around project applications, all of the interviewees think there is more content of a political and instrumental nature in project fund applications. Most of them think that the way questions are asked about for example inclusiveness, might influence artists. As

Magnus Aspegren observed, these types of ideas correspond to policy elements seen to originate from the Environmental Party. Some interviewees also expressed former minister of culture of that party to be more interested in influencing content. These are merely speculations but show there is the possibility of political influence by governing parties to make its way into cultural policy.

Another indication that this might be the case is the great worry among theatre practitioners about what would happen should a more liberal or nationalist/populist government be in power. The interviewees express concern over changes in budgets, mission statements, policy and increased influence over content. Several have taken steps to protect their organizations or the field against political tampering, which points towards there being an awareness of the possible real impacts of politics on the cultural field. The perceptions of the interviewees on how the Sweden Democrats are interested in influencing or even controlling culture, is in line both with concerns expressed in the introduction of this thesis, and with Benjamin and Scanells's (2007) writings about how fascism has previously used aesthetics for political purposes.

Vestheim (2007, in Kangas & Vestheim, 2010) means that cultural institutions work in an "overlap zone" between culture, politics, and money. The findings in this study show that there is indeed an "overlap zone", made up of: the cultural expectations of the field that share a *l'art pour l'art* attitude, of political decision making on cultural and financial policy that balance a dichotomy between *l'art pour l'art* and instrumentalism, as well as large regards for the expectations of a varied set of audience groups. The theatres work in a sensitive field where most (in this sample) enjoy fairly stable economic situations, paired with freedom of expression and cultural policy that is most often not in opposition to their values, *but* where the worry that it might change in the future is ever-present.

## Discussion

This thesis' aim is to investigate whether and how contemporary Swedish theatres use theatre for political purposes, and to investigate whether and how the theatres are influenced by politico-cultural conditions of financing and policy.

The interviews gave a lot of material that help paint a broad picture of the mechanisms behind political theatre in Sweden. The question of whether political theatre is used in Sweden can be answered quickly - yes, or in a more complex way. The biggest challenge in this study has been to find a general idea on what is meant by political theatre, as all respondents have their own interpretations. Some are more willing to call their work political than others, and this probably has to do with the differences in interpretations of the term "political". Most theatres are clear on wanting to stand free from party politics, because they value their freedom of expression and the *l'art pour l'art* principle, but also out of concern for the diversity of their audience. It is clear however, that the theatres in the sample do use theatre for political purposes on the ontological level; that is to discuss issues of existential, societal and political importance. The theatres use their space for what from the perspective of theatre studies can be called participatory purposes, and from the perspective of political science or political communication; deliberative and democratic purposes. As such, the theatres can be seen as democratic meeting spaces, where theatre is used as an interactive medium, communicated by the theatres and

influenced by the audience. The theatres in the sample put a strong emphasis on the participation of their audiences, and are mainly interested in using their space to discuss, problematize and inspire audiences, by investigating complex issues without giving clear answers. All theatres have a strong interest for society and democracy and wish to contribute to change, but generally oppose the idea of pushing opinions or convincing the audience towards specific political alignments. However, all theatres have ideologies or values that they base their work on, and those with pronounced ideological values tend to attract audiences that agree with them. That increases the risk of “preaching to the choir”, something the theatres try to work around by offering complexity around issues that they handle on stage, as well as trying to reach new audience groups.

Some theatres work on the ontic level as well; by communicating their values more strongly and trying to reach outside of the cultural realm with their problematizations. All theatres work on the ontic level to different extents through opinion-shaping; mostly on issues related to their missions or to issues within the theatre or cultural field. However, some work more deliberately towards affecting politics, trying to instigate change on the ontic level, either through their work in general, or related to specific plays.

The findings of this study support the idea that theatre can be seen as a political medium, but that it is also a field of converging political interests and fights for power. As a medium theatre is shaped by the cultural expectations of its field, made up by shared values of practitioners, and of concern for the audience. The political content depends on the artist behind the work, and is possible due to an open climate on art’s content. As several interviewees claim that the field tends to be more left-wing or alternative leaning; this is one thing that taints the choices of issues to problematize. Some on stage trends correspond to issues given attention in cultural policy, which points towards the possibility that cultural policy could influence the choices of some artists.

There is evidence that political governance of the cultural field does have an impact on theatres, predominantly through funding. This seems to affect smaller theatres with less stable funding more, in the sense that they might feel more subject to changes in governance but also less safe because funding can’t be guaranteed. Project applications are discussed as problematic in this aspect, as all interviewees have experienced or heard about other’s experience of politically colored content in applications. This content might not affect the field to a large extent, and is not perceived by the interviewees as demands, but at least poses a risk of misinterpretation between funding authorities and applicants. This means that there is a way through which political government can influence theatre through incentives in policy.

The principle of the arm’s length is clearly stated in cultural policy and is cherished by the theatres, and it seems to be working well in the relations with national funding authorities, and perhaps less well with municipal or regional authorities. The theatres that are subject to local politicians’ decisions face a more wobbly and insecure situation, as they describe more opinionated officials, and changes to budgets and policy demands with the coming and going of local political decision-makers.

Many theatre practitioners see the theatre field as more left-wing leaning, and generally report the current cultural policy to be more or less in line with their values. Therefore it is not surprising that the

worries regarding the future are linked by most interviewees to right-wing, conservative or nationalist-populist opposition's view of culture; both its content and its value. All interviewees are concerned with what would happen to their field if especially nationalist and populist forces would gain more power over culture. The Sweden Democrats are generally seen as a threat because of their outspoken interest in influencing cultural content, which is in line with worries expressed by news channels and writers presented in the introduction of this thesis.

I argue that the presence of these worrisome factors is proof that there has been, and might be, political governing of the cultural sphere. The interviewees with their long experience in the field all share a feeling of operating in a field dealing with a lot of insecurity. As Riksteatern and others have proposed, does the cultural field need to be strengthened to protect freedom of cultural expression from political interference in the future?

Whether one agrees with the values and ideologies held by practitioners in this sample, the theatre field shows it is capable of producing political content, while retaining a strong common respect and interest for complexity and the opinions and experiences of the audience. As such it is a good place for democratic discussions and experimentation with new ideas, much like what has been argued by reviewed research on the potential of political theatre.

