

Complete Citation: Scollen, Rebecca J. (2007). Regional voices talk theatre: audience development for the performing arts. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 12 (3). ISSN 1465-4520.

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Full Title

Regional Voices Talk Theatre: audience development for the performing arts.

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Regional Voices Talk Theatre

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Sponsors:

Australian Research Council (ARC), Australian Commonwealth Government

Northern Australia Regional Performing Arts Centres Association (NARPACA)

Arts Queensland

Arts Northern Territory

Queensland University of Technology

Author Bio

Rebecca Scollen was awarded an Australian Postdoctoral Fellowship to work on the 3-year Talking Theatre project as the primary researcher and trainer, following completion of her doctorate in 2003. Prior to this appointment Rebecca taught in the Creative Industries Faculty of the Queensland University of Technology. She also operated as an audience research, reception and development consultant to the Queensland performing arts industry. Rebecca is now Artsworx Manager in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Southern Queensland in Toowoomba.

Abstract

Audience development is somewhat of a ‘buzz word’ within the Australian performing arts sector at present. However, rather than actually engage with audiences and with non-attenders to discover how to best service the community, most performing arts organisations approach audience development from a product-centred viewpoint.

In direct contrast to this, the *Talking Theatre* project (2004-2006) was implemented in regional Queensland and in the Northern Territory in Australia as an audience development initiative focused on the consumer. The project sought to assist performing arts centres (PACs) to better engage with their local communities and to build new audiences for the future. In particular, the research aimed to understand non-attenders; their reasons for non-attendance, and their reactions to a range of live performances they experienced under study conditions.

The *Talking Theatre* project provided the vehicle for introduction, communication and relationship building to occur to assist in attitudinal and behavioural change. The non-attenders enjoyed their experiences at the PACs and have begun attending performances outside of study conditions. Limited awareness of the performing arts’ relevance to their lives combined with a lack of positive peer influence to attend, were the chief deterrents to attendance for the participants in the study.

Talking Theatre: An audience development programme for regional Queensland and the Northern Territory (2004-2006)¹ was a three-year research project that sought to build new audiences for fourteen regional PACs located in northern Australia. The research endeavoured to develop a profile of non-attenders² in regional areas; to understand their reasons for non-attendance; to identify their cultural and creative needs; and to discover their reception of three live performances (attended under study conditions) and of the PACs who presented them. Each of the PACs were members of the Northern Australia Regional Performing Arts Centres Association (NARPACA)³. Data was gathered by utilising a range of pre- and post-performance questionnaires as well as post-performance focus groups. This paper presents the *Talking Theatre* project and some of

its findings as a case study to illustrate how consumer-oriented audience development can positively impact on performing arts organisations and the communities in which they are situated.

Background

With an ageing population, and fewer of the younger generations attending live theatre⁴ performances, it appears that audiences are declining across Australia, and in states like Queensland and the Northern Territory little audience development⁵ research is taking place to understand and overcome this problem. In the main, audience research is conducted in large metropolitan areas of Australia, which denies a large proportion of the States and Territories access to quality information and effective strategies to build new audiences in the regions. Mostly, audience development initiatives do not include audience reception studies as part of their design, nor do they entail post-performance data gathering. Overall, the majority of arts organisations in Australia do not regularly conduct audience research (of any kind) as part of their audience development commitment. The following examples of national audience development studies clearly illustrate this.

The **New Audiences 2002** audience development programme was an initiative of the Audience and Market Development Division (Australia Council for the Arts: 2002). The programme aimed to test imaginative, innovative and strategic approaches to reach younger audiences. Of the twenty-two proposals selected, three were located in regional Queensland and in the Northern Territory. Of all the successful proposals, there were no instances where a project included research that sought to understand audiences or their

attitudes or reactions to performances. These proposals did not incorporate audience reception studies or post-performance discussions to retrieve feedback. Instead, the organisations proposed to build audiences by disseminating information about product to specific target audiences and by attempting to incorporate target markets in the making of product. The Panel for New Audiences 2002 (Australia Council for the Arts, 2002: 16) acknowledged that there appeared to be “a lack of an understanding of the fundamentals of audience development and arts marketing and drawing a distinction between this and artform development activities”.

