

International Conference
Management of Culture and Media in the knowledge society
Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Belgrade, Serbia
November 9–10 2011

The Challenge of education in cultural management, arts and media in the global environment.

Lotta Lekvall, Director Nätverkstan

“From him [Robert Mapplethorpe] I learned that contradiction often is the straightest way to truth”

Patti Smith, Just kids (2010)

Introduction

I am Director of Nätverkstan, a cultural and civil society organisation based in Göteborg, Sweden. I am a member of the board of the National Arts Grants Committee, member of Swedish Council for Cultural and Creative Industries in Sweden, and an Observer of the board of European Network for Cultural Administration Training Centres (Encatc).

My perspective is that of a practitioner and provider of education, services, and studies designed specifically for the small-scale cultural field. Nätverkstan is run by ideas. We take many initiatives. We run a medialab, provide services such as bookkeeping, accounting, subscription services and international projects for the small-scale cultural scene. Education is one of the important areas. We have run Kulturverkstan, a two-year program of International Project Management within the cultural field, for over ten years. The education is under the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education and has since start presented overwhelming results. Between 60-85% have gotten work or started their own business within the field they trained for. The education has been very successful in meeting a need of competencies, creating new jobs in a changing society, and with people leaving the education having both hands-on knowledge as well as a critical mind-set.

The discussion on art and entrepreneurship is very vivid in Sweden. Swedish Art Universities have during the last ten years discussed how entrepreneurship should – or shouldn't – be built into art education. In 2009 this led to a cooperation between Nätverkstan and Academy of Music and Drama, University of Gothenburg, to set up and lead a Summer Academy on art and entrepreneurship; *The Art of living on Art*. The cooperation has also led to a master program at the university with planned start next year. For three years Nätverkstan also ran the International Project Management Education within Civil Society and Social Movements, Globalverkstan. This education gathered students from all over the world coming to Göteborg. The students were mainly active within civil society around the world, but also art and culture.

It is sometimes difficult to address challenges since these often immediately feels impossible to overcome. Especially with challenges like the ones that we are facing at the moment in Europe. But challenges also imply possibility for change.

The challenges I see within education in cultural and arts management are of the kind that can be met. They require an interest of the field we are educating for and pose questions for reflection and discussion among us educators, professors and believers of the important role of art and culture in society.

I will bring forward three main challenges in form of perspectives to reflect from. All three bring the underlying questions: How do we deal with the rapid changes in society in the classrooms of our educations? Is what we are teaching relevant? And is it related to the specific conditions in the art and cultural field?

1. A historical change is before our eyes

It might be easy to fall into exaggerations of the role of Internet and the digital society, but it's also easy to ignore it's significance. We might overestimate its role in the short perspective, but also under-estimate the role of digitization in the long perspective.

When we started Nätverkstan, in the beginning of Internet, the idea was to make connections between artists and this democratic promise that world wide web was first described to be. Many, also in the cultural field, thought at that time that the Internet was just a "fly", it would soon show that this as so many other things was just a short fashion-thing and it would loose interest.

At Kulturverkstan we gave each student a computer in their hands with the words “connect to the world!”.

Today art students when they enter school have a smart phone, computer, facebook-side, twitter, LinkedIn, use digital cameras, skype, and listen to music in their mp3s or on Spotify. The digital world is growing in front of our eyes, yet we only see the tip of an iceberg. There is more to come that we don't know of today. The computers, Ipads, Ipods, Iphones, and other reading devices and smart phones have changed the way we read texts, listen to music, and communicate. The way we live our lives.

The digital world have already and will continue to change the world, as we know it. Our children know more of this than we do. They don't "go in" to the Internet, they *are* the Internet. It's their breathing air. They are like fish in the water, while most of us treat Internet as something you "visit" now and then.

“To see how profoundly the book business is changing, watch the shelves”¹

In one of this fall's issues of Economist (Sept 10th–16th 2011) you can read how digitization is transforming the book industry. What has been known in newspaper and music world since late 1990s is now heading towards publishers. This year sales in the first half of the year of consumer e-books in America overtook those from adult hardback books.

Digitization has given new life to old books. Harlequin has digitized more than 13.000 of its books and the firm has started to publish romances as only e-books. Amazon is selling more copies of e-books than paper books. Digitization has for small publishers showed a way out of the difficulty of managing inventory. If you print too many books, stores will return many of them. Print too few and publishers will get a problem of costing more than it tastes to reprint.

There are two important jobs for publishers:

“They act as the venture capitalists of the words business, advancing money to authors of worthwhile books that might not be written otherwise. And they are editors, picking good books

¹ *Great digital expectations*, <http://www.economist.com/node/21528611> or printed Economist (Sept 10th–16th 2011). The part was originally written as a blogpost on www.culturalentrepreneur.se.

and improving them. So it would be good, not just for their shareholders but also for intellectual life, if they survived”

The changes suggest new models of organizing, communication, leading a company. New business models will arise. Hybrid and new ideas, that cultural managers will need to have the skills to reflect on, be able to understand and decide what is interesting and not. This doesn't mean that all old knowledge is irrelevant. It rather poses challenges on letting research and theories meet a practice that is fast changing and flexible. These meetings must be held in the classroom.

