

# Working class prefers comedy and the intellectual class goes for drama

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This is the Theatre Royal of Newcastle. Credit: Darrel Birkett

A study enjoying Spanish participation has analysed the theatre demand of society according to the socioeconomic status of the different types of the viewing public. The results were that the theatre is not just enjoyed by the intellectual classes. While they do prefer drama, the working class opts for comedy and the wealthier are swayed by reviews.

Theatre arts are loss-making services that require subsidies to stay afloat. This type of practice has frequently come under fire as it is thought that theatre is consumed mainly by society's economic elite.

A study published in the *'Journal of Cultural Economics'* proves this notion wrong. According to its results, the so-called "intellectual class" prefers dramas, the "working class" opts for comedies and the wealthier

are influenced by professional reviews when they have paid for a theatre ticket.

"The aim was to analyse theatre demand. It was based on a type of models used in microeconomics that analyses how individuals make their decisions. These models are used frequently in transport and marketing and go by the name of discrete choice models. We conducted surveys in two of Newcastle's most important theatres," as explained to SINC by J.M. Grisolia, coauthor of the study and [researcher](#) at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

Newcastle is home to different types of theatres, from the most modern, like the Northern Stage, to older examples. The experts worked with the 3,000 observations obtained from a survey performed on 300 people.

As the researcher points out, "we presented individuals with ten hypothetic choice scenarios, each with five alternatives. Each option was defined by its attributes: price of the theatre ticket (from £7 to £35), the type of theatre, the genre (comedy, drama and experimental theatre), repertoire (classic, modern, contemporary), author (famous or unknown), expert or popular reviews (light-hearted, forums, word of mouth)."

The experts combined different variables for obtaining multiple interactions until arriving at ten choice scenarios in order to extract more information from each subject. The model used is called a latent class model, which groups the sample individuals into different categories.

## **One class, one scenario**

The model clearly identifies three different classes that attend the theatre: a "well-off" class that represents 43.1% of the sample and is characterised by preference for classic theatre venues, enjoying all types

of theatre and showing more willingness to pay, especially when reviews have been good.

The "working" class includes more young theatre goers (25.4% of the sample) who are mainly interested in comedy, consulting non-professional reviews more frequently and displaying less willingness to pay. Lastly, the model identifies an "intellectual" or "cultural" class (31.5%) with high willingness to pay for theatre productions that have a special preference for drama and form their opinion more independently of the reviews. "It is important to highlight that the intellectual class is not the same as the wealthy class," outlines the author.

Grisolía concludes that "these are the three ways in which theatre connects with society. Although it is seen as an elitist pastime, it also has a more popular side. The results are very useful for marketing actions and sales policies and help us to understand the role that theatre plays in each strand of society."

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