Thematic research

Places of Performance

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Abstract

There is a shift taking place in the world of theatre. Cultural subsidies are cut due to budget deficits of the government and the audience is aging; as result the number of visitors is declining. It is time for theatres to reinvent themselves. What can architecture mean for this sector? The idea of building the same type of theatre in every city is outdated, so this research is about finding means to innovate in the theatre typology, in order to reach a broader audience.

This paper includes case studies of projects that already add something new to the theatre typology. Categorization by performed genre, the stage-audience configuration and the added value that makes them stand out, is used to find relations between the projects and the recurring patterns. This all results in a toolkit of elements which can be used to create an innovative place of performance. The innovation lies in what can be added to the existing cultural environment and can be achieved by using tools from the themes that were found in the case studies, such as connection, water and transformation. It gives an innovative place of performance its spectacular characteristics and makes it attractive to a broader audience.

**Keywords**: theatre typology, innovation, place of performance, added value, culture, case study, categorization, connection, water, transformation, toolkit.
Introduction

1.1 Why theatre?

A personal fascination for theatre has been the driving force behind this research. It is an exciting way of story-telling, transformation and creating a different world for the audience to experience. The stage design, scenography and architecture of the theatre contribute to the art of communicating a story and a certain feeling. This “place of performance” also has a social function: theatre is an activity that brings people together, creating a cultural community.

Theatre has always been more than just entertainment. The entertaining aspect is the main reason for visiting a theatre, but it has always added something extra to the cultural environment. Throughout history, the role of theatre in our daily lives has changed a lot. In ancient Greece, theatre was part of the religion and festivals were organized to honour the gods. In more recent history, in the 19th/20th century, visiting the theatre was a part of social life: the phenomenon of “seeing and being seen” was extremely important to display one’s status and wealth. The fact that the lights often stayed on in the auditorium during performances, is proof that this phenomenon was as important as the performance itself, or maybe even more important (Albach, 1965). Nowadays, people come for the performing arts, it’s the main reason for visiting a theatre or performance. But a lot of theatres in the Netherlands are in financial trouble: the audience is aging, the number of visitors is declining and subsidies are cut because of budget deficits of the government (Ter Horst, 2015). It is time for theatres to reinvent themselves and give the audience something extra again in addition to the performances (Gardner, 2015).

This process has already started. A few theatres have recently changed their opening hours in order to become “the living room of the city”, so people can visit it throughout the day. Some even host additional activities, other than only theatrical performances to attract more people. The most successful theatre with this concept in the Netherlands is the “Stadsschouwburg” of Amsterdam, or in short SSBA. They called it “Expanding Theatre” as a new genre. This part of the theatre program contains a wide variety of events, from the TEDxAmsterdam to themed galas and discussion evenings on actualities. It aims to give people something to talk about, engage in the dialogue, but most of all to attract a broader (and younger) audience to the theatre. It is a great success: SSBA is one of the only theatres in the Netherlands that has seen an increasing number of visitors the last years, not only for these events but also for theatrical performances (Daamen, 2012).

If this is a change in the program of theatre, it also means something for the architectonical typology of theatres, with architects playing an important role in this development, when they’re designing a place to be inspired by, where people can meet, interact, exchange experiences and be entertained. Architects can contribute to the creation of a cultural community.

This research aims to find the current developments of theatres or performances that do something different than the typical theatre or performance and thus stand out. Often, these innovative projects attract a lot of people. The question is, how do they do it? Ultimately, the goal is find means to innovate the typology of theatre in a way that it can reach a broader audience.
To take the objective of “attracting an audience” further, it is an interesting fact that these kind of cultural/creative activities are often used for urban regeneration of abandoned areas (Feireiss & Hamm, 2015). These activities give an impulse to other functions, such as commercial companies and (better quality of) housing, which can be reasons for financial investments, upgrading the neighbourhood. Performances of all sorts give people a reason to come there, creating a meeting place for sharing experiences and exchanging ideas (Oswalt, Overmeyer, & Misselwitz, 2013).

This is the power that a place of performance can have, whatever form or genre it may be. It’s going further than selling tickets and getting an audience in a theatre, going further than the performance itself; it has the power to really change the identity of an area, which not only makes it even more interesting, but it also makes this research about the place of performance more valuable.

