

Digital Youth

A Challenge to Cultural Policy and Cultural Dissemination addressing Children and Young People in the Nordic Countries

Af Beth Juncker

Abstract

Artiklen sætter fokus på nordisk kulturpolitik og kulturstrategier for børn og unge fra starten af det 21. århundrede. Har udfordringerne fra digital teknologi, sociale medier og de unge digitalt indfødte generationer påvirket den grundlæggende forståelse af relationerne mellem kunst, kultur, børn og unge? Er de nordiske lande på vej fra en instrumentel kulturpolitik, der har knyttet unges møder med kunst, kultur og kunstnere til dannelse og formel undervisning mod en ekspressiv kulturpolitik, der prioriterer kunst og kulturs selvstændige betydning?

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Introduction

"In theatres and symphony halls across America, it is said, the audience has left the building." The quote is from the beginning of associate professor Lynne Conner's article on the changing patterns in audience behavior on late modern digital conditions. The older generations still attend, but the young digital generations don't. This is not due to changes in cultural taste. American audiences, Conner argues, "are very much as they have always been: looking for similar kinds of satisfaction from their cultural sources." The changes in audience behavior are rather due to changes in the culture surrounding arts participation and arts experience. Conner's point is, "that traditional arts industry has abandoned the responsibility for providing - or even acknowledging - the importance of larger opportunities for engagement with arts events, particularly those that encourage an interpretative relationship." The result, she stresses, is "an ever-widening interest gap between passive forms of high culture (...) and more active types of entertainment." (Conner, 2008: 103-104). Digital technology and the young digital generations challenge the traditional concepts of art, arts institutions and arts participation forcing arts institutions to re-democratize and to open for new types of participation and new types of co-authoring meaning.

In the article *Artistic Expression in the Age of Participatory Culture* Henry Jenkins and Vanessa Bertozzi take the point of departure in an investigation of these young digital youth generations and their

relations to art and culture. They find what they call a new participatory culture "reshaping what is meant by art and by participation in the twenty-first century". The article addresses arts policy makers and arts institutions, giving them a picture of the implications of the new forms of participatory culture advising them to rethink participation, to redefine art, to redesign art worlds, to reconsider the digital, to remake art institutions. "Arts institutions need to keep up with these changes, they say, or they will be left behind". (Jenkins, Bertozzi, 2008: 175-176)

In the Nordic countries surveys on the inhabitants use of art, media and culture and investigations of young people's use of media and public tax supported cultural institutions - museums, theatres, libraries, concert halls, dance stages - have revealed the same tendencies: audiences attending the traditional art forms in theaters, opera houses, concert halls are growing older and older. (Gallup Kompas, 2006, Minerva modellen, Unges medie- og museumsbrug, 2011, Danskernes kulturvaner, 2012, Danskernes medieforbrug, 2012) Young people don't read so much literature anymore, they don't attend traditional theater performances or classic concerts, but they do use the new media possibilities in their everyday lives communicating, creating, experiencing - films, videos, games, music, pictures

In spite of these participatory activities they are often regarded with the traditional attending audience's perspective and identified as 'non-users'.

The relations between users/audiences/ visitors/ guests and the public tax supported cultural institutions in the Nordic countries are encompassed by cultural policy and guided by the cultural policy strategies. Viewed in the light of the digital turn and the challenges from these new participatory user traits demanding a rethinking and a re-democratizing this article asks: Do cultural policy in the Nordic countries face the challenges and do cultural policy strategies open for new understandings?

New tendencies in cultural policies

From the very beginning of the 21th century Nordic cultural policies and strategies addressing children and young people have been aiming at the arts.

The Swedish Arts Council's strategy on culture for Children and Young people underlines that:

"The Swedish Arts Council is dedicated to enhancing opportunities for children and young people to experience professional art and culture and engage in creative activities of their own. [...] The aim is to integrate a child perspective into the Arts Council's activities". (2012, Kulturrådet, Sverige).

