

„The People Formerly Known as the Audience“

Participation and Crowdsourcing in the Arts and Culture

The quote „the people formerly known as the audience“ by Jay Rosen, professor of journalism at New York University illustrates the paradigm shift currently underway in the world of media due to the rise of the social and participatory Web 2.0. According to Bertolt Brechts utopian “Radiotheorie” from the early thirties of the last century, the “former audience” has taken on a new role: *„The radio could inarguably be the best apparatus of communication in public life, an enormous system of channels – provided it saw itself as not only a sender but also a receiver. This means making the listener not only listen but also speak; not to isolate him but to place him in relation to others.“*¹

This vision has become a reality regarding the innovative technical options the Social Web offers for participation. Increasingly, people seek to express themselves and connect with one another; this has led to a rise in the demand for platforms which meet these needs. Among the most prominent examples are YouTube, where 48 hours² of video are uploaded every minute; and Facebook with more than 800 million members³ who “place themselves in relation to others”. It is obvious that technology has changed the way we interact, communicate and shape our media landscape. The line between production and consumption is becoming more and more blurred. Social media seems to be a catalyst for participation and identification of artists and the former audience. It is fascinating to observe these trends in other societal sectors as well, such as politics and economy.

Many arts organisations are examining this shift toward a participatory arts culture and figuring out how to adapt in new and creative ways that will have long-term benefits to arts organisations and the people they serve.

Crowdsourcing

A new term related to online participation has been evolving since 2006. “Crowdsourcing” was introduced by Jeff Howe in an article for the US geek magazine Wired4. Crowdsourcing is defined as “the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call (using the Internet).” It is a form of internet participation distinct from outsourcing where a certain task is delegated to a specific person. Crowdsourcing can be applied in a positive way (as shown below), but its strategies can also be used to give businesses “access to a global, on-demand, 24 x 7 workforce” as the Amazon-platform for crowdsourced labour “Mechanical Turk”⁵ states. There, thousands of online workers make ridiculously small amounts of money by working on HITs (Human Intelligence Tasks) such as translations, writing short articles or categorising online content. Intended for corporate use, Mechanical Turk is based upon the notion that certain tasks are simple for people and difficult for computers. In the same form that a computer scientist would request a piece of information from a database, applications could now be developed to retrieve information from human brains.

Our traditional approach to art is through professional artists. A question that arises through the concept of crowd-sourcing is: what happens if ideas and realisations become crowd-sourced to the

¹ <http://homepage.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/niels.werber/Germanmedia.htm>

² <http://youtube-global.blogspot.com/2011/05/thanks-youtube-community-for-two-big.html>

³ <https://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>

⁴ <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.06/crowds.html>

⁵ www.mturk.com; The inspiration for Amazon’s “Mechanical Turk” comes from an invention of the same name by the Hungarian nobleman Wolfgang von Kempelen, who, in 1769, became famous in Europe for having created a mechanized chess player from wood and gears. The act was in reality a fraud. The machine was controlled by a human chess player cleverly concealed within the wood case.

“people formerly known as the audience”? How can people generate ideas together? Can a coherent result be expected? Can “everybody be an artist”⁶ as Joseph Beuys claimed?

“Audience”-interaction appears in the following forms:

- *Spectating* is the passive act of receiving a finished artistic product (with no or almost no interaction, except e.g. applause).
- Many cultural institutions have implemented *accompanying programs* like lectures or workshops. These measures may activate the creative mind.
- Crowdsourcing allows contributions often in a contest-like call for e.g. audio or video footage, generally curated by professionals. This process may lead to co-creation e.g. participatory public art or even to fully identify the “audience-as-artist” as soon as audience members take full control of the artistic process.

Some examples will give further insight:

The Brooklyn Museum in New York launched a project to put its collection online to make the data available for researchers, but also to create an interface with the community. They created a service (The Posse) where visitors can set up accounts and then anything they like, tag or comment will be attributed to them, both in the collection area and on their profiles. The goal of the tagging (= giving bottom-up key words) option is not just to collect search terms, but also allows visitors to gain a certain kind of ownership by attributing their personally selected terms to arts objects.



Screenshot from “The Museum Social Tagging Project” <http://www.steve.museum/>

The crowd-curated exhibition “Click” went one step further. This exhibition intended to document the changing faces of Brooklyn. The crowd (general public) contributed photographs and participated in the process of curation.

A prominent and successful crowdsourcing experiment is the film “Life in a Day”⁷. The film was produced by Ridley Scott who arranged a series of video clips selected from 80,000 YouTube uploads from around the world on a single day, July 24, 2010. Participants (the crowd) were asked to document one day in their life “because a day is the basic temporal building block of human life—

⁶ http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soziale_Plastik

⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/user/lifeinaday>

wherever you are." 75% of the film's content came from people contacted through YouTube, traditional advertising, TV shows, and newspapers; the remaining 25% came from cameras sent out to the developing world, as the filmmakers wanted to have the whole world represented.



