

# AUDIENCES

15 stories  
about audience development



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Published and edited by CKI and RasmussenNordic

ISBN: 978-87-993435-2-2

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*Thank you* to The Augustinus Foundation for generously supporting this publication



AUGUSTINUS FONDEN

STIFTET 25. MARTS 1942



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**“Some choices have to be made - some of them very difficult choices - at the cultural institutions, and it will be a clear advantage if we have an open, factual joint conversation and exchange of experiences in the field. It is our wish with this anthology to contribute to that conversation, to put into perspective and accentuate different approaches to audience development.”**

# What is this anthology for?

In 2009, a national center for audience development was established in Norway. NPU - Norsk Publikumsutvikling was established to develop the knowledge and tools to make working with audience development easier for their members. And through this they have inspired similar centers in both Denmark and Sweden. Our three countries, together with the rest of the Nordics, have a strong tradition in audience development, where *sharing is caring* and which has prompted a number of joint Arts & Audiences conferences. Arts and Audiences was a Nordic cooperation and networking initiative that was established between Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Finland with the primary purpose of sharing knowledge concerning audience development, especially in a cross-cultural perspective, so that the knowledge and experiences of well-functioning practices were shared and used to strengthen continual audience development. In 2010, NPU published the first Nordic anthology on audience development, "*Om Publikumsutvikling*" (ed. Kristin Danielsen)".

The purpose of that anthology was to convey practical and theoretical knowledge about working with audience development, based on the idea that everyone has the right to take part in culture, and that publicly funded cultural institutions have a duty to become

better at being something for more people. In 2018, Swedish RePublik also published an anthology, a kind of sequel to the Norwegian anthology, "*Publik - En antologi om konst, kultur och utveckling*". Both of these anthologies have served as reference works in these two countries and the Swedish one, which was also published in English, quickly became an important source for audience-interested professionals throughout the Nordics. A lot has happened in the world and in the cultural industry since 2018, and now we believe it is time to publish a Danish follow-up to the two previous Nordic publications.

**AUDIENCES – 15 stories about audience development** is our way of taking the temperature of audience development in the Nordics in a time that is characterised by crises, but also by considerable development, new experiences and lots of resources that did not exist in this area just a few years ago. Culture and arts come in a myriad of forms, and audience development concerns all of them. All of us are either audience, users, participants or recipients in one sense or another. When we talk today about audience development, arts and culture, it is very much about the right to be involved and how. Since the previous anthology was published in 2018, there have been significant changes in the outside world. We have had

a worldwide coronavirus pandemic that shut down our societies, we have experienced a significant movement in identity politics, our awareness of the climate crisis is growing, Europe is once again a scene of war, and the once safe economy in Europe has been hit by severe inflation. With this anthology, we try to identify and describe some of the challenges and dilemmas that come with an increased focus on the audience under these changed conditions, and create a greater understanding of the importance of working more with one's audience. What does this mean for the institutions, for the users, for the artists and for cultural policy goals? What does a nuancing of the target groups actually entail? What considerations should be made?

Many of the most successful formats and programs are those that have a clear target group in mind, and which at the same time have high professional and artistic quality. Some choices have to be made - some of them very difficult choices - at the cultural institutions, and it will be a clear advantage if we have an open, factual joint conversation and exchange of experiences in the field. It is our wish with this anthology to contribute to that conversation, to put into perspective and accentuate different approaches to audience development.



Audience development can be difficult to talk about, because it is a term that covers many different values, objectives and methods. At its heart it is about cultural institutions and cultural actors simultaneously building a relationship between their own artistic or cultural content, their institutional identity, and those they want to be something for. From a political angle, it can be said that all people have a right to arts and culture, and that therefore there must be something for everyone. For the individual institution, it is more about making it clear who you serve and why you do it. Therefore, the term is often used in different ways.

Here at the editorial board, which consists of RasmussenNordic and CKI - The Danish Centre for Arts and Interculture, we - despite our common work area - also have varying approaches to our field of work. We entered into this collaboration in order to learn from each other and put together an anthology that reflects that the concept is both diverse and complex, while at the same time driven by a common goal of shaping a more interesting and diverse cultural life.

With this anthology, RasmussenNordic and CKI continue the joint Nordic conversation about the ongoing development, this time with predominantly Danish contributions. The anthology is curated based on a principle of different approaches to the concept and

a clear professional diversity. The anthology thus contains articles from researchers, practitioners, artists and industry players with experience in audience development from different realities. The anthology addresses topics such as digital art communication, politics, music in school, access and inclusion, collection and use of data, leadership, planetary design thinking and representation. The articles each express a sharp critical focus on their own practice, and they set topics for debate for the benefit and inspiration of actors across the cultural industry. All the contributors have strong expertise, and all writers face audience-related choices and dilemmas in their work. An anthology like this could have been put together in an infinite number of article combinations and themes, and it is of course by no means exhaustive, but it presents current topics, while at the same time asking challenging questions about where we should go from here.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the writers for their distinguished contributions, for good sparring along the way and for agreeing to the anthology's premises. We would also like to thank the Augustinus Foundation for their valuable support in the realisation of this anthology.

**Happy reading** — Astrid Aspegren · Søren Mikael Rasmussen · Niels Righolt











“That we should be able to experience high-quality art and culture at the lowest possible price together, across identity and class, so that no one is left out because they cannot afford to pay. Audience development is the word we have invented to make this dream come true.”

*Ingrid Handeland*



## Audience Development – Quo Vadis?

*Ingrid Handeland, Director, Audiences Norway*

What is audience development? As it will become clear through this anthology, the concept has many underlying values and possibilities, but it also has a history and a genealogy. In this article, Ingrid Handeland outlines the background and significance and poses the question: where are we heading?

In the beginning, the term ‘audience development’ was a collective term for new and experimental methods to encourage those citizens who did not use publicly funded arts and cultural offerings to start doing so. The origin of the term can be traced back to Arts Council England in the late 1990s where it emerged within a cultural policy discourse with roots in the 18th century, when the UK’s first national cultural institutions were established. After World War II, a more explicit cultural policy developed, aiming to democratise culture, but by the 1970s, cultural democracy itself was also being introduced as a counterproposal. For while the democratisation of culture aims to make institutions more accessible, cultural democracy aims to redistribute state expenses from institutions to local cultural life. Audience development itself is rooted within democratisation of culture, and therefore is not so much about the public as it is about legitimising state expenses for publicly funded arts and culture, especially cultural institutions.

### Open and inclusive communal spaces

In the dream society of the audience developer, cultural institutions play a central and important role in society. They are the campfires around which we gather to warm ourselves and become part of a large, physical, and inclusive “We.” The audience developer believes in freedom of expression and democracy, and that it is possible to live peacefully together in a community of disagreement. Those of us who grew up in a time without social media look with horror as young people become more and more screen dependent. We are critical of the attention economy and skeptical of the development of artificial intelligence and the dehumanisation of culture. We are not easily seduced by the talk of digital possibilities after the coronavirus pandemic but insist on physical cultural encounters. The main task of cultural institutions is not to be where the audience is, in front of or inside the



screen, but to be an alternative to screen-based, digital culture. Cultural institutions want to gather our increasingly lonely physical bodies around the campfire. That is the dream we carry in our hearts. That cultural institutions should be open to everyone across social backgrounds and political disagreements. That we should be able to experience high-quality art and culture at the lowest possible price together, across identity and class, so that no one is left out because they cannot afford to pay. Audience development is the word we have invented to make this dream come true.

## Cultural responsibility

The cultural middle-class dreams of being inclusive but tends in fact to look down on groups that do not understand or like the arts and culture we produce. ‘Toxic masculinity’ is unwanted in our circles, and with it, a long list of men of all ages, but especially the young. Instead, they follow Andrew Tate on social media. This is where they confirm their worldview, and this is where they get the power to revolt. They stay far away from the cultural middle class’s campfires. As far as I know, there are no cultural institutions that have set out to engage this target audience. Why not?

Cultural institutions are funded by politicians and bureaucrats who believe in the power of cultural institutions to develop civilised citizens, but those leading cultural institutions are usually first and foremost professionals who live and breathe for art, research, administration, and the dissemination of cultural heritage. The firewood, matches, and flames of the campfire. Resistance wells up in many of them when they face demands from political authorities that provide them with grants with one hand and require audience development with the other. Such a trade-off is perceived as a violation of the arms-length principle. A principle introduced by British cultural bureaucracy - wise from harm after World War II - to ensure that cultural institutions have the freedom to challenge the power that reigns at any given time.

To impose audience development on artistic leaders who struggle to secure basic funding for their business is counterproductive. Audience development only works when practiced voluntarily. An artistic leader who sat on the board of Audiences Norway a few years ago expressed it in two words: cultural responsibility. A single institution cannot realize the dream of the great We. An institution can gather a larger We under the same roof over a year or a fixed period. Everyone knows that for new and inexperienced groups to feel welcome around the campfire, the reper-

toire must be expanded and include elements that interest new groups. It does not violate the arms-length principle when done voluntarily and based on artistic or cultural assessment. That’s when cultural responsibility is demonstrated.

## The golden age of British audience development

Arts Council England (ACE), the parent of all cultural councils, was established during post-war reconstruction and founded on the humanistic ideology of ‘culture for all.’ They operated under the self-imposed arms-length principle and distributed state support and lottery funds to an ever-growing number of players. Under the government of Margaret Thatcher and because of the controversial concept of New Public Management, regular surveys were introduced to uncover who used publicly funded cultural offerings and who did not. For those advocating for the democratisation of culture, the results were discouraging. Regardless of how many institutions and actors ultimately received state support, it was the same people gathering around the campfires. Something had to be done.

When Tony Blair and the Labour Party took over power in 1997, the golden age of British audience development began. ACE was tasked with distributing £5 million per year for three years to institutions and actors wishing to work to reach out to groups other than those who normally showed up on their own. Three years later, a groundbreaking report was written by cultural researcher Nobuko Kawashima, stating in broad terms that you cannot convince non-users in other sociodemographic segments than those already participating without working on cultural inclusion. Marketing and removing barriers such as prices are not enough. If you genuinely want to play a role in the lives of people outside the cultural middle class, you must challenge and expand your institution’s repertoire.

When Blair lost the election, and the Conservative Party took over again in 2010, British audience development had been criticised from many sides. The left argued that cultural budgets should be redistributed, with less going to institutions and more to local cultural life. Cultural conservatives claimed that ACE’s policy had led to a ‘dumbing down’ or simplification of cultural institutions, underestimating both the arts and the audience. Smart audience development minds would soon respond with an expanded cultural concept where there are no longer non-users, only different types of cultural users.

In 2012, The Audience Agency (TAA) was commissioned by ACE to develop a national platform for audience development that could serve as a support system for all institutions receiving grants from the Arts Council. Tens of millions of pounds



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*Ingrid Handeland*

were invested in developing a digital Audience Finder that would make it easier for institutions to find a matching audience. Based on a democratised cultural concept and a segmentation model that includes all citizens, TAA served an entire population of potential cultural users on a silver platter, not just the usual suspects.

In addition to TAA, a competing knowledge environment emerged with alternative segmentation models. While TAA was perceived by many as an extension of ACE, the independent consultant group Morris, Hargreaves, and Macintyre (MHM) spoke a language that appealed to cultural leaders' hearts and minds. Mission-driven and audience-focused was the mantra for MHM. It was about holding two thoughts in your head at the same time: on one hand, the artistic and cultural mission, and on the other hand, a clear understanding of what drives cultural participation in different groups, as well as a willingness to adapt form and content to the cultural segments' premises. According to MHM, cultural participation is driven by deeper social, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual needs. It is more about innate characteristics than class differences.

## Audience development the Norwegian way

Audiences Norway was founded in 2009 with the aim of increasing awareness of audiences and support for the members' cultural offerings. What sets Audiences Norway apart is that we are owned and operated by institutions that voluntarily practice cultural responsibility. They pay an annual amount, depending on the number of full-time equivalents in their activities, to participate in joint studies of the potential for audience development on the population and the impact of audience development work in institutions. The results can be explored in the digital control panel, NPU Monitor. The actors share the results with each other, contributing to building a common understanding of motivation and barriers to participation in cultural life.

NPU teaches audience development based on a six-step guide to cultural management with audience development as a goal, where insights from NPU Monitor constitute an important part of the knowledge base, along with in-depth interviews of cultural actors who demonstrably succeed in developing the audience, whether they are working to increase, strengthen, or expand it. The guide is modeled after the Creating an Effective Audience Development Plan developed by TAA. We use MHM's segmentation model because it is easy to apply and understand. We assume that institutions continue to operate as free and independent actors with a level of public funding sufficient so that they do not need to compromise on quality, and yet tight enough that they depend on a certain willingness from the audience to pay for their experience. Our goal is to help make the doorway high, and the gate wide, for those entering Norwegian cultural life's physical campfire.

## Audience development as institutional legitimisation in Norway

In Norway we have a high degree of public funding compared to other countries, but cultural houses and institutions still struggle hard to meet expectations. They remain underfunded in relation to the goals and requirements for artistic quality and development, maintenance, salary, and pension. Increased self-earning is often a virtue of necessity and is not always perceived as compatible with the democratic development of the audience. It is sad because I believe that the ability to demonstrate precisely this will be crucial to the extent public funding levels are maintained in the future. We must once again look to England. The Arts Council's strategy for the period 2010 to 2020 was 'Great Art and Culture for everyone.' In

this strategy, institutions still had a dominant position. In the next ten-year plan, published in 2020, there has been a clear shift in perspective. The strategy is called 'Let's Create' and is more about how ACE will facilitate a thriving local cultural life. Phil Cave, who was the Head of the Audience Development Department at ACE until the department closed in 2017, even said in an interview with Audiences Norway: *'if you want stability you fund institutions, if you want change, you fund elsewhere.'* Despite massive transfers from the state and twenty years of investment in audience development, institutions had not managed to engage others than the cultural middle class. This disappointment has had its consequence in England in the form of reduced public funding and a situation where institutions are forced to do more business development than audience development. Now it's more about increased user payments than increased user diversity. Everyone knows it's easier to convince existing customers to buy more than to get new ones to take part for the first time.

It is my hope that institutions in Norway can prove their legitimacy as arenas for society through NPU Monitor, so the level of public funding and artistic diversity delivered by public funding can endure. I am personally convinced that there is not an insurmountable gap between quality and audience development. It just depends on how skilled and interested you, as a leader and professional, are in uniting what you are passionate about with what these audience groups are passionate about, that you would like to see around the campfire.

### Posthumanist audience development

Audience development is a humanist project. In the posthumanist era we are entering, a whole new seriousness has crept in. It is no longer about overcoming taste barriers and class contradictions but about the mutual physical meeting between people. How should physical institutions survive in a screen-based era, where the metaverse and artificial intelligence loom behind the scenes? Should institutions even make the campfire digital to maintain an audience?

Audience development, with all its management advice and control tools, aims to bring the citizens together in physical spaces, outdoors or indoors, around what we, working on the democratisation of art, consider significant and important art and cultural experiences. If we reach a point where there is no longer a meaning in bringing people together, the question is whether audience development is relevant at all. But what do I know about cultural participation and what the digital people of the future, and their avatars will engage in?

“Audience development only works when practiced voluntarily.”

*Ingrid Handeland*

**“In both Dublin and Coventry in the UK, research into the impact of cultural projects showed that hyperlocal activities created lasting connections not only between residents and their community but also with culture.”**

*Heather Maitland*



## **Nobody Ever Said Audience Development is Easy**

*Heather Maitland, Independent Art Consultant, Ireland and UK*

What is the state of audience development in our society today? In this article, Heather Maitland takes stock of 30 years of experience, pointing out that although audience development is (still) difficult, there are also good experiences and valuable insights from which to draw. A key point is that the most authentic and successful activity is always based on the context in which the audience lives.

Even after 30 years doing it, I'm still surprised at how challenging audience development can be.

Research across the Nordic countries has found that all the efforts of policy makers and cultural institutions have had little impact on the differences in cultural participation between social groups. Common patterns persist. Men, people with lower levels of education, people in rural areas and small towns, and those with parents who have a lower level of education tend to be less culturally active. Groups with a lower socio-economic status tend to take part in a narrower range of cultural activities. And it's not just the Nordic countries. A pan-European study of audience development talks of a 'failure of participation'.

But does it really matter? Denmark has a higher level of engagement in cinema than any other country in the EU with 66% of the population attending in the past 12 months. It has the second highest engagement in cultural sites at 61% and the third highest in live performance at 59%. These are impressive figures but they still mean that a third of the population did not engage. Why not? The same three reasons apply across the Nordic countries. People's backgrounds create differences in their situation, their predisposition to engage and their interests. There are differences in what is available locally, not just in terms of culture but also education opportunities and supports that enable people to develop social capital. Finally, the range of publicly-funded culture doesn't match many people's preferences. This raises the question: what do we mean by cultural participation? As Anja Mølle Lindelof has underlined, what most cultural research in Denmark

measures is not engagement in culture but engagement with professional, state-sponsored art. She questions what audience development is for: *‘It is not so much a political ambition that everyone participates in cultural life in different ways, but that all segments visit the state-sponsored institutions.’*

## Geographical access to arts and culture

I have been working with a classical music festival in rural Ireland over the past year and much of what I see around me echoes the situation in the Nordic countries. It has forced me to think hard about what I do and why I do it. I’m working in a municipality consisting of two large towns with an extensive rural area in between. The local government has invested heavily in cultural infrastructure, with an arts centre in each town that has excellent programmes of support for local artists and youth arts, outreach, participatory activities, and live performance and exhibitions. This makes sense. The cultural infrastructure is focused on the areas where it can reach the most people. But neither arts centre is responsible for the rural area. The regional branch of the national music development network has a relationship with just one school in the area. Again, they work in the large towns where they can reach most people.

It’s not just in Nordic countries that local availability is a crucial factor in cultural engagement. In both Dublin and Coventry in the UK, research into the impact of cultural projects showed that hyperlocal activities created lasting connections not only between residents and their community but also with culture. The authors of the UK study comment: *‘Taking a nuanced approach to both places and population groups shows that geographic access to cultural opportunities matters a great deal.’*

Culture’s role in placemaking is well-evidenced in Ireland and is an important part of what municipalities call “liveability”. Ireland’s capital city, Dublin, is developing a sustainable city in which each urban village has a distinctive culture and everything it needs within 15-minutes by bicycle or public transport – including cultural facilities. But in the area where I’m working the cultural facilities are 30 minutes away from the tiny town and few villages have public transport.

So is it just residents of urban areas that deserve placemaking? I fully admit that I have become emotionally invested. Although I recognise the logic of getting the biggest possible impact for investment in culture, I burn with feelings of injustice on behalf of the rural communities I have met over the past year, especially because I believe that there are other reasons why they are being pretty much ignored.



“As in Denmark, those who do not attend state-sponsored culture are by no means culturally illiterate. But these cultures seem to go unrecognised by cultural professionals.”

*Heather Maitland*



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An officer from a music development organisation said to me, ‘*They are not interested in music. It’s like flogging a dead horse. In our early days we put on a concert there but only ten people came.*’ Maybe she has a point. The classical music festival was started by the local government twenty years ago and located in the small town as a way of increasing the geographic spread of investment a little. The festival attracts audiences from all over Ireland but only 5% of ticket buyers live in the town. As a result, even its board of directors questions why it is there. And that’s the issue: both organisations imposed state-sponsored art on the town without engaging its residents first.

Different parts of the rural area have distinctive cultures, different again from the cultural life in the two large towns. As in Denmark, those who do not attend state-sponsored culture are by no means culturally illiterate. But these cultures seem to go unrecognised by cultural professionals.

The town is interested in music. It is home to Ireland’s best concert band, which wins awards across the world and sells out its concerts in the town which include substantial programmes of classical music. It has 150 members and a well-established development process for young musicians from the age of eight or nine. It gets some support from the municipality to buy instruments but no other funding and no recognition from the professional cultural sector, even though it behaves like and has the impact of a professional cultural organisation.

Similarly, an ‘amateur’ music group from a large village in the area which has a vibrant culture of Irish traditional music and dance, tours unpaid to rural primary schools to try and fill some of the gap left by the absence of the professional cultural sector. Again, it receives no funding and no ‘official’ recognition for its work. The classical music festival had not met either of these organisations. So how could it ever hope to be relevant locally? Maybe it doesn’t matter that the music development organisation does almost no work in the area’s schools. Several researchers have concluded that it is difficult to get young people to think about the arts in a way that is not shaped by the formal school curriculum. They appear to separate culture that is enjoyable from the culture they experience in school. One reason is that children often express responses in a physical way but researchers observe teachers telling them to sit properly. The culture of the school and the culture of the arts organisation collide. As a result, the arts in schools reinforce feelings of alienation.

## Collaboration with schools makes art present

However, schools are one of very few arenas in which children and young people from all backgrounds, circumstances and locations can experience the arts, particularly if cultural investment is made in schools in communities that have been poorly served in the past. How can we create arts experiences in schools that empower children and young people and resolve the clash of cultures?

