The regional venues as a tool for subsidising rhythmic music

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Abstract

This article1 zooms in on the Danish public funding system for rhythmic music and its ability to accommodate the challenges facing middle-layer musicians today. With a focus on the regional venues (regionale spillesteder), we examine whether this specific funding program, which was established around the millennium, has managed to acclimatize to the developments that the music business has undergone the past 20 years.

The shift from physical listening formats to digital streaming services has transformed the way music is listened to, how artists are remunerated as well as the business models of record labels among other areas. Collectively, these developments have created an unbalance in regard to the actors who profit. The casualties are middle-layer artists who experience significant impediments to their chances of creating and sustaining careers within the business.

Our analysis of the publicly funded regional venues demonstrates that these fall short in certain areas, mainly with regard to the promotion task and talent development. Both areas for which the venues bear formal responsibility. In addition, an increasingly internationalized curation of acts at some regional venues is hampering the creation and progression of careers of Danish middle-layer artists.

We question the effectiveness of the regional venue program as a funding tool to manage the needs of contemporary rhythmic middle-layer musicians, and we also ask if the program is tasked with too many responsibilities. We find that the promotion task should transition into a shared affair between the artist and the venue and that venues to a higher extent should prioritize partnerships with local actors. Additionally, we find that the task of talent development is most effectively handled outside this funding program. Preferably by the creation of new funding programs for managers and record labels.

Keywords

The Danish Arts Foundation, public funding, rhythmic music, middle-layer musicians, music venues, regional venues, venue support

1. The article is based on a Masters thesis titled “Public Funding for Rhythmic Musicians” by the same authors.
Introduction

Since rhythmic music in the 1990’s was given formal acknowledgement as an artistic genre by the Danish Arts Foundation, the music industry has been subject to notable developments and impacts. As a result, some actors within the industry have prospered, others less so. One group of actors firmly belonging to the latter is middle-layer musicians. We have used this term pragmatically to refer to rhythmic musicians who are neither amateurs nor superstars. The boundaries encircling this definition are fluid. Yet, one element which unites these artists is that they identify themselves as musicians by either performing or creating music. This large and heterogeneous group of musicians which to a large extent can be credited for the high degree of diversity within the Danish music scene is slowly getting squeezed out of the picture. Meanwhile, the funding landscape for rhythmic music has remained relatively unchanged throughout and despite these radical developments. This begs the question; does the funding system for rhythmic music need to be re-evaluated and updated accordingly?

The digitization of the music industry is well-documented from both a Danish and international perspective (see Nordgaard, 2018). Likewise, the resulting new challenges for contemporary Danish musicians, i.e. managing entrepreneurial tasks, have been extensively elucidated (see Pedersen, 2018). However, the particular gap in the literature which this article aims to fill is the examination of a specific funding program twenty years after its birth, and its ability to still be conducive to the careers of middle-layer musicians when factoring in the foregone developments.

The funding program in question is the regional venues. Within the public funding system in Denmark, the music venues are the most heavily funded actors. In fact, they receive 50% of the total subsidies for rhythmic music (Kruse & Peck-Thorsted, 2020). In addition, the regional venues have formally been given a particularly encompassing role to fulfil. One which must satisfy the disparate needs of audiences, artists, local environments and the Danish music scene. We reflect on the effectiveness of this set-up in which the regional venues are given such wide-ranging and divergent responsibilities. Therefore, we believe that these warrant particular attention. Accordingly, this article will attempt to answer the following question:

“How can the regional venues most effectively support the needs of middle-layer musicians?”

There are three underlying sub-questions which guide our approach to answering the above research question. Firstly, of central importance is the work of the regional venues, i.e. what do they present? Secondly, we ask, how do they contribute to the careers of middle-layer musicians? Lastly, we ask if adjustments to the program ought to be made in order to more effectively support this group of musicians.

This article is structured as follows. First, we introduce the venue support program and its purpose. We then delineate the music industries and their developments in a Danish context by means of existing literature. Subsequently, we describe the widened role of today’s musicians. Next, we present our theoretical framework, cultural policy, creative labour and the superstar economy. Preceding the analysis, we address our methodological approach and our empirical data. Our analysis corresponds to the first two sub-questions and is thus composed of two parts; a quantitative analysis of the music programmes of the

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2. Not explicitly defined by the Danish Arts Foundation. Rather, it was juxtaposed with classical music, which already was receiving formal support in the form of the pool “Landsdelsorkestre.” Thus, in this article, rhythmic music denotes all genres except classical music.
regional venues and, subsequently, a qualitative analysis of the value of the venues. In closing, we reflect on the role, value and cultural political aims of the program and discuss proposed amendments to the program.

The venue support program
The venue support program which is funded and administered by the principal governmental agency in support of arts and culture in Denmark, the Danish Arts Foundation, was established in 2001 as a two-fold program. The royalty-based program was established to secure a minimum honorarium for professional musicians by offering a tariff for each musician performing on stage. The regional venue program is a superstructure to the royalty-based program and consists of around 20 venues across the country. These are honored with a yearly operating grant between dkk 1 to 3.6 million for four years at a time. In this article, we focus solely on the regional venues.

