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*This article is based on the following essays:

- Föhl, Patrick S. and Gernot Wolfram, "Transformation konkret. Vom Schlagwort zur lebendigen Praxis innerhalb von Kulturentwicklungsplanungen und Ermächtigungsprozessen," in *Jahrbuch für Kulturpolitik 2015/16*, ed. Sievers, Norbert et al, (Essen/Bonn, 2016), pp 381–390.
- Föhl, Patrick S. and Gernot Wolfram, "Transformation und Community Building. Neue Denk- und Handlungsansätze in der Praxis von Kulturentwicklungsprozessen," in *Kulturpolitische Mitteilungen*, no 152 (1/2016), pp. 30–33.

Transformation in the Cultural Sector

Terminology and Examples

An article by Patrick S. Föhl and Gernot Wolfram*

Transformation in the cultural sector

Since reunification, many concepts have been introduced to the cultural policy debate in Germany, not all of which were new, but referred to new structural conditions. One of these concepts is that of transformation, especially in cultural development planning (see, for example, Böhme et al. 2011). Colloquially, this term is based on the idea of comprehensive change and reorientation of established organisational, personnel and action-oriented structures in the field of art and culture (policies). In the years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, sociologist Raj Kollmorgen understood transformation as the "factual and temporal totality of specific and relatively targeted social change processes" (Kollmorgen 1996, 283). In this broad perspective, the concept can certainly find a meaningful application in the cultural sector, even if it often meets with little enthusiasm in cultural policy practice in Germany.

People with a German mentality are considered to be safety-oriented and tend to be rather risk-averse (Klein, 2014). There may be good reasons for this. Changes involve risks. On principle, the core risk of transformation processes can be described as measures taken that may not lead to improvements but to deterioration of existing conditions or to the rise of mere winner-loser discussions. To avoid such debates, any form of transformation should begin with the analysis of existing structures and a formulation of clear goals: Why do we actually need changes? Who will design them and why are they necessary? (See Föhl/Sievers 2013) In terms of cultural policy, in recent years, especially in local contexts, clear challenges have been identified that require constructive action: the consequences of

demographic change, the digitisation and pluralisation of society, changed participation behaviours among cultural recipients, stagnant financial resources with rising expenditures, sometimes parallel (excessive) supplies of similar content, new, frequently invisible cultural actors, the lack of network structures, a lack of cultural education and much more. It is also indisputable that, for example, through many cultural policy measures, and not only within cultural development plans, progress has been made in keeping a vibrant and diverse cultural landscape alive and providing it with prospects for the future despite existing challenges.

Nevertheless, the authors of this article have repeatedly experienced that in numerous cultural development plans there is still a need for functioning methodological approaches for practice in order to derive from the catchword transformation a positive concept of action for different fields in the art and cultural sector.

In any case, we believe that transformation must be a joint process by different actors from civil society, the public sector and the private sector. In the cultural sector, this cross-sectoral approach sometimes meets with resistance. However, cultural participation is no longer a question that concerns only cultural institutions or protagonists from the various arts alone. Rather, actors from politics, industry, science, the educational sector, the socio-cultural sector and the creative industries need to be considered partners. The reason for this is by no means arbitrariness, but a specific form of cultural complexity in which it is only through the different understanding of art and culture in different areas of society that a view of the whole and new partnerships are possible or new synergies are created (see Föhl/Wolfram 2014 and Föhl/Wolfram/Peper 2016). Apart from growth or shrinkage paradigms, transformation is dedicated to changing existing structures and concepts in order to enable new developments on this basis and certainly also to protect the tried and true. Since the additive logic of previous cultural policy procedures is suspended here, since unlimited growth is not possible and also not meaningful, transformative methods often come up against resistance, since they interrupt existing thought patterns and change does, of course, require effort.

