

The Audience of the Volksoper

5.1 THE VOLKSOPER AUDIENCES IN THE MENTHA ERA

Prior to the Mentha era, no extensive survey on the structure of the audiences (or non-audiences) was undertaken by the Volksoper. Visitors could be roughly distinguished into Members and Non-members, though the ratio between them could only be guessed through the ticket income, representing 21 % and 79 % for the two large audience groups respectively in the beginning of the Mentha era²⁷⁵. Non-members are defined as audiences of various attendance frequencies that belong to no membership scheme, while Members can be subdivided according to three types of membership: Subscribers (*Abonnenten*), Cycle owners (*Zyklen- Inhaber*) and Golden Card owners (*Golden Card- Inhaber*).

5.1.1 Subscription - ‘Abonnement’

According to the Volksoper business director Angelika Kopitsch, subscribers are “the foundation stone of the house”, the loyal audience basis making up for around 12 % of ticket income²⁷⁶. The subscription principle is relatively old in the cultural scene of Vienna and it was introduced in the Volksoper in 1945. The Volksoper subscription offers five performances pro season at a 25 % price reduction, in a weekday and seating category of one’s choice, with the exception of Friday and Saturday, when the usually

²⁷⁵ *Unternehmenskonzept*, p. 32

²⁷⁶ Angelika Kopitsch, Interview with Maria Kouri, 24.10.2003

higher audience attendance renders the selling of seats at normal prices more profitable. Subscriptions for the following season can be ordered by March 31 of the running season and existing subscriptions are automatically extended, if they are not cancelled until the aforementioned date. Since a number of people neglect or forget to cancel their membership, this system is beneficial to the organisation²⁷⁷.

The main disadvantage of this membership scheme is that, since the following season's programme is not announced before the order deadline, people cannot know beforehand the content of the product they are asked to purchase. What's more, works contained in a fixed subscription may not be exchanged. In other words, subscriptions entail a high degree of risk and are inflexible, not allowing for spontaneity or personal choice that have been described as important contemporary needs.

Subscriptions are more practical for organisations that are usually sold out (for example the Staatsoper) or for singular events, for which tickets are hard to procure. In the Volksoper, however, a number of tickets usually remain unsold, and due to the dispersing of works around the season, people have the opportunity of choosing the dates that best suit them for their visit. In this light, the subscription scheme in the Volksoper does not seem to offer exceptional benefits. Unless demand increases to such an extent that the house becomes widely sold out and tickets scarce, it is very possible that contemporary audiences will favour other types of membership. Subscriptions could be maintained for the existing users, although the life-cycle stage of this offered service must be explored and the service withdrawn, if the sustenance costs exceed the produced revenues.

5.1.2 Cycles - 'Zyklen'

Cycles are a more recent membership scheme introduced at a small scale in 1990/91 (two Mozart cycles). During the Mentha direction, the cycle scheme gained greatly in significance and was strongly developed and promoted. The cycle card allows admission to a number of pre-selected performances for specific dates and for the seating category of one's choice. The content

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

of cycles varies widely, ranging from a combination of different genres to very focused thematics, for example *New-stagings*, *Premieres*, *Dance or Operetta cycles*, *Mozart* or *Italian opera cycles* etc., while mixed cycles for both Volksoper and Staatsoper performances also exist. Cycle cards offer a price reduction up to 40% according to the cycle content, and they are valid for one season by the end of which they automatically expire. This entails that the attendance of cycle owners depends on the cycle-offer of each season; therefore, this audience group must be every year addressed and won over and, in this sense, it cannot be considered 'stable' in the way subscribers can.

On the other hand, this sort of membership is much more flexible than the subscription, since cycles offer a wide variety of pre-selected works and can be ordered any time of the year depending on the performance dates. In this way, perceived risk is minimised and people enjoy a greater degree of personalised choice both in terms of what they will see and of when they will see it. The cycle membership was widely accepted and proved quite successful. Especially after the third year of the Mentha direction (2001/02) the cycle offer was greatly extended and more combinations were compiled in an attempt to approach younger audiences and re-attract lapsed subscribers.

5.1.3 Golden Card

Contrary to some other organisations, due to organisational difficulties, the Volksoper could not offer a choice-subscription (*Wahlabo*) that would allow people to choose freely between a number of different weekdays and works²⁷⁸. In view of the declining subscriber numbers, the Mentha direction promoted the Golden Card²⁷⁹ as a more flexible membership type, hoping to substitute the declining subscribers by increasing card owners until a choice-subscription could be organised²⁸⁰.

The golden card was activated in May 2000 offering almost similar conditions to the previously existing *Treuekarte*, namely a 15% price

²⁷⁸ *Unternehmenskonzept*, p. 34

²⁷⁹ Established as *VIP VOP Treuekarte* by Bachler and renamed in 2000.

²⁸⁰ *Unternehmenskonzept*, p. 34

reduction on any ticket up to four weeks before the performance and a 50% price reduction on remaining tickets up to three days before the performance (and not on the very performance day as it used to be). The Card was valid for one year and cost ATS 500 pro season (later €36.34).