The team Odsherred Teater in Nykøbing Sjælland, Denmark, also a small town in a rural area, worked closely with schools to research the views of every child aged eight or nine in the municipality. The results became the foundation for future artistic work and they have shared them with politicians and other community development organisations so the young people's voices are heard and valued. The theatre team has redefined audience development as '*a heartfelt desire to be deeply connected to our place and its people*' and apply this principle of open and democratic engagement to everything they do.

Relevance is at the heart of all their artistic work. They often co-create their own productions with local people and have handed over the programming of visiting work to local volunteers, supporting them to present whatever they choose - it is their theatre too. The theatre is a social asset for the community so its café is also important. Long standing company member, Henrik Ipsen says: '*We believe our community should be at the heart of our artistic work. What's on stage should be about them or be of concern to them. The audience should always be in focus.*'

## Hyperlocal activities must be authentic

The importance of hyperlocal activity in levelling up cultural participation raises the question of where that activity should happen. The last thing that the area where I am working needs is an arts centre. The town already has several spaces widely used by community groups and so familiar to much of the population. There are also centres for Irish sport and culture in the town and larger villages. Using these venues for the festival would immediately signal relevance but requires changes in the format of concerts. Will this mean a reduction in artistic excellence?

The classical music sector has been experimenting with different formats and venues for at least two decades. Most adults, just like most children, do not enjoy

sitting still in rigid rows. Many of these experiments have been highly successful in increasing engagement, broadening audiences and encouraging artistic innovation. Johan Idema lists more than 40 of them. But he comments: '*Projects that are promising in themselves somehow remain experiments, or one-offs. In fact, only very few cases are properly measured, evaluated, and, if (potentially) successful, repeated or further developed into regular practice.*' And this is one of three reasons why audience development has little impact identified by the research across the Nordic countries: our efforts are short term and not evaluated properly or followed up.

Like this research, the Coventry study concludes that both social and spatial inequalities are strongly associated with lower levels of cultural participation but it goes further to state that they need to be understood and tackled together. But audience development rarely addresses social inequalities. And this is the second reason for its lack of impact.

Cultural organisations cannot hope to tackle social inequalities alone. There is evidence in the UK that effective interventions can be made by an ecosystem that includes community development, economic development and cultural organisations across all sectors working side by side in a coordinated way. A cross-cutting partnership like this is greater than the sum of its parts, with the success of one initiative supporting the others. The classical music festival I'm working with therefore has a choice: to move somewhere else and deprive the area of its one state-sponsored arts event or to become relevant to its local community by building such a network of partnerships. Residents, however, did not respond positively to past attempts to involve local people. They could see that including the regional youth orchestra as part of a programme or putting a concert on in a local school hall were not authentic reflections of the festival's values but rather, as several of the people I met said, 'cynical marketing to get bums on seats.'

Where traditional power structures remain within a cultural organisation, values do not change and audience development is inauthentic, separated from its core activities. This is the third reason for lack of impact identified in the research. The festival has therefore started by interviewing 29 local community groups and agencies, listening carefully to understand their goals for the area. From that knowledge, it intends to expand its board of directors to include a broad range of

local people who care about community development, developing their skills as cultural leaders so they can use those skills beyond the festival. In this way it will share power with residents and co-create new values that will breathe relevance into its activities. The process will be challenging - but no-one said audience development is easy.

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**“Broad cultural policy tends to disappoint because it has difficulty developing and realizing all its discursive ambitions. Narrow cultural policy tends to divide the waters, as it discursively sets the priorities it is open about, and thus typically has an audience concept that is clearly delineated.”**

*Bjarki Valtýsson*



## **Cultural Policy Perspective on Audience Development**

*Bjarki Valtýsson, Associate Professor at the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies at the University of Copenhagen*

Bjarki Valtýsson gives us a nuanced understanding of how audience development appears in cultural political discourse and practice. Cultural policy strategies reveal something about how we view audiences and what value we place on arts and culture.

### **Cultural policy**

Let us start with cultural policy. It can be defined in different ways and I will not try to explain all its nuances. In a broad sense, cultural policy is about prioritising values, and based on governmentality theories, it is seen as a management tool where our behavior, sense of quality, knowledge and norms are influenced.

A narrower definition, on the other hand, focuses on more apprehensive things, such as how arts and culture are organised, managed, unfolded and used.

These two perspectives cannot but be in productive relationships with each other. If priority is given to certain art forms that are supported by certain cultural institutions with strong financial backing, then this prioritisation will have some effect on the audience's perceptions of quality, art, knowledge, and possibly their behavior. A similar productive tension lies in the concept of culture itself, where the intellectual/humanistic variant converges with the anthropological/everyday culture. In both cases, they are procedural. In both cases, priorities are set when policy is made and, in particular, when policy becomes practice.

Cultural policy can therefore be seen both as discursive and as leading to concrete actions. At a discursive level, cultural policy research has operated with the distinction between democratisation of culture and cultural democracy. Both are interested in spreading culture to as many people as possible, but they use different means to realise their goals. Democratisation of culture is politically more top-down, where a narrower, quality-oriented cultural definition is typically used, where certain (often historical) arts and cultural forms are promoted to the citizens. Democratisation of culture has a clear educational purpose and a belief that if citizens get acquainted with the 'right' works, or the 'right' art forms, culture has

a clear positive influence on us as individuals and thus also on society as a whole. The cultural canon is a good example of a concrete realisation based on the idea of democratisation of culture.

Cultural democracy shares this positive development potential, but not the policies, strategies and actions that lead us there. According to cultural democracy, we choose our own cultural offerings, and they can come to us from different sources and are thus not tied to canon constructions, professional cultural actors or established cultural institutions. It leans on the anthropological/everyday cultural definition of culture, it is *bottom-up*, pluralistic and promotes diversity instead of tightly controlled unitary culture. In relation to the audience, there is an increasing focus on its cultural participation – from a receiver to a co-creator.

I have outlined some of the nuances of cultural policy, because the audience and their development are at the center of the different application of the concept of culture and the policies used for this development process. Both democratisation of culture and cultural democracy have enlightenment, formation, democracy, and personal growth at the center of the cultural movement they are interested in promoting. They just have different means and strategies to get there. However, they cannot be kept completely separate and there are several important actors, bodies and interests that play a major role in all audience development. The culture and media industries and the culture-producing and consuming platforms of the tech giants are obvious examples. On platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok and YouTube, vast amounts of cultural material are produced and consumed, which are part of a complex media ecology with other platforms, companies, institutions and organisations. We often see important players in the field of cultural production such as artists, writers, museums, exhibition venues, libraries, media institutes and publishers using external, commercial platforms in their interaction with audiences. In this interaction, there is also a kind of audience development, or at least potential, to build on existing audience relationships, or form new, digital relationships with an audience that may not frequent museums and theaters or read fiction very often. I will now focus specifically on how cultural policy can be used to develop audiences and at the same time discuss the challenges that policy strategies face in this development process.



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“There is a loss of control in the digital audience development process when it takes place on commercial platforms, as the tech giants use all the harvested data for economic purposes and cultural representation in general.”

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### 3 examples of developing audiences

Copenhagen's Culture and Leisure Policy (2023-2026) focuses specifically on the six themes 'For the community', 'For the overlooked', 'For the talents', 'For the city', 'For the capital', 'For the organisation', and therefore it addresses different audiences. It *'must ensure high-quality cultural and leisure opportunities for all'* (p. 8) while arguing that culture and sport *'have a unique potential as a lever in the social sphere, for integration and for creating joy and well-being for Copenhageners with special needs'* (10). Among its objectives are the development of a plan for arts and culture in deprived neighborhoods, to promote participation and engagement in cultural and leisure activities, and to *'use the diverse activities of cultural life to offer more people a foothold in the labour market'* (11). It will also *'bring the elite to the stage so that the few can inspire the many and create excitement'* (12), further develop a cultural district, develop more sustainable and climate-friendly cultural tourism, and *'cultivate an audience and talent pool in virtually all areas'*(17).

In a cultural policy context, Copenhagen's cultural and leisure policy is far from unique, as it has discursive relations with other similar policy documents, e.g. Odense's and Aarhus' cultural policies. But they are all characterised by a multitude of different discourses that from a policy perspective may seem contradictory. Here we work with discourses that characterise the democratisation of culture, cultural democracy, different cultural concepts, economic and social instrumentalisation, and a diffuse concept of audience. Is it targeted at all Copenhageners? Are Copenhageners the audience to be developed in this case, and how do policy instruments actually do this in practice? When these questions are asked, it quickly becomes apparent that audience development is contextual. When the context is Copenhageners as an audience, cultural policy has to do with a broad audience, and if the goal is to influence or develop as many people as possible, it must discursively capture broadly. This is certainly the case with Copenhagen's cultural policy, which promotes urban development, social work, climate, sustainability, talent, elite, participation and engagement from citizens who want to create and enjoy culture on less artistically ambitious terms.

The problem is that when cultural policy works with a context that discursively embraces such a broad scope, it becomes difficult to shape and steer specific audiences towards a particular development. It wants a lot and risks doing little. As I said earlier, cultural policy is about prioritisation, opt-in and opt-out. When the

policy itself is formulated broadly, one typically finds the actual prioritisation in the action plans and budgets given to realise the policy's ambitions. Broad cultural policy tends to disappoint because it has difficulty developing and realising all its discursive ambitions. Narrow cultural policy tends to divide the waters, as it discursively sets the priorities it is open about, and thus typically has an audience concept that is clearly delineated.

If the context is the National Gallery of Denmark, it has a special responsibility as Denmark's main museum for visual arts, according to the Museum Act. The museum enters into framework agreements with the Ministry of Culture, where performance and operational goals are specified. The museum also has a strategy for 2022-2025 that focuses, among other things, on audience development. In the strategy, SMK will strengthen communities and *'develop its role as a meeting place, for even more and for even more different users'* (1). To achieve the goal of reaching out to more people, the museum will emphasize activities and courses aimed at specific target groups, enter into partnerships *'to strengthen social inclusion through cultural activities'* (4), increase diversity and capture what the strategy refers to as non-users.

In Copenhagen's Cultural Policy and SMK's cultural policy framework and strategy, we see two examples of how policy instruments are used to develop audiences. The third example I mentioned earlier is the notion of digital communication, digital platforms and audience development. Social media platforms are widely used by players in the cultural field. They typically do this to advocate for their site-specific activities, to communicate art and culture in different contexts, and to form and develop relationships with their online audience. The platforms provide cultural operators with data about their quantified audience, which can be used to target communication, come up with new communicative initiatives and interact with their users. However, there is a loss of control in the digital audience development process when it takes place on commercial platforms, as the tech giants use all the harvested data for economic purposes and cultural representation in general. Their interface logics largely determine how content plays out, and algorithmic curation diffusely determines what content is promoted and what gets sorted out in the perpetual stream of digital communication.

### When the audience is controlled

Development always has a direction and a purpose, and cultural policy plays a major role in this. The reason for developing the audience can be knowledge-based,

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e.g. data showing that it is a certain segment of the population that visits museums, knowledge surveys, user/non-user surveys, or a quantification of digital audiences, where likes, emojis, reach, quantity and activities can easily be measured. Of course, it can also be qualitative data based on observations, interviews, etc. Ultimately, however, audience development is a cultural policy management tool, where the direction for how and where the audience should be developed is based on a desire for specific purposes. Should audiences be developed as art connoisseurs? Should the audience develop a vocabulary about the role of arts and culture in society? Should audiences develop as cultural consumers and thus contribute positively to economic growth? Should they be developed on the basis of democratisation of culture and thus steered in a certain direction, such as knowing the 108 works and 8 categories that the Culture Canon outlines? Or should the audience follow cultural democracy and develop bottom-up on their own terms – and what does that really mean?

The premises from which the audience develops are always influenced by externalities such as the public and private cultural offerings that are out there. Algorithms that provide prioritisation and visibility in the perpetual flow of digital content on digital platforms also develop audiences. Here, in fact, I would argue that an entire generation of young people is primarily developed by obscure algorithmic logics. From this point of view, audience development is essentially about attention. To create and maintain awareness, but also to manage and make certain forms of representation more accessible than others. Nor should we forget that just because development is procedural, it is not necessarily positive. The audience can also develop in response to the shadowy sides of our society, such as racism and discrimination. From a cultural policy and research perspective, it is important that the premise for the direction of development is clear and that it is based on solid research that informs policy at its various levels and contexts. In the end, the audience is always controlled at the same time as it is developed. Just because you have research that indicates that it is mainly certain segments that watch opera or go to classical concerts, that fact can be used in different ways when politics becomes practice. It depends on whether you want to develop exactly that target group further and serve those who already come even more, or whether the policy chooses to focus on other target groups that do not frequent these cultural offerings. This is what cultural policy can do, and it is what cultural policy does, and it is how politics is used to influence and steer practices in a certain direction.

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“Libraries can, and are in the process of becoming the platform that creates motivation and local communities around the sustainable development goals, not alone but together with citizens and partners. As the most visited cultural institution, we have the opportunity to connect nature and culture through the concrete, sensory, storytelling, knowledge exchange, and community-building.”

*Sidsel Bech-Petersen*



## **Libraries as Dream Labs: Towards a Sustainable Transformation with Citizens**

*Sidsel Bech-Petersen, Head of Project Development and Citizen Engagement,  
Aarhus Public Libraries*

Design thinking was central to the development of the popular library DOKK1 in Aarhus. This article tells the story of how DOKK1 came to be, but also how the library is rethinking its way of working. Is planetary design part of the answer for how libraries can contribute to creating a sustainable future in collaboration with citizens?

Citizen engagement, co-creation, and user-centered design. There are many ways to describe it, but the idea that we, as a library, must always be in a co-creation process with citizens and the local community has become an integral part of the way many libraries work. And it is the same here in Aarhus, where we use design thinking as an overarching framework for our approach. Here is the story of how we got here, and at the same time, what makes design thinking interesting for cultural institutions to engage with right now.

### **Needing a new way to develop**

When it was decided almost 20 years ago to build a new main library in Aarhus, it was clear that we were facing a process that required something entirely new from us. The vision was to create a library for people, not for books. A place for co-creation, inspiration, informal learning, networking, play and experiences. To achieve this, it was important to involve citizens and partners in an entirely new way, and we set out to experiment with how to approach this vision.

Looking back at that time, we could have approached the process in a more traditional and linear way. We could have conducted surveys and collected data to understand the problems and needs of citizens in order to develop solutions. Most likely, we would have found that by the time we had understood the problem, the world would have changed, rendering the solution no longer relevant. There was a need to do something different, and the situation called for a more design-oriented approach, where one acts to learn new things about the problem. You start by

developing prototypes right from the beginning of the process, and these prototypes are used to learn more about the problem we are trying to solve. And that's exactly what we started practicing when the process towards DOKKI began. The reason we embraced design thinking is that we perceived it to be the best approach for tackling large and complex problems. In a design process, you stay and work within the problem at the same time as starting to take action and find solutions. It is central to design thinking that you approach the process optimistically, believing that we can design a more desirable future. Therefore, the process starts with the question: 'how might we...?' This implies that we not only focus on what is now, but also on everything that can be.

### Transformation in the midst of the library

To push ourselves into action, a Transformation Lab was established in the old main library back in 2004. It was a physical area in the middle of the library, forcing us to step out of meeting rooms and design together with citizens. It was a space for experimentation and transformation: prototypes of the future library's content were to be built. These prototypes were tested, and we received feedback and new insights. This feedback was then used to build new prototypes, which were tested again, and so on. The design thinking approach of learning through action, trying things out and not conducting extensive analyses in advance, was integrated into the physical library space. In this way, the Transformation Lab became a place that continually evolved, constantly teaching us more about how to best meet the needs of citizens. Changes occurred continuously and in the midst of the library, and this is an approach we still practice today. We see libraries as prototypes that constantly need to evolve and adapt to the city, local area, and citizens' needs.

Employees from all parts of the organisation were involved in creating prototypes in the Transformation Lab. And therefore, it gradually became a new way of working for us, which was largely about adopting a new mentality. It was about acknowledging that we cannot guess what citizens need, so we would instead develop the library *with* them, not *for* them. At the same time, the mentality was also about accepting failure, understanding that we need to try things out and learn from them. It's something that needs practice to become good at. Additionally, it was an opportunity for us to learn a variety of methods: How to build a prototype. Methods for conducting interviews with citizens. Understanding how to get feedback. Exploring how to visualise ideas together. Refining how to brain-



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**“A new perspective on design thinking, where we have a broader view of the planet, requires us to develop our mentality to be able to look forward and dream of a new future. We cannot not just design for the near future.”**

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storm. Discovering more on analyzing input from citizens to understand underlying needs. How to find inspiration by interviewing citizens in their homes, and how to find inspiration from other organisations and companies. All these methods are now used in small and large processes today.

### **Design thinking at Aarhus Public Libraries today**

Design thinking has given us a new way of working, and the process towards DOKK1 became the platform that set us in motion. Alongside DOKK1, the other libraries in Aarhus were also developed and incorporated using the same mentality and method. Along the way, we also had the opportunity to establish a common language around the approach when we received support to develop the toolkit: *Design Thinking for Libraries*, which is now translated into 18 different languages and used by many libraries around the world. With that toolkit, we got a solid foundation to work with design thinking across all our libraries. Design thinking is not something you finish with, but it is something that constantly needs to be developed and incorporated. To spread it throughout our organisation, we chose to train 20 design ambassadors from 2017-2019, so we now have employees in all teams who have experience with design thinking and can facilitate processes.

Design thinking is now integrated into almost everything we do: How to develop library services for non-readers and citizens who do not visit the library? How do we create a love for reading in children and adults? How should we work with media literacy? How can we improve wayfinding? How do we communicate our library services better? How do we work with democracy for children? How do we sustain creative learning in our library spaces? We also incorporate it into our user surveys: the last round of questionnaires was replaced by a series of focus group interviews because we often find that this is where we get the opportunity to delve deeper into the answers citizens give us. In a questionnaire, we can ask: what do you use the library for – but in an interview, we can actually ask: *Why* do you use the library? *Why* do you participate in activities? It sometimes takes longer to digest the input we get this way, but it often ends up providing valuable insights that we can act on.

### **From human-centered to planetary design**

We have come a long way in incorporating design thinking into our organisation. But there are also new winds blowing, forcing us to rethink our design approach. When we developed the toolkit Transformation Lab and Design Thinking for



Libraries, the overriding goal was to create a human-centered approach to development. With this approach, as described, we had the opportunity to better understand citizens' needs and develop our libraries accordingly. Since we started our work with design thinking, the world has changed radically. We are heading towards a new paradigm, and it no longer makes sense to set up Human-centered design as the ultimate goal. Instead, we must talk about planet-centered design. In a planetary design approach, humans and nature are considered equal. This also means that we must look at new practices for co-creation. How do we reconnect with nature? One of the biggest barriers in working with planetary design is that we find it very difficult to put ourselves in nature's place. This means that in several projects, we have now started working on nature education and nature connectedness both for ourselves and for citizens. We need to practice conveying and connecting with nature, find new partners we can learn and act with to create free and equal access to nature education. The need to learn about, and in, nature itself is universal and urgent for all citizens of all ages.

### The design approach helps dreams come true

A new perspective on design thinking, where we have a broader view of the planet, requires us to develop our mentality to be able to look forward and dream of a new future. We cannot just design for the near future. If we want to go somewhere else, it is also necessary to turn up the volume on dreams and imagination. We desperately need new ideas to tackle the enormous systemic, societal, and planetary challenges we face. We cannot rely solely on new technology but need new, shared dreams to guide our actions, behavior, policies, and decision-making towards radical change.

How do we activate the dreaming process and our imagination? Both within ourselves but also with citizens and partners? How can libraries become a collective source of inspiration that activates dreams and empowers citizens? It may sound like a big task, but with design thinking, we have an approach that also helps us get started. Professor at the Royal Academy, Ida Engholm, points out that much of what we did during the coronavirus pandemic was actually a design-based approach. There was no time to conduct lengthy analyses; we had to make a plan for how to set up testing centers. Our entire society had to quickly adapt: from office work to remote work, from in-person teaching to online teaching, from dining in restaurants to take-away. It was a significant design exercise, where new solutions were developed quickly, unlike anything we had seen before. Under normal

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circumstances, those changes would have taken a long time, there would probably have been a lengthy analysis process along the way. Yet, during the pandemic, we just started solving problems. Perhaps we can use this experience. Maybe we can prototype our way through the sustainable transformation and set up Dream Labs that can move our society to a better place. With the sustainable transformation, we may be facing the greatest design opportunity ever. If we put on optimistic glasses, we also have the opportunity now to create a better world.

