

THEATERS

Database Analysis

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Summary

Theatre – as a venue, medium, institution and/or performing company – is a major form of mediation and public life of drama, one of the three literary kinds. In comparison with the press, the theater more closely integrates into specific socio-geographical spaces. Actors in concrete physical circumstances and in the presence of actual audiences bring to life dramatic texts. Theater practices in the Slovenian ethnical territory had, from the middle ages to the end of the 17th century, a nomadic and imported character. In other cases they belonged to folklore, sporadically partook religious life or entertainment of the upper class. As in other parts of Austrian empire, first theater venues emerged since the 18th century. They spatially anchored the performing practices, enabling their continuity, autonomy, and geographical distribution among regions and urban centers. Analysis of data on 19 theater buildings, eight national homes, and seven dramatic societies shows how the original and translated theater production in Slovene language in the 19th century gradually occupied the existing theater venues, but also giving life to new edifices intended to symbolically represent the idea of the nation and imaginatively to enhance social cohesion based on this idea.

In the territory of today's Slovenia or next to it, the Romans constructed edifices intended for theatrical performances as early as in the Antiquity (Virunum, Emona, Tergeste). The littoral town of Koper boasted the first documented theater around 1400. In the middle ages and the early modern period, theater performances were mostly sporadic, dependent on foreign itinerant actors and theater companies. They also represented a marginal activity of domestic monastic orders: the Jesuits staged religious drama in the premises of their schools and other buildings, but also in the open air; similarly, Capuchins and other monastic brotherhoods staged Passion processions and related genres in town squares and streets (e.g., in Škofja Loka). Traveling theater companies from Italy and the German Länder offered performances on open urban spaces as early as the middle ages, but they appeared more regularly since the mid-17th century. After 1700, certain town buildings occasionally hosted theater events (e.g., the Ljubljana Town Hall or Vicedom palace, the abandoned Maribor Holy Spirit church). Many visiting theater companies performed before selected audiences in aristocratic salons, castles, or manors, for example, in the Auersperg palace in Ljubljana. Slovenian theater of uneducated literate peasants and artisans in Carinthian villages from the 18th to the 19th century (so-called *bukovniki*) was of great historical importance, although it remained peripheral.

Venetian examples encouraged the littoral town of Koper to boast the first modern theater venue in the 17th century. The other major towns in Carinthia, Styria, and Carniola constructed their public dramatic and/or musical theaters only in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Theater culture, whose intention was the aesthetic enjoyment of middle-class and educated audience, abandoned social barriers of the estate system. Initially, it adopted literary languages of the cultured life at the time – in Carniola, Carinthia, and Styria it was mainly German and Italian in the Slovene Littoral. The Estates Theatre in Ljubljana and few others,

from 1789 onward regularly opened doors for Slovenian performances, among them for original plays. The driving force of these efforts was educated circles of the early national revival. In the aftermath of the Spring of Nations, amateur performances in the mother tongue abounded on smaller stages in towns, market towns, and villages. Such shows constituted an essential component of reading societies, which – in addition to newspapers and literature in Slovene language – established the imagined community. However, the extensive network of over 50 reading societies, gravitating to the western ethnic border and covering almost the entire territory populated by Slovenes (save the north-eastern Prekmurje region), could not meet the aspirations of literati for the artistically ambitious and professional “national theatre.” As a reaction, in the 1860s dramatic societies aiming to advance the idea of a more centralized, institutionalized, and aesthetically prestigious theater (called *narodno gledališče*) emerged in Ljubljana, Maribor, Celje, Ptuj, and Trieste. They strove to promote original or translated theatrical texts in their own standard language.