Offering such a ticket deduction at the small card price, the golden card was ideal for frequent Volksoper visitors. Due to the card's conditions and to the dropping audience numbers during the Mentha era that almost always ensured the existence of unsold tickets, the card encouraged spontaneous visits and last-minute booking. Believing that the golden card did not support long-term sales²⁸¹, the Volksoper direction following Mentha abolished the golden card scheme in 2003.

Despite this rudimentary audience categorisation into Members and Non-members, the Mentha direction had since the beginning realised that, because of the wide programme offer of the Volksoper, one could not speak of one clear-cut, homogeneous audience but of stratified audiences that reflected the heterogeneity and diversity of contemporary society²⁸². However, this belief was based more on everyday experience and observation than on relevant research: until 1999, data on the Volksoper audiences were only quantitative, referring to the number of visitors and of members specifically as well as to the house's used capacity, and were published in the official annual reports of the Association. Qualitative data regarding the cultural behaviour, participation patterns and preferences of the Volksoper visitors were nonexistent and no Volksoper administration had undertaken relevant audience research. The Mentha direction was the first to commission a survey of the house's members in 1999 (*Abonnentenbefragung 1999*, henceforth AB 1999), breaking new grounds for the organisation and revealing the importance communication with the audience held for the new Volksoper administration.

In 1999, under the motto "*The Volksoper would like to get to know you better!*" a questionnaire was sent to 5,500 members (subscribers and cycle owners) of the house, in order to discover to what extent assumptions and

²⁸¹ Christiane Huemer-Strobele, Interview with Maria Kouri, 7.11.2003

²⁸² *Unternehmenskonzept*, p. 31

hypotheses regarding the audiences were valid as well as to further the dialogue with the public²⁸³. The questionnaire covered socio-demographic elements, visiting behaviour, favourite methods of information and ticket booking, genre preferences, ranking of the season's works and factors important for the enjoyment of a performance. The private firm Soffi Institut undertook the analysis. However, the questionnaire return rate was small, perhaps because a pre-paid return envelope was not included and, in the end, only 17% of the total sent questionnaires could be analysed²⁸⁴. Based on a gender and age categorisation (male/female and 20-35 years/ 35-50 years/ 50+ years), the 1999 survey revealed interesting information and gave members (86% Subscribers, 8% Cycle owners²⁸⁵) the opportunity to relate experiences with the house and to express their wishes and comments both positive and negative. This survey furthered dialogue only partly. Indeed, the categorisations used in the questionnaires were sometimes incomplete; for example, the profession categories did not include the option 'retired', making seniors feel excluded²⁸⁶. Moreover, the lack of a pre-paid return envelope did not motivate individuals to complete and return the questionnaire; perhaps people were not convinced of the importance of their opinion and co-operation. Finally, though this project was the first audience survey the Volksoper conducted, it was restricted to members and was subsequently not representative of the general Volksoper audience.

A main point revealed by the AB 1999 was that the majority of members seemed to consist of people over 50 years old (83%), while those between 35 and 50 years were fewer (12%) and those between 20 and 35 years very few (only 3%)²⁸⁷. The high average age levels of members, in addition to the receding member and audience numbers, posed a real challenge for the Mentha administration: if the member groups continued ageing and the non-member's body kept withering without being refreshed by new

²⁸³ SOFFI-Institut, *Abonnentenbefragung '99 Volksoper Wien* Endbericht, (Innsbruck: SOFFI-Institut, 1999), p. 3

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4

audiences, the financial survival of the house would be at stake because of precipitating decreases in ticket-sales income. Equally, the artistic and social mission of the house would not be met, because of financial difficulties that could lead to quality reduction as well as due to the eventual decline of people interested in the cultural product of the Volksoper. Consequently, the mission of the Volksoper regarding audiences as described in the Separation Act, namely to facilitate access to wide layers of the population and especially to children and young people²⁸⁸, becomes all the more important as it can lead to the financial and artistic survival of the organisation and to the fulfilment of its social role.

Based on the existing data on the Volksoper audiences and embracing the house's mission described by the Act, the Mentha direction set two main aims, namely to increase audience numbers so as to exceed an 80% capacity²⁸⁹ and to attract people under 35 years of age²⁹⁰, in this sense setting audience development goals. In effect, the objective to increase the visitors' numbers also through attracting younger people reveals the direction's intention to enlarge the audience size also in the long run; in audience development terms, by opening up to non-participants (since, according to the results of the AB 1999 and to observations by the house staff²⁹¹, young people do not go to the Volksoper in large numbers), the Mentha direction sought to broaden and even diversify participation²⁹². However, the description of the new target audience as "people under 35 years of age" is problematic: the group is roughly sketched and encompasses a wide span of ages and, consequently, interests. Through the Corporation's Concept another audience target can be also derived, though it is neither clearly mentioned nor adequately described, namely (international) tourists²⁹³. Indeed, based on existing information on the tourist movement in Vienna and on the experience that Viennese operettas can be a tourist attraction, the Mentha direction aimed to intensify efforts in the tourist market, in

²⁸⁸ BthOG, BGBl. I Nr. 108/1998, Artikel 1, 1.Abschnitt, §2 (1)

²⁸⁹ *Marketingplan*, p. 9

²⁹⁰ *Unternehmenskonzept*, p. 31

²⁹¹ Otto Hochreiter, Interview with Maria Kouri, 16.06.2003

²⁹² See McCarthy and Jinnett, p. 3, and see also 2.1.

