Recruitment of actors to theatres
About stability and change in the field of the dramatic arts in Norway

Per Mangset
Per Mangset: Telemark University College and Telemark Research Institute: per.mangset@hit.no

Ole Marius Hylland
Ole Marius Hylland: Telemark Research Institute: hylland@tmforsk.no

ABSTRACT
The purpose of this article is to describe and analyse the recruitment of actors to (primarily institutional) theatres in Norway. We will investigate and discuss whether a previous description/prediction of a radical break in the recruitment system from predominantly “profession regulation” to more “competition regulation” has proved to be well founded. Some 10-15 years ago several informants and scholars (ourselves included) predicted that a more open, audition based recruitment system to acting positions in Norwegian theatres would take over and that the professional and institutional control with the recruitment process would become much weaker. Today we can evaluate whether these predictions have come true. This paper is therefore also an attempt to re-evaluate our own previous research. The article is based upon qualitative and quantitative data from several research projects. It concludes that the aforementioned description/prediction was oversimplified: No radical break seems to have taken place within the recruitment system.

Key Words
Actor, theatre, audition, recruitment, performing arts’ education.

INTRODUCTION
There has traditionally been a substantial oversupply of recruits to the education of future actors, both in Norway and abroad. In Norway, the recruitment of actors through theatre schools has been very much controlled by the professions and institutions within the field, while previous research has stated that this situation has changed or is about to radically change, i.e. a change from a predominantly “profession regulation” to a more “competition regulation” in the recruitment system (Bjørkås, 1998; Mangset, 2004). The purpose of this article is to investigate and discuss whether this diagnosis or prediction is well founded. We will conclude that the aforementioned description/prediction was oversimplified: In spite of substantial transformations in the Norwegian theatre landscape (including the education of actors), no such radical break in the recruitment system appears to have taken place.
Artistic careers (including those of actors) are considered to be insecure and risky, as “many are called, but few are chosen” to such professional careers (Menger, 2006; Mangset, 2004). For instance, a lot of young people wish to become professional actors, while only a few of them are accepted as students at high-quality drama schools, and even fewer appear to be able to sustain a long and successful professional career as actors afterwards. Thus, many young actors are affected by the so-called “excess supply disease” (Menger, 2006): They experience a work situation characterised by unemployment or underemployment. The income distribution within the field of the dramatic arts – as with the arts in general – is also systematically skewed. Few earn very high incomes, while the great majority have to be content with rather moderate annual incomes (Heian et al., 2008; Mangset et al., 2010).

However, in the Nordic countries, social-democratic welfare policies and relatively strong professional artist associations have traditionally contributed to reducing the risk of artistic careers (Mangset et al., 2008). For example, institutional and subsidised theatres all have a certain number of permanently employed actors in their ensembles. Moreover, a profession-based- and institutionalised recruitment system has also long contributed to reducing the risk of pursuing a career as an actor. For several decennia, the Academy of Theatre in Oslo has had a quasi-monopoly upon the recruitment of actors to institutional theatres in Norway. Every year, approximately eight candidates graduate from the Academy, and both the Academy, the Norwegian Actors’ Equity Association and the big institutional theatres have felt a more or less tacit obligation to offer all candidates employment within the institutional theatre sector – at least for a couple of years after graduation. Both students and staff expected that the directors of the institutional theatres would come and see student performances during the academic year, so that they could hopefully offer the students employment afterwards (Mangset, 2004). Hence, the immediate occupational risk of this small elite of young actors has been reduced to a minimum.

During our fieldwork in the theatre sector in 1998-99, however, most informants stated that this situation was about to radically change: The monopoly of the Academy would be erased within a short period of time, while actors with a drama education from abroad would be able to compete successfully with Academy graduates and open auditions would become the standard recruitment procedure (Mangset, 2004:250). According to Svein Bjørkås (1998:56-58), an open “competition regime” was about to replace the former closed “profession-based regime”. The era of professional “gatekeepers” in the recruitment system had passed, and it was now time for the “bouncers” to throw out those who did not succeed in the competition (ibid: 58). In the late 1990s, many Theatre Academy students said that they were worried about the ongoing transformation of the recruitment system, insofar as the theatre directors would stop seeing the students at performances at the Academy and instead recruit actors through the use of auditions. The Academy students therefore were afraid that a “quick [but shallow] audition” would replace solid qualifi-
cations as the basis for recruitment to acting positions. They felt that their privileged recruitment system was being threatened by cunning candidates with a more superficial theatre education from abroad (Mangset, 2004).