When talking about the “place of performance” in this research, it concerns not only the performing arts, but everything that has to do with the entertainment of an audience. This means that it will always need two things: the performance and the audience. Without spectators, a performance has no meaning and the performer will just be a person on a stage.

The reason for not only looking at the performing arts – genres such as theatre, musical, opera, dance and music (concerts) – is to widen the scope: if you truly want to innovate the typical theatre and experiment with the typology, it is interesting to see what other cultural and/or entertaining genres do, to attract people. This means that projects that host other genres such as film, art, fashion, circus and even lectures and sports are also studied, as well as activities that combine multiple performances, such as festivals.

Fig. 1.1 “Expanding Theatre”: the event TEDx Amsterdam at the SSBA
(Source: http://stadsschouwburgamsterdam.nl/)
Introduction

1.2 Research Question

The base of the research question is: “How do you create a place of performance?”

To find the answer to this question, it is necessary to describe what basic elements you need to create a place that can facilitate performances, or in other words: the typical theatre. This description of the basics of the “place” has no meaning without a description of the “performance”. What are the different genres of the performing arts? And: Are there more genres that do not belong to the performing arts, but also need a stage and an audience?

When you have the ingredients for the “place” and the “performance”, you need an audience. Without an audience, there’s no performance. This relationship is defined by the spatial structure of the place of performance, the stage-audience configuration. What does this spatial relationship do for the experience of the performance? Is the configuration different per genre or is that of no importance?

All of the above could be answered by studying “regular” places of performance across the world, but the point of this research is to find something new within this realm of knowledge and innovate. So instead of analysing these typical theatres, it is interesting to analyse the projects that stand out. What makes them special and attractive for the audience, compared to basic theatres? What does this do to the experience of the performances that are being performed there? And how does this “added value” relate to the performed genre and the stage-audience configuration?

This means that the main research question changes to:

“How do you create an innovative place of performance with added value to the cultural environment, that reaches a broader audience?”

To summarize all of the above, these are the subquestions that have to be answered in order to be able to answer the main research question:

- What is a typical theatre and how does it work? Or in other words: how do you create a typical place of performance?
- What is the relation between the function (genre) and the spatial layout (stage-audience configuration) of innovative places of performance?
- What is the relation between the performed genre, the stage-audience configuration and the added value in innovative places of performance?
- What specific tools are used in innovative places of performance to add value and thus make them stand out?

These questions will be answered by creating a database of places of performance that differ from the typical theatre, categorizing them and finding patterns that will provide the tools to innovative the typology of theatre.
2.1 Method explanation

A combination of methods is used for this research, varying per subquestion. First, the typical theatre is defined, with the use of literature studies. Any theatre building, production or other (place of) performance that differs from this typical theatre (as described in paragraph 3.1) or/and adds something extra to the theatre experience, can be a subject of this research and thus be added to the database. This database is the result of the second used method: case studies. Basic information is listed, such as the architect/designer, location and the year of completion (or design). Furthermore, for every project there’s a description of WHAT kind of project it is and WHY it is done the way that it is done, in order to better understand it and why it deserves a place in the database.

Than these projects have to be categorized. This is firstly done by making a distinction between the performance and the place. If it is a project that is one particular show, performance or event, it is put in the category: (Place of) Performance. If it is a (theatre)building, stage or platform that can house more performances, not one in particular, it is put in the category: Place (of Performance).

The next categorization consists of three parts: the genre, the stage-audience configuration and why it is in the database in the first place: the added value. Every project is tagged with the appropriate genre(s), configuration(s) and added value(s). These categories are elaborated in the next paragraphs of this chapter. The tagging of the projects with these categories provide the foundations for the results, where the relations that are found between these projects in the database are discussed.
Method

2.2 Genres

The genre represents the performance. The genres that are included in this research, vary from the performing arts to other forms of entertainment with an audience.

Performing arts

Drama Theatre
This genre of acting on stage has the widest variation in stage-audience configurations and in number of spectators, which can vary between 100 to 1200 people. It is also one of the oldest genres of the performing arts. The acoustic requirements for these kind of performances are high.