In the cultural strategy 2010-2012 The Danish Network for Children and Culture says:

"All children and young people have the right to exciting, challenging and enhancing cultural experiences. Cultural experiences inspire them, rouse their curiosity in something new and interesting and develop them as complete human beings. [...] The vision of the Network for Children and Culture is that: • all children must meet art and culture • all cultural institutions must contribute • all art forms must be included." (2012, Børnekulturens Netværk, Danmark)

"The Arts Council Norway agrees: "It is the aim of the Council to improve access to and participation in cultural activities for as many children and young people as possible." [...] all children and young people in Norway must experience creative art and culture of the highest quality." (2012, Norsk kulturråd)

The Arts Council of Finland follows these lines and focuses on art experiences for children throughout their childhood:

"They should be guaranteed concerts and art exhibitions, theatre, dance, opera, cinema and other art experiences, and visits by architects, designers, writers, illustrators, visual artists and comics artists." (2012, Finlands Kulturråd)

There is no doubt, that the digital turn and the digital youth generations have challenged the Nordic cultural policies. Have the Nordic countries turned their back to the educational instrumental cultural strategies dominating cultural policy addressing children and young people in the modern industrial societies? Have the Nordic countries set about developing a set of expressive cultural policies as an answer to the late modern digital challenges?

This article asks. The aim is to contribute to the discussions on rethinking and renewing cultural policies, cultural dissemination/communication and audience development addressing children and young people on late modern conditions.

Social changes, cultural challenges - change of policy rationales?

That a cultural policy aims at the arts ought to be obvious. What might be new in the Nordic countries is not the vision that all children must meet art and culture and that all art forms and all arts and cultural institutions must contribute. In the Nordic countries we have practiced that vision throughout the 20th century connecting cultural dissemination/communication to children's social and educational institutions and thus using art and culture as means to support development of language and literacy, to support social empowerment and social change, to support democracy and children and young people's coming of age. Cultural policies built on instrumental rationales (Skot-Hansen, 2012).

Studying the new cultural strategies and initiatives from the beginning of the 21st century we can follow changes in rhetoric and arguments. The Swedish strategy talks about implementing 'a child perspective', the Danish network for Children and Culture talks about children as beings and about art and culture in own right, Arts Council Norway focus on making children and young people's own voices, reflections and experiences in relation to art and culture visible and recognized and on creating new arenas welcoming them. All Nordic countries want to contribute to the development of experimental art and culture addressing children and young people. New kind of expressions and new ways of arguing which might be rooted in a new expressive cultural policy rationale appreciating and valuating aesthetics as an everyday popular and entertaining activity as well as artistic productions, artistic working methods and aesthetic experiences as special ways to sensitive knowledge, to feelings, to creativity, to innovation, to identity building.

Considering the radical social, cultural, media and technological challenges, which at the end of the 20th century have changed the Nordic societies from modern industrial societies to late modern knowledge and experience societies the answers to the two

questions in the introduction might seem obvious. It is still necessary to learn children and young people read, write and reckon, but it is not enough. The Nordic countries have to combine these intellectual competencies with abilities to create, to innovate, to develop new knowledge and new knowledge designs.

In the 20th century art and culture, arts productions, aesthetic processes and experience have been considered a luxury. We have seen artists, not as producers of special knowledge on sensitive conditions, but as special talented 'genius'. We have regarded, not on the theories, methods and technical skills directing these knowledge producing aesthetic processes, but on the final products - the different pieces of art. In the 21st century we are forced to change both view and perspectives. We have to consider art and culture both as alternative ways to knowledge and cognition and as new basis for future competencies.

This shift of position and perspective might be part of the reason behind the changes in political rhetoric: Aiming at the arts, opening children and young people extended possibilities being part of aesthetic universes, being part of artistic creative processes, meeting artists and artists working methods, experiencing and learning from them challenge our traditional concepts of 'teaching', 'learning' and 'literacy'. Rethinking art and culture might together with the digital technologies open the visions for a new primary school system supporting necessary creative and innovative competencies in new ways.

Another part of the reason behind the changes in political rhetoric might be linked to UN's Convention of Children's Rights. It was passed in 1989. Today 191 countries have signed among them all the Nordic countries. Article 31 focuses on children and young people's right to access to art and culture:

"Article 31

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to fully participate in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity." (United Nations' The Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989)

The keywords of article 31 are leisure, play, recreation, fully participation, culture and art. They are linked together telling us, that our expressive lives are an independent dimension of life not only in adult, but also in children's and young people's lives (Huizinga). Expressive life is leisure life, time to have access to all the possibilities for aesthetic experiences, processes and aesthetic activities offered by the cultural sector. Leisure time is time to meet, to experience and to practice these special productions of knowledge, which on aesthetic-symbolic conditions give special access to all our values and all our feelings (Stigel, 2007).

Implementing article 31 the Nordic countries ought to be compelled not to confuse social policy or educational policy with cultural policy. Implementing article 31 it is not enough to develop cultural policy connected to day care institutions and schools using art and culture as pedagogical and didactic instruments as we have done earlier. As a consequence of article 31 the Nordic countries also have to develop a cultural policy in its own right.

