

# Spatial Location of Theatre Activity. An Analysis Based on the Case of Barcelona

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: Daniel Paül holds a PhD in Geography from the Universitat de Lleida (2009) and a postgraduate degree in Geography, Land Planning and Environmental Management from the Universitat de Girona (2005). His many lines of research deal with the repercussions that cultural activities have on the urban space. In this respect, he has particularly analysed the impacts the museums and occasional activities can have on aspects such as the urban transformation of the city, the residents' pride and the image projected by these spaces.

English translation, Neil CHARLTON

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## Abstract

Cultural activities — and theatres are no exception — interact with the urban spaces where they take place. However, despite this potential, few studies have analysed the interactions between theatres and urban space. The aim of this article is to show that there is not only a “location map of Barcelona’s theatres” but also that a wide range of circumstances contribute to a distribution of activities linked to the theatre fabric throughout the city.

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**Keywords:** location, theatres, Barcelona, city, cultural production

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## **Spatial Location of Theatre Activity. An Analysis Based on the Case of Barcelona**

### **Introduction**

Cultural activities are no longer considered solely as a cultural expression. They are also a factor that can act as an engine of the urban economy, with a set of tangible repercussions for the urban space. In fact, the spatial repercussions of theatres have evolved over time. Traditionally, most cultural activities, including theatres, which needed a permanent infrastructure, had been concentrated in the historical city centres or in their nearby areas. The modern evolution of cities, along with various changes of modes and technical needs, meant that some theatres moved to other, usually peripheral, areas. At present, however, the location of theatres no longer responds solely to this reality. Their location is increasingly broad and variable and goes beyond the building that houses the stage to include other aspects such as training, association movements and various types of economic activity.

Theatre activity can be considered a primary element to understand the mobility and territorial spread of the cultural movement. The high number of facilities and professions that can interact in this activity makes theatres representative of the changes that cultural venues can generate in the urban space. However, despite this potential, few studies have analysed the interactions between theatres and the urban space.

This article will show how the various processes of change and spatial relocation of Barcelona's theatres have involved a dual process. On the one hand, theatre facilities have spread through different areas of the city. But, on the other, they have articulated a process in which aspects such as seating capacity, rotation in the number of shows and the presence of employees have tended to a strong spatial specialisation in very specific neighbourhoods. Specifically, the article will start with an analysis of the historical evolution in the location of theatres, compared to the urban evolution of the city of Barcelona itself. This will be followed by an analysis of the interactions that theatres can generate with their surrounding areas. In this respect, aspects

such as the audience, the number of jobs, the capacity of the auditoria and the number of performances will be analysed.

This approach focused on the theatre stages will be complemented by a broader vision, which will refer to all the activities that are necessary and accompany the development of theatre activity: location of theatre companies, training centres, and businesses and associations related to the theatre world. In this way, we seek to highlight the difference between the venue (more or less territorially located) and the human fabric necessary for the operation of this (much more diffuse) venue.

The final objective is to illustrate how there is not only a “map of the location of Barcelona’s theatres” but that the diversity of existing cases helps generate multiple spatial interactions.

### Theoretical Framework

The functions of arts facilities are diverse. In addition to those traditionally associated with the various activities, in the last few decades people have become aware of the need to incorporate new ones. The most common have been to reclassify and represent new public spaces (Monaci, 2005; Paül i Agustí, 2014a). A change that has led cultural activities to act as an engine of the urban economy (Bianchini and Parkinson, 1993), with tangible repercussions in the public space (Landry et al., 1996).

Performing spaces have participated in this change (Scott, 1997). With the new investments, they have become an element of change for the city and, above all, for the districts where they are located (Hughes, 1998): they promote the feeling of pride of belonging to a city, strengthen economic activities around them, can attract new residents, and so on (Ramos and Sanz, 2009). This has allowed some theatre managers to access new sources of funding, and has enabled the construction of new performing spaces or the renewal of the existing ones. These aspects have not always been accompanied by investments in the production, innovation and consolidation of new theatre initiatives (Strom, 2002). However, in parallel, it has also led to the fact that in some cases the new venues have become white elephants (Paül i Agustí, 2015): excessively ambitious and costly buildings, which can produce less desirable effects, such as gentrification, increased land prices, higher public deficit and disappearance of the most minority productions in favour of big shows with assured success. Some authors have come to consider theatre as “the small white elephant par excellence” (Martínez and Illa, 2015, 74).

The study of the most important projects, usually large national theatres or works by emblematic architects, has overlooked the possible repercussions of other venues. Individually more modest in terms of values, they are also clearly more numerous. Thus, the sum of their repercussions might be relevant at city level. In several cases, the combination of several small cultural facilities, including theatres, has allowed the social cohesion of the city to be improved and an image of a dynamic city to be projected at the regional level (Paül i Agustí, 2009).

Nevertheless, despite the increase in functions related to performing spaces, few articles have analysed the repercussions that this fabric can generate in cities (Harvie, 2009). It is on this aspect that this research will be focused. Specifically, we will analyse the territorial differentiation of theatre activity in Barcelona based on the analysis of different variables recognised by several authors as illustrative of the repercussions that can be generated in the city (Sacco and Ferelli, 2006; Zukin and Braslow, 2011): theatre density, attendance, economic activity that revolves around them or seating capacity of the auditoria, among other elements. With this data, the specialisation in some areas or the segregation of other venues will be mapped, and areas of influence of the different areas where production and cultural consumption are concentrated will be identified (Newman and Smith, 2000). These are all important aspects for interrelations between cities and performing spaces.