In the 1990’s, several analyses of the Danish music scene were carried out. These form the basis for the establishment of the venue support program. Among other things, it was concluded that financial support of music venues would be an effective funding tool. One of the arguments in favour of this type of support was that: “Rhythmic music has long been forced to subsist on market conditions (...)” (Statens Musikråd, 1998: 9). Thus, an underlying goal was to create a counterpart to the traditional market mechanisms which governed rhythmic music at the time. Among various recipients, middle-layer musicians were intended beneficiaries of the program as it targeted artists who regarded music as a professional occupation and who struggled to compete in the free market.

In order to get appointed to the regional venue program, a venue must adhere to a list of objectives, responsibilities and foci including:

“1) to present and promote regional, national and international rhythmic music with a high level of artistic quality; 2) developing the music scene including upcoming music and niche genres; 3) to attract a diverse audience with a specific focus towards children and young people; 4) collaborations with both local, national and international actors (...) 6) talent development including presenting local music acts throughout the region as well as at other regional venues across the country (...) (Slots og Kulturstyrelsen, 2016)4.

The music industry(ies) – a brief review
The music industry is often referred to in singular. This contributes towards depicting the industry as a coherent and monolithic entity. In a contemporary context, one can make a strong case that it paints an oversimplified picture. Moving away from this definition and instead applying “the music industries” as a term heightens one’s sense of the dynamic interplay between the different actors involved. Only by applying such a perspective is it possible to assess the developments within the music industry (Nordgaard, 2018). Accordingly, we shall now examine the three fundamental sub-industries, recorded music, rights collection and live music.

At the very core of the industry for recorded music are the record labels. According to Rasmus Rex Pedersen (2018), these have historically had a critical role to perform in the development of musicians by teaching them how to strategize, promote themselves and so forth. However, the industry experienced a fundamental disruption with the impact of digitization which began to take effect around the millenium.

3. A “tariff”: a standard payment. In 2020, one tariff amounted to dkk 2143.61 (Dansk Artist Forbund, 2020.).
4. For the regional venues appointed for the period of 2021–2024, the seven goals have been combined into two (Slots og Kulturstyrelsen, 2019).
This transition has been delineated by authors such as Patrick Wikström and Robert DeFillipe (2016) who describe it with reference to two “waves.” The first wave disrupted the industry with the transition from physical sales to digital distribution. This wave unbundled music as it became possible to buy a single track rather than forcing an investment from consumers in a full-length album (Elberse, 2010). The second wave refers to the transition from downloading single tracks to subscribing to streaming services with the latter offering near endless catalogues of music. This change has brought about discussions on the issue of remuneration of artists as royalty payments no longer are paid as a lump sum in relation to the acquisition of a track or album, but instead are distributed as micro payments per stream of a track.

The digitization has also changed the way in which we discover new music, in particular for young consumers who today are influenced predominantly by curated playlists on streaming services such as Spotify. The resulting issue from a competition perspective is that the largest playlists are curated by the streaming services themselves. As the biggest market players such as the major labels and superstars are heavily invested in these services, they have a significant influence on the content that these playlists present (Pedersen, 2016).

The business models of record labels have also been affected. Previously, these had to invest heavily in an artist in order to gauge the potential success of the artist. Nowadays, labels can release a single, await the level of success of the track, and based on this decide whether to continue working with the artist. Put differently, the risk has changed from previously residing with the labels to now residing with the artists alone (Pedersen, 2015).

Digital distribution of music has also democratized the possibility of releasing music. Record labels have lost their de facto monopoly of physical distribution channels. This trend came into sight as the number of annual album releases in Denmark doubled in the period from 2004 to 2013 (Pedersen, 2015). One of the repercussions, however, is an increasing level of competition among musicians and an added strain on those who commit to a professional career as a musician.

Common for all these cited developments is that the middle-layer musicians have come off second best. The digitization of the industry for recorded music has intensified the bounty and spread effect Pedersen (2018). Bounty refers to the increased amount of music that is available today. Spread refers to the widening gap between the few artists with economic success and the rest who hardly profit. To exemplify spread in a Danish context, Pedersen notes that 80% of the major label Sony’s (the Danish department) total streams involved just 1% of its artists (ibid.).

Moreover, it has become evident that streaming services primarily foster listening patterns dominated by international music. Numbers from IFPI, the industry organization for recording companies, show that the total revenue within the industry for recorded music has increased by 39% from 2011 to 2018. Despite this, the market share for Danish produced music has declined slowly since Spotify was launched in Denmark in 2011; from representing 57% of the total sales to just 35% in 2018 (IFPI, 2011–2019).