Musical
A musical, short for musical theatre, is a discipline that combines acting, singing and dancing to convey a story. It is usually a genre in bigger theatres for larger audiences, from 1500 to 2000 people, but depending on the production, it can easily be performed in a theatre with 500 seats for example. The acoustic requirements for these kind of performances are very high.

Opera
This is also a form of musical theatre, but has a more classical origin. The production scale is often enormous, as is the number of people in the audience: generally, between 1500 and 2200 spectators. The acoustic requirements for these kind of performances are very high.

Dance
This genre is about the movement of the body on (live performed) music. Dance theatres have large stages and an audience that varies between 600 and 1400 people. The acoustic requirements for these kind of performances are generally high.

Music/Concert
There are many genres of music and depending on the type, the size of the place of performance can go from a recital room with an audience between 200 and 600 people to concert halls with room for 1500 to 2000 people and even huge arenas for over 50,000 spectators. The acoustic requirements for these kind of performances are very high.
Other forms of entertainment

Film
This genre is about the showing of a movie on a large screen for an audience. Cinemas can have one room or multiple, with varying amounts of seats, between 100 and 500.

Fashion show
A Fashion show is a performance with models wearing fashion items, walking on a runway or catwalk, to present the work of the fashion designer in question to an audience. The number of people in the audience varies, from 100 to a few hundreds.

Circus
The circus is usually a traveling company, with the performers (humans and sometimes also animals) performing all sorts of tricks in front of an audience. The technical requirements can be really high, depending on the complexity of the show. Because of its traveling nature, these performances are often done in a circus tent. The number of seats depends on the size of the tent.

Art
There are some projects in the database that don’t have a person doing a performance, but an art installation creating a theatrical-like experience for an audience.

Festival
Festivals come in many forms and sizes and are usually outdoors. It is a collection of multiple performances of the same genre, or from different genres. This also means that it can host many more people than the genres listed here. That is why in the database this label is often used in combination with another genre, to tell what genre the festival is hosting and to clarify that the place of performance is about a big audience and multiple performances of 1 or more genres.

Lectures
This genre is not really about entertainment, but about conveying information to an audience. Lecture halls usually have a screen, like cinemas, the only difference is that the light often stays on in the auditorium. Again, the number of seats is variable.

Sports
This “genre” is used for the research, because it is still an entertaining performance of the athletes in front of a certain amount of people. Depending on what kind of sport and its popularity, the number of people in the audience can vary from a few hundred to tens of thousands of people.
Method

2.3 Stage-audience configurations

This categorization represents the spatial relationship between the performance and the audience, in other words, it represents the **place**. It determines the perspective on the performance by the audience and together with the scale and the number of seats within the configuration, the level of intimacy between performer and spectator can be found. This is a big part of how the audience experiences the performance. There are many different stage-audience configurations, but can be summarized in three main categories: the end stage, circular and the mixed configuration.

Fig. 2.1 Principle sections of the stage-audience configurations (Source: own illustration)
**End Stage**
In this configuration, the audience and the performer have a very linear relationship, from one end of the chamber to the other end. The shape and size of this configuration comes in many variations, but the principle of a stage closing of the chamber is still the same. With this setting comes the use of ranks: the first ranks, the most expensive tickets, have the best views. The spectators on these seats are often closest to the stage and can have a more intimate experience than other visitors. The cheapest seats are on the lower ranks, they have the lesser views and are the furthest from the stage. Depending on the scale of the auditorium, the ranks can vary a lot.

There is also a distinction in a raised stage and a stage that is on the same level as the first row of spectators, the flat-floor theatre/auditorium. The first is called a proscenium theatre, with the stage framed, as though the audience is looking through a peephole into another world. This also creates a distance between the performance and the audience. It is more traditional than the flat-floor auditorium, which is often used for more modern and experimental theatre. The lack of a frame around the stage, separating it from the audience, makes the experiences often more immersive and intimate.

The end stage, with its many variations, is the most common stage-audience configuration, used in the typical theatre (Strong, 2010).

