

WHO ACTUALLY DEVELOPS WHO – AND HOW?



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Sia Andersen (Ishøj Municipality), Gunnar Munksgaard, Sofie Ilsøe Sjöblom, Sofie Sun (ARKEN Museum of Modern Art) , Wenche Andreassen & Gitte Sørensen (Ishøj Library)

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Take eight sites in Ishøj, twelve children with Turkish, Pakistani and Ghanaian background, the new state school reform, a library, an art museum and a cultural researcher from the University of Southern Denmark. Then add a variety of activities, a lot of good intentions and different ways of reflecting on culture, education and yourself. Then you have the cultural project *Places in Ishøj, Places in Me* that took place in 2014 in Ishøj Municipality under the auspices of Culture in Action and the Regional Cultural Agreement, KulturMetropolØresund.

Objectives

Culture in Action Herlev is part of the Culture in Action (CiA) project, which is a cultural development initiative under the auspices of the Regional Cultural Agreement, KulturMetropolØresund, www.kulturmetropol.dk.

The project is a unique interdisciplinary collaboration between 22 cultural institutions and social housing initiatives. Together with children, young people and their families in selected social housing areas, the project sets out to evolve new cultural provisions for residents in the residential areas. A total of six municipalities are involved: Copenhagen, Furesø, Herlev, Ballerup, Ishøj and Frederiksberg.

This was in brief the project and the purpose of Culture in Action and that is certainly also how we perceived the problem when Ishøj Municipality's cultural development consultant and project manager called Ishøj Library and ARKEN Museum of Modern Art to a meeting. Here we sat around a conference table at the town hall and were given the task of inventing something new and profound. Yes, we would really like to do it, but how? We had never done it before. Not in that way and not with that purpose. But who are the people we do not yet know and who do not come to our cultural institutions? And how do we find and select people we do not know and by what criteria? What are the barriers between 'us as cultural producers' and 'them as consumers of culture'? What do they want and why do they obviously not want what we have to offer? Questions began to arise. How do you do something new, when you can't do what you normally do: something, which is what you hope, believe and know works? When you can't do what you know, but something else, you have never tried before...

Target audiences

Local audience

From the point of view of the KulturMetropolØresund, Culture in Action had a special focus on children, young people and their families. In Ishøj we took the opportunity to cooperate with the social housing area Vejleaparken and the state school Strandgaardskolen located in the area. It was the natural thing to do because of Vejleaparken's location close to Ishøj Shopping Centre, and the centre of Ishøj town, and because of the relevant areas in the Vejleaparken master plan, which was on the point of being implemented. In addition, we had had good experiences with, and relations to teachers at the school, which could be useful for us.

In *Places in Ishøj, Places in Me*, twelve children from the 5th form at Strandgaardskolen were invited to participate in a course lasting eight Thursdays. For this course, Ishøj Library and ARKEN Museum of Modern Art had composed a number of cultural activities and what we described as a journey, on

which the children would discover new places in Ishøj, and various artistic and cultural activities. And as employees at cultural institutions who believe in the importance of culture in shaping people our hope was that they would also experience new sides of themselves.

Process

During the children's journey, which turned out to be a journey for us too, they performed, and we performed different activities together. It was a course of eight weeks at eight different locations:

'A Place Close By'
'A Place in Everyday Life'
'My Place - and the Librarian's Place'
'A place in the body'
'A Place Far Away and Close To'
'Somewhere in Nature'
'A Place in Utopia'
'A Place on the Beach'
'Party'

At 'A Place Close By' we started by meeting the children at home in their own residential area where they showed us their favourite places, their secret places and their good and bad places.

The following week the children came to the library in the shopping mall in the town centre - 'A Place in Everyday Life' - , where children were handed a sketchbook and had to write about themselves and make cartoons on iPads. At 'My Place - and the Librarian's Place' the children visited one of us at home and were told to bring their favourite thing. This is how we continued to move from place to place and from activity to activity, so we were finally able to complete the course at the art museum with a sort of celebration and private view.

At "A place in the body" the children were playing in an art installation at ARKEN museum and the children were given yoga lessons. At 'A Place Far Away and Close To' in Ishøj Harbour the children met a children's author, who taught them making up stories. At 'Somewhere in Nature' in the Sea Cottage by the beach the Ishøj Nature Centre gave lessons in nature painting and graffiti. At 'A Place in Utopia' the children were given a tour and workshop exercises at the Hundertwasser exhibition at ARKEN. At 'A Place on the Beach' the children learned knitting graffiti in the beach park. Finally there was the 'Party' with a final private view and presentation of the project at the museum with guests, classmates and family.

We regularly got the impression that the children, like us, always started out excited with high expectations. They were thrilled to be with us and to be introduced constantly to new places and activities. It was something other than being in school. The course took place during school hours and each time involved bicycle trips back and forth, food, talk and fun, adult contact and new experiences.

One may of course ask oneself whether we succeeded in creating the course “with users and citizens” as was our intention. We created much of the experience together, as either sender or receiver, adults and children, producers of culture and consumers of culture. However, it is true that we were the ones who had organised the course in advance, because we wanted to offer the children a course, which was new to both them and us.

We had not previously run a course of eight weeks at eight different locations with another cultural institution as our partner during the “journey”.

Challenges

How did we do? Did we develop new challenging art and culture experiences together with users and citizens who today do not seek out cultural institutions? Did we move into residential areas? Did we experiment with new formats of contact and was it in cooperation with the local residents? Well, the answers depend on whom you ask.

We did, and did not manage it all. What we mainly managed was to establish strong cooperation between a library and an art museum. As a result, we naturally think of each other when we need to venture into something new or just have to tackle a recurring task. We also established stronger cooperation with the school and with the teachers.

