Discussions on visitors and non-visitors of classical and ethnic European music concerts

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Content of the presentation

Background orientation
Audience studies in Helsinki
Studies of non-attendees, Helsinki cases
Observations
Background orientation

In the European cultural policy, particularly in the Nordic countries, interest in the ideas of *dемократизация of culture* and *cultural democracy* prevail.

Audience studies represent one part of this interest and these studies can have practical implications.
Background orientation

Audience studies represent also one key component of arts management field
There is some literature on music audiences,
plenty of unpublished research
Fewer studies on the so-called non-attendees
Dying audience base?

There are worries that audience base in European art music, i.e., classical music, will wither away in the long term.

Worries that the audiences will disappear together with the aging attendees.

However, this is not necessarily anything new.
Dying audience base?

Bonita Kolb (2001) argues that young age groups do not find their way into the classical music concerts the same way as previously was the case.

Young generations are not recruited into classical music audience base when they grow older. Some research data confirms this argument.
Participation in cultural activities in Europe (EU-27) in 2007

54 % visited historical monuments
51% been to a cinema
41 % visited museums of galleries
37 % been to a concert
35 % visited a public library
32 % been to a theatre
18 % seen a ballet, a dance performance or an opera

Source: Eurostat Pocketbooks, Cultural statistics, 2007
Been to a concert by status in Europe (EU-27)

58 % students
57 % managers
44 % other white collar
40 % self-employed
35 % manual workers
29 % unemployed
25 % retired

Source: Eurostat Pocketbooks, Cultural statistics, 2007
Arts audiences in Helsinki

The following data is based on audience research at Helsinki Festival in 2002 and 2007
There are particular characteristics in terms of age and place of residence
Helsinki festival audience
Free open air events
Deviation from the Helsinki region population by age (0=expected)
Helsinki festival audience
Ethnic music events
Deviation from the Helsinki region population by age (0=expected)
Helsinki festival audience
Classical music events
Deviation from the Helsinki region population by age (0=expected)
Studies on non-attendees in Helsinki

Interventions for groups of non-attendees with an idea to study reasons for not participating in art music concerts

Focus group interviews and interventions for university students and recent graduates

Two arts organisations were involved:
- Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra
- Helsinki Festival
Studies on non-attendees in Helsinki

Those young adults selected whose background was similar to the attendees, but who did not visit cultural events

Similarities in background: gender, age, place of residence, education

Interviews before and after the events, participation in the events
Main findings

Assumption of special knowledge
Time management
Social aspects
Search for experiences
Marketing issues
Assumption of special knowledge

Non-attendees expect that typical visitors have plenty of special knowledge of classical or ethnic music
Also an expectancy that the audience members they play a music instrument themselves
Assumption of special knowledge

Non-attendees expect that education is a precondition to like “right” music, particularly classical music. This requirement is not expected of popular music. This belief hinders willingness to attend classical or ethnic music concerts.
Time management

Lack of time - real or perceived - is a key reason for not attending concerts.

Big questions related to personal skills in managing one’s own time both at work and at leisure time.
Time management

Willingness to spontaneously organise leisure time activities, not by planning well ahead

Booking leisure time activities in advance causes stress
Time management

“Having the work calendar fully booked and then even the leisure time planned in advance, that gets to me, it distresses me, there is never enough leisure time”
Time management

“I want to have an illusion that I can choose anytime where to go, that my leisure time has room for flexibility. And in the end I find myself on the couch watching television.”
Social aspects

Non-attendees tend to be passive in selecting their leisure time activities.
More important than the event itself can be the socialising aspects provided by the company of friends. Then even classical or ethnic music concerts might be an option.
Social aspects

Question: Would you consider taking your potential girlfriend or boyfriend to a classical music concert for a date?

“Absolutely not!”

“Why not, with a boyfriend, but not with a brand new partner… with a new acquaintance, it wouldn’t be the first thing for me to do.”
Search for experiences

Non-attendees look for experiences in their leisure time

Their choices are relatively conservative, they want to make sure that the experiences on offer will please and entertain them

Not willing to take any risks where they might get bored
Search for experiences

“At least I expect to get bored sooner or later during the concert.”

“The worst scenario is that it turns out to be a dull and boring event that can not have any impact on me. Be it positive or negative, happy or sad as long as my feelings are touched.”
Marketing

Non-attendees view current marketing by orchestras and theatres as non-informative and dull

Want to use the internet and mobile phones in order to click on some music samples if that was possible in order to get a sense what is on offer
On classical music marketing

"They are kind of cold, not waking any kind of interest. They are made so plain, a little apologetic, sorry for being here, period."

"Obituaries!"

"It seems to me that they are not made to wake the interest of people who don’t attend concerts."
Ticket issues

Especially students expect prices to be much higher that they actually are

When hearing the actual charges they consider tickets reasonably priced compared to rock concerts or cinema tickets that they use as reference
Observations

Following Pierre Bourdieu’s notions it can be argued that the field of classical music effectively dispossesses certain potential consumers by not seeking after them. This is reflected in the comments by the non-attendees who are left outside of this field.
“Dumbing down” or “wising up”? 

John Parker (2008) argues in *Intelligent Life*, that instead of “dumbing down” people are “wising up”. Therefore, at least educated non-attendees might be tempted to change their behaviour in the future. This provides opportunities for further research.
View on education

There might be room for optimism that with the rising education level also younger generations would be recruited to the classical and ethnic music events.

This, however, requires rethinking in terms of marketing, pricing, accessibility, presentability of concerts, etc.
Thank you!

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