**Circular**
The circular configuration means that the performance can be viewed from (almost) all sides, because the spectators sit (or stand) all around the stage. Depending on the size of the auditorium, ranks can also be used in this configuration. However, this is a different relation between the audience and the performer than the end stage. It is not a linear performance, but has to be performed all around to reach every spectator. With a small place of performance, this setting can be much more intimate than the end stage configuration, because more people are closer to the stage.

When you look at the section of this principle, there are multiple settings that determine the perspective from the audience and thus the experience. The stage can be raised, or be lower than the audience surrounding it. The audience has to look up to a stage that is raised, which puts the performer more in a place to be admired. When the audience is looking down, the view lines are generally better and creates a more equal experience for people close to the stage and the spectators that are more in the back.

**Mixed**
This is a configuration with no hard limits, shape or size. It simply means that the performance and the audience are mixed. When there is no defined stage and the audience can move freely, the experience is a lot different than when the spectators are perched in their seats. It requires a more active attitude from the audience and that is often something that regular visitors of theatres are not used to: this creates already the base for a new experience. Just like the floorplan, the section has no hard limits, shape or size. It can vary from a flat floor indoors to an outdoor hillside area and everything in between. As long as the performance and audience are mixed.
Method

2.4 Added value

What makes the selected projects in the database stand out? How do they differ from the typical theatre or basic performance? In other words: what is the added value? To give a generic answer to these questions, 3 categories are derived from the projects in the database that summarize different kinds of added value. Each of these categories are divided into subcategories to make the innovation clearer. The particular used elements that make a place of performance innovative, are discussed in chapter 3.2. The categories are:

Connection

Water

Transformation
Surrounding
The places of performance in this category create a connection with their surroundings. This differs from the typical auditorium, because it’s generally a closed “black box”, not related to the surroundings at all.

Community
The case studies in this category create a connection between the people in the audience: they create a place for social interaction, a community and require a more active, participating attitude from the audience.

Active
A project gets this label, when water is actively used during performances: the water is a part of the show and thus creates a spectacular event that is usually not seen in a regular theatre or show.

Passive
This subcategory is used to express the presence of water in a passive way: there’s water present (in the background for example), but not used during performances.

Performance
When a project is labelled with this category, it means that the ways of transforming the décors differ from the regular way, creating a spectacular effect. The regular way of changing a scenery in most theatres, means hoisting elements up and down in the fly-tower above the stage. The projects in this category often have a transformation specifically designed for the performance in question, hence this label is only used in the category Performance. It doesn’t change the stage-audience configuration.

Place
This category includes all the projects that have means of transformation for changing the stage-audience configuration entirely and thus making a change in the building. It is not specially designed for a single show, but makes these designs flexible. By transforming, the place of performance can facilitate different kinds of events and is therefore multifunctional. This means this label is only used in the category Place.
Results

3.1 The typical theatre

Subquestion 1: What is a typical theatre and how does it work? Or in other words: how do you create a typical place of performance?

Most typical theatres are made up by three main areas of activity. There are many variations in scale, size and types of theatres for different genres, but the basic characteristics are similar. These three components are: the chamber (auditorium and stage), the front of house and the back of house (backstage).

Fig. 3.1 Diagram of the typical theatre (Source: own illustration)
Chamber – Place of performance
The chamber is “where the magic happens”: this is the place of performance. The elements that create this place are the stage, where the performers perform, and the auditorium, where the audience is seated. The presence of an audience is the vital condition, because there is no point in doing a performance without an audience (Ter Horst, 2015). The total experience is about the spatial relation between these two key elements. The stage-audience configuration, which has a wide range of variations and determines the character of this connection between spectator and performer. This is further elaborated in paragraph 2.3.

The stage, on which the performance takes place, can be a simple (elevated) platform, or just a designated area, in the same space as the audience. It can also be a separate compartment in the chamber, which is viewed from the auditorium through a proscenium opening (Strong, 2010). This setting usually comes with a fly tower: the heightened space above the stage. It is used to change the sceneries of a performance, if necessary. A side note is that not every genre needs to change the scenery, but if they do, it is usually done by hoisting the décor elements up and down into the fly tower to get them out of sight. This way of changing décors has been used since the 17th century (Simonson, 1950).

The auditorium holds the seating for the audience and has to be planned in such a way that the view on the stage and acoustics enable all spectators to see and hear the performers. This is a fixed format in the typical theatre, but can be flexible in order to create different stage-audience configurations.