Outcomes

The children began to visit both the library and ARKEN museum. Many times several of them were down to play in the art installation, and at the library we got on first name terms with each other when they visited us. Many of the children have a big smile on their face when we meet them and look at us and ask: “Do you remember me?” And yes, we do.

We saw that the children committed to the process and the individual activities. A boy finger-knitted so much that we almost couldn't stop him. Other children had other enriching or new experiences and thanked us for being allowed to participate. It was something they remembered. Teachers returned saying that the children had been looking forward to the experiences and had expressed that they wanted to be a part of it each and every time, both in terms of contact and content.

While we followed the children, we were ourselves followed by a post-doctoral researcher from the University of Southern Denmark, Hjørdis Brandrup Kortbek, who served as both observer and assistant along the way. In the article that followed, ‘Cultural pampering for children - teaching children about culture and perceptions of children's culture, democracy and formation’ she argued that the children were “... participants in a project where a socialisation concept of formation was the main lever in the transformation from poor to rich culture consumers.”

In the same article, she uses the term “cultural complex”, the term that the Australian cultural politics researcher, Tony Bennett applies to connections, which are “... a culture political way of handling behaviour, where culture, knowledge practices, values, rationales and identities are interwoven.” CiA can be said to represent a cultural complex, which defined certain values and rationales between art, culture, social inclusion, citizenship, transformation and participation. Culture was put into action in

Places in Ishøj, Places in Me. Participating cultural institutions defined the rationales of the cultural complex, which then transformed non-users into users.

Our researcher also touched upon the exercise of play and imagination as essential to the formation of man as a thinking being. According to theorist Lars Geer Hammershøj, who researches the meaning of play, you become human through social interaction, and playing has a great and important role. Therefore, in Hjørdis Brandrup Kortbek's words, the formation of the children happened "... on the one hand, in playing with art and culture and in social meetings between the children and the culture employees and, on the other hand, in the transforming journey, where the children were to exceed their own world."

Yes, that was our intention, but Hjørdis Brandrup Kortbek also points out in her article, that in her view it was a misguided intention on our part. We only showed interest in the children's everyday life, cultural context and own place, and used the residential area as a starting point for an educational journey, which, with us as producers, was intended to lead the children into our cultural institutions and cultural and aesthetic values.

We had not thought these thoughts, at least not consciously, and herein lies perhaps an equally large experience for us as employees of cultural institutions ... we do not always fully understand what we practice. And so one can always learn from follow researchers' insights, and we did.

Key points

KulturMetropolØresund's intention of cooperation "across institutions" has been fruitful and instructive for us as a library and art museum. It is motivating to create cultural projects with another and totally different cultural institution, but also an institution with many of the same values, dreams and thoughts about what a cultural institution should be. We have learned that we both have very similar wishes for our audiences, despite the fact that we have a totally different life, collection and dissemination practices. We are left with the experience that we as cultural institutions:

- Understand the power of co-creation between institutions
- Have learned that it is about being true to your own institution
- Know the importance of being clear about what "sells" – and what you have to offer
- Know that together we can create a better product than we can by ourselves
- Have gained valuable insight into different communication practices from each other
- Understand that trust is a prerequisite for doing something together
- Have learned that professional friendships across cultures can move mountains
- Have changed our communication practices so that we now regularly use each other
- Have learned that we are colleagues at different locations.

Through contact with our 'non-users' - the twelve school children with a different ethnic background than Danish - we have learned:

- That we all come from somewhere - ethnically, socially and mentally
- That children are children, with their unique perception of reality
- That children are at a point in their lives that we as cultural institutions must cherish, understand and support

- That there is so much positive energy in the encounter between adults and children
- That the notions of 'the other' must be replaced by the meeting between us, so that we can learn about each other
- That children want to be seen, recognised and praised - and want to be part of the decision making
- That eating together is powerful - food and meals bring us together.

Having been followed by a researcher in the field of culture, and subsequently having read about ourselves and our project in a scientific context, we experienced:

- The value of having a sharp, academic theorist as 'a critical friend' in the process
- An outside look at our cultural institution, practices and intentions
- That there is a world of difference between the researcher's helicopter gaze and knowledge and our own opportunities for contemplation and project development
- That we do not always know how what we do is perceived in a culture theoretical context

It is one thing to be a pilot project staff. It is quite another to be a professional audience developer. That being said, as cultural institutions we developed a sustainable product, which fits perfectly into the school reform. All right, it is a pampering course, but a course that with a few adjustments could easily be compelling to an entire year group of children each year: as a presentation of some of the culture children in Ishøj surround themselves with.

Contact and links

Culture in Action: <http://www.kulturmetropol.dk/node/238#.Vi3cg5qFPIU>

"We must learn to take a step back": <http://kulturmetropol.dk/artikel/%E2%80%9Dvi-skall%C3%A6re-tr%C3%A6de-et-skridt-tilbage%E2%80%9D#.Vi3cs5qFPIV>

"It's fun to make art": <http://kulturmetropol.dk/artikel/%E2%80%9Ddet-er-sjovt-lave-kunst%E2%80%9D#.Vi3dGpqFPIV>

"Culture in Action – TV-Ishøj": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_R6gbkrKyHU

"Cultural pampering for children – TV-Ishøj": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDjZZ-k_49M

"Cultural pampering for children" - Cultural children and ideas about culture for children, democracy and formation "[http://findresearcher.sdu.dk/portal/da/publications/kulturel-forkaelse-i-boernehoejde\(399bf843-3cda-4587-8216-33694bfdec83\).html](http://findresearcher.sdu.dk/portal/da/publications/kulturel-forkaelse-i-boernehoejde(399bf843-3cda-4587-8216-33694bfdec83).html)

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