The *Talking Theatre* project’s standpoint was that in order to build new audiences performing arts organisations needed to understand their target markets, and discover how they experience product, before they could make decisions about disseminating advertising and choosing programming. Modern marketing ideology also contends that artists or arts organisations cannot really understand their product, until they understand how the consumer or audience perceived it (March & Thompson, 1996). However, the endeavour to find out what audiences experience and why, or audience reception studies, has received little attention over the last century. The field of theatre audience reception is still in its infancy stage; emerging in Europe and Scandinavia in the 1980s. It seeks to understand the perceptions and reactions of audience members to performance and to the theatrical event as a whole. Martin and Sauter (1995: 9) explain it “...essentially deals with the spectator’s intellectual and emotional experiences in the theatre.”

In academic circles, theatre audience reception studies have grown in popularity over the last two decades and in Australia this kind of research is now beginning to infiltrate theatre industry audience development strategies. Yet, most of the published academic

research typically focuses on the experiences of regular theatregoers (Pavis, 1985; Sauter, 1986; Gourdon, 1992; Deldime, 1988; Currathers & Mitchell, 1995; and Martin, 1995) rather than on non-theatregoers and their experiences of theatre. It is also rare to find published research, besides the work of Sauter (1988) and Kolb (2000), where post-performance group discussions are used to discover the immediate responses of audiences to live performance. Although there has been some uptake of audience reception as a tool to increase knowledge of audiences by those working in the Australian performing arts industry, the majority of research conducted by the industry seeks traditional demographic data rather than experiential information. Few arts organisations attempt to find out what non-theatregoers think of their services or of the theatre industry in general.

In fact, Australian arts organisations know the importance of research for audience development purposes, however, the minority regularly undertake the research required. A clear example of this was illustrated in a study of 250 Australian arts organisations and their marketing and audience development strategies in 1996 (Soutar and Close, 1997). Soutar and Close (1997: 15) claimed that 82% of organisations conducted audience surveys, however, only 29% did so regularly. Almost one in five organisations never did audience surveys to inform their audience development strategies (1997: 16). Of those that did conduct audience surveys, 60% never conducted surveys with the general public or people who did not consume their product (1997: 16). Of those who conducted audience surveys, it was rare that they utilised the post-performance focus group method to generate information.

Over recent years the Australian Commonwealth Government has increased funding to arts organisations to conduct research for audience development purposes. One useful example of Federal investment into audience research and development was the Regional Audience Development Specialists (RADS) Program conducted from 2000 to 2002. The RADS National Overview Report (2002) suggested a number of recommendations to improve regional arts organisations' engagement with their local communities. Some of the key findings across the sector were that "audience development objectives need(ed) to be considered in the planning of all programs and events" (2002: 34). Thus it was noted that many of the organisations operated under a product-centred viewpoint (Rentschler, 1999: 3), focusing attention chiefly on the artworks rather than considering their audiences. The RADS National Overview Report stressed this point clearly by arguing that the "arts organisations that have developed works responsive to audience feedback and those with particular thematic relevance to the community are often successful" (2002: 27). It also stated that regional venues needed to target wider audiences. This recommendation aligned with suggestions outlined in the *Australians and the Arts* report (Woolcott Research Pty Ltd, 2000: 19) which asserted the "future of the arts depends on finding new supporters/markets outside of current traditional support eg. non-theatre-goers and regional populations".

The 'top end' of Australia remains the nation's most regional with half its population outside the metropolitan area. In light of the need for new markets within the regional sector it seemed fitting to commence the *Talking Theatre* project there, in Queensland and in the Northern Territory, for trialling an audience development initiative to later translate to the nation at large. This project would chiefly rely on post-performance

audience reception methodology to obtain quality information from non-attenders (or potential new audiences) to inform regional PACs' policies concerning programming, marketing, pricing and facilities. In turn, these policies would assist new audience growth as they would be of direct relevance and benefit to this target market. A broad range of experiences were offered to the non-attenders while at the PACs so that their reactions and feedback could impact on many areas of business. This breadth meant that a collection of audience research types were included in the research design.

Kolb (2000: 159) explained that the most common types of audience research that can be conducted by cultural organisations consist of: Audience research; Motivation research; Customer satisfaction; Pricing research; Product research; Competitor research; Policy research; and Promotional research⁶. The *Talking Theatre* project included all of these inquiries as part of its design. Participants provided information about themselves, and their reasons for non-attendance, as well as their expectations of, and reactions to the PACs, the three performances, pricing, promotion, and the performing arts industry locally and beyond. The strong focus on audience reception in the *Talking Theatre* project saw the emphasis on Product research move beyond feedback gathered solely for improvement purposes. Instead, it sought the reception of the participants to the performances to better understand the participants (and ultimately new audiences) and how they engage and relate to product. This gave clearer insight into how live performance was perceived and what aspects of it held attention, stimulated imagination, and satisfied the novice audience member.