## **Dream Labs and Collaborative Action**

At Aarhus Public Libraries we are just beginning to explore how to approach this. We are running Dream Labs for children, where they are presented with challenges related to biodiversity, nature, circular practices, and inspired to build ideas for a better future. Every year, we hold the Children's Green Festival, where children meet and dream about what they can do to change their habits. We have held dream debates, and we have workshops where we experiment with how to rethink our relationship with energy and the consumption of the Earth's resources. We are tapping into Future Literacy, speculative design, futures design – but also literature: science fiction and the fiction we also have in play. It may help stimulate imagination and creativity in thinking about new possibilities.

Libraries are the most visited cultural institution in Denmark. People of all ages, genders, education levels, and cultural backgrounds visit libraries. In 2021, Danish libraries were included in the government's sustainable development goals strategy and budget. Libraries can, and are in the process of becoming the platform that creates motivation and local communities around the sustainable development goals, not alone but together with citizens and partners. As the most visited cultural institution, we have the opportunity to connect nature and culture through the concrete, sensory, storytelling, knowledge exchange, and community-building. We cannot solve the challenges alone - no one can. We must break down silos and collaborate across sectors, organisations, and countries. Perhaps the role of libraries is precisely to enable that. We are able to connect many partners and create synergy between citizens, experts, associations, enthusiasts, and entrepreneurs. Perhaps it is precisely this collaboration and communities of action that create the right infrastructure for sustainable transformation.

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**“To open the doors to auditoriums and music rooms, it is crucial to hit the nail on the head and fit the realities concerning municipalities and schools. It is not enough to present a high-quality music experience at reasonable prices; keywords also include anchoring, synergy, and bridge-building.”**

*Gitte Abildtrup and Dorthe Damgaard*



## **Opening the Child to Music and Music to the Child**

*Gitte Abildtrup, Director, and Dorthe Damgaard, Knowledge Specialist, Live Music in Schools*

School concerts need to adapt to the reality and framework of the school while pushing children (and adults) enough to broaden their cultural and musical horizons, and achieve enlightenment. It's a balancing act that places significant demands on organisers, artists, schools - and pupils. But when done successfully, everyone has the potential to go home enriched.

When it comes to audience development, there is arguably no target audience as important as children. They are both the present and future cultural users, and with the school as the arena, it is theoretically an 'easy' target group to reach - and to engage with their still-open minds. Through a national effort in primary schools, the language of music can become accessible to everyone regardless of geography, economy, and resources at home and in school. This way, students don't need to come from a home with a piano to find their way to the piano keys or concert halls. However, reaching everyone requires a common understanding and financial prioritisation of the vision - from the teachers' lounge to the parliament hall.

### **Step 1 - Elected support**

The work of audience development at children's level for Live Music in Schools (LMS) does not begin with the pupils but on the organisational and political stage, both nationally and locally. LMS has for three decades worked to promote this area to ensure equal access to professional live music for all primary school students. With a national strategy from the Danish Arts Foundation and additional funds in the national budget, LMS is in a favorable position to reach all primary school pupils with at least one professional concert each school year, although tight municipal budgets can sometimes block the path. This effort is called the Concert Initiative, where multiple stakeholders collaborate on concerts in schools, at venues, and in concert halls. Audience development in this article, however, is based on LMS's core product, the professional concert *at school*.

## Step 2 – Local ownership and synergy

To open the doors to auditoriums and music rooms it is crucial to hit the nail on the head and fit the realities concerning municipalities and schools. It is not enough to present a high-quality music experience at reasonable prices; keywords also include anchoring, synergy, and bridge-building. At LMS we need to understand and navigate both the municipal and school contexts on a professional/ pedagogical and practical level, creating ownership and engagement around the concert experience for all participating parties from the municipality to the individual pupil.

The establishment of a strong structure with a contact person at each of the over 1,000 partner schools, and a contact person in each of our currently 69 partner municipalities, is one of LMS's cornerstones. This provides room for dialogue and influence, building bridges to other relevant actors such as music- and cultural schools and venues.

In practice, this means that schools and municipalities have influence on music groups and genres; annual networking meetings with knowledge and experience exchange are held in all municipalities, and networks are created across schools. All parties are also invited to LMS's annual festival/showcase, where they gather for concerts, professional content, and networking. This strengthens the bond with our key contacts, who are often the enthusiasts that ensure that the program continues at a local level.

However, anchoring and ownership at the school do not solely rest on the contact teacher. The pupil-involving concept, CultureCrew, can play an important role for many schools, where the crew assists with planning and executing concerts and serves as good role models for other pupils.

## Step 3 – Move them without moving them

Another crucial step in audience development is that LMS School Concerts is a democratic initiative for all schools. Regardless of geography and local conditions, all are offered concerts brought to their doorsteps.

Is it a good idea to hold a hair-swinging heavy metal concert or a classical concert



**“Not all pupils will want to be there, and they might be unfamiliar with the concert format, placing significant demands on the setting, communication and presentation.”**

*Gitte Abildtrup and Dorthe Damgaard*

in a semi-cold gymnasium at 8.00AM? The short answer is: Yes! By playing on the children's home turf, the school and musicians can get very close to the pupils, who then relate to the music in a safe environment. It often means something to the children, that the musicians have traveled all the way to their school, to their school hall, to play just for them.

And finally, the concert at the school also has significance in terms of accessibility, as some schools may not have the opportunity to travel to a concert venue nearby.

*'It was truly a lovely and fantastic experience. We, small village schools, don't have many opportunities to participate in events that take place in big cities. We are limited by transportation. So FANTASTIC with this opportunity.'* Hørby-Dybvad School, Dept. Hørby, Frederikshavn municipality after a concert with Phonix.



“Is it a good idea to hold a hair-swinging heavy metal concert or a classical concert in a semi-cold gymnasium at 8.00AM?  
The short answer is: YES!”

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#### Step 4 - The two pillars of concerts

Since LMS began introducing school students to professional live music, experience has shown that almost no genres are too challenging, as long as the structure and communication is tailored to the school's and pupils' reality. In the work with the concert, all new music groups are connected to a production team, which produces educational material and collaborates with the group on communication, form and target audience. The production team plays a key role as a link between the school and the artists.

To ensure quality, development and upskilling of producers, LMS is also part of the international network YAM – Young Audiences Music – and also sustains a national network of Children and Youth (B&U) producers. This way, audience development is promoted not only within LMS but broadly across concert initiatives.

#### The musical pillar

An LMS school concert always starts with the music group's own artistic expression. From there, the concert producer works on experience design; refining and collaborating with the musicians on all elements of the concert format, such as the use of space and various forms of involvement and co-creation.

*‘The producer's expertise with the age group was an important component in structuring the concert, both in terms of performance and audience interaction. We immediately felt that her thoughts and suggestions strengthened the trust we wanted to build with the pupils. Her feedback also has great relevance for me outside the LMS context – something I take with me to ‘normal’ concert stages.’* Musician, Asbjørn. Playing a concert for school pupils is radically different from performing for an adult audience, who have most often chosen to attend willingly. Not all pupils will want to be there, and they might be unfamiliar with the concert format, placing significant demands on the setting, communication, and presentation.

Experiencing live music performed by living people has a special quality. The potential intimacy of this type of performance space is particularly experienced when the musicians are approachable. Therefore, the producer works to ensure that classical musicians perform without music stands. It opens up a different form of communication and provides freedom to engage with the artists.

*‘It is incredible how vibrations and the sound of the instruments affect them. They become completely fascinated! It is a very beautiful moment in the concert when we walk around the room to get as close to the children as possible.’* Musician, Lisa Vogel,

Damkapellet. All music groups must, both in the application process and in the dialogue with the producer, consider their concert and communication based on the IAN model, focusing on the concert's ability, obligation, and willingness: what do they want from the concert? What is it about the genre that is essential to present to the target audience? Is this clear both musically and communicatively?

**Producers therefore work with a range of techniques in concerts and materials to reach the audience:**

- To create a clear framework for the event so the audience feels comfortable and understand what is expected of them.
- To build a personal relationship with the pupils through presence.
- To create meaning for the pupils between the pieces.
- Providing a focus on what inhibits or promotes the music experience – clown noses or eye contact?
- Preparation before (and preferably after) the concert through the use of educational material.
- Familiarity with musicians, instruments, and music.

**The learning pillar**

For LMS, educational material is a high priority. It prepares pupils for the concert experience ahead, both in terms of the music, genre, and meeting with the musicians. When pupils see the musicians' video greetings in the material, a connection is created that enhances their positive expectations for the concert, just as a presentation of the music is essential so that the content of the concert is recognisable to the pupils. Furthermore, the educational material places the concert in a meaningful learning context that precedes the actual concert. All learning activities are based on the Common Goals for the subject, often involving interdisciplinary teaching. *'I can see that it moves something in the pupils when they are presented with something foreign - first in the classroom and later through a live concert.'* Cornelius Hansen-Skolen, Flensburg, after a concert with IKI.

**Step 5 - Opening the student to music and music to the student**

LMS has a clear vision with school concerts: first and foremost, to open the student to music and music to the student. It is an encounter with art on art's own terms but also a musical and cultural education. The intention is that, by encountering

**“As with so much else in our ever-turning world, audience development is not something you can check off and be done with. LMS therefore closely follows the concerts, including teachers and musicians' evaluations after each concert.”**

*Gitte Abildtrup and Dorthe Damgaard*



music, pupils open their minds towards the world while simultaneously expanding their musical and cultural horizons. In this movement, community plays an essential role, being together with someone through a shared musical experience provides an experience where the individual is not at the center.

The Dutch educational theorist Gert Biesta precisely defines the overall purpose of education as *'to awaken the desire in the pupil to want to exist in and with the world in an adult way, without wanting to be the center of the world.'* In many contexts both in and outside of school, pupils learn to look at themselves, their learning, their performance, and to put themselves in play. According to Biesta, we need a counterbalance to that. One could see it as an 'insta moment' versus a 'magic moment.' In the former, the self and its needs are at the center, while the magical moment is the opposite: the focus is away from the self, and one is together with others through a third element. Here, the encounter with music can be that special third element.

LMS's ambition is that when pupils leave school, they have encountered various musical genres and role models, creating enthusiasm, admiration, wonder, and reflection. They have experienced concerts on and off school premises and stand with a more nuanced perspective on the diversity of music, art, and culture. They have become wiser about what music is and what it can contribute in terms of knowledge, insight, and emotions. Perhaps they are inspired to attend concerts or become performers themselves. In any case, the school concert provides them with something to reflect on, express themselves with, and develop from.

## Step 6 - Audience development evolves

As with so much else in our ever-turning world, audience development is not something you can check off and be done with. LMS therefore closely follows the concerts, including teachers and musicians' evaluations after each concert. In recent years, we have also focused on increased pupil involvement. This applies both when schools request music groups, when evaluations are submitted, and in specific production processes where producers involve pupils in the process.

To bring forth the pupil's voices and investigate what the encounter with music brings, both for the individual child, the community, and the school, is a research field we find is lacking attention in Denmark. It is something that LMS will pursue in the coming years to become wiser and create even better concerts for Danish school students.

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1. *The Concert Initiative is an alliance between LMS, the industry organization DEOs members (Danish ensembles, orchestras and opera institutions) as well genre organizations and regional venues.*
2. *Live Music in Schools has started CultureCrew in collaboration with Teatercentrum following the Norwegian model. Read more at kulturcrew.dk*
3. *The wish branch model was developed at Aarhus University in 2002 in connection with performance art evaluation. LMS's subject committee also uses it in the selection of music groups each year.*
4. *These actions align with the conclusions of the Tutti project's report "First-time visitor for a concert" prepared by DEEO and Rasmussen Nordic.*
5. *"The more exposure effect" and hitting the right level of complexity. See e.g. Peter Vuust's Music on the brain.*
6. *The German education pedagogue, Wolfgang Klafki, talks about the student opening themselves to the world through education, and that the world opens up to the student in one and the same movement.*
7. *When Biesta refers to an "adult" way of being in the world, it is in contrast to the infantile, where the ego is at the center.*
8. *Educational researcher from DPU Lars Geer Hammershøj writes that music is "the medium of education par excellence" due to its ability to instantly prepare us for a new one and common atmosphere.*

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“The lack of intimacy in terms of access is experienced when we read the many small signs of othering that are most often associated with encounters with institutions. They arise, for example, because no one or very few in the institution inhabit the experience of otherness, and because the institution as an organisation has naturalised a special understanding of who they exist for, which is so normative that it has infinite difficulty absorbing other perspectives.”

*Moussa Mehagama and Frederik Larsen*



## Meeting the Arts

*Moussa Mchangama and Frederik Larsen, Founders of In.futurum*

We are becoming increasingly aware of conditions that have become naturalised, but which fundamentally differentiate certain people and uphold the idea of a form of society that takes whiteness, binary genders, heteronormativity, and body capability for granted. This article is about how cultural institutions can work consciously and strategically with diversity and inclusion.

### Invisibility of distance

Before Korean-American artist Johanna Hedva (they/them) attends an exhibition or speaks at a cultural institution, they have already undertaken a great effort to get there – an effort that goes beyond the visible work we normally associate with artistic production. Hedva lives and works with chronic illness, and in order to participate in exhibitions and the work of art institutions, special conditions must be put in place. Over the years, they have had to inform the institutions about the obstacles that make it difficult to participate, and so Hedva has developed a document, a *disability access rider* that they send to the institution in advance, and which describes the conditions for their participation in an event or exhibition. In their rider, Hedva raises some of the obstacles that must be removed for them to participate, and the document describes both physically and socially discriminatory conditions that make it difficult for people experiencing functional obstacles and other minoritised people to participate in the activities of cultural institutions. These include the need for a caregiver, time before an event to rest, and access to the institution. Hedva’s rider takes as point of departure their own situation and points to the conditions that most often prevent them as an artist from participating in the ingrained practices of established cultural institutions. It also highlights some of the obstacles the audience is confronted with, which is why it also includes requirements for wheelchair access, sign language interpretation for talks, etc. Hedva’s riders are thus not just about giving themselves viable access to the institution, but also about ensuring that the institution’s eyes are turned to the audience. Thus, Hedva does a great deal of the work for the institution themselves, by specifically forcing them to relate to their qualifying practices and thus see some of the structures or barriers that can often be invisible to the institutions



themselves, but which can be crucial to the ability of minorities to participate in arts and culture.

In recent years, very important work has got underway to expose, register and describe structures in society that create inequality, injustice and insecurity among minorities. In our work with strategic advice and organisational development for arts and cultural institutions, we have registered both a great need for, and a great curiosity about, topics such as diversity, inclusion and access. Many conversations are ongoing, and they are in themselves a crucial step towards understanding how minority groups are prevented from participating in societal communities or participating under terms that overrule significant parts of their existence. Let's take female artists as a grossly underrepresented group in museum collections as an example: Women as artists are a minority group, even though they are the majority gender in society – and their status as minoritised is thus not 'just' a statistical/demographic problem, but one that is the result of societal structures, norms and stories. Likewise, the gaze with which women have historically been represented through art – absent, naked or suffering – is crucial in relation to what narratives we create about women at all, both as artists, but also to a large extent as human beings. In other words, being minoritised (and thus also majorised) is a process that depends on context – for example, we often talk about ethnic minorities without considering that brown and black people are a global majority, and that it is in the encounter with Danish society or institutions that minorisation occurs. The very exposing and description of structures can be liberating for those who experience minorisation on their own body, and in many cases the clarification itself is an important piece in enabling the change. However, change rarely comes without also being followed by difficult conversations, investigations into complex relationships and often also some resistance to the new and unknown.

Exposing and naming obstacles and needs is vitally important. The American writer Mia Mingus, who works for justice for people with disabilities and to reduce othering, writes, among other things, about when she experiences lack of access and other people's lack of understanding of her needs. She identifies the invisible relationship between herself and another person who understands her needs and has called it 'Access Intimacy'. For her, the term describes the sense of security that can arise when another person understands her needs and seamlessly participates in removing barriers to access for her.



“The Enlightenment’s belief in rationality, categorisation and separation has defined exhibition practices, collection practices and research practices ever since, and are also fundamental elements in the development of cultural institutions’ relationship with their audiences.”

*Moussa Mchangama and Frederik Larsen*

“The seeds of change may lie, among other things, in working to soften the separation that both institutions and art itself work with, by fundamentally daring to challenge the basic idea that our view of quality, art and culture is neutral.”

*Moussa Mchangama and Frederik Larsen*

Access intimacy describes a closeness in the relations between people that allows minoritised people to feel both seen and heard and thus feel that they belong. It is an intimate feeling, as the word clearly describes. Mingus uses the term around access, and based on the experience of functional obstacles, but here we borrow the term to describe access intimacy as something that minoritised people often experience the lack of in their encounters with institutions. The experience being that although we are not rejected at the door, the institutions are not made for us. The lack of intimacy in terms of access is experienced when we read the many small signs of othering that are most often associated with encounters with institutions. They arise, for example, because no one or very few in the institution inhabit the experience of otherness, and because the institution as an organisation has naturalised a special understanding of who they exist for, which is so normative that it has infinite difficulty absorbing other perspectives. The small and sometimes large signs that Hedva describes can include the time of an event or whether it is clear whether there is access for people in wheelchairs. It can also be gender-segregated toilets, texts that take the reader's heteronormativity and European cultural knowledge for granted, the absence of brown or black people in artistic representations, and thousands of other small signs that show that the institution has a clear understanding of their audience. That audience usually consists of white, heterosexual, cisgender people who don't experience functional obstacles.

### **To separate and dominate**

In the name of diversity and with the aim of opening up institutions to minorities, institutions often resort to setting up diversity committees and asking visitors what it takes to make them feel welcome. They organise Friday bars, play corners, exhibitions by female artists and workshops to signal that the institution is for everyone – or at least for more, but modern cultural institutions are so deeply rooted in a cultural history that has separated, subjugated and dominated, that new signs of othering are constantly emerging. They do this partly because most people launch diversity initiatives in a positive spirit, but forget to deal with the anger, pain or contempt that may lie in the history and exclusion they themselves have historically maintained.

The history of which public cultural institutions are part of has class, gender and colonial roots. These institutions are one of the cornerstones of the development of European cultural understanding, societal structures and beliefs in science.

They emerged as educational institutions for the modern citizen in Europe's new national democracies in the late 1800s. This history is well described elsewhere, so we will not unfold it here, but simply remind you that the role of institutions was, among other things, to make visible and maintain cultural greatness and educate citizens in national values. Values based on the European Enlightenment and the ideals of modernism, where enlightenment and education are central.

The Enlightenment's belief in rationality, categorisation and separation has defined exhibition practices, collection practices and research practices ever since, and are also fundamental elements in the development of cultural institutions' relationship with their audiences. The public must understand the logic by which the institutions are built, otherwise exhibitions and dissemination are inaccessible. This applies both to the idea that Renaissance art is something other than Baroque art, and that it is natural to separate stone from plants in the study of nature, just to give some examples.

Therein lies one of the educational aspects: separating those who understand from those who do not understand. This separation has been criticised in particular for its class implications and for making institutions inaccessible to people who did not grow up in or were brought up with a European concept of knowledge and culture.

The separation doesn't stop there. Despite postmodernist, feminist, postcolonial and queer critiques a particular concept of art still prevails in art museums that cultivates the individual's – overwhelmingly the white male individual's – ability to think and conceptualise, expressed through works to be viewed from a distance in deep reflection. The audience comprises of passive observers who, through their contemplation, pay tribute to the artistic genius. The attempts in recent years to lure more families with children into art museums only make this concept of art clearer when clashes occur between playful children and audiences who try to enjoy art in reverent silence.

In relation to art and cultural institutions, it is often quite clear who is othered through the art shown and the dissemination of it. These include women, people who are not educated in European cultural history, people of minoritised ethnicity, queer people and people who experience functional obstacles. Nevertheless, many of us go to museums quite often, which is why we constantly allow ourselves to be minoritised. It clarifies the power of the institution and our desire to feel part of the community.

**“If including more people fundamentally contradicts our historical-cultural foundation, which has largely excluded and categorised, what is our future work and relevance? What does it mean for art and culture that more people have access? For our dissemination? For our view on quality and elite? For who feels welcome?”**

*Moussa Mchangama and Frederik Larsen*



What many of us have in common is that our physicality has been made visible and used to oppress us. Women are primarily present in art institutions as naked bodies in representations, queer people and neurodivergent people as sexualised and pathologised objects, indigenous peoples and brown and black people are exoticised, fetishised or dehumanised on the basis of their skin color or ethnicity, and people who experience functional obstacles often do not have physical access to a protected building at all, whose access conditions cannot simply be changed. The physicality stands in contrast to the rationality and thinking that are celebrated and which are the basis of the existence of cultural institutions.

In other words, working with diversity, inclusion and access is not just about showing new artists or slightly adjusting the use of language. Both are important factors in the work, but do not answer the fundamental question: If including more people fundamentally contradicts our historical-cultural foundation, which has largely excluded and categorised, what is our future work and relevance? What does it mean for art and culture that more people have access? For our dissemination? For our view on quality and elite? For who feels welcome?

