

Innovative models:  
a report on resilience  
in Nordic spaces  
for contemporary art



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# Introduction

In recent years, contemporary art organisations across the Nordic region have been operating in an increasingly uncertain environment shaped by economic pressures, political shifts, and changing funding structures.

In response, Frame Contemporary Art Finland, Bildkonst Sverige, and Danish Association of Art Centres have initiated a collaboration to explore how resilience is being developed within the field.

This report brings together experiences from Sweden, Finland, and Denmark to highlight how art institutions are adapting to these conditions and rethinking their roles within society.

# Purpose

The report aims to map resilient strategies among exhibition spaces for contemporary art in Sweden, Finland, and Denmark. The purpose is to identify examples of innovation and sustainability in the current political, economic, and societal context — examples that can serve as models and inspiration for others.

By involving three Nordic countries, the report provides an overview of strategies adopted by peer institutions, which enables comparison, the exchange of insights, and a better understanding of the opportunities and limitations specific to each national context.

The project arises from the need to reinforce the Nordic tradition of a free, accessible, inclusive, and democratic cultural landscape. The report therefore examines how the conditions and support frameworks for these values are perceived today. It also investigates how the participating organisations and institutions understand and interpret their societal role, and the significance that contemporary art holds in society today.

The report is initiated by Bildkonst Sverige, Frame Contemporary Art Finland, and the Danish Association of Art Centres, and supported by the Nordic Culture Fund. As these three organisations act on behalf of the sector, the

report is part of their continued work to improve the conditions for visual art in their respective countries.

## Key Concepts

In this report, *resilience* refers to the capacity of art exhibition spaces to withstand, adapt to and develop in response to changing and often challenging conditions. It includes both economic resilience—such as navigating unstable funding—and institutional resilience, including organisational flexibility, innovative programming, and the development of new partnerships and income streams.

Resilience is understood as both a stabilising capacity (to endure external pressures) and a transformative one (to rethink and evolve practices). This dual perspective is central to how innovative art institutions operate strategically in complex environments.

*Sustainability* is approached as a dimension of resilience, referring to practices that strengthen an institution's capacity to endure over time. Particular emphasis is placed on how sustainable approaches contribute to resilience across three interconnected dimensions: environmental (resource use and impact), economic (financial stability and diversification), and social (engagement, inclusion, and societal relevance).

Both *institution* and *organisation* are used in this report. In general, *institution* refers to an established organisation (i.e. an exhibition space), whereas in Finland the term is used only to refer to a public body.

### Target Groups

The report is intended for contemporary art organisations and institutions, as well as professionals across the Nordic region and beyond. It provides a look under the hood: a practical resource for sharing experiences and exploring alternative models for organisational resilience.

Though primarily aimed at organisations and institutions, their leaders and board members, the report also addresses the support frameworks in each of the countries. These include the state, the regions, local municipalities, as well as private foundations, which provide the economic basis for exhibition spaces working with, providing access to, and communicating contemporary art.

The report offers relevant insights for those making decisions both at a political level and within the growing number of private foundations, which are becoming increasingly important as providers of support for contemporary art. We hope they will find the report relevant as well.

### Criteria

As mentioned in the introduction, one of the aims of the report is to reinforce the Nordic tradition of a free, inclusive, and democratic cultural landscape. It has therefore been essential that the selected exhibition venues present visual art of a high standard, characterized by strong artistic quality and integrity.

This constituted the fundamental requirement. Subsequently, we examined which institutions have demonstrated innovation and resilience that could serve as inspiration for others. In each country, we selected three different institutions, differing both in terms of organisational structure and geographical location, in order to represent as broad a range of institutional models as possible. This breadth ensures that multiple types of exhibition platforms will be able to identify a model to which they can relate.

As context plays a decisive role in an exhibition venue's opportunities for funding, local identity, and audience, we also sought to identify examples with varying geographical locations and demographic conditions.

### Method and Validity

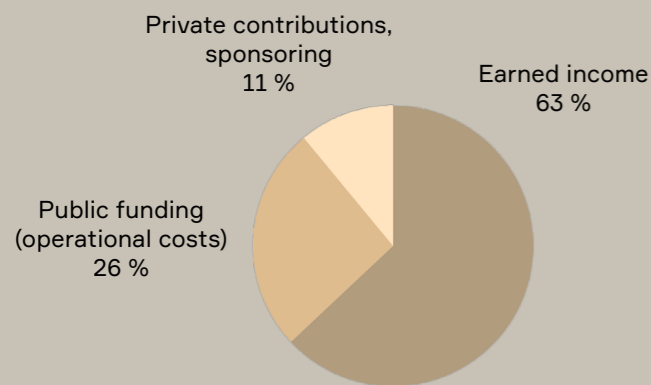
The report is based on qualitative interviews with the leaders of nine art institutions. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach, based on an interview guide. The interview guide was sent in advance. The questions placed particular emphasis on changing structural conditions, the development of economic and institutional resilience, funding strategies, innovative initiatives, and societal roles.

This is not a research-based study in which cases were selected with the aim of generalisability. Rather, the cases were chosen to provide insight into the perspectives and experiences of individual exhibition venues. Taken together, however, they reveal a pattern—particularly concerning how the political, economic, and societal situation for exhibition venues is currently experienced in Sweden, Finland, and Denmark. In this way, the report offers nuanced and subjective information with a high degree of practical relevance.

