Leuven – a city in motion?

Reflections on culture, cultural politics, democracy and audience engagement – from a Nordic perspective
Good evening

My name is Niels and this is my lifelong friend Corto …

For 30 years we have engaged ourselves in cultural encounters across genres, expressions and values …
Engaged audiences are a cornerstone in the foundation of a strong arts ecosystem.
In the Nordics we see a variety of different cultural policy perspectives alongside in the formation of a new cultural political strategy.
THERE SEEM TO BE A DIVERSE SET OF POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES OF CULTURE IN TERMS OF CULTURAL POLITICS AND AT LEAST TWO IMPORTANT ‘GAME CHANGERS’:

THE INCREASING URBANISATION AND THE EMERGANCE OF THE DIGITAL MAGORIUM.

LETS HAVE A LOOK AT THE SITUATION IN THE NORDICS AND IN COPENHAGEN.
1. CULTURE AS A NATIONAL NARRATIVE
2. CULTURE AS AN IDENTITY MATRIX
'School services' are in Denmark a unique cultural endeavour
3. CULTURE AS ENTERTAINMENT
4. CULTURE AS A SOCIETAL DRIVER
Are they our audience and legacy?
5. CULTURE AS DEMOCRATIC GLUE
Streetart turns perspectives upside down ....
6. CULTURE AS THE INNOVATION ENGINE
7. CULTURE AS A GLOCAL FIXPOINT
Cultural policy - 8 perspectives

1. Culture as a national narrative
2. Culture as an identity matrix
3. Culture as entertainment
4. Culture as a societal driver
5. Culture as democratic glue
6. Culture as the innovation engine
7. Culture as a glocal fixpoint
8. Culture as the game-changer
The challenge of opportunities

LEUVEN: NAVIGATING OPPORTUNITIES
Centre vs. periphery

• The proximity to Brussels
  • Close to, but still outside
  • The Brussels scenes as main competitors
  • Finding ways of extending the cultural ‘center’
  • Do not copy what others are already doing
  • Find your own Modes
Between tradition and modernity
Leuven step-stones

- **City scale**
  - 100,000 inhabitants, average age is 30
  - manageable political frame

- **Demographics**
  - 50,000 students (young, highly educated, international)
  - 26,000 foreigners of 154 nationalities
  - 15% live in relative poverty

- **Cultural heritage**
  - Historical UNESCO sites
  - Top level university
  - Some great ‘classical’ venues
Leuven step-stones, continued

• The Cultural Space of Leuven
  • Culture organizations consider each other as partners in Leuven.
  • The organizations thinks on an urban scale.
  • Leuven as a unique laboratory setting an example in Flanders

• Lifelong learning
  • The majority of cultural players in Leuven have integrated it into their artistic practice: providing challenge, training and perspective.
Who’s invited to take part?

A TALK OF DEMOCRACY AT THE CULTURAL AGORA
Beyond the ‘Usual suspects’

If all citizens are ‘paying’ the party. How do you make sure they feel invited to take part in it?

How to ensure a diversity of modes, stories, expressions, events and projects that reflects different societies in Leuven and finds resonance in their respective communities?
When searching for new audiences

We maintain serving the audience we already have …
While looking for the audience we don’t have...
Hoping to find the wizard tool ...
The potential users are everywhere .. All over the place.. We just can’t see them ... Why?
Glocalism

- Acting locally
- Navigating globally
- Orientating glocally
A greater narrative

- Multitude of opportunities
- Sharing and participation
- Arts institutions no longer have monopole of their own stories
- Tension between traditional gatekeepers and those who master the new opportunities
The political approach

The society is increasingly getting more and more diverse. Relations have become technically easier but socially more complicated. That calls for a new approach:

- Flexibility
- Migration and mobility - shifting populations and cultures
- Intercultural competence
- Ethics
- Transnational collaboration - practicing constructive relations
- Culture and diplomacy - opening doors to sustainable relations
The ‘new’ identity of cultural institutions

• Interaction drives development.

• Redefinition of organizational skills.

