The power of art galleries in local development:

Tensta Konsthall and Virserums Konsthall in Sweden


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Abstract

How has the development of the well-known art galleries in the Stockholm suburb of Tensta and in Virserum in Småland taken shape in the ten years since they were inaugurated? That is the question that we try to answer in this article. What is certain is that the establishment of these two art galleries demonstrates the power of culture in developing a place that can be enjoyed by both residents and visitors to the area. But it also shows the problems faced by the leadership of art institutions; on the one hand artistic ambitions should be highlighted, on the other hand economic and political interests need to be taken into account.

Both Tensta Konsthall’s and Virserums Konsthall’s establishment and first ten years of operation thus present a history that casts a light on the problems and possibilities which art organisations that use public funds deal with when it comes to management and long term financing. The use of public funds is often a necessity for cultural organisations. It often turns out that the providers of these public funds are actively involved, and have opinions of and demands on the organisation. There can be clear differences between managers of art organisations and funding providers from the public sector when it comes to what is seen as appropriate organisation and expected actions.

The studies of Tensta Konsthall and Virserums Konsthall show the power of culture and art in revitalizing and inspiring, but they also reveal the important role of the public sector in making artistic entrepreneurship possible, with clear positive effects for the region. At the same time, the studies show how bureaucracy and political forces can contribute to both strengthening and weakening artistic entrepreneurship. To better take advantage of the values generated by cultural entrepreneurship, the differences in expectations and organization between actors in the artistic and political spheres must be acknowledged

1 This article is based on a chapter in the book *Kulturens kraft för regional utveckling* (The power of culture for regional development), edited by Lisbeth Lindeborg and Lars Lindkvist, 2010. The article is based on interviews and analysis of secondary material. The material from Tensta was collected by Katja Lindqvist and the material from Virserum by Lars Lindkvist.
**Prologue**

*A beautiful flower grows in the concrete jungle of Tensta. This flower is an art gallery, both daring and important. Tensta Konsthall works experimentally with an extended concept of art, which includes art, design, music, text, performance and architecture. The work is local, international and active. Its basis is innovative teaching that is both interactive and farsighted with in-depth cooperation and projects.* (www.alltomstockholm.se)

Tensta is a district in the western suburbs of Stockholm. The area has just over 17,000 inhabitants, 85% of whom are of foreign background. Tensta was built as part of the “million programme”: 6200 residences were constructed between 1966 and 1972, and the first residents moved in 1967. Residents in the area tend to live in confined quarters, with 3.3 individuals per residence, as opposed to an average of 1.6 in Sweden as a whole. Unemployment levels are high and crime is considered to be rife.

Tensta Konsthall’s website points out that since its conception in 1998 the art gallery has become an internationally recognized centre for contemporary art and has developed a strong educational base which gives the art gallery an important role in the surrounding area. During its development Tensta Konsthall has formulated a value system that strengthens the cultural vision and methodology in three different arenas: the international, the national and the local arena. (www.tenstakonsthall.se)

Virserums Konsthall maintains on its website that art should belong to everyone; the starting point is that the art gallery should be the people’s art gallery.
Everybody philosophizes about life. Who am I, where am I going, how did things turn out this way? That’s why art exists. Virserum Konsthall wants to be the people’s art gallery. We believe that the most important images and the most important stories can be found in the lives of ordinary people, especially in everyday life. Art can bring them out, make them clearer and more profound. Art can open up our imagination. Art should belong to everyone. That is why Virserums Konsthall exists. (www.virserumskonsthall.com)

The stories of Tensta Konsthall and Virserums Konsthall show that art and culture have a very strong power and ability to create an interest, both positive and negative. One of the aims of this chapter is to show how the power of art can both attract and frighten, entice and challenge, and how art generates values, often in unexpected ways, which in themselves can trigger strong reactions.

Tensta Konsthall – compromises and controversies

The day before Christmas Eve 2003 Gregor Wroblewski, initiator and artistic director of Tensta Konsthall, the Stockholm suburb of Tensta’s bright star, finds out that he has been dismissed by the board of the art gallery. The reason is that he with all possible means has stubbornly worked towards realizing a vision: demonstrating that contemporary art in a suburb can give the residents of Tensta a new pride.

The question remains how it came to an open confrontation. What characterized the developments up to Wroblewski’s dismissal and what has happened since then?
Let us remember that Tensta Konsthall developed as an idea of a place for art in Tensta. Gregor Wroblewski, an artist who both lived and worked in the area, thought that the disused space in the lower level of the entrance-way to the subway station in Tensta would be perfect for an art gallery. The Tensta project benefited from Stockholm’s stint as European Capital of Culture in 1998, the preparations for which started some years earlier. In 1997 the District Council in Spånga-Tensta approved temporary funds for the establishment of an art gallery in Tensta, with the help of financial support from “Ytterstadssatsningen”, a project in Stockholm city for the development and improvement of the sections of the city established as a result of the “Million Programme”² on the outskirts of Stockholm. During the first year a board of directors was formed and given the task of suggesting how the gallery would be organized in the future. Gregor Wroblewski was given leave from his regular job in the district administration office in order to work with the art gallery, and a half-time position was created for the period May – December 1998.

Tensta Konsthall was inaugurated on May 8, 1998. Its goals were: to exhibit high quality Swedish and international art, to reach an established audience, and to build up a new audience around the art gallery with focus on the western outskirts of Stockholm.