To increase the external validity of responses concerning the funding landscape, both public and private, these are, in the report, considered in relation to existing knowledge on Nordic arts and cultural funding produced by recent research—particularly the three reports published by

*Kulturanalys Norden: Cultural Expenditure in the Nordic Countries (2020), Nordic Funding for the Arts and Culture: A Multilevel Approach (2025), and Private Cultural Funding in the Nordic Countries (2025).*

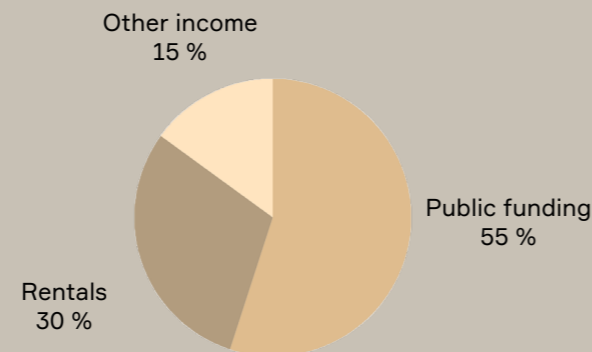
# Cases



**Vandalorum** is an art and design museum in Värnamo, southern Sweden. The museum was initiated privately and is organised as a foundation. It opened in 2011 and presents Swedish and international contemporary art and design. In addition, the museum offers a range of activities including educational programmes for schools, upper secondary schools and adult education, workshops, a design school and the Bruno Mathsson Design Residency. The museum collaborates closely with other exhibition venues, companies and design colleges in Sweden.

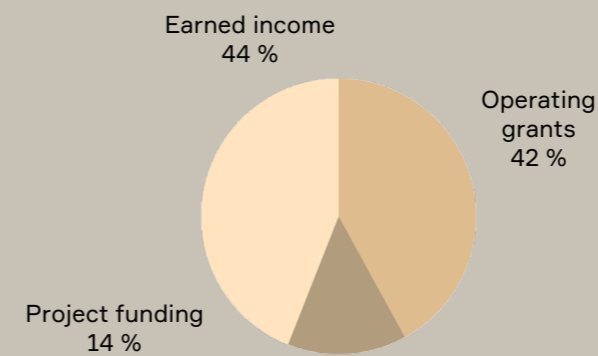
The space includes a restaurant, shop, and a garden designed by Piet Oudolf, established in 2023–25. The museum is open all year round and employs the equivalent of 24 full-time positions (half of them in the restaurant).

[www.vandalorum.se](http://www.vandalorum.se)



**Hägerstensåsens Medborgarhus** is a community centre, cultural house and people’s house in the South-western part of Stockholm, Sweden. It is run by a non-profit association. The house was built in 1957 as a community centre for the local area, and today it presents contemporary art as well as offering cultural activities, courses, meetings and social events. It serves as an open meeting place and hosts various communities, associations and cultural organisers. It has two theatres, a cinema, a radio studio, a print workshop, a café, a library and a collection of modern Swedish art. It is open all year round, every weekday from 9:00 to 22:00, and has 4,6 full-time employees.

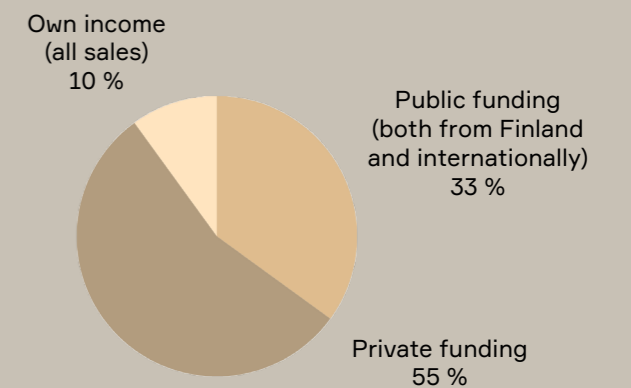
[www.medborgarhuset.se](http://www.medborgarhuset.se)



**Ifö Center** in the historic Iföverken industrial area in Bromölla in Southern Sweden is a non-profit association dedicated to fostering a free, robust and diverse contemporary arts and cultural landscape. The centre is artist-initiated and artist-led and has been in operation since 2014. It is structured as a membership-based organisation with approximately 300 members. Ifö Center runs an exhibition space (open six months annually), international artist residencies, studios and shared production facilities, offers venue hire, and delivers courses, workshops and guided tours.

Ifö Center has 5.5 paid employees.

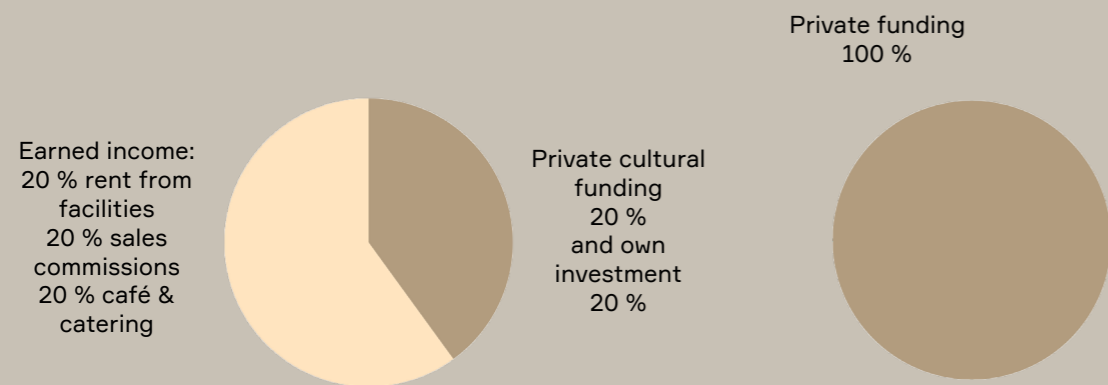
[www.ifocenter.com](http://www.ifocenter.com)



**Kohta** is a kunsthalle in the Kalasatama (Fish Harbour) area in Helsinki. It is artist-initiated and organised as a joint-stock company owned by a not-for-profit private foundation. It opened in 2017 and shows contemporary art from Finland and the rest of the world. In addition to the exhibition programme, Kohta organizes events, screenings, talks and guided tours.

