Vantaa City Library – Transcending Consumer-producer Relations in Public Library Music Services

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Abstract:

In our article we discuss about the two-year service experimentation project that was implemented in Tikkurila public library music and media department in 2016-2017. The project, which was funded by the Finnish ministry of education, included interactive children's music sessions, experiments with new pedagogical approaches to music, educational co-operation with local music education providers, upgrading music production facilities in the library, new media content services such as karaoke, theatre improvisation workshops, online learning materials and providing performance space for local musicians. During the project we were able to make a significant increase in our customer visits and create new innovative services and give more people access to enjoying musical creativity and actively producing music.

Keywords: musicality, music libraries, creativity, improvisation, emancipation

1. Introduction

Until recent years the main mission of public libraries has been providing access to various documents such as books, articles and recorded music. However, during the last decades technological changes in information technology and consumer behavior have forced libraries to reinvent themselves. This is especially true in music and audiovisual library services where the lending rates of recorded music have dropped significantly during the last ten years as the new online streaming services have seriously challenged the traditional library concept. In

Finland we have seen loans of music recordings from public libraries plummeting from almost 10 million loans in 2001 to 3 million loans in 2017.

Loans: Music recordings
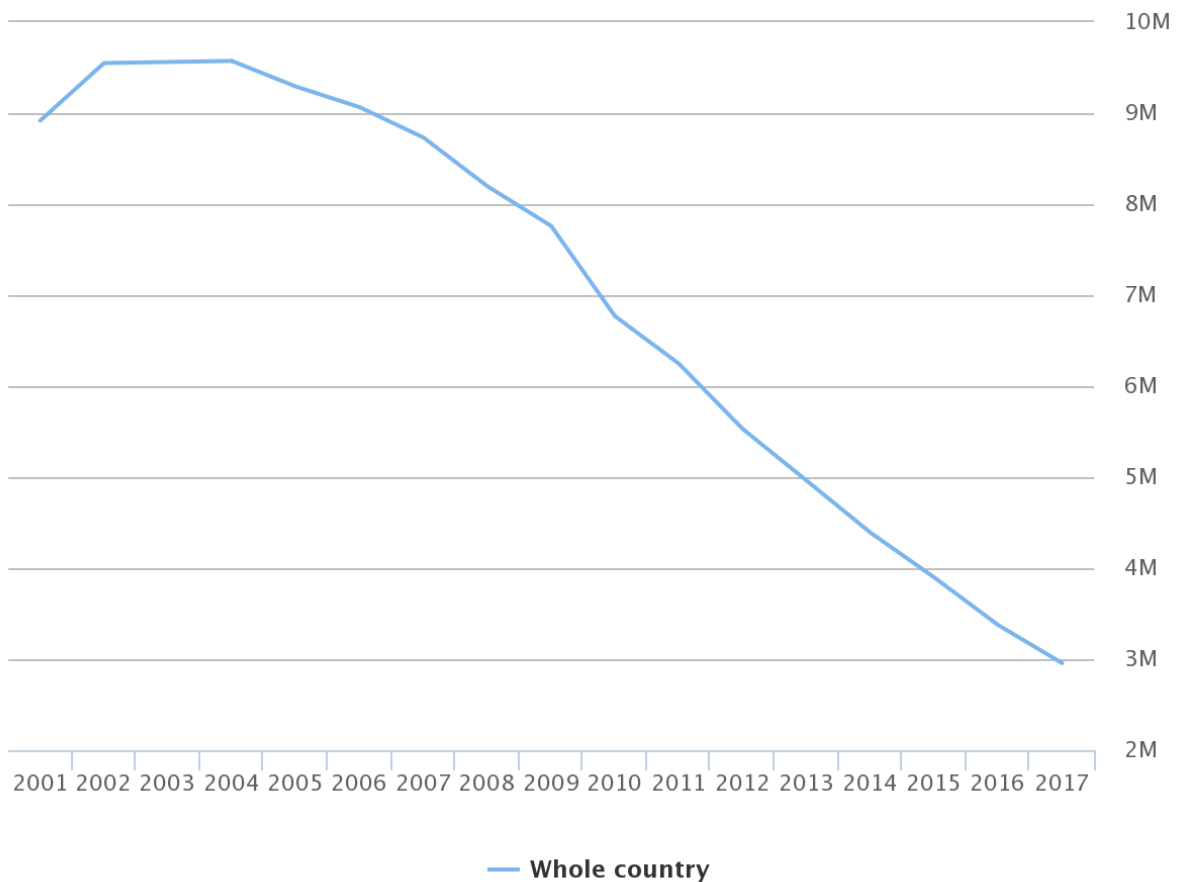
Loans of music recordings from Finnish public libraries between 2001-2017 (*Statistics of Finnish Public Libraries 2007*)