The sub-industry for rights collection is composed of the organizations which ensure that composers and performing artists receive remuneration whenever their music is used. In Denmark, Koda (rights for composers) is the largest rights collection organization. In the past decade, Koda has experienced a significant growth of 75%, climbing to a yearly revenue of around one billion (Koda, 2019). However, only a limited number of composers receive notable remuneration from rights collections. According to Koda, 23 of the total revenue in 2018 was allocated to only 1.5% of its members (only members who actually received a pay-
ment in 2018 have been included) (Koda, 2019). In that sense, the increased revenues within this sub-industry have largely benefitted the already successful artists, much less so the middle-layer.

Regarding the live industry, both venues and festivals have in general experienced financial growth over the past five years. The total revenue of live music in Denmark in 2017 amounted to approximately dkk six billion which represents an increase of 69% from 2012 (Rambøll, 2017: 6). In light of these numbers, it would seem reasonable to assume that the growth in the live industry could help middle-layer artists recoup some of the lost revenues from the other sub-industries. However, as Fabian Holt (2010) explains, the live industry has not shown solidarity by providing for everyone. In the main, the superstars and large international conglomerates have benefitted from this prospering sub-industry.

For example, the large venues are posing a formidable threat to the smaller venues. Because of their superior capacities and production facilities as well as their financial muscle, they can attract the larger Danish acts and consequently take away a substantial income from smaller venues (Københavns Kommune, 2015). As a result, these smaller venues struggle to cover the costs of presenting niche artists who do not constitute a significant revenue stream. That being so, niche artists are often disregarded on the line-ups.

Musicians as entrepreneurs
These developments within the industry for recorded music have left many middle-layer musicians in a rather bleak situation. Coupled with the characteristic working conditions of the music industry, many artists are severely challenged in their quest to sustain a career. As a result, Haynes & Marshall (2018) describe how musicians must display entrepreneurial features such as being “(...) psychologically resilient, flexible, efficient and innovative, prepared to seek out new opportunities and to take risks, creative at finding solutions to problems.” (ibid.: 464).

Pedersen (2015) also underlines that the newfangled music industry is forcing artists to adopt an entrepreneurial approach. Firstly, artists are less dependent on traditional industry and media gatekeepers as it has become easier to release and promote music through social media channels. Secondly, labels have become more risk averse as a result of their diminishing revenue streams. Thus, they invest less in talent development. These two factors make musicians subject to both push and pull effects which are heightening the need for them to act entrepreneurially (ibid.).

Theoretical framework
Cultural policy
Cultural policy is involved in the ongoing interplay between different interest groups such as the market, the public as well as producers of culture (Duelund & Hansen, 1994). For example, the public has a dual desire for a rich and diverse supply of culture, yet, as importantly, this supply must be made available at an inexpensive cost. Conversely, cultural producers demand the highest possible return on their efforts, and additionally crave appropriate working conditions for their work for it to evolve in an uncompromising manner (ibid.).

Danish cultural policy: roots and pillars
According to Duelund and Hansen (1994), three historical movements have had a considerable influence on the leanings of Danish cultural policy. Firstly, cultural radicalism, which places a high degree of importance on the individual, brought about a newfound
acknowledgement of the importance of artistic autonomy as well as a greater curiosity towards contemporary and international scenes (Topholt, 2019). Secondly, the labour movement and the Social Democratic Party’s devotion to protecting the equal interests of people has given rise to the principle of equal access to cultural goods (Duelund & Hansen, 1994). Finally, grundtvigianism shaped Danish cultural policy by emphasizing a higher degree of freedom for cultural institutions.

These movements each manifest themselves in some of the foundational pillars of Danish cultural policy. Firstly, a fundamental element is the **arm’s-length principle** which restrains the Danish government from having direct influence on the decision making process over the allocation of state subsidies. The duty of politicians in this process is limited to the establishment of financial boundaries (Duelund, 1995).

A second pillar is the Danish notion of enlightenment which contains an added emphasis on cultural pluralism (Duelund & Hansen, 1994). According to Duelund (2008), in the latter part of the 20th century, there was fear that a lack of cultural enlightenment would lead to the population falling into the hands of corporate industries much to the detriment of cultural diversity and quality. Thus, there was a strong desire to regulate these economic institutions in order to safeguard artistic freedom and cultural diversity (ibid.). Furthermore, inherent in the Danish idea of enlightenment is an insistence on active participation in cultural life rather than a passive acquisition of enlightenment ideas (Duelund & Hansen, 1994). Lastly, of great significance to Danish cultural policy is the egalitarian principle. This perspective considers culture a social good that everyone has the right to enjoy. By virtue of this premise, cultural policy must promote equal access to culture and attempt to limit inequalities within cultural life (ibid.). However, the economic rationale inherent in cultural policy started to erupt in the 1990’s (Duelund, 1995). This financial motivation underpinning Danish cultural policy has remained a dominant factor since the turn of the century (Council of Europe, 2012).