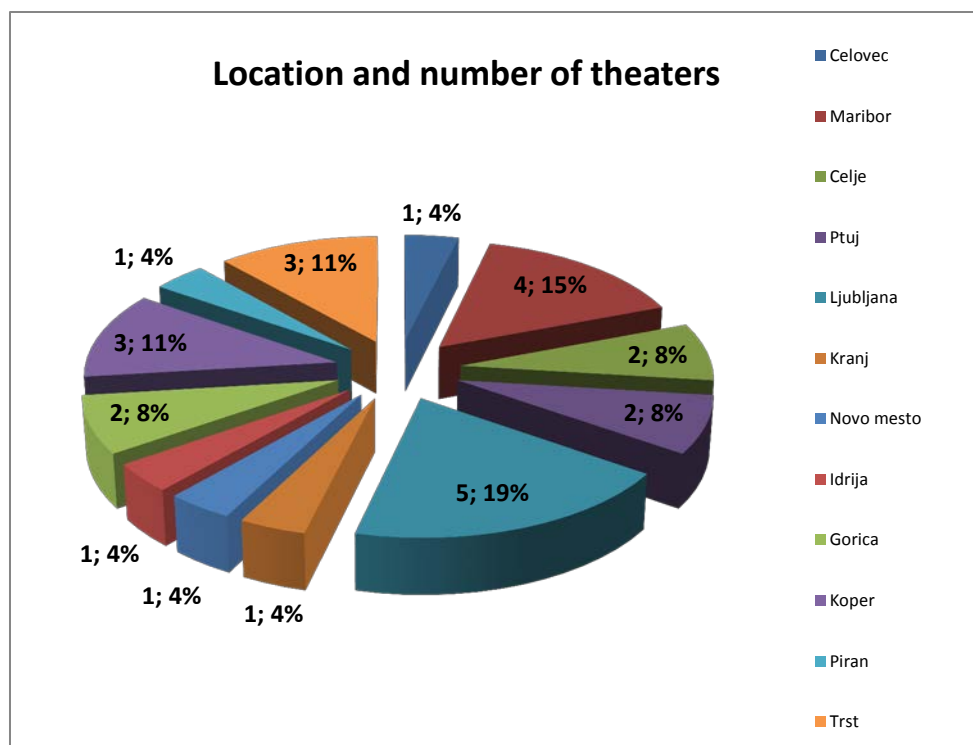
With the help of these societies, the Slovenian theater companies – provisional or permanent – gradually occupied the existing German-language city theaters towards the end of the 19th century (e.g., in Maribor, Celje, and Ptuj). On the other hand, they settled in more representative edifices that had been intentionally built to house them. In addition to “national homes” (*narodni dom*) in which theater still accompanied nationalist sociability and amateur culture (Novo Mesto, Celje, Maribor, Ljubljana, Kranj, Trieste), dramatic theaters dubbed *narodno gledališče* took roots in Ljubljana, Maribor, and Trieste. Such theaters together with “national homes” spatially symbolized the cultural capital of the people. Professional theater companies were established after 1919 with the creation of the new state of South Slavs. Although they frequently flattered with popular tastes of petty-bourgeois audience, theaters in the inter-war period finally distinguished themselves from amateur endeavors in rural areas, smaller settlements, and working-class environments. Around 1920, the Fascist regime in Italy violently suppressed autochthonous public word in the Primorska region. The Nazi and Fascist occupation in 1941 abolished Slovenian theater or subjected it to severe control and restrictions.

