

## ***Audience development in relation to Cultural Policies for Sustainable Learning Cities, Communities, and Regions – a Nordic perspective***

Henrik Zipsane

As part of the NCK spring conference 5-6 February in Östersund a discussion was arranged on the topic of audience development and especially with the focus on if and how cultural policies is experienced in the heritage sector in the Nordic countries. This discussion was also the first of a series in the Rolling Workshops which will be held in the period February to May 2016 in Östersund, Glasgow, Catania, and Pecs to discuss how cultural policies and activities can be developed so as to contribute to sustaining learning cities and regions.

This “rolling workshop” is a collaborative activity of the Harnessing Cultural Policies Network set up under the PASCAL Learning Cities 2020 Networks program. This program has been implemented by the PASCAL International Observatory to examine key issues in building sustainable learning cities for the future.

The discussion in Östersund was organised as a panel discussion between archivist Bente Jensen from Aalborg City Archives in Denmark, head archivist Brynja Birgisdottir from the National Archives of Iceland, curator Ann Siri Garberg from the Museums in South Trøndelag in Norway and professor Peter Aronsson from Linné University in Sweden. The discussion was moderated by Henrik Zipsane, director of Jamtli Foundation in Sweden.

-----

Bente Jensen pointed out that the time in which the heritage institutions is existing now is very much marked by the transition from a relatively local industrial society to a more global knowledge society. That creates a challenge for archives where the institutions have financial problems managing their own affairs and at the same time have to rely on partnerships and engage in citizenship building and volunteering.

Participation and empowerment are key words in almost all applications and development projects these days. On the positive side this means that institutions such as archives more than ever opens themselves to society but there are counterproductive elements in the development too. One of the most important and principal challenges at this moment is the regulations of copyright which makes it difficult for heritage institutions with collections created through generations of hard work to manage the schism how to be open to the society and at the same time be regulated by the law in this field to be very protective in their use of the holdings. That situation is probably certainly not sustainable.

Brynja Birgisdottir said that in reality cultural policy aims falls outside the main work of institutions such as the National Archives in Iceland. The regulations which founds the basis of what the institution is supposed by law to manage and provide does not say much or anything about cultural policy targets. Of course that is not a situation which she or her colleagues in the institutions likes and probably bot even the political leadership but everybody are aware of the situation and the main reason for that is the issue of resources.

In order to achieve some of the aims anyway which are set by cultural policies the institutions shape and participate in projects which work in that direction and hopefully make a little

surplus which can be reinvested in activities which helps the institutions to reach some of the targets in cultural policies. Brynja told about such a project which is a collaboration between the archival institution and national museums, library and a research institute. Such a collaboration is valuable but also indeed very difficult because of different cultures in the institutions. From time to time it can easily feel like other organisations expect an archival institution just to provide sources and not respecting needs and ambitions of the archival institution itself. That can make such collaborative projects less attractive for the archive.

Ann Siri Garberg emphasized the importance of resources combined with political colour of the government. For more than a decade the Norwegian museums has gone through a period of great organisational transition with what has been called a process of consolidation. The main idea has been to have many smaller museums merging in to larger consolidated organisational entities. Looked in the mirror it is now clear that an important tool for previous governments to stimulate this process has been financial resources and among the especially the stimulation through development projects which has been in the main fore of progressive cultural policies. This has all changed now. The current national government is much more precautious with financial support.

Support to development projects has been given a whole new direction. The government do not prioritize projects which has the aim of broadening participation and access for people who normally experience higher barriers towards heritage institutions such as disabled people, low skilled people or people with immigrant background. Instead the new political directives has in reality moved towards prioritizing development projects where museums work together with private interests as for example private industry. Renewing the sector seems to be what drives the policy development at the moment. It is symbolically interesting that the museums in Norway are now not required to report to the government what they do for social inclusion.

On regional level the new national governmental policies meet the focus on how museums are expected to contribute to tourism. The new focus on private business from the government in many ways enforce the local and regional expectations on how museums can attract more visitors.

Peter Aronsson took his starting point on the European level where he see an interesting development which is especially clear in the new European research programme called Horizon 2020. This programme which is the largest research programme in the world is more instrumental than we have traditionally seen such programmes. The projects which is supported by Horizon 2020 are supposed to find answers to questions and challenges of Europe and especially the European Union is very clear to emphasize that the prioritized challenges these years are the ones brought upon the European society by the current financial crisis.

What is expected from for example museums from the perspective of the European Commission is to use the specific competences of museums in an instrumental way. Museums are recognized as places where identity are constantly created, negotiated and renegotiated and reshaped. Museums are specialists in creating confidence in society through “shared ownership” in heritage and thereby confidence between people and politics.

The discussion focused on how the different initiatives in the Nordic countries even though through different methods had a clear tendency to point towards the necessity for new

partnerships for the heritage institutions and organisations. From the participants in the audience was mentioned examples from Wales, Glasgow and elsewhere which supported the feeling that this direction in developments is not exclusively Nordic.

Some initiatives are however counterproductive as for example with complicated rigid copyright regulations not letting the heritage institutions make the most of what we are probably best at: Creating, preserving and exploiting collections. It is not stimulating for the heritage institutions to not being seen as creative as “private entrepreneurs”.

On the other hand engaging in new partnerships with research, private business or others can be absolutely stimulating and all seem to be a precondition for future development of the heritage sector as such.