CultureCase

Three big ideas for diversifying arts audiences

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Summary

This paper charts an initiative called 'Intercultural Audience Development' designed to broaden and diversify the audiences for elite arts institutions in Germany. It found that diversification only happens when changes are made to the programming and management of organisations that are inclusive and informed by diverse perspectives, when there is widespread quality arts education for all children, and when those in power abandon the traditional distinctions between highbrow and lowbrow art to support more community and participatory forms.

For publicly funded “high arts” organisations, it is matter of change or die

More immigration to Germany alongside changing cultural tastes across the whole population mean that the generous subsidy to cultural institutions is being questioned. German cultural organisations have not diversified their audiences in recent decades. They remain predominantly white, middle-class and highly educated. Germany spends almost 10 billion Euros a year on its theatres, opera houses, classical orchestras, and museums. Without diversifying audiences, it is likely that support for this subsidy will reduce over time.

One region tried out an 'Intercultural Audience Development' approach

From 2011 to 2013, seven prestigious public theatres, opera houses, and a museum in the North Rhine-Westphalia region received extra funding to 'explore and develop new concepts for attracting hard-to-reach audiences.' Work was created as a result of a collaboration between cultural organisations and local community-based organisations. 'New audiences were younger and included more immigrants (13 per cent) and first-time theatre or museum attendees (50 per cent).'

The new audiences for the shows tended not to return for the regular programming

One reason was that 'no one in their peer groups' attended with them. Another was that 'they feared not understanding and being bored' by the traditional offerings. From the point of view of artistic leaders involved, 'the main effects of the projects were not seen in attracting new audiences, but first and foremost in expanding their own horizons.' The paper concludes that if the organisations themselves are not willing to change then their audiences will remain the same.

Keywords

audience **Germany** **survey**

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