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To lead or not to lead? And how?

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In spring 2017, we published a call for articles about *cultural leadership*. While education in cultural leadership is now increasingly in demand in cultural policy related university programs, it has been neither a central research perspective nor a central object of study in cultural policy research. The first three articles are in response to that call. In addition, the issue includes a review of Ruben Östlund's *The Square* (2017), a movie that directly relates to cultural leadership. Moreover, there are two more peer reviewed articles on other topic areas, which have their own theoretical frames but can also be read as illustrations of the state of (lack of?) leadership within the cultural sector in Nordic countries.

Leadership is becoming an increasingly influential notion in the cultural sector, internationally, and now also in the Nordic countries. This can be linked to the ongoing change in the cultural sector and its dominant discourses. Perspectives and methodologies originating in other spheres of society, and perhaps especially in the fields of management and economics, are becoming increasingly influential. The focus is shifting from art and culture as such. On the one hand, it is shifting towards quantifiable results. On the other hand, it is shifting towards perspectives where creativity is ascribed not only to single individuals, but also to organizations and modes of organization. Such shifts changes the focus from the autonomy of the arts, and of individual artists, to the leadership and organization of the arts, of artists and other cultural professionals, and of the entire field of cultural production, as means to ensure both creativity and improved results.

In the first article, Njörður Sigurjónsson takes lessons of cultural leadership from John Dewey to provoke questions about the role of established cultural institutions. He reminds us that experience is something holistic, transformative and ever-changing, obliging cultural leaders to think of the audience as active creators. Secondly, Berndt Clavier and Asko Kauppinen show how

UNESCO has influenced what kind of knowledge has been used – and how it has changed over the years – in the management of the cultural sector in Sweden via cultural policies. Thirdly, Trine Heide, Nanna Kann-Rasmussen and Jeppe Zielinski Nguyen Ajslev provide us a look at Danish cultural governance. They conclude that there has been a lack of culturally specific leadership as market economics and corporate governance have penetrated the cultural sector.

Like cultural policy research, the study of cultural leadership is a research field overlapping and intersecting with several other fields, such as organization studies and leadership studies. These fields have distinctly different histories, both in terms of theory and in how they relate to the field of practice. This is reflected in the articles published in this thematic issue on cultural leadership, articles which exemplify cultural leadership both as a perspective in cultural policy research and as a phenomenon to be studied and discussed by cultural policy researchers. Dorte Skot-Hansen takes the floor as a discussant by reviewing *The Square* as a movie about cultural leadership.

Besides the articles that explicitly reflect the theme of cultural leadership, in this issue Casper Hvenegaard Rasmussen writes about Danish cultural policy from a Bourdieuan perspective. As such, his article does not focus on cultural leadership but it still is tempting to reflect his text against the role of cultural leadership in Danish cultural policy, as he ends up asking for new ways for leaders of cultural institutions to legitimize their doings. Finally, Ingeborg Hjort investigates the national memorial process in the aftermath of the twin terror attacks in Norway on 22 July 2011. Interestingly, she finds underlying confusion and vagueness in Norwegian memory politics. That observation could also be interpreted as a lack of leadership, could it not?

We wish you a nice read!