**Creative labour**

The conditions for creative work are impacted by a highly skewed distribution of earnings and a high degree of unpredictability. Therefore, artists tend to hold multiple jobs in order to uphold a reasonable living standard. Yet, the artist only works the absolute necessary amount of time in jobs not affiliated with art to be able to free up time for artistic work. The conditions for employment are irregular, there is an oversupply of labour and little job protection. Consequently, there is a predominance of self-employment and freelance workers (Hesmondhalgh, 2013).

These working conditions can be very difficult to understand for a new entrant. As delineated by Ruth Towse (2010), jobs are extremely idiosyncratic. For instance, the conditions for a painter are different from those for a photographer, actor or a musician. This lack of homogeneity makes it difficult to transmit general information on working conditions within the market. Thus, many new entrants learn about these through personal experience.

**Superstar economy**

The highly skewed distribution of earnings in the music industries is partly because they exhibit manifestations of the superstar economy. In 1981, the American economist Sherwin Rosen introduced the phenomenon of *superstars* where a relatively small group of people were earning huge amounts of money in a commanding way. Rosen concluded and quizzed in his influential paper: “What changes in the future will be wrought by cable, video cas-
settes, and home computers?” (Rosen, 1981: 857). As the author quite rightly anticipated, technological change has led to increased superstar effects. The obstacles which once prevented the best professionals from accessing wider markets are now long gone (Filimon et al., 2010.). Coupled with the speed and ease at which performances today can be reproduced, these processes of superstardom have escalated. The end result is an increasing dominance of global superstars. One of the major consequences to follow is the creation of global cultures to the detriment of local cultures and in the context of the music market less renowned, local and niche artists.

Method
This study has been conducted with a mixed methods approach which has seen us deploy a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques.

The main objective has been to seek insights into the value of the regional venue program. Thus, we have conducted 15 interviews with a range of different actors within the industry who all have strong familiarity with the program, either directly through performing at the venues, indirectly through working with artists who perform at the venues, or by working within organizations which are in direct contact with the venues.

More specifically, we have conducted seven interviews with rhythmic musicians who differ in terms of the genre they play, their gender, their experience in the industry, whether they work as solo artists or part of a band, and whether they have received formal music education. One unifying aspect is that they all comply with the definition of a middle-layer musician. In addition, we have interviewed six music industry professionals who hold various positions within the industry, both within independent companies, e.g. record labels, as well as within both public and other organizational bodies. Lastly, we have conducted interviews with two music business researchers, both of whom have issued an extensive catalogue of research papers and publications on live music and music streaming among other areas. We believe this multitude of perspectives is crucial in order to obtain a thorough and nuanced understanding of the regional venues and to maintain a sufficient level of equilibrium.

There is, however, one noteworthy limitation to our data set. We have not interviewed anyone directly employed at a regional venue. This could have given us a valuable perspective from someone directly concerned with the objectives of the program and the practical implementation of these. Each regional venue is, however, highly unique with regard to its size, set-up, organizational structure, geographical location as well its framework agreement with the Danish Arts Foundation. Thus, any interview data concerning venue operations or challenges would be highly specific to that particular venue. We believe that interviews with Dansk Live and the Danish Arts Foundation constitute representation of the regional venues. Dansk Live is an advocacy group representing music venues in Denmark and thus acts as a mouthpiece for the regional venues among others. The Danish Arts Foundation administers the program and is therefore versed on the goings-on of the regional venues.

In addition, we have analysed the concert lists (containing all the concerts for one year) from the various regional venues (17 out of 18) all appointed in the period from 2017–2020. In this analysis, we have categorised all headliner acts based on predetermined criteria in

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5. Rhythmic musicians, who are neither amateurs nor superstars. An unifying aspect is that these artists identify themselves as musicians first and foremost by either performing or creating rhythmic music. Classical musicians are excluded in this definition.
order to generate statistical data which has helped illustrate the division of live music and activities performed at these venues. In order to combat the effect of our own personal bias, we created sets of criteria on which our evaluation has been based.

In order to determine the genre, i.e. contemporary, popular or traditional, we compiled a table which contained different sub-genres and their relation to the above three “umbrella genres.” To exemplify, sub-genres such as electronic music and avant-garde music fall under the heading contemporary whereas schlager and traditional jazz have been placed under the heading traditional. Popular refers to mainstream oriented music. Similarly, in order to ascertain how renowned the act is, i.e. amateur, middle-layer or large, we put together a table containing these three categories with their respective criteria. For example, to be categorised as an amateur act, the act has to be local, entrance to the event has to be free or the act must have less than 100 monthly listeners on Spotify. In contrast, to be classified as a large act, the act must have at least 20,000 followers on one social media platform, or 13,000 followers on several platforms, at least 200,000 monthly listeners on Spotify, or constitute a national unifying name.

Naturally, many acts are ambiguous and less clear-cut to define. In these instances, discussions between the authors regarding the full range of criteria would ensue. This has ultimately led to a more informed decision. However, this type of analysis will never be completely void of a degree of bias.

Analysis
This section is structured in two parts. Firstly, our quantitative analysis of the music line-ups at the regional venues will be introduced in order to gauge the content which the venues present. The second part is a qualitative analysis which explores the value of the regional venues from the perspective of the middle-layer musicians.