The opera “Twitterdämmerung”⁸ that had its premier at London’s Royal Opera House in 2009 had its libretto comprised by 900 Twitterers (the staging and the music was done by professionals). The Savonlinna Opera Festival 2012⁹ in Finland intends to go beyond this: “In the project anyone can contribute to the creation of an opera. Any member of the online community can help to write the libretto, compose the music and design the sets and costumes – from beginning to end. The Savonlinna Opera Festival will be placing world-class soloists, a chorus of 80, a symphony orchestra and its entire production machinery at the community’s disposal. “

The Thalia Theater in Hamburg is also experimenting with crowdsourcing. They let the audience choose three plays to be performed in 2012/2013. In an interview Carl Hegemann, dramatic adviser, stated: “Die Kunst lebt auch vom Risiko und der Bereitschaft, sich selbst überraschen zu lassen.”¹⁰

As mentioned before, crowdsourcing also has negative connotations. The most prominent example in this regard is the aforementioned platform “Mechanical Turk”. Nevertheless, numerous similar platforms have been established in Germany¹¹.

The artist Aaron Koblin¹² made use of “Mechanical Turk” to critically reflect its concept, which seemed to achieve a new level of depersonalisation and exploitation in the workplace. He created an online drawing tool and offered 2 cents to draw a sheep facing left. The crowd contributed 10,000 sheep for a total amount of US\$ 200¹³. The sheep were sold at the online shop “The Sheep Market”¹⁴.

⁸ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/opera/6143295/First-Twitter-opera-given-premier.html>

⁹ <http://www.oopperajuhlat.fi/operabyyou/english.iw3>

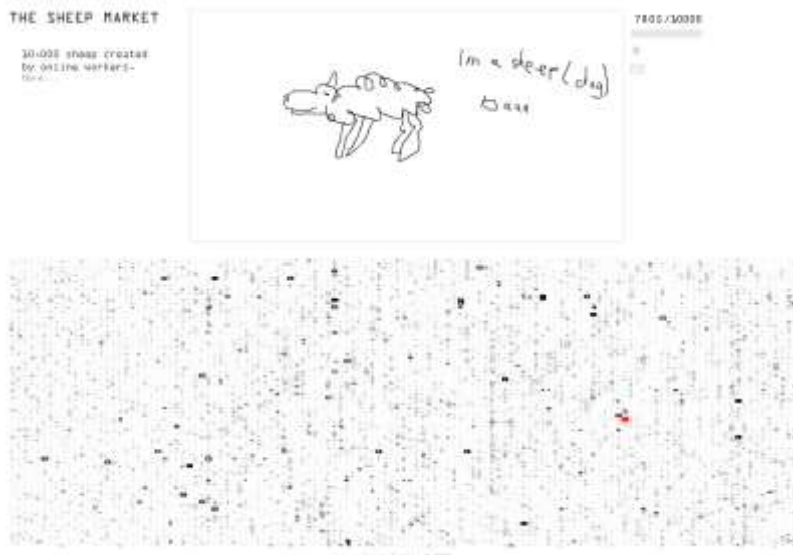
¹⁰ <http://www.abendblatt.de/kultur-live/article2123370/Streitgesprach-Darf-Publikum-ueber-Theater-entscheiden.html>

¹¹ <http://www.crowdsourcingverband.de/>

¹² <http://www.aaronkoblin.com/info.html>

¹³ <http://www.aaronkoblin.com/work/thesheepmarket/index.html>

¹⁴ <http://www.thesheepmarket.com/>



With this concept, Aaron Koblin explores how bureaucratized and systematized human labor is being established in the post-industrial society.



From 10,000 submissions, only two directly questioned the meaning of the task.

Crowdfunding

Another term deriving from Crowdsourcing is Crowdfunding. Crowdfunding is a rather new method to fund projects by individuals using the social web. Social media play an important role for the development of crowdfunding. Facebook, Twitter, and blogs are important tools to communicate information about crowdfunding projects to potential contributors and possibly convert social capital into financial capital. The interactive web empowers users to create content, to distribute and to discuss it. The social web enables bypassing intermediaries in a traditional supply chain. This disintermediation can also be observed in the area of crowdfunding. Money seekers can now bypass traditional public financing regimes, foundations and sponsors, making funding processes more transparent and democratic. Crowdfunding allows money seekers (artists and art institutions) to approach their public directly and involve them in the financing process. Besides opening up the possibility of influencing the artwork, financial contributions can be made directly to the artist. Thus, a combination of crowdfunding and crowdsourcing seems to be an innovative, far reaching method to include target groups in a comprehensive way.

A significant number of crowdfunding platforms have been established in the US and many European countries. Most platforms in the creative sector provide in-kind rewards whereas a rising number of platforms in the field of music share financial revenue with investors, which are sometimes addressed as co-producers.

The term “crowdfunding” also first appeared in 2006, the objective of which is to finance a specific project or enterprise. This concept of financing by a large number of supporters is admittedly not new; Mozart and Beethoven financed the publication of compositions via a priori subscriptions.

