CultureCase

# Establishing a European-style 'culture house' may boost elite culture at the expense of community arts



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## Summary

This research looked at the impact of 52 ‘culture houses’ in Norwegian municipalities. These are high-profile anchor institutions which support (and act as the venue for) a mix of art forms. Specifically, the research aimed to find whether or not the establishment of these venues changed the way that the local government thought about culture when devising policy and budgets. The author found that after the establishment of a culture house there was an increase in the size of the local cultural sector, including an increase in jobs, but that this growth tended to be concentrated on elite or official culture at the expense of community arts.

## The 52 culture houses were opened between 2001 and 2014

The paper was able to build upon a mix of high-quality data on areas of local government spending, employment, population numbers, cultural provision and activity, and local tax revenues. As expected, there was a large increase in the cultural sectors of cities where culture houses had been established. The paper makes clear that this growth may not be the result of the culture house itself, but rather reflect an already-booming sector in which a new culture house would make sense.

# One of the downsides of culture houses is that they shift funding away from community arts activities

The investment needed to build an architecturally impressive culture house results in municipal budget restraint for arts and culture in the years following its completion. This restraint falls unevenly across the local sector in the cities concerned. The data from Norway suggest that municipal governments actually spent more on ‘art dissemination’ (a budget line which covers grants to professional musicians and theatre companies, museums and galleries for exhibitions and tours). In contrast, spending on ‘children and youth activities’ (like play parks, youth choirs, local festivals, etc.) went down.

## Keywords

civic | norway | economic | employment | culture house | funding

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