These apocalyptic predictions of the transformation of the recruitment system were partially based upon anxious visions of the future expressed by theatre students, and partially inspired by social scientists who predicted a radical/paradigmatic change in working life in general in late modernity. For example, Ulrich Beck (2000) described “a brave new world of work”, a “Brazilianization of the West” and a “risk society”; Zygmunt Bauman (2000) wrote about “a liquid modernity”; Pierre-Michel Menger (2002:8) looked upon the independent and creative artist as “an exemplary figure of the new worker”, while Richard Florida (2002) considered artists as a vanguard of a new creative class. Beck (2000:1) also predicted “the spread of temporary and insecure employment, discontinuity and loose informality into Western societies that have hitherto been the bastions of full employment”. In addition he noted that “this nomadic ‘multi-activity’ – until now mainly a feature of female labour in the West – is not a premodern relic but a rapidly spreading variant in the late work-societies, where attractive, highly skilled and well-paid full-time employment is on its way out” (ibid:2). Several scholars have also analysed the arrival of a new type of cultural worker – the cultural entrepreneur – on the contemporary cultural scene (Mangset/Røyseng, 2009). According to Ellmeier/Angerer they are:

- on average a 25–30-years-old, multiskilled, flexible person, psychologically resilient, independent, single, unattached to a particular location, who jumps at whatever opportunity there is to be had in the field of the art, music and the media (Angerer, 1999:26, in Ellmeier, 2003:9).

All these scholars predicted a change of (both artistic and non-artistic) work in the direction of more open and individualistic competition. Many artists, of course, are worried about such predictions and trends. They tend to see short time occupations, lack of predictability and security at work, and increasing demands of flexibility as symptoms of the increasingly precarious work conditions of artists (Slettemeås, 2008).

Bjørkås introduced the idea of a transformation from “profession regulation” to “competition regulation” in the recruitment to artist careers in his report from 1998. “Profession regulation” here referred to a control of the recruitment process by a monopolistic Academy of Theatre in Oslo, in close cooperation with the major institutional theatres – and implicitly the Association of Norwegian Theatres and Orchestras and the Norwegian Actors’ Equity Association. The “profession regime” implied that all the directors of the principle institutional theatres were supposed to follow each class of acting students closely during their three years. They should also be present at student performances during the study, and at the beginning of the last term (just after New Year’s Eve) they were supposed to offer a work opportunity (permanent or temporary)
in their theatre to the students, i.e. to the student(s) that they considered most fit for their ensemble. If not all 8-10 acting students had got such an offer before the end of the last term, it was considered to be a problem, if not a disaster, especially by the students and the Academy (Mangset 2004). Theatre directors that did not show up at student performances, and that did not offer employment, were considered not to fulfil their professional duty. “Competition regulation”, on the other hand, referred to a system where recruitment is regulated by more open competition – preferably through audition. Bjørkås (1998:58) noted that the mechanisms that regulate the size of the artist population have gone, or were about to go, from “profession regulation” to “competition regulation”. The limitation of access did not happen by control of recruitment by professional and institutional interests any more. It was instead regulated by “exclusion” through internal competition between artists. Thus the artists’ collective regulation arrangement had lost its dominant position, while the size of the artist population was regulated by open competition, according to Bjørkås.

We repeated and confirmed Bjørkås’ typology – based on our own empirical field work – in a report in 2004, and similar ideas have also been taken up by public cultural policy. In a white paper to the Parliament in 2003, the Norwegian Ministry of Culture wrote:

Artistic life has gone from being regulated by profession to being regulated by competition. The expansion of the number of artists who compete for public support and the development of the relationship between different artist groups has created distribution problems both within- and between the different artistic disciplines (Ministry of Culture, 2003:214).¹

Much the same story has subsequently been told in several Norwegian master theses in theatre studies (e.g. Cheng, 2009:44; Næss, 2011:47), as a typology describing a swift shift from “profession regulation” to “competition regulation” seems to have been taken up by a standard cultural policy discourse. But is it really true that there has been a substantial change? Is this a good description of how the recruitment process takes place, or is it more or less misleading? It may be time for self-scrutiny, apologies and modifications.