² The “Million Programme” is the colloquial name of an ambitious housing programme launched in Sweden during the period 1965-1975. The aim was to solve an acute housing shortage by building a million houses and flats in a short period of time, while at the same time increasing housing standards. In total just over one million new residences were constructed, accounting for 25% of all residences in Sweden today. The programme can be seen as a reflection of the ideals of the welfare society. The reason behind the huge scale of the programme was financial – a large-scale project intended for many renters would be more financially secure. In the past decade tens of thousands of these residences have been torn down as demand for housing has decreased, while others have been renovated. Although almost half the buildings erected were single-family homes and few used concrete on the outside, the Million Programme is often associated with “concrete suburbs” where crime and racial segregation are rife.
Financial conditions
The district council awarded the Tensta Konsthall project 4.5 million kronor, which included a 1.2 million extraordinary contribution from the City Planning and Real Estate Division for projects associated with Stockholm’s year as European Capital of Culture. The municipally-owned property company Svenska Bostäder contributed 1.1 million kronor to the project by renovating the space underneath the subway entrance in Tensta Centrum, which would come to house the art gallery. In addition, the art gallery received 300 000 kronor in 1998 for operational costs from Stockholm Kulturhuvudstad 1998 (an organisation which itself falls under the Culture Committee in Stockholm City), and the same amount from the Culture and Sports Division in Stockholm. The total budget for the art gallery’s first year of operation, May-December 1998, was 1.3 million kronor, including expected ticket sales of 40,000 kronor.

In 1999 the Foundation Tensta Konsthall was created, with the help of 5 million kronor left over from Stockholm’s time as Capital of Culture. This sum was used as foundation capital. The foundation had a board made up of people from both the cultural sphere and trade and industry, and an artistic advisory committee was established to make decisions on the art gallery’s exhibition profile.

During the first three years of operation the art gallery’s costs remained within budget, but in 2001 and 2002 costs exceeded the funds provided by the district council (Nikkhakian 2002, Andér 2003). As a result the foundation’s capital was used to cover operational costs. The
board found this to be inappropriate. The artistic director and initiator saw the foundation’s capital as a possible way to finance operations, that is to say, to cover running costs.

For the most part the exhibitions were critically acclaimed successes. During the years 1998-2003 exhibitions were shown with works by Joan Mirò, Julian Opire, Shirin Neshat, Ulf Rollof, Susan Hiller, Dina Thater, Tracey Moffat, Ma Liumig, Eva Koch, Kutlug Ataman, Chris Cunningham, Mark Wallinger and Magnus Wallin, Amar Kanwar and Salla Tykkä. But although the critics were positive not enough visitors turned up.

Demands for a financial inquiry

As the budget year 2003 approached Spånga-Tensta’s financial situation deteriorated. The district council indicated to the board of the art gallery that the gallery’s funding was at risk. This led the board to demand an inquiry by Stockholm City’s Culture Board into the art gallery’s finances and operations in April 2003. The mission of the foundation’s board was to find long-term solutions to the financial and organisational problems of the art gallery, given that the budget deficit of the previous two years had been covered by the foundation’s capital (Dagens Nyheter 2003-11-15).

The art gallery’s board contacted the Culture Administration office and were recommended help in the form of Bo Andér, a development strategist at the administration. The official assignment was threefold, to evaluate: 1. a long-term financing strategy, 2. organisational responsibility, 3. cooperation with other organizations. Andér himself added a fourth task, to do with the art gallery’s profile. In Andér’s report the goals of the art gallery were compared to the national cultural-political goals and the conclusion was that they were not in accord. The suggestion was to implement a broader profile in order to attract more visitors:

*The future development of the organization’s profile/exhibition programs/events should be discussed in terms of greater variety, considering the fact that the organization has so far had trouble reaching the adult “home audience” in Tensta and the relatively low annual visitor figures.* (Andér 2003, p. 6)

In addition, Andér suggested that the gallery should be allowed to keep its formal independence but that it in practice should work in close cooperation with, or as a branch of,
for example the Modern Museum (run by the state) or Kulturhuset in Stockholm (run by the municipality).

The director of the art gallery is questioned
On 18 June 2003 the board of the art gallery decided to deny Wroblewski the right to sign on the company’s behalf on matters related to the art gallery, since he did not want to follow the financial and operational strategy that the board had recommended. The tensions and conflicts between the leadership of the art gallery and its board were now starting to receive attention in the media (Dagens Nyheter 2003-12-21). After the presentation of Andér’s report in the autumn of 2003, there were three separate appeals to allow the leadership of the art gallery the right to make decisions and to keep the gallery’s special organization, in order to prevent an increasing centralization of cultural life in Stockholm. Tensta Konsthall was seen as important because it had a unique agenda and profile and increased the diversity of voices within the institutionalized field of art in Stockholm. The appeals also pointed out that the art gallery was a medium for increasing integration in the city. A number of journalists and professionals within the art world became involved in the conflict, the majority of them supporting Wroblewski against the board (e.g. Dagens Nyheter 2003-10-01 and 2003-10-02, P1 2004-10-20, Göteborgs Posten 2003-12-02, Expressen 2004-01-10).

The director of the art gallery is fired
The conflict between the board and the manager of the art gallery escalated. The district council for Spånga-Tensta decided on 30 October 2003 to revoke its funding for the art gallery because of the conflict between the management and the board. The council decided that it was not productive to support the art gallery while it was involved in a long-drawn out conflict that had a negative impact on the gallery. The district council had previously provided about a quarter of the art gallery’s total budget and revoking the funding meant that the art gallery had to close down immediately.

On 2 December 2003 the head of the Culture Division, Erik Nilsson, had a meeting with the director of the art gallery, Gregor Wroblewski, as well as the board (Dagens Nyheter 2003-12-04). On 12 December the board had a meeting and on 23 December 2003 Wroblewski was fired. One of the members of the board was appointed temporary director. Wroblewski responded by refusing to hand over the keys to the art gallery and closed down the gallery’s
website. The society Friends of Tensta Konsthall dissolved itself in protest against the actions of the board (Dagens Nyheter 2004-01-09).

After Wroblewski’s dismissal both the District Council and the Culture Committee decided to once again approve funding for the art gallery. Then two other employees at the art gallery resigned. New staff and management thus had to be recruited. At this stage the board of the art gallery needed two new members that had direct associations with the district in order to comply with the foundation’s rules. Eventually the board managed to recruit two new members and a management group consisting of three people (see below), thereby qualifying for funding from the municipality and the District Council (Dagens Nyheter 2004-04-21).

