

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

3<sup>rd</sup> World Forum on Music  
Session V: Challenges to art music  
November 21, 2009  
Tunis

Timo Cantell  
Professor in Arts Management  
Sibelius Academy  
[timo.cantell@siba.fi](mailto:timo.cantell@siba.fi)



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMİN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## Content of the presentation

Background orientation

Audience studies in Helsinki

Studies of non-attendees, Helsinki cases

Observations



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMIN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## Background orientation

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

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



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMIN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## 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There is some literature on music audiences, plenty of unpublished research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



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMİN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## 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



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMIN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## 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



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMİN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## 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



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMİN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## 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





SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMIN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## Arts audiences in Helsinki

The following data is based on audience research  
at Helsinki Festival in 2002 and 2007

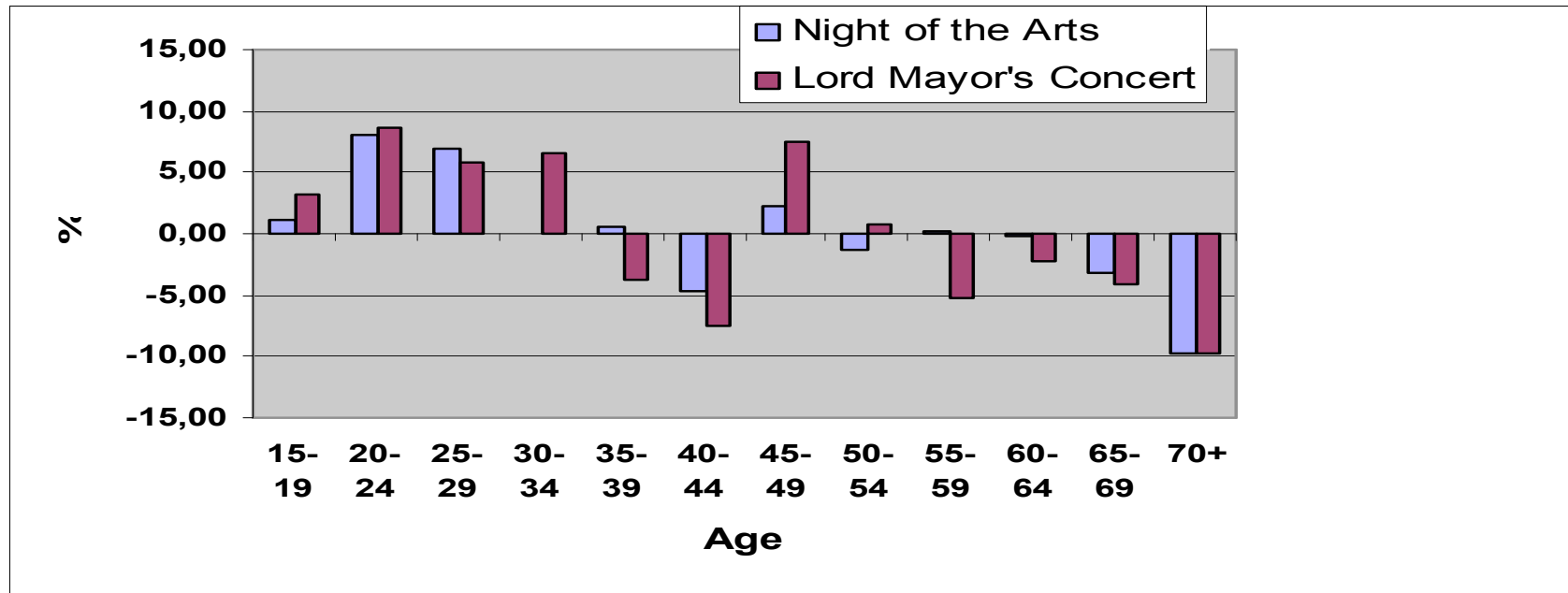
There are particular characteristics in terms of  
age and place of residence