• Complex relations with its audience, artists and other institutions
Where the magic happens

your comfort zone
“We need the ability to create ideas that in advance are thought to match the many narrative tools we shall use digitally and socially”
new audience groups, **sustainable relations**, working with inclusion, **diversity**, intercultural competencies and **user perspectives** … and not least adapting into a new technological reality ..
How to break the Code?

• How to improve cultural services?

• What cultural tactics?

• Managers are often unfamiliar with the tools available.

• New modus operandi
Make use of:
The old university and it’s high-tech innovation.

Connect:
Research and audience engagement in developing new local narratives with a global anchorage.

Ensure:
That reflection and development as part of Leuven’s genes are more than words.

Test:
Why not let the music stronghold you have become the laboratory for innovative community engaging models
A change of perspective

- Between audience development and audience engagement
- Participation as an opportunity
- Co-creation as an attractor
- Access to culture
Some institutional actions

• Institutions as intercultural meeting places: community centers, culture houses and public spaces
• Urban re-invention, public space re-visited
• Improved language skills within the institutions
• Education - informal and non-formal learning skills
• Audience development skills, exchange with new communication/information trends. Beyond marketing, print and masses. Targeting.
• Increased mobility and simplified procedures for cultural exchange
Re:interpretation of the task:

Ask questions.
Seek inspiration.
Imagine if ...

Vision  - think out of the box!
- Creativity in action • stay ahead of the game

Invest  - in your contacts and cooperate with the audience

Co-creation  - audience: from experience to co-creators

Facilitate  - be midwife

Innovate  - seek the new

Re:take stage  - as an agenda-setting institution
Re:interpretation of the task:

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Transform
- changes in your internal culture

Innovative thinking
- in your program and working habits

Re-energize
- daily life through cooperation

Reform
- recruitment practices

Digitise
- make use of the opportunities provided
Key questions …

- How can you connect with deeply held social, political and cultural values in your community?
- What causes and issues are at the forefront of community life?
- What other community organizations are working on these issues?
- What opportunities can you create for meaningful dialogue in an artistic and/or cultural context?
AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT is about...

DISTRIBUTION OF POWER

MODERNIZATION

TO FOLLOW THE TRENDS

CONTEMPORARY FOCUS
AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT is about...

DEMOCRACY
My standpoint

It is an institutional duty to promote a state of affairs, where it is possible to test opinions, modes of expression, boundaries and norms, within all aspects of the institutional practice.
When audience teach and other competences are brought in

THE ABRACADABRA OF CO-CREATION - SOME EXAMPLES
Rijksmuseum and SMK

Releasing thousands of artworks in super high res. for digital use and reuse.
Christian Borstlap for Rijksstudio
The Metro Wall, Copenhagen
Music Experience Design

Introducing MOD

“My four-year-old is really into it! He records all three satellites and then plays them back simultaneously. Sometimes we record one voice each, and he connects it to space by singing the Star Wars theme, daaa-daa-da-da-da-...”
The Citizenship Project, Copenhagen

Designmuseum Danmark
Thorvaldsens Museum
Kunsthall
Center for Kunst & Interkultur
Skuespilhuset
The Citizenship Project, Findings

- New narratives
- Exchange of perspectives
- New knowledge
- Interaction & co:creation
- Cross-institutional knowledge exchange
- New audience
- New repertoire
In Copenhagen I belong …

Copenhagen Music Theatre
The Secret Company
11 parts of the city
The Citizens
7 local theatres
In Copenhagen I belong, Findings

New Narratives
Interaction & Friction
Local identification

New partners
Empowerment

Expanding the repertoire

Labor and structure effects
If the institutional challenge is the establishment of adequate and open meetings between audience / public and a diversity of artistic expression, it is important to remember that real change is NEVER made through projects alone.
It requires thorough and rooted structural changes within the institution. A change of conduct which involves all parts of the institution: from leadership and management, employees, directors, stakeholders, donors, etc. - and the presumptive users
Thank you!

Niels Righolt, CKI
nr@cki.dk
+45 3167 2110