It is open all year round and has 2 full-time employees.

[www.kohta.fi](http://www.kohta.fi)



**KUBU – Kulturhus Björkboda** is a cultural house on Kimitoön island, Southwest Finland, with a year-round exhibition programme. It is artist-initiated and organized like an association. KUBU opened in 2022 in the former Björkboda Folkskola. KUBU shows contemporary art, hosts weekly courses and workshops and has a café and craft shop. The house also has conference rooms, a gym, a stage, a small library and collaborative spaces.

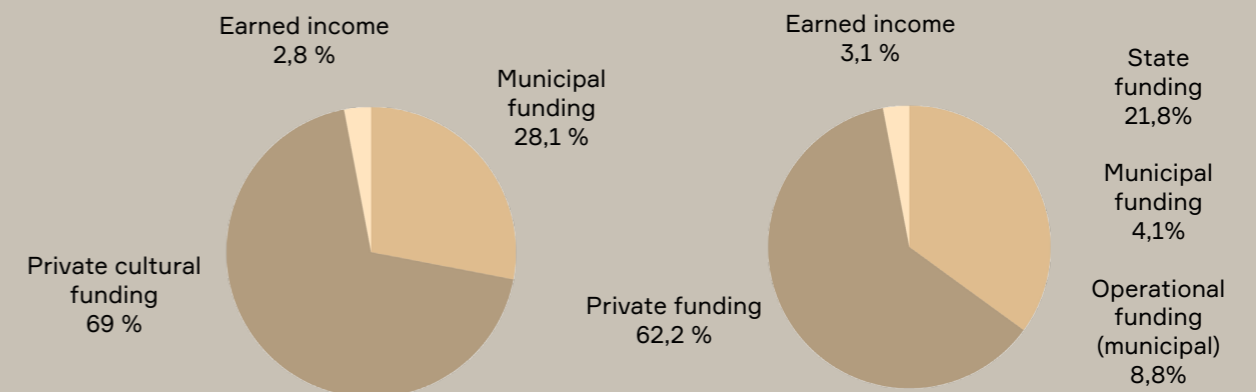
KUBU is open all year round and has 0,4 paid employees.

[www.kubu.fi](http://www.kubu.fi)

**IHME Helsinki** produces a new artwork for public space annually in Helsinki. IHME is organised as a foundation with a Board and an Advisory Board. IHME started in 2009 as an annual contemporary art festival and was transformed in 2019 into a commissioning agency combining art, science and climate work. IHME also offers courses and seminars.

IHME shares offices with Cupore (Centre for Cultural Policy Research) in Helsinki and has two full-time employees.

[www.ihmehelsinki.fi](http://www.ihmehelsinki.fi)



**Deep Forest Art Land** is a forest area in Central Jutland, Denmark, featuring approximately 80 sculptures and works of contemporary art integrated into the natural environment. It is an artist-initiated project, founded in 2010, and became an independent cultural institution under Herning Municipality in 2016. The forest is open year-round and also offers guided tours, workshops and educational programmes for schools.

Admission is voluntary, and visitors are welcome to bring their own packed lunches; however, there is no café or restaurant on site. The organisation has six full-time employees.

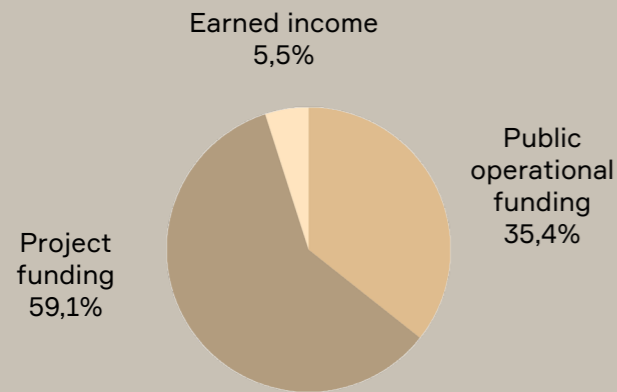
[www.deepforestartland.dk](http://www.deepforestartland.dk)

**Simian** is an independent art space (kunsthalle) located in Ørestad, newly developed urban district in Copenhagen, Denmark. Simian was established in 2020 as an artist-led institution presenting experimental Danish and international contemporary art. Simian is organised as a non-profit organisation and, in addition to exhibitions, produces mediation and outreach activities, events and festivals, podcasts, and educational programmes for children and young people.

Simian is open year-round, with free admission. Simian employs 2.5 full-time equivalents (2025).

[www.ssiimmiaann.org](http://www.ssiimmiaann.org)

## The present funding situation in Sweden, Finland, and Denmark



**Rønnebæksholm Art Centre** is a municipal exhibition space (kunsthall) and former manor estate with historic buildings, gardens and a park in South Zealand, Denmark. Rønnebæksholm was acquired by Næstved Municipality and has functioned as an art centre since 1998. In addition to presenting contemporary art, Rønnebæksholm runs and manages Billedskolen Storstrøm and the visual arts part of the Talentskole, as well as workshop facilities and artist residencies. The programme also includes concerts, author performances, poetry salons, talk salons and other cultural events such as the Midsummer (Sankt Hans) celebration and garden markets.

Rønnebæksholm charges admission and has both a shop and a café.

The art centre is open year-round and employs 4.7 full-time equivalent paid staff.

[www.roennebaeksholm.dk](http://www.roennebaeksholm.dk)

### Common Ground

Before examining the differences, it is important to consider whether — and, if so, what kind of — common ground the Nordic countries share. The welfare-oriented “Nordic cultural policy model”, developed in the twentieth century as part of a broader effort to promote social equality and universal access to public services, has remained relatively stable over time. Recent research has established that it is still evident in contemporary cultural policies, including current priorities in public funding for the arts and culture.

