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# Bridging social network analysis and field theory through multidimensional data analysis: The case of the theatrical field



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## ABSTRACT

In this study, the theatre industry is conceived of as a field of cultural production, and analysed in the framework of Bourdieu's field theory and social network analysis (SNA). The theatrical field is formalized as an affiliation network of companies participating in stage co-productions in Italy's Campania region, over four theatre seasons. Differently from Bourdieu, but similarly to other works in the sociology of culture and the arts, the study focuses on relational and attribute-based dimensions of theatre production, presenting a novel way to combine field theory and SNA. By adopting the positional approach of SNA through Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA), Multiple Factor Analysis (MFA) and blockmodeling for affiliation networks, the study reveals oppositions among companies by reason of their differential partnerships in co-productions, and a combination of hierarchy and segmentation characterizing the network structure of the field. These oppositions also appear in the 'objective' social space defined by the attributes of companies and co-productions (positions and position-takings), showing the unequal distribution of symbolic cultural capital among theatre producers and the latter's inclinations towards different theatrical styles and genres.

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## 1. Introduction

Artistic production systems usually provide producers with differential opportunities for engaging profitable collaboration or experiencing isolation. These opportunities often take the form of partnerships in artistic projects that may give rise to a space of relations, i.e. a social space of cultural producers who derive their position in this space from the projects in which they participate. In social network analysis (SNA, hereafter), this implies the logic of the *positional approach* to affiliation networks (Burt, 1976, 1980; Doreian, Batagelj, & Ferligoj, 2005; Scott, 2000; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). However, from a rather different perspective, the same social space can be conceived of as a *field of cultural production*, "a space of objective relations among positions" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 181) where 'positions' do not refer to concrete alliances among producers but to the latter's location in an analytical space based on the distribution of capital forms. Albeit distinct, both these two perspectives allow us to see such social space as a space of opportunities where producers could fight or cooperate to gain relevant resources and artistic recognition.

In this paper, thus, we propose to combine Bourdieu's field theory and SNA for analysing the theatrical field as a social space in both the above-mentioned senses. Our approach is clearly different from Bourdieu's own application of field theory

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(that refuses ‘interactionist’ approaches [e.g. Becker, 1982] and SNA [see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu, 1983, 1989]), but builds upon previous research that advocates the inclusion of manifest relations in field analysis, through SNA (e.g. Bottero & Crossley, 2011; Bottero, 2009; De Nooy, 2003).

Our analyses rely on the potential encounter between the different notions of position in Bourdieu’s field theory and SNA. Although positions in networks must not be confused with Bourdieu’s field positions, these latter have a theoretical meaning in connection to the former.<sup>1</sup> In fact, while network positions represent the structural location of groups of agents in a relational space by virtue of the relational patterns characterizing them, this also means that those agents may have similar interests and dispositions and be proximate in terms of social conditions (Bottero & Crossley, 2011), which relates to Bourdieu’s concept of position.

Besides the ‘objective’ structure defined by the distribution of capital in the theatrical field, we posit that the latter also has its *network structure*, defined by the differential affiliation of producers in joint artistic projects. Positional analysis in SNA can thus be used to distinguish equivalent classes of producers with similar (relational) opportunities. In addition, as both theatre producers and productions have their own categorical attributes, this relational space, by means of multidimensional data analysis, may also reveal agents’ distinctive properties and artistic inclinations. Bourdieu himself often utilizes the theatrical world as an example of artistic field (see Bourdieu, 1983, 1984, 1993), though without paying further attention to it. Thus the paper expands on field theory and positional analysis to shed light on the way theatre producers distinguish themselves by reason of their activity and on how these distinctions matter for understanding the theatre production system as a “*field of struggles*” (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 312).

The network structure of the theatrical field is formalized as a two-mode network in which theatre companies (the first mode) are involved in stage co-productions (the second mode). This permits us to operationalize field positions and position-takings (Bourdieu, 1983) through the network positions of companies and their affiliation in co-productions, these latter being ‘manifestations’ of companies as agents in the field, i.e. recognizable forms of position-taking (cf. Bourdieu, 1983, p. 312). We focus on the co-productions released by companies located in Italy’s Campania region (Serino, 2015), over four theatre seasons. In line with past research, and proposing a novel way to treat of the multidimensionality of this object of study, the positional approach of SNA is pursued by means of Multiple Factor Analysis (MFA) (Escofier & Pagès, 1998) and Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) – the key tool of Bourdieu’s methodology (Bourdieu, 1984, 1988) – both applied to two-mode networks (D’Esposito, De Stefano, & Ragozini, 2014; Faust, 2005; Ragozini, De Stefano, & D’Esposito, 2015).

The paper is organized as follows. Sections 2 and 3 illustrate the background and our theoretical proposal and hypotheses, followed by data and methods in Sections 4 and 5. Then, Section 6 presents the results of each step of our analysis. In a first explorative step, we analyse the relational patterns of companies and co-productions through MFA, providing a preliminary indication of network positions. In a second step, network positions are analysed through *generalized blockmodeling* performed “in a *confirmatory* (deductive) mode” (Doreian et al., 2005, p. 234), following an explorative phase, in which we used this tool inductively. Finally, network positions are displayed in the factorial map along with companies and co-productions’ attributes (field positions and position-takings). Interviews with three ‘key informants’ provide a knowledge complement to the analysis. Finally, Section 7 discusses the theoretical and methodological implications of our approach. Additional material concerning the application of factorial methods and blockmodeling to two-mode networks is provided in Appendix A, along with supplementary results in Appendix B.

## 2. Field structure and network positions

Bourdieu’s field theory is intended to apply a relational view to the social space of cultural producers, described as “a space of objective relations among positions” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 181), which corresponds to “the structure of the distribution of the capital of specific properties which governs success in the field” (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 312). Regarding theatre companies, the forms of capital defined by Bourdieu (1986) can be conceived of as follows. Economic capital refers to material resources such as theatre spaces, scenery, etc., and monetary resources deriving from box-office revenues or public and private funding. Cultural capital is best understood in the form of symbolic cultural capital deriving from the recognized value of a company’s prestige as institution (public acknowledgment, rewards, etc.) or for the ‘cultured’ character of its productions (depending on genres and performing styles). However, also economic capital can take a symbolic form by its recognition (Bourdieu, 1986, 1989; see Section 4). Social capital is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248). In this case, social capital is an asset managed by company members exploiting their social contacts in the art world of theatre (Becker, 1982).

Artistic positions of companies in the field relate to the recognized possession of specific capital in the social space. In addition, the space of ‘position-takings’ is inseparable from that of artistic positions: it deals with “the manifestations of the social agents involved in the field” (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 312), i.e. artistic works like theatre productions. Finally, Bourdieu’s conception of field includes the notion of *habitus*, which constitutes the system of actors’ dispositions towards the “objective

<sup>1</sup> In order to avoid confusion between the terminologies of Bourdieu’s field theory and SNA, we shall speak of ‘field positions’ in the sense of the former, and of ‘network positions’ with respect to the latter.

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