MORE ABOUT THE NORWEGIAN THEATRE LANDSCAPE

This analysis needs to be situated in relation to the specific Norwegian theatre landscape. There are two dominant national institutional theatres in Norway, the “National Theatre” and the “Norwegian Theatre”, both located in Oslo. The Oslo theatre scene also comprises other theatres, including some more or less permanent private theatres. A “National Touring Theatre”, which is visiting cities and villages all over the country, also has its principle base in Oslo.

¹ Translated from Norwegian.
In addition there are significant institutional theatres in middle-sized towns, like Bergen, Trondheim and Stavanger, and several so-called “regional theatres” in smaller towns. All these institutional theatres have traditionally employed a permanent staff of actors, which benefit from the status of “civil servants”. During the last decades, however, the number of permanently employed actors has decreased radically, while more and more actors have become fulltime freelancers or temporarily employed by the theatres. The number of permanently employed actors at each institutional theatre is, however, strictly negotiated between the Norwegian Actors’ Equity Association and the different institutional theatres.

For the time being there are three BA or MA level theatre schools in Norway, which are endorsed by the authorities. The principal and most prestigious Norwegian theatre school – the Academy of Theatre in Oslo – was established in 1953. For several decades it was the only theatre school in Norway. The theatre studies at the University College of Østfold (Fredrikstad) – which has a more experimental profile – was endorsed in 1996, while the theatre studies at the University College of Nord-Trøndelag (Verdal) was endorsed and established in 2005. All these three theatre schools have to refuse many applicants who want to become actors. Quite a lot of the would-be actors therefore search for an educational opportunity at one of several private domestic theatre schools or at some theatre school abroad (mainly in Great Britain or Scandinavia). During the last five years before 2011 around 110 actors were educated at the three state theatre schools in Norway; 45 at the Academy of Theatre in Oslo, 39 at the University College of Nord-Trøndelag and 26 at the University College of Østfold. This implies an annual growth of 22 new professional actors from these three theatre schools (Hylland/Mangset 2011:116). In addition one of the private theatre schools – the Nordic Institute for Scene and Studio (NISS) – educated around 100 actors during the same five years, while 80-90 students each year studied at theatre schools abroad in order to become actors (ibid.).

The labour market for Norwegian actors certainly has expanded substantially during the last 15-20 years, especially within the media (Heian et. al. 2008). But there is also a substantial oversupply of recruits. Several informants in the field say that around 25 newly educated actors each year would suffice to cover the labour market (Hylland/Mangset 2011:117). We do not have solid and updated figures of unemployment among Norwegian actors. But a previous study has shown that the working time used to professional artistic work is

2. According to the present agreement, the “National Theatre” shall employ at least 52 actors (of which at least 42 should be permanently employed). The corresponding figures for the “Norwegian Theatre” are 50/35, “Oslo New Theatre” 26/18, “Trøndelag Theatre” 30/20 a.s.o. http://www.skuespillerforbund.no/avtaler-tariffer

3. Academic institutions and studies (BA, MA and PhD) in Norway must be endorsed by the “Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education” (NOKUT). The government may allow or deny the start-up based on the recommendation from NOKUT.

4. The theatre school at NISS has not been endorsed as a BA level study by the government.
declining among Norwegian actors: While almost 70% were occupied more than 1500 hours per year with professional acting in 1994, this proportion declined to a little more than 50% in 2006. The average artistic working hours of professional actors declined from 1560 to 1450 during the same period (Heian et al. 2008:111). Thus professional actors in Norway have to use more of their working time upon non-artistic or artistically related work. These figures only tell about the working situation of professional actors that are members of the Norwegian Actors’ Equity Association. In addition there are probably many other, not unionized actors with an education from other Norwegian or foreign theatre schools, who are unemployed or underemployed. This probably leaves us with a substantial “reserve army” of professional or would-be actors on the doorstep to the labour markets.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The purpose of this article is to discuss whether the above-mentioned predictions about a paradigmatic change from a predominantly “profession regulation” to a more “competition regulation” in the recruitment system had actually come true in 2011-12. Or does the old “profession-based” or “institutionalised” recruitment system still persist? It is also worth discussing whether the description of the previous recruitment system as predominantly profession-based and institutionalised was misleading in 1998-99. Perhaps it just described a minor part of the recruitment system, i.e. the relationship between those 8-10 Theatre Academy students on exiting the Academy and their career over the following two-three years, while the broader picture was forgotten?