Policy frameworks, politics and values are one thing, but how do they materialise in funding allocations across the Nordic countries? Are they comparable? To a large extent, yes. According to the data presented in *Cultural Expenditure in the Nordic Countries* (2020), total expenditure on State level on cultural activities amounts to approximately 5 per cent of GDP in Sweden, 7 per cent in Denmark, and 6 per cent in Finland, based on figures from 2018. Although these figures are eight years old, the overall tendency indicates that they remain relatively stable over time.

### Structural Differences

However, beneath these similarities, there are significant structural differences between the countries when it

comes to public funding for contemporary art exhibition spaces. This applies both to the availability of operational funding and to how responsibility is distributed between the state, regions, and municipalities. For example, Denmark does not have a regional cultural administration, whereas in Sweden, the regional level is arguably the most important.

This, of course, reflects the demographic differences between the three countries: Sweden, the largest, with 450,000 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 10.5 million; Finland, with a considerably smaller population of 5.6 million distributed across 338,000 km<sup>2</sup>; and Denmark, by far the smallest country, with 43,000 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 5.9 million.

As for private funding for exhibition spaces, Denmark and Finland have a longer tradition of private foundations as important funders, whereas Sweden has hitherto relied more heavily on public funding.

### What Do the Interviews Tell Us About the Present Situation?

The recent research anthology *Nordic Funding for the Arts and Culture: A Multilevel Approach* (2025) observes that high inflation and the current prioritisation of security policy across the Nordic countries make it unlikely

that national public funding systems for the arts and culture will see any dramatic increase in the foreseeable future.

However, a more differentiated picture emerges from the interviews.

Sweden stands out as the country experiencing the most radical changes with negative effects. These include cuts in public funding and a decline in real public support due to inflation, which has not been compensated for in funding allocations (a concrete example being the MU Agreement). Inflation is also affecting income streams negatively. In addition, a changed political landscape and a shift in public discourse have contributed to a perception that artistic freedom has come under pressure.

To some extent, these negative changes are also observed in Finland, where art and culture are perceived to have been deprioritised in favour of defence and security. There are also observations that the public support structure for the arts is inconsistent or uncoordinated, lacking a clear policy or overarching purpose. A recent development is that some Finnish private foundations are now awarding three-year grants.

Conditions in Denmark are experienced as developing in a more positive

direction, not least due to the emergence of more private foundations, some of which also allocate multi-year grants. However, securing operational funding is still considered difficult. As a downside, increased competition is noted.

This pattern corresponds with the conclusions in *Private Cultural Funding in the Nordic Countries* (2025). Funding from private foundations is strikingly high in Denmark and strikingly low in Sweden, which entails a stronger reliance on public funding. Finland, by contrast, is the country where private foundation funding has increased the most in recent years.

According to the same report, the picture is somewhat reversed when it comes to corporate sponsorship, which is generally less significant than private foundation funding in the Nordic countries, with the exception of Sweden. Overall, corporate sponsorship shows a negative rather than positive trend across the Nordic region. This is an interesting observation, as sponsorship does not play a significant role for most of the exhibition spaces interviewed, with the exception of Vandalorum.

The following section includes interviews with the directors of all case organisations.

# Vandalorum

Värnamo, Sweden

Interview with Museum Director Elna Svenle



Vandalorum and Piet Oudolf's garden. Photo: Deltavormgroep



Museum Director Elna Svenle. Photo: John Nelander

**Have you experienced changes in your operating conditions – for example, altered funding opportunities or other changes that have affected your finances or activities in recent years?**

First and foremost, the state has announced that the grant for regional culture will be reduced next year. Last year, the state also decided not to adjust grants in line with price and wage increases. Our region, Jönköpings län has covered this for us this year, but I don't believe they can or will compensate for this going forward.

Our costs are constantly rising due to inflation, especially heating and

electricity. These are expenses we cannot cut, so it has a real impact when our public core funding does not follow the price trend. Transport, insurance and printing costs have also increased. We cannot offset this through our own income, as our visitors are also affected by the economic downturn and are holding back on spending.

Sponsorship is an important part of our income, and many assume that because companies in our region are doing well, we should therefore receive more sponsorship income. Unfortunately, that is not the case. They, too, are feeling the effects of tighter economic conditions. We therefore have to work harder and harder to reach our sponsorship targets.

The MU Agreement (Artists' Participation and Exhibition Compensation)<sup>1</sup> has also been increased, without exhibition venues receiving compensation. And for those of us working with living artists, that really has an impact. So, this has become more challenging, too.

The consequence is that we will have a deficit this year. We had one last year as well. And of course, that cannot continue. Even though we have a high proportion of self-generated income and sponsorship, we still cannot make the finances add up.

So, we start thinking about what we need to do to survive. When we see the public sector stepping back, primarily at the national level, we wonder whether this means they want us to focus only on the most popular, the most accessible. Alternatively, we must scale down, offer less, fewer exhibitions, shorter opening hours. Go on a "diet". But that doesn't benefit our audience, nor the artists.

#### **How is your funding structured?**

We are a foundation with a close dialogue with the public sector – both

the municipality and the region. The municipality donated the land on which the museum sits, and the region helped finance the planning. But it is a privately initiated project, and when I arrived in 2012, there was no public operating support at all. Today we receive funding from the municipality, the region and the state. And I believe they feel they get real value for money.

For us, securing public funding has been absolutely crucial for also obtaining private funding. The entire construction of the buildings was financed by three entrepreneurial families, and for the construction of the garden another entrepreneur has joined. We also have many small companies – and large ones – that contribute through sponsorships. We also receive a lot of "in-kind" support for exhibitions: free materials and so on.