2. Library as an educative playground

Ethnomusicologist John Blacking ponders in his seminal study 'How musical is man' about the paradoxical attitude towards music and musicality that modern society has. While our society "claims that only a limited number of people are musical, and yet it behaves as if all people possessed the basic capacity without which no musical tradition can exist – the capacity to listen to and distinguish patterns of sound" (Blacking, 1974, p.8). In modern industrial society musicality and creativity have been traditionally seen as the privilege of the chosen few extraordinary and skillful professionals. Musicality has been defined as a set of competencies that require long and expensive formal music education to develop, such as impressive performance skills, ability to read, write, comprehend, and interpret staff notation.

Although to some extent idealistic, Blacking's vision still challenges us to think new directions for providing and comprehending music library service. Blacking suggest that we should discredit the idea of the "stupidity" of majority and consider the possibility that all human beings are equally musical and creative (1974, p.116). Instead of seeing our customers primarily as consumers or end users of recorded and notated music, we should

now consider them also as potential creators and producers of their own musical self-objects. We are not claiming that everyone *could or should* become a performing star or professional musician, it could be however argued that majority of people live their lives below their full creative and musical potential. We believe that many people want and can take a more active role than mere consumer and that they would benefit from it.

Recent technological development also challenges the division between consumers and producers. During the last decades, new pedagogical technologies such as widely available online learning materials, virtual instruments and learning games have made learning and making music accessible for much wider public as before. At the same time also, the technology required for producing music have become affordable for many and distribution is no longer limited to commercial publishers. The limits for enjoying actively making music or even becoming a commercially successful artist or record producer are no longer limited not so much by access to scarce resources or music industry gate keepers but depend more on ability to utilize new media technologies and breaking psychological constraints of becoming creative. Our main argument is that today *public libraries should be seen not only as depositories of documents but as educative playgrounds fostering creativity.*

Creativity has a central role in current discourse on economic development. It could be argued that all human development and economic development is based on creativity. In recent decades, we have also seen the rise on importance of the so called 'creative industries'. For instance, according to OECD 2014 forum "Creativity and innovation are now driving the economy, reshaping entire industries and stimulating inclusive growth. Businesses, organizations and economic regions that embrace creativity generate higher revenue and provide greater stability into the future. Based on ideas, the creative economy spans economic, social, cultural and technological aspects and is at the crossroads of the arts, business and technology. It relies on an unlimited global resource: human creativity, skills and talent. " (OECD, 2104)

Music is also connected to all so called 'new literacies'. Music is powerful way of moving and influencing people. There are practically no political, social or religious movements that are not accompanied by music of some sort. From media literacy perspective understanding how music influences us is one skill needed in critical reading of media. Producing and publishing own creative works can also be motivational factor in improving digital literacy skills. In future, developments in AI, automatization and robotics are fundamentally changing working life, as many mundane and repetitive tasks will no longer require human beings to do them. Although we do not know what the specific future job skills are, it is likely that what is left are the tasks that require essential human capacities such as creativity and ability for innovative collaboration.

While creativity is nowadays seen as central element in economic development and essential skill in future working life, it should be also acknowledged that being creative also has intrinsic value in the personal level i.e., it has value "in its own right". Being engaged in various creative activities, such as making music has possible economic implications, it is also beneficial to our general wellbeing in many levels. In terms of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, music creates sense of belongingness, strengthens self-esteem and even provides opportunities for actualizing our full creative potential as human beings.

3. Overview of the project

A two-year project aimed at redesigning the music library services in Tikkurila library was undertook between 2016-2017. During the project both interior design of the library and the service concept was renewed thoroughly. Although we still have an extensive collection of recorded music, sheet music and book, the new interior design of the music and media department devotes more space for making music, various events and social interaction between customers. In the following we will discuss in more detail some of the service experiments that we undertook during the project.