Which aspects of the recruitment system have changed, and which have persisted as stable since the 1990s? Substantial transformations have certainly taken place within the field of dramatic arts in Norway since then (Heian et al., 2008; Mangset et al., 2010), and we will mention nine specific changes:

1. The number of professional actors has increased dramatically, i.e. it has more than doubled from 1994 to 2006;

2. The proportion of full time actors has fallen from 70 to 50% during the same period;

3. The proportion of permanently employed actors (primarily in institutional theatres) has been radically reduced, i.e. from 43 to 19% if we use the same definition of “permanently employed” as we did in 1994;

5. Most of the fieldwork that this article is based upon took place in 2011 (see the “Methodology” paragraph below). The analysis is more extensively reported in Hylland/Mangset 2011, and the article barely takes into account developments after 2011.

6. Puppeteers included.
4 Subsequently, the proportion of freelancers in the actors’ labour force has increased radically;

5 The actors’ labour markets have expanded substantially, particularly due to the introduction of commercial TV (since 1992) and the introduction of the so-called “Cultural Rucksack” (around 2000);

6 The average real artistic income of actors has decreased slightly from 1993 to 2006, i.e. by approximately 8%, while the real income of the entire professional population has increased by 40% – and of artists in general by 18%;

7 The excess supply of recruits to this labour market has persisted; the aforementioned expansion of the labour markets for actors has not been sufficient to meet the doubling of professional actors;

8 There is still a substantial recruitment of young actors with education from abroad, though the number has decreased somewhat after 2003; and

9 Two new public academies of theatre have been endorsed by the authorities – and several lower level private drama schools have also popped up.

All in all, these changes should have created more of an open competition within the actors’ labour markets, as more freelancers probably competed for fewer permanent jobs and a limited number of temporary jobs. Our question then is how- and how much these changes have affected the recruitment procedures. Have the recruitment procedures to acting positions become equally open and competitive?

Most of the changes described above refer to the period from 1993-94 to 2006, and we have less systematic knowledge about later transformations in this field. The number of applicants to Norwegian theatre schools may have decreased somewhat lately, but for the time being we do not know in detail whether the criteria and procedures for admission have changed, and we do not yet have a full picture of the development of the total number of applicants to all the different theatre schools.

7. “The Cultural Rucksack” is a national programme (since 2001) for the promotion of professional art and culture in Norwegian schools.

8. Nord-Trøndelag and Ostfold university colleges. In addition a bachelor in “music theatre” at the private “Musiktkteaterhøyskolen” was endorsed by NOKUT (the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education) in 2012. But this study program will not be covered by this analysis.

9. The description of changes, especially points 1-8, is based upon Heian et al. 2008; point 9 is based upon Hylland/Mangset 2011.

10. See the article “Færre vil bli skuespillere” by Chris Erichsen at Scenekunst.no, http://www.scenekunst.no/pub/scenekunst/nyheter/?aid=3311
In this article, we will discuss the relationship between stability and change within the recruitment system to the profession of acting in Norway, focusing more upon the recruitment to institutional theatres (both permanent and temporary employment) than to other parts of actors’ labour markets. We will also argue that substantial aspects of the former “profession-based” and “institutionalised” recruitment to the institutional part of the drama field still persist, despite of all the above-mentioned transformations. For this reason, we will also argue that contrary to earlier predictions, an open and competitive recruitment system (i.e. particularly through auditions) has not generally taken over.