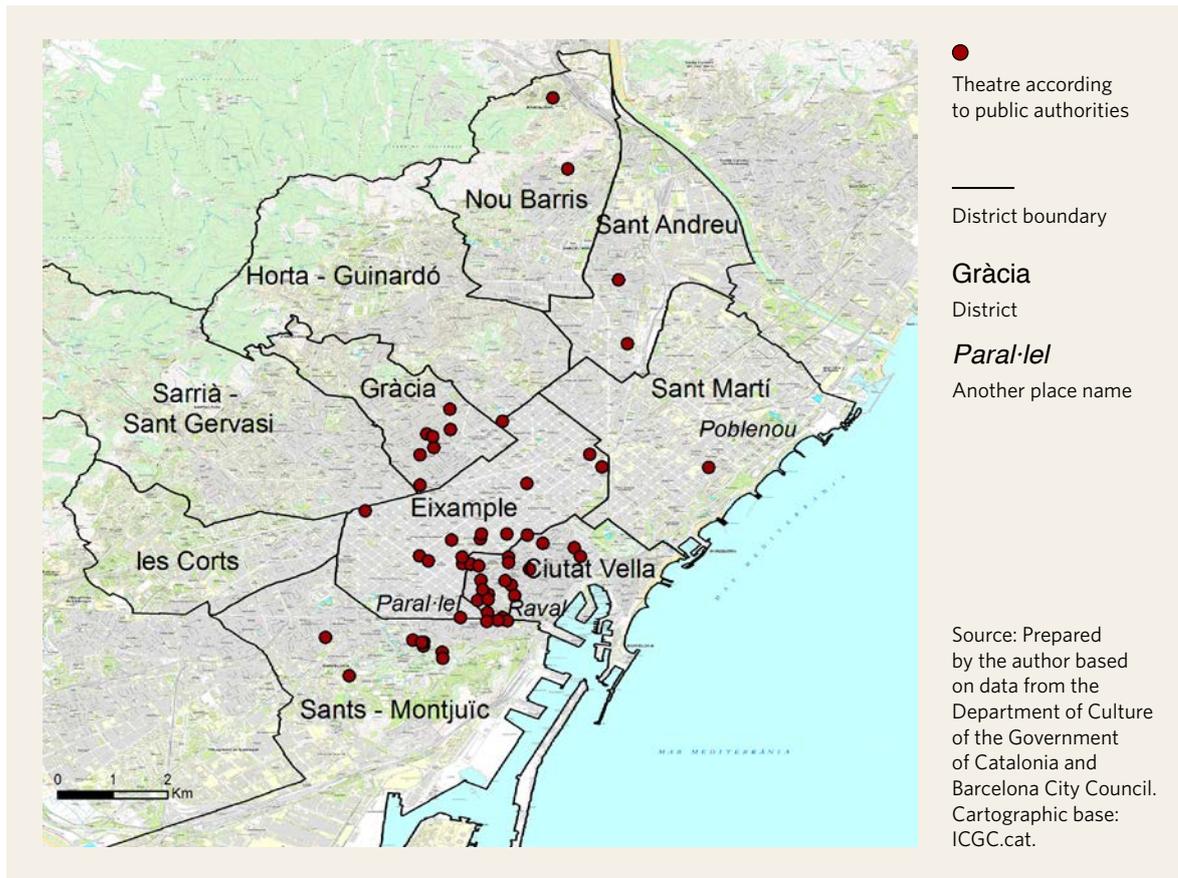
### The Distribution of Theatres in Barcelona

The location of Barcelona's theatres obeys several distribution logics (Paül i Agustí et al., 2017). Thus, if we analyse the theatres officially recognised by some of the public authorities (Government of Catalonia or Barcelona City Council) we find quite a concentrated distribution (Figure 1) where, first of all, there is a well-established central area, around Gràcia and Ciutat Vella, which has a good number of venues, including most large commercial auditoria. This central area is complemented by a new northern area, headed by the theatres Zona Nord, Ateneu Popular de Nou Barris, Sant Andreu Teatre, Nau Ivanow or Sala Beckett, which recently moved to Poblenou (2016). We could also include in the centrality logic the great public venues, the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya (TNC) and Mercat de les Flors.

However, these large venues are complemented by a series of other theatres, of small or medium format, largely devoted to experimental and alternative theatre programming. These are venues much more widely spread in the city as a whole, mostly private initiatives. Nevertheless, the location of the Art Factories, new creative centres promoted by Barcelona City Council, has helped strengthen this dual trend. This second group of theatres tends to be located in developing urban areas. The availability of land at affordable prices and the existence of some abandoned manufacturing sites have been fundamental to these locations.

The theatres in this second group tend to base their location on advantages derived from urban development. As these advantages disappear, basically due to the growth of the urban fabric and the rise in the price of land/rent, they tend to move to new peripheral locations.

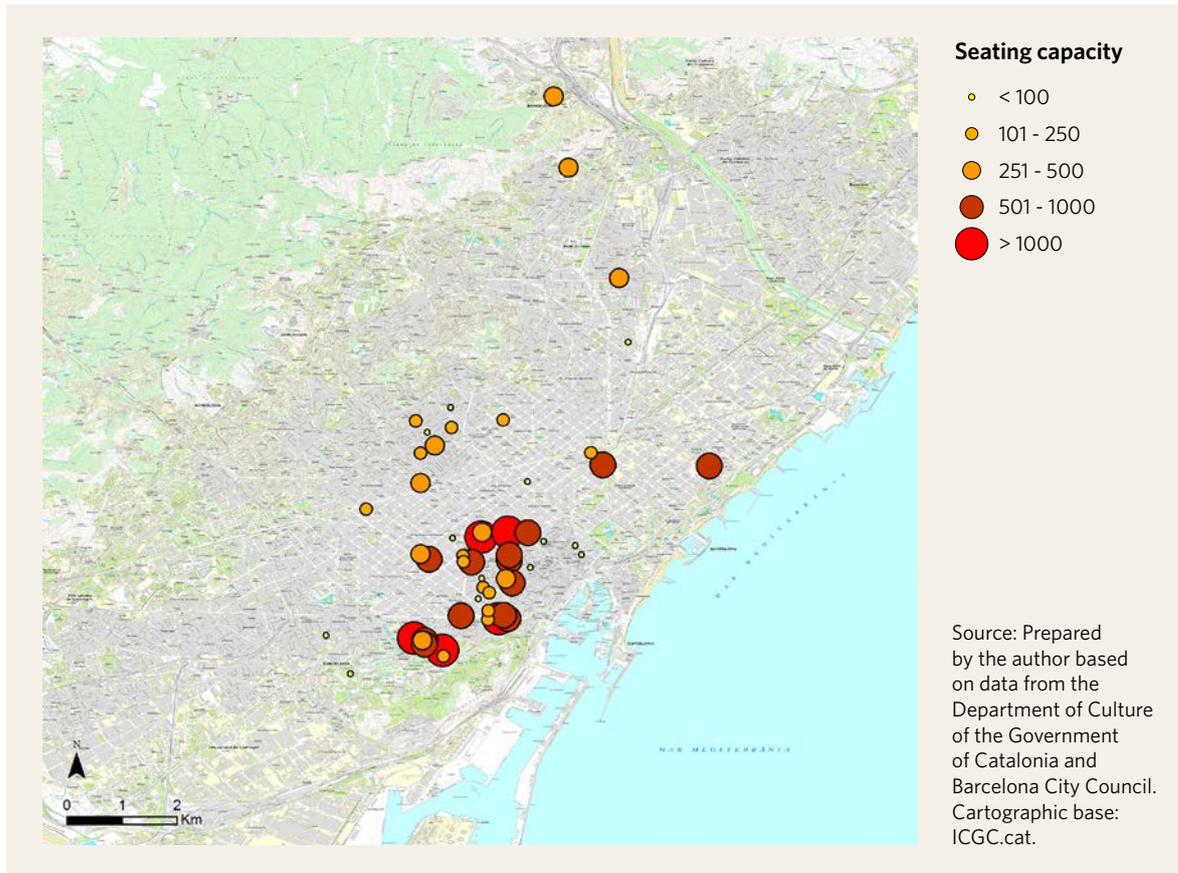
This process is not new. Historically, Barcelona has experienced a major process of opening and closing of theatres, which has been widely studied (Sobrequés, 1991-2001; Aloy et al., 2011; Albertí and Molner, 2012; and Ramon and Perrone, 2013). These changes have meant, for example, that in 2014 the average age of Barcelona's theatres was 27 or that only 12 of them exceeded this average. Two important facts arise from this. None of the theatres opened in Barcelona between 1930 and 1960 are still operating today in