**Tensta Konsthall under new operational management**

In May 2004 Ylva Ogland, Jelena Rundqvist and Rodrigo Mallea Lira started their new assignment of leading the art gallery artistically and operationally. The art gallery’s goals and profile were the same as before, that is to say, to exhibit high quality internationally recognized visual art. Their appointments were somewhat controversial, since no one wanted to take the place of the initiator (Dagens Nyheter 2004-05-08, Ericsson 2005). Many who participated in the debate thought that the board should also have been changed, as well as the name of the gallery.

**The art gallery is closed**

The art gallery was closed but reopened under new management on 8 September 2004. In 2007 the municipally owned property company, which owned the gallery’s premises was sold by Stockholm City to the British company Boultbee. Relatively shortly thereafter Boultbee significantly raised the rental fees on the art gallery’s premises, which once again raised the issue of Stockholm City’s continued support for the gallery (Engel & Wickman 2008).

During 2007 Tensta Konsthall was given funding for its rent by the project Järvalyftet, which contributed funds for the renovation and improvement of the suburbs around the area known as Järvaflätet, including Tensta, Hjulsta and Rinkeby as well as other suburbs built during the “Million Programme” years (the late 1960s and early 1970s). The new leadership troika which took over in 2004 had intended to act as artistic directors for five years, but in the autumn of 2007 they discovered that the board of the art gallery had, without informing them, given one of the board members the task of examining the art gallery’s finances. They
resigned from their positions at the start of 2008 (Dagens Nyheter 2008-01-16). In the autumn of 2008 the art gallery was given a new boss, William Easton, who not only had an educational background in art but could also boast long experience of education in marketing. He had previously worked for five years as director of Bergh’s School of Communication, Sweden’s leading school of design, advertisement and marketing (Dagens Nyheter 2008-08-20).

**Entrepreneurship, leadership and change in cultural organizations**

Tensta Konsthall is an example of a development that is not unusual for municipally-funded cultural organizations. Within the cultural sphere the dangers of managing a cultural organization with private sponsorship are often discussed, but we also want to point out the problems that can occur when publicly funded cultural organizations are run by public authorities and financers. The story of Tensta Konsthall’s first 10 years shows the power and ability of visions in leading to change, but also the difficulties faced by artistic entrepreneurship when trying to conform to a rigid political structure.

The entrepreneurship that politicians often want is at risk of being strangled when it is evaluated by a different system. Entrepreneurs stand for long-term visions, while the people in politics, those who actually make the decisions, change during every election period, which makes their actions more short-sighted. But in Tensta Konsthall’s story there are also other dimensions to do with entrepreneurship, leadership and change of cultural organizations. Let us look at these dimensions:

- The importance of artistic visions and entrepreneurship
- The dissimilar strategies of the artistic entrepreneurs and the political/administrative leadership
- The different interests of different political institutions

**The importance of artistic visions and entrepreneurship**

The first dimension in this story is the vision of an internationally recognized art gallery for contemporary art in the suburb of Tensta. This vision was turned into reality by Gregor Wroblewski with the help of three different types of supporting agents: 1. Spånga-Tensta’s district council, 2. Stockholm City, which financed the renovation of the outskirts of the city,
3. Stockholm’s venture as Capital of Culture, which included financial support for cultural organizations. The strength of this vision became clear when it created an immediate interest regionally, nationally and internationally. With Tensta Konsthall’s success it became possible to associate art institutions worth visiting with the outskirts of the city as well. Tensta became a place to travel to for Stockholmers to look at art even if they did not live there. Some years earlier Edsvik Art and Culture had managed to get people to travel to Sollentuna, north of Stockholm. The difference was that the type of affluent residents of Stockholm who already lived in Sollentuna travelled to Tensta as well.

Within aesthetic organizations aesthetic style and judgement is essential for professional success and career advancement. Style and aesthetic judgement form the capital that professionals in the sphere have to offer their employers and buyers. They provide the basis for the creation of a personal trademark and have two consequences. One is that the personal connection to one’s own works and projects is very strong and personal. The other is that artistic taste and judgement steers the entire organization created by the aesthetic vision, including administration and finances. The process of aesthetic production is very different from the production of, for example, products for consumption, which brings with it different types of organization and management (Austin & Devin 2003, Guillet de Monthoux 2004, Lindqvist 2008, Dublin & Lindkvist 2009).

Within the artistic and aesthetic sphere there is a tradition that the artistic director has the last word in all decisions related to production, irrespective of formal positions and the balance of power between artistic and administrative staff. Eikhof & Haurnschild (2006) describe the strong commitment that professionals in the art world often show for their work or their projects as a necessary strategy. An artist’s “name” – his or her trademark – plays a central role when it comes to employability and career opportunities. It is this value that is regulated by work offered and accepted or rejected. The conditions in many artistic and aesthetic organizations require individuals to sacrifice a considerable amount of family life and a private life outside of work.

**The dissimilar strategies of the artistic entrepreneurs and the political/administrative leadership**

As an entrepreneur Gregor Woblewski had to consider the political structure because he was dependent on it for support for the art gallery. With a strong vision, based on the elements of
the highest artistic quality and exhibiting contemporary art, he argued for a greater interest in and support for the gallery, which turned out to be the correct strategy. But what was also needed, in order to create a long-term organisation, was an administrative structure, which required knowledge of formal organizations and their rules. Here Woblewski assumed that the project would be managed by an artistic leadership philosophy based on the artistic director’s final say in decision-making. But this assumption would prove to be fateful for Wroblewski – the board of the foundation he wanted to create to stop politicians from having too much influence instead became his challenger.