1. Music collection
2. Stage / happenings
3. Game room
4. Studio
5. Karaoke and music room
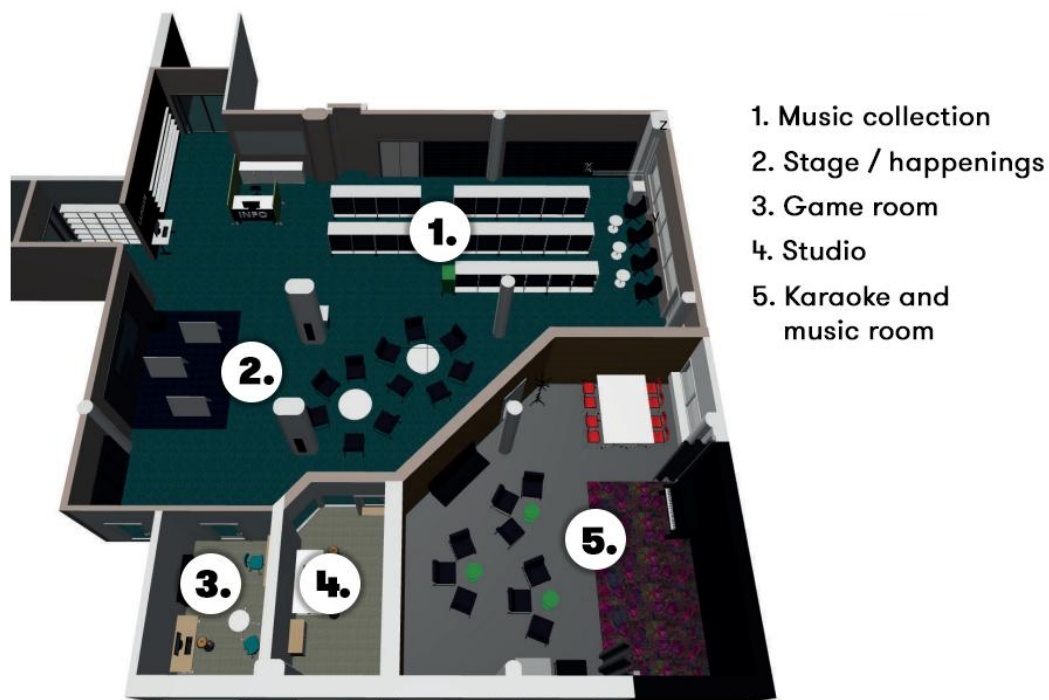
Overview of the redesigned music and media department.

4. Karaoke as a library service

Singing is the most basic and likely the first form of musical creativity in human evolution. Statistics from the Statistics Finland show that within the general population singing is the most popular way of actively making music. For this reason, promoting singing was chosen as a one of the key goals of the project. This is easy to understand as singing is a very low threshold way of practicing music which requires very small initial investments since instruments or other expensive equipment is not needed to begin singing. Karaoke, choir and community singing sessions have traditionally been very popular leisure time activities in Finland.

On the left-side a communal singing session and on right-side children from local kindergarten singing karaoke.

As a new service experimentation karaoke service was introduced to the music and media department. A karaoke room with over 20 000 online karaoke tracks can be booked for private sessions during the opening hours of the library. Karaoke can be sung in a sound proof room in the music and media department thus providing a safe and private space for musical experimentation. In Finland, as in most places, karaoke is traditionally sung in pubs and bars where alcohol is consumed. Providing alternatives for singing karaoke and spaces for social interaction in a safe non-alcohol context is an obvious health benefit. Our experiment has shown that, there are many people who want to sing but can't or don't want to do it in pubs or bars. Since the beginning of the experiment the space has been fully booked for almost a month in advance.

