Bridging digital

INTERCULT IO 1 Mapping Conclusions:

Bridging Digital is a cooperative European Erasmus + project focusing on innovative practices and enhancing the digital skills in the creative and informal education sectors.

Based on the results from our desk research and interviews conducted by SMart for the Digital Blackbox-project, we can draw a number of conclusions on the current status of digital technology and its use among professionals in the performing art sector in Sweden.

A significant increase in the use of digital technology in the field:

According to several of the sources present in our desktop research, the number of performing art institutions, groups or artists that create content with some kind of digital technology involved have significantly increased in conjunction with the Covid-19 pandemic. [1]

The increase consists first and foremost of digitalised versions of performances, either recordings or live streams, who have been made available either through the institutions or artists own streaming service or via larger, third party websites such as Youtube. [2] Only a limited number of groups or individuals in the performing art sector used digital platforms prior to the pandemic, mostly larger and public funded, but as of the pandemic more smaller stages and artists have begun to create and upload digital content as well. [3]

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[1] Post- och telestyrelsen, Digital omställning till följd av covid-19, 2021, s.21-22; Svensk scenkonst, Framtidens Kulturkonsumtion, 2021, s.20,22; SOU 2021:77 Från kris till kraft. Återstart för kulturen, 2021, s.121.

[2] Från kris till kraft, s.122.

[3] Post- och telestyrelsen, s.21-22.

A widespread lack of competence:

A recurring concern brought up in the examined material is a, at least perceived, lack of digital competence among those active in the field. This lack of competence is explained as a product of their limited experience.

As mentioned above, most of the professionals in the performing art sector had little to no experience with creating any form of digital content prior to the limitation on public gatherings due to the pandemic. The limitations, which started in march of 2020, forced the performing art sector to rapidly move their focus to digital formats. [4]

An increased level of competence is, according to previous research, a necessity in order to improve the quality of recorded performances and to use technology in order to evolve their work.[5] Beyond competence in digital technology, producing digitised performing art also requires a new type of artistic competence, in order to create a comparable digital version of the analog original.[6]

… and resources:

The other significant challenge for creators of performing art in Sweden when it comes to using digital technology is a lack of resources. According to a survey commissioned by the Swedish government, a lack of economic resources is effectively discouraging the performing art sector from developing their work with digital technology. [7] For the groups and artists who first and foremost create analog and location based performances, the creation of digital versions result in additional costs. They need to dedicate resources for competent staff, technological equipment and other infrastructure, such as digital platforms, etc. Content available through the internet also results in an increased cost for copyrights. [8]

There also seems to exist a widespread uncertainty regarding the monetizing of produced digital content. According to the sector associationSvensk Scenkonst (Swedish Performing Arts Association) a majority of the public funded institutions haven't monetized their digital content. In order to make it sustainable from an economic standpoint, they need both an increase in funding and new revenue models. [9] And according to a survey done by Svensk Scenkonst the quantity of the audience interested in watching digital performing art is very low and those willing to pay for it is even lower. [10] This creates an uncertainty regarding how a continued investment in digital technology can be made profitable, especially in a way that doesn't affect the rest of the creative work in a negative fashion. The increased amount

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[4] Från kris till kraft, s.220-221.
[5] Från kris till kraft, s.126.
[6]Statens Kulturråd, Ökad digitalisering av offentligt finansierad kultur i Sverige, 2016. s.18.
[7] Från kris till kraft, s.220-221.
[8] Från kris till kraft, s.122.
[9] Från kris till kraft, s.19; Svensk Scenkonst, s.28.
[10] Framtidens Kulturkonsumtion, 2021, s.30-31; Framtidens Kulturkonsumtion, 2020, s.33-35; Post- och telestyrelsen, s. 29.

of available digital content also contributes to an increased expectation regarding its quality.[11] Possibly making it even harder to catch the interest of the audience.

As of now the type of investment needed to to develop their digital competence isn't something that many of the producers of performing art can financially manage. In order to achieve a continued development of the digital content produced there need to be a change to the current economic structures and cultural politics as they still only accommodate for an analog consumption of culture. [12]

A need for an audience:

An aspect where the difference between digitized and traditional, on location stage performances is apparent, is in the interaction with the audience. Even though many of the institutions and artists heard in the surveys have begun to produce digital content they express a longing for an opportunity to be able to meet an audience participating on location again. An aspect of performance that appears to be central to the audience members as well. According to Svensk Scenkonst's survey 67% claim that experiencing the performance on location among other people is a "very important" part of the experience.[13]

Even though a big portion of the material examined in this mapping process claims that digitally available content has the potential to reach a wider audience there is, especially at publicly funded institutions, a concern over risking to alienate or exclude audience members by creating more digital and internet dependent content. Specific elderly and underprivileged groups in society, due to a perceived lack of digital competence and access to technology among these groups. [14]

The increase of content available through digital platforms has also made it even more of a challenge, especially for smaller creators, to reach a possible audience. According to a survey commissioned by the Swedish government, the larger amount makes it difficult for the audience to find content other than what's available through the big mainstream platforms. [15]

Although several of the artists and institutions heard in several of the examined sources claim to be interested in continuing to create and develop their digital content, many claim to be longing for a physical audience. Many also claim that they have an intent to continue producing digital content, but as more of a compliment to their regular, analog work and stage productions. [16]

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[11] Från kris till kraft, s.220-221.
[12] Från kris till kraft, s.121-122, s.134.
[13] Framtidens Kulturkonsumtion, 2020, s.19; Från kris till kraft, s.170.
[14] Myndigheten för kulturanalys, *En översyn av pandemins effekter inom kulturområdet, 2021*, s. 9, 23; Från kris till kraft, s.22.
[15] Från kris till kraft, s.199.
[16] Från kris till kraft, s.122-123; Svensk Scenkonst, s.28.