**Figure 1.** Location of theatres in Barcelona according to institutions

Barcelona and almost half of them are less than a decade old (Paül i Agustí et al., 2017). Theatres show, therefore, a strong tendency to change location to adapt to a shifting urban context.

The differences between Barcelona's theatres are even more evident if we analyse more quantitative aspects. If we analyse the number of spectators in the different auditoria (Figure 2), we see how the central areas of Raval, Paral·lel and Montjuïc have the vast majority of the seating capacity. Beyond these three, only the area occupied by the TNC stands out (more than 1,700 seats distributed in three auditoria). Most of Barcelona's theatres have a single auditorium (84%). The six theatres that have two auditoria and the three with three are mostly located in the aforementioned areas. On average, Barcelona's auditoria have a capacity of 397 seats, but they range from the 40 seats of Cincónomos Espai d'Art to about 2,000 of the Teatre Grec. Most of the smaller premises are located in Ciutat Vella, while the venues with more than 1000 seats are located in Montjuïc and Eixample.

The location of Barcelona's theatres described so far, focusing on a series of central areas, starts to change if we analyse other variables. For example, if we analyse the number of shows that are scheduled in a season, new areas appear (Figure 3). Gràcia is the district that offers the greatest number of different shows. In spite of having around 10% of the number of auditoria and seating capacity of the city, more than 25% of the shows in Barcelona are performed there. On the other hand, the theatres with the greatest seating

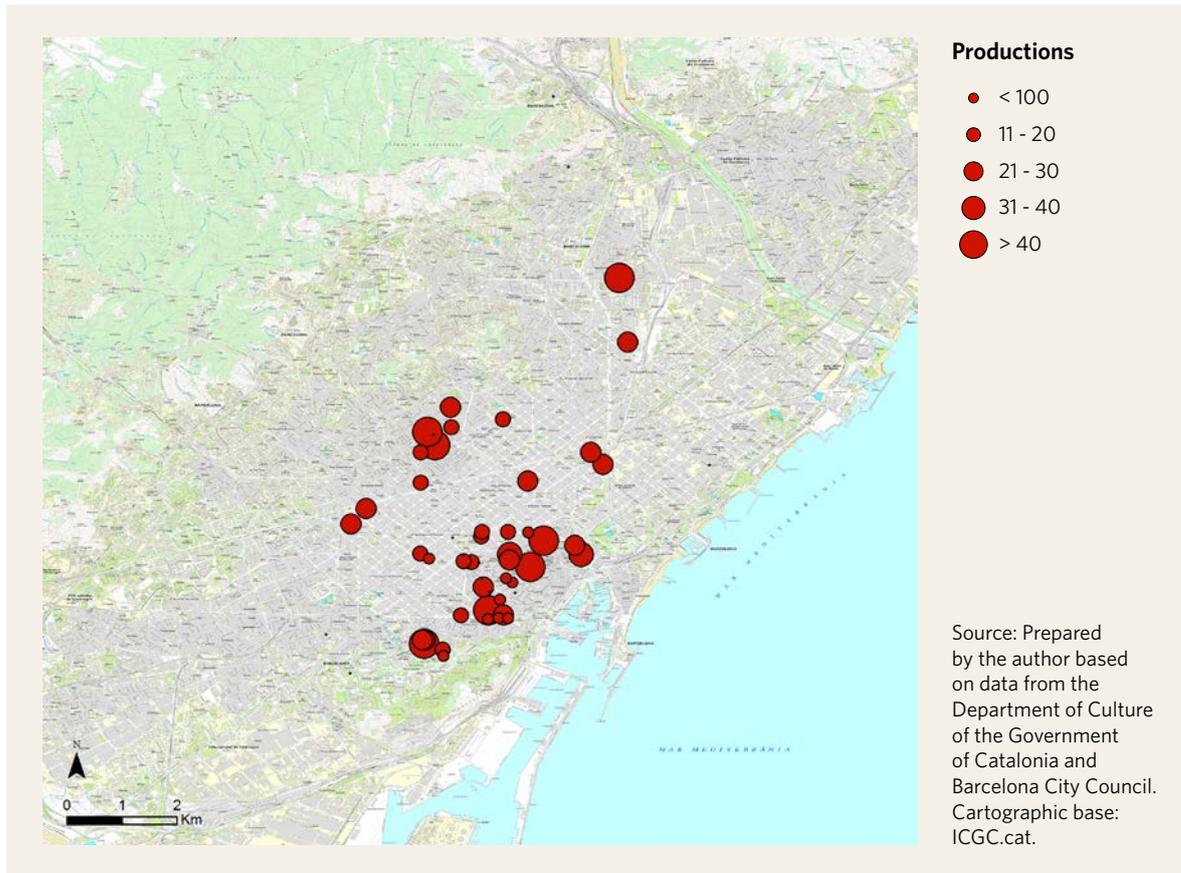
**Figure 2.** Theatre seating capacity (2014)

capacity, located in Eixample, Sants-Montjuïc and Sant Martí, have longer seasons for each production, which means less rotation. Therefore, the small theatres tend to be more dynamic in this field.