Selected tables, graphs, and maps

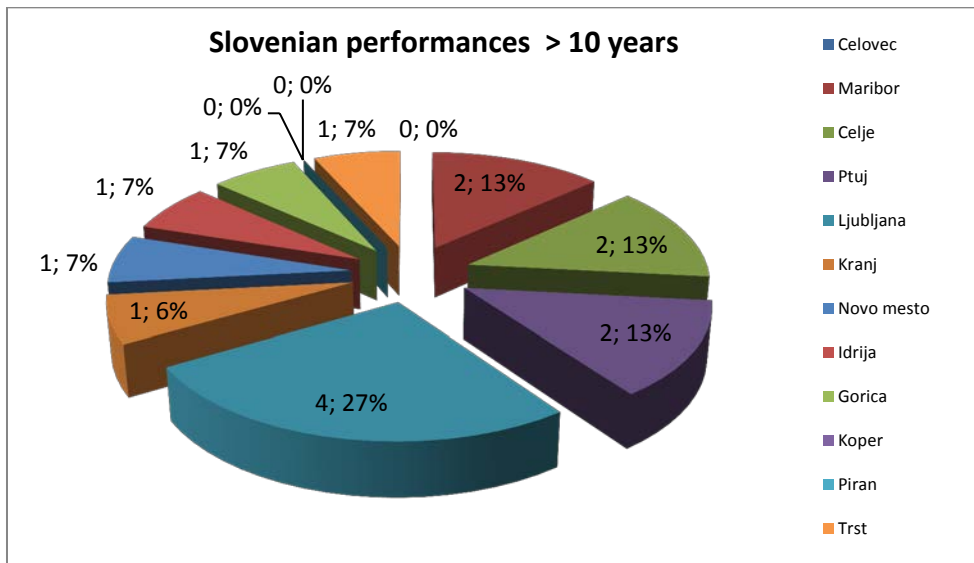
Table 1

Settlements	Number of theater buildings – period of construction					Number of national homes	More than 10 years of Slovene performances
	Total	1400-1700	1700-1800	1800-1850	1850-1920		
Celovec	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Maribor	4	0	1	1	2	1	2
Celje	2	0	0	1	1	1	2
Ptuj	2	0	1	0	1	1	2
Ljubljana	5	0	1	0	4	1	4
Kranj	1	0	0	0	1	1	1
Idrija	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Novo mesto	1	0	0	0	1	1	1
Gorica	2	0	1	0	1	1	1
Koper	3	2	1	0	0	0	0
Piran	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Trst	3	0	1	0	2	1	1
Total	26	2	8	2	14	8	15

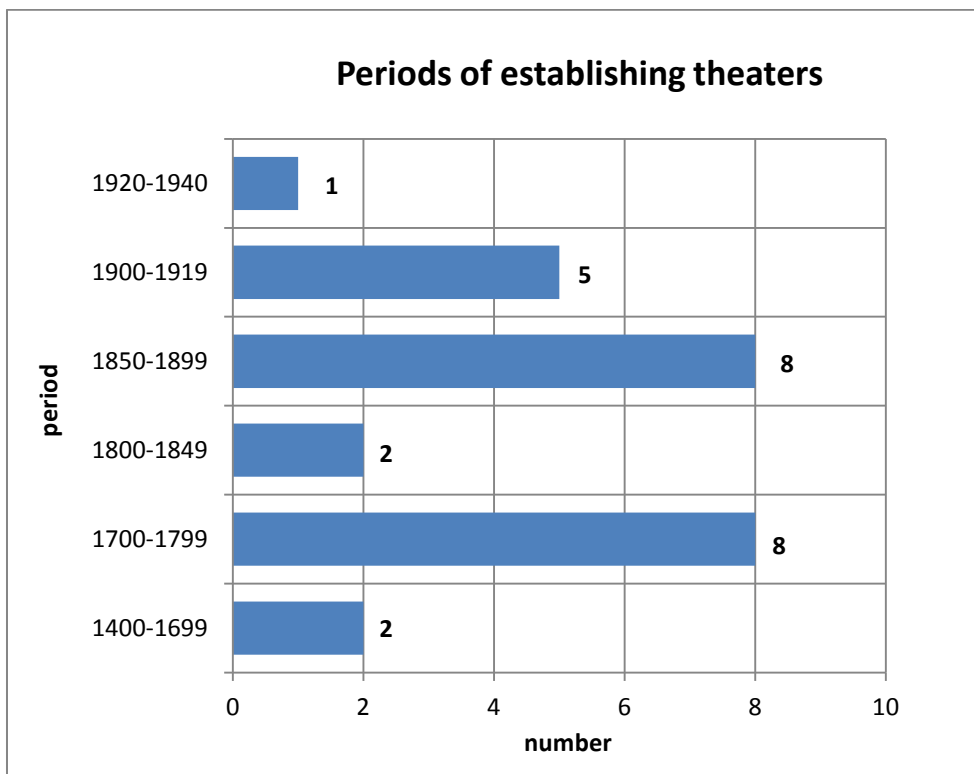
Graph 1. Settlements with theater buildings (their shares in the sum total of theaters)