Can the growing focus on art and culture in the Nordic cultural policies addressing children and young people be seen as a token of change from an instrumental policy rationale to an expressive policy rationale, from an educational cultural policy to a cultural policy in its own right? To examine these questions we will take a quick look back to the development of cultural policies addressing children and young people in the Nordic countries and offer a thesis which can direct the discussions.

John Dewey's vision: to restore continuity between art, art experiences and the meaning of aesthetics in everyday life

When John Dewey wrote "Art as Experience" in 1934 he was angry:

"When artistic objects are separated from both conditions of origin and operation in experience, a wall is built around them that renders almost opaque their general significance, with which aesthetic theory deals. Art is remitted to a separate realm, where it is cut off from that association with the materials and aims of every other human effort, undergoing, and achievement. A primary task is thus imposed upon one who undertakes to write

upon the philosophy of the fine arts. This task is to restore continuity between the refined and intensified form of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience." (Dewey, 1934/2005)

Dewey was looking at an American society, where the meaning of arts in everyday life during the 19th and 20th centuries had lost weight. Art, arts productions had been institutionalized and sanctified, put in museums, in showcases and exhibition cases. Demanding to be communicated by experts, to be attended, looked at and listened to by a silent contemplative audience with awe and admiration. Between the nonprofit cultural institutions and the life and practice of everyday people the concepts of art had developed a hierarchy built on a range of oppositions neglecting the values of aesthetics in daily popular practice. Oppositions between art and craft, between high and low culture, fine arts and popular arts, between popular daily practice and literacy, between arts and industrial production, between entertainment and aesthetic experience, between non-profit cultural institutions and the cultural commercial market, between cultural policy and the profit chasing business industries. A cultural development devaluating and underestimating ordinary people and their taste, giving too much power to the upbringing of arts advocacy and arts communicators.

The American professor Joli Jensen draws on John Dewey when she inspired by the discussions the new notion of art in the American Canvas Report from 1997 provoked set out to examine Arts Advocacy in USA. She expected to find opposite political positions, but ended up with a pattern of widespread consensus:

"What I found were various versions of a unitary - and problematic - instrumental logic." (...) "Most American critics were uncomfortable with the actual tastes, habits and cultural choices of everyday people. [...] I found case after case of social critics' speaking for "the people" in the abstract, while deploring them in the concrete. Across the political spectrum and across generations. I found calls for the arts to somehow turn everyday people into an American populace that could be trusted to self-govern. This deep-seated mistrust of the American public as it currently exists leads to an inflated

faith in the possibility of the "right" kind of culture to create (or restore) the "right" kind of citizen." (...) In this way art is defined as the non-mass-mediated cultural form that intellectuals appreciate and the masses ignore". (Jensen, 2003)

Cultural policy and arts advocacy is turning art into what she calls 'cultural spinach'. Something we know we ought to like, but as we (secretly) dislike. As a conclusion and a vision she proposes to let go of the instrumental logic and to develop what she calls: "An expressive logic". The instrumental logic links the notion of art with a notion of literacy, determining the very meaning of cultural policy, arts advocacy and cultural communication as educational and therefore primarily addressing the part of the populace with popular, say bad, tastes.

"Instrumental logic leads inexorably to oppositions between art and media and between elite and popular taste. It therefore insults those people who enjoy media and other forms of commercial culture and who resent being patronized. It makes art property - the property of an educated elite - to be bestowed upon an unworthy populace. When we rely on this logic (no matter how hard we try to disguise or dilute it), we insult the very people we most need and hope to persuade." (Jensen, 2003: 71)

Dewey's vision was to get rid of the oppositions, to rethink and restore the meaning of aesthetics in art and the meaning of aesthetic experience in everyday life and to reestablish the respect of popular - and childish - taste and practice. The research of (amongst others) Joli Jensen shows that although influential he did not succeed. Looking at the new rhetoric accompanying the development of cultural policies and strategies addressing children and young people in the Nordic countries from the millennium it might be seen as a new attempt to fulfill Dewey's vision.