**METHODOLOGY**

The study is based upon the following empirical data:

- Qualitative interviews with 12 drama students/young actors and a couple of employees at the Academy of Theatre in 1998-99 (Mangset, 2004);

- Qualitative interviews with four of these students again in 2002-2004, i.e. after they had left the theatre school and entered the labour market (Røyseng et al., 2007);

- Qualitative interviews in 2011 with three theatre directors, informants from the three major theatre schools and informants from relevant organisations (Hylland/Mangset, 2011);

- Data from an e-mail enquête with 12 theatre managers (both in institutionalised and independent sectors) in 2011 (Hylland/Mangset, 2011); and

- Quantitative data about Norwegian artists’ income and work situation in general based upon a national survey with all categories of Norwegian artists in 2006 (Heian et al., 2008; Mangset et al. 2010; Heian et. al. 2012). This study also included analyses of changes in the income and work situation of Norwegian artists from 1993-94 to 2006 based upon a juxtaposition of data from two surveys (i.e. 1993-94 and 2006, Elstad/Pedersen, 1996; Heian et al., 2008). The total response sample of the 1993-94 study was 3158 (all artistic categories included). The total response sample of the 2006 study was 2985 (all artistic categories included). This was a stratified sample. 302 of the respondents were actors. Our discussion about oversupply is mainly based upon the quantitative data from Hylland/Mangset 2011 and Heian et. al. 2008.

We have good and relevant diachronic data; hence, the methodological challenge may be that we have recruitment data from somewhat different types of informants at different points in time. Nevertheless, we still consider that we have a sufficient amount of empirical data to be able to shed some light on the research question.
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Our analysis shows some important changes in the recruitment to theatrical work, but despite the above-mentioned transformations of the theatre landscape important aspects of the recruitment procedures have also persisted. We will sum up our principal findings in the following nine points:

(1) The Academy of Theatre in Oslo is still predominant

The Academy of Theatre in Oslo is still the most important recruitment channel for acting positions in Norway, especially in the institutional theatres. Those approximately eight students that graduate from the Academy each year are still more or less guaranteed work in a theatre after graduation. Thus, seen from the Academy’s point of view, no radical break with the previous recruitment practice has taken place. According to an informant from the Academy of Theatre, all the talk about a radical break is just “a myth”. It is just “rubbish” that there has been a change from a “profession-based regime” to a “competition regime” for recruitment to this labour market, he says. And the theatre directors still feel an obligation to see the student performances at the Academy, according to informants from the Norwegian Actors’ Equity Association.

According to several informants, the two other (recently endorsed) public academies are also important in the recruitment process, although they are less important and prestigious than the Oslo Academy. The theatre directors that we interviewed undoubtedly recognised the new academies as relevant for work in their theatres, but “I still trust the Academy of Theatre [in Oslo] more [than the other academies]”, said one theatre director. The director continued:

Until now, that Russian method [i.e. the Stanislavskij method, which is preferred by the Academy] has implied that they have quite simply come out with a “toolbox”. The least gifted [students] become so focused upon the toolbox that they keep standing still. But the others [the gifted students] know how to use the tools when it is necessary – and adapt themselves to the conditions – they may reach very far.

Another theatre director says that when he\textsuperscript{11} is going to recruit a new actor to his ensemble: “I first and foremost consider the Academy of Theatre [in Oslo]”.

(2) Two new theatre schools have also been quite successful

It is still worth noting that the two new and more peripheral academies\textsuperscript{12} have succeeded quite well and relatively quickly in making themselves relevant to the Norwegian dramatic labour markets. Most informants seem to agree that

\textsuperscript{11} For anonymity reasons we may have concealed whether the theatre directors that we have interviewed are male or female.
graduates from the three academies reach a higher professional level than graduates from the other (private) theatre schools. According to these informants, the private theatre schools should instead be considered as prep schools for the academies. Both of the two new public academies seem to have been welcomed positively by the Norwegian theatre world. “The academies in Verdal and Fredrikstad have had a very positive development over these last years”, says one enquête respondent. “They are breathing down the neck of [the Academy in] Oslo.” The success of these two new academies may be seen as a necessary and adequate response to the strong increase of recruits to the acting profession in Norway. Nonetheless, the three national public academies have somewhat different professional profiles. Generally speaking, this is considered to be an advantage because they mutually complement each other. The University College of Nord-Trøndelag is more directed towards institutional theatres, whereas the University College of Østfold appears to be more relevant for the independent theatre scene. However, the University College of Nord-Trøndelag also differs somewhat from the Academy of Theatre in Oslo; the first is quite inspired by the Lecoq tradition, while the second is more Stanislavskij-oriented. Both of the two new academies are more highly appreciated than the alternative private theatre schools by the theatre directors. Even so, some informants are still somewhat reticent to the two newcomers, particularly to the Østfold University College in Fredrikstad. This is partly due to the fact that Østfold was initially planned to be an academy for puppeteers, and at least one theatre director seems to regret that they gave up that task. But the Østfold University College soon changed direction and profile and became a more general avant-garde theatre school. Several theatre directors in institutional theatres find this transformation beneficial in principle, but somewhat problematic in practice, as they have limited use for their graduates. One theatre director says:

They [the academy in Fredrikstad] sit and wait for a radical change of the [theatre] institutions. We would welcome that they did; I support that. But I do not see that it will happen very fast. The theatre education down there [in Fredrikstad] is planned in enormous opposition to what theatre looks like in Norway today. I totally agree with them, but it is a very difficult starting point.

12. Nord-Trøndelag University College (endorsed in 2005) is located in a small town (Verdal) in the middle of Norway, while Østfold University College (originally a school for puppet/marionette theatre, a drama school from 2003) is located in a small town (Fredrikstad) in South-East Norway.
13. Jaques Lecoq (1921-99) was a French actor and theatre instructor who became famous for his particular methods of physical theatre. He founded “l’École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq” in Paris in 1956. Constantin Stanislavski (1863-1938) was a Russian actor and theatre director who established a system or method of acting that has profoundly influenced dramatic art both in Russia and the rest of the world.
14. E.g. the “Nordic Institute of Stage and Studio” (NISS) and the “Bårdar Academy” in Oslo.
(3) There are two different recruitment paths

It should also be noted that the recruitment of actors follows quite a different logic if we talk about: a) recruitment to a permanent ensemble compared to if we talk about, b) recruitment to a specific part in the production of a play (e.g. “Nora” in “A Doll’s House” by Henrik Ibsen). There is an abundant supply of potential recruits to both permanent and semi-permanent acting positions in theatre ensembles, from the three public academies, from foreign theatre schools and from the private theatre schools in Norway. Here, the theatre directors are free to choose the most promising talent. But according to one theatre director, if he were to recruit a new actor to his permanent ensemble, he would first consider recruits from the Academy of Theatre in Oslo, while recruits with other educational backgrounds – both public, private and foreign – might also be relevant, if not the first choice. The theatre director has to consider the actor’s talent, but also what type of actor the ensemble needs when its total profile is taken into consideration. Indeed, actors are rarely recruited directly from theatre schools to permanent positions in ensembles. More often, they go through a trial and error period – via temporary engagement in this or that theatre – before eventually being employed permanently or semi-permanently by a theatre. The theatres seldom – if ever – organise auditions in order to recruit actors to their permanent ensembles; instead, they “use” the young actors’ performances in other theatres or in temporary engagements in their own theatre as “auditions”. The institutional theatre landscape in Norway is indeed limited, and theatre directors know each other and often exchange opinions informally. They frequently see new actors in plays in other theatres, and some also see students when they play parts in plays in the theatre academies. Consequently, they are quite well-informed about the available young talents that sooner or later can be employed in their theatre.

However, when a theatre director needs an actor for a specific play, the recruitment process is quite different. The director then more often searches for an experienced actor in the national theatre landscape who is particularly fit for just that part. He or she may help themselves with “the Actors’ Catalogue”, a presentation of professional actors by the Norwegian Actors’ Equity Association. In addition, if the director wants to recruit an actor to a leading part in a play, he/she will normally try to recruit the most relevant “top actor” to that part in Norway: “If one shall recruit an actor to play Pastor Manders [in Ibsen’s “Ghost”], then you need an established actor. You first phone Bjørn Sundquist; he says ‘no’; then you phone Jon Eikemo 15; he says ‘no’ and so on,” says one theatre director.

(4) Audition is not very important

The audition – which is supposed to be the principle recruitment method in the new “competition regime” – in reality plays a minor role in the present recru-

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15. Bjørn Sundquist and Jon Eikemo are two of the most experienced, talented and well-known senior actors in Norway.
Auditions are primarily important when theatres want to recruit actors to musicals. When a theatre plans to stage a big musical they need many actors who can preferably act, sing and dance. Therefore, “we had very thorough auditions” to the musicals, says one theatre director. As a result, many recruits with quite different backgrounds would then try their luck, as graduates from Norwegian academies, Norwegian private theatre schools and several foreign theatre schools would all participate.