### Relationships, inward and outward

The seeds of change may lie, among other things, in working to soften the separation that both institutions and art itself work with, by fundamentally daring to challenge the basic idea that our view of quality, arts and culture is neutral. This can be done by creating relationships between fields of knowledge, between people and understandings of worlds; not just relationships between knowledge about stones and knowledge about plants, but relationships to several ways of reading a stone, relationships that can give ourselves experiences that illustrate that our way of understanding and seeing the world is the result of a very specific and historical/political viewpoint.

This may help us begin to understand that neither art nor knowledge belongs to the small elite for and by whom the project of modernism was created. Art is storytelling and relational work between a society's values and people, but also between different forms of society. If institutions are to be truly part of the future process, it specifically requires that they actively co-create in correcting the unfair historical practices they themselves have been a part of and concretely help create new futures that include wider.

One way to do this is to work with your archival practice if you have a collection. Archives are important documentation of history, but not of objective history, of specific history – and most often of the history of the most powerful in society. Therefore, it is a core task to help change the history of our present that future generations can go back to – among other things by collecting significantly different and archiving ideas, perspectives or practices that would previously have been overruled. It can be one of the steps towards creating a future where those of us who have been othered can be allowed to belong. You can do this by working fundamentally with your practices.

The Danish art and performance group Sisters Hope is one of the examples of an art practice that wants to radically rethink relationships. Not surprisingly, they do so by bypassing institutions, or by taking them over completely. At the same time, a very special kind of archive is collected, namely all the diaries in which participants in the manifestations of the institution write. In other words, the thoughts and experiences of the participants, not just those of the performers, are archived. Other institutions, such as Qaumajuq, the Museum of Inuit contemporary art in Winnipeg, Canada, work with the diverse relations to the country the collection inhabits and covers, involving indigenous residents and Inuit communities in the development of the institution. In concrete terms, this means a fundamentally different approach to exhibiting objects, because their exhibition must be in line with respect for the land, practices and people that the indigenous people inhabit. These two examples may suggest how the cultural institutions of the future can work with relationships, but unless the basic premises for the institution's role and its worldview are examined and changed, we will not get far. In a world that calls for structural change and bold conversations, our arts and cultural institutions are at the heart of our role as custodians of a particular past – but also as the enablers of a new future.

“Cherishing the small joys of life, leading an independent life that resonates with them, saving time, and making everyday life easier’. Is there better and more simple guidance than that for a cultural professional considering the best and most inspiring foundation for audience development activities?”

*Marcin Poprawski*



## **Art Companions Leave No One Behind Spotlight on Audience Development, practice and values in Finland**

*Marcin Poprawski, Humak University of Applied Sciences, Helsinki*

This article can be seen as a small catalog of audience practices that cultivate certain Finnish values: social trust, care, a humanistic approach to technology, informal education, the social power of aesthetics and imagination, storytelling, generosity and flexibility, playfulness, and finally empathy and dialogue between the generations. All in all, something that contributes to the good life.

### **Audience Development - Made in Finland**

In the palette of European audience development practices and audience-oriented activities in art and culture, can we distinguish a specifically Finnish hue? Is there a particular kind of approach, poetics or aesthetics of audience engagement work? Is there a set of values more dominant and visible in the choices made by audience development professionals in the country? Usually, it is foreigners who feel the need to express Finnish specificity. We can find an example of such an approach in the opinion of Japanese composer Toshi Ichianagi (1933-2022): *‘It seems to me that in Finland it is always considered what kind of outcome would make the people as happy as possible and what would be the best environment for the development of art. In other words, there is an awareness of the importance of these things in life.’* This, according to Ichianagi, is the essence of something important: *‘In Finland, life and music belong to the same world. This is the thing that most calms my mind in Finland.’*

This feeling of serenity is somehow evident in the findings of a survey conducted by Sitra, a national innovation fund, which asked about the motivating factors for sustainable lifestyles that unite Finnish citizens. The importance of local nature and its preservation is one of the most important elements. Other key motivating factors identified by Finnish respondents were *‘cherishing the small joys of life, leading an independent life that resonates with them, saving time, and making*



*everyday life easier*. Is there better and more simple guidance than that for a cultural professional considering the best and most inspiring foundation for audience development activities?

### Turn on the spotlights!

I am therefore deciding to turn 7 spotlights on initiatives, methods and cultural formats that could illustrate the possible specificity of Finnish choices in audience development practice. In a sense, these selected proposals are symptomatic of problems and approaches to audience habits. They can also illustrate some of the rationale behind these initiatives. There are two radars I use for this: the first is one led by my students, active cultural professionals who work in different areas of the Finnish cultural ecosystem. The second is that of my colleagues - academics, trainers and researchers, who have shared their recommendations and experiences.

**1. Kulttuuriluotsi (Cultural Companions).** There are two similar but independent systems used in two different municipal entities. Kulttuuriluotsi was an innovative voluntary initiative created by the Jyväskylä Art Museum and spread to a network of more than 10 cultural institutions in central Finland. The second program was created with a trio of metropolitan cities: Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa. The description of the service offered by the City of Helsinki says that *‘the culture companion operation is intended for everyone who finds it difficult to attend a cultural event, or who would prefer to attend an event accompanied by another person. A voluntary culture companion will accompany the person who wish that to a cultural event, reserve tickets and assist or guide to the venue, if necessary’*. In Helsinki alone, about 30 institutions are involved in the program. The person requesting this free service calls a special number and selects an event offered by a cultural institution. Cultural companions are volunteers trained by the city. The city of Jyväskylä advertises the project as a volunteer service with the goal of *‘providing low-threshold access to a variety of cultural activities’*.

**2. Museum Card.** This is a nationwide system offered by the Finnish Museums Association. It was developed in 2015 and allows free access to 370 museums in Finland for one annual fee. In the summer of 2022, people used it a record 760.000 times. The Museum Card is a very popular brand among Finns. A 2017 survey showed that more than 80% of respondents were already aware of the museum card system. In the first 5 years of operation alone, it increased admission



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revenues by 71%. The growing revenue from card sales is returned to museums, and a fraction of the revenue is used to cover the museums' joint marketing costs and developing the museum card system. A study of over 13.000 respondents showed that people who have a Museum Card visit museums 5 times more often than those who do not have one.

**3. Opera Beyond** is an initiative of the Finnish National Opera and Ballet. They offer opera productions with a highly immersive component that changes the role of the audience. The institution has a special, small department dedicated to the Audience Outreach. It is an institution that provides one of the richest spectrums of audience development activities. In 2022, the artists guided by the audience developers visited nearly 50 municipalities and reached about 50,000 people through different projects and partnerships.

The tools for reaching the audience are clothed in the garments of various activities. This includes, on the one hand *Stage24*, a digital service with fully accessible streaming and recordings of opera productions. On the other hand it also includes more physical activities that require different involvement by people working with the audience in other dimensions of time and space:

- (a) an opera staged in school that is co-produced by fifth and sixth grade students with professional musicians
  - (b) arts and crafts workshops that are thematically related to the main performance from the current repertory held in the theater's Foyer Balcony with children aged five to six, accompanied by adults
  - (c) a theatre ensemble group of 12-16 years old teenagers given free rein to create and produce a musical theater show of their own choosing, in collaboration with opera professionals
  - (d) free high-energy workshops for boys with dancers from the Finnish National Ballet held in public schools in Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa and Kauniainen, allowing 7-years old children to try out acrobatics, pirouettes and balancing, as well as strength exercises, aimed at introducing ballet to boys as both a sport and an art form.
- Helsinki Opera and Ballet is also active in the field of continuing education. *A day for teachers gives an insight into the activities of the opera or ballet, and evening workshops linked to performances are designed for different school subjects. The aim is to enable them to discover new methods for inclusive and multidisciplinary teaching.* Another proposal is focused on the elderly, who are invited to a free, joyful and informal Opera Theatre Dance party every month in the Main Foyer of the Opera House.

**4. The Visual Thinking Strategies in Finland.** This method was developed for teaching visual arts in museums and schools but is widely applicable beyond the boundaries of these institutions. It is based on the work of American psychologist Abigail Housen and museum educator Philip Yenawine and rooted in the theories of developmental psychology by Piaget and Vygotsky. The method is based on group participation whereby works of art or images are used as a tool to teach skills around thinking, interaction, cultural competence, language and picture reading.

The key words of this method are learner orientation, use of open-ended questions and verbalization of visual perception. The method is based on *seeing* from the individual's side, *seeing* together and *learning* together, and requires no prior knowledge. The method is based on a few basic questions that guide the group's work. An open-ended question inspires not only the listing of what has been seen, but also the search for meaning. The questions create a sense of collective viewing and activate participants to find more and more meanings in the image. There are seminars and trainings for artists and audience caretakers who would like to use this method and training for art educators, teachers of various disciplines and students who want to become teachers and professionals in this method.

**5. Open Museum - Place of Safety for Refugees.** Started at the Helina Rautavaara Ethnographic Museum, with funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture, the project invited 14 other Finnish museums to join the initiative to answer the question: how can cultural organisations, including museums, help asylum seekers? Just before the project started in 2015, more than 30,000 people were seeking asylum in Finland. *The Museum as Safe Haven* project started in 2016 and continued in the following years. The first project phase aimed to activate and support the wellbeing and integration of young asylum seekers, children under 25 and their families through activities in museums. In the second phase, activities were extended to all young migrants, not just asylum seekers. Over the course of the project, a total of 10,000 people visited the museum and took part in various workshops and events. A characteristic feature of this project was the wide margin of flexibility. *Especially when working with asylum seekers and migrants, sticking strictly to a plan and top-down assumptions will not always produce the desired result. This meant that many activities changed their form, events became workshops, new activities were added to projects along the way, such as demonstrations and events, and even employment and internships.* Plans that didn't work were modified and the project's

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funder, the ministry, was open to change. As a result, the project succeeded beyond expectations in terms of both reach and quality.

**6. Leikki - Museum of Play** calls itself a step into the land of childhood. It is located in the courtyard of the WeeGee Exhibition Centre in Tapiola, Espoo. Leikki is dedicated to childhood, toys and play and offers interesting, nostalgic and touching cultural experiences for all ages. Laboratory of Play, the surprising main exhibition, represents the museum's change of perspective from toy exhibitor to play explorer. The concept of play is well grounded philosophically in theories of participation and co-creation. The idea of this museum is so much in line with the universality of play promoted by the father of hermeneutics, Hans Georg Gadamer. In his great work *Truth and Method*, he wrote about art as a playground for the free activity of interpreters. It is play that makes us real participants and gives us the chance to integrate with the community.

**7. Mynä-Mynä-maa** is an 18-month activity located in Mynämäki, a city of 7.600 people. The idea relates directly to a sister area of audience development - namely community art. Here we have the case of a care home for the elderly ready for demolition but given to 250 mainly non-professionals involved in artistic processes and emotionally connected, usually familiarly, to the place of action. They created 72 artworks in 43 rooms, corridors and halls. The project moved audiences from passive to artistically active positions. Audiences from 1 to 80+ years of age became co-owners and co-creators of this art space, which was visited by 10.000 people during its duration, who experienced free of charge the places transformed into a very stylistically diverse art space. The artworks were created from recycled materials found in the spaces, sourced from the community and later re-donated to charities and then recycled back into the community. The creative process, for which the community took responsibility, prompted a discussion about the history of the home for the elderly with people who worked there or visited their family members. This case also set the stage for a discussion with the audience about art, its status, benefits and value.

This is my choice of audience development best practice, but other choices are possible, such as for instance, Finnish music festivals that are vehicles for democratic values and responsive formats, as well as increasingly environmentally and socially sustainable venues. Another obvious example of the extensive and again,

most accessible audience focus work, is the activity of public libraries; spectacular and ultra-functional ones like Oodi, experimental (free electric car lending) ones like the Turku Public Library and other central facilities visible in any neighborhood of any city in Finland.

## The epilogue

One of Finland's most respected composers of the younger generation, Lauri Supponen, expressed his handling of creative processes and audiences in a very interesting way when he emphasised the role of the composer as a 'deep listener.' *'Instead of thinking about the social significance of a composer, we should think about the social significance of imagination and listening (...). Listening is underestimated in our society. There is no Marvel superhero whose superpower is listening. It's seen as passive, even though it's not. The sentence 'can war be stopped by listening?' is perhaps the most naïve sentence possible, but there is some truth in it. I believe that a renaissance of soft values and listening is coming.'* According to the composer, listening means not only being attentive to others and seeking to understand, but also avoiding noise and maintaining focus. Supponen promotes the idea of a composition that can help the listener in listening itself. Such music is very often created with the active participation of the audience, but listening also has another dimension - the storytelling - the importance of who tells the story and how.

In Finland, there is a relatively strong trend in cultural practices that rely on the power of storytelling. Pekka Vartiainen and Juha Iso-Aho, my colleagues at Humak University, have implemented a project that demonstrates the power and multiple practical applications of narrative and storytelling rooted in local communities. According to the authors of the Rural Explorer project located in southeastern Finland, stories offer a new dimension to how people experience places and provide a new layer of human experience. It's an approach to the audience in a less formalised and more effective way.

In my mind, it's like following the brilliant narrative of Icelandic non-fiction writer Andri Snaer Magnason, in his book *On Time and Water*. He perfectly illustrated the potential of creative professionals as narrators to influence audience attitudes and behavior. Especially when they transfer intergenerational values from the long dead to the yet unborn with the power of their imagination.

Creative professionals with a talent for storytelling can make my great-grand-

daughter talk to my great-grandmother. The role of creators is to make the audience see and try to understand the future through the past, and science through mythology. The aesthetic and ethical value of beauty, emotion and sensory perception come to the fore when dealing with the most complex issues. The quality and credibility of storytelling is the threshold to deep audience-centered work.

## Notes

I would like to thank my colleagues from Humak University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki, who enriched the range of examples and reminded me of issues related to audience development practice in Finland: Liisa Hämäläinen, Minna Hautio, Jonna Aakkula, Paula Kostia, Pekka Vartiainen, Tuula Salo, Oona Tikkaaja, Markus Suomi and Taru Kemiläinen and also Marjo Mäenpää from the research center Cupore.

The specificity of the Finnish festival scene is the priority of the accessibility feature. Kai Amberla, head of the Association of Finnish Festivals, pointed out that “the geographical distribution of festivals in Finland is very wide, which makes the festival sector the most democratic way of providing access to art in the country. Several Finnish festivals have been analyzed by my Humak colleague Benny Majabacka, who noted that the vast majority of music festivals in Finland communicate that they are increasingly environmentally and socially responsible. The long list of all the efforts of the festival organizers stems from the needs of the younger generations, their beliefs and ethical values. All of this has an absolutely positive impact on the reputation of festivals, which must act in accordance with their stated values in order to remain a relevant carrier of culture for a younger generation of audiences. From the perspective of the festival as a social phenomenon, it is also important that it is rooted in the local community; Kai Amberla. 2013. *Festivals in Finland*. In: E. Negrier, L. Bonet, M. Guerin (ed.). *Music Festivals: A Changing World*, Paris: Editions Michel de Maule: 193–198; Benny Majabacka. 2021. *Creating sustainable event. Case study (unpublished course material)*. In: M. Poprawski, COSM 2 *Cultural Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Management course materials*, Helsinki: Humak University of Applied Sciences; Waldemar Kuligowski, Marcin Poprawski. 2023. *Festivals and values. Music, community engagement and organizational symbolism*, ‘Cham’: Springer.

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“If we want to go from a quick musical Tinder date to something deeper, we must be attractive in the moment, interesting enough to return to repeatedly, and have enough integrity and depth to build a relationship upon.”

*Åsa Bernlo*



## The Audience is Never Digital

*Åsa Bernlo, Marketing & Sales Manager/Vice CEO, Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra*

A combination of a global pandemic and increased digital formats has taught the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra an important lesson about what it means to work with its audience. In this article, Åsa Bernlo shares the experience of closing a physical venue and opening a digital one, and then letting the two formats play together.

On Wednesday March 11 2020 we opened the doors to a sold-out piano concert. While the evening's soloist, Leif Ove Andsnes, warmed up backstage, the rest of us followed the news updates. The main hall of the Gothenburg Concert Hall seats 1,247 people, and the restaurant and foyer bars are usually bustling with expectant individuals enjoying a glass of wine or chatting with friends. However, on this early spring evening, it was quieter than usual. Hushed, waiting not only for Dvorák's *Poetic Tone Pictures* but also tense before a crucial announcement. The tension was palpable, and many had apparently chosen to stay home despite having booked tickets long ago. When our CEO Sten Cranner finally introduced the evening's concert from the stage, the hall was only half-full, and that's when we knew that the world as we knew it would never be the same again. The notes that echoed from the stage would be the last people would hear in our venue for a while. We just couldn't imagine for how long.

### We closed a physical concert hall

On the evening of March 11, 2020, we closed a physical concert hall and moved all operations to our digital platform - GSOPlay. I write this exactly three years later, and the pandemic feels distant in many ways. At the same time, it has left a noticeable mark on our business, offering insights that became especially sharp because everything suddenly came to a head. In the face of what is life and death, one thing became crystal clear above all: the audience is never, ever digital. When the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra launched the digital concert hall, GSOPlay, in 2012, it was with the purpose of countering declining record sales, maintaining a relationship with the international audience that had primarily followed the orchestra through recordings, and to maintain a deep relation to the audience

in Västra Götaland and the rest of Sweden as a publicly funded activity and the Swedish national orchestra. Using filmed concerts, the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra simply had the opportunity to reach more people than could be accommodated in the Gothenburg Concert Hall.

## No role models

At that time, Facebook was long-established, YouTube was already significant, and the iPhone had found its way into almost everyone's pockets. However, there was no abundance of high-quality streamed cultural offerings. Netflix launched its first Nordic version in October the same year, Spotify had only about 3 million paying users - compared to approximately 345 million today in 2023 - and besides the Berlin Philharmonic's Digital Concert Hall, there were extremely few cultural institutions offering self-produced digital content for broad distribution. In short, there were almost no role models to lean on. The people behind the investment in GSOPlay, including Måns Pär Fogelberg, who at the time held the title of audience developer and is still one of the driving forces, paved the way. They simultaneously built the technical infrastructure and gained trust from the orchestra and other participants. They connected people using cables, cameras, and - above all - music, and they reached an audience. People all over the world encountered the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra via GSOPlay and responded to what they received. Through the noise of ones and zeros, new relationships were forged. In October 2013, technology and music collided in a very tangible way when Christian Zacharias interrupted Haydn's piano concerto after a mobile phone rang not just once but twice in the audience. The clip, 'Hayden killed by a mobile phone,' spread like wildfire and gave GSOPlay a real push into the world and directly into the consciousness of a large audience. A disturbance for people on-site became, at the same time, entertainment, and an awakening for distant viewers. The short clip, which today has been seen by nearly 5 million people, speaks to the tension between the physical experience in the moment, the concentration it requires, and all the possibilities, but also challenges, that technology presents.

## Between relation and expectation

All artistic expressions - including digital ones - are based on a relation and an expectation. If we don't understand the difference between the various formats and the needs they fulfill, there is a great risk that we will betray the audience's trust and damage the relationship. It goes without saying that a visit to a concert



“We can do everything to lower thresholds and be as inviting as possible, but above all, we must build a relationship with the people who make up our audience, no matter where they start their journey with us, regardless of their prior knowledge, and with respect for their needs.”

*Åsa Bernlo*

“The audience is never, ever digital. It consists of real people with expectations needing to be fulfilled and emotions waiting to be triggered. If we forget that, we will slip up. Only technology can be digital - the audience never is.”

*Åsa Bernlo*

hall is different from the experience of listening through headphones via the phone or attending a concert at home on the sofa or by the stove. We understand that the intimate atmosphere in the concert hall should not be disrupted by a shrill phone signal. It disturbs and ruins. When encountering an audience connected through digital channels, we must consider a different kind of care. On the bus it doesn't matter if it's crowded; we as distributors have no control over that, and perhaps it is to escape everyday life that people connect to GSOPlay. In that situation, concentration and quality needs to be of a different kind. The sound should not stutter, the image should not freeze, and the clip should not be too long or perceived as boring. In a home environment, the audience may want to use their television or perhaps their more advanced speaker system, and our technology should facilitate that in the simplest way possible. We must be ready to assist with things that are a bit beyond what we normally work with, as it also contributes to our relationship. A link that doesn't work or a complicated setup can ruin the image of us and affect the experience, causing the person on the other end to choose something else, potentially with feelings of frustration and increased distance.

### **The digital campfire**

In the digital concert hall, the best possible format is required for the best possible artistic results, and portraying music through sound and image is an art form in itself. During the pandemic, GSOPlay was our only opportunity to stay in touch with our audience, and we tried to make the most of it. As the opportunities for the orchestra to sit close together on stage dwindled, creativity soared, and new formats emerged. With GSOPlay Sessions, we had a chance to experiment and let the smaller context take the stage. The camera was allowed to get up close and personal with one or a few artists, and the music could also be complemented with more creative lighting. The GSOPlay team also produced a National Day special as a substitute for the big outdoor concert that Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra usually offers Gothenburg audiences every year in the large Slottsskogen park. Instead of 25,000 visitors on site, the National Day concert had the potential to reach viewers across Sweden. Many municipalities, especially in the Västra Götaland region, chose to base their own digital National Day celebrations on the GSOPlay production. With it as the 'campfire,' people could gather without seeing each other, and reactions poured in. Images of picnic baskets, champagne glasses, and greetings were shared via chat, email, and social media.