In organizational theory the conflict which in the story of Tensta Konsthall took place between the founder of the art gallery, Gregor Wroblewski, and the board of the gallery is known as the principal-agent problem. The principal-agent problem looks at the owner’s perspective (the principal) and ability to direct the management (the agent). According to research on small companies there lies a similar potential conflict between the owner and management, especially during an expansion phase. A founder of a company can be seen as unsuitable as manager because he or she may have developed an exaggerated interest in the company and cannot allow others to make vital decisions which can lead the company in new directions. From a sociological perspective the story of Tensta Kontshall can of course also be seen as a conflict of power, where the definition of the art gallery’s goals and means were subject to other wills; those of the founders, those of the financers (politicians and bureaucrats) and the interpretation of the appointed board.

The strategy for the art gallery’s exhibition profile chosen by Wroblewski was to create high class international art exhibitions, which generated regional, national and international interest. However, this strategy meant that the budget was exceeded (Dagens Nyheter 2003-06-13).

The board of the gallery thought that a more appropriate strategy would be to produce cheaper exhibitions, so that the foundation’s capital would not have to be used. These different strategies would eventually create increasing tensions between the board and the founder and manager of the gallery, Gregor Wroblewski. Many of the spectators to this drama, as well as Wroblewski himself, had expected that the board would support Wroblewski and his creation. In creative organizations it is common that the artistic director has the last word, but in this case the organizational structure was such that the gallery became further removed from a
strictly artistic or aesthetic organization. The board saw Wroblewski as employed by and subordinate to the board, even though he was the founder of the art gallery.

The new management trio that took over after Wroblewski’s departure had a very different relationship to the board. They themselves stated that they were not given any restrictions when it came to the art gallery’s profile (Lindquist 2007b). With the new management the organization became more relational and process oriented, but also more clearly locally oriented than before. It should be noted that this management also resigned, in 2008 after they were not informed of a consultancy job that the board had given to one its members with regard to the art gallery (Dagens Nyheter 2008-01-16).

Maybe it was necessary from an administrative perspective to fire Gregor Wroblewski in order for the art gallery to remain solvent long term. But the question is whether this has benefited the residents of Tensta, Stockholm and other art lovers and future potential entrepreneurs in the field of culture.

Another dimension that affects cultural organizations is the possibility for these organizations to be located in central places in the public space. Many cultural organizations have had to move or close down because commercial rent levels have made their premises too expensive. In the case of Tensta Konsthall, the art gallery contributed to creating a higher value for the gallery’s premises, for which they then had to pay higher and higher rent. Cultural organizations thus often risk paying double for the value they generate.

**The different interests of different political organizations**

The story of Tensta Konsthall shows the capriciousness of political municipal support for culture. Tensta Konsthall has been affected by the fluctuations in the finances of the district and municipality, with funding both approved and withdrawn. This capriciousness is an extra dimension, besides the ones associated with the usual economic upswings and downswings. When Stockholm City decided to evaluate the usefulness of Tensta Konsthall, in order to decide whether to provide further funding, the criteria were very different from those that the district council had applied up that point.

For the district council in Spånga-Tensta it was enough that the art gallery gave the area a good name and brought new visitors to the district, in order to justify giving public support
This made the district’s inhabitants feel proud of their art gallery and their district. The art gallery attracted about 10,000 visitors every year, of which the majority came from other parts of Stockholm. The district council in Spånga-Tensta thus did not have any particular demands that the local population should visit the art gallery. To the contrary, visitors from outside were seen as valuable by the residents and politicians in Tensta.

But in order to receive funds from the Culture Committee and Culture Administration in Stockholm City it wasn’t enough that visitors from other parts of Stockholm travelled to Tensta. The politicians in City Hall instead expected the residents of Tensta to be the primary visitors to the district’s art gallery. That art-loving Stockholmers came and visited Tensta Konsthall was seen as less important because there were already other arenas for these people in the inner city.

Englund (2004) argues that Andér in his evaluation of Tensta Konsthall made the assumption that the residents of Tensta demanded locally produced art in order to become more involved in the art gallery. Yet there were no surveys that suggested that this assumption was correct.

**Virserum Konsthall – from idea to success**

*An art gallery of this dignity should not have been located in Virserum, but in a large city. Yet the reason that it exists at all is because it is located in Virserum. Here the impossible can become possible. A truth which holds even truer for the art gallery. Just look at Pappershuset (The Paper House). Virserum Konsthall is one of the most talked-about art galleries outside the larger cities. It directs its work at ordinary people, bases its exhibitions on ordinary people’s experiences and perspectives. Art that one can recognize, reflect on and understand is the art gallery’s showpiece. This is how the Regional Council in Kalmar County presents Virserum Konsthall on its website of things to see in Eastern Småland.*

Virserums Konsthall is located in the municipality of Hultsfred, in the Dackestop area, which also features the Stinsen Art- and Crafts Association, the Telemuseum, the Bolaget coffee shop, and the community’s tourist office³. The municipality has 14,000 inhabitants and is a typical rural municipality, with a manufacturing industry, young people leaving the area, and

³ Lars Lindkvist wishes to thank Henrik Teleman for conversations and correspondence and Barbro Wendén for providing ten years worth of minutes and press cuttings about the art gallery.
an ageing population. During the 19th century furniture making was already an important source of income. This industry expanded during the years of bad harvest during the 1860s and has continued to develop. In 1947 there were more than 40 furniture factories in the area. The largest was O.E. Ekelunds Snickerifabrik, which was located alongside one of three sets of falls in the Virserum Beck in Virserum. It is at this site that Dackestop and the art gallery have since been built (Johnson 2009).

Trade and industry in the area is dominated by wood-based industries with sawmills, house building and carpentry companies, and IKEA which produces particle board and flat-pack furniture. What separates this municipality from so many others is that there are many well-known and successful cultural and sports operators in the area. Rockparty and the Hultsfred festival, Virserums Konsthall and Virserums Music Days can all be found in the municipality, but also the Speedway team known as “Dackarna”, which for many years could be found at the top of the elite league. But to sum up, life in the community is dominated by values where things that can be touched are perceived to be more important than ideas.

