

# The viability of a theatre depends on the character of its local population

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This research was conducted by **Ken Willis, Jen Snowball, Colin Wymer and Jose Grisolia** at **Newcastle University, UK, Rhodes University, South Africa and Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain**

## Summary

This paper describes the findings of research that built a statistical model to identify what determined the likelihood that someone would visit the theatre, particularly the role that travel costs played in that equation. The research used the case study of Northern Stage, a producing theatre in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, northeast England. The researchers examined box office data for 29 productions between 2007 and 2008 (comprising a wide variety of genres and types of performance). They found that socio-demographic variables like education, employment and age had ‘a relatively larger impact on average attendance than distance from the theatre’ on the likelihood of attendance.

## They profiled theatregoers to compare them with the general population

Because the box office data contained the postcode of the booker, the research was able to profile the theatregoers using neighbourhood statistics about the socio-economic profile of the areas where they lived. They used the smallest, most granular geographic area possible: Output Areas.

## The research was plagued with the difficulty of calculating the true cost of a visit to the theatre and the degree to which demographic variables were interrelated

For example, one visit to the theatre may lead to subsequent trips, or a change in employment status may affect someone's lifestyle. Nonetheless, the researchers were able to arrive at adequate figures and identify what they thought were the key variables to go into their model.

## 'The viability of Northern Stage is very much dependent on its location in the city of Newcastle, with its large population'

The reason for this is that changes in the demographic character of the local population would (according to the researcher's model) significantly affect the number of trips to the theatre in Newcastle. As a major city, Newcastle has a critical mass (and relatively high proportion) of those likely to attend the theatre: the educated, the affluent and those without dependant children.

### Keywords

**theatre** **distance** **UK** **behaviour** **box office**

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