Finally, we have income from the surplus generated by the restaurant, the shop, admission fees, memberships, tours and conferences. Both the restaurant and the shop generate a healthy surplus today. We run them ourselves. We sell an incredible number of books in the shop, and I truly believe

1. The MU Agreement is an agreement between the Swedish government and organisations representing visual artists to ensure that artists in Sweden are fairly paid both for showing their work (exhibition compensation) and for the work they do related to the exhibition (participation compensation). The agreement applies to publicly funded institutions (museums, galleries etc.) in Sweden.



Exhibition 'Boro, The Art of Necessity' in 2022. Photo: Patrik Lindell

there is a strong demand for high-quality books on art and design.

#### **Do you apply to funds outside the arts and culture sector?**

Yes, we have done so several times – for example, regional development funds. We have also applied to Klimatklivet (support for physical investments that reduce greenhouse gas emissions), and we have a project with RISE (System Change with Locally

Shared Energy), to which the Swedish Energy Agency has contributed, concerning the aesthetic qualities of solar panels. In general, these are complex applications requiring specialised knowledge or expertise, and the processes are long.

But there are many opportunities here – within climate and environmental issues and other forms of social sustainability. Both museums and art centres

have a remarkable capacity to bring people from different fields together in open conversations, free encounters, from which fantastic results can emerge and be made accessible to the public. We could play a really important role in this.

#### **What contributes to your institutional resilience?**

Our strong ties to the local community and to local businesses. And the fact that both the municipality and the region see that they get a great deal for their money.

Our sponsorship work also builds on the contacts of our chair and other board members. For about 20 years, we have had a chair who is a former business leader in the town. It is absolutely vital for us to have board members who come from companies in the region. They support sponsorship work by talking about us – and for us – in many different contexts.

Our sponsorship model is based on personal contacts. We cannot just send out a brochure. It simply doesn't work like that. We also employ a person who works almost full-time on financing – about 90% of their time – handling applications, relations with the public sector and sponsorships.

We have a sponsorship programme

that we launch at the beginning of October, and then we have lunch meetings with business leaders throughout November, December and January until we have secured our targets.

We have different sponsorship categories – gold, silver and bronze – depending on a company's resources and the level of commitment they wish to invest in Vandalorum.

Almost 100% of our sponsoring companies are from the region. Occasionally we receive contributions from national companies, but usually for a specific exhibition. It is the local family-owned businesses, those that feel responsibility for the town and the area, that sponsor us. They want their companies to continue to thrive, and they want their children and grandchildren to remain here. That requires an attractive town – and an attractive town is more than schools and nature. There must also be cultural opportunities in people's leisure time. It has great value that there is something people can be proud of, something that is mentioned in the media. That applies even to those who do not visit us – they are still pleased with and proud of the place.

#### **How do you see your wider societal role?**

We are aware of our location – there



Garden designed by Piet Oudolf. Photo: John Nelander

are not 50 other cultural institutions in the area. So we are important to local residents, as mentioned, and they come here often. It is a meeting place. Many are members – we have almost 2,000 members. We are a small town. That is why it is important that we are part of everyday life for local people. This has been strengthened through the new garden, which is open around the clock. People come here with their dogs in the morning, bring coffee in a thermos, and visit in the evenings too.

Our university programme also binds art, design and industry together. It has been part of Vandalorum's programme from the beginning. We are located in the heart of Swedish industry, and education institutions – both in art and design – are very keen to

connect with industry, and vice versa. So we continuously establish collaborations between established artists, designers, students and industry.

#### **Do you also work with volunteers?**

We started with volunteers as gallery attendants and hosts in the exhibitions. When the garden was being created, we received many enquiries from people wanting to contribute in some way. We were not quite sure how this would work, but we gathered everyone and they met **Piet Oudolf** (the Dutch garden designer, who did the garden design). Today we have 50 volunteers who care for the garden. They receive brief training from our gardener, and now around 10 people come twice a week to maintain the garden together with our gardener. This work



Ingegerd Råman's exhibition in 2016. Photo: Patrik Lindell

is extremely important to us. The same applies to the exhibition hosts. It is labour we could never have afforded to pay for ourselves. It also brings value to the volunteers – they have made new friends and found new purpose. There is great social value in that.

**Do you have experiences or advice you would like to share with other Nordic arts institutions?**

Bring the business sector into your board – for their experience and knowledge, but also for the networks they bring.

If possible, prioritise hiring someone dedicated solely to working on funding applications, sponsorships and financing models. It is the only way to get results. We receive rejections for around 50% of our applications, but the approvals more than make up for it.

**If you could change something structural to give institutions like yours better conditions, what would it be?**

I find it deeply regrettable that when the state negotiates new MU Agreements, it does not compensate for the increased costs. If they did, it would have enormous positive ripple effects: it would ensure proper remuneration for artists, we would be able to present more contemporary art, and it would benefit society as a whole. As things

stand, I know that some exhibition venues cannot afford the fees and therefore show works from their own collections or borrow works to avoid paying exhibition compensation.

The system we have established in Sweden with the Cultural Collaboration Model, where the region distributes the state's contributions to cultural institutions, is problematic. The regions must also find funding for their own projects from the same pool. This should be separated.

Finally, I believe that if the state wants us to work more with private financing in the cultural sector, or to seek funding outside the arts and culture funds, then it must support this. Either by allocating resources to train us for this work, or by providing grants so that we can secure the necessary capacity to do it.

# Hägerstensåsens Medborgarhus

Stockholm, Sweden

Interview with Artistic and Executive Director  
Sebastian Dahlqvist



The release of the anthology 'En viktlos skärva av tid för Gaza' by Aska Förlag.  
Photo: Sebastian Dahlqvist.