As a field, theatre is affected by political influences and negotiations of power. With a growing neoliberal and also nationalist influence in large parts of Western society, there is a strong worry regarding politicians with interest in using culture for wholly opposite functions than those often shared values of *l'art pour l'art* and democracy held by practitioners. This is an argument for theatre as a democratic force needing to be protected from undemocratic forces by those who think society should have a space to gather to think and feel collectively about existential and political issues. I argue that theatre is a valuable but vulnerable democratic space and medium. As such it deserves to be protected. It also deserves more interest by political communication scholars, among many others.

This study aims at painting an emergent picture of the mechanisms behind political theatre in Sweden. The conclusion is that theatre is a medium used for a diversity of political purposes, but with an openness that makes it incomparable to more direct political media. It is first and foremost an art form, that can be seen as a political medium when it is used to communicate political ideas or used for political practices, as for example a democratic arena or discursive space. It is also a politically governed medium, which makes it sensitive to influence from political decision-makers, with the *arm's length* principle needing to be continuously enforced to keep the art free from political tampering. As this study is based on a small sample, large generalizations can not be made. However, the combination of experiences of informed professionals from the field, as well as current policy and interdisciplinary theory, offers an emergent picture of a medium and its supporting mechanisms that should be of interest to the field of political communication.

## Suggestions for further research

This emergent picture of theatre as a political medium and politically governed field can be added as a new research topic to the field of political communication. One aspect this could be used for, is towards creating a media logic of theatre and other art forms possibly used for political communication.

It seems from the results of this study that there is a divide regarding sensitivity on political climate and funding, between larger national institutions and smaller and/or local theatres. Smaller and/or local theatres seem to be more sensitive in general, as well as risk being affected by their local decision makers to a larger extent. Therefore, research including several smaller theatre organizations as well as more cases from Swedish small-towns and countryside are needed to confirm or disrupt the picture of the Swedish theatre field shown in this thesis.

Patterns related to cultural policy and financing proved much easier to find and confirm, as there is more pre-existing theory on these issues. Patterns related to the theatres' political attitudes and motivations related to their audience were found in the study, however research using other sources than the theatres themselves need to be used in further research to see whether the theatres' statements are seen in a similar way by other instances. There is a lack of theory on this issue, which made the analysis of this part of the study less multi-faceted and the results harder to "prove". There are lots of things to be said still about the intent behind theatres that aren't covered in this sample.

The study of effects of political theatre proved very hard to find in previous research, as well as in this study as it would require other methods such as experiments. Therefore an effects study of theatre would be an interesting topic for future research.

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1: Interview guide

### INTERVJUFRÅGOR

#### Del 1. BAKGRUND

Kan du börja med att berätta om dig själv och din nuvarande yrkesroll?  
Beskriv er organisation (aktiva år, storlek, organisationstyp, inriktning, ev. uppdrag, spelplatser)

Följdfrågor:

Någon övrigt kompetens jag bör känna till?

#### Del 2. TEMA: Teaterns politiska roll

##### 1. Hur ser ni på teaterns roll i samhället?

Följdfrågor:

Har ni en samsyn kring detta på teatern? Hur vet ni det?

Har ni som organisation någon särskild roll att fylla (t.ex. pga ett uppdrag)?

Vad gör teater speciellt som medium?

##### 2. Hur ser ni på att använda teater politiskt?

Följdfrågor:

Bör teater syssla med politik? Varför/varför inte? Hur/hur bör den inte göra?

Era pjäser har många ggr haft politiska/samhällstillvända teman. Håller ni med? Varför har de det?

Upplever ni att det finns politiska strömningar i dagens teater-Sverige?  
Om ja, vilka? (T.ex. i teman, problem som lyfts).

##### 3. Arbetar ni som teaterorganisation politiskt på något sätt?

Följdfrågor:

Är det isf främst genom tex innehåll, repertoar, representation i ensemble/övrig personal, metoder, syn på publik.

Vad är ert största politiska fokus? (T.ex. lyfta ämnen, ändra branschen, påverka publik, få ny publik, annat?)

Har ni någon uttalad politisk ideologi/åskådning/manifest som organisation?

Påverkar er syn era pjäsval? Hur?

Hur ser ni på opinionsbildning som organisation? Är det något ni gör/vill göra?

Inom vilka frågor? Gentemot vem/vilka?

Vad hoppas ni uppnå med det?

### Del 3. TEMA: Publik/mottagare

#### 1. Vad hoppas ni uppnå i mötet med publik?

Följdfrågor:

Vad kan teater göra med en publik? (Påverka, förändra, förstärka, annat?)

Har ni några förhoppningar om att påverka dem politiskt/åsiktsmässigt?

Enligt dig/er, finns det någon fördel med att använda teater för att få ut ett budskap jämfört med andra medier/konstformer?

Finns det någon nackdel?

#### 2. Vilken publik brukar ni vanligtvis möta?

Följdfrågor:

Demografi? Klass? Kön?

Upplever ni att er publik delar era värderingar?

Är det främst en teater-van publik?

#### 3. Vad finns det för fördelar/nackdelar med att ni har den typen av publik?

Följdfrågor:



Hur tror ni det påverkar hur era pjäser/arbete tas emot?

Har ni känt av någon preaching to the choir-effekt?

Om ja, hur? Är det något ni tycker är ett problem?

#### Del 4. TEMA: Finansiering

Bakgrund: Beskriv vilka som är era främsta finansiärer och hur ansökan går till (hur ofta ni söker, vilka bidrag ni får, vad ni behöver ange vid sökning/redovisning). Vilka dokument från dessa finansiärer innehåller de direktiv ni främst behöver följa?

#### 1. Upplever ni att de direktiv ni får från finansiärer/uppdragsgivare är politiska på något sätt?

Följdfrågor:

Hur förhåller ni er till det? Tex i ansökningar.

Vad upplever ni att era största finansiärer är mest intresserade av? Tex lönsamhet, kreativitet, publikantal, nåt annat?

