

Art and social communities

Programme description

The Danish Arts Foundation and Arts Council Norway are working together on a research programme to stimulate research into the role and modus operandi of art in society, with particular emphasis on the public aspect of art, on different forms of social structures and the value and impact of art at the level of the individual and wider society. In announcing the availability of funding for research projects, the programme seeks to promote Nordic research collaboration and studies in view of the Nordic art scene.

The programme's objectives

The programme is intended to generate new knowledge and new perspectives on how art works in society, how art manifests itself in social communities and itself helps to establish different forms of social community, and how the social significance of art can be understood within a Nordic context. The programme is based on an open-ended and differentiated concept of art, comprising various types of art practice. Social communities are understood in this context as gatherings, interactions, networks, groups and audiences/publics in the social contexts on which art acts, functions in or is part of. Audiences/publics can be understood in various ways, such as intentional and non-intentional users, people with similar experiences and emotional ties, particular sections of the population, organized groups (members of art associations, supporters, activists), or as imagined communities.

The programme is intended to help bring research results into contact with artistic and cultural environments and cultural policy's decision-making system. The programme's activities and results should be disseminated via established channels of communication, (publications, seminars, conferences, etc.) and in other, innovative ways.

The programme aims to contribute to strengthen research on artistic and cultural life in the Nordic region and collaborations between Nordic researchers across research traditions.

Background

In 2016, the Danish Arts Foundation initiated a study with a view to exploring the connections and links between art, the production of artworks and cultural and social communities. The purpose of the study was to investigate how research could help explore

and conceptualize various aspects of the role and social function of art as a basis for legitimizing and shaping state support of artistic endeavours.

The study resulted in the report “Art as a forum. A research paper on art and social communities” (*Kunsten som forum. Et forskningsoplæg om kunst og sociale fællesskaber – 2017*) prepared by a working group composed of members from Denmark, Sweden and Norway under the leadership of Frederik Tygstrup. The political discussion about the social value of art (and on public support for art and culture) has traditionally, the report said, been conducted along two dimensions: 1) the contribution of art to general knowledge and experiential standards in society and 2) the contribution of art to the development of the public sphere and creation of a better society. The report also emphasized a third aspect of art’s “manner of being”, i.e., that art “in the public sphere in itself constitutes and promotes communities. Encounters with art are always a social encounter too. The artwork forms a forum.” This, the report said, is an important aspect of art’s essence, function and value in society. “The communities that coalesce around art in all its forms represent an education in democracy in their own right”, the report added. Art “is a good thing for the individual citizen, and experience of art can promote growth and development. But art is also good for our ability to be a society”.¹

The Danish Arts Foundation wanted to proceed with a research initiative partly based on the report and invited the Norwegian Arts Council to help develop a joint Nordic research programme on art and social communities. The “Art and Social Communities” programme is the result of this joint venture. Projects have also been initiated in collaboration with the Nordic Culture Fund, which will be further clarified in 2019.

A research programme focusing on art and social communities fits well with Arts Council Norway’s interests in perceiving fields of art in a holistic light, according to the Arts Council’s R&D committee. The programme also dovetails with the Council’s ambition to highlight the societal importance of a rich and accessible artistic and cultural life. There may well be fertile connections between the research programme and several of the projects under the research programme “Art, Culture and Quality” (*Kunst, kultur og kvalitet – 2014–2018*),²

¹ *Kunsten som forum. Et forskningsoplæg om kunst og sociale fællesskaber*, p. 9.

² See among others Tolstad, I., “‘Det hær va jævli bra!’ Om kvalitetsvurderinger i kunstneriske arbeidsprosesser”, in Hovden, J. F. and Ø. Prytz (eds) *Kvalitetsforhandlinger*, 2018

the committee has suggested, and with other investigative and research projects under the Council's aegis.