However, we cannot commence a meaningful analysis without covering the purpose of the regional venue program. This program is just one out of many funding programs administered by the Danish Arts Foundation. Albeit a heavily funded and fundamental one.

In its own words, the Danish Arts Foundation sets out to: “(...) spread the arts to a wide audience all over Denmark, to promote Danish art internationally, and to pave the way for talented artists.” (Statens Kunstfond, n.d.). Thus, there are three objectives which the foundation formally intends to preserve; namely that of a national geographical spread of the arts, an international outlook as well as a focus on developing artists. It is clear from this statement that artists and audiences are principal beneficiaries, and that cultural political pillars of enlightenment and equality are given emphasis.

These pillars also recur at the practical level. Namely in the list of objectives of the regional venue program (cf. p.4). Examples which honour the Danish notion of enlightenment include the overt focus on presenting international music and developing niche genres. An example reflecting the egalitarian principle is the aim of attracting a diverse audience as well as presenting acts throughout the region and across the country.

Evidently, the program has been presented with tasks that concern two highly different groups; audiences and artists which may be harbouring incongruous demands of cultural political initiatives. The following analyses aim at establishing whether tasking this funding program with an abundance of wide-ranging responsibilities has hindered its ability to attain its own objectives, and, ultimately, at the cost of the middle-layer artists?
Line-ups at the regional venues

In order to illustrate the work which the regional venues carry out, we have identified nine musical categories that together represent the types of activities that take place at the venues; see figure 1. Having performed this task, we have been able to demonstrate the number of events featuring amateur (blue), Danish middle-layer (yellow) and international middle-layer (red) acts as well as what we have categorized as profitable acts (blue). Profitable refers to acts and events which we estimate do not need funding in order to cover their costs. This category includes large acts, both international and Danish, cover acts and other activities.

Figure 1. Events at the regional venues
Sorted in order to the received amount of subsidies by the Danish Arts Foundation

Signs of internationalization

Of the 17 regional venues, three venues which coincidentally are based in the two largest Danish cities have an overweight of international acts; three venues have an almost equal distribution of the categories; ten venues have a slight predominance of Danish middle-layer events, a more or less equal distribution of middle-layer international acts and amateur music, however, differ in the amount of profitable events. Lastly, one venue primarily focuses its efforts towards amateur music.

Regarding the venues with an overweight of international acts, such events are a formal objective of the regional venue program and, thus, should not constitute a point of concern. However, the fact that these are mostly presented in the larger cities is a disadvantage for some Danish middle-layer musicians as their audiences are often located there. As one interviewed booking agent argues in response to a question about the ideal places for the development of talent: “It is in Aarhus and Copenhagen and in some instances Odense and Aalborg.” (Kruse & Thorenfeldt, 2020).

If we analyse the percentage of profitable events in the total line-up for all venues, at half of the regional venues profitable events constitute 30% of the total number of events. Vega

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6. Comedy, talks or movie screenings.
7. Vega, Alice and Voxhall
8. Stars, Gimle and Tobakken
9. Spillestedet Thy, Musikens Hus, Sønderborghus, Radar, Turbinen, Fermaten, Studenterhuset Aalborg, Musikhuset, Godset and Posten
trumps this category by a long distance (57%). The remaining eight venues have in between 4% and 29% profitable events. If we perform the same exercise for amateur music, only three of the 17 venues have more than 28% of this category on their bill. By contrast, four venues have less than 5% amateur music and the remaining ten venues present in between 11% and 19%. In that sense, it appears that regional venues to a great extent focus their efforts towards profitable events.

A lack of contemporary music outside the two big cities
Still, Danish middle-layer acts constitute the largest category at the regional venues (37%). Of these middle-layer events, traditional music\textsuperscript{10} comprises 6%, contemporary music\textsuperscript{11} 17% and lastly, popular music\textsuperscript{12} 14%. It is noteworthy that of the six venues at which contemporary music is most dominant, four are located in the larger cities, Copenhagen and Aarhus, and one in the fourth largest city Aalborg\textsuperscript{13}. This constitutes a disproportionate spread of certain acts. Though, as pointed out by a senior consultant at the Danish Arts Foundation: “(...) a good regional venue must understand its surroundings. It must be able to understand what kind of musical life, cultural life, demographic make-up, what kind of population is it tapping into?” (Peck-Thorsted & Traasdahl, 2020). Thus, in this statement resides an acknowledgement that the venues should tailor their program to their audience.

However, one might advance an argument that in regard to certain objectives, for example developing niche genres, the venues outside the largest cities should do more for contemporary artists as opposed to traditional and popular artists. The latter two are arguably better suited to flourish under free market forces without supplementary support.

This marks the end of the first part of the analysis. The following part of the analysis is presented in response to our second sub-question which seeks to scrutinize the value of the regional venues from the perspective of the middle-layer musicians.