This project could also be understood to comprise the four types of audience

development as defined by Kawashima (2000) but all were applied specifically to non-attenders. *Cultural Inclusion, Extended Marketing, Taste Cultivation, and Audience Education* were combined to develop new audiences by introducing non-attenders to the theatre, by supplying them with a range of live performance products and experiences, and by providing the environment for each to learn through self and peer education. The following information outlines the scope of the *Talking Theatre* project, and then details some of its results couched within Kawashima's four audience development types. This summary will seek to highlight the usefulness of consumer-oriented audience development research initiatives.

The *Talking Theatre* project (2004-2006)

“Before *Talking Theatre*, the (performing arts) centre was just another building, now it's some place with which I am familiar and have fond memories.” (*Talking Theatre* participant)

Aim and Sample

The central aim of the *Talking Theatre* project was to apply the SPPAR⁷ method for audience development to create new audience growth in the short and long term for regional Queensland and the Northern Territory. Please look to Appendix One for further aims of the research project. Twenty-four people from each region were sought to take part in the study. The local media were utilised to inform the fourteen regional communities of the research and the need for participants. Members of the public interested in participating contacted the PACs directly to register their details. The potential participants were screened to check that they fitted the sample requirements, that is, they were aged between eighteen and fifty-five years, lived in the local area,

identified themselves as non-attenders, and had not attended their local PAC before (if they had it was understood to be a rare ‘one-off’ occasion). Please look to Appendix Two for the predominant profile of participants included in the research.

Process

Each of the PACs selected three live performances for the participants to attend free of charge. They presented a mix of genres to provide the participants with variety, such as plays, opera, contemporary dance, stand-up comedy, musicals, ballet, and orchestras. The selected twenty-four participants in each region were separated to form two groups of twelve people who would attend each of the three performances together, as well as take part in the three post-performance data-gathering sessions. Demographic and psychographic information was gathered about the participants via an *About You* questionnaire that was sent to their homes and completed prior to attending the first performance in the *Talking Theatre* project. Directly after experiencing each of the three performances on offer, the participants individually completed the *Tonight’s Performance* questionnaire, which asked them to rate their experiences of the show. After the participants completed the questionnaire they talked together as a group about their reception of the performance. The post-performance group discussions were facilitated by the researcher, however, the facilitator played a passive role to encourage the participants to direct the topics of discussion and to interact with each other rather than answer a series of posed questions. The unstructured, free-flowing discussions generated substantial qualitative data that provided insight into the elements of performance and of theatregoing that were important to new audiences.

A few weeks following the final performances in the *Talking Theatre* project another questionnaire was sent home to participants to complete. This *Feedback* questionnaire was to generate their assessment of the research, of the PACs, and of the likelihood of their future theatre attendance. The extensive data gathering created a large amount of quantitative and qualitative information about the participants and their perspectives. This information was interpreted by applying content and thematic analysis. Participants were also tracked through the PAC box office databases in the year following their participation in the project to find out how many chose to return and pay to attend performances outside of study conditions. Their purchases continue to be recorded at the PAC box offices in order to gather sufficient longitudinal data to access and analyse at a later date.

Results

Cultural Inclusion

“Before the *Talking Theatre* program I thought that theatre was boring, even though I had never been before. I guess it was a preconceived thought.”
(*Talking Theatre* participant)

According to Kawashima (2000: 8) *cultural inclusion* “...targets the group of people who for apparently social reasons are the least likely to attend the arts.” No particular social/cultural/economic group was selected specifically for the *Talking Theatre* research. However, the restriction to only involve those who were non-attenders meant that the project was aimed at those who were currently unlikely to attend the performing arts. The free tickets provided in return for feedback meant that those in financial difficulty could have the opportunity to participate.

According to the results of the *About You* questionnaire that participants completed at home prior to attending the first performance in the *Talking Theatre* project, the most popular reasons for non-attendance were:

Reason	% of sample
1. Ticket prices	59%
2. Parenting commitments	26%
3. Quality of shows	26%
4. Work commitments	24%
5. Lack of interest	22%
6. No-one to go with	20%

However, as indicated by the verbal responses of the participants in the *Talking Theatre* project, one of the key reasons for their non-attendance was their perception that theatregoing was an elitist activity where only ‘select’ people were welcome to attend. As Sayre and King (2003: 246) assert “Appearance at these (theatre) events reinforces social status and proclaims identity as a member of the elite group.” The perception of theatre as a ‘closed shop’ worked to reinforce the other reasons for non-attendance as listed above.