Upplever ni att ni och finansiärer generellt har samsyn? Om inte, var går ni isär? Hur påverkar det arbetet?

#### 2. Har ni någon gång upplevt att ni behövt anpassa er på något sätt till policy?

Följdfrågor:

På vilket sätt har ni anpassat er (ansökan, verksamhet, repertoar, annat?)

Hur påverkar de mål som uttrycks i finansiärers policy er verksamhet?  
(Påverkar det t.ex. Innehåll, val ni gör, val ni inte gör, osv?)

Känner ni att det finns uppmaningar eller begränsningar till vad ni ska visa eller hur?

Upplever ni att det finns förväntningar på att ni ska bidra på något särskilt sätt? T.ex. till samhällsnytta, innovation, jämställdhet, konstnärlig kvalitet)?

Finns det andra sätt än policy o budget som påverkar verksamheten från politiskt håll?

Behöver ni "bevisa" något för att fortsätta få stöd?

#### 3. Hur anser ni att kulturpolitik i Sverige idag är utformad, och hur påverkar det teaterbranschen?

Följdfrågor:

Är det armlängds avstånd, instrumentellt, konst för konstens skull/annan attityd som dominerar?

Är det skillnad mellan era finansiärer, t.ex. Nationella och regionala instanser?

Har ni märkt några förändringar i de mål som uttrycks i policy de senaste åren?

Hur tror ni att ni skulle bli påverkade om regeringspartier skiftar? Har ni varit med om det förr?

Finns det något ni oroar er för/tycker är problematiskt med hur kulturpolitik genomförs gentemot er idag/i framtiden?

Något annat ni vill tillägga?

## Appendix 2: Field notes

### FIELD NOTES ON INTERVIEWS

Field notes 1:

Do theatres hold a wish to shape opinion?

To some extent, but more often not. The ones that did are because they have an openly political approach, or together with the theme of a current play on a specific theme they wish to raise awareness or knowledge of. However, some are involved in discussions about financing.

Do they wish to affect the audience?

Yes, but rather in raising questions, creating new thoughts and feelings and sharing an experience and ideas they might entail. Rarely with a wish to change people's political opinions, unless again being openly political as a theatre. Several theatres noted that they are supposed to be neutral, in part due to their given mission, and/or because they play for children and youth.

Are they affected by politics as an organization?

Varies a lot, it seems smaller theatres are more vulnerable to changing political landscapes and/or relations to politicians as they have to apply for money more often. The larger theatres seem to feel less governed, even though they receive money from the state or even has a mission from the state. This we discussed might mean that their mission and the political ideas are not in opposition. Most theatres did have concerns this could change with another political climate, such as one where Sverigedemokraterna are in majority, because as one

interviewee said “they are very clear about their ambition to control culture and content more”.

Field notes 2:

Several confirmed my question about if smaller theatres feel more affected by politics (municipal and regional in this case) because they apply for grants more often. Riksteatern said that they often hear this from the member organizations.

Riksteatern has been able to be quite political, much in the way f.i. Unga Klara is, Magnus Aspegren even compared, even though one UK person claims they are not political, while one claims they have formulated political ground values. Conclusion: it depends on how the respondent interprets “political”.

Several confirmed a focus on Swedish theatre stages in later years on so called identity politics, and more overly political content than the years before (not like in the 70's but a bit), but some believe this phase will soon end (cause people are tired of it?). Someone said there are obvious trends in theatre like in everything. Many seem more interested in art for art's sake and those (?) might be the same that do not want to say they are political, while some seem more keen on saying they are political. Is this a personal stand or an organizational one? Most seem to feel they are (so far/at the moment) free to play what they want.

Several confirm some political effects on the organization, especially on funding, and this is also a prevalent worry for the future. Worries for the future include a switch in government as it would give different perspectives on governance, funding and possibly on the content of culture. If so many practitioners are worried about the same things linked to political governance - is this a hint that there *is* a political governance effect on theatres already?

Field notes 3 - initial conclusions:

The political content depends on the artist behind the work, and is possible due to an open climate on art's content. Trends come and go within the field, and several see a political trend now coming to an eventual “turn”.

The political governance of theatres does have an effect on theatres, predominantly through funding, which seems to affect smaller theatres with less stable funding more, in the sense that they might feel more subject to changes in governance but also less safe because funding can't be guaranteed.

The arm's length principle seems to be working well in the relations with state funding organizations, and perhaps less well with municipal or regional organizations, depending on what different political parties rule, as they might have different levels of wanting to interfere, have opinions or cut funding. Also different theatres meet different problems related to their size, city, targeted audience, organization, main funding, etc.

## Appendix 3: Code book 1

See separate .pdf

## Appendix 4: Code book 2

### SECONDARY CYCLE CODING: Themes

THEMES	Unga Klara	Backa Teater	Potato Potato	Teater Tribunalen	Riksteatern
<b>BACKGROUND INFO</b>					
Interviewees (7)	CEO & Creative director (FA: Farnaz Arbabi)  (2)	Dramaturgist & head producer (LN: Lisa Nowotny)  (2)	Founder + 1 of 5 creative leaders  (1)	Creative leader & Executive producer  (2)	CEO  (1)
Organization	Institution based on free group	Institution based on free group	Independent group	Independent group + a Political Stage Art school	Institution based on "folkrörelse" with member assoc. all-over Sweden
Type	Youth theatre, national stage	Youth theatre, of Gothenburg City theatre	Stage arts group	Socialist theatre	Touring & arranging stage arts, national stage
Main office & stage	Stockholm	Gothenburg	Malmö (+ office Stockholm)	Stockholm	Stockholm (+ member organizations nationally)
History	Started 1975	Started 1978	Started 2008	Started 1995	Started 1933
Size (employees/year)	Middle: 5 full time + 25 contracts	Middle: 20 full time + 20 contracts	Small: 5 full time + 0-15 contracts	Small: 5 (not full time) + 20-40	Big: 100-180 full time + 100 contracts/season)