A definition used in most academic papers has been established by Armin Schwienbacher: Crowdfunding involves an open call, essentially through the Internet, for the provision of financial resources either in form of donation or in exchange for some form of reward and/or voting rights.¹⁵

In practice this means that interested users are invited to donate a certain amount for concrete projects via Internet donations. Each project has an initial target budget which should be reached within a limited time frame. If the targeted percentage of the budget is reached, the project is considered successful and can be implemented.

Most crowdfunding takes place on platforms which provide payment facilities and project management tools. They channel the funds from the donor to the project owner. However, there are also examples of projects which succeeded without making use of any crowdfunding platforms. This is due to the fact that the development of web based software to handle payments is not overly complicated. A prominent example is the movie “Hotel Desire” which raised € 170,000 in 80 days during the summer of 2011 on its own website <http://hotel-desire.com>¹⁶

The dimensions of crowdfunding are difficult to assess because the platforms give only estimations of their financial volume. The American platform Kickstarter claims to have funneled more than 60 million US\$ to about 24,000 projects since 2009.¹⁷

In April 2011 ikosom¹⁸ evaluated the volume of crowdfunding for the German market, focussing on non-financial rewards.¹⁹ The results of the survey are a boost of motivation for creators of crowdfunding projects. Every second project (53%) is successful. The average sum raised by these projects was about 3,000 Euro, with the largest project receiving almost 27,000 Euros.

Among the most prominent platforms in Germany for cultural projects Startnext.de and mySherpas.de can be mentioned. Startnext has as well established an Austrian branch.

Crowdfunding could revolutionise the traditional public funding regime which up to now requires money seekers to send complicated applications to funding body such as the European Commission or national authorities, who then make decisions in a top down approach.

It could be an interesting option to combine crowdfunding with traditional public funding. One could imagine a system where project initiators have to prove that they have a community behind them who are even willing to support their project financially.

¹⁵ Belleflamme, P., Lambert, T., Schwienbacher, A. (2010): Crowdfunding, : An Industrial Organization Perspective. Preliminary paper for the Conference "Digital Business Models: Understanding Strategies" Paris, June 25-26, 2010.

¹⁶ <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/medien/film-crowdfunding-experiment-geglueckt-1.113300>

¹⁷ <http://techcrunch.com/2011/05/25/since-2009-kickstarter-hosted-funneled-20-million-to-24000-self-funded-projects/>

¹⁸ www.ikosom.de

¹⁹ <http://www.ikosom.de/2011/06/22/crowdfunding-survey-2011/>

Crowdfunding makes a unique relationship possible between the pitched project and the target group, as well as providing an indication for the sustainability of the project. Even the project outline could be refined through a crowdsourced process, as many platforms allow or even encourage people to contribute their talent or ideas to the project. Starting a crowdfunding project means starting a communication process. Establishing communication around a project is the kickoff for dissemination of project results at a later stage.

The blog www.crowdfunding-deutschland.de indicates that crowdfunding generates a change of paradigm with public funding:

Crowdfunding thus achieves a paradigm shift to a different level. It is a departure from the previous expectation towards the "public hand" as a "sprinkling system" for money. Instead of the passive role as a receiver of money and applicant, the three basic rules of crowdfunding apply: Discuss - connect - act. "We make it ourselves" is the healthy response of mature citizens. Either he takes his future in the hand, or he leaves the decisions to the arbitrariness of the decision makers.²⁰

The combination of crowdfunding and crowdsourcing (shaping a project by many people) can lead to more sustainable and successful ventures. Especially the creative sector could serve as a role model in this regard.

As funding is getting more and more participatory the projects themselves will also follow this paradigm. Traditional funding will not disappear but crowdfunding is being established as a complementary option and leading to participation.

Conclusion

A good starting point for crowdsourcing and crowdfunding can be the introduction of social media into an arts institution. Tweeting, facebooking and youtubing directors, curators, and artists will most likely start a conversation with their target groups and establish a community which could also support a project financially. Social media will most likely make production processes more transparent which is a prerequisite for involvement. The inherent participatory approach of social media will change the traditional sender-receiver model, not only in regards to communication but to the whole value added chain. Participation and financial support via crowdfunding leads to increased identification between the audience and the specific projects with which they are involved. It is audience development at its best.

²⁰ <http://www.crowdfunding-deutschland.de/post/5865632212/crowdfunding-das-nachhaltige-business-2-0->

Crowdsourcing - Partizipative Wertschöpfung im Kunst- & Kultursektor //

Der 2006 eingeführte Begriff „Crowdsourcing“ beschreibt die Auslagerung von bestimmten Aufgaben an eine unbestimmte Menge von Menschen über das Internet. Der Begriff hat vielfältige positive und negative Konnotationen und fand auch praktischen Eingang in die künstlerische und kulturelle Produktion. Crowdsourcing bedeutet Partizipation und eine weitgehende Identität von Publikum und ProduzentInnen und kann dadurch den Kulturbetrieb demokratisieren.