The prevalence of middle-aged, well-educated, high-income earners (Throsby and Withers, 1979; Gourdon, 1982; Bennett, Frow and Emmison, 1999; Woolcott Research Pty Ltd, 2000) attending the theatre could indicate that the non-attenders’ pre-conceived notion was correct. Theorists such as Kant (1952) and Bourdieu (1986) have certainly argued that theatre (amongst other publicly-funded cultural institutions) composes ‘the field of restricted culture’ and can only successfully be experienced and appreciated by those with ‘taste’. Or in other words, those who have the “...interpretative, intellectual and aesthetic skills...” (Bennett *et al.* 1999: 230) available to a selected minority via the

education system and the family. This is supported by research in Australia which has estimated that tertiary educated citizens are 194% more likely to participate in the arts than those with primary schooling (Bennett, *etal.* 1999: 232).

For those who do not believe they have the social status to be a part of this elite group there is a sense that they will not be welcome to attend the theatre and that the experience will not be relevant or satisfying to them. Yet during the recruitment of non-attenders as participants for the *Talking Theatre* project it was found that a significant number of those interested in being involved in the research were middle-aged⁸ (40% of total sample), tertiary educated (46% of the total sample), medium (38% of the total sample) to high-income earners⁹ (14.5% of total sample). This finding supported but also reputed the common perception that theatregoing is for elites in society. On the one hand, half the total sample consisted of ‘the elites’ (well educated people earning substantial incomes) and they were clearly attracted to the idea of becoming theatregoers. This could suggest that they had an aptitude for engaging with the arts because of their education and financial position. However, the fact that so many well-educated, financially secure citizens were eligible to participate in the study because they were not theatregoers highlighted that education and income did not automatically ensure appreciation and participation in the arts, nor elitism. In fact, many of these participants were also of the opinion that theatregoing was elitist and that they would not fit in with the theatregoing crowd. One young doctor participating in the research explained, “I always thought (Theatre) was for cigar-smoking old people”.

Extended Marketing

I don't think I would have a real problem spending money on a show like that, but then I'll go and spend \$80 on a meal...but then I don't have children and I don't have a family (like some of you have said) so I don't have to worry about those sorts of things. So for me, at this point in time of my life, I can afford to because I'm by myself." (*Talking Theatre* participant)

The *Talking Theatre* project perhaps sits more squarely within the realm of *extended marketing*. This form of audience development "...focuses on people with high attendance potential but who are not yet in the customer group" (Kawashima, 2000: 9). Citizens in each of the fourteen regions were informed of the research project (and its need for participants) through the local media. This promotion made clear that a significant level of commitment was required of the participants because they would attend three live performances and would then take part in post-performance questionnaires and group discussions on each of the three occasions. In order to participate in the research, citizens were invited to contact their local PAC to register their details. This approach ensured that those who decided to contact the PAC had potential to attend in the future as they were already interested in the prospect and had identified the *Talking Theatre* project as a way to begin experiencing live performances at their local PAC. According to the results of the *About You* questionnaire, the most popular reasons for participating in the project were:

Reason	% of sample
1. Exposure to shows would not normally attend	74%
2. Free tickets	69%
3. Sounded interesting	69%
4. Something to do/different	62%
5. Have a good night out	61%
6. Meet new people	38%

Additionally, it eventuated that a significant percentage of the participants were highly educated and earning average to high incomes. This outcome also positioned them within the 'high attendance potential' category as international research has shown this group within society is most likely to participate in the arts (McCarthy *et al.*, 2001; Bennett *et al.*, 1999; and Kotler & Scheff, 1997). Of note since the *Talking Theatre* project began in March 2004, it has generated a 110%¹⁰ increase in ticket purchases by all participants. Twenty-nine percent of all participants returned, on average more than once, which is 177% up on their previous attendance. Factoring in the guests that they brought with them, results in a ticket multiplier of 397% per participant (or a ratio of 3.97 to 1). New family and friends have now been introduced to the PACs, and may return with guests of their own.