The chamber is the place where the performer(s) and audience come together and participate in a live performance. In the typical theatre, both have separate spaces that serve their different needs and prepare them for the performance in the chamber. These are the front of house and the back of house.

Front of House
The front of house is the entrance for the audience and houses all foyer facilities, such as a bar/café, a cloakroom, toilets and sometimes a restaurant (Strong, 2010). This part of the theatre is in some cases open throughout the day, but usually has its peak in use an hour before and an hour after the performance. This means that the front of house has to be planned in such a way that it can accommodate the large flow of people that are going in or out the theatre in a very short amount of time.

Back of House
The back of house - or backstage - is the part that most people don’t see, behind the stage. It houses technical facilities, dressing rooms and a green room (relaxation space) for the performers and crew. There is space for loading and unloading all the equipment and (large) items of scenery and sometimes even a rehearsal studio (Strong, 2010). The reason for “hiding” this part of the theatre for the audience, is to maintain to mystical illusion of a different world, created by theatre. People often visit a theatre not only for entertainment, but also to “escape” their day to day life and reality. The back of house has its own entrance(s) to keep the making of the show out of sight, which enhances the illusion of the performance.
Results

3.2 Genre vs. Stage-audience configuration

Subquestion 2: *What is the relation between the function (genre) and the spatial layout (stage-audience configuration) of innovative places of performance?*

The found relations between the components of “place” and “performance” of the studied innovative projects are not very different from the typical performances. The genres that form the performing arts use the end stage layout the most. This also goes for the genres film and lecture, which is a very logical layout for an audience looking at a screen. The circular configuration is used mostly for the (rock)concerts, sports and fashion shows. The mixed configuration, where the audience and performance blend together, is mostly found in combination with the genres art and festival.

There is one exception and that is the genre of drama theatre. This genre is found in every stage-audience configuration and is experimented with the most. It is interesting to see what the other genres do to become innovative and be a subject for this research.
3.3 Recurring patterns

Subquestion 3: What is the relation between the performed genre, the stage-audience configuration and the added value in innovative places of performance?

From the previous subquestion, it has been made clear that the innovations are not made by a divergent relationship between audience and stage, with the exception of the genre drama theatre. This means that the innovations are achieved in a different way. At first sight, all the projects seem to be doing something entirely different, which makes it hard to compare them. But there are some patterns found in the relations between the genre, the configuration and the added value.

The first pattern is the “connection-surroundings” category, combined with the end stage and the performing arts, plus the genres of film and lecture. This means that the scenography of the stage is enhanced by using the environment in a certain way.

Another pattern is the “connection-community” category with the mixed configuration and the genre of theatre. To be clear, a theatre performance in a mixed configuration is not self-evident: it is in fact rare. The case studies show that mixing the audience with the performance, requires an active attitude from the audience and some level of participation. This is new for the regular theatre visitor, which makes this combination of categories a very new and exciting experience.
The combination of the mixed configuration with “water-active” and art, is a recurrent relation. When water is used in an art installation, the audience is free to move around, over and through it, maybe even touching it, which is contrasting with what we usually expect of art exhibitions. This creates a new experience for the visitors.

A second pattern that has to do with the “water-active” category, is a combination with the end stage and the genre of opera. This classical genre of the performing arts has a long tradition of large productions in opera houses. The projects in the database defy this tradition and are performed outdoors, in or on the water. This creates a new experience for the regular opera visitors, and even attracts people who usually don’t go to the opera.

This relation is similar to the first pattern in this paragraph: the surroundings are used to enhance the scenography of a performance. In this case, it is specifically water that is present - passively - in the background of an end stage, in combination with the genres of theatre and music (concerts).
The “transformation-performance” is often used in combination with musical and the end stage configuration. It is interesting to see that they all deviate from the regular way of changing the décor (using the fly tower) by rotating the different sceneries. One particular musical, “Soldaat van Oranje”, does it even the other way around: the auditorium is on a huge turntable, rotating from one location to the other. This unique transformation is the reason for the success of this show.