				contracts + teachers	(compared in size to Dramaten, and half of Operan)
Financing (other than ticket & show sales)	Swedish Department of Cultural Affairs (national stage) "verksamhetsstöd"  + facilities (Stockholm city theatre) + kommun/ landsting	Part of Gothenburg city theatre AB, owned by Gbg city  +46-48% from Gbg region  Maybe Kulturrådet? (via Stadsteatern)	Swedish Ministry of Culture "verksamhetsstöd"  + (project funds) Malmö city Skåne region Sthlm city Sthlm region	Swedish Ministry of Culture + Sthlm City "verksamhetsstöd"  (sometimes) Sthlm region	Swedish Department of Cultural Affairs (national stage) "verksamhetsstöd"  + municipal support of member orgs. + regional support of regional member orgs.
<b>ON THEATRE</b>					
Theatre's uniqueness	Combination of many art forms  Impermanent  FA: Dream, fiction, magical, a place to create utopia  Happens now, in relation to audience, changes w participants  Can't fast-forward or stop as screens	A space where people come together to experience art together during limited time  A ritual, where one experiences emotions together, get mirrored by stage & other audience  Limited in time & space, unlike tv/streaming, makes it a social arena  LN: Investigating	Magical art form, both as work & for audience  Potential of making interesting art  Theatres driven much like companies, but are a counter-force to capitalism in its existence  Theatres = alternative to profit-driven organizations	Very slow medium because of processes  Can have powerful impact on people in short time if right place/time  Can be drastic, claim almost anything as "it's just theatre"	Too slow/behind reality; other mediums better to comment reality

		<p>online live versions now, what is theatre if not live?</p> <p>Theatre is a constant interplay between stage &amp; audience</p>	<p>Theatre is so emotional, makes bad theatre more painful</p>		
<p>Theatre's role in society</p>	<p>Art form rather than political medium</p> <p>Open up new worlds, show utopia</p> <p>FA: Create utopia - a way to show what's missing</p> <p>Open up doors, create new life</p>	<p>Artistic &amp; social arena</p> <p>To explore dilemmas, think, feel around what you're unsure about</p> <p>To share dilemmas, so one is not alone w it</p> <p>Is good when people disagree, can lead to discussions</p> <p>LN: Lift existential issues, discuss society, problematize</p>	<p>Has strong impact, helps understand different perspectives, to think new thoughts</p> <p>Has also been used for propaganda historically</p> <p><i>Large</i> role: Theatre has more audience than all sports combined (not counting amateur theatre) (according to Cecilia Djurberg)</p> <p>(Idea exists within theatre that few are interested)</p> <p>Stories of how theatre has led to life-changing insight are common</p> <p>Has the</p>	<p>Art is a tool to discuss difficult issues</p> <p>To inspire, motivate</p>	<p>Dramatic, poetic</p> <p>Art can be used to be open &amp; problematize, bring up issues, ask questions. Best when not serving answers</p> <p>Stage arts is a way to educate oneself &amp; help define one's opinions</p> <p>Their role: Comment &amp; reflect on society</p> <p>Be seen as an important voice</p> <p>Be close to the audience, reach out on important issues, be wise, create discussion</p> <p>Understand society, meet, have something to do &amp; talk about</p>

			potential to handle all difficult questions		
<b>POLITICAL VIEWS</b>					
Ideology/ manifesto	Politically independent. Norm creative, anti-racist, feminist view.	No, because too limiting. Not political but value-based  Agree (but everyone makes their own interpretation); not to do pedagogical work, right vs . wrong.  Very careful on political opinions, but have responsibility to represent children's rights	No. "Not doing politics" (because have been accused of it by local politicians)  <i>Not</i> feminist group (perceived because they are 5 women)	Socialist, anti-capitalist, left-wing	Roots in socialist era, seen as left-wing. Today more of a liberal/libertarian movement  Equality, human rights, equal access to art, accessibility  People's movement/member association = many members also engaged in political issues f.e. human rights, migrants, environment
Attitude to political theatre	Artistic quality before politics  The theatre does <i>not</i> push political opinions, but creatives are free to do so  Can be <i>perceived</i> as political, both by those agreeing & disagreeing  "Our mission is not to send	Artistic quality before politics  When you deal w right & wrong = politics/journalism Backa is not political, as it is a municipal-owned institution + their audience is forced to go (through school)  Plakat = bad theatre  Theatre is a bad	Artistic quality before politics  Want to be allowed to just do art  Has to be neutral/not allowed to be party-political  <i>Do</i> work w political issues - commenting society, engaging, discussing unclear issues	Politics through art  Started as political theatre, when political theatre was seen as outdated. Then political was in again, so next step = becoming socialist theatre  Aim to end up on the political	Artistic quality & political topics  "Art is political all the time"  Have been criticized when themes have corresponded to political parties' agendas (not on purpose)  Non-political <i>events</i> , can become political due to artists that participate

	<p>values”</p> <p>Give children power through art &amp; culture</p> <p>FA: All theatre, even classics, is political; seen in relation to society</p> <p>Agitational theatre = “flat”</p> <p>Against the term “identity politics” - is a social problem &amp; real life stories not just politics <b>Använd</b></p> <p>Personally a bit tired of talking politics, expected to be political, wishes to make art</p>	<p>choice of medium if one wants to do politics; takes resources, reaches few. Other mass media like tv/radio better suited for opinion shaping</p> <p>Nothing wrong w political theatre, some groups are fueled by politics</p> <p>Theatre can be used to enhance culture/identity within a movement f.e. the worker’s movement in the past</p> <p>Have made very political plays, is every artist’s choice, but the artistic quality is what matters</p> <p>Small repertoire = opt out on what is too “plakat” (straight forward)</p> <p>LN: Thinks that all decisions involve politics</p> <p>Not into educative theatre (70’s) or plakat-theatre (2010’s) like identity political</p>	<p>The act of doing/seeing theatre is political in <i>itself</i>, “not productive”</p>	<p>pages not cultural pages, reach further</p>	<p>Quite political</p> <p>Very careful not to push opinions when young audience</p>
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		<p>f.e., where the idea matters more than the artistic quality</p> <p>LN: Agree on not doing politics, but choice of voices/bodies/stories entails politics</p>			
Perceived political theatre trends	<p>Artists comment each other's work = trends. They change.</p> <p>FA: Most people involved in theatre are left-wing; affects themes</p> <p>Theatre has socialist/popular tradition, no right wing theatre tradition</p> <p>Often; rights, racism, feminism, gender roles. Could be liberal but perceived as left-wing</p> <p>Trans/non-binary/queer = popular themes for a while due to lack.</p> <p>Now no</p>	<p>Absolutely. Comes in part from most theatre people being left-wing/GAL/ "friheltig vänsterhållning"</p> <p>LN: 2010's; educational/plakat, very clear goals, answers instead of questions, idea over artistic concept. Looks like it's going away now</p> <p>Themes: identity politics, feminism, have made those too.</p>	<p>No. Often "sprinkled" on plays to make it seem (rather than being) socially/ existentially "urgent"</p> <p>Example: Play about female vote, really a Netflix type love-story</p>	<p>For many years; identity political themes of oppression/inclusion, revolution, etc</p>	<p>Lost the dramatic/poetic, too "plakat" sometimes</p> <p>Criticism of populism/nationalism, describing history/future, mental health, loneliness. Dystopian versions of classics f.e. related to environment/nationalism</p> <p>Very straightforward, documentary, focus on content not interaction</p> <p>Might switch towards more written drama, classics, new material, w situations/interaction</p>