²⁹³ *Unternehmenskonzept*, pp. 38-39

order to gain more visitors for the house. Other non-participant groups are not mentioned and, more importantly, no clear reference is made regarding the cultivation of existing audiences and the increase of their attendance frequency (deepening participation²⁹⁴).

The opening to new audience groups can be understood as a policy of the Mentha direction to counter the continuously decreasing audience and subscriber numbers²⁹⁵. On the other hand, attracting new audiences is more difficult to achieve than stimulating increased attendance among current patrons²⁹⁶, and turning the first into loyal supporters of the organisation takes much effort, time and resources. Though such a long-term audience development aim is commendable as it ensures the future audience base of an organisation, current audiences must not be disregarded. In the chase for new customers, maintaining existing ones is often neglected²⁹⁷ and, indeed, the Mentha audience policy did not address the pressing problem of the subscriber decline nor the development of existing audiences. The Corporation's Concept reveals that the direction saw in the recession of subscriber numbers and in the decrease of income in the seasons 1997-1999 "that the offer in available seats becomes greater. These can be offered to the new target groups of the urbane gainfully employed people and the (international) tourists"²⁹⁸. Thus, the Mentha direction either overlooked the so-called '80-20 rule' of marketing, in other words that 80 percent of purchases are made by 20 percent of frequent users²⁹⁹, which in the case of the Volksoper are the house members, or believed it had more chances to attract new groups than to change the members' existing negative attitudes.

Nevertheless, the choice of the two new audience groups did not follow up on relevant market research specifying the exact size and potential cultural interest of those markets, probably because the budget did not allow funding for such a project. Hence, it seems that, concentrating all efforts, time and resources to new target markets, while disregarding the

²⁹⁴ See McCarthy and Jinnett, p. 3, and see also 2.1.

²⁹⁵ See Table 8

²⁹⁶ Kotler and Scheff, p. 103

²⁹⁷ McLaughlin, p. 205

²⁹⁸ *Unternehmenskonzept*, p. 32

²⁹⁹ Kotler and Scheff, p. 103

already existing audiences, was a great risk that was taken on the basis of assumptions, one-sided information and noble aspirations rather than on palpable and encompassing data.

In any case, the orientation of the Mentha direction towards people cannot be ignored. Mentha envisioned the Volksoper as a social space open to diverse people to meet, discuss and discover new things regarding themselves and life through a wide variety of works that directly communicate with them on mental and emotional levels³⁰⁰. The significance attributed by the Mentha direction to a two-way enriching relationship between the organisation and the community, aspiring to elevate art into an important part of people's everyday lives and to promote social integration and awareness, epitomizes a main point of audience development.

One more step in this direction was the addressing of the house's identity problem and the attempt to cultivate a new distinctive, contemporary image that would reflect the direction's understanding of the word 'Folk' as 'Society', opposing the general perceptions, especially prominent among younger people, of the Volksoper as an elitist and expensive outdated operetta house for older people³⁰¹. Subsequently, the direction saw in the repositioning of the house an opportunity to communicate with wider strata of society, including non-attenders, aiming in this sense not to a direct increase in ticket and membership sales, but in an image amelioration of the Volksoper among the general population³⁰². This objective opens the way to the development of audiences in the long-term: a positive image of the house can motivate existing audiences to maintain and deepen their relation with the organisation, and at length it can generate awareness and interest also among non-participants, thus creating fertile grounds for a potential widening of the audience base³⁰³.

Summing up the main aims of the audience policy of the Mentha direction, namely the increase of the audience numbers and the lowering of the audience's average age, as well as the fostering of people's awareness of and direct communication with the house, it is concluded that, though

³⁰⁰ *Geschäftsbericht 1999/2000*, p. 13

³⁰¹ *Unternehmenskonzept*, pp. 30-31

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 34

³⁰³ For more information on the Volksoper image see 7.3.

not officially articulated in such terms, the Volksoper administration had taken some active steps towards audience development.

At the end of the Mentha era, the total audience numbers and used capacity of the Volksoper had retreated dramatically. As the figures in Table 8 show, even in the first year of the Mentha direction (1999/00), the decline of audience numbers amounted to almost two-thirds of the total regression since 1996/97³⁰⁴. During the following two seasons, capacity was kept at relatively stable levels, but in the last season, it reached the lowest levels since 1962 and the Mentha era ended with a 12% total loss of capacity, representing 53,749 visitors. In the report of KPMG Austria, the given reasons for the stark audience retreat already occurring in Mentha's first season were the direction's artistic concept, which included original, challenging works in the programme, the forcing of the house's ensemble to present difficult works and the unexpected failure of popular works to finance risky productions³⁰⁵.