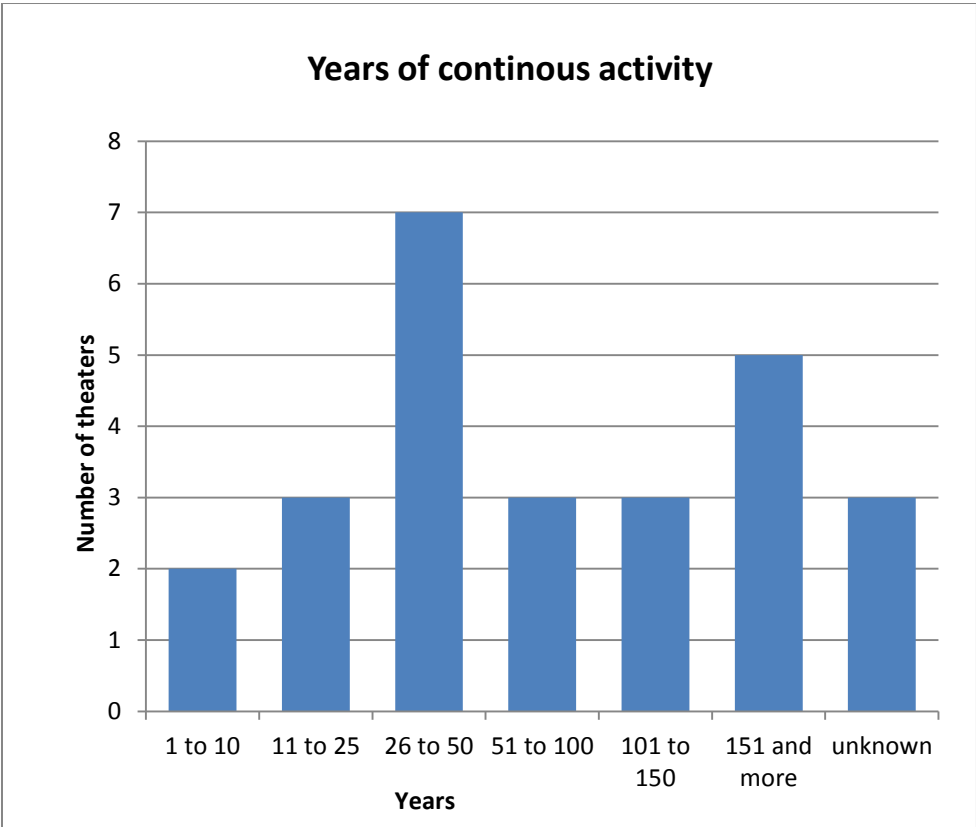
Graph 2. Settlements with Slovenian performances in more than 10 years (their shares in the sum total of theaters)



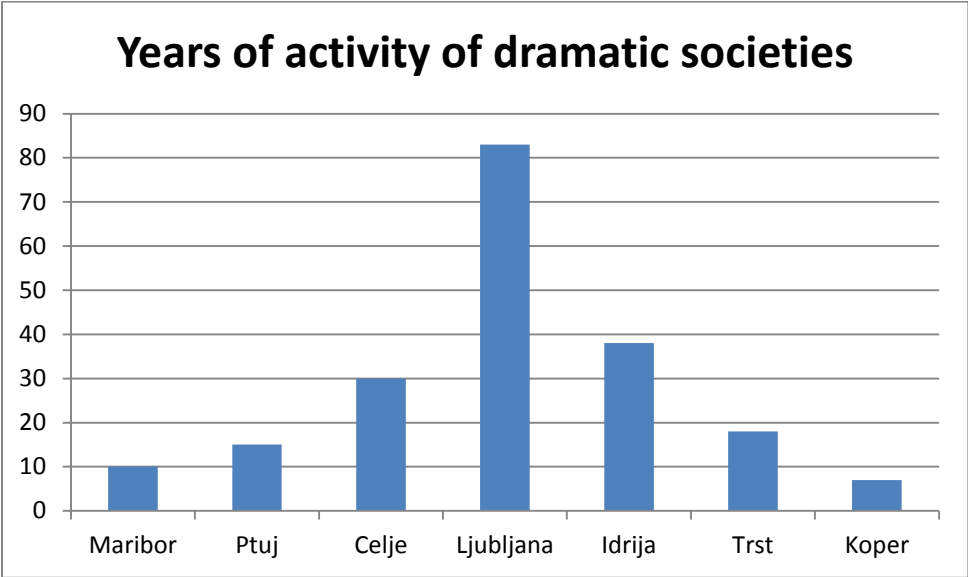
Graph 3. Period of construction of theaters and number of buildings