“I bought a ticket to see James Morrison. I took a friend who had never been to the Ipswich Civic Hall before and now she is going to other performances.” (*Talking Theatre* participant)

Taste Cultivation

“Thanks to the project I now have a greater appreciation for classic piano music after being "forced" to see the very talented John Chew play.”
(*Talking Theatre* participant)

Kawashima (2000: 9) states, *taste cultivation* “...seeks to introduce different art genres and forms to attenders of specific art forms.” In this way it aims to cultivate their taste and broaden their range of arts experiences. As each of the PACs showcases a variety of live performances during the year, it was decided that participants would attend three different genres of performance while taking part in the *Talking Theatre* project. This would allow them opportunity to try a range of performance styles (eg. opera, play,

ballet) to begin their introduction to different arts experiences. It was hypothesised that the experience of a mix of genres would increase the likelihood of participants returning as paying customers in the future. This was because the introduction would create familiarity with a wider range of product and thus offer a larger suite of performances to choose from. “I see the shows advertised in the newspaper but because I don’t know anything about them (style of performance), I have no idea which one to go to” (*Talking Theatre* participant).

According to the results of the *About You* questionnaire, the non-attenders believed there were certain types of performance that were preferable to them, should they consider attendance. The findings showed that the participants selected genres that were most familiar to them.

Theatre	% of sample
1. Comedy	90%
2. Drama	66%
Music	
1. Popular/Rock	76%
2. Musicals	54%
Dance	
1. Modern/contemporary	52%
2. Ballet	51%
Other	
1. Stand-up comedy	71%
2. Circus	57%

The *Talking Theatre* project provided them with the chance to attend some of these genres along with others that they were unaware of, or thought that they might not enjoy. A clear example of attitudinal change pertaining to genre was noted in the results of the

Feedback questionnaire. It was discovered that participants' desire to now attend plays (outside of study conditions) outweighed the other more popular live performance genres, such as musicals and live music concerts (as was previously indicated in the results of the initial *About You* questionnaire and in the early post-performance group discussions).

By attending three very different performances in the *Talking Theatre* project the participants could also provide the PACs with quality feedback concerning a selection from their product range. This scope meant that the PACs could have a clearer understanding of non-attenders' reactions to their season (or part of it) than if feedback only concerned one style of performance. The *Tonight's Performance* questionnaires, completed immediately after attending each of the three performances, gave insight into how the participants reacted to the shows. For example, across the entire sample and across all performances, the average level of enjoyment for the shows was 7 out of 10 and the average level of comprehension for the shows was 7.5 out of 10. Thus there was a high level of enjoyment and understanding of the range of performances on offer. The sample of participants indicated that the most helpful aspects in the shows for creating enjoyment were:

Aspect	% of sample
1. Performers	69%
2. Sound/music	63%
3. Humour	54%
4. Acting	44%

The most helpful aspects for creating understanding across all shows were:

Aspect	% of sample
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1. Performers	57%
2. Sound/music	47%
3. Acting	43%
4. Dialogue	36%

These results demonstrated that performers and their actions combined with sound and music played a very strong role in theatrical communication for new audiences. This finding was further clarified in the post-performance group discussions where the participants shared their perspectives about the shows and their experiences at the PACs with each other. The top three most commonly discussed positive aspects of the performances were: the professional and highly skilled performers; the music and the singing; and the participants' ability to relate to aspects in the performances. The participants were particularly impressed with the performers; their skill, talent, energy, enthusiasm, and closeness. Negative comments about the shows were most likely to concern participants' lack of understanding of a performance or aspects of it. Performers who made mistakes or were not engaging, as well as lack of visual stimulation on stage, were also commonly referred to when participants discussed negative aspects of a show.

Audience Education

“I really enjoyed the group's feedback, it gave more insight into the whole thing.” (*Talking Theatre* participant)

Kawashima claims (2000: 9) *audience education* “...tries to enhance the understanding and enjoyment of the arts which existing attenders currently consume.” Within this context, the existing attenders were the participants in the *Talking Theatre* project. Rather than simply attending three performances and returning home immediately at their conclusion, the participants remained at the theatre to reflect on their experiences

and to share their thoughts and feelings with each other over refreshments. The participants were not instructed by ‘experts’ (researcher, theatre manager, performers, and directors) to know how to best understand or react to the performances (as sometimes occurs at organised ‘pre- or post-show chats with the stars’). Instead, the chiefly peer-led post-performance group discussions provided an environment that encouraged the participants to have faith in their own interpretations and to honestly present them to the group for consideration. The free-flowing discussion of ideas, the questions raised in the group for clarification, and the confirmation that one’s reception was similar to another’s, all operated to assist the participants to enhance their understanding and enjoyment of the performances and of the overall theatregoing experience. Seventy-six percent¹¹ of the participants stated that they had a greater understanding of the performances after taking part in the group discussions.