The Nordic Tradition - children as 'becomings'

On the face of it, there is no connection between John Dewey, Joli Jensen, USA and the Nordic cultural dissemination tradition addressing children and young people developed during the 20th century. But - going back to the philosophy and the ideas behind the development of cultural dissemination/commu-

nication in the American society in the 1930's and the development of the tradition communicating art and culture to children and young people in the Nordic countries starting out in the 1920's and 1930's we find the connections in the visions and ideas of rationalism: the visions of Enlightenment raising common people to come of age, to be educated, to have access to democratic rights and to take part in democracy. Access to art and culture as a means to literacy and social empowerment. As part of these ideas children's playing communities, their own aesthetic-symbolic practice in everyday life, their participatory cultural forms, their funny popular taste were looked upon as part of their childishness. It was nice and noisy, but without profound meaning. The aim of cultural policy and cultural dissemination was to leave this participatory culture with its playing aesthetic-symbolic practice behind and to educate and qualify both taste and behavior. Children were disregarded as 'beings', recognized as 'becomings' - the adults of the future (Juncker, 2006)

On this basis the Nordic countries from the beginning of the 20th century developed a cultural system, producing first of all literature, later on also theatre- and dance performances, films, music, concerts, art and art exhibitions, TV and computer games addressing children and young people. Art and culture productions allowing children and young people to meet and experience different kind of art and art forms evaluated, chosen and communicated by teachers, pedagogues and librarians. A cultural system linked to and communicated by libraries, schools and day care institutions.

Looking at this tradition through Dewey's glasses might have augmented his anger. Children were defined by their deficiencies. Their daily aesthetic practice and creativity was ignored. Cultural policy and cultural dissemination addressing children and young people in the Nordic countries confirmed the development and the basic thinking, Dewey was criticizing.

The Nordic tradition was a normative, educational tradition. It was built on the notion of the child as a becoming and the notions of art and culture as instruments serving the aims of the social and the educational system. The principles guiding the cultural strategies were based on the thinking founded in oppositions described by John Dewey and rediscovered

by Jensen. Children's own playing practices, their hunger for fun were disqualified. Market, entertainment and popular culture were regarded as the bad guys. Cultural institutions, cultural dissemination and fine arts were seen as the good guys. Keywords connected to the qualities of this tradition focused on the educational qualities of the aesthetic products, on supporting children and young people's intelligence, comprehension and literacy. A solid tradition built to and serving the aims of the Nordic modern industrial societies (Mouritsen, 1996, Jessen, 2007, Juncker, 2006).

New challenges

During the last decades of the 20th century this instrumental educational tradition have been challenged. The development from modern industrial societies to late modern knowledge and experience societies due to digital technology and digital medias has changed both the Nordic societies and Nordic childhood radically and challenged both educational and cultural institutions and the Nordic cultural policies encompassing children and young people (Buckingham, 2003, Tingstad, 2006, Rasmussen, 2002, Juncker, 2013).

As a consequence the Nordic countries have from the end of the 20th century been on a move from this dominant educational cultural paradigm founded in theories of developmental psychology to the outlines of an aesthetic cultural paradigm founded in theories of play and the meaning of aesthetics in everyday life. A move where notions of children as 'becomings' meet notions of children as 'beings', and where notions of childhood as time for development and formal learning meet notions of childhood as time for children's play culture and playing communities.

The challenge is *not* the move rendering the aesthetic paradigm and children as beings visible. The challenge is the ambivalence created by the move forcing us to rethink the educational basis of cultural dissemination and cultural policy, to redefine the different cultural terms involved and to discuss the relations and the differences between art and culture in different cultural contexts: art and culture in daycare institutions is guided by pedagogical terms of culture founded in developmental psychology and seeking the social perspectives, art and culture in schools is encompassed by educational terms of culture found-

ed in theories of learning. Both these two terms are using art and culture as instruments for developmental and learning purposes. Art and culture in leisure time is encompassed by aesthetic terms of culture founded in theories of play seeking aesthetic cognition and aesthetic experiences. We are not facing a shift of paradigm. We are facing an ambivalence we have to handle.

The discourse on children as beings and the increased focus on access to art and culture throughout childhood and youth, the focus on aesthetics as both a professional and a popular everyday practice with participatory elements and the new focus on supporting creativity and innovation in the Nordic cultural policies and strategies addressing children and young can be regarded as a contribution to Dewey's vision. According to the new rhetoric and the underlining of the importance of children as 'beings' and children's perspectives the Nordic countries are in train of rethinking Enlightenment. Cultural policy, cultural strategies and cultural dissemination are leaving the thinking in opposites and are in train of restoring the connections between the meaning of aesthetics in art and the meaning of aesthetics in everyday life.

Children's playing communities - the goal for a cultural policy in its own right

Cultural policy and cultural dissemination addressing children and young people depends on a cultural market producing child culture - professional productions of toys, artistic and cultural experiences and participatory activities. The 20th century focused on child culture as a means to support children's literacy and coming of age. (Juncker, 2013). In the end of the century terms of children's culture and children's perspectives influenced the field. Children as beings have throughout their childhood been practicing an aesthetic-symbolic practice, a play culture, a culture of fun and laughter, creating 'worms' - dedicated children and young people. Due to their daily participatory practice they know what gives meaning to them.