Due to its looser aesthetics for many karaoke is 'the lowest of the low' in the hierarchy of cultural forms. If karaoke is valued within the western art music aesthetic discourse it is true that often karaoke performances lack the qualities considered musically beautiful or skillful. However, it could be argued that the aesthetic values are only secondary in importance. Karaoke is based on the idea that expressing oneself musically is valuable on its own right. The positive and encouraging atmosphere of karaoke makes it very suitable for promoting positive attitude towards making music and encouraging people to express themselves musically. For many the constraints keeping us from not singing are internal such as feelings of shame and fear of being evaluated often stemming from early experiences in school music lesson. (Ruismäki et al, 2013, p.1231)

The library karaoke service has been utilized also by local kindergarten and preschool groups. In that context karaoke can be also a motivational tool for promote reading skills in general. As argued for example by Gupta (2006) "Children do not perceive Karaoke as a reading activity rather for many it is a fun music play. Struggling readers who dislike reading and have a negative attitude towards reading find this atypical non-reading like method more motivating. The tool could be particularly useful in enhancing fluency in reading. As readers immerse themselves in music and interact with text, a new dimension of their reading behavior starts to emerge. During karaoke process, children are engaged in different aspects of reading that promote fluency. " (Gupta, 2006, p.84).

Karaoke is also very social and inclusive in nature. In many industrial societies loneliness is a major social problem. In Finland, especially senior citizens are very often suffering from lack of meaningful social contacts in their lives. Therefore, providing opportunities for

communal music making and social interaction is a one way to create general social wellbeing. In addition to private sessions, an open karaoke group is organized twice a week thus promoting also social interaction among library customers. The group started as a self-organized meeting of local karaoke aficionados and was later adopted by the library. Feedback collected from the participants suggest that participation in the karaoke group has very important meaning in their life improving its quality significantly.

While most people sing karaoke just for the enjoyment of singing and because of social participation it offers, for some karaoke is also gateway to help them to become professional performing musicians. There have been several customers that have been using the karaoke service as a way for practicing for singing competitions and for admission tests for music schools. More formal singing tuition is also provided in karaoke courses that are organized in co-operation with local adult education provider. The course titled "Have courage! Sing karaoke!" provided participants advice on voice formation, microphone techniques and performance skills.

5. Studio as a library service

During the last decades, the prices of studio and recording technology have decreased dramatically making them accessible for much wider groups. A well-equipped studio can be now built in a library with reasonable costs. Major development was done in the music and media departments studio facility including studio and recording technology, various instruments and online learning materials for self-learning. The studio facility was built into a room which was originally designed as a listening room.
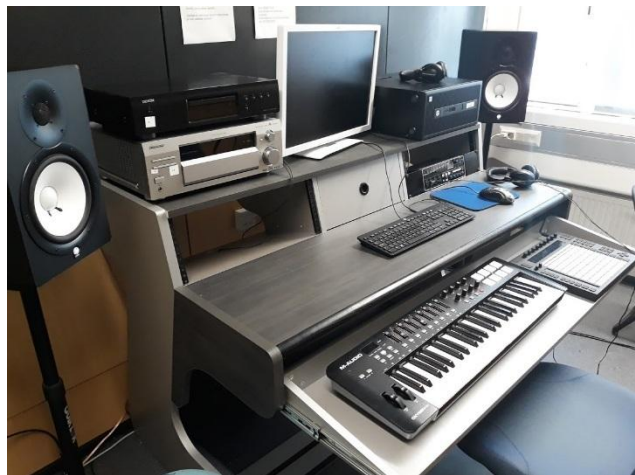
The studio facility at the Tikkurila library

The studio has been popular especially with freelance workers with music and other sound processing projects and young hip hop and rap enthusiasts. Recently one of our regular youth groups got a commercial recording contract with a Finnish hip hop -publisher. For this group, library provided a safe learning environment for experimentation and learning from which to bounce towards more professional projects.

For the younger crowd the studio has also evolved into a social gathering and meeting place. In this context peer learning has also self-emerged especially within the younger user groups, with less experienced aspiring hip hop artist 'hanging around' more advanced artists in studio and music department. Starting by singing over popular YouTube-videos in "karaoke style" and moving towards making their own lyrics and beats. Especially within various popular music styles peer learning has always been a popular learning strategy. Finnish music education system has been traditionally geared towards teaching western art music and thus there have been less formal learning opportunities for popular music styles than art music. It also seems that often young people see their own peers as most credible "teachers".