Ways into artistic and social communities

In the report *Spans – On art and art policy (Spændvidder – om kunst og kunstopolitik – 2011)*, prepared by a group of writers under the leadership of Jørn Langsted at Aarhus University, the structure of government art support, the division of labour between government levels, the arm's length principle in art policy and the role of the Danish Arts Foundation were discussed. "The purpose of arts policy in a modern society is to maintain and develop spaces for conversations about experiences and reactions where the big and small issues of human life and society are turned inside out in a sensual, emotional and intellectual way without necessarily leading to anything measurable in the here and now. The purpose of art policy is to enable and develop free spaces."³

In the report "Art as a Forum", cited above, these free spaces were referenced, and further investigations, descriptions and qualifications of the art's spaces were called for, including what art spaces are and what is happening or might happen, in them. The term 'forum', as used in the report's title, has two meanings, as a venue and a gathering. The report described how art as a source of experience, insight and critique creates, and helps to maintain and develop, communities. Artwork and artistic experiences provide the basis for experiences that are produced together with others and can be shared. Such gatherings and spaces for verbal interaction constitute a distinctive community. It can be community in time, in space, or a "spread" community, consisting, for example, of people who have seen the same show or read the same book. In the exploration of these communities, the report urged a combination of aesthetic and anthropological research perspectives.⁴

Artistic and social communities, understood as the public aspect of art, was also thematised in the Norwegian government's 2014 *Kulturutredningen (Report on Culture)*, which presents a broad synopsis of cultural policy since 2005. Among other things, art and culture were found to act as a "social glue" in creating concord and strengthening the density of social networks in society. Participation in cultural activities was also shown to be a potential source of

³ Jørn Langsted (ed.), *Spændvidder – om kunst og kunstopolitik* (2011), p. 8.

⁴ *Kunsten som forum. Et forskningsoplæg om kunst og sociale fællesskaber*, pp. 17–18.

identity and sense of belonging.⁵ The report referred, to a book by sociologist Arild Danielsen, *Behaget i kulturen (Contents in Culture – 2006)*. Audiences, or the public, Danielsen suggested, can be seen as a community that evolves “insofar as the participants have artistic and cultural expression as a focal point”. Danielsen described four types of social community based on shared aesthetic interests and experiences: 1) “associated audiences/publics”, a close network formed around the production and distribution of art and culture; 2) artistic and cultural organisations formed on the basis of a planned activity and with a formalised structure; 3) temporary associations of people who share an interest or are supporters of artistic and cultural activities; and 4) “imagined communities”, communities communicated via (digital) media.⁶ Danielsen’s study was part of a research project under the auspices of the Arts Council Norway, “Kunststoffentligheter” (Art in the Public), which enabled studies of connections between art and the public sphere through projects targeting the audiences and new trends in contemporary art.⁷

Also the new Norwegian government report on culture, *Kulturens kraft – Kulturpolitikk for framtida (Culture’s power – Culture policy for the future)*, highlights the relationship between cultural activities and social communities. Art and culture, it says, “have the ability to unite human beings whatever their opinions, interests and backgrounds”, providing a platform for the different ways in which art and culture can work in and affect society.⁸

The importance and value of art was the subject of the report, *Understanding the Value of Arts and Culture*, published by the British Arts & Humanities Research Council in 2014. The report was the result of a wide-ranging survey of the possibilities of investigating and assessing the value of culture. It covered both state supported art, commercial artistic and cultural endeavours and amateur activities. Studies of the impact of art and culture on, for example, the economy and public health, etc., the report suggested, had to be based on the experiences and responses of the individual.⁹

⁵ *Kulturutredningen 2014*, p. 69.

⁶ Arild Danielsen, *Behaget i Kulturen. En studie av kunst- og kulturpublikum*, Norsk Kulturråd 2006, p. 112 ff.

⁷ Studies of various aspects of the Norwegian public sphere have been discussed recently in Jostein Gripsrud (ed.), *Allmenningen. Historien om norsk offentlighet* (2017). The book does not, however, investigate art’s public aspect, or social communities associated with art in particular.

⁸ Meld. St, 8 (2018–2019) *Kulturens kraft. Kulturpolitikk for framtida*, p. 16.