Among our informants, there is generally great admiration for the regional venues. According to several of our informants, a strong feature of the regional venues is the opportunity they provide to perform live in a professional setting. Another sentiment shared among several informants is that they constitute a much needed source of income for artists. These are both important elements which help preserve the artistic freedom of middle-layer artists. However, does a cheque alone represent adequate development for a musician looking to navigate within an industry of enormous complexity? Also, who stands to gain if only a handful of people turn up to these events?

The task of promotion
Several of our informants argue that the task of promotion is performed to a substandard level. One of the cited reasons is that many venue bookers are too preoccupied towards filling up their calendars with as many concerts as possible. It must be noted that each framework agreement contains requirements regarding the minimum number of concerts. Yet, this can leave regional venues few resources to promote each concert to a required standard. Here, our methodological limitations reveal themselves. On this occasion, it would have provided this article with valuable insights to have a regional venue manager or booker explain in his or her own words how resources are prioritized.

Even so, engagement towards the task of promoting artists is required, especially when

\textsuperscript{10} Traditional blues, folk, jazz etc.
\textsuperscript{11} Music that is modern and in some way pushing boundaries
\textsuperscript{12} Music that is modern but mainstream oriented
\textsuperscript{13} Vega, Alice, Radar, Voxhall and Studenterhuset Aalborg
it comes to the types of music genres which do not fit the streaming format. The consequence is two-fold. Firstly, from the perspective of the musicians, it can mean turning up to an empty venue. Similarly, as the head of the association Dansk Live explains:

“(…) It (smaller genres) is something, which there is not an audience for in sparsely populated areas. Then it is about motivation, it is very demotivating to create a concert for 15 people. If you have done this for many years, then you end up having a cynical approach.” (Peck-Thorsted & Marcher, 2020)

Thus, this issue has adverse effects on many of the groups involved in the interplay which cultural policy attempts to orchestrate. Artists become dispirited and venues likewise. The public may potentially be missing out on enriching experiences.

Some informants argue that the task of promotion should be performed by the artists themselves. Other informants object to this by arguing that the task of promotion firstly forms part of the vision statement of the regional venues, and secondly, in light of the amount of funding which the regional venues receive, they should be capable of carrying out the task to a satisfactory level. One of the interviewed industry professionals, Jesper Bay, calls this promotion issue the promotion gap: “(...) this promotion gap has emerged since the arrival of streaming, because who is doing the promotion? It is as though it has fallen down a crack between offices and venues and artists.” (Kruse & Bay, 2020)

The task of talent development
Talent development is a formal objective of the program. According to the objectives, talent development includes presenting local acts throughout the region and across the country. Artists most often start their careers within the greater cities in which their chances of finding an audience are considerably higher. However, incongruously, the regional venues based in the large cities in the main present international acts. The regional venues outside the biggest cities show a greater effort towards the presentation of Danish middle-layer acts albeit with a heavy focus on popular and traditional acts. Nevertheless, our informants express uncertainty about the degree to which this effort in practice is particularly developing. The problem is linked to the lack of promotion as concerts with new artists often are very low in attendance which can be disheartening for young artists. As one interviewed musician from the field of indie jazz recalls:

“One day we played in front of 100 people, because the promoter had done a good job, and the next day in front of 0 people because the promoter did not care. Once we experienced a promoter asking us if we could cut our set short to half an hour as there weren’t enough people and he wanted to go home.” (Kruse & McCoy, 2020)

Another point which has been raised as an argument against the aptness of the regional venues to handle talent development is that they have been built physically to fit the needs of a classic rock band. As a result, they struggle to embrace all types of music. For instance, a genre such as electronic music which to a lesser degree is intended for the live format and is often produced on computers with the purpose of breaking through on streaming services. In that sense, the type of value that a venue can offer might not be the most suitable for the development of all types of artists.

The fixed form of the regional venues is another point of criticism shared among informants who argue that it is difficult to present small niche acts if the venue is designed for a 700 audience capacity. According to one of the interviewed music researchers Fabian Holt, gathering all concerts under one roof is a question of efficiency: "From a commercial
standpoint, it is worth having all concerts in the same space because it is effective, profitable and industrial – you can make use of the same production technologies (...). There is a standardization.” (Peck-Thorsted & Holt, 2020). This naturally complements the growing role of the economic rationale in cultural policy. However, in line with enlightenment and egalitarian principles, Holt argues that it would make sense to implement a more flexible arrangement in which concerts do not necessarily need to be hosted in-house. This would enable artists to actively reach and engage with more remote areas and audiences, and it would also provide better support for the many types of middle-layer artists who are not suited to large scale venues. To discuss this idea, the perspectives of regional venue managers would have been highly valuable in order to learn about the difficulties in arranging concerts out-of-house.

It would appear that the regional venue program has not adjusted its talent development strategy to the entrepreneurial role of the contemporary musician. Nowadays, an essential aspect of a musician’s development is learning to handle many of the areas around the “core” musical activity such as building a brand or establishing partnerships. Yet, the regional venues are not designed to deliver this type of value. Bearing in mind that talent development constitutes one of the three principal goals of the Danish Arts Foundation, this area should arguably be given higher priority than a formal tick box within this program.