Regarding members, Subscribers show an accelerating decline that by the end of the Mentha era amounts to a 35% reduction from the last season of the Bachler direction (1998/99). In effect, the subscriber regression, occurring since 1990, was intensified during the Mentha era, reducing income and destabilising the organisation's 'foundation stone'. There has been no extensive research on the reasons for this decline: only in 1999 did the Mentha direction conduct a phone survey among those who cancelled their subscription and main reasons voiced were growing age, health problems, change of residence and the house's programming during the Mentha direction³⁰⁶; the author has been unable to locate the records of this survey. On the other hand, the subscriber shrinkage could also be caused by the very nature of this membership type requiring long-term planning and thus contrasting with contemporary leisure time trends. An in-depth research of the reasons of the subscriber decline would be imperative, in order to address problematic aspects and halt this regressive tendency.

³⁰⁴ KPMG Austria, p. 13

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17

³⁰⁶ *Unternehmenskonzept*, p. 33

Cycle owners, after suffering a small decrease between 1999 and 2001, more than double their numbers in 2001/02, exceeding even the first year of the Bachler direction, indicating the success of this membership scheme during the Mentha era. The Golden Card seems less popular but generally well accepted. The sudden decline of golden card owners in the season 2002/03 may be explained by the large offer in European operettas, which did not raise the interest of the audiences to the expected degree³⁰⁷.

	Used capacity	Audience numbers	Members			All members
			Subscribers	Cycle owners	Golden Card owners	
1996/97	88.7%	335,961	11,548	3,083	-	14,631
1997/98	87.4%	359,994	11,193	3,006	-	14,199
1998/99	84.3%	337,584	10,703	2,646	-	13,349
1999/00	78.2%	303,456	9,974	1,795	-	11,769
2000/01	77.3%	297,227	9,025	1,371	551	10,947
2001/02	78.5%	303,107	7,729	3,141	602	11,472
2002/03	71.9%	283,835	6,954	3,648	414	11,016

Table 8 *Used capacity, total audience numbers and member numbers of the Volksoper between 1996 and 2003*³⁰⁸

During almost the same time span (1996-2002) the Staatsoper presented an average capacity of 93%; however, a more comparable to the Volksoper opera house, the Komische Oper Berlin, showed a 67% capacity in 1998/99, 63% in 2000/01 and only 50% during 2002 and the first months of 2003³⁰⁹.

³⁰⁷ Angelika Kopitsch, Interview with Maria Kouri, 24.10.2003

³⁰⁸ Data includes performances and additional events, for example introductory evenings etc. Table constructed according to data from *Unternehmenskonzept*, KPMG Austria, *Geschäftsberichte 2000-2003* and from information by the interview with Angelika Kopitsch (24.10.2003).

³⁰⁹ 1998/99 from KPMG Austria, p. 19; 2000/01 from <http://www.leonce.de/buehne/oper.html> (Retrieved April 22, 2004); 2002-2003 from <http://www.klassik-in-berlin.de/seiten/frames-de.html?aktuell/nachrichten-de.html> (Retrieved April 22, 2004)

Still, judging the degree of Mentha's success in reaching the set audience development aims through ticket numbers alone can be misleading, since they reveal little about the audience's profile or about the degree of achievement of Mentha's qualitative goals. Indeed, the measurement and evaluation of such objectives is hard, as they often contradict quantitative ones³¹⁰: for example, reaching specific artistic standards or presenting important but unpopular works could oppose the objective of increasing ticket sales.

In order to establish some measures for assessing the extent of meeting the set aims, the Mentha direction planned a second, more comprehensive audience survey in 2000/01, which, due to lack of time and resources, was not realised until 2002/03.

5.2 PUBLIKUMSBEFRAGUNG 2003 – THE 2003 AUDIENCE SURVEY

5.2.1 Aims of the Survey

The aims of the *Publikumsbefragung 2003* (henceforth PB 2003) were to gather more detailed information on the Volksoper audiences so as to adjust the house's policies accordingly, and to ascertain to what extent the two basic cultural-politic aims of the Mentha direction, i.e., the realisation of a wide offer to a wide public and the decrease of the audience's average age, had been reached³¹¹.

5.2.2 Method

5.2.2.1 Participants - Procedure

The Mentha direction believed that a representative and comprehensive audience survey should reflect the heterogeneity of the Volksoper audiences and the variety of the house's offer. Therefore, this survey included both members and non-members, visiting all different products of the Volksoper: Operetta, 18th-19th century Opera, 20th-21st century Opera, Musical, and Dance.