Virserums Konsthall is owned and operated by a non-profit society with Henrik Teleman as artistic director. Its work is project oriented and features installation-based art. The gallery is financed by funding from the Regional Council in Kalmar County, the municipality of Hultsfred Municipality, the Swedish Arts Council, the business community, admission
charges and organizations. A large part of the funds (55-75%) are, and always have been, project funds. But let us go 10 years back in time and take a look at how it all began.

Emphasis on local mobilisation right from the start
The last furniture manufacturer, O.E. Ekelunds Snickerifabrik AB, closed down in 1971 and in 1996 renovation of the disused premises started. On the site where “the Company”, as it was known, previously operated the town’s biggest furniture factory, a great deal of effort was now put into creating what come to be known as Dackestop. The work was led by former municipal commissioner Bengt Rosander, who was also in favour of building an art gallery.

After Henrik Teleman moved to a small house in the woods near Virserum he approached Bengt Rosander and asked if it would be possible to do something exciting in the way of art with the building that used to store oak. In 1993 Henrik had gathered 30,000 pairs of work gloves for an installation at Lunds Konsthall (AKUT) and in 1994 he had worked for Arbetets museum (The Labour Museum) with a large exhibition. He threw himself into his new task with great enthusiasm:

The building was covered in pigeon shit and the subsidence was something to behold. But it wasn’t even funded so we had to start with the Bonarverkstad (Wax Shed) where the Telemuseum is now housed. The oak storeroom was ready in time for the TV-exhibition Dreamworld, 16 months late. The Wax Shed opened on 27 June 1998.

On 27 June 1998 the art gallery was inaugurated with an exhibition entitled “Virserum en dröm – en utställning om det moderna Sverige” (Virserum a dream – an exhibition on modern Sweden). It was based on the photo albums of the local population and the visitors streamed in.

Ideologically and aesthetically two questions were central for the art gallery right from the start: 1. Whose story are we telling? 2. How do we tell it and to whom? The idea was that Virserum would be the mirror through which one saw the world outside.

The concept of “local development” was central right from the start, in part to secure funding in connection with the EU. Culture’s most important contribution to local development was seen as intellectual and democratic. People learn, expand their views, become visible and
achieve a conscious relationship with the world around them. At the same time, Virserums Konsthall has, according to Henrik Teleman, always wanted to become a visitor destination. As early as 1999 there were thoughts of a “Wood Biennial” in order to contribute more to the local economic development.

The inspiration came from the French idea of the eco-museum, as expressed in for example Hugues De Varine’s article “Lokalmuseet som process” (The local museum as process) in the journal Nordisk Museologi (1996). In this article it is argued that a museum can contribute to local development by mobilizing a town’s assets and taking stock of local resources. This should be done by the residents themselves.

This is where the museum comes in. Special cultural tools are needed in the development project, in order to identify resources, formulate goals, indicate strategies and methods – in short, in order to mobilize the community. This cannot always be achieved by verbal means, by writings and speeches; they must be communicated using the language of tangible things, through direct, concrete experiences. But this is not a normal task for a normal museum working in a traditional way... We must create a new type of museum, or rather, use museum methods that have been developed in countries with strong local communities. (De Varine 1996, p. 62).

This view of the importance of local mobilisation can also be found in Virserum Konsthalls “statement of principle” from 1998/99. Here we can read:

Art uses, creates and develops language for people to use. Life is the greatest story and the greatest storyteller. Virserums Konsthall works with giving shape to the experiences and questions of ordinary people ... We work from a popular perspective, which is worth disseminating outside our area... Art and democracy very much belong together.

This bottom-up perspective has not changed during the art gallery’s ten year existence and in the latest operational plan from 2009 it is clearly emphasized.

By working from a consistent bottom-up perspective, Virserums Konsthall can create knowledge about and give a different picture of life and today’s Sweden when compared to the increasingly commercialized and centralized mass media, while at the same time this
perspective is a precondition for breaking with the consensus currently in place within so-called contemporary art.

**Funding from many sources**

According to Henrik Teleman, one of the initiating factors in the creation of the art gallery was Stockholm’s venture as European Capital of Culture in 1998. When Minister of Culture Marita Ulvskog gave Stockholm 100 million kronor, 25 million was promised to the rest of the country as compensation. Part of this sum was used as a contribution to Virserums Konsthall. This funding was then available for a couple of years as a support fund provided by the Swedish Art Council known as “Kultur i hela landet” (Culture in the entire country). Contributions from this fund had a positive effect on the art gallery. Since that time the organisation has mainly operated with public funding.

For the year 1998 the budget was calculated to be 696,000 kronor and in order to cover these costs an application for 443,000 kronor was submitted to “Kultur i hela landet” and for 371,000 kronor from Stiftelsen Framtidens Kulturen (the Art of the Future Foundation), with some overlap between the sums. In addition an application for 32,000 kronor was made to the regional authorities and 36,000 kronor was sought from the municipality of Hultsfred for rent and running costs.

In 2003 Virserums Konsthall received funding to the tune of 1,500,000 kronor from the EU’s Objective 2 fund. This was reduced as time went on and by 2006 had fallen to nothing. In the spring of 2005 the Regional Council in Kalmar County and the municipality of Hultsfred agreed to each provide 350,000 kronor in basic funding and 250,000 kronor in project funding. If one adds in the Swedish Art Council’s contribution of 600,000 kronor, regular contributions came to a total of 1,800,000 kronor.

The financial situation for the past decade (1999-2008) looks like this: the Swedish state has contributed 16.5 million kronor (32%), the EU 13.2 million kronor (26%), other sources (projects, admission charges etc) 12.7 million (25%), Hultsfred municipality 4.8 million kronor (9%) and the Regional Council in Kalmar County 4.4 million kronor (8%).

In 2009 the following regular funding was awarded to Virserums konsthall: from the region 1,350,000 kronor, from Hultsfred municipality 600,000 kronor, and from the state 500,000
The number of visitors to the museum has varied through the years, reaching a peak of 28,000 visitors during Trä 2007 (Wood 2007), considerably more than the 2360 residents who live in Virserum.