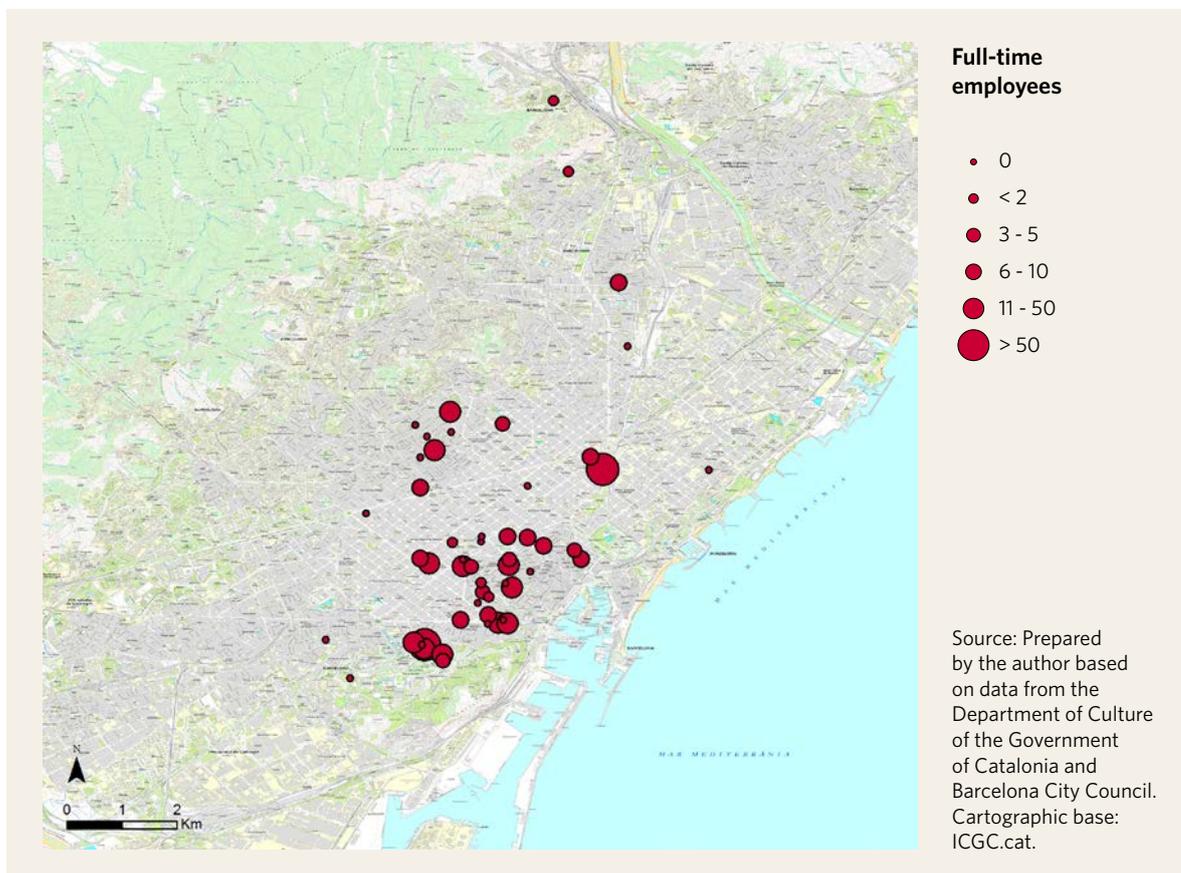
Location patterns change again if we consider jobs created in the theatre itself (Figure 4). Every production involves a large number of professionals. Unfortunately, we do not have data on all the people involved in theatre activities, only on the direct employees involved in the theatre sector. A figure that, given the uncertainty under which part of the profession is forced to operate, probably does not reflect the group of professionals involved in the theatre world but can be an indication of the existing distribution patterns.

According to data from the Government of Catalonia for the period 2006-2013, the number of direct employees in Barcelona's theatres was between 490 and 620 people working full time (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2006-15). This means an average of between 14.5 and 18.8 employees per theatre. However, the reality is more complex. Almost half of the direct employees in Barcelona's theatres are active in three public venues: the TNC, Mercat de les Flors and Teatre Lliure. If we do not take into account these three public theatres, the average would drop to eight employees per venue. We must also bear in mind that the economic crisis experienced in recent years has affected this. While private theatres have experienced a moderate fall in the number of employees, there has been a greater drop in public theatres.

**Figure 3.** Number of productions in theatres in Barcelona (2014)



**Figure 4.** Concentration of employees (full time) in the Barcelona's theatres (2014)



As can be seen, the distribution of theatre employees is clearly determined by the location of the big public theatres: Sants-Montjuïc and Sant Martí clearly stand out in the Barcelona context. The concentration of direct employment is not linked, therefore, with the number of theatres, or with their seating capacity, or with the number of shows. In this respect, the case of Gràcia is very illustrative. It is the district with the highest number of shows, but that in comparison employs few people. The small size of the auditoria and the presence of volunteer and/or amateur personnel explain the low number of direct jobs.