³¹⁰ Rados, p. 528

³¹¹ Otto Hochreiter, Interview with Maria Kouri, 10.04.2003

Since genres were distributed unevenly in the season programme and specifically musicals were performed only in February, the survey ran for 6 months (September 2002 - March 2003) in the main house. All genres, weekdays, begin times and parts of the house were covered³¹². The survey questionnaire was developed by the deputy artistic director of the Volksoper, Otto Hochreiter, in cooperation with Gerald Stocker of the Press department and the tourism management student Peter Kratochvil, supervised by his professor Dietmar Kepplinger. The questionnaire was distributed to audience members by the Volksoper staff before the beginning of performances and during the first intermission. Since no previous data on the composition of the audience existed, no set of rules to guarantee a representative sample were followed; the staff had been instructed to hand out questionnaires in a spontaneous, random way, covering as wide and varied an audience sample as possible³¹³. A specific policy for group visitors or second-fillers did not apply. Completed questionnaires were gathered either on the spot or at the end of the intermission. Boxes for late returns were also placed in the cloakrooms.

To compensate for failing returns, a total of 3,700 questionnaires were distributed. The number of questionnaires for each genre was proportionate to the ratio of performances of the respective type. Detailed performance numbers and ratios by genre during the survey period are shown below:

<i>Genre/Months</i>	<i>Sep.</i>	<i>Oct.</i>	<i>Nov.</i>	<i>Dec.</i>	<i>Jan.</i>	<i>Feb.</i>	Total Perf.	Perc.
Operetta	20	11	8	16	20	5	80	46%
Opera 18-19 c.	4	14	13	10	6	4	51	29%
Opera 20-21 c.	4	1	7	2	-	1	15	9%
Dance	2	3	2	-	4	6	17	10%
Musical	-	-	-	-	-	10	10	6%
Other	-	2*	2**	2**	1*	2*		

* 'Singen mitten im Lärm der Welt'

** Concert, 'Singen mitten im Lärm der Welt'

³¹² *Ibid.*

³¹³ Peter Kratochvil, Interview with Maria Kouri, 12.04.2003

5.2.2.2 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire covered one A4 sheet and contained seventeen questions, both multiple-choice and open-ended, on types of audiences (member/non-member), socio-demographic elements (gender, age, income, profession, origin etc.), visiting behaviour (number of and reason for visits, accompaniment etc.), favourite ticket booking and informational methods, genre preferences as well as personal comments and wishes. In order to differentiate between genres, different sheet colours were used: *pink* for Operetta, *yellow* for 18th-19th century Opera, *green* for 20th-21st century Opera, *white* for Dance, and *blue* for Musical.

On the whole, the questionnaire was well made: questions could be anonymously and quickly completed even while standing, and they were designed to yield a wide range of important information. Both German and English versions addressed native and foreign customers. Past mistakes were not repeated; categories were for the most part complete, though often the use of the option “other” proved necessary [e.g. in Q11 “*where did you buy your ticket from?*” the obvious answer *Abonnement* (subscription) was not included].

On the other hand, unique questionnaire numbers, date or other points of reference were missing and one may only roughly guess when or where questionnaires were distributed by the sheet-colour and sometimes by answers regarding specific works. Furthermore, the chosen colours, particularly blue and pink, in combination with the relatively small fonts (12p.) could in poor light hinder reading especially for seniors. Used technical jargon proved confusing (for example in Q12 *Leporello*=folded brochure) and likewise the name of the member card promoted by the house (Golden Card) drove some audience members –especially foreigners– to believe the homonymous Visa card was meant. Also, some questions seemed quite unclear (for example Q5 “*you have also seen...*” not specifying whether in the House or in other venues) or even meaningless [for example Q10 “*why are you here*”, which showed a high *No Answer* percentage (29.3%), probably due to the question’s curious formulation, which baffled audiences]. Additionally, sensitive questions were asked one after the other and quite bluntly (i.e., Qs 14, 16, 17 –age, income, car brand) testing

the limits of people's indulgence and often making calculations necessary (turning Schillings into Euros³¹⁴). Generic categories, especially regarding age and income, could have been less intrusive and user-friendlier. Finally, assurances regarding the confidentiality of information could have incited people to be more forthcoming.

A series of mistakes during the carrying out of the survey were not avoided either: questionnaires in English were given out to German-speaking people and vice versa; questionnaires of the wrong colour were distributed in performances of another genre (e.g. yellow in Operetta or 20th-21st century Opera instead of 18th-19th century Opera). Most importantly, although the staff had been presumably informed about the aims of the survey and trained accordingly³¹⁵, they seemed unable to provide information on the intention and specifics of this survey, when asked by the author. Indeed, the objectives and importance of this project for the house were not communicated not even on the questionnaire: the two introductory lines are polite but sketchy and the only explanation given for the inconvenience is "to be able to better arrange your visit in the Volksoper" (*Um Ihren Besuch in der Volksoper Wien besser gestalten zu können...*). A patronizing hue is not avoided ("We ask for your active cooperation in the following survey" / *...bitten wir Sie bei folgender Umfrage um aktive Mitarbeit*) and the overall impression conveyed does not really persuade people on the weight of an individual's opinion for the house's administration. This way, a rapport with the audiences was not easily built, especially in a period when many people were not positively disposed towards the organisation and the Mentha direction. Indeed, some people reacted negatively to the survey both orally and in writing.