In the concert hall, you can sometimes literally feel the atmosphere. When many people experience something at the same time and in the same space, a very tangible energy arises. It can be both nervous and truly magical. This collective energy cannot be replicated digitally, but that doesn't mean the desire to share a cultural experience disappears just because the audience is in different locations. Through GSOPlay, people showed up with a need to share their experiences of the music, and to meet them in that, the GSOPlay Live format was developed. A 'pre-show' that, like the prelude to sports broadcasts, invited the audience to warm up before live concerts by meeting interviewed guests and chatting with each other via a moderated live chat. GSOPlay Live is now an established and highly appreciated format that we connect to all our live concerts.

## We need to know who they are

As mentioned, the main hall of the Gothenburg Concert Hall can seat 1,247 people. We know their journey and follow them all the way from marketing to ticket booking, through the wardrobe, bars, and restaurant, to the seat they have chosen. When they rise to go home, there are staff handing them their coats and wishing them a good evening. Everything needs to flow smoothly so that the music can take center stage, and the longing to return is amplified. A visit to GSOPlay does not follow the same logic, but it requires just as much care from us about each individual's experience. We need to know who they are, what their needs are, and how we can meet them where they are. Above all, we must be sure of who we are and what we have to offer.

The relationships we build with the audience in the physical concert hall are often long, deep, and loyal. Alongside subscribers, we aim for golden wedding anniversaries, and along the way, we get to know each other better and better. We go through ups and downs together, and it makes us stronger. When we don't see each other, we long for each other. The audience attracted to GSOPlay also encounters the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, albeit amongst the noise of everything else happening at the same time and with the ability to choose and reject what we offer with just a flick of a finger. If we want to go from a quick musical Tinder date to something deeper, we must be attractive in the moment, interesting enough to return to repeatedly, and have enough integrity and depth to build a relationship upon.

## Room for experiments

GSOPlay's offerings therefore range from shorter clips and individual pieces, through live broadcasts of entire concerts, to in-depth interviews and other exclusive material. We aim to capture interest, maintain attention, and get to know each other better, assuming that the audience is diverse with different prior knowledge and special interests. There is room, therefore, for everything from classical pieces to the more genre bound GSOPlay Sessions and experiments such as our yoga concerts, alongside in-depth interview material for the particularly interested. The experience of GSOPlay is based on the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra's offerings, basic mission, and values, but the program in the digital concert hall is completely adapted to the digital format. It allows space for content with so much edge that it will only attract a small number of people – and material that lowers thresholds and opens the doors to classical music for all the curious. GSOPlay is for all those people who, for various reasons, cannot attend the Gothenburg Concert Hall to experience a concert, but the offerings via GSOPlay have their own expression, with their own qualities. It is also one of the basic prerequisites for cross-pollinating the two. We can harness the physical energy that a live performance creates and guide it in the best way. We can offer the best of the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra and showcase the Gothenburg Concert Hall from its finest angles. We can do everything to lower thresholds and be as inviting as possible, but above all, we must build a relationship with the people who make up our audience, no matter where they start their journey with us, regardless of their prior knowledge, and with respect for their needs.

## Standing on two legs in the encounter with audiences

So: the audience is never, ever digital. It consists of real people with expectations needing to be fulfilled and emotions wanting to be triggered. If we forget that, we will slip up. Only technology can be digital – the audience never is. The recipients of what we produce are unique individuals with very tangible bodies, feelings, and reactions. Rarely has it become so clear to us as when we were cut off from each other during the coronavirus pandemic. A small hiccup in history in many ways, but filled with learnings for us, especially when it comes to the relationship with the audience and the value of standing firmly on two legs in meeting them: one physical and one built of ones and zeros.

## The Museum and the Audience in the Age of Multicultural Democracy

*Mikkel Bogh, Professor of Art History, University of Copenhagen, former Director of Statens Museum for Kunst (National Gallery of Denmark)*

Mikkel Bogh has been the Director of Statens Museum for Kunst in a time when audience development and the ideal of cultural democracy have increasingly taken up more and more space. This has led to a lot of reflection, experimentation and, not least, dilemmas. In this article, the former Director shares his thoughts.

In recent years many museums, both large and small, have undergone a veritable reorientation: they increasingly understand themselves as institutions that exist for an audience. The audience, guests or users have not always had such a central place in the cultural institution's self-understanding as it does now, and this despite the museum's original ambition to democratise access to collections that have previously belonged to, and been reserved for, a privileged social elite. For many decades after its opening as a public space, museums as an institution functioned more than anything else as a collection-centric framework for archiving and for research carried out by historians and other specialists in various subject areas. Those whose knowledge was the unassailable authority in museum work and whose efforts to preserve the collection for posterity and to produce knowledge of its objects was the museum's *raison d'être*. The audience? They were, roughly speaking, guests in the experts' house, far from unwelcome and yet a group seen as nothing more or less than, precisely, guests on a relatively short visit. Those to whom the experts occasionally communicated their research with the goal of educating and informing the interested part of the population and thus equipping them to deal with history objectively. This new orientation of the museums does not imply a complete upheaval of this public service tradition. Research and collection-expertise have not been thrown overboard. But new skills have emerged that were not previously in demand: educators and teachers with different professional backgrounds, visual artists, scenographers, experience- and event developers, communicators, diversity consultants, data analysts, exhibition hosts, café- and shop managers and others whose task it is to orient the museum's rooms, furnishings, exhibitions, digital presence and activity program towards the

**“Putting the user at the center opens up multiple perspectives for a museum. One of them could be that the museum learns from and allows itself to be developed by its audience. This possibility should be part of the ambiguous sounding board of the concept of audience development.”**

*Mikkel Bogh*





users. The reorientation overall manifests itself in the form of a large number of strategically conditioned changes in the museums' practices and priorities. It is based on an idea of the museum as bearer of a social responsibility and the museum as a forum and a meeting place, where the audience and the conversation are at the center of the organisational attention with the collections and research as decisive elements in the ongoing production of content.

I myself have had the opportunity to observe the changes in the museum institution referred to above in my role as director of SMK - Statens Museum for Kunst in the period 2014-23. Here, one of the things I became aware of was that the part of SMK's vision that talked about attracting 'more - and more diverse' visitors, expressed a necessary, but also contradictory endeavour, which was reflected in a number of managerial dilemmas in the work with organisational development, programming and financial prioritisation. Because even if 'more' is about legitimacy, it is also about economics - more paying guests - which implies both professional cultural marketing and commercial thinking. 'More diverse', on the other hand, has something to do with the museum's social and democratic potential: How does the museum make itself relevant to groups that have not previously used the museum and have not previously had a voice and received attention from the museum? And who actually needs to develop in order to fulfill these strategic objectives? Is it the museum that has to turn in the direction of a new audience, or is it the audience that has to get used to becoming cultural consumers in a way that it hasn't been before?

### 3 examples and some dilemmas

In the following short presentation and discussion of three efforts within audience development at SMK, I am basing it on the assumption that audience development (in this case) is linked to the museums' work to adjust the organisation and program to the audience, which includes becoming more aware of what audience the museum has, and those groups it possibly wants more of. At the same time, I am keeping in mind that the need for greater knowledge of and more data about the audience is in many cases driven by several motives, one of which may be to form an audience for more active engagement, to become users of an institutional framework, a collection and of culture in general. Putting the user at the center opens up multiple perspectives for a museum. One of them could be that the museum learns from and allows itself to be developed by its audience. This possibility should be part of the ambiguous sounding board in the concept of audience development.



“Because even if ‘more’ is about legitimacy, it is also about economics - more paying guests - which implies both professional cultural marketing and commercial thinking. ‘More diverse’, on the other hand, has something to do with the museum’s social and democratic potential.”

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## SMK Fridays - A big attraction

At SMK, three efforts have contributed in particular to moving the institution's audience development in new directions. Most well-known and popular among these is undoubtedly SMK Fridays. SMK Fridays were introduced in 2013 as part of a new strategy centered around young users. The aim from the start was to make the museum an attractive meeting place for young people in the age group 14-29, a group which at that time did not make up a satisfactory proportion of the visitors and that the museum, with inspiration from museums in large cities such as New York and London, assessed had the potential to become more frequent users. Thanks to support from foundations, it became possible to keep the house open seven Fridays a year from 4 to 10 p.m. and, over the course of six hours, offer a rich program of talks, mini-tours, music and artistic performances and other events featuring professional and creative content. This was combined with an invitation for social interaction and the possibility of consuming food and drinks in the museum's atrium, Skulpturgaden. Some SMK Fridays have also been held outside the main museum complex, for example at Folkemødet in Allinge<sup>1</sup>, at SMK Thy and at The Royal Cast collection in Vestindisk Pakhus. The event format, with its mix of academic and social content, was a success from the very beginning. The number of visitors has settled at a steady level, well above the original expectations. On the busiest evenings around 7,000 guests came, on quieter evenings around 2,800. More than 60 SMK Fridays were held between 2013 to 2023 with an average of 3,300 visitors to each. The profile of the users has not been constant, although young people still make up a large group. Over the years, several older user groups have embraced the concept, but the visitor statistics also reveal a demographic downside. Around 60% of the visitors are women and 80% of the visitors have a medium or higher education. Around 80% of the visitors are in the age group 14-49, of which around half are between 14 and 29 years old. These figures partly reflect an effort that has managed to fulfill the original objectives, but has also, in recent years, given rise to reflections on how future SMK Fridays can be developed, so that the visits to a greater extent reflect the demographic spread in the Danish or at least the Copenhagen population. The challenge seems particularly pressing for a national gallery like SMK, which has an obligation to be nationally comprehensive. There are no easy answers to how this can be done. The managerial challenge, which can also be described as a dilemma, consists of, on

<sup>1</sup>Ed.: Folkemødet is a political, culturally popular event that takes place in Allinge on Bornholm for four days in mid-June every year. The purpose is to bring together all interest groups and individuals with an interest in democracy across political parties, professions and opinions. The event gathers up to 60,000 participants each year.

the one hand, maintaining the already existing audience base and, on the other, creating content that to a greater degree speaks to people with a different ethnic and socio-economic background than that which is the dominant among museum visitors, i.e. to people other than a highly educated, predominantly white, middle-class audience. SMK Fridays has a big task here, because the statistics show that despite a considerable variety and lightness in the offer, including transforming the museum space into a social meeting place, the audience remains largely the same. The question is how far one can and will go in adapting the program and organisation to make SMK Fridays relevant and attractive to groups other than those the museum already knows. A new partnership between SMK and the Bikubenfonden has been initiated with an ambition to exploring this.

## Youth Laboratory for Art - Contact with a young target group

Drawing young users closer to the museum's central functions, as SMK has done with *Unge's Laboratorier for Kunst* (ULK, Young's Laboratories in Art), and thus giving young people an opportunity to test their creative abilities with institutions that traditionally employ highly specialised staff to carry out core tasks, can have a dual purpose: An educational one - in so far as the young people acquire new skills - and a developmental one - in so far as the museum develops in dialogue with the young people. At SMK, ULK has for many years played a role as both a dissemination laboratory, think tank and adviser to the museum in questions about how the institution maintains relevance to the young audience. The young people at ULK have, among other things, curated SMK Fridays, decorated the subway fence for a Copenhagen subway construction site with digitalised works from the collection, set up a fixer room at Vesterbro, created communication tools for the museum's exhibition on Carl Bloch in 2023 and - collectively applied for the position of director of SMK, as my own contract expired and the position was advertised. There is no doubt that the young people who have been involved in ULK on a voluntary basis over the years not only become ambassadors for the museum to an age group that can be difficult for a museum to reach, particularly on social media; the inputs they have given regarding program and dissemination are valuable in the ongoing shaping of the museum for the current times and a younger audience. The challenge here, however, can also be quantified as the same related to SMK Fridays: the typical young people who apply to become part of ULK represent a narrow part of the population, if nothing else then because they come from Copenhagen.

“Audience development is a dilemma-filled, but also necessary field to navigate for a museum that understands itself as a social actor. Most art museums today may lack sufficiently comprehensive charts for this, partly because the public is constantly changing and filled with conflicting interests.”

*Mikkel Bogh*

### SMK KOM - Hosting new Danes

A third and final effort I will mention here, SMK KOM, compensates to some extent for this downside. Perhaps it can even offer itself as a model for another way of hosting as a museum institution. Although, after a multi-year grant, it now stands on its own financially, it represents one of the most interesting steps in museum hosting that I know of, despite the fact that it addresses relatively few people compared to the total number of visitors. KOM is an invitation to a monthly meeting with free entry, coffee/tea and cake for people who are learning Danish and at the same time want to meet others in the same situation, but in a setting that is more informal than the language school. There are people here who have just started to learn Danish and others who have progressed further in their language acquisition, but who want to improve. The growing group of participants has many backgrounds, both ethnically, educationally and culturally. But gathered around the tea and coffee table in the museum's sculpture street, they have a lot in common: They are sitting here together, they were not born in Denmark, they are learning the language and they like to look at pictures and talk to others about what they see, guided by an experienced educator from the museum. Many of the participants have not previously been regular users of art museums but see opportunities here that alternative language education does not offer them. If there is a dilemma associated with this type of effort, it primarily has to do with difficulties associated with prioritising a scale-up and thus moving from the pilot stage to a fully integrated part of the museum's heartbeat. As a niche activity with no associated income, it can have great strategic importance, not only for what it already means to those involved, but also because, by the gesture of hosting, it can inspire other parts of the museum to think of the audience, not as one, but precisely as a non-homogeneous, multicultural public consisting of people with different needs, backgrounds, expectations and capacities. Despite the strategic importance, such initiatives very often remain too niche to achieve what they have the potential to achieve if they had a larger volume. But financial considerations often set limits to development – including audience development – at museums. And when the pilot phase is over and the funds run out, it can be very difficult to continue the new formats with a sustainable economy.

### To learn from the guests

A user perspective and the increased focus on the customers has initiated an unparalleled transformation of the art museums over the past ten to fifteen years. Many

museums have experienced that this transformation contains pitfalls and that it cannot be implemented without significant dilemmas for management. In light of a general economic situation characterised by increasing operating costs, decreasing public subsidies and a growing dependence on own revenues and external funding, it is no wonder that vulnerable museums feel tempted or pressured to renounce the experiment and prioritise a program and a profile which guarantees audience attraction. Something which not infrequently happens at the expense of strategic audience development and of efforts that could increase cultural pluralism and create a better demographic balance in the visitor composition. Such priorities have also been subject to criticism. Despite the obvious difficulty of the task, however, the strategic reorientation needs not threaten the professional integrity of museums, let alone lead to a populist fixation on the bottom line and the widest possible appeal. Audience development is a dilemma-filled, but also necessary field to navigate for a museum that understands itself as a social actor. Most art museums today may lack sufficiently comprehensive charts for this, partly because the public is constantly changing and filled with conflicting interests. If one manages to let go of the unconstructive notion that there is a contradiction between the sharp and possibly research-based curation and the multi-pronged audience appeal, and if one understands artistic and curatorial experiments as something that can be both inviting, contagious and inspiring, as Victoria Noorthhoorn has suggested, one will have come a long way on the road to a museum that speaks to and with diversity. Knowledge of the public one wants to reach, knowledge of its needs, dreams and habits, cannot be avoided either, if you want to maintain relevance for anything other than a narrow section of society. Most important, however, is that the museum allows its knowledge of, and dialogue with, the public – including the dialogue with groups on the periphery of, or perhaps completely outside, the largest group of users – to influence the way it organises itself, mediates, tells stories and asks questions. If not, the museum will remain tied to a narrow local or national self-narrative that does not promote a deliberative, multicultural democracy.

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**“The more the cultural sector equates professionalism, quality, and efficient management, the harder it becomes for institutions to appreciate amateur activities as part of their professional practice and to invite many, diverse actors and perspectives to a dance where artistic and cultural expertise can be valued.”**

*Anja Molle Lindelof*



## **Cultural Leadership in Motion – or Dancing with Dilemmas**

*Anja Molle Lindelof, Associate Professor, Ph.D., and Study Director at the Department of Communication and Humanistic Science, RUC*

Does the management paradigm of New Public Management and its overly strong focus on goals and efficiency really go hand in hand with Audience Development? Or is there a need for audience development to embrace an entirely different management paradigm, one where dilemmas inherent in the work with arts and culture create new spaces for practice and managerial reflection.

‘To dance with dilemmas.’ - The phrase used by a leader of a medium-sized, state-supported cultural institution when describing their work in a conversation about the consequences of the last two decades’ focus on audience development for the field of cultural leadership. When I choose to use this metaphor to describe some of the consequences that key cultural policy ideas and management logics have for cultural leadership, it is due to two things. Firstly, the dance with dilemmas seems to me an apt image of the development that cultural life has undergone over the past decades, in parallel with increased globalisation, digitisation, and professionalisation. Secondly, the metaphorical perspective reminds us that the way we talk about and visualise our ideas on art and culture is crucial for how we understand the phenomenon we are talking about, and therefore how we act.

### **Dilemmas**

The dilemmas are evident, and there are plenty to choose from. Audience development has been part of the work of Danish cultural institutions and the cultural policy discourse for almost 20 years, and has contributed to shaping how art institutions relate to their audience. However, what constitutes good audience development is far from clear-cut. It is also unclear which cultural policy rationale(s) underlie it. Much research literature points to the many diverse and often contradictory goals that the term can encompass. The desire to reach a larger and broader audience is the common starting point, justified by an aging core audience and declining attendance combined with increased visibility of a systematic demographic imbalance – educational level and age are the decisive parameters



for those who primarily use publicly funded cultural offerings. But even here, the first familiar dilemma emerges: is audience development primarily extended marketing, which continues classical cultural policy ideals of educating the audience and adds experience-based marketing initiatives to attract guests to their specific offerings, or is it the interests of the audience that should define the development of new activities? Are we talking about product- or recipient-oriented initiatives?

A central question revolves around participation or the lack thereof. Inclusion and exclusion are often discussed, and here, language plays a trick on us again. Is it meaningful to talk about participation among our interest groups and their characteristics if they have commonly already been discussed through the negative definition of ‘non-users’? Is it, in some cases, really the audience that needs to be developed and included? Or how much should institutions themselves change? Overall, the question is of importance to cultural policy because usage patterns raise fundamental questions about the democratic potential of art in society and the democratic legitimacy of cultural institutions. It raises several dilemmas – to what extent should it be the individual institution’s responsibility and goal to attract a diverse audience that ideally represents the demographic spread of the population? Is that rather a cultural policy goal best served across the diversity of cultural activities available? What role does the individual institution’s attitude and audience awareness play in the puzzle? And can one avoid resorting to the extensive segmentation of cultural users based on age, education, ethnicity, gender, disability, etc., which reduces interest in diverse audience perspectives to questions of demographic representativeness – and thus, in a way, risks confirming and even reinforcing these divisions, which were initially defined as problematic? If measurable participation and evidence-based effects become the prominent evaluation criteria, how can we simultaneously maintain and insist on the importance of the non-measurable aesthetic and experiential, educational, and community-building qualities of art, which are the fundamental cultural policy rationale? What roles can artistic and cultural knowledge play in an audience-oriented institutional perspective?

The point is clear enough – something needs to be done because the ideological foundation of the Western European cultural policy model is continually challenged by changing consumption habits, new media forms, and an increased skepticism towards expert knowledge. If audience development was a much-needed challenge



“To dance is simultaneously something everyone can do and something that can be refined as an art form. It is movement based on the repetition and shifting of shared patterns, and it looks different depending on who is dancing.”

*Anja Molle Lindelof*

to cultural institutions' self-perception and (lack of) focus on the audience in the beginning, it is now evident that - regardless of what one does - it also has unintended consequences; every choice is also a rejection. Or put simply - no matter how a cultural institution reacts to current demands and challenges as formulated in political forums, by the local audience, in research discussions, and in public discourse, it can be problematised. Such is the nature of the dilemma.