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The concept of *affinity space* coined by John Paul Gee (2005, p.225) is fruitful in understanding what happens in studio. According to Gee, affinity spaces are spaces where people are drawn together by shared interest in common activity and often including common knowledge creation and informal peer-to-peer learning. The spaces can be virtual such as various web forums or physical places where people are engaged in common activity such as gaming, making music or playing. They are based on equal participation and not on hierarchic power relations. They are ways of creating social cohesion, as participation in an affinity space is based on willingness to participate in common activity and not to belonging to groups defined for example by ethnicity, nationality, profession, age or class.

For affinity spaces and peer learning to emerge, library space and its social atmosphere must be supportive for the social interaction required. It is important that library is experienced as safe and accepting social place, where people want and like to "hang out". However, while peer learning has its own significance, it is also clear that more formal tuition and guidance is also needed. Support for using the studio have been provided by the library in informal introductory session for the studio facility that are organized once a week. The sessions are walk in open sessions where no fees or pre-enrolment is required. This appears to be a working strategy as especially the young patrons often seem to have difficulties in planning ahead their activities and are difficult to recruit for formal teaching sessions. In addition, several more formally structured studio courses were organized in co-operation with the local adult education center.

6. Interactive music sessions for and parents and children

Weekly children music sessions targeted for parents at home with small children were another way of promoting singing. The sessions are organized once a week at the children and youth department. They are organized in the open library space to make them easily accessible. The sessions are free of charge and no preregistration is required.

A selection of instruments designed for small children, such as various easy-to-play percussive instruments were provided. In addition, experimentation was

Children's music session at the Tikkurila library. On the ceiling, there's a hanging directional speaker and on the table a drum machine and android tablet with a selection of music apps.

made utilizing the possibilities of modern music technology. While very small children do not have motoric or cognitive skills to play most of traditional instruments, new technology provides ways that children can experiment with producing different sounds using for example virtual instruments and design instruments utilizing motion sensor devices.

For small children singing and listening to music are ways to promote language acquisition, social interaction skills such as listening and interacting with others in a music context. Studies in cognitive neuroscience suggest that there is connection between learning a language and leaning music. It could be even argued that in the early stages of childhood

language is a special type of music (Brandt & al., 2012). There is also evidence from that music making in the childhood can improve information processing capabilities making language acquisition faster (Zhao & Kuhl, 2016). According to Daniel Levitin "even just a small exposure to music lessons as a child creates neural circuits for music processing that are enhanced and more efficient than for those who lack training "(Levitin, 2006, p.194).

7. Improvisations on Music and Theatre: Importance of Instant-Performing

It`s in our nature to be creative. Every second we`re awake, numerous impulses arise in our mind. However, mainly because of our social living, we have boundaries in putting many of our impulses into practice. In the following, we will describe one usable theory drawing on the work of psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva, that illustrates the main task of a workshop leader as an improvisation enabler.

7.1. How Our Mind Works: A Psychoanalytic Point of View

Psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva sees mind as an ongoing battle between two modalities - *the semiotic* and *the symbolic*. The semiotic represents total freedom. In semiotic all our impulses arise and need to proceed into the symbolic to become conscious. The symbolic modality is like a constitution; it represents all the rules and prohibitions. The symbolic is the place of consciousness, and in there the impulses are put into practice. Kristeva also describes a necessary filter that she calls *the thetic*. It can be understood as a layer that exists in between of those two. Its task is to allow some of the semiotic`s impulses to proceed into symbolic, but not all of them; If all of them did, an individual would feel chaotic, and an extreme outcome of it would be psychosis. The thetic layer is needed in social living.

Kristeva suggests that it is impossible to work sanely if all the impulses are carried out. Moreover, if the thetic layer is too thick and no impulse can proceed, there can be no creativity, and a person is no longer in touch with himself. It is an unhealthy state, as well as total freedom. In the optimal circumstances the thetic is porous. An individual should be well balanced with both semiotic and symbolic, between total freedom and the lawbook. (Kristeva, 1984, 19–30, 43–44, pp.117–126). Apparently, the filter of an average workshop participant is way too thick. It needs to be modified to help the impulses flow out with no hesitation.