The post-performance discussions themselves were enjoyed and provided opportunity for the participants to learn through self-reflection and debate with their peers. Lidstone (1996: 168) agreed this form of discussion was “...perceived by the participants as pleasant experiences in which they may learn from...the various perceptions of their co-participants.” Sixty-seven percent¹² of participants stated they would be more likely to attend live performances if they knew they could meet other people afterwards and discuss them. Those participants (57% of the entire sample) who completed and returned the *Feedback* questionnaire highlighted the key elements of the post-performance discussions that were enjoyable. The participants particularly enjoyed listening to others’ ideas (78%); knowing that their thoughts and feelings were valued (62%); thinking about performance (61%); getting to know other people (60%); and

learning about theatre (46%).

“I totally enjoyed the project. The performances, social interaction and the hospitality of the Cultural Centre added up to a lovely experience...Everyone was able to speak freely and have their two cents worth.”

(*Talking Theatre* participant)

As the participants attended the PACs on three separate occasions and took part in a post-performance group discussion each time, their knowledge and confidence continued to grow as they built on the prior experiences (and the experiences of their peers) encountered during their participation in the *Talking Theatre* project. According to the responses to the *Feedback* questionnaire, 80% of the participants believed they had greater knowledge of theatre since taking part in the research, and almost the entire sample (92%) stated their interest in live performance had increased. The self and peer education approach that was applied (through the use of post-performance group discussions and regular direct exposure to performances) was shown to be an effective way for non-attenders to learn about theatre. This finding was important because recent international research has shown that the greater one's education the more likely one is to attend the arts (Kotler & Scheff, 1997; Woolcott Research Pty Ltd, 2000; McCarthy *etal.* 2001). In line with this thinking a 1996 study of Australian arts organisations found that “Seventy-seven percent of Australian arts organisations surveyed believed Australians need to be educated to appreciate the arts” (Soutar & Close, 1997: 27). Kotler and Scheff (1997: 518) also advise that “Education is the key to making art meaningful, important, and necessary. Ultimately, the best way to educate people about art is to expose them directly and often to artistic experiences.”

The *Talking Theatre* project assisted the participating regional PACs to better serve their local communities and to come a step closer toward the goal of building new audiences for the future. The project fostered a relationship between the PACs and non-attenders where each was able to learn from the other via direct introduction and information sharing; detailing perspectives, reactions, and suggestions. The PACs are now better placed to make informed decisions concerning programming, marketing and promotion, pricing, branding, and audience research with the much sought after non-attender market in mind. The participants (or new audiences) now have a much greater understanding of their PAC and what it has to offer. Their interest and knowledge of live performance has grown, and their confidence to attend has significantly increased.

“I now know better what to expect and I am more comfortable.”
(*Talking Theatre* participant)

In conclusion, the *Talking Theatre* project as case study demonstrates the value in community consultation and relationship building as central components of audience development. Until people are invited to provide their reception of live performances and of all other aspects associated with attendance, the performing arts sector can only speculate about its relevance and worth to the community. To assist in making effective decisions to positively impact on all areas of business, this paper argues that it is vital to undertake consumer-oriented audience research and reception studies. To further improve PAC operations, research such as that utilised in the *Talking Theatre* project ought to be ongoing to enable regular evaluation to occur. The success of the *Talking Theatre* project has raised interest within the wider arts and cultural sector in regional Australia. Future research will see the methodology tested within this broader

context to help organisations to better engage with their local communities and to build new audiences for a range of arts experiences.