We understand transformation within cultural development as a step-by-step process of change in which different persons, groups and institutions use joint reflection, resource assessment, competence exchange and cooperation to open up fields of action that were previously hidden or had only a low level of activity (see the cultural development process examples at www.kulturkonzept-hbn-son.de, www.kep-duesseldorf.de, www.ulm.de/kultur_tourismus/kulturentwicklung_ulm). Transformation processes are usually expressly about cooperative processes, not about interfering with artistic creativity. Put simply, transformation can be described as communicative action that bundles forces and reformulates cultural development approaches.

Fig.: Graffiti in Berlin-Neukölln (© Photo: Patrick S. Föhl).

Transformation as a process

In the following, we attempt to address some concrete aspects of transformation work that have proven to be helpful in cultural development processes in order to shape conceptual and structural changes (for examples and further reading see Föhl/Sievers 2015). It is not about reusable solution templates, but rather about approaches that assume that transformation can usually only be shaped meaningfully in networks and partnerships – but at the same time requires responsible individual actors who act as mediators and communicators in hybrid arrangements. At the same time, analytical and participatory methods are necessary to substantiate corresponding processes. These cannot be discussed here, but we refer to the recent and exemplary use of sequential and up-to-date analysis and participation methods in the context of the cultural development process of the state capital of Düsseldorf (see www.kep-duesseldorf.de).

In order to translate transformative thinking into practice, a look at the relationship between individual actors and networks is necessary (see, for example, Castells 2009, Latour 2010). Especially in many small communities so-called “local heroes” or key persons are found within associations, artists’ cooperatives, galleries, museums, theatres etc.; people highly committed to cultural projects that, in smaller as well as larger social (also digital) networks, are not only well received but experience a response from recipients who are not always users of cultural offerings. They must be made visible and strengthened in cultural development processes.

Fig.: Fishbowl debate during cultural development planning of the state capital of Düsseldorf (© Photo: Jürgen M. Wogirz).

Selected fields of transformation in present-day cultural development processes:

Creating anchor institutions and new cooperative spaces

Many cities and towns have potential “anchor institutions.” These can be theatres, museums, libraries, galleries, community colleges, etc. These spaces often have a traditional and sometimes well-defined usage description, but some can be transformed into new cooperative spaces if they experience an extended or changed usage. For example, many municipal libraries have “reinvented” themselves in recent years as social meeting and event spaces. The same applies to the use of existing spaces for extended purposes. The Badische Staatstheater in Karlsruhe, for example, is opening its lobby, which is currently unused during the day, to students to learn there. This gives the theatre new openness and visibility. In Anglo-Saxon countries they increasingly speak in this context of so-called “makerspaces” or of “creative placemaking,” a development that can also be increasingly observed in Germany.

However, anchor institutions also refer in particular to the opening of an institution to cooperation and the sharing of its own intangible and material resources with other actors from the cultural field for mutual benefit. This approach also goes hand in hand with the realisation that, as a rule (and usually by tradition) a small number of institutions and projects receive a large share of public cultural funding. This results in them bearing an increasing share of responsibility for other cultural actors, who have no or only little access to public resources, to create new responsibilities and participatory structures, but also to prevent cannibalisation effects in the cultural scenes. There are many ways of opening up traditional cultural institutions to new forms of participative and cooperative production. For example, we can cite the Theater Oberhausen or the transformation of the Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg National Theatre into an urban platform in Brussels, in part through the dissolution of the classical artistic director/stage director model to project-related teams composed of various disciplines. The Belgian theatre scholar Ivo Kuyt writes on this, “As an urban platform, the KVS no longer wants to express the identity of just one population group or social class. Rather, it seeks to anticipate a society that does not demand that we adapt to a homogeneous cultural tradition of the past, but which is willing to build a common future through cultural dialogue, coproduction between different cultures and backgrounds.” (Kuyt 2011) This is not just a reaction to a now heterogeneous, individualised, pluralistic and colourful society, but also creates opportunities to cooperatively unite these different horizons of experience in art productions. In this way art and culture again become spaces of social debates, without overtaxing them. On the contrary, this satisfies the demand for dialogue and the integration of diverse views and ways of life. As a result, at least in Brussels, this type of art production also leads to increased audience growth, as many social groups feel directly addressed and included.

