CultureCase

The 'digital turn' taken during COVID was unsustainable

This research was conducted by **Ole Marius Hylland** at **Telemark Research Institute, Norway**

Summary

This paper charts the way that the cultural sector in Norway took a ‘digital turn’ during the first 100 days of the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown in Norway. The research was a rapid response to the crisis – gathering data by tracking the growth of online performances, observing audience behaviour and interviewing artists and organisers. The months of lockdown saw more digital innovation and change than the previous decade. However, the author concludes that the digital turn during the lockdown in Norway represented a ‘temporary disruption’ rather than an enduring transformation of the way that people produce, distribute and consume culture. Paradoxically, ‘fundamental values like collectivity, presence, ambience and the analogue qualities of performances seem to have been rediscovered’ in the move to make everything available online.

Making money from online performances was a major challenge

When lockdown began, lots of people were suddenly able to produce and distribute content online. The rush of activity online was characterised as ‘ad hoc solutions and a combination of idealism, voluntarism and amateurism’. The big challenge was to find appropriate and sustainable sources of revenue.

The pandemic triggered a temporary digital disruption

Many people in the industry saw the explosion of online content as a fad. Data from platforms like Facebook show that interest in online content from producers and consumers waned quickly through the first half of 2020. That interest did not recover in subsequent lockdowns. The digital products and services developed by the cultural sector in lockdown showed no signs ‘that digital concerts could be an actual challenge to the existence of analogue concerts’.

The research should be seen in the “Nordic Model” of cultural policy

This is characterised by ‘a high level of public subsidies’ and ‘a relatively low level of private investment in the cultural and creative industries’. The subsidy means there is normally support for artists livelihoods and an aim to make culture accessible to everyone.

Keywords

COVID-19 **norway** **online** **digital** **lockdown**

Title	The paper charts the way that the cultural sector in Norway took a ‘digital turn’ during the first 100 days of the cultural Covid lockdown in Norway, which started on 12 March and ended on 19 June 2020. The research was a rapid response to the crisis – ga
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