Additionally, an “Annual Audition” is organised each autumn by the Norwegian Actors’ Equity Association in cooperation with other organisations in the field. The Annual Audition is a forum which is specifically designed for new recruits in the professional field, i.e. for graduates with at least three years of professional acting education at a proper academic level. In practice, this includes graduates from all three Norwegian- and several foreign academies. In addition, actors with other theatre education and at least three years of professional practice may be accepted, though this is a forum for new recruits, and not for experienced actors. One is not allowed to present oneself at the Annual Audition more than twice. All in all the Annual Audition is not a very important part of the recruitment system. Still, it may be interesting for some, especially those with an education from abroad who have difficulties getting seen by the gatekeepers of the theatre field.

From the point of view of the Norwegian Actors’ Equity Association, the scarcity of auditions may be a problem since an audition may be considered as a fairer recruitment method than other more informal and less transparent methods. Everyone who is allowed to participate at the audition gets an equal chance to succeed, as more internal casting processes lock several potential recruits out. Theatre directors also experience the problem of giving an equal chance for different categories of recruits: “We considered whether we should introduce more auditions in order to create a fairer regime”, says one theatre director. But in practice, an audition is confined to musicals, even in her theatre.

**Many different roads may lead to professional work**

Although graduates from the three national academies have easier access to the labour markets, graduates from both private theatre schools in Norway and from theatre schools abroad are employed from time to time by the institutional theatres in Norway. Graduates from the national academies – and particularly from the Academy of Theatre in Oslo – certainly have a better chance, although the theatres are free to hire others, and they frequently do so. It is all a question about talent: “Good people can come from everywhere”, says one theatre director, “it is a bit accidental”. “It is often like this that the most talented break through”, says another theatre director. But “the Academy of Theatre [in Oslo] has an advantage [compared to the other schools]; the students from there are solid; their craft is solid; this becomes apparent in the long run; they can do things”, according to the first director. Thus, all recruits with a profes-
vessional education have a chance to make a professional career, but to paraphrase Georg Orwell in “Animal Farm”: Some recruits are more equal than others.16

(6) Sometimes theatres even employ autodidacts

Occasionally, the theatres even employ autodidacts. If the need for a proper recruit is pressing and the right talent is available, the theatre director might hire a recruit without any formal theatre education at all, e.g. an actor from an active amateur theatre. “Educational background by and large means nothing; what counts is that they are good [i.e. talented]”, says one theatre director. This statement should probably not be taken quite literally, as educational background probably also means something for this informant. But this also implies that perceived talent may sometimes overshadow formal education. “Because we are some old rats; we know what we are after; and we see it [i.e. the talent] within 10 minutes”, says another theatre director.

(7) Recruitment may be influenced by accidental events

The theatre directors also emphasise that the recruitment process may be influenced by quite accidental events. Coincidental meetings and immediate needs may lead to employment of this or that actor with little or no formal educational background, which is experienced as somewhat troublesome by the theatre directors because it happens at the expense of the equal chances of all the other recruits.

“The weakness lies in the accidental”, says one theatre director. “The accidental [aspects of the recruitment process] may torment me because it should not be that accidental. One summer some years ago someone told me that I had to see – there is a corny revue theatre called “XX”17 – so I went to see “XX”, an insane performance that lasted five hours! And there was this lady who was incredibly funny; her name was “ZZ”. So I met her in the street or the cafeteria some days later, and I said to her “we have to find some place for you here [in my theatre]”. And she is totally autodidact. She comes from the radio, where she offers small informal talks. And then, three weeks later a role turned up where we were missing someone like this (...). So we hired “ZZ”, and she made a good performance, and everybody fell in love with her. Later on she played big leading parts in the theatre. It has not been without problems for her because she lacked formal education; she does not have the technical skills, she drives on the crude reserve all the time. But on the other hand she is funny; she has written several fine performances for the theatre. She is an extremely gifted multi-talent. (...) I took her in directly from the street, and from time to time you do that” [i.e. take actors in directly from the street].

16. “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others”, Orwell “Animal Farm” (1945).
17. Here we have anonymised the revue theatre (XX) and the actor (ZZ).
Several other informants also emphasise the informal and accidental aspects of the recruitment process. Of course, such “accidental recruitments” may not be that accidental in reality, as available networks and visibility may also play a crucial role.