Despite its shortcomings, the questionnaire was on the whole quite well accepted: of the 3,700 questionnaires distributed, about 2,590 were returned, showing a return rate of 70%, and of those 1,885 were usable. At this point, Kratochvil left the project and the author of this dissertation took over the electronic entry of data as well as the analysis and interpretation of results on behalf of the Volksoper.

³¹⁴ Mistakes were obviously not avoided, except if some retired people gain €10,000 a month.

³¹⁵ Otto Hochreiter, Interview with Maria Kouri, 10.04.2003

Table 9 *The questionnaire of the Publikumsbefragung 2003***DEAR GUESTS!**

Welcome to the Volksoper Wien! To improve our quality-standards, please answer the following questions. We appreciate your participation.

1. Gender:

①	Male	②	Female
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2. You are owner of...

①	Abonnement
②	Golden Card
③	Zyklus
④	None of the above

3. How often do you visit the Volksoper Wien during one season?

_____ times

4. You visit the Volksoper Wien to see mainly:

①	Operetta	④	Opera of the 18./19. ct.
②	Musical	⑤	Opera of the 20./21. ct.
③	Dance	Other:	

5. What else have you seen?

①	Operetta	④	Opera of the 18./19. ct.
②	Musical	⑤	Opera of the 20./21. ct.
③	Dance	Other:	

6. What do you like in our house?

7. What do you not like?

8. What is missing?

9. You are accompanied by...

①	None, I am alone	⑤	Parents
②	Partner	⑥	Friends/Relatives
③	Children	⑦	Business-partners
④	Family or Partner & Children	Others:	

10. Is there any special occasion for being here tonight?

11. Where did you buy your tickets?

①	Counter, in advance	④	Counter, same day
②	Internet	⑤	Ticket-office
③	With my credit card by phone	Other:	

12. How did you get your information?

①	Theaterbrief	⑥	Special magazines
②	Leporello	⑦	Internet
③	Daily news	⑧	Radio
④	Weekly news	⑨	TV
⑤	Monthly news	Others:	

13. Where do you live?

- Foreign countries:** _____
- Austria, Postal Code:** _____
- Municipality: _____

①	Vienna	②	Carinthia	③	Burgenland
④	Lower A	⑤	Tyrol	⑥	Styria
⑦	Upper A	⑧	Salzburg	⑨	Vorarlberg

14. How old are you? _____ years**15. What is your profession?**

①	White-collar-worker	} <input type="radio"/> Leading Position
②	Blue-collar-worker	
③	(State) Official	
④	Self-employed	
⑤	Responsible for household	
⑥	Pupil/Student	
⑦	Retired	
⑧	No Work	
Other:		

16. Net-Income/Month: _____ €**17. How did you get to the Volksoper Wien tonight?**

①	Public means of transport
②	My own car, brand:
③	Taxi
Other:	

Thank you!

We wish you a pleasant evening at the Volksoper Wien.

LIEBER VOLKSOPERNGAST!

Um Ihren Besuch in der Volksoper Wien besser gestalten zu können, bitten wir Sie bei folgender Umfrage um aktive Mitarbeit. Kreuzen Sie einfach an...

1. Geschlecht:

①	männlich	②	weiblich
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2. Sie sind...

①	Abonnent
②	Golden Card-Inhaber
③	Zyklus-Inhaber
④	Weder noch

3. Wie oft im Jahr bzw. pro Saison besuchen Sie die Volksoper Wien?
_____mal

4. Sie gehen in die Volksoper um hauptsächlich zu sehen:

①	Operette	④	Oper des 18./19. Jhdts.
②	Musical	⑤	Oper des 20./21. Jhdts.
③	Tanz	Anderes:	

5. Sonst haben Sie auch noch...gesehen:

①	Operette	④	Oper des 18./19. Jhdts.
②	Musical	⑤	Oper des 20./21. Jhdts.
③	Tanz	Anderes:	

6. Was ist positiv in der Volksoper?

7. Was empfinden Sie als eher negativ?

8. Was fehlt Ihnen bei uns im Haus?

9. Mit wem sind Sie heute hier?

①	alleine	⑤	Eltern
②	Partner	⑥	Freunde/Bekannte
③	Kinder	⑦	Geschäftspartner
④	Familie bzw. Partner & Kinder	andere:	

10. Aus welchem Anlass sind Sie hier?

11. Wo haben Sie die Karten gekauft?

①	Vorverkaufskassa	④	Abendkassa
②	Internet	⑤	Kartenbüro
③	Telefonisch mit Kreditkarte	anders:	