### The Distribution of Theatres in Barcelona and Repercussions on the Urban Fabric

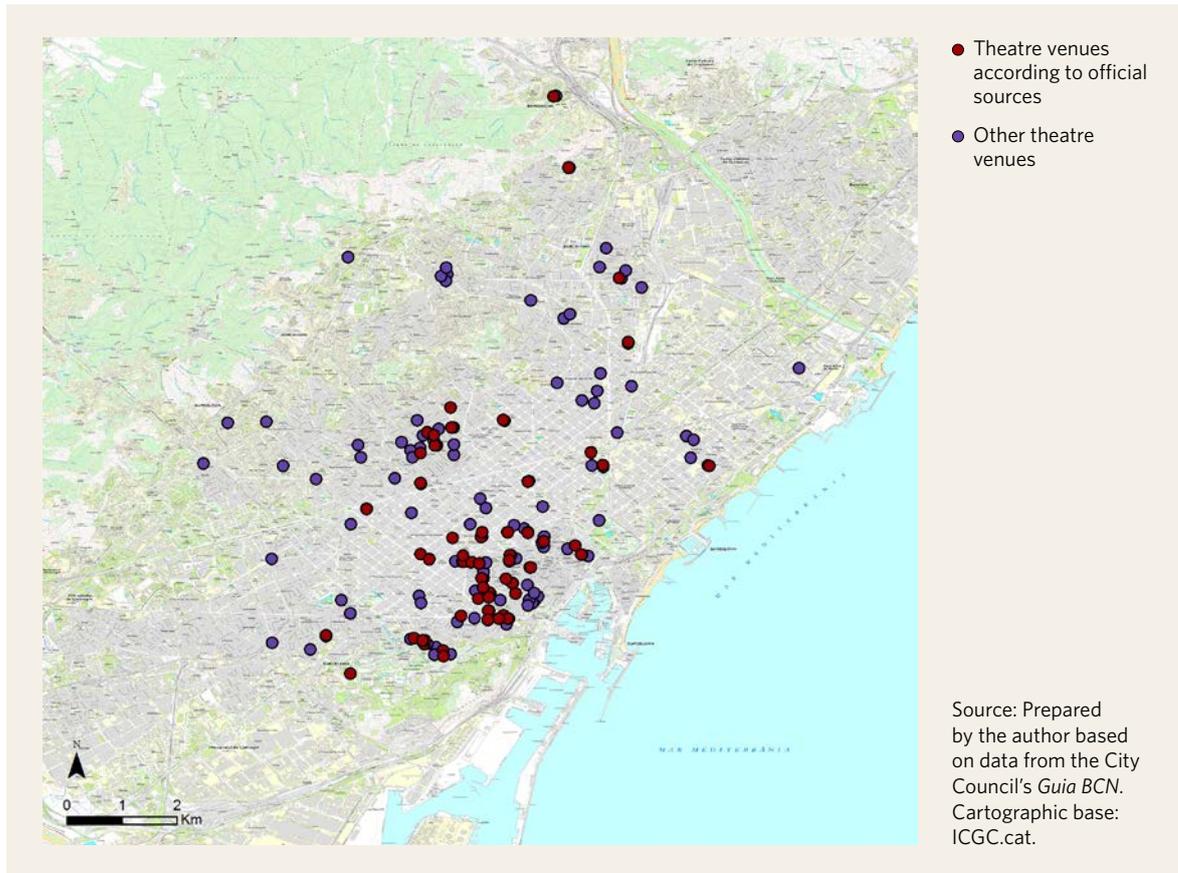
The distribution of theatres, described in the previous section, only provides a partial picture of Barcelona's theatre reality. In fact, it omits some important venues. Thus, if we only take this data into account, of the 10 districts into which Barcelona is divided, three would not have a single theatre (Les Corts, Sarrià - Sant Gervasi and Horta-Guinardó) and in three others there would be only one or two (Sant Martí, Sant Andreu and Nou Barris). This polarisation would be even greater if we distinguished by neighbourhoods: only 16 Barcelona neighbourhoods (of the 75 in the city) would have a theatre.

However, this data does not reflect the existing situation on the ground. We have not identified important venues, such as the Teatre de Sarrià (in Sarrià - Sant Gervasi) or the Foment Hortenc, Lluïsos d'Horta or Ateneu Hortenc (all three in Horta-Guinardó). The activity of the whole Barcelona theatre sector far exceeds the effects generated solely by the theatres that appear in the previous sources. This is clearly seen if we extend the field of analysis with information from the City Council's *Guia BCN*<sup>1</sup> (Figures 5 to 8). If we take into account the set of venues in Barcelona, understood as all those that could accommodate, in a closed space with a permanent stage, some type of theatre performance, the number would pass from the 67 theatres identified by the official sources to 124 (Figure 5).

The first change we see if we take into account all venues is that the dispersion increases. The location of the venues is more concentrated in the aforementioned areas (Gràcia and Ciutat Vella) but all the districts of the city now have some venue. In this respect, the concentration of venues in Sant Andreu and La Sagrera is especially notable. This greater spatial dispersion reinforces the vision of the importance of theatre venues throughout the city, not just in a few neighbourhoods, as official statistics seemed to indicate.

This distribution throughout the city is also seen in one of the activities most directly related to theatre: the location of the companies (Figure 6). If we map out their location we can find a fairly wide distribution, with major concentrations in Sants-Montjuïc. However, the virtually total

1. *GuiaBCN* is a website of Barcelona City Council featuring information about "over 30,000 associations and facilities" in the city. It allows different search criteria: by show, by theme, by district, by ownership... This research used the information available on the subject "theatre" in June 2018.

**Figure 5.** Distribution of the theatres and stages of Barcelona (2018)

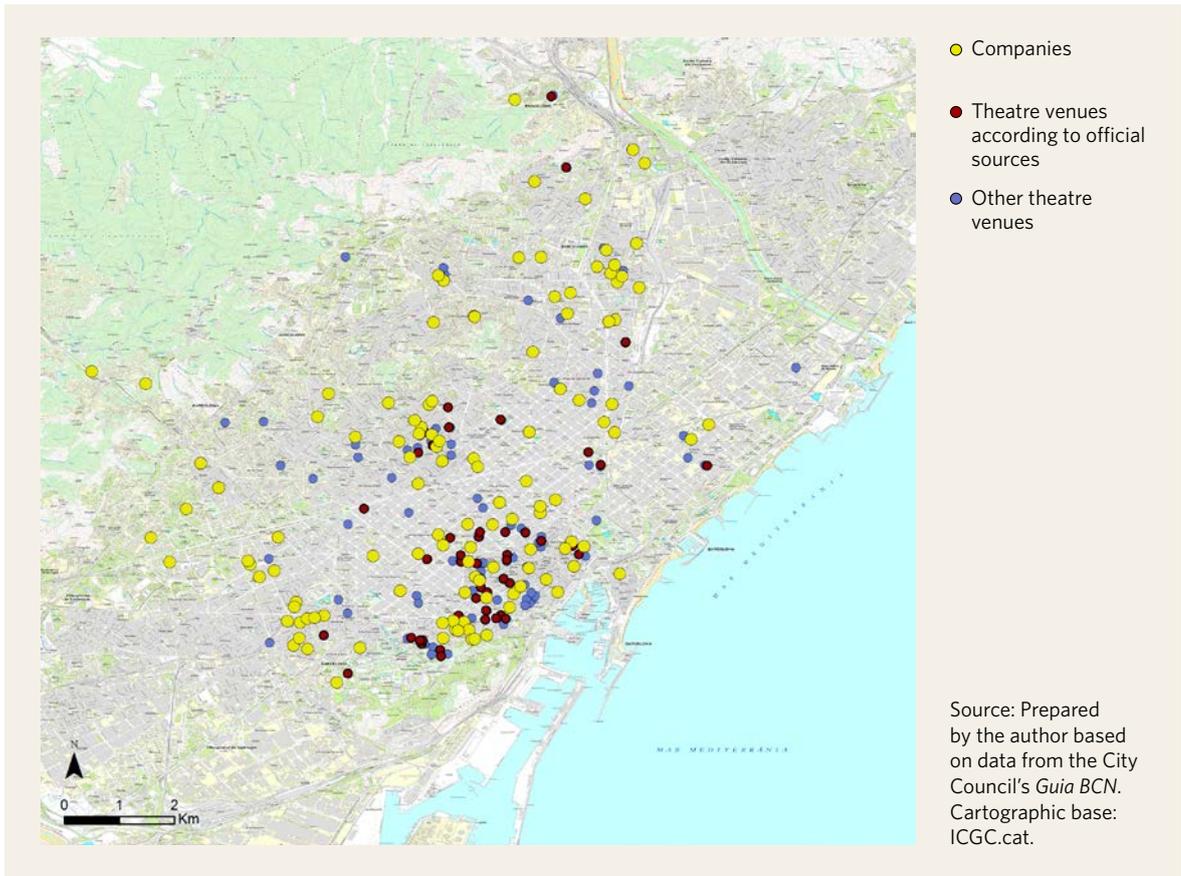
absence of companies in Sant Andreu and Sant Martí, an area considered (and promoted) officially as a creative district, is surprising. This absence is reflected by other sources, such as the association Poblenou Urban District, which does not identify any theatre artist in the area. A micro-scale analysis would be needed to identify the causes of this situation. However, everything seems to indicate a context radically different from that of other districts in the city.