# Helsinki festival audience

## Free open air events

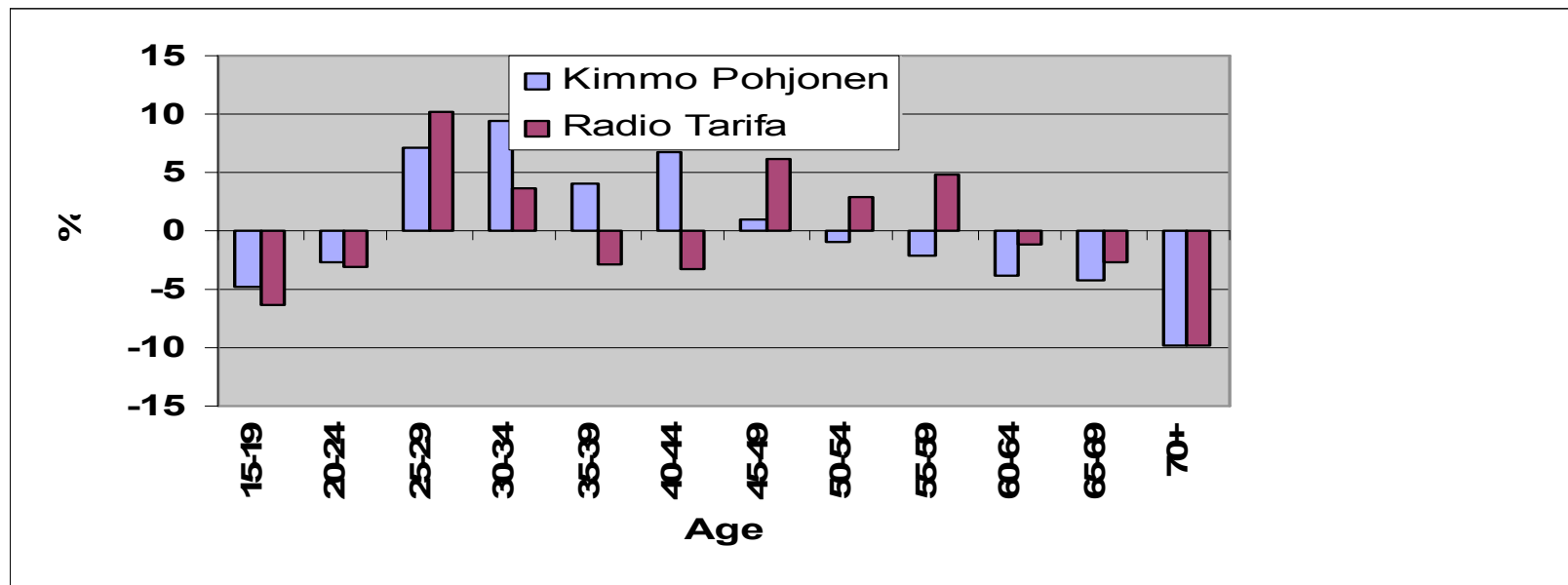
Deviation from the Helsinki region population by age (0=expected)





# Helsinki festival audience Ethnic music events

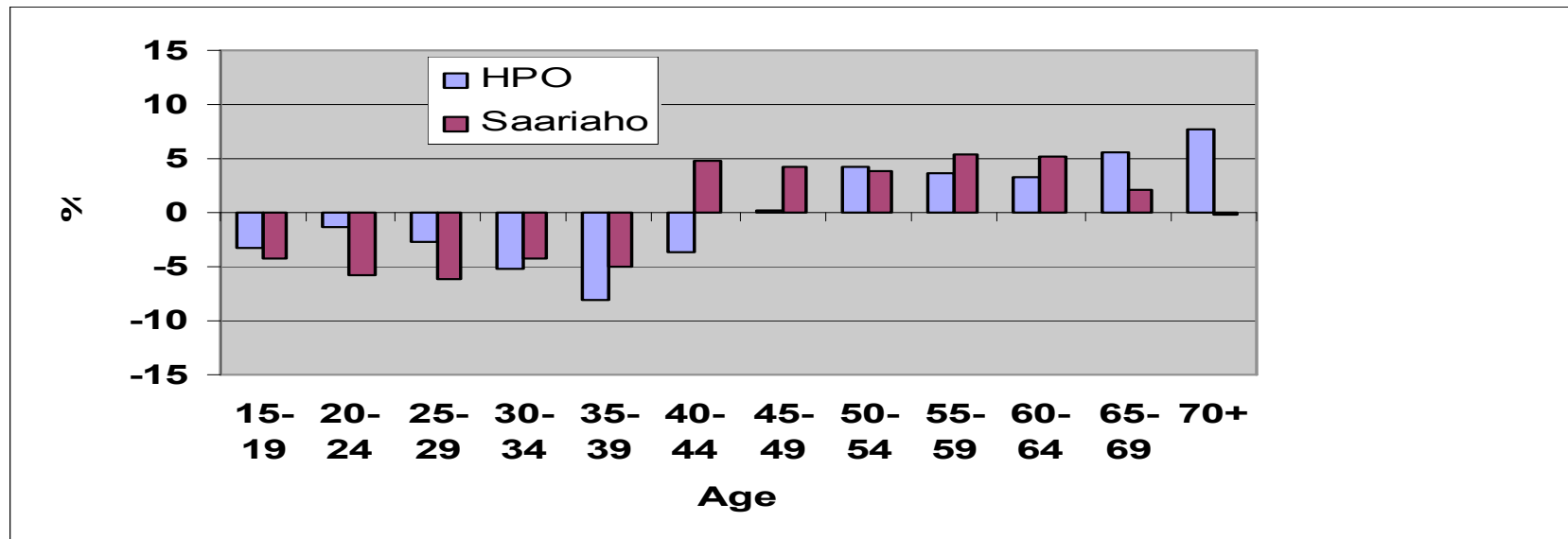
Deviation from the Helsinki region population by age (0=expected)





# Helsinki festival audience Classical music events

Deviation from the Helsinki region population by age (0=expected)





SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMİN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## 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



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMİN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## 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



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMIN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## Main findings

Assumption of special knowledge

Time management

Social aspects

Search for experiences

Marketing issues



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMİN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## 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





SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMIN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## 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.



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMİN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## 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.



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMIN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## Time management

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

Booking leisure time activities in advance causes  
stress



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMIN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## 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”*



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMIN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## 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.”*



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMIN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## 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.



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMIN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## 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.”*



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMİN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## 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





SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMIN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## 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.”*



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMIN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## 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



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMİN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## 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.”*



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMIN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## Ticket issues

Especially students expect prices to be much higher than 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



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMIN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## 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.



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMİN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## “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.



SIBELIUS-AKATEMIA  
SIBELIUS-AKADEMIN  
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

## 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!

Timo Cantell  
Sibelius Academy  
Finland

[timo.cantell@siba.fi](mailto:timo.cantell@siba.fi)