(8) The monopoly of the Academy of Theatre in Oslo is broken

The most important change in the recruitment system to institutional theatres in Norway since the 1990s is probably that the quasi-monopoly of the Academy of Theatre in Oslo has broken down. In practice, there were certainly also several recruitment channels to theatres in Norway before, but there was only one highway, i.e. via the Academy of Theatre in Oslo. With two new national academies, which formally have the same status as the Oslo academy, this situation has changed greatly. “The funniest, and perhaps the most exciting, is that the Academy of Theatre has unlocked [the school]”, says one theatre director. “Because [previously] they were hermetically sealed from everything and about everything,” he says. “This made Norwegian theatre incredibly predictable, somewhat stingy and safe, as it was for many years”, he says. He also refers to the new “fourth year” at the Academy, which aims to promote independent and creative acting, and which is even open for recruits with a three-year bachelor’s degree from other theatre schools.

(9) The excess supply of recruits is persistent and structural

Lastly, it is a rather undisputed fact that theatre schools in Norway and abroad educate too many Norwegian actors compared to what the dramatic labour market realistically can absorb. This “excess supply” of competent actors may indeed be considered to be an advantage from the theatre directors’ perspective because they can choose among more talents than they would have with a more restricted recruitment system. However, it may become a personal tragedy for several actors who do not succeed, but who have invested much time, initiative and money in their career. The fact that the number of professional actors in Norway has doubled from 1994 to 2006, while the capacity of the theatre schools have expanded dramatically, puts a strong pressure on the entire recruitment system. It is certainly true that the labour market has also expanded, but probably not enough to absorb the expansion of new recruits.

Nevertheless, it is possible, however, though uncertain, that the number of applicants to theatre schools has slowed down and/or slightly decreased in recent times. Even so, this would not alter the fact that there is still a substantial excess supply of recruits to this kind of career.

18. This statement does not apply to all elderly Norwegian actors. Their educational background varies a lot. The Academy of Theatre in Oslo was not established until 1953.
CONCLUSION

In general, the social context of theatre education is characterised by:

(1) A substantial excess supply of recruits compared to the available or potential jobs on the labour market;

(2) A substantial “reserve army” of professional or would-be actors on the doorstep of the labour markets;

(3) A substantial transformation of the entire theatre landscape (e.g. more freelancers, new media jobs), and

(4) An establishment of several new – public and private – theatre schools, at least in Norway. Based on this (including substantial empirical material from the Norwegian theatre field), we have argued that there is no need for more public theatre schools in Norway on a BA level (Hylland and Mangset, 2011).

However, our study indicates that the idea about a radical change in the recruitment system to theatres in Norway – as previously articulated by Bjørkås (1998) and Mangset (2004) – was probably misleading. It is certainly true that the monopoly of the Academy of Theatre in Oslo has been challenged, if not abolished, because of the introduction of two new national academies. But the Oslo Academy still remains the most important and prestigious recruitment channel, and graduates from the Academy have been exposed to relatively moderate occupational risk, even in 2011-12. Furthermore, nothing indicates that a system with formal competition by help of an audition has taken over, or will take over, as the principal recruitment channel. A generalised audition system might have introduced more equal opportunities to all potential recruits, i.e. it would have weakened the power of theatre directors to the benefit of the recruits. Instead, the recruitment system is now characterised by informal communication channels, coincidental decisions and a lack of transparency, which leaves the theatre directors in the most powerful position in the recruitment process.

It is also quite likely that the idea of a radical change in the recruitment system after the 1990s for a great part was due to a methodological misconception: In 1998-99, we primarily interviewed students and employees at the Academy of Theatre in Oslo, as we did not interview theatre directors or other partners in the recruitment process. It is quite likely that through the help of our interviews in 1998-99, we primarily caught a “threatening scenario” of the future, such as it was conceived by students and employees at the Oslo Academy. They saw a generalised audition-based recruitment system as a threat against their relatively monopolistic control with the recruitment process at that time. But it is also likely that they saw just a limited part of the entire recruitment system, as informal communication channels, coincidental decisions and a lack of transparency were probably important aspects of the recruitment process in the 1990s, as well as today.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