The number of visitors has declined recently, though, from 28,000 visitors in 2007 to 12,000 in 2008. This shows the difficulties in maintaining continuity at the gallery. But by cutting costs and reducing the number of yearly exhibitions from six to three the expectation is that museum will survive financially until the large Wood Biennial in 2010 when the financial situation is expected to improve.

In order to clarify the financial situation and provide a clear framework the Regional Council in Kalmar County, Hultsfred municipality and Virserums Konsthall have reached the following agreement for development in 2008-2010. Its purpose:

*the long-term development and establishment of Virserums Konsthall as a creative centre for art, where art, education and a connection with the forest and wood forms the basis of the organization.*

Virserums Konsthall will be part of Regional Council’s Art Group, which has formulated a document with goals, “Strategy for the development of art in Kalmar County”, intended to guide the art gallery’s regional work. What is emphasized in this agreement is that Virserums Konsthall is a regional operator in art, whose activities cross boundaries into other areas. Virserums Konsthall intends to give people the chance to experience contemporary art, awaken an interest in the forest and in wood, and operate educational programs.

The Regional Council in Kalmar County and Hultsfred municipality guarantee Virserums Konsthall an annual grant, which will be at least at the same level as that of the previous year. The grant is paid biannually, without need for an application. For each of the next three years the Regional Council will contribute 1.35 million kronor and Hultsfred municipality 600,000 kronor. The Regional Council’s contribution is paid out on condition that matching funds are provided by the County Council.
Exhibitions featured during a 10-year period
Virserums Konsthall has for the past decade been the subject of much discussion due to its controversial exhibitions. In Swedish cultural circles Virserum Konsthall is mentioned with respect and admiration. In 2001 the art gallery was nominated for Museum of the Year, for the following stated reason:

*Virserum Konsthall has moved away from the canon when it comes to the establishment, form and content of an art gallery for contemporary art. It works for contemporary art touching the people who live in Virserum which means that the exhibitions and artistic projects organized by the art gallery are influenced by the people and life of Virserum – without foregoing artistic ambitions. The art gallery builds on a symbiosis between the artists and the residents of Virserum, which means that the art gallery sees the values of a public not used to art and meets them with respect.*

The exhibitions were inaugurated in 1998 with the exhibition *Virserum en dröm – en utställning om det modern Sverige* (Virserum a dream – an exhibition on modern Sweden) where 10,000 private photographs were collected from the 1950s, 60s and 70s, a time during which Sweden rose as a combination of welfare state and consumer society. The opening day drew 380 people, 960 came on the second day and the public streamed in. In 1999 the TV-exhibition *Dreamworld* was carried out, where the daily TV-lives of families from Malmö to Luleå were depicted. In 2000 a youth *Ambassad* (Embassy) was created, featuring various youth activities. At the same time staff at the art gallery started to take impressions of the hands of Virserum residents, something that they have continued to do ever since. The first textile exhibition *Liv och Längtan* (Life and Longing) was also completed in 2000. In 2001 two popular exhibitions were carried out: *100 år av småländska möbler* (100 years of furniture from Småland) and a depiction of women called *Ett hyggligt liv* (A decent life).

The election year of 2002 featured the exhibition *Makten* (Power), on power and the use of power in Sweden. Other exhibitions included *Skogens Människor* (People of the forest) and *Urskogens väsen* (The primeval forest’s being). In 2003 Wanja Djanieff created *Textilsommar* (Textile Summer) and graphic art by retail employees was presented in *Över disken* (Over the counter). In 2004 the residents of Virserum participated in *Vår utställning* (Our exhibition), during the summer *Träbiennalen* (the Wood Biennial) was presented and December featured *Jag – om grabbar* (I – about lads). In 2005 Hultsfred lads photographed themselves in the
exhibition *Vi (We).* Textile Summer was repeated. *Hata Sydkraft och Telia/Älska Sydkraft och Telia/Rata Nödkraft och Felia* (Hate Sydkraft and Telia/Love Sydkraft and Telia/Reject Emergency Power and Failia), an exhibition on the aftermath of the winter storm known as Gudrun which led to lengthy problems with downed power lines and telephone cables, inspired 20 TV-segments and 170 newspaper clippings in the entire country. In 2006 the big summer exhibition was *Summer of Love,* carried out together with RFSU (The Swedish Association for Sexuality Education) and resulting in twelve radio programmes co-produced with Sveriges Radio P1 (Swedish Radio P1).

In 2007 *Trä 2007 - Bygga i trä, leva med trä* (Wood 2007– Building with wood, living with wood) was carried out when the new Pappershuset (Paper House) was opened. The summer of 2008 saw Sweden’s first Art Camp, which became a big success and was repeated in 2009. During the spring of 2009 *Ung 2009* (Young 2009) was held – a seminar on youth on the edge and art as communication. The theme was self-image, youth violence and moving away from or staying in a town.

In the spring of 2009 Virserums Konsthall moved permanently into Pappershuset, thus becoming one of Sweden’s largest art galleries, with an exhibition area measuring 1200 square meters. Exhibitions that are not produced locally can now also be shown, including international exhibitions. As stated in the 2009 operational plan:

*For those who want to see exhibitions that depict people’s lives and circumstances it should be a natural thing to travel to Virserum. Virserums Konsthall should be an obvious meeting point for the social arts and its practitioners.*

**Ten years of wisdom as director of the art gallery**

When Henrik Teleman looks back at what he has learned as director of an art gallery with a local focus, he says that there are many experiences and problems to talk about. He doesn’t see all of them as solvable. Above all there are three insights that Teleman has gained as entrepreneur and director of a local art gallery:

- Satisfying both local and national artistic interests can be contradictory
It is important to find ingenious sources of financing – different funds from different levels are needed

Initial enthusiasm gives way to formalization and institutionalization

Satisfying both local and national art interests can be contradictory
Because Virserums Konsthall has moved away from the canon of what the focus of an art gallery or museum should be and which audience is served, Teleman feels that the gallery “bounces back and forth between different sociocultural categories”.