	trends/trying to be more apolitical.				
Conscious use of representation	Yes, as an artistic & societal choice. To “mirror” the audience & ensemble.	<p>Yes, is demanded by board &amp; policy.</p> <p>Also as artistic choice when it comes to ensemble because:</p> <p>Very diverse audience; able to identify w ensemble</p> <p>Devising based on actors’ experiences; diversity = enriches stories</p> <p>LN: Also in documentary material, but w/o “trying to check all the boxes to be PC”</p> <p>The polyphonic = more interesting</p> <p>Important for audience to recognize themselves &amp; to problematize norms</p> <p>Also in hiring, analyzing what is missing</p>	?	Yes, mainly on stage	<p>Yes, equality work throughout the organization</p> <p>Best results on stage; ensemble, types of stories &amp; international plays</p> <p>Is a discussion, f.e. a play about a minority w/o involving them would be criticized today</p>
Participation in	Yes,	Not really,	Yes,	Yes,	Yes,

opinion shaping	<p>on children's rights, perspectives</p> <p>FA: Comes naturally when working w youth, hear their issues</p> <p>Often active in cultural debate, forums</p> <p>FA: 3 bosses = can be more active than some</p> <p>To participate in creating norm creative, anti-racist, feminist society.</p>	<p>except on children's rights, perspectives</p> <p>Yes, related to some productions, based on artists' engagement</p> <p>LN: No, but to give arguments &amp; knowledge to teachers to see more stage art/analyze it</p>	<p>on cancelled culture funds + taking part in forums &amp; development groups on culture</p> <p>Get politicians to invest long-term in local culture</p> <p>Takes time, started saying no. Different groups ask for opinions on funds/corona, etc.</p> <p>Should not be their job to argue for their existence</p>	<p>participate in activism, street performances, protests, party meetings, lectures</p> <p>Through plays</p> <p>Socialist values, against neoliberalism</p>	<p>debate articles, letters, campaigns, meetings to strengthen members orgs. &amp; make them heard (part of mission)</p> <p>Debate on legally strengthening culture, to <i>protect it from influence by political parties</i>. Many other institutions took part, many parties were positive</p>
Opinion shaping directed at	Society		Local politicians	People in power (politics & business)	Politicians, nationally & locally
<b>ARTISTIC VIEWS</b>					
Artistic views/aim	Innovation, challenging norms, discussion, critical	<p>To play &amp; investigate theatre of high artistic quality for youth</p> <p>Theatre should work with dilemmas; where you don't know the answers</p> <p>Value the artistic quality of each project, no</p>	<p>Innovation, owning own expression.</p> <p>The idea is starting point, but process important to result</p> <p>Always original premieres; so related to context</p>	Political change through theatre (minor)	<p>Support diffusion of quality stage arts in the whole country, develop dance</p> <p>Create discussion/debates/new thoughts/move</p>

		theme years etc	<p>Theatre can be very boring, institutionalized form hinders creativity</p> <p>Thinks more focus should be put on deepening process, instead of quick things like youtube-videos (during corona)</p>		
Specific methods	<p>Long process, audience participation, reference groups, children's perspective, use of experts</p> <p>FA: Elaborates w methods to challenge norms</p>	<p>Children's perspective</p> <p>No to educational work (except making material to support teachers in analyzing plays)</p> <p>Focus on artistic experience</p> <p>A lot of documentary material, devising, actors' own experience</p> <p>LN: Collision of documentary &amp; classics</p> <p>Discuss difficult subjects regardless of age; try new methods</p>	<p>Artistic &amp; organizational vision for self-sufficiency</p> <p>All creative leaders also on stage/part of the whole process</p> <p>Full-time team = expensive but allows for more productions</p> <p>Lends out stage to other groups</p>	<p>To reach outside the cultural sphere</p> <p>Call themselves "ideology producers"</p> <p>Form combined with political mission</p> <p>Flexible, can work fast compared to bigger institutions</p>	<p>Folkrörelse</p> <p>Participation of member organizations, following &amp; spreading research, new voices</p> <p>Diffuse &amp; support stage art all over Sweden, through support of member orgs.</p> <p>Help members orgs. arrange repertoire (1/3 is produced by Riks, they choose)</p>
Play themes	Children's	Contemporary/	Issues that	Criticism of	Among others:

	<p>perspectives &amp; issues, power, injustice, human conditions, norm creativity, anti-racism, feminism</p>	<p>existential dilemmas &amp; issues (example; economics/ critique of capitalism)</p>	<p>make them unsure what they think</p> <p>Issues from own life + current events</p>	<p>capitalist/neoliberal system, socialist values, working conditions, in favour of vulnerable groups</p> <p>Important current issues</p> <p>Opt out on plays that don't fit manifesto</p>	<p>HBTQ, equality, different languages, sign language theatre, mental health, "heavy issues", documentary</p> <p>A lot of newly written plays</p> <p>Members also want comedy, entertainment, famous names</p>
<b>VIEWS ON AUDIENCE</b>					
Audience type	<p>Schools</p> <p>Public, mostly young</p> <p>Mostly un-used to theatre</p>	<p>Schools: from all of Gbg = diverse socio-economic &amp; ethnic backgrounds</p> <p>Public: Young adults (under 50)</p> <p>Both used &amp; un-used to theatre</p>	<p>Teenagers to 40-50 (can change w locations)</p> <p>Topic-based audience (interested in topic)</p> <p>"The snobs", nerdy/ knowledgeable</p> <p>More audience than all other independent groups in Malmö together</p>	<p>"A lot of random leftists" ("löst vänsterfolk")</p> <p>A bit older</p> <p>Value-based audience (agree)</p> <p>Both un-used &amp; used to theatre</p> <p>More high schools in the past, now mostly theatre high schools</p> <p>Younger audience thanks to students</p>	<p>Adults, all-over the country</p> <p>Older women largest group, used to theatre</p> <p>Topic-based + value-based audience (interested in topic)</p>

Concerns	<p>Children have low status</p> <p>FA: Tough to be a child, low power, brutal tone</p> <p>Not seen &amp; heard</p> <p>Representation important</p>	<p>Playing for youth = responsibility, conscious of them being forced there</p> <p>Representation important</p> <p>Un-used audience is good = no preconceived expectations</p> <p>Diverse audience = resource, bring different perspectives to each other (reference to study on audience's shared heartbeat)</p> <p>Very hopeful, when not all agree on same things</p> <p>LN: Aware that they are affected by f.e. what happened at school that day, etc</p>	<p>Audience = also people in audiences' life + society</p> <p>There has to be room also for the small very interested audiences</p> <p>Being specific gets people interested (compares to censorship in Russia)</p>	<p>Want mix of those affected by an issue &amp; those w power over the issue</p> <p>Less access to young audiences now</p>	<p>Need to reach more &amp; broader</p> <p>More projects to reach youth in country side, as members are often 65+</p> <p>"Preaching to the choir" - "spela för de redan frälsta" = reinforcement of beliefs</p>
Hopes & aims for the audience	<p>To become a new person/get new direction</p> <p>Give tools to form opinion &amp; get new</p>	<p>Open up doors within, discuss, or just experience (not "understand")</p> <p>Encounters that</p>	<p>To get one person to change their life</p> <p>Leave the room a new</p>	<p>Inspiration &amp; motivation towards resistance &amp; revolution</p> <p>New thoughts,</p>	<p>Recognize themselves, get insights, new thoughts</p>

	<p>thoughts on self/others</p> <p>Open up new doors to life/inner life</p> <p>Goal is not to convert, but many are changed</p> <p>Reach deep rather than many</p> <p>FA: Be another space in their life, show alternatives</p>	<p>can affect people deeply, but is personal</p>	<p>person</p> <p>To think it's "okay" themselves, let audience define good/bad</p> <p>Pass on the doubt they feel on issues, shape new thoughts</p> <p>The show is only the start, the art experience/ effect comes after</p> <p>"A thought thought by 1 person is as important as if it is thought by 40.000"</p>	<p>change of mind</p> <p>Insights on themselves &amp; their role in society</p> <p>Entertaining, fun/moving/surprising experience</p>	
<p>Methods toward audience</p>	<p>Make audience feel seen</p> <p>Reference groups of young people throughout process</p> <p>"Mirror" audience through representation</p> <p>FA: Meet the team, magical/un-magical, see the work behind Meeting =</p>	<p>Active communication w audience, get them to <i>want</i> to be there, not force opinions/ alienate them</p> <p>Trust that they can handle complex issues</p> <p>"Mirror" audience through representation</p> <p>LN: Not confirming their views</p>	<p>Put irrelevant details in shows, to remind audience in their life later</p> <p>Do material for different settings, but still creating doubt</p>		<p>Rather reach few people deep than many for an hour, possible to do both</p> <p>Unique organization, does not exist w same level of resources abroad, many interested from abroad</p>

	<p>more respect for the art</p> <p>Allow audience reactions + consciously stop shows = seen + boundaries</p>	<p>Meetings &amp; reference groups &amp; research in schools, to “butt heads” w young audience</p>			
Reactions	<p>Many first-timers; surprised.</p> <p>Feel seen &amp; heard</p>	<p>Both provoked &amp; agreement</p> <p>Have heard from people who have been very affected by plays</p>	?	<p>Inspired, recognized themselves (meeting less common audiences)</p>	<p>Hear a lot from member orgs on what they like/dislike/need</p> <p>Reach young people specifically through certain projects that interest them</p>
<b>FINANCING &amp; GOVERNING</b>					
Applications	<p>No, have to account for received funds</p>	<p>No, get funds from Stadsteatern, budget to them</p> <p>LN: Money is funneled via Gbg municipality/region, political decisions they don't know exactly</p>	<p>Apply 1/year for verksamhetstöd. Apply to project funds 15-20/year, get 3-5.</p>	<p>Apply 1/year for verksamhetstöd. Apply to project funds</p>	<p>Same as UK?</p> <p>Account for received funds + ask for funds they need</p>
Relationships	<p>Feels stable</p> <p>Have been able to voice their view on guidelines</p> <p>Agreement</p>	<p>Stable, don't have to apply for funds</p> <p>Agreement</p>	<p>Feels stable</p> <p>More work related to project funds, but try to send similar applications</p> <p>Project funds = not worth it</p>	<p>Less stable financing, but feel like they can do their thing, but might change</p> <p>Some won't support because political</p>	<p>Feels stable, but funds go up &amp; down</p> <p>Write their own “stadgar”, broad mission</p> <p>Agreement on mission</p>