12. Wie informieren Sie sich über uns?

①	Theaterbrief der VOP	⑥	Fachmagazine
②	Leporello der VOP	⑦	Internet
③	Tageszeitung	⑧	Radio
④	Wochenzeitung	⑨	TV
⑤	Monatszeitung	anders:	

13. Wo haben Sie Ihren Hauptwohnsitz?

- Ausland**, nämlich _____
- in Österreich**, Postleitzahl: _____
Gemeinde: _____

①	Wien	②	Kärnten	③	Burgenland
④	NÖ	⑤	Tirol	⑥	Steiermark
⑦	OÖ	⑧	Salzburg	⑨	Vorarlberg

14. Wie alt sind Sie? _____ Jahre

15. Was sind Sie vom Beruf?

①	Arbeiter/in	}	○ leitend
②	Angestellte/r		
③	Beamte/r		
④	Selbständig		
⑤	Verantwortlich für den Haushalt		
⑥	Schüler / Student		
⑦	Im Ruhestand		
⑧	Vorübergehend ohne Arbeit		
Sonstiges:			

16. Monatseinkommen netto: _____ €

17. Mit welchem Verkehrsmittel sind Sie heute in die Volksoper gekommen?

①	Öffentliche Verkehrsmittel
②	Privatauto, Marke:
③	Taxi
anders:	

Vielen Dank!

Wir wünschen Ihnen einen schönen Abend in der Volksoper Wien.

5.2.3 Data Analysis

5.2.3.1 Appropriateness of the Chosen Survey Method

The choice of methods for data collection depends on specific situations and factors, for example, human, time and money resources, the organisation's character, history and policy, arising difficulties and problems, the audience disposition, timing etc. In the case of the Volksoper, at the specific phase, an extensive survey aiming to produce quantitative and especially qualitative data, was crucial: almost no reliable information on the audience characteristics and behaviour existed and the organisation was going through a difficult stage, receiving negative criticisms and facing rapidly shrinking audience numbers.

Survey results regarding a limited sample can be generalised to a larger population, naturally within limits of error, provided that the sample and the sample size are precisely drawn to ascertain accuracy and to enable the generalisation of results³¹⁶. The 'population' of the Volksoper includes all visitors of the house, members and non-members alike, regardless of attendance frequency; the study of a sample of this population and the extension of findings to the larger audience could prove invaluable for the Volksoper direction, as it would produce significant information for current and future reference.

Since no former extensive survey had taken place, no data on the composition of the audience existed and subsequently no detailed categorisations could be realised. Therefore, the method of simple random sampling for the PB 2003 was appropriate: according to this approach, "each population member and thus each possible sample has an equal probability of being selected"³¹⁷. The distribution of questionnaires in all genres, days, times and parts of the house ensured equal chances for all members of the population to be included in the sample, in other words to participate in the survey.

Finally, the combination of quantitative and qualitative data emerging

³¹⁶ Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, *Designing qualitative research*, 2nd edition (London: Sage Publications, 1995), pp. 96-97

³¹⁷ David A. Aaker, V. Kumar and George S. Day, *Marketing research*, 6th edition (New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1998), p. 381

from the survey would help the direction draw for the first time a more comprehensive picture regarding the house's audiences. Contrary to quantitative data, qualitative information can be voluminous and unstructured. As a result, there is no generally accepted formula for its codification and analysis³¹⁸. However, such information is unconstrained by predetermined categories applicable in quantitative research: since multifarious opinions and experiences are not compressed into given responses, qualitative research contributes to the depth and quality of the survey³¹⁹.

5.2.3.2 Analysing the Data

For the statistical analysis, usable questionnaires were given ID numbers and the programme SPSS 9.0 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) was employed. The audience sample was segmented in four large groups, namely in Members of the organisation including Subscribers, Golden Card and Cycle owners, and in Non-members, in order to better highlight different customer-group behaviours. Detailed analyses of each customer category as well as of the sample as a whole were carried out, so numbers and percentages both in customer-group detail and in total are provided.

Categorisation of answers has been mostly dictated by the formulation of the questionnaire. Regarding age, no prior categorisation existed and the author employed more analytic groups than those used in the AB 1999 to demonstrate in greater detail the age composition of the audience. The same applies for income categorisation; nevertheless, due to the great 'no answer' percentage (two-thirds of the sample) results on income must be treated with care.

A number of various analyses of the data have been undertaken to draw main profiles and explore the visiting behaviour of audiences as well as to highlight participants' preferences regarding the Volksoper programme,

³¹⁸ Alan Bryman and Robert G. Burgess, 'Reflections on qualitative data analysis' in Alan Bryman and Robert G. Burgess (eds.) *Analyzing qualitative data* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 216-217

³¹⁹ Michael Quinn Patton, *How to use qualitative methods in evaluation* (London: Sage Publications, 1987), p. 9

favourite sources of information, transportation methods etc. Not unexpectedly, qualitative data generated by people's comments were often subjective and ambiguous (especially regarding Stagings: *good, some, loyal-to-the-work*), hindering assessment to a large extent. Nonetheless, the information provided has proven invaluable as it sheds light on aspects that could not be thoroughly revealed by quantitative data (for example regarding people's degree of acceptance of Mentha's artistic line).