However, the above approaches pose the risk that even more funds will be used to strengthen anchor institutions in the already “better-off” facilities. This should be considered and avoided. In general, the discussion is about how existing cultural spaces should be used in the future and how they might be opened without giving up their core content (see the discussion of theatre rehabilitation in Augsburg as an example): <http://www.augsburg.de/kultur/theatersanierung/>.

Fig.: Quatschmobil on duty (© Photo: Patrick S. Föhl).

Formulating activating topics for cooperative cultural development

The experience of many citizens' initiatives (such as on the recent TTIP agreement) shows that active participation of citizens in a digitally oriented society is not just a form of resistance or protest, but rather a desire to participate, to be involved, to shoulder responsibility. This form of participation, revitalised mainly through digital transformation, is almost always thematically oriented and requires new formats for communication (see, as an example, www.quatschmobil.de). Many municipalities have set a thematic profile by focusing on a specific theme (e.g. Donaueschingen on New Music or Graz, Austria with the steirischer herbst festival), which invites participation and even contributes to their international visibility (see Wolfram 2012). However, this requires an extensive dialogue on a guiding theme that must be conducted in a participatory manner and among many sectors to bring about fruitful results (see Föhl/Pröbstle 2013).

Understanding cultural participation and education as a form of community building

Contemporary cultural development planning procedures, as we are presently experiencing them throughout Germany, are also and primarily characterised by participative approaches. But how can difficult questions requiring extensive knowledge (e.g. about buildings, political processes), be discussed constructively and translated into functioning community building? In Germany, this still requires a lot of "training" and a collaborative accumulation of experience (see also Terkessidis 2015). Cultural development planning procedures are suitable for creating occasions for this. But lasting participatory and discourse formats such as cultural advisory councils and cultural conferences are also increasingly important (see Föhl/Künzel 2014). Cultural managers are often suitable actors to moderate and communicate within these interspaces (see Föhl/Wolfram 2014 and Föhl/Wolfram/Peper 2016). In such interspaces, new forms of cultural communities can emerge, which also take into account that actors can no longer be understood through the lens of a single culture (keyword refugee crisis). For example, many civil society NGOs such as the association MitOst e.V. (see www.mitost.org) consistently focus on community building projects (e.g. in the Raumformation project), which result in positive participation of many of their communities or their common good. The aim is to empower various actors in a local area to participate, to make their voices heard and to independently evaluate their work. Something similar is happening increasingly in German municipalities, as cultural development planning in Thuringia demonstrated. Local clubs such as the southern Thuringian association Schwarzwurzel e.V. consciously rely on broad cultural participation methods. This approach "should provide more and more people with a platform to put their own ideas for cultural activities into action" (<http://www.schwarzwurzel.net/verein.html>). This approach is gaining recognition. In 2011, the work of the cultural association was awarded the 2011 Kulturriese Prize for innovative and grassroots cultural projects in Thuringia. In 2012, the association received the third prize in the nationwide Land und Leute competition by the Kulturstiftung Wüstenrot. But there are also many similar approaches in German cities, which very often have their origins in the independent scene. Take for example the theatre projects with Ingo Toben at Düsseldorf's FFT. Since 2007, a team of artists from the fields of music, theatre, film and the fine arts has specialised in cooperation with Düsseldorf pupils. Together with young people, they create performance formats that combine film, installation and live music. The projects combine reality and fiction into new forms of narrative and thereby open up artistic work for the life worlds of young people. At the same time, they illustrate the potential of interdisciplinary cultural work (see <http://www.forum-freies-theater.de/projektemitjugen.html>).