			<p>economically but needed to show endorsement</p> <p>Feels like one needs to keep good relations with local officials to get funds</p>	<p>The region once turned down play because political</p> <p>Feels like personal engagement among officials sometimes decides</p> <p>More support from Kulturrådet than municipality &amp; region where the tone has hardened (think this might be the case in other places too)</p>	<p>Good renommé, dialogue</p>
<p>Artistic freedom/ arm's length</p>	<p>Yes, very free. Freedom of expression, no censorship.</p> <p>FA: More free now w stable financing</p>	<p>No governing of content etc. Both Gbg city &amp; the (politically elected) board of directors handle it well.</p> <p>Very free mission; only artistic quality, "very luxurious"</p>	<p>Some local politicians have very personal opinions on the art</p> <p>More free now that they are established</p> <p>Have created own stage (against political opinion) to get more freedom</p>	<p>More w new than former minister of culture (Alice Bah Kunke), who was more opinionated on content</p> <p>Think that larger institutions might be more stable due to financing, but more "aware" regarding content</p>	<p>Very free.</p> <p>Dependant on funds, but try to be as independent as possible</p> <p>Both he &amp; Kulturdepartementet let creative leaders set repertoire</p> <p>Works well now, last gov could have more opinions</p>
<p>Expectations from</p>	<p>No, neither on</p>	<p>Nothing, other</p>	<p>Explain</p>	<p>Explain</p>	<p>Just mission:</p>

financers	<p>content nor quantity measures</p> <p>FA: Hard to “prove” quality</p>	<p>than defending values of democracy &amp; human rights</p> <p>LN: Styrdokument: Act, create debate, entertain, encourage thought, have a varied &amp; renewed repertoire, address broad audience</p> <p>No expectations on quantity, but audit audience numbers &amp; reach &amp; have to act when some part of town is not reached. Is a balance act since mission is to reach many but they play for few at a time</p>	projects	<p>projects, 1,5 years in advance</p> <p>Work more w businesses (Sthlm municipality), which feels political</p> <p>Might lose their stage/find new stage</p> <p>Work with businesses, dance, suburbs; different things</p> <p>Prove continuity, innovation</p>	<p>Reach, creation, reach youth, focus more on dance</p> <p>Might get demands to f.e. focus more on some things = re-arrangement within funds</p>
<b>CULTURAL POLICY &amp; GOVERNING</b>					
Perceived power over goals	<p>High</p> <p>UK &amp; Riks have shaped policy by “teaching” politicians, perceived agreement on goals</p> <p>UK was</p>	<p>High?</p> <p>Agreement, loosely defined mission</p> <p>LN: Thinks it’s because they are successful, sell out, receive good critique, etc</p>	<p>Medium</p> <p>Works a lot on trying to influence funding policy &amp; local culture politics</p>	<p>Low?</p> <p>More struggles</p>	<p>High?</p>

	threatened by shut-down, saved by politicians because has created unique stage				
Perceived content	<p>Equality, prioritizing youth, creating infrastructure, reach (Riks is example of reach). Good goals.</p> <p>Inclusive projects have to be represented, hence there are questions on inclusiveness included.</p>	<p>Liberal ideas of democracy, human rights,</p> <p>Independent groups can feel more governed, because of specific questions on f.e. reaching different groups in applications</p> <p>LN: Possibly political interest in some of topics seen as previous trends</p> <p>LN: Not very political mission, very important cause otherwise depending on who rules</p>	<p>Innovation, new thoughts (works well for them)</p> <p>More specific content in project fund applications</p>	<p>More neoliberal attitude in Sthlm</p> <p>For a while it felt like culture officials in Sthlm were actively trying to de-politicize arts</p>	<p>Reach youth, other backgrounds, country side, do more dance</p> <p>“To value the Swedish language” is in their mission, have asked about it, could be old formulation</p> <p>Before Januari-överenskommelsen, when Sweden was w/o government, political content was weeded out = identity politics, gender, equality etc were removed; shows some party political affiliation</p> <p>Parties place focus on different things, but things that relate to Swedisg grundlag stay</p> <p>Focus on getting culture to all of the country, thinks even right-wing parties</p>

					agree on that
Perceived governing/ influencing	<p>Theme years can be set = governing through incentives</p> <p>Culture goals criticized by the right for holding political incentives. Good discussion.</p> <p>Has heard that some perceive a content governing, however SH claims artistic vision IS prioritized</p> <p>FA: Project money comes w categories, some can perceive it as influence on content</p> <p>Thinks it's not about content, rather consciousness of issues. Proven by not much happening on larger stages</p> <p>Thinks smaller org. feel more influenced. Can cover more themes in large</p>	<p>There are political guidelines behind financing, confirms that when agreement exists one might feel less influenced</p> <p>The expectations they have are so loosely formulated, on liberal ideas of democracy &amp; human rights, so level of governing feels low</p> <p>Thinks independent groups can feel more governed, due to questions, but people working w funding prioritize artistic quality = might be a lack of communication</p> <p>LN: Might be problematic w arm's length sometimes, w government investigations interested in certain subjects (mentions MP)</p> <p>Heard about SD reacting to content in VG</p>	<p>When applying for project funds, a lot of influence through the questions asked</p> <p>More influenced if one wants to "make it right"</p> <p>Application processes remind of institutionalized form</p>	<p>Requests to work on certain themes has happened (municipality &amp; region)</p> <p>"Prove" how one works for different groups, this might have to do with <i>how</i> the questions in applications are put</p> <p>Not sure there are consequences to this, but excerpts some pressure</p>	<p>Did several plays on environment when Alice Bah Kunke (MP) was minister for culture; not linked but perceived as linked</p> <p>Reach youth, other backgrounds, country side, do more dance <i>is</i> politics, but politics <i>should</i> make such analyses</p> <p>Against discussion of <i>what</i> art should be made/not. Refers to Sölvesborg; "If you want to take down art bc some people don't like it, you need a democratic process"</p> <p>Less nationally than locally, where politicians (both left &amp; right) have opinions on what the member orgs. show</p> <p>Possible that smaller/local orgs feel less arm's length</p>

