

## In Ugly Times The Only Protest Is Beauty

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### **Abstract:**

*Hygge Factory is an award-winning non-profit dedicated to empower challenged young people to tell their personal stories through art and give them a strong voice in society. Powered by a strong network of volunteers, partners, artists, creative professionals, and libraries, Hygge Factory supports the young people in every step of the process from idea to finished art product of high professional standard: A book or a record. Libraries are excellent platforms for making the products of these talent- and empathy developing projects relevant and accessible to the public through youth-to-youth communication.*

**Keywords:** Youth, volunteers, co-creation, art, communication.

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## In Ugly Times The Only Protest Is Beauty

I was 22 years old when my hands suddenly went insane. They wanted to make stuff: Write, draw, knit, fold boats out of paper, boats so huge that I could stand in them myself. Yarn, paper, felt, scissors and buttons were scattered all over, occupying every corner of my apartment. So I started calling my apartment Hygge Factory (*Cozy Factory*).

That year my mother had died. I was struggling to fill the empty space. My mother's death was an incomprehensible loss that turned every day into a battle against the empty space, but it also opened my senses to a roaring ocean of possibilities, it sparked my desire to create something beautiful to protest the ugliness of it, and it planted the seed of what Hygge Factory is today: An award-winning non-profit organization dedicated to empowering young people (13-20): To allow them to express their personal stories by co-creating a professional art product in close collaboration with volunteers and professional artists.

Every year Hygge Factory organizes a talent- and empathy developing project that challenges young people to make a professional and sellable art product based on their personal experiences: □A book, which is the result of the writing project Ordskælv! (*Wordquake!*) or

a record, which is the result of the songwriting project Vinyl!. In every project, Hygge Factory sets the framework for young people to develop their ideas into finished products of high professional standards, in the course of six months. Regardless of skills and qualifications, we make sure that they succeed in expressing their personal stories and debut as writers or songwriters.

Hygge Factory brings together a wide range of support from the state, libraries, businesses, foundations, associations, students, researchers, artists and creative professionals, who share their talents and resources, and join forces to achieve one common goal: To give young people a strong voice that can shake up taboos, a voice that will nuance and expand society's understanding of who they are.

### **An Empty Space Full Of Possibility**

The idea for Hygge Factory – an ever-changing production company that can put all kinds of art created by young people into production – was sparked when death suddenly flung me into a huge empty space. In this huge empty space, I could sense the shape of what was missing. I needed help to get the ugly mess inside of me out where I could see it, shape it, and find a way to communicate it with others, so it made sense that I had lived through it. My project was extroverted and explosive. I felt that I was much more in need of a production company than a shrink: I wanted to express myself through art and create a narrative of everything that had happened to me so others could understand what I was dealing with. But where was the production company that could give me the tools and network to tell my story in a way that would make the world listen, understand, and be inspired? That production company didn't exist. So I created it.

Hygge Factory is dedicated to giving young people who fight against something ugly, an opportunity to create something beautiful by expressing themselves through art at a professional level. Hygge Factory is designed to give young people all the things I wish someone could have given me when I needed it the most. Hygge Factory takes young people seriously as creative individuals by organizing art projects based on: 1) Ambition and vision, 2) Network and tools, and 3) Uniqueness and a dynamic setting.

### **Ambition And Vision**

When young people are given a real audience and a real challenge, they rise to it. That belief lies at the core of every Hygge Factory project. We frame every project with a clear vision and high ambition, that motivate and acknowledge the young people's work and desire to create: Their diligent efforts always result in a finished product. The latest book publication was printed in 3000 copies, marked with a public release event, a tour with the young writers to 13 libraries in Denmark and the Faroe Islands, and sold nationally. All proceeds from the sale of products are reinvested in future projects.

It is Hygge Factory's vision to create projects focused on art and creativity rather than disguised tools for social leverage, integration, or therapy. This is a significant point that may initially be difficult to grasp. Our first project Ornskæl! # 1 (2010) resulted in the book "2200 N - Oracles, Shawarmas, and Shattered Stereotypes", written by young people from the media-ridden and ethnically diverse neighborhood Nørrebro in Copenhagen. The project was labelled as an integration project. Our second project Ornskæl! #2 (2012) resulted in the book "It Looks Black - But It Is Not!" and was written by young people who have lost a

mother or father. The project was labelled as a therapy project. Vinyl! # 1 (2013) and Vinyl! # 2 (2014) where young asylum seekers and Danes collaborated to express their personal stories through songwriting was labelled as integration and therapy. Ords-kælv! and Vinyl! are neither spaces for integration nor therapy, but spaces for telling stories. The young people who join the projects don't meet social workers, psychologists, or therapists, but writers, journalists, editors, songwriters, musicians, and producers. Although, or *because*, our focus is not on integration or therapy, those are some of the lucky by-products that have come out of our art projects. We don't approach or regard the young people participating in Hygge Factory's projects as disadvantaged victims who must be helped, but rather as creative individuals who are in a unique position to create.