Following on from the previous aspect, we can also cite the formal training centres related to theatre (Figure 7). These centres can be very diverse: recently-created small schools, well-established centres, centres specialised in fields such as circus or musical theatre... There are about 20, mostly distributed in the southern part of the city, not particularly related to the concentration of auditoria.

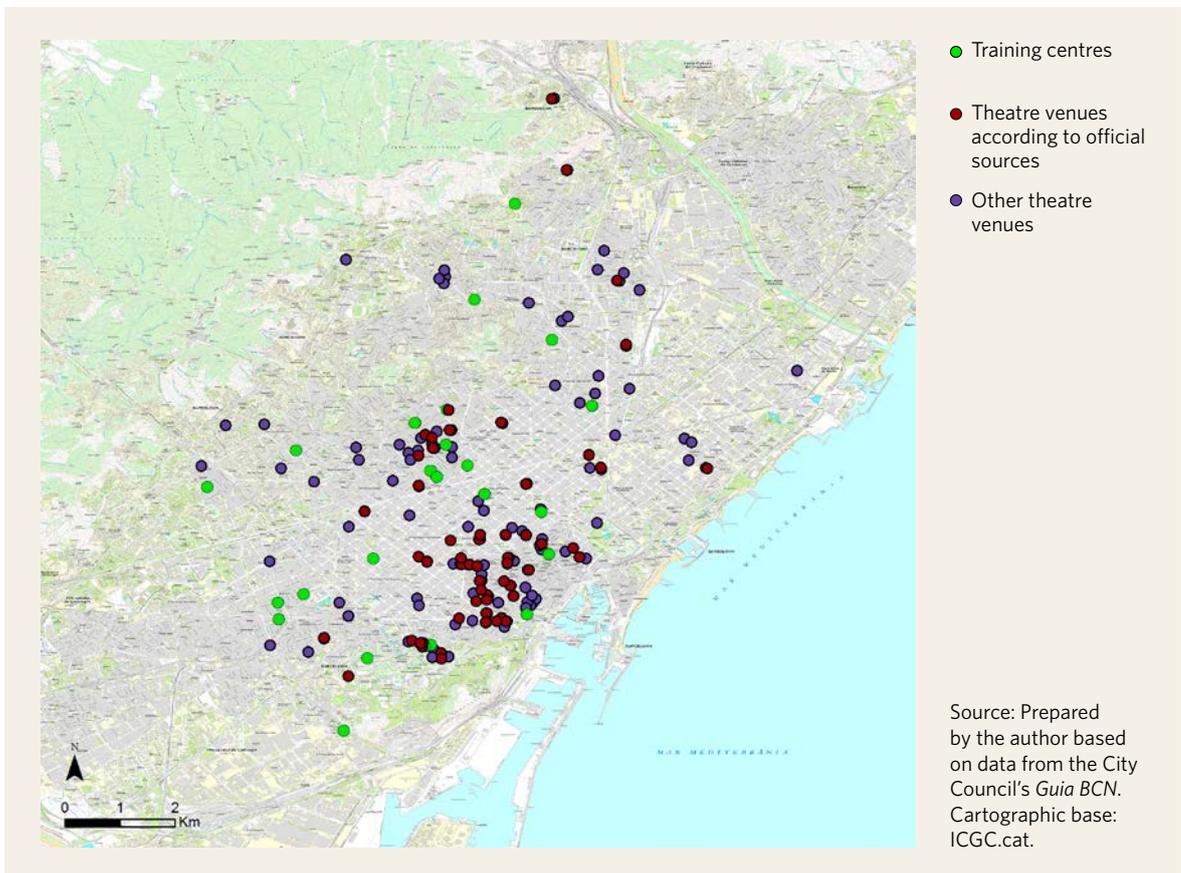
Another aspect that we can identify is the venues where other activities related to theatres are located: associations, media or event managers (Figure 8). Their location in the city is quite diffuse. Parallel has approximately 10% of these other activities. However, the highest concentration follows a logic that is more similar to that of the distribution of tertiary economic activity in the city than theatre or perfuming arts venues.