Sebastian Dahlqvist (left) and Elof Hellström, the artistic director and operations developer.  
Photo: Beatrice Lundborg

## Have you experienced changes in arts funding or societal changes that have affected either your economy or your activities?

I have been here for five years, so this should be taken into account when considering my answers. However I will also speak from a longer experience of working as an artist and being involved in running self-organized and artist-run institutions over the last two decades. Not least during the current government's rule in Sweden, we have witnessed a targeted attack on all kinds of spaces for art, culture and popular education.

The first national cultural policies were implemented in Sweden in 1974

alongside the second wave of cultural houses. Since then it has changed dramatically. Its political goals have transformed from being endogenous to becoming exogenous. Evaluability being a core criterion in itself. The names and superficial form of the field of politics have been kept, but not its content. Visible not least in the repurposing of the concept of freedom, changing from a let's say "practical one" to one that is formal. In turn, making it possible to argue, as our current government does over and over, that so-called artistic freedom is only possible to realize on the free market.

In addition, during the rule of the current government, we have witnessed more and more examples of political

control of individual institutions and a massive restructuring of the state funding for art, culture and popular education.

We have also experienced a massive increase in the rent we and other publicly funded cultural institutions pay to our public landlords. The municipality is, so to speak, our landlord, as they own the house. This has posed yet another major challenge to our work. A challenge we share with most publicly funded cultural institutions that do not own their building.

### How have you worked on creating institutional resilience?

Five years ago I was invited by the board of the NGO to take on the role of Artistic and Executive Director of the house, a role that had previously not existed. At that time, we had rather limited funding; this has since increased, as has the revenue we generate, which has tripled. During the last five years, we have grown from three to six employees. But we still do not have the means needed to run the house on reasonable conditions.

I would argue that one crucial aspect that has made the institution function during the last five years, as well as the 69 years preceding these, has been the massive amount of unpaid labour that has been put into running it.

We are a public institution, a public space. In a society that during most parts of the year is both cold and dark, a warm house is needed where you can organize meaningful free time and meet others in joy as well as grief. In the context of your question, I guess you could say that one resilience strategy has been to make this an institution that would be mourned if it were threatened — an institution worth defending. I believe we have, to some

extent, succeeded. Lots of people now have a relationship to the house and would indeed defend it if it were needed.

Another ambition and strategy to “create resilience” has been to open up the house to new communities through the means of our public program and by offering the infrastructural means needed to organize almost anything. Five years ago, there were around twenty member communities using the house regularly. Today we have fifty-two, and beyond that, many other formalized as well as informal groups and communities using the house and its infrastructures every week.

### What kind of funding do you receive?

We receive local and national support, and we receive both operational funding and project funding.

### Do you generate your own income?

We generate income mainly from renting out our different rooms and infrastructures, from ticket sales (which is not much, as we rarely charge entrance fees), from selling support merchandise, and from our cafeteria.

Our house has been used a lot for film recordings during the last decades, not least because much of the interior aesthetic is well preserved, making it a highly desirable film set. Previously, these often massive companies paid only a very small fee; in the last few years, we have increased this substantially.

In addition, my colleague **Elof Hellström** (also part of the artistic leadership and working as operations developer) and I also do a lot of teaching, lecturing and what could probably be framed as consultancy work which brings in additional income.



The release of 'OEI #104-105: Organisering!?' Rum för kultur: Folkets hus, kulturhus, publiceringspraktiker'. Photo: Sebastian Dahlqvist

### How do you see your societal role?

First of all, there are significant differences between us and most other art institutions. The very DNA of this house is the same as in any people's house or community centre: the various spaces that make up the house are used by many different organized communities for many different things. We offer the infrastructures needed to organize a meaningful free-time. It is a house of culture, popular education and community organizing.

Hägerstensåsens medborgarhus is open from nine in the morning until ten in the evening. During these hours, the doors to the house remain open. You

do not pay to enter and you stay as long as you like. During the last decades we have witnessed, and in various ways experienced, the increasing enclosures of all kinds. In light of this the house might be understood as an exception to the prevailing order of things.

It is of great importance to be relevant to our local community and for all of our neighbours to feel not only welcome but at home in our house. It is equally important to be a relevant cultural institution, people's house and infrastructure for people all over, not least to residents along the red subway line (13 & 14).

During the last five years artistic strategies and methods has guided the management of this institution as well as its programming and spatial arrangements. In line with this our work might partly be understood as a kind of organizational aesthetics. This is at least an idea I am trying to develop.

Hägerstensåsens Medborgarhus opened 1957 and grew out of a local initiative and over ten years of mobilizing. My colleague Elof Helström and I have worked extensively on tracing its historical threads and exploring the early years of the people's house movement. This history has had a significant influence on us, as many of the strategies we use today can be found already in the movement's first decades. The movement emerged in a deeply unequal society, where the right to vote was far from equally distributed and where workers lacked safe spaces to organise for better working conditions and for a more just society. The people's houses were born out of this need and quickly developed into the first cultural houses — places where new forms of self-representation could unfold through the means of visual art, theatre, poetry and later film.

From the outset, these houses were spaces where conflict was made possible—agonistic and antagonistic spaces—linking everyday life with the idea that another society was possible. In

academic terms, they were prefigurative spaces, where ideas of another society were realized in the here and now. This remains a central ambition for our institution today, and pre-figuration is of course partly an aesthetic practice.

Many of the infrastructures we have established in the house are infrastructures found already in the first people's houses: the print workshop, the radio studio, the theatres, the cinema, exhibition spaces, the library and the café as a shared social space. Even our graphic design draws on an older mode of communication, translated into a contemporary context.