2. Patience, Persistence and Perfect timing.

”It [art education] is an education without rules. But so-called real life, where we are subject to an endless variety of improvisations, suggestions, confusions, and catastrophes, is also finally without any rules. Ultimately, teaching art means teaching life”²

Life is complex, unpredictable, it's difficult to overlook and plan. Some years ago, one of the examining students at Kulturverkstan summarized what you need in project work within the cultural field in three T's; in Swedish Tålamod, Timing, Tapperhet. Translated to English it would be three P's: Patience, Persistence and Perfect timing.

Those are difficult things to teach. To dare being persistent you need confidence. To be patient means that you trust the process and use your finger-tip feeling of when and how to intervene or take action. How would you teach these things to students in cultural management or art universities? This is often the glue in between the formal courses; networking, meeting others, learning from those of have more experience. *“Teaching art means teaching life”* Boris Groys says. How well do we bring in what is happening in the context around us into the classroom? How flexible are our schedules and course outlines?

An often disputed question is if there are specific conditions running an organization in the cultural field compared to other fields. There are several studies that suggest that this is the case; it's not only a gut feeling within many artists and cultural directors.³

² Boris Groys, *Education by infection*, article in *Art School (propositions for the 21st century)*, edited by Steven Henry Madoff (Massachusetts Institute of Technology 2009)

If the cultural scene has specific conditions, no-matter if these also are relevant in other fields or not, what consequences does this have being a cultural manager? A student at a cultural management education who has a background as an artist and has working experience have a the knowledge of how it works in the cultural field, but it is often a “silent knowledge”. The education then becomes a way to express and put words on knowledge you already have. If you start a cultural management education without experience and are not so well formulated around arts and culture yet, what knowledge and skills do you need to get during education to be able to work as a cultural manager?

A challenge within art education and cultural management education is how to build in the complexity in the cultural field into the education. The art and cultural field is small-scale, volatile, and multi-skilled. It's build on freelancers, micro-businesses and self-employed as the major part. There are only a few very large businesses. This is the reality our students face when they leave education. When they leave the safe surroundings of the university they need to know how it really works in the cultural field and they need confidence to be persistent about their ideas.

3. Creativity and critical thinking

“The goal of education – any kind of education, but especially a humanistic education – is traditionally understood as being twofold. First, the students are supposed to acquire certain knowledge, certain practical skills, and certain professionalism in the field in which they are being educated. Second, the students are supposed to be changed as human beings, formed anew by their education – to become different, more accomplished, even a better example of humanity”⁴

³ For such studies look at for example: *What is to be preferred: a generic economic policy with the assumption that it caters for the creative industries versus special policy schemes for creative industries and its sub-sectors?*, Erik Braun & Mariangela Lavanga (2007), p 61; Richard E Caves, *Creative Industries: Contracts between Art and Commerce*, Harvard University Press 2000, p 2-10; Per Magnus Johansson och Johan Linton, *Arkitektliv: intervju med Gert Wingårdh*, *Arche* nr 36-37, 2011, p 64; Justin O'Connor, *The Cultural Production Sector in Manchester: Research and Strategy* (1999), p 95ff; Mina Kimes, *From Guns N' Roses bassist to money manager*, CNN Money, 4 march 2011. Found at: http://money.cnn.com/2011/03/04/pf/duff_mckagan_meridian_rock.fortune/index.htm [110830]; Karlsson, David och Lekvall, Lotta, *Den ofrivillige företagaren*, Nätverkstan (2002).

⁴ Boris Groys, *Education by infection*, article in *Art School (propositions for the 21st century)*, edited by Steven Henry Madoff (Massachusetts Institute of Technology 2009)

In a seminar some time ago literature-researcher Jan Holmgaard reminded me of the philosopher Jacques Rancière and his thoughts of politics of aesthetics. It got a very practical meaning.

Rancière describes, in my very simplified version, two understandings of society in constant struggle with each other. On one hand the current and overall mutual understanding of reality, on the other hand the resistance towards this understanding. The gap in between is where creativity can spur. This is where contemporary art is. As a resistance or opposing argument in relation to the more common understanding.

This suggests an ability of critical thinking. A questioning attitude. A capability of understanding the common value in society and relate to this. It means that you understand that the struggle of consensus among a group of people might just confirm the current. Instead a more democratic line would be to allow for dissensus and disagreement.⁵

Translated into practical cultural management work it would be posing questions like: Does cultural management institutionalize hierarchy? What would those be? How can education be set up to support creativity rather than kill it? What methods, skills and tools need to be taught at our educations to prepare students for working in teams that allow for disagreement rather than consensus?

Related to this is a tendency of growing instrumentalism, also seen in educational situations. Many students expect or hope that they will get quick courses and handbooks. *"Tell me how to do and I'll do it"*, is sometimes an attitude that you meet in the classrooms. Our job as educators is to challenge them in this.

⁵ Lecture at DIK Association, Stockholm, by Jan Holmgaard on September 6 2011. Also read Jacques Rancière, *The politics of aesthetics*, Continuum International Publishing Group (last issue 2011)