We keep on blocking many of our impulses because we don`t want to be seen insane, dull or unoriginal. We want to give a safe image of ourselves and, if possible, to be better than others. That is: to succeed. If I produce a genius impulse, I will be accepted, I may think. This is not true. In fact, the opposite is: Ingeniousness is nice, but we`d rather identify to someone ordinary, someone human. When trying to produce one brilliant idea hundreds of them, possibly fantastic ones, are being deleted. (Johnstone, 1979)

How to fool our brain to just act with no thinking? Our mind can be modified by the environment, and a workshop trainer has a central role in creating the environment. Boundaries of our mind can be overcome by full acceptance and by maintaining a facilitating environment. When it`s achieved, people do not feel responsible of what they say or do. Self-irony is a crucial tool in all improvising. It reduces our desire be successful and to beat the others. It also helps us to get the sense of belonging. The trainer should also be involved in all making, not just telling others what to do. Moreover, the trainer should be constantly aware

of the nonverbal communication to find out the current energy level of the group. In an energetic state people tend to drop their social masks. (Winnicott, 1971; Johnstone, 1979.)

7.2.   To Try Your Best or to Perform Instantly?

Vantaa City Library offers workshops on improvisation in both music and theatre. The participants in the workshops are just regular library customers. Musical improvisations are based on an ongoing playing, and the participants are never called to play along. A professional musician plays in a public library space for an hour in a row, there are instruments available and the customers join in the jam if they like. In many cases they like to, because the music performed is the Floating Impro™, a non-idiomatic and easy-to-play-music, especially designed for improvising.

Theatre improvisations work slightly different. We have a separate room in which people feel safe to play improvisation games. The sessions always begin with absurd games that are necessary to get the participants relax. Soon after, we play short improvised scenes together. Participants are given the rule to always accept their first, their most obvious idea and to put it into practice. We also have a rule to give a cheerful applause on everyone who thinks too much before acting. Even though the scenes are not meant to be funny, sessions tend to be very funny. One of the groups went on with the weekly sessions on theatre improv, after the guided workshop activity in the library had ended. Once again, we succeeded to offer a space for a group with the shared interest.

Still, there are many similarities in both musical and theatre improvisations. Both are based on an extreme acceptance, and good interaction skills are required in them. Instant-performing is acting with no thinking. In western societies, music and theatre are often taught verbally, and even interrupting pupils when they perform. They are taught by transferring knowledge, by making difference between right and wrong. Usually there`s one master and the rest are journeymen. Improvisation sessions in our library work differently. Our workshops are run to promote emancipation. People are encouraged not to think. "Try your best" is a bad idea.

The paradoxical conclusion of Kristeva`s theory is that we need some rules (the symbolic) to actualize ourselves. Rules increase safety. They are needed in tempting the impulses from the semiotic. Art is not made successfully by offering total freedom in the beginning, it`s useless to just tell people to "go free yourselves". The rules in the Floating Impro™ music are stable pulse, acceptance, only few chords at the time and long length of each improvisation. The rules in theatre improvising are listening, an energetic and positive rush, acceptance, the usage of the first obvious ideas and fast reacting. Later, when certain amount of self-esteem is gained, the rules can be reduced.

Kids are commonly encouraged to be creative, and separate playgrounds are built for them. Why not for people of all ages? Instant-performing is valuable in any age. It`s a technique that can be applied to many activities outside arts such as giving a speech or writing an article. The outcome of it is often better than an idea worked hard on. Our ideas appear naturally and obviously. It´s up to our personal filter whether they are carried out or blocked. Eventually, producing ideas with no thinking helps us to accept ourselves and take a more participatory role in society in general.

Final words

This paper describes some of our experimentations in creating new library services for supporting creativity in Tikkurila library. Generally, only few of library customers have written and published something of their own. Library has a long history of being a place an average customer is gravitated to admire those "creative" individuals and to borrow the fruits of their exceptional creativeness. This is now changing. Library, while still being a collection of masterpieces, is now becoming an educative playground for creative experimentation. Presently, we are also witnessing similar development in numerous other Finnish libraries. Many libraries are moving from collection-based services towards providing space, resources and guidance for creative activities and experimentation in various domains. While our project concentrated in music we currently have several other ongoing projects with similar goals in other domains such as virtual reality, game development, coding and robotics.

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