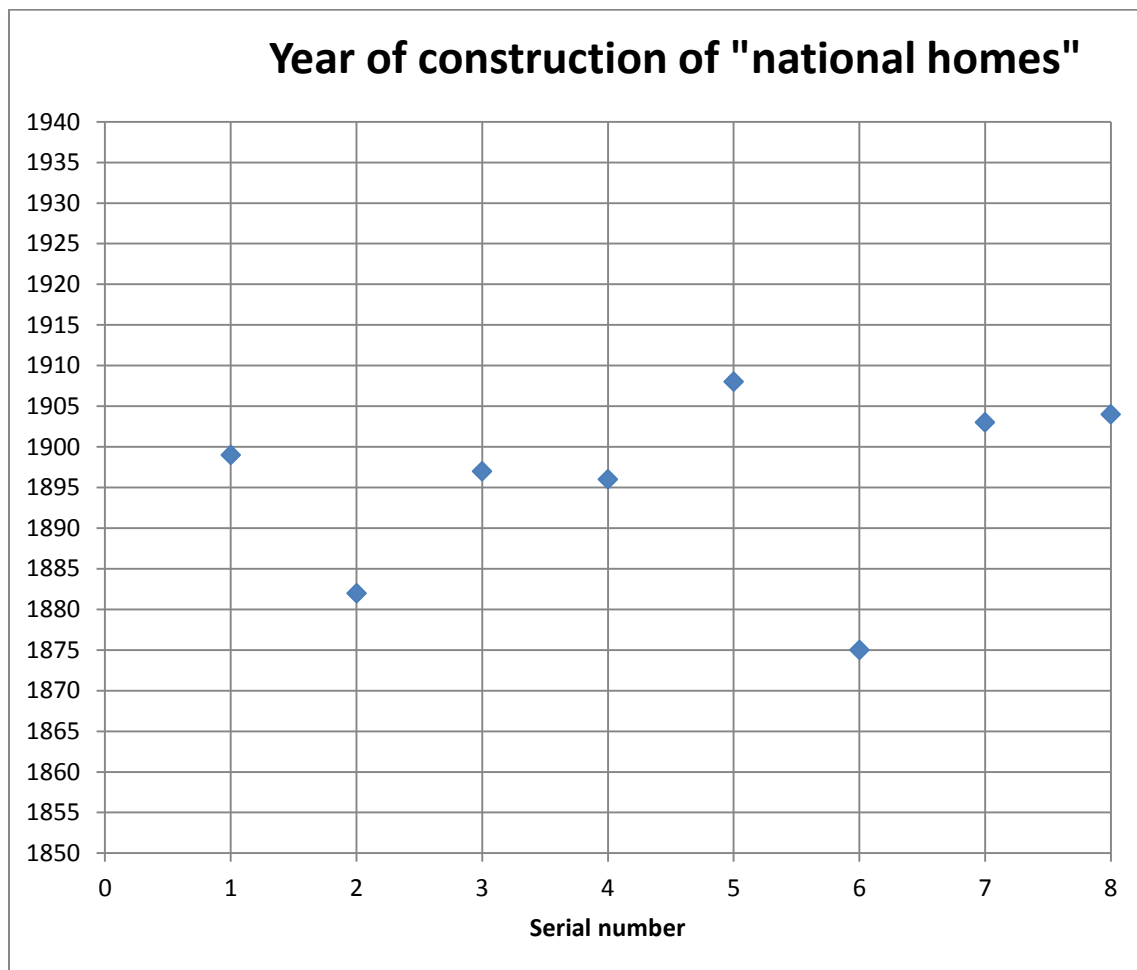
Graph 4. Number of years of continuous activity and number of theaters



Graph 5. Years of activity of dramatic societies – Koper (Dramski skup Istra)



Graph 6. Year of construction of national homes: 1 – Maribor, 2 – Ptuj, 3 – Celje, 4 – Ljubljana, 5 – Kranj (Ljudski dom), 6 – Novo mesto, 7 – Gorica (Trgovski dom), 8 – Trst (Slovensko gledališče)



Map 1. Theater buildings: Languages used (S = Slovene, N = German, I = Italian), Years of activity (yellow = 5–49, green = 50–99, blue1 = 100–149, blue2 = 150–199, blue3 = 200 and more)