## Dance

This is where the dance metaphor can be useful. Unlike dilemmas, which focus on desired results and effects, the dance metaphor points to action and human movement. It reminds us that a meaningful discussion of art and its institutionalisation cannot be reduced to questions of representation, cultural distinction, and economy. In The Great Danish Encyclopedia, dance is described as *'movement of the body, without any other physical purpose than the movement itself.'* In other words, the dance metaphor offers us a processual and bodily perspective on the interaction between diverse interests and between the various involved person(al)itie)s. It insists on the meaningfulness of highlighting the dilemmas, bringing them forward, inviting them to dance. It is performative. In a discussion of what figures, metaphors, and concepts do to our understanding of cultural phenomena, the Danish ethnologist, Tine Damsholt, highlights the potential of working with the dance metaphor. She talks about dance as a 'cultural-theoretical configuration' that embodies two essential realisations: firstly, the dance metaphor is a way to move beyond the classical sociological dichotomy and apparent opposition between structure and individual action. Secondly, dance - whether it is calypso, disco, or waltz - emerges from an interplay between bodies, music, clothes, and dance floor. Connecting concrete individuals and their bodies with each other in specific situations and spaces, where the design of the dance floor, the number of dancers, tempo, and rhythm are crucial for the movement patterns that can emerge. In other words, dance is not a thing in itself but something that arises through the fact that someone dances. *'Without a plurality of mutually oriented and dependent individuals, there is no dance. Furthermore, there are specific dance configurations that can be repeated by different people,'* as Damsholt formulates it, or as the description in The Great Danish Encyclopedia continues: *'Dance arises from human beings' inherent urge to move, often in connection with social interaction and rituals. As an art form, dance appears as refined body expressions with defined aesthetic ideals and training forms.'*

To dance is simultaneously something everyone can do and something that can be refined as an art form. It is movement based on the repetition and shifting of shared patterns, and it looks different depending on who is dancing. The dance metaphor captures the point and complexity of what is referred to in cultural theory as the performative turn and, in short, offers *'a performative understanding of practice as collective doing rather than an expression of individual intention.'*

Central to this is the importance of relationships and co-creative actions, of distributed and collective responsibility for patterns that are repeated and shifted in interaction between human intentions and bodily and material conditions. In relation to the increasing professionalisation of the institutions' work and operations, this action-oriented, relation-based, and bodily-material perspective is particularly relevant for understanding one of the most fundamental dilemmas in cultural leadership: at the same time that cultural and artistic expertise is de-prioritised in what several have called the era of anti-experts, professionalisation is a positive term, e.g., as one of six points in the trade organisation Dansk Kulturliv's recent contribution to the cultural policy report. An analysis of Norwegian concert organisers describes professionalisation as a prerequisite for the institution's survival in the increasingly globalised and competition-based cultural landscape, where expectations for artistic quality in production are high. At the same time, it is unclear what professionalisation means. In her historical account of the changing phases of professionalisation in the museum sector, Susanne Krogh Jensen characterises the last 20 years' development as 'administrative professionalisation,' which has meant more central, political control with an increased focus on museums' societal relevance and a simultaneous de-prioritisation of museum professionals' influence on legislative and structural matters. In contrast to professionally oriented education with protected titles, there is no professional control in the cultural field, and because actors with and without formal education work side by side as artists and cultural mediators, professionalism in this context is often understood as being of an economic nature. Those who succeed in the market are perceived as professionals. In an institutional context, professionalism is about performance management. At the same time, this and other studies suggest that the same processes of professionalisation often lead to reduced enthusiasm among volunteer enthusiasts. The fact that voluntary work simultaneously changes character from primarily being a leisure activity characterised by community, fun, and mischief to being described as a CV-worthy, career-promoting activity and

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important as a way into the cultural industry is an obvious example of what is described as one of the central contradictions of audience development: empowerment versus employability.

Here the dance becomes a concrete expression of the emerging managerial attention to co-creation and collaboration across professional boundaries and expertise, which goes by the term ‘new public governance.’ It is not only art institutions that find themselves in a time of upheaval, but a much broader movement in the public sector that problematises the idea of the ‘citizen as a customer,’ which has driven much of the audience development thinking and made cultural issues a matter of consumption. It is obviously not coincidental that the audience development term emerged and developed in parallel with New Public Management, which, as the prevailing management paradigm, equated the public and private sectors. In their description of the need for New Public Governance, the social scientists Thorning and Triantafillou describe how NPM has created increased economic efficiency by breaking with some of the traditional drawbacks of public administration, such as institutions’ self-maximisation, self-preservation, and lack of competition. Still, it has also sidelined the public sector’s essential characteristics in terms of political leadership, transparency in decision-making processes, and a large amount of public service motivation among employees, while simultaneously accustoming citizens to see themselves as consumers, make greater demands, and not consider themselves part of societal solutions. The more the cultural sector equates professionalism, quality, and efficient management, the harder it becomes for institutions to appreciate amateur activities as part of their professional practice and to invite many, diverse actors and perspectives to a dance where artistic and cultural expertise can be valued precisely because of the interaction that diverse voices and forms of knowledge bring. If audience development was the cultural sector’s answer to New Public Management, then the dance with dilemmas heralds New Public Governance as a performative management paradigm.

**“Unlike dilemmas, which focus on desired results and effects, the dance metaphor points to action and human movement. It reminds us that a meaningful discussion of art and its institutionalisation cannot be reduced to questions of representation, cultural distinction and economy.”**

*Anja Mølle Lindelof*



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“It turned out that it was vulnerable both for the audience to comment on artistic experiences and for the artistic team to accept that feedback. It is my argument that this vulnerability can be met through a focus on relations.”

*Nina Gram*



## From Ad Hoc Projects to Systematic Analysis

*Nina Gram, Analyst, The Royal Danish Theatre*

This article describes how The Royal Danish Theatre moved from time-limited and experimental efforts, characteristic of a start-up phase, to daily systematised data and analysis work.

For The Royal Danish Theatre, work on audience development started more than ten years ago with a new ticketing system that gave the theatre access to its own data. Then followed a time-limited project, *A Suitcase of Methods*, which investigated different qualitative methods for gathering knowledge about the audience. The time-limited and project-oriented aspect is often seen in cultural institutions' work with audience development, but as it has gradually been ascertained, audience development is better understood and handled as organisational development and to thus originate from and be prioritised by management. If the work is to lead to positive changes, an outside-in perspective must be spread across disciplines and all sections of the theatre's artistic and wider administrative teams.

### **The suitcase is in storage but the journey continues**

In 2020, I closed the “suitcase” - the so-called *Suitcase of Methods*, which was a 4-year knowledge project that aimed to collect and test new qualitative methods to gain knowledge about our audience's experiences with arts and culture. We examined, among other things, how the surroundings and the questions we ask the audience influence the conversation we can have with them and also the knowledge that the conversations generate.

It sounds wonderfully effective to have a collection of methods that any cultural organisation can pick from, and implement and thereby learn more about its audience. It is also my impression that our experiments and reflections have inspired others to explore this field either in an academic context or in practice by reaching out to the audience. But as the project also learned, audience development is not done by finding ‘the right method’. Partly because it requires a combination of data sources to obtain adequate and relevant knowledge that can be acted upon, and partly because deciding on which research questions (and thus which methods) to pose is directly related to the context or challenge that the organisation needs to tackle.



So, instead of highlighting one or more methods, *A Suitcase of Methods* ended up describing two core values that I learned were crucial when data had to be understood and handled as organisational development, namely *vulnerability* and *relations*. It turned out that it was vulnerable both for the audience to comment on artistic experiences and for the artistic team to accept that feedback. It is my argument that this vulnerability can be met through a focus on *relations*. Partly in the way we listen to audiences and how we implement a conscious dissemination of data and audience feedback within our organisations.

It was thus clear that the primary quality of the project did not lie in the various methodical experiments, but instead it was as a continuous representative of the audience's voice in the organisation – a voice we continue to include and listen to in various ways. How we work with this outside-in perspective is constantly in motion and thus a part of the organisational development.

### Selecting concrete tools for working with audiences

In order to anchor an understanding and usage of data in the organisation, a large part of our analysis work at The Royal Danish Theatre is automated and regularly recurring. The systematic approach allows us to follow the development of a number of different measures. In addition, we use recurring tools that support understanding and dialogue across departments, both when we analyse and communicate. Some of these tools are presented below.

The theatre's audience segments form the foundation for our audience-focused work, and help us to have a language for who our audience is and can be. We use the segments when we look at who buys tickets, what they think of a performance, or whether they have inputs regarding our app, website, etc. In addition, we involve them in connection with segmented communication and in the actual planning of the performances, which I will come back to.

The segment map itself, which creates the segments, is based on the individual's frequency of attendance and whether our offer is experienced as relevant to that person. The segments are divided into *the core*, which is very high-frequency, *the loyal*, who come often, *the fleeting*, who choose us sporadically, and *the potential*, who do not naturally orient themselves in our direction but who nevertheless have not refused to come to The Royal Danish Theatre.

Through qualitative and quantitative analyses, each segment is enriched with socio-demographic characteristics, descriptions of media consumption and willingness to take risks in relation to culture. As well as qualitative descriptions that help us understand the type of person they are and understand more about why they go to the theatre and what it takes for them to recommend a performance to others.

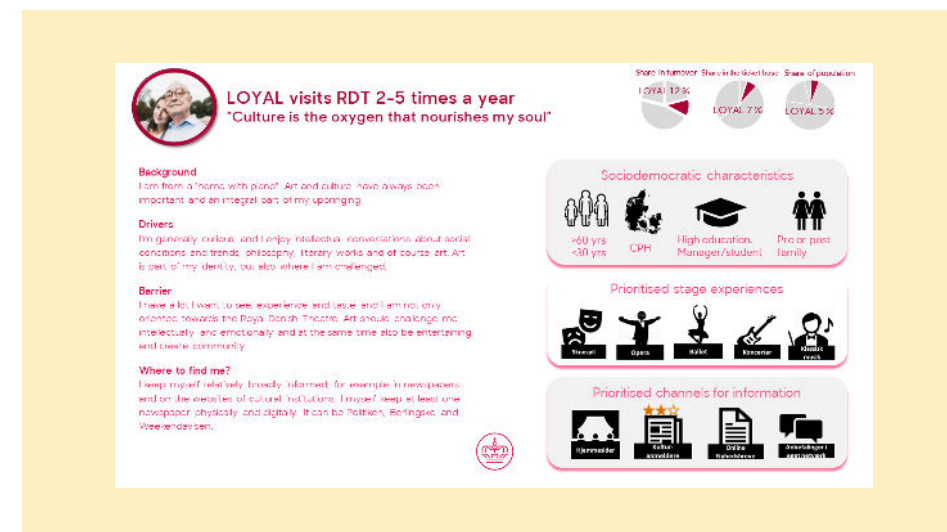


Figure 1. Excerpt from The Royal Danish Theatre's audience segments.

Something often overlooked in working with audiences in creative organisations is a more systematic segmentation of the artistic 'product' itself - in this case the performances. Perhaps because it is also one of the most difficult. Our work with audience segments involves consideration of the link between segments and performances, and these links are often complex for several reasons. Partly because the considerations most often take place before we know the final expression of the performance, and because there can be divergent views on which segments will be interested in the title in question.

In order to minimise complexity, we work with a tool we call 'The Flag', which sets up different categories of performances, in relation to how broadly they appeal, and at the same time points out which segments are expected to be interested in the production.

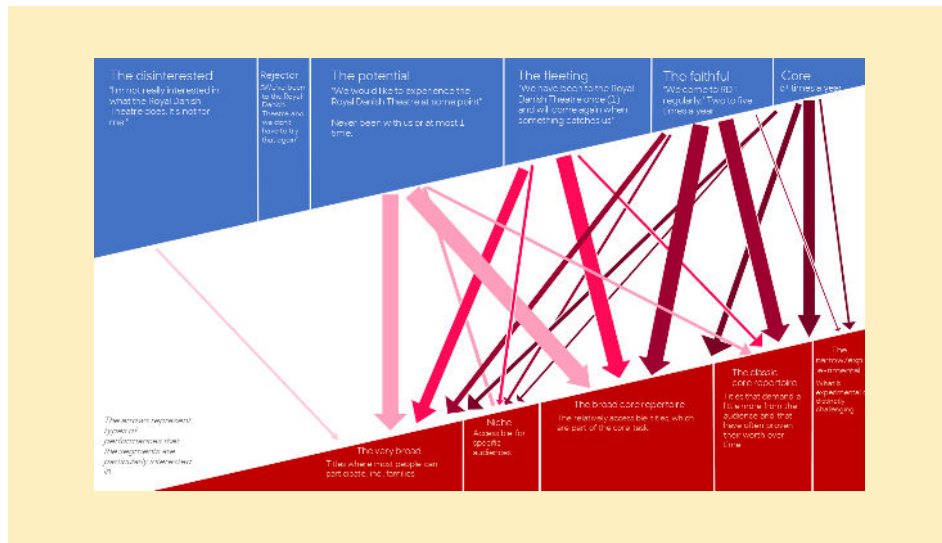


Figure 2. ‘The flag’. Developed by Martin Havn, further developed in collaboration with Anna Reinhard Danchell and Nina Gram.

At the top of the flag, the theatre’s audience segments can be seen, and at the bottom the various categories of performances are presented according to the degree of accessibility. It is important to emphasise that there is no quality assessment at either end of the scale, as the aim across categories is to deliver high-quality performing arts experiences. Instead, the categorisation is based on the experience that some parameters (such as a clear plot, music in the performance, known titles and known actors) make the experience easier to access for a less frequent theatre audience. The size of the arrows in the flag indicates the expected interest from the segment for that performance category.

The flag should not be understood as a checklist that locks down a certain understanding of a performance. Instead, it functions as a dialogue tool that facilitates a conversation about the performance across departments and disciplines. The goal is that the flag, as part of a larger planning process around a performance, helps with a common understanding of which segments the performance is aimed at. In addition, the flag provides input on how the performance is best marketed. A show that is in ‘the very broad’ will typically have a larger marketing budget, as here we have to reach an audience outside our customer database. On the other

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hand, a performance in 'the narrow' has a smaller marketing budget, as we can reach relevant customers via our own channels in a CRM effort.

At the end of the season, we revisit the flag and evaluate whether the performances hit the expected target groups, whether the audience had a good experience, and whether the performances were therefore placed in the right categories. The evaluation helps us to continuously get better at using the tool and to understand our audience and how they react to different titles and setups. Finally, the flag provides an overview of whether our repertoire is broadly represented in all categories, so that we thereby support the theatre's objective of reaching a broader audience'.

### We listen to the audience every single day

In order to assess whether a performance was received as expected, we send out a questionnaire to the ticket buyers the day after the performance. Here we ask about various aspects of the theatre visit (whether it was a good experience, what they think about the length of the performance, where they had sought information about the performance, etc.). Here we also ask the so-called NPS questions, which measures the extent to which the audience is willing to recommend the performance and overall experience to others, followed by an open text field where they can justify their Net Promoter Score rating. At the big performances, we receive several thousand comments, all of which are read through and used to nuance the results from the quantitative data. The comments can, for example, elaborate on why many experienced the show as long and explain why it got a high or low NPS.

We combine this questionnaire data with sales data for the performance in question in a report, which is distributed widely throughout the organisation and is available on the theatre's intranet. The results are also presented at evaluation meetings for the artistic management and for sales and marketing twice a year.

Aside from the regularly recurring analyses, we also work with smaller qualitative studies (interviews and observations) to clarify minor considerations in connection with the start-up of new projects. This applies to our work with the mobile experience-universe Postyrium and Børneuniverset (Children Universe) at the Stærekassen stage, which is currently under development. The exploratory approach that characterised the work in *A Suitcase of Methods* is used here in the work with children, where it can be advantageous to include different strategies and tools that can help the children's reflections.

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## Our plans for the future

As mentioned, our audience-focused work is in continuous development, and right now we are focusing on automating the presentation of data through dashboards that show the current sales figures and audience evaluations at title level. This will result in a faster pace in the dissemination of data and will mean that up-to-date knowledge is available to more people in the organisation. These dissemination opportunities help to get the organisation used to looking into, and using, data in their everyday life, which in turn pushes development in this area.

The qualitative perspective, however, requires greater attention, it cannot be automated in the same way and does not deliver results at the same pace. Because the quality of the qualitative lies precisely in the attention to detail and in combining the results with the other data. Therefore, we continue to prioritise reading through all comments in order to maintain the relationship with the audience and have a sense of what is important to them.

For all those questions that suddenly appear and that do not need to be automated, we continue to go out and observe and talk to the audience and cultivate the relationship as well as our fundamental interest in how the theatre visit is experienced.

All this work with data ultimately benefits the audience as well. This means that they encounter an organisation which has an eye for the overall experience in the theatre, which has relevant offers for them, and which is better able to prepare them in relation to the upcoming theatre experience.

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*Audience development comes in many different forms at The Royal Danish Theatre, such as outreach work, digital measures and in sales initiatives. This article focuses on the data and knowledge work surrounding audience development in my function as analyst in the department for strategic planning and analysis at The Royal Danish Theatre. The project was financed by Bikubenfonden. Read more about the project and the results at [www.asuitecaseofmethods.com](http://www.asuitecaseofmethods.com).*

*NPS stands for Net Promoter Score, which is a widely used measurement tool for loyalty and satisfaction, and on a scale from 0 to 10 asks how much the person is likely to recommend the performance to others.*

*A challenge with this method is that we can collect only the the ticket buyers' assessment, since we do not have contact information about their companions. We address this challenge via an ongoing distribution survey, where each month we ask a representative section of the population (500+ people), whether they have had any contact with The Royal Danish Theatre within the past 12 months. We do not get their assessment of specific experiences, but instead it gives us a sense of who we are connecting with on our various platforms.*

*There is often an overrepresentation of our most frequent ticket buyers among the respondents, but tests show that the NPS does not change significantly when we weight the responses in relation to the distribution of segments among the ticket buyers.*

“(..) we must develop practices and create spaces - not only for spectating, or temporary participation, but for what I call inhabitation of the sensuous and poetic. In Sisters Hope, we often find that the ‘audience participants’ (..) in our universes have a great longing to return to the universe.”

*Gry Worre Hallberg*



## To Inhabit the Art Practices for Inhabiting the Sensuous and Poetic

*Gry Worre Hallberg, PhD and Artistic Director, Sisters Hope*

The performance group and the movement Sisters Hope have developed a number of sensuous methods that can carve the path towards a new paradigm - beyond economic rationality towards a sensuous-poetic starting point. In the new paradigm, the audience must not only participate, but inhabit the art in order to gain access to their own Poetic Self. In this article, Gry Worre Hallberg talks about the ideas behind the methods.

In Sisters Hope's performances, we examine various aspects of a 'Sensuous Society'. The group originated in a Danish, northern European context, and today works both with an international practice, e.g. in collaboration with the Danish Cultural Institute (DKI) and the project *Sisters Sensing (The World)*, and with a locally rooted 5-year performance work and platform for artistic research *Sisters Hope Home*, where we specifically investigate how we can inhabit the sensuous and poetic on a more permanent basis.

In this article, I present some of the basic ideas behind Sisters Hope's work, which I have had the opportunity to delve into through a PhD at Theater- and Performance Studies at the University of Copenhagen. The thesis entitled *Sensuous Society - Carving the path to a sustainable future (2021)* bears the subtitle *through aesthetic inhabitation stimulating ecological connectedness*, as it is an important perspectival argument that we must develop *practices* and create *spaces* - not only for spectating, or temporary participation, but for what I call *inhabitation of the sensuous and poetic*. This is of particular importance, as precisely the immersion in the sensuous and poetic stimulates a deep sense of connectedness on mental, social and environmental levels, and this is again crucial in the transition towards a more sustainable future.

By 'practice' I mean the development of methods with which experiences and knowledge gathered within the 'sensory universe' framework can be transferred to



everyday life, which is expressed in the practice-methodical development of the *Sisters Performance Method - Sensuous Learning*. This practice method was developed as part of my practice with Sisters Hope, and I have - through teaching students both at national and international art schools, and through Sisters Hope's international activities - seen how the method transcends national borders.

By 'space' I mean platforms for a more permanent access to the sensual and poetic - such as, for example Sisters Hope Home.

In what follows, I will briefly introduce what I mean by 'Sensuous Society'. Then I will unfold *the Sisters Performance Method - Sensuous Learning* as a practice approach to work with inhabiting the art or 'inhabitation', as a potentially new art paradigm.

## The Sensuous Society

I wrote the *Sensuous Society Manifesto* in 2008 as a response to the economic crisis of that time and to the ongoing ecological crisis, but the manifesto can also be seen as a response to the current biological and social crises. The manifesto proposes a potential future world that moves beyond economic rationality and instead has the aesthetic dimension as its central guiding premise.

*Sensuous Society Manifesto* calls for a 'democratisation of the aesthetic', by which I mean opening the access to the sensual and poetic. The intentions of the manifesto are the starting point for Sisters Hope's performance experiments. For example, we examine the school, education and learning in a Sensuous Society through the *Sisters Academy* project. In *Sensuous City* we examine the city and public space in a Sensuous Society, in *Sensuous Governing* we examine 'governance' in a Sensuous Society. We continuously open up new areas of exploration. For example, we have started a dialogue with Danske Hospitalskløvn about exploring the health sector in a Sensuous Society, and with Hillerød Library about 'sensuous reading' in the *Sensuous Reading* project.