The outstanding concerts in a circular configuration are using “transformation-performance”, not to change the scenery for different parts of the story, but to (simply) create something spectacular. The Lotus Stage of the Rolling Stones for example, was a lotus-shaped stage that could open up like a flower, revealing the band to the audience.

The most recurrent relation is the transformation of a place with all three configurations and multiple genres. Typical theatres are only able to be multifunctional on stage, but many projects in the database show that transformation can also be applied to the auditorium or even to the entire building. This creates more possibilities for different genres and sometimes even other functions than only performances. Which kind of genres are performed in these projects, depends on the policy of the theatres in question. The places of performance that can transform, can be seen as a theatre machines: they’re able to adjust to the needed space and technical requirements.
Subquestion 4: What specific tools are used in innovative places of performance to add value and thus make them stand out?

All the analysed projects have an added value and thus differ from the typical theatre, which means that they’re all innovative. In this way they each become an attraction, like a magnet that attracts a broad audience, which is in the end the point of every place of performance. The added values that are found in the database were summarized in three categories - connection, water and transformation – in paragraph 2.4. But what are the particular elements that were used?
Connection
This category is divided in two subcategories: projects that make a connection with their surroundings and projects that create a place for people to connect and create a community. The used elements for making a connection with the surroundings are:

Visual connection
This differs from the "black-box" mentality of the typical theatre, where the place of performance is completely closed off of the surroundings. A famous example is the Casa di Musica, where the auditorium has two glass façades to show the city in the background.

Use of the surroundings
The environment acts as the performer or is part of the scenography. One example is the Sea Organ, where the seawater and the wind are the performers: they play the organ.

Physical connection
The place of performance creates an infrastructural, physical connection with its surroundings, like the Mur Island/Bridge: it is an outdoor theatre on the water, but also a bridge between two parts of the city.

The community-connection is established when the audience is participating in the performance, creating a (temporary) cultural community. So in this category, the found element is:

Participation by the public
One example is the Colosseum in ancient Rome. After a gladiator fight, the audience was given the power to decide if a defeated gladiator should die or stay alive. Another, more recent example, is the festival of Burning Man. Here a temporary and experimental community is created in the desert, where all the visitors participate in their own way, whether it is by constructing an art piece or by doing a performance for other people.
Water
The use of water in a (place of) performance is often spectacular, because it is difficult to operate with large amounts of water in a typical theatre and all its vulnerable technical facilities. So when it is used, it adds some reality to the performance, instead of faking it. Water can be used in an active or in a passive way.

The found elements in the active category are:

Water as stage
When the water is the stage, the performers swim in it, emerge from the water, or move across the water. This is all done in Orpheus & Euridice, an opera performed in the pond behind the Palace of Soestdijk in The Netherlands. The performers bike across the water, disappear in the water and cross the pond by boats.

Water as performer
Water is the performer in the project Cloudscapes. It is used as vapour to create artificial clouds indoors, where the audience can walk through them and touch them in a fantasy-like experience as if they were walking on clouds.

The tools in “water - passive” are:

Dramatic backdrop
The water creates a dramatic backdrop and that adds something special to the performed shows. One example is the Minack theatre, a permanent outdoor seating area and stage carved out of the rocks in the south of England. The sea in the background adds a spectacular view, enhancing the experience.

Water as auditorium
There is one project where the water functions as a seating area for the audience. Only here the seating is made out of boats, belonging to the spectators themselves. It is the annual Prinsengracht Concert, where the floating stage is placed in a canal in Amsterdam and the audience gathers around, on land and on water, to hear the classical music.
**Transformation**

The “transformation – performance” category is about innovative ways of transforming or moving décor(elements) of a particular show. The found tools are:

**Rotation - performance**

The rotation of (a part of) the décor is used to change the location of a scene. This is sometimes used to create a spectacular effect, but for one show in particular it was the only way to get it done: the musical Act One has 35 (!) locations in 2.5 hours. By combining them on different levels and rotating the stage, the change of scenery becomes an important part of the musical.

**Movement of audience**

Most visitors are used to sit in an assigned seat for the entire performance. In some cases, the show uses the movement of the audience to create a unique experience. One example is “Soldaat van Oranje”, where the tiered seating is placed on an enormous turntable, which rotates the audience to the different locations in the story. Another example is the show You Me Bum Bum Train. The audience has to walk through a sequence of rooms, in order to follow the story and go to the next scene.