	repertoire	region, but hasn't noticed this in Gbg			distance
Accommodation to cultural goals/financers	<p>Not now</p> <p>FA: Before, when seeking project funds, felt more governed</p> <p>Some collab organizations = thoughts on content</p>	<p>When one applies for project funds, one tries to decode what they want</p> <p>LN: No, financiers are understanding &amp; supportive</p>	<p>"Sprinkles" <i>could</i> be effect of perceived expectations</p> <p>Financers probably open to many ideas, but if artists <i>do</i> define their art on these expectations = bad/flat art</p> <p>Easy to formulate ideas to get around it, possible to get funds even if specific</p> <p>Groups are probably aware of demands but can apply for funds that fit the project</p> <p>Some project demands forces new ideas = their own ideas filtered through the demands</p>	<p>More in wording in applications</p> <p>Demands to focus on minorities affects thinking, can be good, but don't want it to come from authority</p> <p>Have sought cooperation w Handels</p>	<p>Possible that focus on equality, representation etc has some links to government, but no major difference from time w right-wing government</p> <p>Possible that smaller &amp; local orgs are more sensitive to financing incentives; might change their ideas/orgs to suit it</p>
Instrumental	Not mentioned	Not for them, but	Yes, has had	Yes, asked to	Part of national

policy		<p>guard themselves from becoming a pedagogical resource, as some politicians <i>could</i> get that idea</p> <p>LN: Perceives such tendencies in society in general; like bonuses (in Sthlm) for independent groups based on audience count, educational goals, measuring</p>	<p>to argue for the "need" for theatre</p> <p>Demands on contributing to regional development, questions it</p>	<p>work more towards minorities, businesses, suburbs - how will it work economically? Have to defend that theatre is important</p> <p>Imported ideas from England, like "skapande skola" where artists also have to be pedagogical resources (Backa is also against this)</p> <p>Art should be allowed to be art</p>	<p>strategy to include country side, agree &amp; think several parties agree on this</p>
Effects of changes in government	<p>Not much changed in national policy since re-write 2009</p>	<p>Hasn't noticed, might be because municipally owned</p> <p>Has heard of changes noticed by institutions on national level, when MP had former minister of culture</p>	<p>Changes in local cultural policy has affected them</p>	<p>Changes in culture policy toward youth in Sthlm has affected them</p> <p>Neoliberal local government has affected them, more pressure</p>	<p>He worked under right-wing government, no major difference</p>
Problems	<p>Good situation, could change</p> <p>Expects SD to rule at some point</p>	<p>LN: Very fun with mixed age groups, but harder now due to re-organizations in school (harder</p>	<p>Institutions driven like companies, worry about "subscription audience" instead of</p>	<p>Problem getting schools to come due to re-organizing of how schools</p>	<p>Thinks that if SD controlled cultural goals it might be a problem, as riksdagen shapes their</p>

	<p>Perceived expectations might lead to social projects rather than artistic</p> <p>FA: If expected to be more self-financing = hard w school audiences. Would kill quality. Schools choose = some will not prioritize arts = unequal opportunities</p>	<p>for schools to come evenings)</p> <p>Not a problem, but ticket sales to schools are cheap so don't bring in much (same for UK)</p> <p>Re-organization of schools that change their access to theatre + (in Gbg) changed goals on how much culture kids are allowed + (in Gbg) changed youth culture from department of culture to department of education; places it in an educational context = direct drop in statistics</p> <p><i>Ha med citat</i></p>	<p>larger audience = boring theatre</p> <p>Has taken long time to get stable financial situation</p> <p>Thinks the ambitions for supporting culture in Sweden are low, the campaign 1% of BNP to culture has existed for 20 years</p>	<p>access art</p> <p>Get money to reach youth but infrastructure to give young people access is weakened. Culture secretaries changed for schools prioritizing = less diverse audience. Money then goes to own administration efforts</p> <p>Hard work/problems reaching audiences in other parts of Sthlm</p> <p>Hard to reach people in power</p> <p>Demands from financiers not paired with help to meet these demands, f.e. demands on businesses to support art</p>	<p>mission. Think they would be able to argue based on freedom of expression</p> <p>Need to be more in schools; risk that young generation misses out on culture (criticizes closing of culture schools/aesthetic programmes)</p> <p>70% of funds go to reproducing/administering bourgeois/classic art, this is not discussed. Provocative art gets quite little space</p> <p>Local member orgs have problems getting financing sometimes, being taken seriously, not being counted on to do things they could</p>
<b>FUTURE</b>					
Wishes			For local politicians to invest long-term in	Need better infrastructure, mediator between	Make sure they perceive what is important to the audience, reach

			<p>culture = more stable terms More “verksamhetssöd” to be less dependent on project funds</p>	<p>theatres &amp; schools, instead of schools choosing because some won't prioritize art</p> <p>If businesses &amp; art should cooperate need to be true, so not just selling out culture</p>	<p>broader &amp; keep evolving (more aim than wish?)</p>
<p>Worries</p>	<p>SD: a worry for all liberals that illiberal forces could set the priorities If SD gains power; UK could lose financing, employees could want to leave, some might not be able to leave due to work market</p> <p>Cultural policy does change, a danger in itself</p> <p>FA: SD + right wing gov. Less interested in culture/lowered funds = loss of quality</p> <p>Covid; might affect audience habits</p>	<p>Confirms that many in the field are worried about a possible change in government</p> <p>SD, they have aggressive cultural politics, open about wanting to influence content</p> <p>But also conservative government; M no interest in culture &amp; might sell, KD/SD want to change content</p> <p>LN: Risk analyzes always include the risk of changed political decisions; other goals, cut funds</p>	<p>Felt like giving up when funds from Region Skåne were cut, but motivated again</p> <p>Talk about what would happen with f.e. SD in power. Censorship has in some countries led to bolder theatre, might happen here too (up side)</p>	<p>Funds not index-based = diminish over time</p> <p>Might lose their stage</p> <p>Money is given to culture without stages, infrastructure, etc</p> <p>Sthlm used to be Europe's most theatre-frequent city, has diminished a lot</p> <p>SD, climate might get even tougher</p> <p>Right-wing, neoliberal tendencies in society w privatizations</p>	<p>Thinks we should be worried about SD/extreme right wing</p> <p>Riksteatern could get people that are anti-democratic w changed government (not big worry)</p> <p>If a party wanted to f.e. place more focus on traditional Swedish dance, they could argue against it, but if long-term power change it would be possible</p> <p>Tendencies of people thinking Rikis is too left-wing</p> <p>SD open about wanting to</p>



					influence culture Corona Not reaching audience, high competition
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