In Sisters Hope, we often find that the 'audience participants' (hereafter called the participants) in our universes have a great longing to get back into the universe - a 'postliminal longing', you could call it. Seen in that light, a question for further exploration could be how to move from 'postliminal longing' to a 'constant

belonging' where the sensuous can always be accessed. Although the belonging is strong in Sisters Hope's strong participatory practice, participation is almost always temporary, which is why I am curious to explore inhabitable art practices and works - from 'participation' to 'inhabitation', as a potential new art paradigm. Such an inhabitation of art can, as mentioned at the beginning, be accessed through *spaces*, which can be understood as platforms for permanent access to the sensuous and poetic, and through *practices*, with which experiences and knowledge gathered within the framework of the sensuous universe can be transferred to everyday life outside these frameworks.

## Practice - Sisters Performance Method - Sensuous Learning

*Sisters Performance Method - Sensuous Learning* can be understood as a practical approach to working with inhabiting the art. I will here briefly describe the method.

At Sisters Hope, we have developed our own performance method: *Sisters Performance Method - Sensuous Learning*. Although not specifically formulated as a method from the beginning, the development of a new art educational method has been at the center of Lawaetz's and my research since 2007. Through the work with Sisters Hope, I have continuously developed and refined the method through the facilitation of the larger associated performance group. Much has also developed as the method has been taught in other contexts. For example, as a 4-month course that was offered at Ryslinge Højskole, where the students live at the school during the education. This is a big difference from previous courses I have taught, where the method was primarily available to the group's performers, teachers and students in the manifestations and to the students. The first full-time course in the method at Ryslinge Højskole was offered to all interested parties in 2018.

Central to the Sisters Performance Method is 'The Poetic Self'. Whenever Sisters Hope manifests, rests, sleeps, teaches, fights or dreams, we live in our Poetic Self for the duration of the manifestation. The Poetic Self is not a fiction or a character, but the area of being where we are and are together on sensuous and poetic terms. The Poetic Self can also be perceived as a performance method that gives access to the inherent poetic potential, which may not unfold in everyday life. If our everyday selves are shaped in part by the economic rationality we are born into, the Poetic Self can be thought of as the self in the Sensuous Society.

“The Poetic Self is not a fiction or a character, but the area of being where we are and are together on sensuous and poetic terms. The Poetic Self can also be perceived as a performance method that gives access to the inherent poetic potential, which may not unfold in everyday life.”

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The first step towards finding the Poetic Self is ‘The Poetic Self-exercise’. It can best be understood as a kind of facilitated dream journey in an immersive space enveloped by the atmospheric Sisters Hope soundscape, in subdued lighting and/or colored light, which will mostly be red or pink in resonance with the Sisters Hope’s overall visual style. When presence is established, the facilitator asks a series of questions to the participants – or more precisely to the participants’ Poetic Self; to their inherent poetic potential; to the life already living in them that they may not have paid much attention to before.

After the exercise, the participant is asked to write down reflections - or, if they are in a long-term process with the Sisters Performance Method - to compose their Poetic Autobiography, i.e. the life story of their Poetic Self through past, present and future. For many, the Poetic Self becomes a practice-methodical tool for *inhabiting* the sensual and poetic sides of their being, also outside the space of the art institution.

Through previous trips with the Sisters method to, for instance, Greenland, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, USA, Switzerland and the Czech Republic I have experienced participants from very different cultural contexts in dialogue with their Poetic Self. On these occasions, I have often shared thoughts about ‘The Sensuous Society’ as a potential future world that takes the aesthetic dimension, the sensuous and poetic, as its starting point instead of the rational and the economic. My experience is that the longing to move beyond the current economic-rational paradigm and into the world where the sensual and poetic approach plays a greater role transcends national borders. In Sisters Hope Home, we offer a more permanent space for such an inhabitation of the sensuous and poetic.

### **Inhabitation - a new poetic artistic paradigm**

In my PhD, *‘inhabitation’* emerged as a new art paradigm as a possible response to a transition towards a more sustainable future.

Here I used Guattari’s three ecologies in my analysis of the experiences of the participants in Sisters Hope’s universes. For Guattari, ecology refers to the connection between all elements, which he categorises as the connection between the environment, social relations and human subjectivity. For each of these three categories,

he develops an ecology: an environmental ecology (the environment), a social ecology (social relationships), and a mental ecology (human subjectivity). They are not separate territories, but are formed relationally and transversally. Guattari also argues for the need to develop new social ecologies, based on the aesthetic, within which new mental ecologies can be developed and the environmental ecology formed. New places and spaces for inhabiting art can thus be understood precisely as the development of new social ecologies based on the sensuous and poetic, which in turn can stimulate both mental and environmental ecology. As I wrote in summary when I submitted my PhD:

‘It is titled Sensuous Society - Carving the path towards a sustainable future, and is subtitled - through aesthetic inhabitation stimulating ecological connectedness, as that is my finding; that we must create spaces, not only for participation in, but for what I term ‘inhabitation’ of the sensuous and poetic, as such spaces stimulate a deep sense of connectedness at all ecological levels, which is so pivotal in order to transition into a more sustainable future. As written previously in here: Bateson writes *“There is an ecology of bad ideas, just as there is an ecology of weeds.”*, as he argues that wrong ideas have dominated for centuries and it is now time to breed new ideas that will ultimately cultivate an ecology of mind in humans, which understands this deep interconnectivity of everything. This understanding sharply contrasts the understanding of everything to be separated, which is ‘the bad idea’ that has been cultivated for centuries and can be summarized in idioms as: “It is us against the environment”, “It is us against other men” and “it is the individual ... that matters”. Ideas that are still highly dominating as among others Latour reminds us in *Down to Earth* where Trump is portrayed as an embodied example of the human illusion of separation in its extremity and as the catastrophic outcome of this illusionary understanding. Bateson furthermore argues that to train in humans an ecology of mind that understands the profound interconnectivity of all things, is not only one way out of the ecological crisis but the way, which is why he goes as far as naming the ‘bad ideas’ evil and thus proposes active propagation of the good ideas: *“I believe that these ideas are not evil and that our greatest (ecological) need is the propagation of these ideas...”*. With Latour’s Trump analogy in mind this work is not yet exhausted, rather the effort done to train and share this profound understanding is of the highest necessity in the face of the current crisis’. Herewithin in the face of the overarching climate crisis (environmental ecology), the crisis of discrimination (social ecology) and the

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*Gry Worre Hallberg*



crisis that each individual faces, often expressed in depression, loneliness, anxiety and beyond (mental ecology). No matter at what ecological level the healing potential lies in nurturing an understanding of deep interconnectivity, by which the process of repair would be initiated and the training of deep respect for all life begins. It is ultimately the life-threatening battle between connectedness or separation that we engage in.'

Through our practice, we thus hope to be able to contribute to the establishment of opportunities for a different way of being in the world, which can support a more sustainable future.

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*For an overview of Sisters Hopes travels and activities see: [sistershope.dk](http://sistershope.dk)*

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**“When we ask cultural stakeholders and operators, many are uneasy to go deeper into impact measurements. It becomes a difficult conversation, with uncertainty on whether these secondary targets can stand up to scientific scrutiny. But with the knowledge we already have of existing research on the significance of arts and culture, there is no need to worry. Arts and culture can play a big role in most sectors.”**

*Esben Danielsen and Åsmund Boye Kverneland*



## **At the Centre Lies the Participant!**

*Esben Danielsen, Director, and Åsmund Boye Kverneland, Project Manager, at the Danish Institute for Cultural Policy Analysis.*

Arts and culture, interacting with its participants, is at the core of the matter. It can be seen as a meeting of shared communication, or in other words, a conversation. In this dialogue, curiosity, attention, and exploration should flow both ways to enrich it. And we, at the Danish Institute for Cultural Policy Analysis, aim to maintain this conversation.

Audience development... consider the term... does it imply, from the perspective of the cultural institution, that the audience is not adequately educated and skilled enough to engage with arts and culture? That they need to be ‘developed’ to reach an appropriate level of understanding and participation? We posed this somewhat provocative question in a debate at the Danish annual political gathering, Folkemødet in 2023, to stimulate dialogue and focus. Because it was our observation that many cultural institutions do not closely involve their participants. Often, there is no ingrained practice of communicating with, researching, inviting, or gaining deep knowledge of their audience or participants. We increasingly sense that when a cultural institution or stakeholder perceives themselves as experts in their field, the harder it becomes to place their participants at the centre. Often, the participants are regarded as ‘something that the marketing people should handle.’

### **Why is it crucial to know your participants?**

For the cultural institutions, the artists, and the professionals, this importance arises from the intention to foster the ‘best possible conversation.’ This impact is achieved by deploying strategies, adjusting formats, and attempting to map the effects of these decisions on participants’ encounters with arts and culture. For society, the ‘best possible conversation’ is also a critical parameter, as this is where arts and culture can challenge, support and/or change the individual and public wellbeing. When a society chooses to invest in its arts and cultural life, it is crucial to establish common ground for why this is important. And to be able to compare and understand the many different ‘conversations’ possible in this space, an important parameter is how participants encounter any cultural institution



and why that encounter happens. This insight ensures that the institution knows something fundamental, both qualitatively and quantitatively, about its role as a platform of arts and culture. It is not the only central parameter, but one of them.

We hold the view that this conversation is not strong enough today. There is no adequate common platform of knowledge in the field of audience development and participants. It is often ad hoc, based on numerous methodologies, and above all, often not something that can be compared and looked at across the many cultural operators, activities, and institutions. Many opportunities for strengthened professional practice, many opportunities to increase and improve the dialogue with more and different participants are being missed, and the political conversation about the importance of arts and culture often remains internal among cultural professionals. This is the main message of this anthology. To even talk about audience development, you need to have at least one common parameter in place, particularly ‘what is meant by an audience?’ To illustrate this, an audience can be any of the following: someone buying a ticket, going to an exhibition, participating in an event, participating in a school class visit, or it could be an activity or project undertaken by the museum/theatre/venue outside of its usual home environment. Meetings and conversations with audiences are, therefore, inherently diverse.

The other thing that concerns the qualitative aspect is: ‘what is the audience’s purpose for interacting and engaging with us?’ What is the purpose of the experience or activity taking place – is it intentionally purposeless and unmediated? What ‘conversation’ does it provide? When we talk to institutions, and we zoom in on the individual audience visit situations, it becomes a crumbling castle, with many opinions and limited knowledge. To even begin talking about audience development, we need to know what one wants with one’s audience, to be aware of whether there has been changes in it, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

### **Understanding participation - crucial for arts and cultures’ work outside its own domain**

As soon as we talk about the role of arts and culture in other sectors, understanding your audience is fundamental. Other sectors, such as health or social services, have no room for ambiguity here. If you are going to work with the wellbeing of young people, and you cannot clearly tell who is participating in the project – is it



**“A good example is the challenge around digitalisation, where streaming is a challenge for film, music, and literature, but most often processed separately without time for the conversation of knowledge sharing across these different professions. We see that the field of audience development contains similar traits.”**

*Esben Danielsen and Åsmund Boye Kverneland*

“Many cultural artists, stakeholders and institutions, are often very busy and with relatively few resources, so there is rarely time to seek out new knowledge and experiences in adjacent cultural fields.”

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young people? Are they having difficulties with their wellbeing? The legitimacy of the project collapses, seen from a health and social professionals' perspective. And here, the cultural sector often loses legitimacy in collaborating with other policy areas, when neglecting appropriate methods of participation insights. Compared to the domain of sports, we see that they have moved in the right direction. They have established a natural approach to assess member participation, they follow up on project impact and effect. Sports activities exist in their own right, but they can also 'do good' in other contexts and sectors. When we ask cultural stakeholders and operators, many are uneasy to go deeper into impact measurements. It becomes a difficult conversation, with uncertainty on whether these secondary targets can stand up to scientific scrutiny. But with the knowledge we already have of existing research on the significance of arts and culture, there is no need to worry. Arts and culture can play a big role in most sectors. Of course, there are plenty of artistic contexts where it is permissible to work solely with an artistic orientation towards the art itself. Audience development or understanding participation dynamics is not always relevant. For an artist with strong artistic expression, it might not matter what the audience thinks, and that is perfectly ok.

### **Is arts and culture being thrown on the bonfire in the name of problem-solving?**

What are the pitfalls of focusing on audience development? Especially if it is also about looking at the effect of arts and culture within other sectors and societal challenges, for example wellbeing, public health, social cohesion, democratic participation, urban development etc. Is this exploitation of art and culture to achieve something else? We cannot dismiss that proposition; and it is an emotionally charged topic. On the other hand, we can see that arts and culture are often played down or excluded from central political conversations and priorities due to policy makers lack of insight or access to reliable knowledge. Is that really better? Does it harm arts and culture that it also can create positive effects outside its core arena?

A large part of the political conversations often revolves around the desire for arts and culture to reach even more people. A difficult discussion, because what we implicitly often talk about is that there is something special about the arts and the cultural domain. However, in reality there are no Danes who are not in contact with art and culture in one way or the other. More or less everyone watch-

es films and listens to music. Therefore, there is a need for a deeper discussion about which arts and culture more people should be a part of, and why. Once that becomes clear, it is much easier to understand and act on it and at the same time also a more relevant political topic.

### **High cultural expertise and audience involvement still need to converge**

When we're discussing this topic with cultural institutions and with artists, we often encounter variations of the following statements: Audience involvement is a sellout. It's just populism to want to give people what they want. Audience involvement is not necessary. We already know what they will say. The audience can only suggest something they know. They do not have the expertise to know what the right thing is to do.

These are common reactions from highly experienced cultural and artistic professionals we have seen provoked by the idea of audience involvement and co-creation. A group of professionals for whom audience development is a red rag to a bull and perceived as lowering quality because it involves people who, from their point of view, do not know anything about what they are supposed to help formulate or how to communicate the content professionally. We believe that the Danish Institute for Cultural Policy Analysis can contribute to this field of friction because we understand the need to work cross-disciplinarily, comparing different models and practices related to audience development. By working in this way, cultural stakeholders and operators can possibly find inspiration to consider new approaches in their organisational development. It can be done in a respectful way. We sense that there are many cultural stakeholders are afraid that someone will come in and talk to them and not know anything about their field, while it really is about not wanting to work on an unqualified basis in their own professional area. We can understand that. The key is to work respectfully and professionally with participant and audience involvement. The whole field is extremely well-developed methodically and experientially in many other industries – just think of design thinking methodologies.

We already have experience creating comparable narratives across the cultural field. Just getting the language right and being able to approach each other's experiences in a relatable way provides "aha" moments. Many cultural artists, stakeholders and institutions, are often very busy and with relatively few resources, so there is

**“The role of the Danish Institute for Cultural Policy Analysis is to collect and qualify various types of tools in the relevant toolboxes. Deeper understanding of audience development is one tool that many do not know well enough yet.”**

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rarely time to seek out new knowledge and experiences in adjacent cultural fields. But on the other hand, we can see an increase in interest, and the settings enabling cross-sector exchange, is growing. A good example is the challenge around digitalisation, where streaming is a challenge for film, music, and literature, but most often processed separately without time for the conversation of knowledge sharing across these different professions. We see that the field of audience development contains similar traits.

## A common map of potentiality

One of the most important outcomes we will see, when we create an overview of these potential cross-sectoral links and map the landscape of research on what arts and culture can do, is that it retains a huge mass of energy and transformative potential. This energy and versatility can truly be utilized when effects and impacts of art and culture become more understandable and therefore potentially usable for those outside its own sector. Policy makers on both local and national level, needs a stronger fundament to base their decisions on. They face the task to prioritise resources and wants to ensure that the best possible decisions are made. Often, they lack access to qualified research, professional advice, and to understand the possible impact of their prioritisations, including basic knowledge about effects on the participants engaging in arts and cultural activities. And that is a big problem. Because when the pressure to prioritise rise, it becomes uncomfortable for policy makers to make big decisions without a scientific backing and firm ground to stand on. They need access to this kind of verifiable knowledge in order to place arts and culture alongside other resource demanding priorities.

Luckily we often hear policy makers saying: ‘Oh, there is energy in this. It works! This does something for the children’ or ‘it does something for patient rehabilitation’ or ‘it does something for my local area.’ This is not feedback coming from policy makers who necessarily have a deep understanding of the cultural field. One can compare it with what has happened with sports in the last 30 years. Today, we understand that sports are good for us. We know that going for a jog is beneficial, even if the participant doesn’t enjoy it. This journey of insight and proliferation of understanding is the same path that culture needs to go on - if we can state it that plainly.

The role of the Danish Institute for Cultural Policy Analysis is to collect and

qualify various types of tools in the relevant toolboxes. Deeper understanding of audience development is one tool that many do not know well enough yet. Because if you need a saw, you should not use a hammer. If we can ensure a greater variety in the toolboxes, the individual cultural institution, artist or professional can decide how to use it.

Fundamentally, we are amazed of how relatively large the body of research and knowledge on the role and potential of art and culture is. But it exists fragmented, many times inaccessible, and often incomparable across cultural industries.

**“At a general level, publicly funded cultural life must be geared towards everyone. It is not a question of every single company achieving this, but overall that is the goal - there must be something for everyone.”**

*Johanna Hagerius*



## **Audience Focus in Development in Sweden**

*Johanna Hagerius, Consultant, RePublik (Sweden)*

After just over a year without Covid-19 restrictions, many cultural institutions find that audiences have not returned to the same extent as before. In this article, Johanna Hagerius asks how this can be, while at the same time giving us an insight into a Swedish reality.

The corona pandemic years were a time when new thinking was undertaken on formats and experiences. For many institutions, a digital offer became a lifeline to their audiences and also an opportunity to expand this group. It also became clear that the culture field is a complex infrastructure in which institutions, organisations, businesses and individual practitioners and the public, as in private and civil society, function through interdependency. Various scenarios were worked on that dealt with the likely effects of changing habits and behaviour. Would we continue with the new digital cultural behaviors like ‘visiting the museum’ by participating via screen in their exhibitions or ‘going to the theatre’ by watching performances online?

But the most likely discovery was that it is place-based culture in different environments that fulfils several needs, such as meeting with friends and meeting new people, taking part in something outside the four walls of the house and experiencing places and environments. Because the value of concerts, performances, museum visits and exhibitions is very rarely just of the aesthetic kind. And these other values and needs will probably also be important to audiences in the foreseeable future, which means that there is a strong momentum to keep searching for such offers and experiences.

### **Like starting all over again**

Despite values, needs and motivations, much is still not as it used to be, and we cannot yet fully see how the pandemic has affected audience behavior. We are still in recovery. *‘We felt that people were a bit ‘chipped’ when we opened up the doors,’* says a Director of a museum in Sweden, *‘and therefore it was like starting over when the restrictions were lifted.’*

The pandemic has also been followed by uncertain times with war in Europe,



inflation and the energy crisis, which has meant that the audience is holding on a little tighter to their wallets. For many arts and cultural organisations, getting the physical audience back has been a high priority. It is clear that consumption patterns have changed. Some are therefore investing in a wider range of activities and find that they have broadened their audience. Others are taking a few steps back in their digital practice to entice the audience to buy a physical ticket instead. Some find that it has become more difficult to get in touch with new groups and that a program is becoming an important tool to investigate the needs of these groups and perhaps communicate in a different way. Some say that they have been working in a rut and taken it for granted that everyone would come back as soon as possible. Others notice that the core audience has found its way back quite quickly but that many people are generally more particular about what they choose to do and visit.

### Pressure on the institutions

It is in this landscape that the work with audience development becomes both a challenge and a help to reflect on one's activities – particularly when a global pandemic and uncertain times raise new questions about the relationship between the audience and the institution. In times like these, it also puts pressure on organisations and institutions and raises questions about the role of culture. How can you make the changes needed to become relevant to different target groups? And how will the organisation handle some of the challenges that may arise in changing times? Many arts and cultural organisations testify to the fact that the audience's perspective is becoming increasingly important. That in addition to categories such as demography and socioeconomics, they define their target groups from a broader perspective in order to become relevant, to be able to meet the needs of the audience and better design their experiences and visits.

The three overall cultural policy objectives in Sweden are the independence objective, the participation objective and the societal objective. The participation objective has a clear link to the work with audience development, as it aims for everyone to have the opportunity to participate in cultural life. At a general level, publicly funded cultural life must be geared towards everyone. It is not a question of every single company achieving this, but overall that is the goal - there must be something for everyone. The work of trying to expand participation in different target groups has been going on for many years, but despite this, it is difficult to see major overall changes in the composition of the audience. Working with extended participation may seem like a



“Long-termism is important, as this kind of change work is often slow and requires both caution and courage; Daring to stick to change, even if the results take a while, becomes crucial to the result.”

*Johanna Hagerius*

cumbersome task; for audience/visitors, programme, organisation and management if they read, for example, *The Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis* (MYKA - Myndigheten för kulturanalys) reports on the population's cultural habits.

The same underlying structures also emerge in research on expanded participation and in studies of our cultural habits. They show that socio-economically strong groups participate in a wider range of cultural activities, while groups in a weaker socio-economic position participate in a narrower range of cultural activities. In surveys of cultural habits, where people are asked why they do not take part in the cultural offer, lack of interest is indicated as one of the more common reasons. A lack of time, lack of money and long distances are other important reasons for why people do not take a greater part of arts and culture.