The tools used in “transformation – place” are:

**Movable roof**

With this element, the place of performance can be made outdoors by opening the roof. This is done in the Starlight theatre for example. Movable roof elements can also be used to create the appropriate acoustic requirements. This is done in the conceptual design for the Lyrical Theatre, with roof elements sliding up and down.
Movable floor
Movable floor elements are not new in the typical theatre. However, using it for the seating area as well is quite new. This creates the possibility to change the stage-audience configuration and thus a lot of artistic freedom. The best example in this category is the Dee & Charles Wyly Theatre, which not only has movable floor elements, but an entire fly tower for the auditorium, to create all kinds of different layouts.

Movable wall
The movable wall tool differs per project. In the Gehua Youth & Cultural Centre, a simple sliding wall creates different stage-audience configurations for different genres and activities. The Old Market Square Stage has curtain-like walls, which can be pulled back to host different genres.

Rotation - place
This tool is about rotating (a part of) the building to host a different genre or function. The MultiMill is an object that can completely rotate on a turntable, depending on the performance that is taking place. The Prada Transformer is a project that is rotated onto a different floor plan, with the use of three cranes. So it is not really a rotation, but turned completely upside down.

Filling with water
This tool is used to change the regular stage to a water stage, for a different kind of performance. There is proof that it was used in the Colosseum in ancient Rome, for the re-enactment of sea battles. A more recent example is the design of the Open Air Theatre, which also functions as a water reservoir after heavy rainfall.

As shown in the database, the ways of transformation can be extreme, by turning the entire building upside down or it can be done very moderately, just by sliding doors for example, opening (parts of) the building up. It provides the - usually spectacular - means for the performances to take place.
Conclusion

According to the results of the case studies, some conclusions can be made. The first is that the relation between the genre and the stage-audience configuration of the projects are not really new or surprising: most genres stick to a certain layout which apparently has been working the best for the performances. The only exception is the genre of drama theatre, which can thrive in any layout.

This means that every project adds something else to the experience than just a different relation between performance and audience. These added values are thus essential for the non-typical places of performance to stand out, they are the key to making a theatre or performance an attraction. The way the genres and the configurations individually relate to these different added values show some recurring patterns. The most frequent pattern is present when a place of performance can transform: this generates many more possibilities than a typical theatre and thus creates a place which can be used in a more flexible way. These kinds of buildings are innovative because they are not as static as the typical theatre. Most of the times this means that there is the possibility for many – if not all – genres to be performed and not only the performing arts, because all configurations can be made. This technical ingenuity makes it interesting for more events and for a broader audience.

Finally, the main research question can be answered.

“How do you create an innovative place of performance with added value to the cultural environment, that reaches a broader audience?”

Innovation in the typology of theatre – and thus creating added value – can be achieved by breaking with the typical place of performance. This can be done by using tools from the transformation category. When movable elements are used, not only for the stage, but also for the auditorium, it gives a lot of artistic freedom for the performing arts and other genres. It can also be done by defying the tradition of the closed “black box”, surprising and wowing the audience. This will give them something to remember, enhancing the experience of the performance. Water, especially when used indoors, can be a piece of reality in the creation of an illusion, in order to strengthen the world that is created on stage.

Ultimately, these elements give a place of performance its spectacular characteristics, which makes it an attraction for a lot of people.

Discussing the method

This developed method of the case study is up for discussion. The findings, as a result of the database, could maybe have been different when adding more and/or other projects to it. Are the chosen categories for genre, stage-audience configurations and added value good/right/enough? It would be interesting to see if these results can also be implemented/used for other architectural (or even theatrical) projects.

Recommendations

It is important to be aware of the possible means: a lot has been done before but an individual tool can still have a unique effect in another situation. A new combination of tools can also create an innovative place of performance. Nonetheless, not everything has to be used in the same project in order to design something that renews the typology. Depending on the issues of the site, the right solution can be chosen and implemented. One simple element can make it magical and choosing thoughtfully is necessary.
References


Figures: http://stadsschouwburgamsterdam.nl/