⁹ “The project has sought to put the experience of individuals back at the heart of ideas about cultural value, arguing that it is only once we have started with individual experience that we can then work outwards, and understand the kinds of benefit that culture may have for society, for communities, for democracy, for public health and wellbeing, for urban life and regional growth.” Crossick, G. and Patrycja Kaszynska, *Understanding the value of arts and culture*, 2016, AHCR.

In the memorandum “Kunsten, kulturen og teatrets verdi” (The arts, culture and the value of the theatre”, Trine Bille, of the Copenhagen Business School, speaks about how, from a cultural and economic point of view, we can understand the societal value of art and culture. Among other things, she points to non-marketable values as part of the total social value of art and culture.¹⁰

The role, importance and value of art to society has been further examined and studied in a variety of contexts and in various ways, not least within the social sciences (anthropology, sociology, economics etc.) and humanistic traditions (aesthetics, history, etc.).

About the programme

“Art and social communities” will support studies from several scholarly traditions, that can bring forward new perspectives and appreciations of art’s public aspect, the importance of art as a social venue and of art as the starting point for the creation of communities.

The programme is also based on a conception of art as not just something that brings different people together and helps in the creation of communities, but as something, that stimulates debate, disagreement and differences. Art can create divisions. At the same time, not everyone is actively involved in different forms of social community. Some people remain on the outside, or are prevented from gaining access. Projects aimed at examining these perspectives will be welcomed.

The research programme is open to projects that explore how art works in society. Preference is given to projects, which in different ways thematise the following issues:

- The public aspect of art: Gatherings and the creation of communities centred on artistic and cultural activities. How art as a starting point for experiences, insight and critique creates and helps maintain and develop communities.
- Art as infrastructure. Investigations of how art creates relationships and forms processes in society. How art facilitates dissent and works through conflicts and negotiations.

¹⁰ Trine Bille, “Kulturens, kunstens og teatrets værdi. Et overblik over eksisterende forskning”, August 2017. Available at: <https://asuitcaseofmethods.files.wordpress.com/2017/10/teaterrapport-dft.pdf> (last accessed 26 November 2018).

- The effect and importance of art at the societal level. Investigations of effects of art on intentional and non-intentional users. Investigations of art's non-market-traded values.

Schedule and activities

Programme duration: spring 2019 – autumn 2021

A brainstorming conference was held on October 23, 2018 in Nordens hus in Copenhagen with the participation of research communities from all over the Nordic countries. Ideas and suggestions from the conference partly informed the configuration of the programme and calls for research proposals. Minutes from the conference will be made available on the programme's website.

The programme's main activity will be to fund research projects and facilitate seminars and networking activities, and communication of results. Outputs of the programme will be communicated in the media, in scientific publications, presentations and events.

A start-up seminar will be held and researchers who have received support from the programme will be expected to attend. Seminars and meetings will be held where project participants can come together to discuss their research contributions. Networking will be enabled to strengthen links between research and art communities.

Organisation

The research programme is collaboration between the Danish Arts Foundation and Arts Council Norway. A working group has been set up consisting of representatives from the Danish Arts Foundation and the Arts Council Norway. The working group makes suggestions and plans activity within the programme's framework, advises on the formulation of calls for projects, assesses applications, allocates research funds and monitors the programme throughout the period.

The Arts Council's R&D committee, supplemented by a representative from the Danish Arts Foundation, will act as the programme's panel of experts and evaluate applications for research funding in response to calls based on the recommendations of the working group. Applications will be assessed with reference to research quality and relevance in light of the programme's objectives. Applications will also be assessed and viewed in connection with

research themes, interdisciplinarity, international network, scientific perspectives, geographical distribution, diversity, gender balance and relevance within a Nordic context.

The panel of experts will also play a role in the development of the programme's activities and calls for proposals, the contents of seminars and conferences, and in connection with quality assurance of research results.

The Arts Council's R&D department will act as secretariat for the research programme and follow up decisions by the panel of experts.