In many ways, the history that we are embedded in informs our daily work, and the building's original aesthetics and architecture are important to preserve and build on, even as we add new infrastructures and aesthetic elements. At the same time, the particular spatial traditions of the various movements of cultural houses in Sweden and beyond continues to inspire us—including the houses that were never realized but existed only as shared dreams of what could be.

**Do you use volunteers or interns as a way to build institutional resilience?**

We usually host around six interns per year, coming from various cities and studying art- or culture-related



Exhibition 'Ett flin utan katt' by Sebastian Dahlqvist & Lina Lundquist, also featuring works by Alex Valijani and Asier Mendizabal in 2025. Photo: Johan Österholm.

programmes. Their contribution is significant, both in terms of practical support and because we regard the entire house as a training ground and pedagogical environment—an educational space in its own right. Their presence is therefore essential. It is important to note that the exchange goes both ways: the interns teach us a great deal as well.

We also work with a few volunteers, although we do not yet have a formal structure for involving more; that is something we plan to develop.

**Do you have any experience or good advice that you would like to share with other institutions?**

Work beyond the logics of the

temporary project, happening, event and exhibition. Build long-lasting relations and alliances with the communities. Work across disciplines. Invite people far beyond those you perceive as your given audience. Think critically about the concept of the audience—who is included and who is not.

And critically examine the infrastructures at hand and how they can be used by as many as possible.

**If you had the opportunity to change something structural to improve conditions for art institutions like yours, what would it be?**

A fundamental redistribution of wealth in society.

# Ifö Center

Bromölla, Sweden

Interview with co-founder and Director  
Teresa Holmberg



“T-Rex” by ROA in the Ifö Center Outdoor Gallery

## **Have you experienced changes in arts funding or societal changes that have affected either your economy or your activities?**

We believe we are facing a new political landscape, one that was felt earlier in Skåne than elsewhere in Sweden. During the 2015 election campaign, a local Sweden Democrats (SD) politician approached us, proposing collaboration in exchange for political support — an implicit form of pressure. When we declined, SD attempted to block our municipal funding. I was summoned to answer questions in the City Council, and only after the other parties voted against SD was our annual funding released. SD argued that Ifö Center was “undemocratic” because our statutes explicitly reject fascism and were therefore, in their view, “not open to all”.

We were also strongly affected by the 2021 decision of the new conservative government to abruptly abolish the “Extratjänst” programme. This wage subsidy scheme supported employers who hired people facing barriers to the labour market and had funded a significant part of Ifö Center’s workforce. It was highly successful for both the organisation and the individuals employed. Its sudden cancellation had a negative impact on both the centre and an already vulnerable group in society.

A further political decision has seriously threatened the operation of Ifö Center Art Hall: the failure to adequately fund the MU Agreement, the national framework for exhibition remuneration. Since 2016, exhibition fees at Ifö Center have been funded through the Swedish Artists’ Organisation (SKF), which distributes state funding. In 2024, SKF’s exhibition funds were exhausted by April, and in 2025 already by February—an unprecedented situation caused by the government’s failure to adjust funding in line with the MU Agreement’s indexation.

As a result, SKF has been forced to breach the agreement and reduce fees to the guaranteed minimum. An exhibition fee that should be SEK 20,400 has been cut to SEK 7,300. While we have continued to pay artists according to the MU Agreement by covering the shortfall ourselves, many organisers—especially volunteer-run art associations—cannot. The result is fewer exhibitions or artists working for significantly reduced fees, if at all.

Failing to fund exhibition remuneration is both undignified and short-sighted. For the state, it involves relatively small sums; for artists, it can be the final blow to an already fragile livelihood, forcing them to leave the profession altogether.

### How have you worked to ensure institutional survival?

In 2018, when Ifö Center was under threat of closing down due to the factory shutting down, we raised the money to buy the buildings through crowdfunding. We began by interviewing others who had previously run crowdfunding campaigns and learning from their experiences. The process took a year and a half, but we managed to raise more than 760,000 Swedish kronor by selling support shares. In total, 550 people bought shares, which enabled us to secure an additional bank loan to purchase the buildings.

Owning the buildings has given the centre a sense of security. We are very aware that art and culture can unintentionally contribute to gentrification processes, which can ultimately result in artists, cultural workers, and other members of the local community no longer being able to afford to remain in the area. Ownership gives us a stronger voice in how the area is developed and has also provided the centre with an income, as we are now able to rent out parts of the space. Part of the building has become our “cash cow”, so to speak, giving us greater independence.

### What are your funding strategies?

Funding the creation and operation of Ifö Center is somewhat

patchwork-based. Ifö Center is a grassroots initiative, and our initial funding came from Leader Skånes Ess, a locally led development programme supported by European funds for rural development. Since then, we have received support from Region Skåne (our largest and most stable funder), Bromölla Municipality, and more recently directly from the Swedish Arts Council (Kulturrådet).

We also receive support from Ivetofta Savings Bank, many small donations from visitors, and in-kind contributions from companies that donate district heating (fjärrvärme) and materials in exchange only for a public acknowledgement online. These companies do not provide cash funding and have no influence whatsoever on our activities.

Part of our funding always comes from temporary projects, and when needed we have occasionally generated additional income by selling industrial equipment left behind by the former factory owners.

Beyond arts and culture grants, our projects have also received funding related to cultural heritage, tourism (besöksnäring), and the green transition. Dedicated funding for art and culture is very limited, but by working across sectors we have been able to access support from other fields, which often have significantly larger



Guest students with Ifö Center's in-house artists during a coffee break.

budgets. While there are clear synergies to be gained from cross-sector work, the lack of core funding for our main field remains a serious challenge. We are constantly finding ways to survive and remain true to our mission within a system largely designed for other sectors rather than our own.