Fig.: Theatrical performance in 2011, Schwarzwurzel e.V. (© Photo: Tobias Kurtz)

Initiating empowerment and outreach processes

Cultural empowerment means enabling people to participate in societal development processes, for example by teaching them to gradually shoulder more and more responsibilities. Specifically and above all, this means inviting people who have not previously been the focus of attention of cultural institutions and projects to actively participate in the work of associations, committees and development processes, while at the same time helping them to understand and adapt existing structures, or even to provide them access at

all to cultural facilities in the spirit of outreach. One example is the current participation project *The Moving Network – Empowerment & Participation* (www.the-moving-network.de and *The Moving Network* 2016). Here refugees are involved in research projects and concrete cultural projects as contributors with specific competences (see Wolfram 2015). This requires that training and mentoring programmes be provided that enable such forms of empowerment. Cultural management thus experiences a dissolution of boundaries, but not in an arbitrary sense. Topics of cultural education, such as access to theatre, visual arts, film, literature and museums, remain the focus of attention, but new participants are focused on. This approach has been impressively proven by the *Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin*. In their cultural education programme *Multaka: Treffpunkt Museum*, Syrian refugees offer guided tours of the collections in Arabic. “Six refugees from Syria were trained as guides at the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* so they could do tours of the exhibitions for their compatriots in their mother tongue. The title of the project is programmatic: In Arabic, ‘multaka’ means ‘meeting place’ and stands for the exchange of various cultural and historical experiences. The *Deutsches Historisches Museum* wants to enable the refugees to approach German culture and history along with the crises and renewal movements. The post-World War II era and the subsequent reconstruction is the main focus of the tours.” (see <https://www.dhm.de/bildung-vermittlung/>) An adept training approach empowers refugees to become cultural actors in Germany and to convey German cultural history from their point of view. This also has an impact on the communities these people come from and to whom the experiences made in the museum are further communicated. This may be a first step in thinking about concrete factors for successful equity management about actual job opportunities for migrants and refugees. The result would be the representation of a diverse, intercultural society in the fixed working structures of cultural institutions.

Enabling visibility and participation via digital platforms

Digitisation is becoming increasingly relevant in the cultural sector as it has a strong influence on the production and reception of art as well as offering new possibilities for cultural mediation. Especially in cultural development planning, concrete requirements are similar in almost every city and municipality. It is often first and foremost a matter of how the many physical (flyers, etc.) and digital information sources in a region can be better consolidated via one format. Furthermore, there are many other possibilities such as the integration of social media activities and specific offers such as the organisation of carpooling (especially important in rural areas) or “*Mitgehbörsen*” – platforms where people can find others to attend cultural events with them – as first successfully realised in Ulm in Germany (see www.mitgehboerse-ulm.de/). In addition, interest communities can be activated much faster and addressed for concrete cultural goals in the digital world (see Al-Ani 2015). This leads to a broader perspective that digital researcher Ayad Al-Ani frequently points out in his work on digital communities: There are not only social and communicative needs that make people get involved online but also the desire for visibility, participation and meaning, which lead to new forms of social and communicative creativity, but also to solidarity. Web communities can thus become real communities, as in the above Ulm *Mitgehboerse* project or on the website *Art But Fair* (www.artbutfair.org), which originated from a Facebook initiative and connects artists to fight for fair pay in the real world of culture.

Shaping cultural development for today’s world

The aspects mentioned here throw a spotlight on a variety of measures that are discussed and developed together in cultural development planning. To address all relevant aspects would have required more space. What we hope to make clear, however, is the changed perspective of cultural policy measures, namely not to think only in segmented decisions for the cultural sector, but to a much broader extent to understand “cultural policy as social policy” (see Baecker 2013) and also to ask about the “relevance” or new opening models in the cultural sector (see Simon 2016). And the challenge to think using the logic of new communities, as well as to allow for controversy and dialogue about changes that have now been negated for too long in many cultural scenes. Especially in times when we hear new populist slogans on the importance of the “German” and “German culture,” an innovative cultural policy based on new group dynamics in Germany, at regional as well as national level, can show that a contemporary understanding

of cultural life in this country is based on models of participation, integration, cosmopolitanism, but also a vibrant awareness of tradition. Models whose appeal lies not in their delimitations but in their involvement of as many actors, institutions and partners as possible.

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Translation: Faith Ann Gibson

The translation was sponsored by the Goethe-Institut