Children's cultural communities communicate through action. It is communities, which constantly deal with transformations. You can actually be what you eat. Communities practicing the aesthetic-symbolic dimension - fictions - every day. In this dimension everything can take place, but never ever for

real. And there is one golden rule here: children never start activities, they don't like (2006, Juncker).

As adults we are confronted with these playing communities, which carefully distinguish between social reality and cultural reality. Social reality just is. Cultural reality, you have to create and maintain yourself. Cultural reality is only present as a fourth dimension raising while you are running, jumping, swinging, singing, playing, listening, reading, talking, laughing. A way of life connected to the very moment, the now and here. This fourth - aesthetic-symbolic - dimension is the Alfa and Omega of children's culture. It raises when you are playing, laughing together, when you are absorbed by a book, a performance, a film, a concert, involved in an exciting discussion on ideas or feelings. When you stop playing, reading, listening, discussing, it fades away.

This fourth dimension never rises by itself. You need a variety of cultural patterns, experiences and expressions - rhymes, rhythms, movements, figures, words, narrative patterns, metrical patterns, playing patterns - in other words - aesthetic tools - to create and maintain it. Cultural policy, artistic productions and experiences, is committed to this register of cultural expressions. It is the most distinguished obligation to secure and guarantee that the register, children already possess, is given the possibilities to be inspired, to grow and to be practiced. It is children's own way to the world, to knowledge, to feelings, to expression and communication - to joy of life and quality in life.

In cultural politics and in cultural dissemination the dynamic relations between this popular cultural tradition rooted in our bodies and practiced in daily life and the professional artistic developments are the crucial point. Meeting and dealing with art - in music, theatre, films, dance, performances, paintings and installations, medias, computer plays - is the heart of these dynamic relations, securing that our popular daily culture and its practice stays alive and is constantly transformed and developed. The changes in Nordic cultural policies addressing children and young people can be regarded as the beginning of an expressive rationale using cultural policy as means to inspire and enrich children's playing, participatory cultures and their expressive lives. If this is the fact we are facing a shift of cultural paradigm and cultural policy rationale.

Nordic cultural strategies and initiatives - the need of a common language

As pointed out above we do meet new notions, new expressions and new type of arguments in the late modern Nordic cultural strategies. Put together they form a pattern pointing in the direction of an expressive cultural policy rationale separating cultural policy from social and educational policy. A pattern which underlines that it is the difference between cultural, social and educational policy that makes *the difference*. However examining both Nordic cultural strategies and the initiatives created as a result of them we also meet another pattern built on well-known instrumental arguments.

2001 Norway started The Cultural Rucksack. "The Cultural Rucksack is a joint venture between the educational and cultural sectors at the national and local level." An important objective says that the goal is "To assist schools in integrating different forms of cultural expression with their own efforts to attain learning goals". 2008 Sweden followed with The Creative Schools Initiative: "The objective is long-term integration of cultural and artistic expression in the work of schools through greater collaboration with cultural operators, which will lead to better achievement of the knowledge targets." The creative Schools Initiative in Sweden is directly based on experiences from the Cultural Rucksack in Norway and is in the same way linked to school curriculum, not to children and young people's cultural communities and their participatory aesthetic practice in everyday life. The Danish cultural strategy 2010-2014 talks about "strengthening the creative subjects" by means of interplay between school and cultural sector: "An increased collaboration with museums, libraries and archives will furthermore broaden the understanding of the cultural heritage and provide increased knowledge and inspiration for discovering new paths."

We are in the Nordic countries facing a set of cultural policies and strategies talking with two tongues. They have recognized the need for change, but they still haven't developed a new and common language arguing for a cultural policy in its own right on new expressive conditions and they still need to develop a new type of collaboration between social, educational and cultural policies built on the insight in the importance of the *difference*. Nordic cultural policies are no longer addressing silent, attending generations

of children and young people they are addressing new participatory generations. The politicians know that artistic working methods, artists as knowledge and cognitions producers, sensitive ways to knowledge and cognition have to be central part of the basis creating competencies for the future. The cultural policies want to make a difference. But they still don't know how. As researchers in this field we have in these years to help them - to rethink the meaning of aesthetics in everyday life, to rethink participation, to redesign art worlds, to reconsider the digital, to remake art institutions and to reconcile Dionysus and Apollo - and so doing preparing for Dewey's vision to come true!

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All references to the nordic cultural policy papers and strategies can be found at the homepages Art Councils.