During the analysing process, it became evident that additional information that would help better explore the audience profile and visiting behaviour was not generated by the questionnaire, for example the general cultural preferences or favourite leisure-time activities of individuals. Understandably, a questionnaire like the one employed in the PB 2003 should be short and not take too much of the visitors' time and a series of other basic questions took priority, since no previous audience research existed. In the future, the commissioning of audience research must become a regular practice for the organisation and the inclusion of questions aiming at a more extensive illustration of the Volksoper audiences is strongly recommended.

The lack of previous research of similar scope on the Volksoper audiences hinders the comparison of present results with the past -even the AB 1999 can be employed only partly, since it regards only members. In other words, no existing information can serve as a basis for comparing present data and, subsequently, allow the assessment of the results of the Mentha policies. Though the need for further research regarding the Volksoper audiences is prominent, at this point informed assumptions can be made and it can only be hoped that the PB 2003 will serve as a comparative basis for future audience surveys.

The need for market research on non-attenders has been already stressed by the audit office of the Federal Chancellery³²⁰ and is for the Volksoper especially significant, in order to fulfil its mission as the 'opera house of the people'. However, until now the Volksoper has undertaken no research among non-participants. Since no information on the reasons of non-attendance as well as on the characteristics, interests, tastes and

³²⁰ BKA, p. 56

cultural behaviour of non-participants exists, the subsequent analyses and observations will regard the Volksoper audiences only.

5.3 DESCRIBING THE VOLKSOPER AUDIENCES

5.3.1 General Profile

	Customer type				
	Subscriber	Golden Card	Cycle	Non-member	Total
Frequency	353	41	61	1430	1885
Percentage	18.7	2.2	3.2	75.9	100.0

Table 10 *The customer types of the Volksoper*

According to the survey results, Volksoper audiences consist of one-fourth Members and three-fourths Non-members. Women outnumber men by one-fifth. Almost three-fourths of the audience are Austrian, mainly coming from Vienna (70%) and from Lower Austria (21%). The rest one-fourth of the audience are foreigners originating chiefly from the E.U. as well as from other parts of the world³²¹. Concerning age, the majority of visitors are over 55 years old (39%), followed by people between 35 and 54 (29%) and finally by people below 34 years of age (27%).

The majority of the Volksoper customers are employed (57%). The two largest groups are retired people and white-collar workers (around one-third and one-fifth respectively) followed by pupils/students. Civil servants and self-employed are also moderately represented, contrary to blue-collar workers, the unemployed and those responsible for the household, who comprise the smallest groups. These results make up, in a way, for the lack of information regarding the education level of the Volksoper audiences, as they assume the existence of at least an average educational level.

³²¹ E.U. citizens represent 17.4% on the total sample and 65.4% on foreigners only.

Profession of customers

			Customer type				Total
			Subscriber	Golden Card	Cycle	Non-member	
Profession	NA	Number	4			19	23
		% of Customer type	1.1%			1.3%	
		% of Total	.2%			1.0%	1.2%
Retired		Number	186	12	14	338	550
		% of Customer type	52.7%	29.3%	23.0%	23.6%	
		% of Total	9.9%	.6%	.7%	17.9%	29.2%
White-collar worker		Number	68	11	17	386	482
		% of Customer type	19.3%	26.8%	27.9%	27.0%	
		% of Total	3.6%	.6%	.9%	20.5%	25.6%
Pupil/Student		Number	20	4	5	281	310
		% of Customer type	5.7%	9.8%	8.2%	19.7%	
		% of Total	1.1%	.2%	.3%	14.9%	16.4%
Civil servant		Number	37	5	8	144	194
		% of Customer type	10.5%	12.2%	13.1%	10.1%	
		% of Total	2.0%	.3%	.4%	7.6%	10.3%
Self-employed		Number	19	6	7	150	182
		% of Customer type	5.4%	14.6%	11.5%	10.5%	
		% of Total	1.0%	.3%	.4%	8.0%	9.7%
Household work		Number	14	3	7	57	81
		% of Customer type	4.0%	7.3%	11.5%	4.0%	
		% of Total	.7%	.2%	.4%	3.0%	4.3%
Blue-collar worker		Number	3		1	28	32
		% of Customer type	.8%		1.6%	2.0%	
		% of Total	.2%		.1%	1.5%	1.7%
Unemployed		Number	2		2	27	31
		% of Customer type	.6%		3.3%	1.9%	
		% of Total	.1%		.1%	1.4%	1.6%
Total		Number	353	41	61	1430	1885
		% of Total	18.7%	2.2%	3.2%	75.9%	100.0%

Table 11 *Profession of the Volksoper audiences according to the PB 2003 survey results*

Leading professionals are few (6.6%) and the main monthly income ranges between €500 and €1,500.