Discussion
Our analyses have called attention to several areas of concern from the perspectives of middle-layer musicians. As highlighted in the first part of the analysis, many of the line-ups at the regional venues are dominated by events with profitable artists as well as popular middle-layer artists; two segments, which operate according to commercial market conditions, and to which the regional venue program originally was intended to act as a counterpoint. On the other hand, the contemporary middle-layer artists make up a significantly low percentage. On that account, it might be worth questioning whether the regional venues rely too much on the major acts from the large booking agencies and as a result of that contribute towards sustaining a culture of superstars? Considering the raison d’être of the regional venues, one might contend that the program should make a greater effort to honour the tradition of public enlightenment and support the type of music which does not conform to the tastes of the major commercialised gatekeepers. The aforecited music business researcher Holt points to this issue:

“It is actually the large agencies, who are placed within the cities, mostly in Copenhagen, who benefit quite a bit from the art support that the venues receive, as they are able to sell their artists a bit more expensively. The venue bears the costs whereas the profit goes to the bureau.” (Peck-Thorsted & Holt, 2020)

The internationalization of line-ups at most regional venues within the largest Danish cities also represents a barrier for Danish middle-layer musicians as they are not given the chance to find an audience. As highlighted earlier, the market share for Danish produced music has already begun to diminish since the emergence of Spotify.

Whilst the line-ups constitute a challenge from the perspective of middle-layer musicians, we have chosen to limit ourselves to two more pressing issues, namely promotion and talent development. A regional venue program which is found wanting in regard to these two fundamental objectives is arguably not fulfilling its cultural political aims. A Danish music landscape which grants such limited space to the domestic middle-layer is in danger
of neglecting what it set out to support and not providing an equal playing field for all types of musicians.

How then might the regional venue program modify its design to most effectively support Danish middle-layer musicians? And is it necessarily the regional venues which are best equipped for this role? We shall now explore these questions.

The importance of local engagement
Firstly, the promotion task is absolutely indispensable for the reason that it gives artists the opportunity to discover an audience, and it helps ensure that music actually reaches the local communities for which it is intended. The completion of this task alone would help dovetail two of the objectives of the Danish Arts Foundation; spreading the arts and paving the way for talent. In some instances, prioritizing objectives can become a trade-off in which one actor stands to gain, occasionally at the expense of another. In this instance, however, cultural political aims of democratizing art and supporting artists are both closer to being reached simultaneously.

According to our informants, concerts with niche artists need to be communicated with enthusiasm in order to flourish. The value gained from booking such artists is lost if they are not supported by way of a promotion effort which gives them an actual chance of meeting an audience. As the second analysis testified, neither the artist nor the venue gains from concerts with negligible or no turnout. The public does not stand to win from this situation either. Besides providing venues with the required documentation that they have a miscellaneous musical profile, booking niche artists alone is not necessarily an effective way of supporting them.

It is crucial that there exist ambassadors within the local community who are able to encourage people to attend. There appears to be consensus that the regional venues which receive widespread appraisal for their operations have a few characteristics in common; they have a strong local culture surrounding the venue, and they have decided to relinquish responsibility to various local actors.

Establishing partnerships with local actors is already specifically addressed as a formal criteria for the regional venues (Slots og Kulturstyrelsen, 2019). However, there should be an added prioritization of this objective. As the Head of Dansk Live explains, partnerships can enhance promotional efforts (Peck-Thorsted & Marcher, 2020). He points to the regional venue in Thy as an example. This venue distinguishes itself in regard to its organizational structure by incorporating different local associations. In doing so, the venue ensures that it gathers all the dedicated agents in the region. These are then able to contribute towards the promotion task with the required level of enthusiasm.

Promotion as a joint task
As highlighted in the analysis, there exists different opinions on who bears the responsibility for promotion. Is it the venue or the artist? Although the regional venues are formally obligated to perform this task, our findings have revealed stories of success when the artists have played an active role in the performance of this task. Here, the take-away point has been that artists in one way or another need to actively engage the local environment. For example, one interviewed musician recounted how the performance of a short “teaser” concert at the local high-school before the official concert helped stimulate interest in the main event (Peck-Thorsted & Tobiassen, 2020).

If the promotion task explicitly transitions into a two-man job, the success of it hinges on the level of commitment from both the artist and the venue. For example, regional venues
must display tolerance in the early stages of an artist’s career, in particular when it concerns
the more contemporary genres. As one of the music managers from the field of niche genres
expresses in our interview: “For example, he (a regional venue booker) has booked a band
such as Girls in Airports several times. In the beginning only two people turned up, now they
sell out the shows.” (Kruse & Jarby, 2020).