Sources

The following page presents a list of a number of publications, reports and surveys covering different aspects of digitalisation of the culture sector in Sweden, with a focus on performing art. A majority of them can be seen quoted above.

Official Report of the Swedish Government
Från kris till kraft. Återstart för kulturen.
[From crisis to force. Restart for the culture], 2021.

Official Report of the Swedish Government
Konstnär oavsett villkor
[Artist despite conditions], 2018

Kulturdepartementet [Ministry of Culture]
Politik för konstnärens villkor
[Politics for the artists' conditions], 2021.

Myndigheten för kulturanalys
[The authority for cultural analysis]
Ett år med pandemin - Konsekvenser och offentliga insatser inom kulturområdet
[One year with the pandemic - Consequences and public cultural area], 2021

Myndigheten för kulturanalys
[The authority for cultural analysis]
En översyn av pandemins effekter inom kulturområdet
[An overview of the effects of the pandemic on the cultural field], 2021.

Post- och telestyrelsen
[Swedish Post and Telecom Authority]
Digital omställning till följd av covid-19
[Digital conversion due to covid-19], 2021.

Pratik Vithlani/ TYP Kulturkapital
[TYP Culture capital]
Digitaliseringens Konsekvenser för konstnärligt yrkesutövande
[The consequences of the digitalisation for the artistic profession], 2017

Statens Kulturråd [Swedish Arts Council]
Ökad digitalisering av offentligt finansierad kultur i Sverige
[Increased digitalising of the publicly funded culture in Sweden], 2016.

Eric Sjöström/Svensk Scenkonst
[Swedish Performing Arts Association)]
Omstart för scenkonsten
[Restart for the performing arts]. 2020

Svensk scenkonst
[Swedish Performing Arts Association)]
Framtidens Kulturkonsumtion
[Culture Consumption of the Future], 2021.

Svensk scenkonst
[Swedish Performing Arts Association)]
Framtidens Kulturkonsumtion
[Culture Consumption of the Future], 2020.

SMart, Digital BlackBox, 2021

Examples

The following pages presents a selected list of performances by Swedish performing artists and groups who incorporate digital technology in their works.

Title: The art of facing fear
Creator: Darling Desperados
http://www.darlingdesperados.com/the-art-of-facing-fear/
Description:
Theater play performed during 2020 live through Zoom, created by the Swedish independent theatre group Darling Desperados. It was performed with multiple different casts to accommodate different time zones. The play also incorporated elements of improv, based on audience members' testimonies during discussions in breakout rooms halfway through the play.

Titel: Alone together
Creator: Robin Jonsson
https://www.robinjonsson.net/alone-together
Description:
A VR dance performance created by Swedish choreographer Robin Jonsson. VR-sets and controllers are used by both dancers and audience. Also digital avatars of both audience and the performing dancers. Focus on interactions between the dancers and the audience. Performed live, with the dancers in motion capture suits

Titel: The Big Boo
Creator: Bombina Bombast
https://www.bombinabombast.com/the-big-boo
Description:
Point of view, through a VR-headset, from one of the characters in a movie.

Titel: The Shared individual
Creator: Bombina bombast, with Danish film studio Makropol.
https://www.bombinabombast.com/sharedindividual
Description:
A camera live streams from the point of view of the actors on stage, to VR-headsets worn by the audience members.

Titel: Half Life – The Ultimate VR Experience
Creator: Kungliga Operan
[Royal Swedish Opera]
https://www.operan.se/media/video/the-ultimate-vr-experience-with-the-royal-swedish-ballet/
Description:
A performance of Half LIfe by Sharon Eyals recorded from 60 different angles, to create a VR-environment. Created in collaboration with a Swedish production company specializing in Virtual Reality.

Titel: Urgent Drama
Creator: Folkteatern
https://fjardescenen.folkteatern.se/node/19
Description:
A series of short plays created by international writers for Fjärde Scenen [Fourth Stage], their stage dedicated to performances created for digital platforms. By themself describe as a "emergency response" to the pandemic.

Titel: Opera extravaganza!
Creator: Collaboration between Smålands Musik & Teater, Riksteatern[National theatre] and Operahögskolan i Stockholm.
https://www.smot.se/opera-extravaganza/
Description:
Opera performance with the orchestra and singers on two separate geographical locations. Possible due to new "fiber optic" technology.

Titel: Residens i Gnosjö
[Residency in Gnosjö]
Creator: Magma Dans
https://helenafranzen.se/
Description:
Three recorded dance performances, only available through scanning an associated QR-kod, located at the same location as the video was recorded.

Title: The Road
Creator: Darling Desperados
http://www.darlingdesperados.com/
Description:
Performance created by artists from South Africa, France and Sweden.
Combination of 3D animations, virtual reality and live theater.
The show can be seen both live and online.

Titel: Antigones dagbok [Antigone's Diary]
Creator: Kista Teater
Description:
Radio theater through a Gps-connected smartphone application from 2011. Plays a prepared sound clip when the audience member is closing in on one of the predetermined locations. Was later made into a book with the same name, with additional content such as audience members' interactions.

Titel: Other than human
Creator: Robin Jonsson
https://www.robinjonsson.net/other-than-human
Description:
A dance performance/lecture with a small robot. Focus on the interaction between Alex, the robot, and the human participants.

Title: A.I.-partiet [The A.I. party]
Creator: Bombina Bombast
https://www.bombinabombast.com/the-ai-party
Description:
A performance that has been compared to an escape room, focuses on interactivity. Uses VR, projections and 3D-animations. The story centers around a political party run by an A.I.

Authored by Pixie Hård av Segerstad, 2021