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Appendix

Appendix One

Talking Theatre aims:

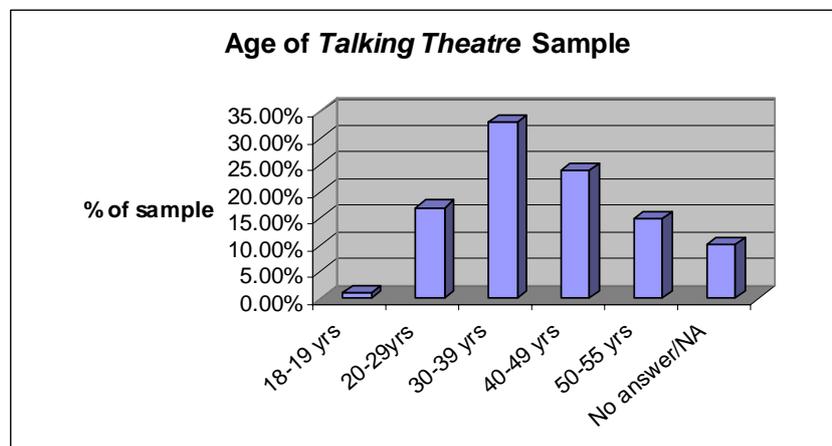
- 2) To chart a highly significant yet often overlooked section of Australia by mapping audience reception and theatrical repertoire in regional areas;
- 3) To further research into a new substantive field of non-attenders' reception of live performance;
- 4) To ascertain the entertainment and cultural needs of non-attenders living in regional areas;
- 5) To revitalise the international field of audience reception, and integrate audience reception and arts marketing theories and practices;
- 6) To contribute new knowledge to the field of arts education by providing an environment that empowers and educates non-theatre-goers about theatre and theatre-going, via introduction to live performances and participation in self-directed and peer learning.

Appendix Two

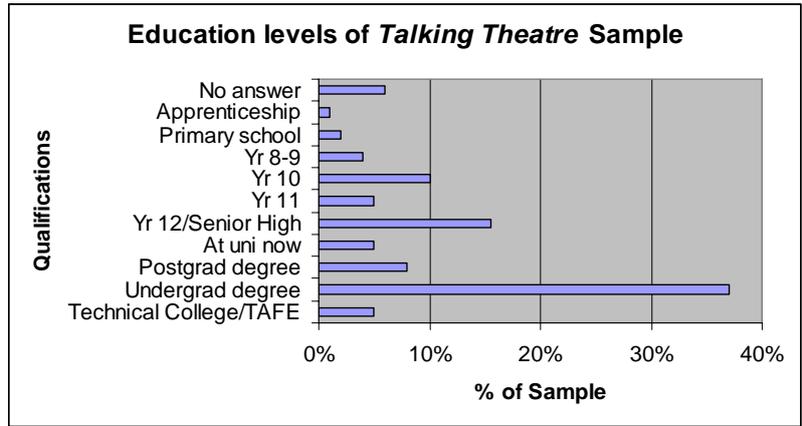
Participant Profile

Although a wide range of people registered and participated in the research, the predominant demographic profile of the entire sample was female (67%), aged 30-49 years (57%), tertiary educated (51%), and earning \$20,000-\$50,000 (AUS) per annum (45%). The sample also consisted mostly of active leisure seekers who regularly spent time and money on dining out at restaurants (76%), going to the cinema (68%), engaging in family gatherings (60%), and exploring arts and crafts markets (57%).