Should the task of talent development lie elsewhere?
The regional venues also bear formal responsibility for talent development. In spite of this,
it has become evident that the prevailing notion of talent development is not suited to the
needs of contemporary musicians. Moreover, new music genres are not necessarily
designed for the live format and, thus, require a different type of support than the type
which regional venues are capable of providing in their current structure. Considering
these barriers, it might be a more effective way of supporting middle-layer musicians to
hand over this task to people specialized in this line of work. The interviewed music busi-
ness researchers Rasmus Rex Pedersen is of the opinion that the role of developing talent
should lie elsewhere:

“For me it is about, when you create subsidies for music, to think about, who has the possibility to work
with a musician over a long time and to work with its career development. (...) but the venues are, at the
most, in touch with an artist once a year, and in that sense, they are able to offer a platform for artists to
perform on, but it is only a platform for a very limited time, and there are limits to how developing that
is for a musician.” (Kruse & Pedersen, 2020)

As the theory on creative labour sets forth, creative jobs are characterised by a lack of
homogeneity which means that a one-size-fits-all approach to talent development will not
suffice. Rather, actors who are able to deliver highly specialized knowledge and guidance
based on experience are required.

Several of our informants recommend an increase in funding for record labels and man-
gers as these can accommodate the need for long-term and specialized direction. Cur-
rently, there are no pools intended first and foremost for these actors. Many of the inter-
viewed musicians point towards the value of these two actors. In particular, at the early
stages of a career. As one of the musicians from the field of avant-garde jazz recounts:
“When I look back, there is a specific time in your career, when you’re younger, especially if you
don’t have a manager, if you’re managing things by yourself, there can be a lot of uncertainty
and many challenges.” (Kruse & Anker, 2020).

Funding record labels and managers which cater to a wide range of different artists and
genres is one way of providing the type of support that many middle-layer artists are in
need of.

Cultural political reflections
This article does not attempt to bring into question the existence of the program. Rather, it
represents an acknowledgement of the different needs of different cultural actors. With this
in mind, we question whether the regional venue program simply wants to accomplish too
much for too many? We do not believe that a funding program, which attempts to incorpo-
rate the tripartite purpose of the Danish Arts Foundation, can effectively deliver value in all
areas. An inevitable implication is that somebody will suffer from a lack of attention. In this
instance, middle-layer musicians. We propose dividing the workload between specialists.
Thus, we argue that regional venues should be tasked with the line of work in which they are
highly specialized. Namely, spreading the arts and creating experiences for audiences. In
turn, labels and managers should be given more funding so that they can help pave the way for talent.

In light of the developments which the music industries have become subject to over the past couple of decades, one might argue that principles such as enlightenment and egalitarianism now more than ever have grown in significance. In particular, if central objectives of cultural policy are to ensure a continued high degree of cultural diversity and equality. As a group, middle-layer artists epitomize the part of the music industry which the regional venue program initially set out to support. We believe that a more accommodating system of support must be implemented to safeguard the artistic freedom of this group of musicians. Providing middle-layer artists with a springboard to develop is crucial in order to ensure a high level of diversity within the scene.

We also hold that a more dedicated commitment towards local involvement is completely in harmony with the strong Danish tradition of active public participation in cultural affairs. Moreover, it can be argued that engaging the local environment, and devoting more time towards the promotion of middle-layer artists in local communities, is one way of ensuring that as many people as possible are offered the opportunity to participate in cultural affairs. A goal which accords strongly with the egalitarian element of Danish cultural policy.

**Conclusion**

The regional venue program has been given a very important role to play in delivering cultural value for artists, the public and local environments alike. In practice, however, there are areas where the program falls short. This has inauspicious effects on some artists. For example, do the line-ups at the regional venues marginalize niche artists? Also, does the increasing internationalization of line-ups within the larger cities constitute a barrier to Danish middle-layer acts who find it hard to gain a foothold? Maybe so.

However, of more critical concern is the lack of promotion which leads to middle-layer artists oftentimes struggling to find an audience. In addition, insufficient talent development makes it difficult for the same artists to establish themselves and learn to navigate the complex music industry of today. Despite the lack of data from regional venue employees, we find it questionable, the extent to which regional venues are able to provide meaningful talent development, bearing in mind the limited contact they have with artists as well as the multitude of responsibilities which they must manage.

Middle-layer musicians have become victims of radical industry developments, cost-effective setups at the regional venues, a lack of time-sensitive adjustments to the regional venue program, and perhaps audiences taking the precedence over the artists within the cultural political aims of the program.

We hold that the regional venue program is in service of too many cultural political segments, and, in addition, is assigned too many areas of responsibility. That being so, we have proposed some lines of action which are better geared towards the realities of the contemporary music industry. We believe that these initiatives will support middle-layer musicians more effectively in terms of aiding their development early on, and giving them an opportunity to find an audience. Most importantly, these areas reflect the challenges, which our empirical data has given emphasis to. However, we also maintain the relevance of these particular areas as they mirror the tripartite purpose of the Danish Arts Foundation as well as the foundational principles of Danish cultural policy.
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