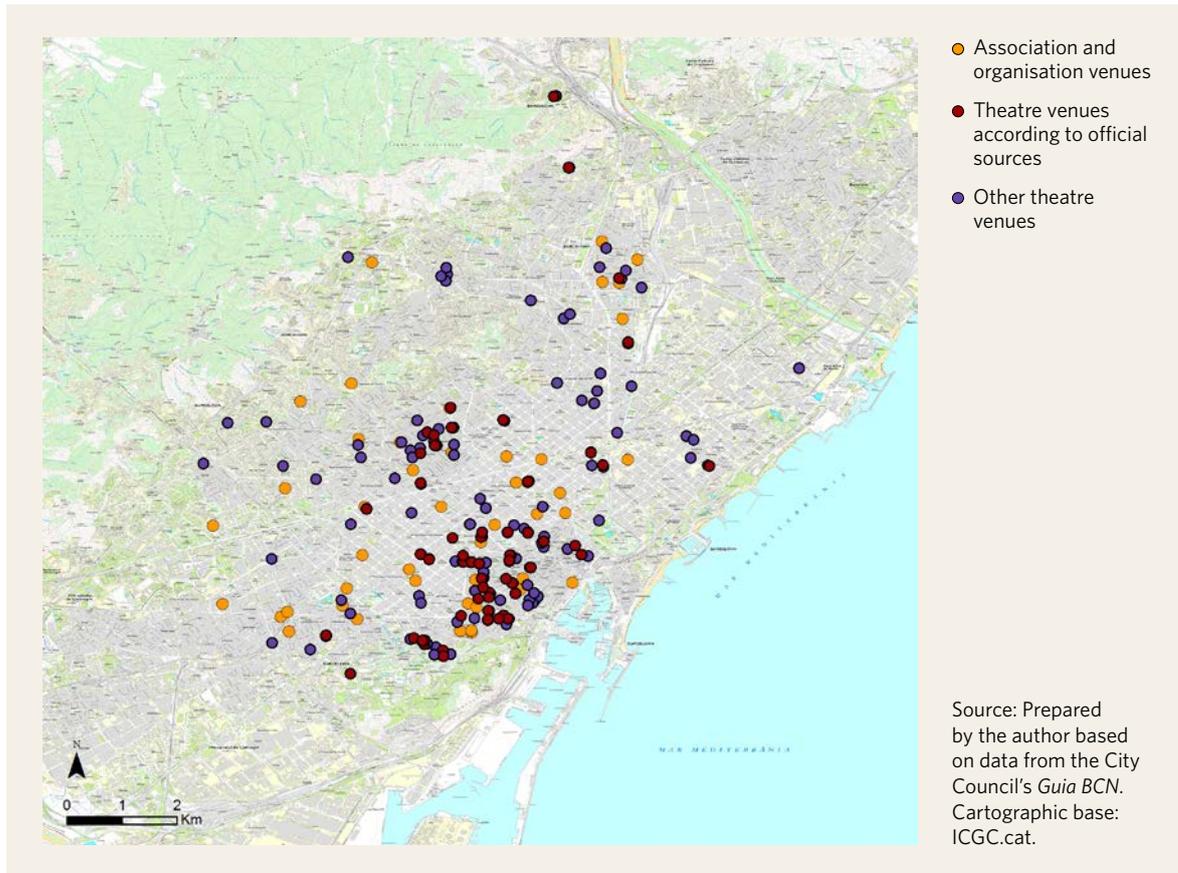
Finally, we can also locate the main economic and commercial activities related to the theatre sector. This classification was carried out on the basis

**Figure 6. Theatre companies based in Barcelona (2018)**



**Figure 7. Centres providing formal training in Barcelona (2018)**



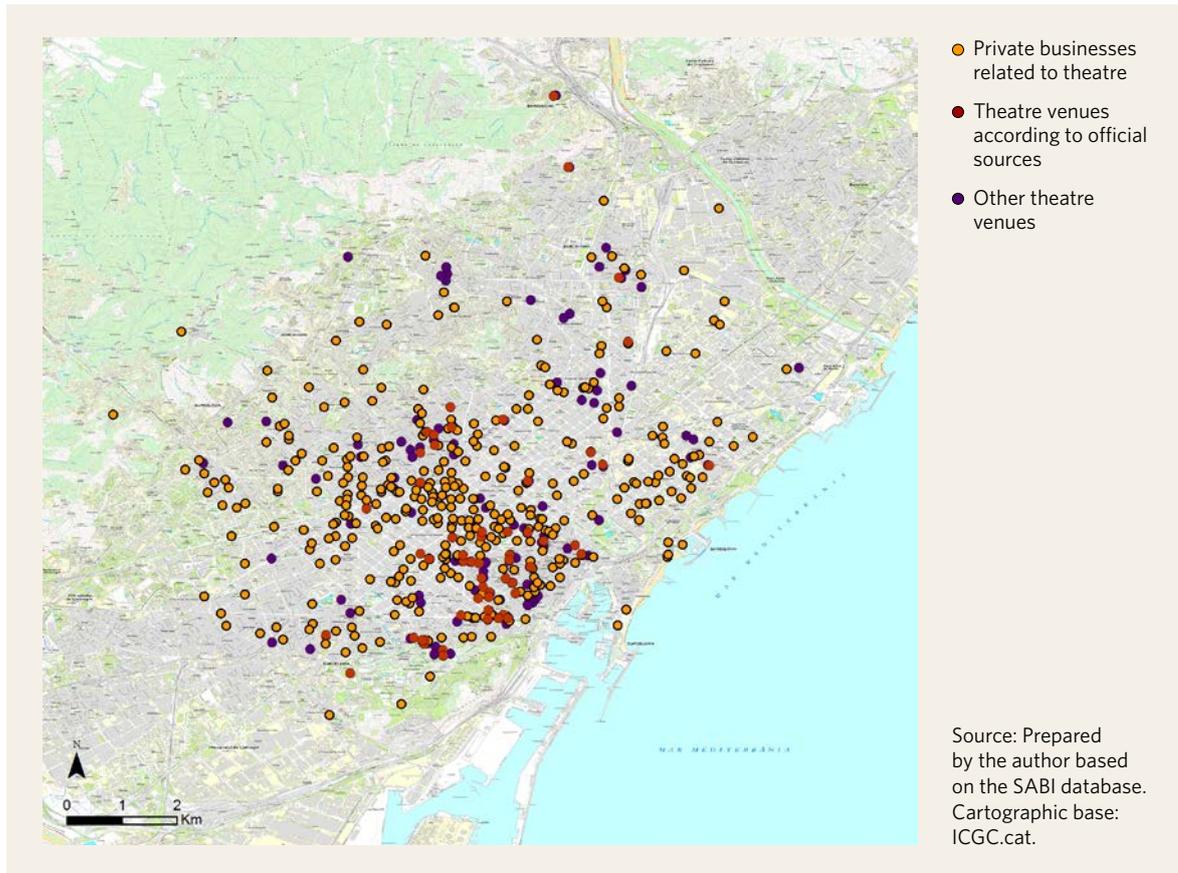
**Figure 8.** Location of institutions and associations linked to the theatre fabric (2018)

of the companies present in the SABI (Sistema de Análisis de Balances Ibéricos) database. It contains individual information about companies in Spain and Portugal, with specific information extracted from the annual reports submitted by the various companies and which provides information on turnover, type of activity, location, and so on. Specifically, those companies that identified, among their areas of activity, some type of indicator linked to the theatre fabric (Figure 9) have been mapped.