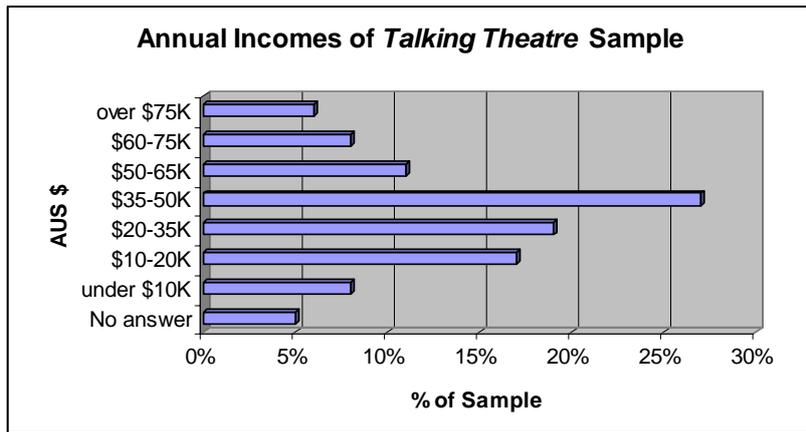
Age



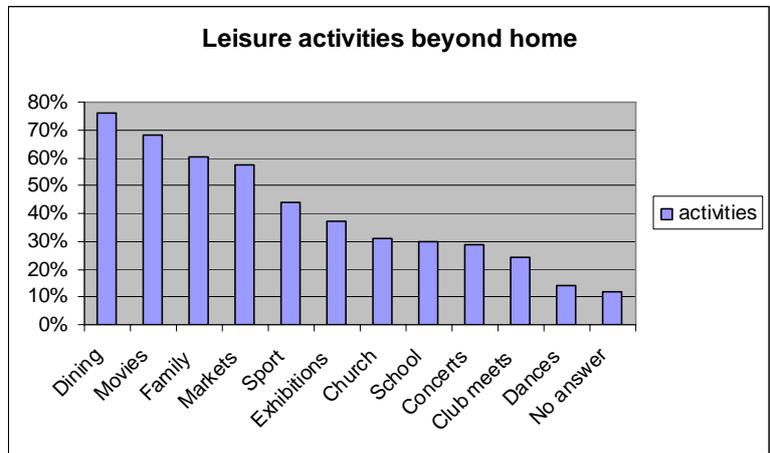
Education



Annual Income



Regular Leisure Activities Beyond the Home



References

¹ The research was funded by the Australian Commonwealth Government's Australian Research Council; the Northern Australia Regional Performing Arts Centres Association (NARPACA); the State and Territory Government Arts funding agencies Arts Queensland and Arts Northern Territory; and the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) located in the State's capital city of Brisbane. The QUT chief investigators working on the *Talking Theatre* project were Dr Jacqueline Martin, Prof. Jennifer Radbourne, Prof. Brad Haseman, and Dr Rebecca Scollen.

² Non-attenders in this context refers to people who do not purchase tickets to live performances at their local PAC or at other locations. If they have attended a live performance in the past this is understood to be a rare 'one-off' special occasion. Spending time and money on attendance at live performances is not a priority leisure activity for non-attenders.

³ NARPACA is a large regional theatre network formed in 1983 as an administrative support group focused on the activities and requirements of regional PACs throughout northern Australia. The great distances between the individual PACs and between northern Australia and the country's southern states (where much of the resources for the arts were located) meant that this network was vital in overcoming isolation and invisibility. Today NARPACA also operates as a powerful lobby that presides over a touring circuit of immense value. The fourteen participating PACs are situated in towns or cities that range in population size from 9,000 to 200,000 people. The locales vary from tropical, sub-tropical, hinterland, grassland, and desert, with a plethora of industries (eg. rural, mining, manufacturing, education, health, and tourism) that employ the residents. Each publicly-owned PAC differs in size (venue, seating capacity, staffing and funding), which directly impacts on theatre programming, marketing and promotion, and audience research and development.

⁴ The concept of Theatre in this research project and in this paper refers to live performing arts products and venues.

⁵ Audience development not only strives to increase audience numbers but to increase the range of people who constitute an audience (Hill *et al.*, 1995: 27) and to develop the community's knowledge of, and interest in, theatre (Kotler & Scheff, 1997: 72). Therefore, there are potential gains to be made when applying audience reception theories and strategies (with a focus on audiences' thoughts, feelings, and ideas) to traditional marketing tools for audience development (March and Thompson, 1996: 5).

⁶ Audience Research – Nature, composition and preferences of current and potential audiences.
Motivation Research – Reasons for attendance.
Customer Satisfaction – Extent to which event meets audiences' expectations.
Pricing Research – Formulation of pricing policies.
Product Research – Improvement of product and facilities.
Competitor Research – Audience perception in comparison to other venues.
Policy Research – National attitudes toward the arts.
Promotional Research – Effectiveness of different media, messages and promotions in communicating.

⁷ SPPAR refers to the Scollen Post Performance Audience Reception method for audience development. This method was developed, tested and refined as part of Scollen's doctoral studies at QUT. Her PhD, *Building New Theatre Audiences: Post Performance Audience Reception in Action* (2003), detailed the development of the methodology as applied to non-theatre-goers at professional theatre companies in Brisbane (Queensland's capital city). The *Talking Theatre* project sought to find out whether this same methodology would be as successful when applied to performing arts centres in regional areas.

⁸ Middle-aged in this context refers to people aged 40-55 years.

⁹ Medium income equates to \$30 000-\$60 000 (AUS) per annum. High income equates to \$60 000+ (AUS) per annum.

¹⁰ Percentages based on data retrieved to date from participating PACs in the *Talking Theatre* project.

¹¹ This statistic is derived from results from the *Feedback* questionnaire. This questionnaire was sent out to participants' homes a few weeks following the final performances in the *Talking Theatre* project. Fifty-seven percent of the entire sample completed and returned the *Feedback* questionnaire.

¹² Ibid.