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Co-creation and other types of audience development in arts and cultural organizations

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Abstract

This paper addresses audience development activities of arts and cultural organizations. Audience development is seen as a tool for providing specific skills useful or even necessary when consuming arts and cultural products in a way that satisfies the consumer. In Finland, the number of arts and cultural organizations having audience development activities increased from 2006 to 2010. The number of organizations providing co-creation projects between artists and non-professionals increased fastest. The number of organizations targeting audience development work at children decreased slightly whereas the number of organizations targeting those activities at senior citizens and special groups increased. The attendance remained rather unchanged meanwhile.

Keywords Orchestra, theatre, museum, audience development activities, performing arts

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Introduction

The objective of the study is to contribute to the research on how cultural policy emphasizing audience development encourages participation in performing arts organizations and museums and accrues value to the participants and organizations. Our final results will also have implications for cultural policy making in terms of the role of audience development as an assessment criterion for public funding (see Potschka et al. 2013).

Primarily, we are concerned about the latest trends in audience development and especially co-creation projects of artists and cultural professionals with both arts attenders and non-attending community members. Co-creation projects are processes in which arts professionals together with participants coming outside an arts organization create an artistic product from the very beginning to the stage: write a text of a play or a manuscript of an exhibition, compose music for a concert etc. and finally perform the play or composition in front of the audience or construct the exhibition for museum visitors. Our main research task is to find out how co-creations projects are carried out in arts and cultural organizations and how co-creation projects create value for participating individuals and organizations. At the preliminary phase of the study, we examined the types and volume of audience development activities in Finnish arts and cultural organizations and report the results in this paper.

Theoretical background

We believe that the choice process underlying consumption decisions made by arts audiences is not different from that employed to choose between other services and brands (see Hand 2011). We therefore

assume that arts and cultural products need specific consumption skills in order to be utilized and enjoyed maximally. Consumers learn through experience or from social interactions (Babutsidze 2011). These two sources of consumer skill acquisition are called learning by consuming and the consumer socialization process (Babutsidze 2011; see also Chang and Mahadevan 2014; Lévy-Garboua and Montmarquette 1996). Consumption activities change over time as a result of cognitive learning or non-cognitive learning in the form of conditioning (Witt 2001).

For a consumer, audience development is a tool for learning to consume products provided by arts and cultural organizations. For a producer, the purpose of audience development is, while maintaining artistic integrity, to create proactively new audiences and sustain relationships with existing audiences through engaging, educating and motivating individuals and communities to participate in arts and cultural activities (Hazelwood et al. 2009; Tajtáková et al. 2012), i.e., to consume arts and cultural products. Sometimes audience development is also seen as education work contributing to artistic work without a direct relationship with attendances (Selwood et al. 1998).

In this paper, we do not take a stand on whether there should be emphasis on learning and education rather than experiencing and entertaining or vice versa in audience development (cf. Johanson and Glow 2011). Our main interest is in the ability of various audience development activities to attract new audiences, to increase the attendance and to deepen the relationship between an arts organization and arts consumer.

Previous research on audience development

Audience development in the arts has been understood in the literature as the development of attendance sizes (Kirchberg 1999; Selwood et al. 1998) or as describing strategies to create new audiences and sustain relationships with existing audiences (Barlow and Shibli 2007; Hayes and Slater 2002; Hazelwood et al. 2009; Tajtáková et al. 2012). It also has been considered as strategies to increase the access of socially disadvantaged groups: physically and mentally challenged, minority ethnic groups, the unemployed, and teenagers to the arts (Kawashima 2006; Tajtáková et al. 2012). Kawashima's (2006) audience development framework includes extended marketing, taste education, audience education, and outreach (targeting people unlikely to attend and bringing arts projects outside their usual venues). Tajtáková et al. (2012) suggest five areas to be considered and employed in their framework of audience development: marketing, education, relationship-building, programming, and social projects. Their approach, like the one of Hayes and Slater 2002, emphasizes the importance of retaining the loyalty of existing audiences through the implementation of relationship marketing.

Audience development theorized solely in terms of dominant marketing conceptions has been criticized e.g., by Sigurjonsson (2010). Lindelof (2014) addresses the term audience development from the perspective of cultural policy.

Selwood et al. (1998) provide an overview of research into the audience education programs of subsidized performing arts organizations and museums in England and the UK. The types of programs include work with the young, work targeted at schools, colleges, and adult education institutions, work involving users of all ages as participants rather than audience, and work with 'an intended learning outcome' rather than for enjoyment or entertainment. Selwood et al. (1998) make a difference between educational work that many educators see as contributing to a body of artistic work of an arts organization and audience development that is primarily concerned with increasing the size of an audience for an arts organization's work.

Selwood et al. (1998) and Tajtáková et al. (2012) list as examples of the tools of audience education and audience development the following: talks and demonstrations, opportunities for personal experience with the arts, workshops or sessions for teachers, in-service training for teachers, project material for schools and students, large-scale collaborative projects involving schoolchildren or other non-professionals,

lectures and courses for adults, and a wide range of events organized on an occasional basis, such as open day events for families, events and teaching services for special-needs groups and minority communities.

Theatre talks as a method of audience development have been studied by Hansen (2014) and audience co-creation and post-performance discussions were studied by Heim (2012). Familiarizing young non-attenders with performing arts was examined by Scollen (2008) and Rissanen and Sorjonen (2011), open day events by Barbosa and Brito (2012), and museum websites by Pavlou (2012) among others.