## **Network And Tools**

The young people are never alone in the process from idea to finished product. The strength of every project is the unique collaborations that lie at the core of every project, involving more than 200 people and organizations who volunteer to support and inspire the young people during the creative process. The projects are built around a weekly three-hour workshop where young people work one-on-one with mentors (students and professional adults who work as volunteers). The mentors serve as role models, expand the young people's network, and help them to master the necessary tools for creating their art product. The mentors pour their attention into the work of the young creators and meet them right where they are in the process. The mentors are the secret to Hygge Factory's success. It is their commitment, encouragement, and belief in the young people's success, that guide the young people through the path of uncertainty and doubt to achievement and triumph.

Artists and creative professionals share their tools and talents to inspire the young creators and frame each project with a sense of "realness". Their participation is an acknowledgment of the young people's hard work that raises the bar and is a powerful motivation and encouragement for the young creators to experiment and find a footing in their own personal expression. In Ords-kælv! the young writers have met journalists, writers, editors, proof readers, and graphic designers, and written personal letters to highly acclaimed artists such as Michael Kvium, Bjørn Nørgaard, and HuskMitNavn who have illustrated the young writers essays with original art work. In □Vinyl! the young songwriters have met musicians, songwriters, composers, instrument builders, producers, and graphic designers, and recorded their songs in a studio with professional artists. They have written a personal letter to the highly acclaimed artist John Kørner who has illustrated the cover of the latest finished vinyl record with original art work.

Every Hygge Factory project aims to give the young people insight and understanding of what it takes to get from idea to finished product. They become familiar with the creative process step by step, acquire practical tools, and create a network they can continue to build on throughout their lives.

## **Unique And Dynamic**

Hygge Factory works as a fast, project-based and scalable business that annually grows from 1 to 1000: Each project starts out as a simple idea that brings together more than 200 people to create a unique product, 300 people for publishing and fundraising events, and inspires more than 500 people in the phase of communication and sharing knowledge.

Each project in Hygge Factory is thought of and organized as a start-up: Everything is created, collected, recruited and built from scratch every time we start a new project. The projects are always based on the same basic recipe of the Hygge Factory Model: A structured workshop process, a unique product, a group of young people, mentors, professionals, partners, foundations, etc. The structure is solid, but it also has its own unique dynamics, because it's always new people who meet in each project and work together to make it possible.

### **Youth-To-Youth Communication**

In the spring of 2012, Hygge Factory partnered with The Main Libraries in Copenhagen and Frederiksberg as well as 22 libraries in Denmark and the Faroe Islands to "create a model that can empower young people to communicate art and culture created by young people to other young people" (application to the Danish Ministry of Culture, 2011).

The core of the collaboration was a nationwide youth-to-youth communication of Hygge Factory's talent- and empathy developing art projects Ordskælv! and Vinyl!. It was our goal to empower young people to experiment with one of the library's core services: Communicating art and making it accessible to the public. We created a framework for the creation and distribution of young people's creative expression in the library space and learned that libraries, in close collaboration with creative organizations like Hygge Factory, can successfully equip young people with tools of communication that engage a young audience.

The two year long collaboration resulted in the youth-to-youth communication model, that consists of these following steps:

- Hygge Factory (or another youth organization) organizes a talent- and empathy developing project that results in a unique and professional art product made by young people based on their personal stories.
- The product – such as a book or a record – and the young creators of the product go on tour to libraries.
- The tour is based on youth-to-youth communication of the art product. An essential part of the tour is a one-day-workshop offered by Hygge Factory to local youth (a school class, high school class, or another youth group) at the local library. Working one-on-one with volunteers (recruited by Hygge Factory and the local library) the young people work together to communicate the art products made by the young creators to other young people. Their focus is to use themselves and their personal sense of aesthetics to make the art products interesting and relevant for the young target group while using the library as their platform for communication.
- The results of the one-day-workshops are a series of short films (such as book-trailers or music videos that can be distributed via social media), exhibitions, and an event involving the young creators of the art product as well as the young communicators at the local library.

Art and cultural experiences play important roles for young people's sense of identity, and libraries are great platforms for engaging young people's imagination, creativity, and

innovation. The youth-to-youth communication model gives young people an opportunity to explore libraries as performative spaces where they can challenge themselves and each other to experiment with the communication of different art forms (litterature, music) and events while getting practical experience with tools of communication as well as strengthening their own and others sense of empathy.

### **Society's Developing Fluid**

At Hygge Factory we believe young people who have had their world shaken by a life crisis have stories that are important to tell and be told. Their stories are as developing fluids that can pull all of society's nuances out in the open. The stories are a unique invitation to gain insight into their young lives and to follow them in their stagger towards triumph and success, when they win the battle against what is ugly by creating something beautiful. And libraries are excellent platforms for making the products of such talent- and empathy developing projects relevant and accessible to the public.