## How can you develop the relationship?

So how do you make the work of developing the relationship with different audience groups, those you already have and those you want to reach, to be effective? Over the years, we at *RePublik - The Centre for Audience Development* have received questions from arts and cultural institutions as well as municipal administrations for guidance on how to work with audience development in practice. Two years ago, we launched our Guide to Audience Development, which we created in collaboration with the British audience development expert Heather Maitland. It is a web-based roadmap with practical advice, tools, methods and case studies you can draw on in your work. With the help of the guide, the user can tailor a plan based on their own organisation's goals and vision. We are not alone – both the *NPU* (Norsk Publikumsutvikling) in Norway and the audience development organisation *Applaus* in Denmark have produced similar learning tools, indicating that our Scandinavian neighbors are experiencing the same demand.

In recent years, we in Västra Götaland have noticed a tendency for cultural institutions and municipal administrations to receive clearer instructions from their owners or clients to work with audience development. Likewise, we see a tendency for more people to get the title of audience developer, and this helps to raise awareness, but it also creates new needs to continuously meet in networks to share experiences about how to work in a long-term perspective. Tools such as guides and manuals are a good help on the way to dealing with complex issues, but it is also important to create the conditions within the cultural organisations to meet and reflect on their own activities and practice.

## Custom-designed processes

In Gothenburg, three of the city's largest museum institutions have just undergone a specially designed process around experience design linked to ongoing organisational changes. A similar process has been carried out in a municipal cultural administration in western Sweden. There, the municipal administration has been given the task of working with audience development and examining how it can be designed from a citizens perspective, which frames a wide range from libraries to theatre experiences. These are different organisations with different challenges and needs. Common to the museums and the cultural administration has been to work both inwards towards the organisations and outwards towards the public and potential audience. The goal is to create a long-term and sustainable relationship between the organisation and the visitors/citizens, and dialogue has been an important key to a successful process.

By listening, it becomes possible to find the relevance between what the organisation wants and the audience's/visitors' engagement. Tools and methods must help structure and anchor the work in new ways, but the biggest success factor is the process itself. The opportunity to allocate time and continuously meet across departments and professional roles, between managers and employees, is a good investment for the development of a sustainable audience-centered organisation. Long-termism is important, as this kind of change work is often slow and requires both caution and courage; daring to stick to change, even if the results take a while, becomes crucial to the result.

## Audience development as organisational development

Audience development is synonymous with leadership and organisational development. It is a way of working where the artistic direction is given and central, but where the organisation opens up for a focus on the audience/visitors. We primarily meet publicly funded cultural institutions and organisations with complex tasks with many and different stakeholders with strong expectations, opinions and requirements. Objectives and tasks relating to extended participation are formulated by the clients. As a leader, it requires a sensibility to develop the organisation and at the same time balance the expectations and demands of the outside world. It is both about strengthening the legitimacy of an institution that has perhaps traditionally been a pillar of society, and it is also about being able to act in a market about people's time, interest and money.

The audience already freely chooses where they want to take part in culture. Now you need to be able to use your creativity to open up to more people and do it in a systematic and strategic way, and thereby becoming more relevant to a wider audience. Arts and cultural operators will continue to have the task of working to better reach out through their activities. As changing habits and behaviors continue post-pandemic, you'll need to work on getting your audience back while trying to reach new groups.

## Lack of knowledge about the audience

One of the challenges for the cultural sector is that there is often a lack of actual knowledge about the audience. Partly in the narrow sense of audience/visitors who buy tickets for events, and partly in the broader meaning of fellow citizens and their way of relating to arts and culture.

We have begun work to gather the knowledge-sharing and continuing education needs of cultural organisations in Sweden in order to increase competence in various areas. Among other things, we are investigating the possibilities of developing different platforms that can inspire and strengthen working strategically and purposefully in relation to the audience and where further development in different networks is provided. There is a need both to develop organisations from an audience perspective and to support the role of audience developers at arts and cultural institutions. One possible way forward may be to create new and joint forums in Scandinavia and the Nordic region, where managers and employees have access to colleagues with similar ambitions for change and development. While working to develop your organisation from an audience perspective, you increase your knowledge of your audience, those you already have and those you want to reach.

“As changing habits and behaviors continue post-pandemic, you’ll need to work on getting your audience back while trying to reach new groups.”

*Johanna Hagerius*

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“The impression I can leave is to show a new side of performing arts, where new drama can be created from new voices from and for reality. Therefore, I do a lot to curate various aspects of what we call reality.”

*Sargun Oshana*



## **Transformative Theatre: When the Audience Can See Themselves on Stage**

*Sargun Oshana, Theatre Director, Blaagaard Theatre*

Representation takes center stage at Blaagaard Theatre in Nørrebro - Denmark's most diverse neighborhood. Read about the Theatre Director's perspective on the power of theatre and the opportunity to create meaningful theatre productions for a wide range of people.

Power is an interesting topic to discuss in the context of theatre. There's the scenic power - the ability to stage something and thereby be a spokesperson for something and someone. Additionally, in my role as a Theatre Director, I possess a form of power because I act as a gatekeeper for what appears on stage. Conversely, this power can also be an element for changing some societal structures, contributing by introducing different voices, influencing power dynamics by putting someone on stage, shedding light on it, making it transparent so that people can have their voices heard. The power is there, and it can be risky to deny that one has it.

I have undergone some transformations myself: I went from being an actor to a Director and, finally, a Theatre Director. As an actor, I was hired, I went to castings, so I was the one 'waving the flag.' Then, as a Director, I stood behind the scenes, having the power to hire and select roles. When I became a Theatre Director, it was the experience of delving into the engine room, understanding the foundations that allow both the Director and actor to stand on stage, what journeys lead there, which are completely invisible to the actor. A significant part of my task has been to help new talents understand the ladder leading to the stage, motivating them with their own ideas and assisting them entrepreneurially in transforming their post-it note ideas into stage performances. Then there's the other part, which is the political power. In a way, it's a power that can be taken from us by the municipality because we fall under what's called a small municipal theatre, and our existence relies on ongoing funding applications for the operation of the theatre. We must be transparent and clear about our values, what we stage, and what we stand for.

This comes with a huge responsibility. Even though we would like to, we can't

accommodate everyone. I still have to decline, even though I want representation and inclusion in my theatre, as we only have a window to create 5-6 productions a year, with funding for one in-house production, while the rest are co-productions. So much of a theatre's finances is tied to funding. I initially tried to include as much as possible, but that's unsustainable because it requires a small number of employees to work very hard. No matter how much one tries to open the theatre and the stage, it requires more resources and more hands to execute it. It's a balance between wanting to create good art, exciting theatre, and maintaining a good working environment. It's a significant theme for me - how well-being and a good working environment can influence good art. There has been an assumption that suffering in art equals superior art, but that's an outdated mindset. What actually motivates employees is understanding what they thrive on and being unafraid to engage in dialogue and meet your employees at eye level.

### We want to reflect our reality

We believe that theatre is a reflection of reality. In a way, it's also a distortion of reality. At our theatre, we think that the performing arts can depict reality and the dilemmas and issues that color us as human beings. There's a convention that theatre is hard to digest and a bit dusty, which stems from classics. Many other theatres are excellent at restaging existing works, but we believe there's a treasure in the voices from the real world waiting to be heard. The impression I can leave is to show a new side of performing arts, where new drama can be created from new voices from and for reality. Therefore, I do a lot to curate various aspects of what we call reality.

We do this in many ways - such as curating *Black to Normal* at our theatre. It's an Afro-Danish drama festival created by Marie-Lydie Nokouda, and we are holding it for the third time now. We also do this by hosting *Pink Pavilion*, where, through an Open Call, we find new international dramas to explore what's happening in the world beyond Denmark's borders because it's essential to look outward. When we do this, we can sense that there are people who thought theatre was wigs and powder and a lot of old conventions often associated with theatre. One doesn't think it can be modern but theatre can cover many relevant topics, and there can also be a future perspective on where we are heading. The most surprising and positive thing for us is all the new young people who attend because they suddenly think it's cool to go to the theatre, and they see themselves reflected. They haven't been dragged by the schoolteacher to see a play they can't recognise themselves in.



“The most surprising and positive thing for us is all the new young people who attend because they suddenly think it's cool to go to the theatre, and they see themselves reflected.”

*Sargun Oshana*



“Imagine if the audience’s first meeting could be something where they meet ‘Den Anden Arabiske Kvinde’ (The Other Arab Woman) or a queer person on stage talking about our time today.”

*Sargun Oshana*

In addition to what we curate for the audience, we have a casting dogma where we consciously challenge ourselves by casting *color consciously* rather than *color blind*. We are always aware of our biases when casting or hiring sound designers, lighting designers, or whatever it may be, so we assemble a team with new voices and mix it up as much as possible, so it’s not the same people in rotation.

As a final part, we also look at who we are as a house. I am very interested in the idea that a theatre is not just what we stage; it’s also the building, it’s also what’s at street level, it’s also our neighbors, and we have a strong focus on local anchoring. When we talk about audience development and ask how we can develop the audience, we do it by inviting them in and seeing how the audience can develop us. We have a neighbor premiere the day before the actual premiere, we do ‘Mod Lyset,’ which is a soundwalk in the local area by Caspar Eric, where we are in close dialogue with all the neighborhood residents and courtyard guilds. We also do pop-up events in our foyer, trying to break the threshold between the theatre and audiences interested in entering from street level. Our theatre is not just a ‘wall’ consisting of four walls; it’s a tree branching out and being part of the city.

### **Another narrative**

Danish theatre stands on the shoulders of Ibsen, Strindberg, and Holberg. Holberg, in a way, was an imitation of Molière and the French tradition, so we have, to some extent, copied something instead of creating something original rooted in what we ourselves have made. In Germany, there’s a completely different theatre history with Brecht, where theatre became a mouthpiece for sorrow, pain, and collective trauma. I see the theatre as a very powerful and truly impactful place. A place where our primal emotions are depicted, and the portrayal of contemporary bodies takes place. In the nearly three years I have been here, I have seen and felt what our productions have done for the neighborhood. We have meant a lot to many of those who have been here. A good example of something we did to strengthen representation is ‘Den Anden Arabiske Kvinde’ (The Other Arab Woman), which felt more like a movement than a performance. Hanin Georgis knocked on our door with an idea: *‘It’s a mix of my own story and a rebellion against the portrait that has been painted of the Arab woman. I don’t recognise myself in any of it. How can you erase a portrait and create a new one?’* So we started brainstorming, and it went from a post-it to a performance, and that show has meant a lot to many people. It touches some very personal issues for the young Arab woman, but

also other women and men of color because it's a modern portrayal of a different form of feminist confrontation. It played at Vega (music venue) and at the National Gallery of Denmark as its own pop-up. There are also plans for it to go abroad now because people are being touched by this one woman's lived life, which has suddenly had a synergetic effect for so many. When we produced it at the National Gallery of Denmark, there was a woman of color who came up to me and said: *'It was so wild given my experience of being the only brown woman present and to then see a performance reflecting precisely that.'* You could feel that she was deeply involved in some way.

It is meaningful to do what we do when I experience people writing to us about the effect of seeing one of our performances, and the meaning it has had for them, and I carry that with me. When we did *'Dobbelt V'* with Wahid Sui Mahmoud, we received a message from a schoolteacher who had visited with some students who were in the theatre for the first time, and they were completely blown away and wanted to see it again. I can't help but remember that I was dragged to the back row of some theatre to see Macbeth when I was young and was almost traumatised by it. It sounds very banal and simple, but it's not, because one thinks that theatre is history and classicism, and it's as if we're still afraid to make that renewal because we're also bound by some institutional expectations of what we should be as a theatre. You need something contemporary to mirror yourself in, and we have hit a vein of those who haven't felt seen on stage before. I like to call it transformative theatre when we work with these autofictional subjects that we transform on stage because it's also important that the voice, no matter how representative, is also transformed in a scenic sense so that it doesn't become educational theatre that you get beaten over the head with, but an experience where you feel seen.

It is essential to talk about representation as a concept that not only deals with ethnicity but also involves age and bodies. The theatre is a banner-bearer in this area because we have real people on stage, and we have an important task in creating that representation. I have been influenced by a time where we do it because it comes naturally to us. It doesn't feel like an activist mission; it feels like a value-driven, essential, and joyful vision of wanting to create representative and diverse theatre. Where I think real change needs to happen in the industry is that the shift and fight towards representative theatre should be undertaken by the majority, not just people of color or those on the margins or those on stage.

It should include those in the majority who often applaud from the sidelines and comment on *'how well you're doing, and how important you are.'* It needs to involve those on the outside, who should also try to create value. It should come from a desire, but hopefully, the big houses and the big stages will also see the importance of it. We immediately feel a great interest when others see what it is that we actually put on stage and how much value it has for the audience. For the future of representative work, it is essential that it is not just the small marginal theatres that carry that agenda, but the big ones with the big muscles and finances should also join in.







**Ingrid Handeland** Leader of Audiences Norway (NPU), a national knowledge network for cultural institutions who work to develop their audience base. She has been employed at The National Theater for 12 years in various public-oriented management positions and has previously worked with music production and research administration. She has a degree in intellectual history from University of Oslo and lectures in audience development at USN, University of Southeast Norway.



**Sidsel Bech-Petersen** Head of project development and citizen engagement, Aarhus Municipality Libraries / Dokk1  
Through 13 years as a library developer, Sidsel Bech-Petersen has worked to support the transformation of the Main Library into the new library at Dokk1. As Head of project development and citizen engagement, she now supports new projects and user involvement across Aarhus Municipality's Libraries. Since 2013, she has worked on a joint project with the Chicago Public Libraries where they have published the handbook Design Thinking for Libraries. The handbook provides tools for designing better library services and to ensure that users are at the center of the development process.



**Heather Maitland** is an independent Art Consultant, author and trainer working in Ireland and across Europe. Her recent research projects include the study of pay, conditions and financial security for artists in the Irish music industry and performing arts sector for Theater Forum, qualitative research into the impact of cultural participation on active citizenship for Dublin City Council Culture Company and benchmarking diversity in the literary and publishing sector for Words Ireland. She is currently working on capacity building projects with three Irish arts organisations..



**Dorte Damgaard** Cand.mag and knowledge- and project worker in LMS since 2014. Responsible for researching and disseminating research and knowledge with relevance for professional school concerts, internally in LMS and externally in relevant networks. Works with ongoing evaluation of school concerts and is Head of an upcoming evaluation and research project. She has been project manager for LMS's big classic venture Taste for Classic (Smag for Klassisk) 2019-2022.



**Bjarki Valtýsson** is Associate Professor at the Department of Arts and Culture Studies at Copenhagen University, where he researches and teaches cultural policy, digital cultures, cultural institutions and digital platforms. He is Head of the cluster 'Digital culture' and currently participating in three research projects and networks, which focuses on digital creators and their relations with the culture and media sector, platformisation of culture and the cultural policy of the future.



**Gitte Abildtrup** Cand. mag with supplementary children's and youth cultural studies. Employed in LMS since 1999, Director since June 2022. Has participated in the development of LMS from development center to national competence center. Works with management and organisational development, development and anchoring of LMS's school concert scheme, festival manager, and development initiatives and is part of a large number of national musical- and children's cultural networks.





**Frederik Larsen** (Ph.D.) is a Senior Advisor at In futurum. He works with culture and organisations as a researcher and advises from a norm-critical, queer perspective. Frederik's work is based on people and relations, and he works with connectedness as the basis for change and a living future.

**Moussa Mchangama** is a Senior Advisor at In futurum and has as advisor, organisational leader, activist and debater distinguished himself as a strong voice at the intersection of people, power, inclusion and the role of companies and organisations in creating a more just and caring future.

Together, they founded In futurum, a 5-year-old consulting company that works with the processes of change, business development and knowledge gathering. Across the arts, culture, the experience industries and the design- and lifestyle industries they provide the facilitation and advice that push us in the direction of a future where people and nature thrive.



**Marcin Poprawski** (PhD) works at Humak University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki. His academic interests include arts organisations, ethical and ecological dimensions of cultural management, cultural policy, audience engagement, aesthetics and festivals as organisations. He is the leader of the Finnish team in Horizon Europe EKIP (European Cultural and Creative Industries Policy Platform) project led by Lund University. He is an expert in the association of Polish cities and the European expert network on Culture (Interarts Barcelona), which works for the European Commission. Previously he worked for over 20 years at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. For 17 years he worked as cultural manager in the private, public and civil sectors, including 8 years as Head of culture of the Music Festival.



**Åsa Bernlo** is the former CEO of Gothenburg Film Festival and the advertising agency Forsman & Bodenfors Factory AB, who also worked on developing the Media Days in Gothenburg for the Gothenburg Book Fair and built Gothenburg's city support for film and audiovisual media. Since 2014 she has been a member of the board of Swedish Radio and from 2019 Marketing and Sales Manager and Vice CEO of the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra.



**Mikkel Bogh** is a Professor of Art History and Head of the Center for Practice-based Art Studies at the University of Copenhagen. He has previously been the Director of the National Gallery of Denmark, rector for the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts and Head of department at the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies. Michael Bogh holds several board positions in Danish and Nordic cultural life, e.g. at Overgaden - institute for contemporary art, the National History Museum, Frederiksborg Castle, Ribe Arts Museum, the Museum for Contemporary Art in Roskilde and Henie Onstad Art Center.



**Anja Mølle Lindelof** is Associate Professor at the Department of Communication and Humanities, Roskilde University. She works with performance culture, audience experiences and notions of 'liveness' with a particular focus on institutional and cultural political problems, e.g. as they are expressed in audience development. She often collaborates with cultural institutions and publishes both nationally and internationally, most recently the chapter "With the experience in the center" in the book *Theater and Audience* (Edited by Holdgaard, Gram and Hansen, 2022) and as editor of the anthology *Performing Institutions - Contested Sites and Structures of Care* (Intellect, 2023).



**Nina Gram** is an Analyst with a special focus on the qualitative at The Royal Danish Theatre in Copenhagen. Nina is behind the theatre's knowledge project *A Suitcase of Methods*, and also works with the theatre's audience analyzes and various forms of audience feedback. Nina has a PhD in Aesthetics and Culture and has through her studies and work been preoccupied with how we become wiser when it comes to people's experiences with arts and culture.



**Gry Worre Hallberg**, PhD and Artistic Director of the award-winning performance group and movement Sisters Hope. Gry works in a broad intersection between performance art, research, curation pedagogy and activism. She is constantly exploring new ways to integrate and unfold the aesthetic dimension. She is behind the vision of The Sensuous Society, a radical vision of the future that moves beyond economic rationality, which she is constantly unfolding and testing through 1:1 experiments. Her artistic research PhD, Sensuous Society - Carving the path towards a sustainable future through aesthetic inhabitation stimulating ecological connectedness, unfolds how we can move towards a more developed sensuous and poetic approach and how it will support a more sustainable future through 'living practices' in art. Do also see her TEDx talks Sensuous Society and Sensuous Learning.



**Esben Danielsen** Esben Danielsen is Director of the Danish Institute for Cultural Policy Analysis. Previously, he has worked as Deputy Director General for culture in the Municipality of Copenhagen, spokesperson for Roskilde Festival and Director of the Danish Foundation for Culture and Sports Facilities. Esben has worked broadly with the understanding and mapping of the dynamics and needs of cultural life, as well as the sharing of experiences, analyses and recommendations.



**Åsmund Boye Kverneland** is Project Manager for the Danish Institute for Cultural Policy Analysis. Previously, he has worked as district-, cultural center and library manager in KFF in the Copenhagen Municipality, as development manager at Turning Tables Denmark and stockbroker at Saxo Bank. Åsmund's background ranges from cultural entrepreneurship and artist development, through to civil service work and stockbroker positions. He has wide experience in consulting institutions, organisations, projects and communities, as well as mediating and building bridges between industries and sectors.



**Johanna Hagerius** is a consultant and responsible for RePublik – Center for Audience Development in Sweden. Through knowledge dissemination, development projects, further training, networking and advising, she works to develop arts and cultural organisations based on an audience perspective. The main focus is on cultural leaders, because sustainable development requires committed leadership. Johanna has a background in media and public administration. RePublik is a center for audience development and is part of the Administration for Cultural Development, Region Västra Götaland.



**Sargun Oshana** is a Theatre Director and has made a name for himself as a strong voice and director who, among other things, was house director at Aarhus Theatre, where he for his staging of Sarah Kanes 4:48 Psychosis received the Reumert Award as Director of the Year in 2019 and again in 2020 as Director of the Year for The Sorrows of Young Werther. Now he has given Blaagaard Theatre on Nørrebrogade a strong makeover as the city's most visible theatre for new voices and backgrounds. With the name change to Blaagaard Teatre, he ties the place even further to the mixed ethnicity of the immediate surroundings and offers a program that is imbued with diversity. They facilitate talks for the locals, reach out to associations for the vulnerable and launch initiatives where young people, whose voices are rarely heard, can be heard.