Laamanen and Sorjonen (2014) examined empirically the influence of audience development activities on demand of arts and cultural products using data collected from the annual reports of 143 Finnish professional theatres, orchestras and museums. Demand was defined as the attendance of an arts and organization. The impact of audience development on the attendance of arts organizations seemed to be rather weak and no confirmation of a positive association between audience development activities and the attendance of orchestras, theatres, and museums was observed. The results were in line with the finding of Barbosa and Brito (2012): satisfied museum visitors of open day events did not express an intention to return to the museum in the short term.

Method and data

As a preliminary study, we examined types and volume of audience development activities in 143 out of 205 Finnish theatres, orchestras, and museums accepted into the statutory system of central government subsidies. As the data source we used the annual reports from 2006 to 2010 of each organization. In the second phase of the study, we will use a sample of case studies for mapping the latest trends in audience development of Finnish theatres, orchestras, and museums and will focus on co-creation projects particularly. Through in-depth interviews with participants, we will explore why and how co-creation projects are carried out, what kind of resources are needed in them, how do the participants experience the process, what kind of value is accrued during the process for them and the organization, and how does this kind of work alter the traditional artistic work of arts organizations.

Preliminary results of the empirical study

Using the annual reports of Finnish arts and cultural organizations from 2006 to 2010 as the data source, we counted the number of organizations having audience development activities in general, the number of organizations providing various types of audience development activities, and the number of organizations targeting the activities for children, young people, adults, senior citizens, and special groups respectively. In 2010, altogether 122 organizations (85 percent) had implemented at least one of the various audience development types listed in Table 1. The corresponding number was 109 (78 percent) in 2006. Most of the organizations targeted audience development activities for children or young people.

Table 1. The number of Finnish arts and cultural organizations by the audience development activity type and target group in 2006 - 2010 (N = 139 - 143).

All organizations	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Change 2007/06 %	Change 2008/07 %	Change 2009/08 %	Change 2010/09 %	Change 2010/06 %
Audience development (=AD)	109	110	109	119	122	0,9	-0,9	9,2	2,5	11,9
Program presentation, talk, lecture, seminar	46	42	45	50	62	-8,7	7,1	11,1	24,0	34,8
Workshop	42	40	41	51	58	-4,8	2,5	24,4	13,7	38,1
Open day/evening event	81	79	81	86	89	-2,5	2,5	6,2	3,5	9,9
Co-creation of a concert, theatre performance, or an exhibition	19	29	32	28	29	52,6	10,3	-12,5	3,6	52,6
Workshop outside own house	43	40	40	42	54	-7,0	0,0	5,0	28,6	25,6
AD targeted for children	124	107	111	115	118	-13,7	3,7	3,6	2,6	-4,8
AD targeted for young people	97	92	99	104	110	-5,2	7,6	5,1	5,8	13,4
AD targeted for adults/of working age	70	82	82	80	89	17,1	0,0	-2,4	11,3	27,1
AD targeted for senior citizens	22	27	25	34	36	22,7	-7,4	36,0	5,9	63,6
AD targeted for special groups	13	20	22	17	20	53,8	10,0	-22,7	17,6	53,8
Additional subsidy or grant for AD (1 000 euros)	147	231	266	249	712	57,6	15,2	-6,4	185,9	386,1
AD Personnel	28	31	37	38	43	10,7	19,4	2,7	13,2	53,6
Attendance (1 000)	6 773	6 978	7 037	6 583	6 787	3,0	0,9	-6,5	3,1	0,2
N	139	139	140	140	143	0,0	0,7	0,0	2,1	2,9

The number of organizations providing co-creation projects between artists and non-professionals increased fastest, 52,6 percent (Table 1). The number of organizations targeting audience development work at children decreased slightly (-4,8 percent), whereas the number of organizations targeting activities at senior citizens and special groups increased (63,6 and 53,8 percent). The number of organizations employing audience development personnel increased from 28 to 43 (53,6 percent). The attendance of all organizations remained rather unchanged and was around 6,8 million both in 2006 and 2010.

Discussion and conclusion

Our empirical study supports the view that arts and cultural organizations are increasingly implementing audience development activities. In Finland, the growth of the volume might be partly explained by the increase of statutory state subsidies to professional theatres, orchestras and museums. They received an additional subsidy of 50 million EUR in the three successive years from 2008 to 2010, an almost 80 % increase on that of 2007, which enabled them to start new initiatives. Also the recommendations or possibly even obligations set by cultural policy-makers and funding bodies may have urged them to allocate resources on audience development activities. However, the preliminary results of this study and the study of Laamanen and Sorjonen (2014) indicate that audience development does not seem to have an impact on the attendance. Since the number of the organizations implementing co-creation projects increased fastest from 2006 to 2010 the main research task seems to be justifiable and we may conclude that co-creation projects deserve to be examined more thoroughly.

The empirical study is not without limitations. First, some of the organizations did not report the types and target groups of their audience development activities annually. Therefore the numbers of the Table 1 might be lower than the number of organizations actually having provided audience development activities. Second, as we did not have data on the goals set on audience development we only are able to evaluate its appropriateness and effectiveness on the basis of general assumptions. Qualitative research methods in the next phase of the study will allow us to investigate the views and perceptions of arts managers and participants of the co-creation projects.

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