The results indicate a concentration in Ciutat Vella and in Eixample. Contrary to its significance in the number of auditoria, Gràcia does not have an excessively high concentration of businesses linked to theatre activities. In contrast, Poble Nou has a significant number of businesses.

These interrelations indicate that we can hardly speak of clusters of activities directly related to theatre. Rather, they reveal the characteristics of the economic activity and the existence of venues adapted to the needs of the various companies in these two districts. Thus, we can note that for Barcelona's economic activities, immediate proximity to performing spaces does not determine their activity.

The analysis of this set of actors related to performing activities shows how the various related activities have an important presence in the city as a whole. Specifically, the database indexes a total of 331 active companies that would provide work for approximately 2,000 people. However, in this

**Figure 9.** Location of economic activities related with the theatre world (2018)

group we find few companies with a large number of employees (where Focus would stand out, with almost 200) and companies with no employees or one (60 and 74 companies, respectively). Table 1 shows this range of economic activities linked to the world of theatre. It includes different professions, some closely related to theatre activity, such as props and furniture for stage design, lighting, costumes and makeup. They also include others, more indirect, but widely used in the theatre sector, such as advertising, publishing and printing, transportation, catering, packaging, furniture, audiovisual, tailoring, dry cleaning and laundry.

To those companies that claim to be directly related to the theatre world, it is necessary to add others that are also linked through indirect and induced effects. More imprecise, extraordinarily complex relationships, which although they cannot be examined in a study of these characteristics, should be taken into account because they highlight all the broad effects of the theatre sector. Therefore, we must be aware that the spatial analysis of theatre venues goes beyond their location. It includes a wide range of urban spaces where theatre activity helps generate work, economic activity, mobility of people, rental or purchase of venues, attraction of public or private agents, and so on. A set of activities that help make cities dynamic and that spatially go beyond the repercussions generated in the immediate surroundings of theatre venues.

**Table 1.** Classification of economic activities related to the world of theatre according to the National Classification of Economic Activities (2018)

No. companies	CNAE	Description
1	1419	Dressmaking
2	1812	Printing and graphic arts
1	1820	Reproduction of recorded media
1	4110	Property development
2	4399	Other construction activities
1	4639	Non-specialised wholesale trade
4	5630	Bars and cafeterias
1	5811	Book publishing
4	5819	Other publishing activities
8	5911	Cinema and TV production
2	5914	Film exhibition
4	5920	Sound recording and music publishing
1	6399	Other information services
1	6810	Property buying and selling services
4	6820	Property rental services
1	6910	Legal activities
2	7021	Public relations
2	7022	Other business management activities
1	7112	Technical engineering services
3	7311	Advertising agencies
1	7312	Representation in the media
2	7410	Specialised design activities
4	7490	Other professional scientific activities
1	7729	Personal items hire
1	7739	Machine hire
4	7810	Recruitment agency
3	8230	Organisation of fairs and congresses
4	8299	Other business support activities
140	9001	Performing arts
36	9002	Performing arts auxiliary activities
9	9003	Artistic and literary creation
42	9004	Theatre auditoria management
2	9319	Other sports activities
1	9321	Amusement and theme parks
30	9329	Other leisure and entertainment activities
1	9523	Footwear and leather repair
4	9609	Other personal services

## Conclusions

As we have shown through the mapping applied to Barcelona, the repercussions of performing spaces clearly go beyond the simple location of theatres and extend to the whole city. Limiting the impact of the performing activities to the analysis of the theatres provides an interesting, yet partial, picture of the repercussions created on an urban scale.

The combination of mapping of theatres, performing venues, associations, schools and economic activities allows us to see how the fabric associated with performing activities is distributed almost homogeneously throughout the city. According to the data collected, in the case of Barcelona we cannot speak of the existence of a district that concentrates the theatre activity of the city. While it is true, as we have shown throughout the text, that there is a certain concentration of some aspects linked to theatres in certain areas of the city (seating capacity in the Paral·lel area or number of jobs around the TNC), the various activities tend to be spread across the city as a whole. As an example, we can mention that even in areas that have undergone an accelerated development process, like Poblenou (Paül i Agustí, 2014), we have identified the presence of activities related to the theatre sector. We can assert, therefore, that theatre activity has taken advantage of the various existing venues in the city to establish itself. A fact that has allowed it to maintain a significant economic fabric associated with the performing arts.

In contrast, large public institutions have not articulated a theatre fabric in their surrounding areas. We can consider that these great initiatives have contributed to improving the physical spaces of the city. However, the analysis shows how the surrounding areas of the TNC or Mercat de les Flors practically do not include activities such as associations, schools or businesses linked to theatre, similar to the case of the environment of the Art Factories. It is probably still too early to see the repercussions generated by these creative spaces promoted by Barcelona City Council. We will have to monitor their evolution to see whether these venues have helped generate a creative fabric linked to theatre in their nearby areas.

In fact, the future evolution of certain areas is one of the possible future lines of research. The evolution of cities implies changes in the distribution of the various aspects analysed, in some cases because of adaptation to changes and in others due to obligations linked to aspects such as rents or changes in regulations. A study that monitors changes in the various aspects related to theatre activity over time would help to better understand the changes experienced by the city.

In the same line of future work, wider study of the indirect and induced repercussions of the various aspects analysed would help to provide a much broader view of the multiplier effect generated by the theatre sector in the city, already largely shown in the present article.

Therefore, we can conclude that the breadth of the fabric linked to performing arts activities undoubtedly has an important impact on the city as a whole. Its broad presence in the city means that we cannot reduce Barcelona theatre activity to simple theatres. Theatres are the most visible part of

a mechanism that reaches the city as a whole and that helps locate Barcelona's theatres in a fundamental point of the cultural, economic and social fabric of the city.



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