Our primary audience is the local one, people who often do not have any experience of art and have a low level of education. These are the people we have to work with. This audience does not demand much in the way of peculiarities in order to feel spoiled. At the same time our work makes us heroes among many culture bureaucrats, but in order to talk to these people, we need to use a language of which the locals do not understand a word. Yet at the same time we are an art gallery, and must for the sake of funding exhibit many artists (who do not normally function with our local audience). In addition we are prone to various unexpected actions that have made us popular, much discussed and criticized – but these do not exactly cooperate with the idea of the art gallery as a visitor destination. A destination should offer a feeling of well-being – politics are ugly.

The staff at Virserums Konsthall arrange seminars, publish books, write newsletters, create projects, arrange Christmas markets, Speedway exhibitions, an exhibition on Gaza, national projects on job redundancies, and international initiatives on the architecture of necessity. At the same time, project financing (such as for Wood 2010) means that the daily work, the building of relationships, is drained of resources.

It is important to find ingenious sources of financing – different funds from different levels are needed
Teleman thinks it is vital for Virserums Konsthall that the project funding comes from several different contributors and different levels and that good contact is maintained with knowledgeable and independent civil servants.

Labour market funding and EU funding in various forms were important for the establishment of the art gallery. However, the trend is that access to project funding is diminishing, both
when comes to the cultural sector and other parts of society. At the same time EU-funding has become harder to come by. That is why different types of funding on different levels are necessary.

If one person says no, another may say yes. If one says yes, one can force a third party to also say yes. The increased costs connected to institutionalization (see below) in combination with increased costs for projects means that the art gallery is today far more careful when it comes to taking the initiative in establishing new projects. In the long run our finances have decreased, which is hardly in the interests of the county or the municipality.

Able and independent civil servants with cred who can be part of the organization then become extremely important. With politicians one can normally discuss one or two questions at the more formal meetings. An additional problem is the relationship between the entrepreneur and the public sector. Everybody loves the entrepreneurs, but nobody knows how they work. If a new image is created of something that doesn’t exist, expectations are also created. But when this happens, someone has to finance the project.

Henrik Teleman finds it is difficult to get timely decisions, positive or negative, from financers when he needs them. This means that he has to speculate on what the outcome will be.

There are two alternatives: we either take risks and develop, or we do nothing, which means safety but stagnation. But if we take risks and fail the politicians concerned think that we are irresponsible. It is basically impossible to start reasonable, proactive discussions, which is one of my greatest sorrows.

Initial enthusiasm gives way to formalisation and institutionalisation
As entrepreneur and founder Teleman looks back at the development of the past 10 years, from the original enthusiasm to a greater formalization and institutionalization of the art gallery.

To leave behind that idealistic passion of the first five-six years is a painful process that is not easy to handle. (See also e.g. Rockparty, Edsviks konst och kultur, Tensta, Baltic Art Center, Färgfabriken). Those of us that are left – like me – are becoming more tired and want a little
bit more security. Suddenly one needs to follow rules on working hours and contracts. Newer colleagues tend not to have the same focus as I have. One needs to be able to do so much more that has nothing to do with art or the building of relationships. Becoming a visitor destination means being involved in a large number of things that we never thought about much from the start: a café, the outside environment, tourist information, etc. How does one build structures and routines for the sake of clarity, while at the same time creating projects, and keeping the passion, which is supposed to be a little spontaneous? (Because we don’t want to be a NORMAL culture institution.)

The power of culture in local development
When it comes to Vireserums Konsthall’s influence on local development in Virserum Henrik Teleman points out that there have not been any in-depth surveys and interviews on its effects, but he wants to emphasize the following types of influence that the art gallery has contributed to:

- A more positive self-image and outward image
- Well-known visitor destination
- A focus on local consumption, with an increase in job opportunities
- Greater democratic significance

More positive self-image and outward image
The most frequent comments about our existence have to do with self-image, or rather the image of Virserum. People who travel around notice that everybody knows Virserum because of the art gallery. Previously Virserum was known for its furniture industry and the entertainment site of Kärringryggen, but from the 1970s onwards the image was dominated by crisis and stuffiness. Nowadays the image of Virserum is positive, thanks to the art gallery. We are now used to the fact that there are actually quite a lot of things happening in little Virserum. In that respect one can see the gallery’s worth as a negation: “But if we disappeared it would be noticed.”

Since we started Virserums Kontshall the Blanda och Ge Theatre Company and Dackespelet (a play about Nils Dacke, a 16th-century farmer and leader of a revolt against Gustav Vasa) have been established and the local community association has become more ambitious and is
now showing movies, among other things. The latter is even run by young people. Many of the other associations are dominated by the aged. In this respect I am convinced that we have led by example. The art gallery has for the second year in a row collected all the community’s societies in one common event in Pappershuset in the autumn – Liv och rörelse i Virserum (Life and action in Virserum). A few people have actually ended up in Virserum for good because of the art gallery.

The art gallery also sets an example regionally and nationally – that it is actually possible.

Well-known visitor destination
Virserums art gallery attracts between 15-25,000 visitors a year, and at least half of these come from outside the community. It is hard say how much these visitors consume while visiting the community. These days there is a society involved in marketing Virserum and its shops called “Virserums köping” (Virserum’s market town). It markets Virserum under the heading “Culture and shopping”. Virserums Konsthall is the only cultural activity in Virserum that is open all year round, so that motto would be difficult to maintain without us.

Before the summer of 2009 Virserums Konsthall published a newspaper on Art and Culture in Småland, printing a hundred thousand copies. A total of two and a quarter pages were dedicated to activities in Virserum: the market town, the Virserum Days market, Virserum’s Music Days. This newspaper also functions as a marketing opportunity for Småland and culture in Småland. The Stinsen Art & Craft Centre always has its best sales days during the annual Christmas market arranged by the art gallery.

Focus on local consumption with increased job opportunities
One area where we have had a very big influence, or at least have been an important part of a significant development, is in the field of wood. The wood industry has always been good at increasing productivity but has in other ways been characterized by low education levels and an almost autistic relationship with its surroundings. In 2003 we carried out the first “Smålands trädagar” (Småland Wood Days), 2004 saw our first giant project “Träbiennalen 2004” (Wood Biennial 2004), which included the participation of 160 companies and the building of Pappershuset. The other exhibition “Trä 2007 – Bygga i trä, leva med trä” (Wood 2007 – Building with wood, living with wood) emphasized that wood is an important construction material.
We can see that the attitude towards higher education, and the need for (and knowledge of) communicating on different levels with the surrounding world has changed dramatically since we started our conscious work in 2003. “Trä 2010” (Wood 2003) is the third large exhibition on the art and architecture of wood construction at Virserums Konsthall. This time there will be an international focus; the portal exhibition “Bäst i världen” (Best in the world), which focuses on housing and construction in the future, will be touring Sweden, Scandinavia and Europe.

**Increased democratic significance**

What is most important for us is the democratic significance of our work. The art gallery elucidates the experiences of ordinary people in two ways. Our audience is given back its experiences and images so that they become languages/symbols to use in understanding themselves and society – an intellectualizing and democratic process. These narratives and images are also made available to a wider audience. They make our marginalized public visible.

At the same time, the art gallery presents new opportunities and realities to the public, but also through for example publications, and “more advanced” discussions and questions such as in seminars like “Kärlekens väsen” (Love’s being) in the spring of 2006, “Kvinnor och islam” (Women and Islam) in the autumn of 2007, and “UNG 2009” (Young 2009) this past spring. Some of the ethnological and youth-focused projects are also in part research oriented. The art in general has a very open character, one that recognizes the imagination, which is important in areas such as the Kalmar region where relatively traditional and inhibiting values abide.

**Conclusions**

Based on the factors identified as central in the analysis of the history of Tensta Konsthall’s and Virserum Konsthall’s first ten years of operation, some conclusions can be drawn as to the potential of culture in local development.
Both cases show some common elements: an idea of a high quality art venue, located in a spot with significant physical as well as social non-existent current value, but with considerable potential to put a deprived or anonymous area or region “on the map”. A physical location for a cultural enterprise that would generate resources and its specific social value from the unique combination of physical location and cultural quality, with very low infrastructure investments, and with an initiator who knew the local limitations and had a position or the persistence to mobilize resources for a new art enterprise. As the enterprises became successful, questions of long-term funding became more pressing, and this is where the enterprises needed more formal support from their political, social and economic contexts, but at the same time the original ideas were questioned as a strategy for the enterprise to gain solidity.

Culture is seen as an optimal tool for urban and regional regeneration, and both cases presented in this paper are excellent examples of the power of fine arts in creating new energy in a place previously without social meaning. However, as Bailey et al. (2004) and Moss (2002) have shown, the regenerating effects of cultural investments are not so simple to achieve as often stated, the effects of public support are ambiguous. Clearly, the passion and commitment of the initiators and first artistic leaders of these art galleries were vital to their establishment, but this commitment was also closely related to the personal priorities and sense of quality of these leaders. This personal profile proved to be a contested arena in both cases, and the high quality of the profile was perceived to be problematic by other stakeholders, such as politicians, to secure broad support. At the same time, it was this personal and exclusive profile that really secured the power to reinvent the places in which the art galleries were established.

Artistic leadership is closely tied to aesthetic and artistic decisions that need to be taken in close contact with the actual production of art. There is still a need for boards and managers to help consolidate successful art enterprises, and to release artistic directors of unnecessary administrative burdens. Thus the risk of institutionalization processes immediately enters the enterprise, and more so with public support, where politicians judge an enterprise from their political perspective which does not always recognize the social and cultural values of art enterprises to their full extent. A conclusion both from literature on the influence and role of founders in start-up organisations that become established, and from the cases investigated, is that it seems to be a true dilemma. It is a problem, from a management point of view, that
founders have such a strong commitment to their enterprises. From the point of view of the founder and artistically involved stakeholders, however, too much formality in management easily kills the value of an art enterprise. The enthusiasm of art enterprise initiators appears, according to boards and management, to be problematic as long as it is not available for more rational, more instrumental aims of politics and formal structures. The entrepreneurship, compassion and personal engagement so sought after in institutional contexts, government, and public administration today, is not accepted as it is too passionate and personal.

To sum up: one conclusion is that it is important that the differences in expectations and organization between the artistic and political spheres are recognized and negotiated. Successful artistic organizations cannot be calculated ahead of time. It is due to the individual initiative taker and his or her ability to use a network of contacts and to create interest for his or her vision that it becomes possible for the whole thing to be turned into reality. Starting a company and running a company are not the same things; they require different resources and abilities. At the same time, cultural organizations are dependent on the aesthetic judgement that those working within the arts often have to a far greater degree than administrators and managers.

Another conclusion is that short-term nature of politics can do great damage to a cultural organization. What is needed from politicians is a more long-term commitment that goes beyond their own term of office. Politicians like to talk about the positive aspects of entrepreneurship and that culture can create added value. But unfortunately it appears to be difficult for original ideas to become reality without being subjected to the political wording and priorities of the day (Du Gay 2008). Hubris, the erotic form of revelation for artistic power, is not appreciated by the Apollinic bureaucrats and politicians – moderation over originality seems to be the norm (Lindqvist 2008).

A third conclusion is that political interests set the conditions for cultural institutions. In order to gain legitimacy, culture’s goals and profile often have to adapt to political interests, which are vital for the cultural organization’s finances. Thus one political institution can accept an organizational profile while another may not. Culture that is tied to politicians’ apron strings runs the risk of becoming a meaningless organization – visions and commitment require that risks are taken. Politicians thus tend to be less willing to become involved in risky projects, despite all the talk of culture’s central role in regional development.
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