### How do you see your societal role?

As an institution, our work is rooted in solidarity. We see ourselves as part of a community, and with that comes responsibility. Solidarity means recognising when others are under strain and responding with care—not as a burden, but as a fundamental human interaction. These roles are never fixed; those who receive support at one moment may be the ones offering it the next.

Ifö Center brings people together and creates frameworks for connection and mutual support. Volunteers play an important role—for example, our art hall is often staffed by volunteers—and we are mindful to ensure that tasks are meaningful and mutually beneficial, as people have different needs and motivations.

Centres like Ifö Center have a strong community-building and stabilising function. We connect people in “win-win-win” situations, where individuals and society as a whole benefit. One example is pairing Swedish elderly people with young people born abroad who need to practise reading and writing. These one-to-one exchanges across generational and cultural divides build skills, confidence, and mutual understanding.



The dance performance 'Minne' with DaT.Com surrounded by the exhibition about the opera 'Tre Knivar' by Reine Jönsson and Patrik Sörling at the Ifö Center Konsthall.

In 2022, when the war in Ukraine escalated, our artist residencies were transformed into protection residencies for colleagues fleeing the conflict. We hosted nine Ukrainian artists and musicians for 18 months and remain in close contact. During their stay, their work was exhibited and concerts were organized to raise funds for humanitarian support, such as wood-burning stoves for Ukraine.

People from many diasporas, including Afghanistan, are an essential part of Ifö Center and our local community. While we welcomed the strong institutional support offered to the Ukrainian diaspora in Sweden, we cannot ignore that other groups in need have been

treated very differently. Sweden's increasingly restrictive and inhumane migration laws and practices cause severe distress. Visitors, collaborators, and staff are directly affected by prolonged uncertainty, leading to fear, illness, and despair.

Those facing deportation are no different from the rest of us: they study, work—often in elderly care—and have built their lives here; some were even born in Sweden. Deporting or discriminating against them causes deep harm, not only to individuals but to society as a whole. At the same time, it has become almost impossible for people in acute danger to reach safety. We are currently involved in cases

of women trapped under Taliban house arrest in Afghanistan, despite being married to men in Sweden, with applications left unanswered for indefinite periods by the Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket).

**Do you have any good advice that you would like to share with other Nordic art institutions?**

Don't be afraid to speak up.

**If you had the opportunity to change something structural to improve the conditions for art institutions like yours, what would it be?**

If I could influence voters and politicians, I would urge them to restore the right to asylum, introduce humane migration policies, and reduce growing inequality. The current shift towards a harsher and more exclusionary society is deeply worrying and harms us all. Denying support to people fleeing war, deporting ordinary working people, or allowing child poverty and homelessness to grow in a wealthy country is neither necessary nor just.

When society fails its basic humanitarian responsibilities, the consequences extend far beyond those directly affected. Teachers, care workers, librarians, cultural institutions, volunteers, and local communities are left to carry the emotional and practical burden of witnessing and responding to avoidable human suffering. This drains time, energy, and resources from both

individuals and organisations.

Art and culture cannot flourish in isolation from the rest of society. Cultural centres and libraries are often the last remaining safe spaces for people in crisis. We need a society that offers protection from racism, poverty, and social exclusion, and that does not punish people who have built their lives here.

Structurally, I would also call for operational funding that reflects the real cost of running cultural organisations, including fair pay for artists. Long-term, stable core funding combined with limited project funding would be far more efficient than today's project-based system, which wastes resources on constant applications and reporting while pushing organisations and individuals towards burnout.

Finally, responsibility for funding arts and culture must remain public. I want to urge all politicians to immediately end all efforts to make the cultural sector seek sponsorship from private companies. Market-driven sponsorship cannot replace public support without undermining artistic freedom. Instead, public investment should enable cultural organisations to build sustainable income streams and reinvest any surplus into their work. The MU Agreement already exists and should be fully funded; its cost is small, but the damage caused by not honouring it is immense, particularly for smaller exhibition organisers across the country.

# Kohta

Helsinki, Finland

Interview with Director Anders Kreuger



Lasse Juuti & Anastasia Sosunova's exhibition 'But it's not finished', 10.4.—15.6.2025. Photo: Jussi Tiainen

## Have you experienced changes in arts funding or societal changes that have affected either your economy or your activities?

Kohta started as a private initiative by a group of Finnish artists. The artists felt something was lacking in the art world in Helsinki — a certain quality and a clear programming principle. But they were also looking for a place where they could show their own work. We respect both these conditions in our programme.

I, as a curator, was asked to join the core group at a relatively early stage, already in 2016. They knew that to avoid becoming another artist-run organisation, they needed a different model and a curator on board from the beginning to help design the programming.

We are hybrid in three ways: we are an artist-initiated organisation run by a curator; we are a private, non-profit entity working for the public good with free admission and a programme designed for an engaged public; and we operate as a kunsthalle, producing exhibitions without a collection. We never charge artists rent, which is unusual in Finland, though we do take a commission on sales.

That is why I think the biggest change was simply that we appeared on the

scene. And that the model proved sustainable enough to keep us afloat, though not without challenges.

We function as a joint-stock company owned by a not-for-profit private foundation. We complement our other income with sales, but this is a small part — roughly ten per cent of our turnover. Our model has evolved with experience. Our formal and legal formulation — especially in relation to the tax authorities, funders, and the handling of VAT — has been refined over time to ensure clarity.

We have two main challenges. One is ensuring that we can continue to have our operating costs covered by sources other than our backer. The second is the steep decline in press activity reviewing our exhibitions.

In the first years, almost every exhibition we made would be reviewed properly, sometimes by more than one newspaper. Today, we are very lucky if we get one or two reviews a year. We see the difference immediately. We always attract our core audience, but it is only when the press writes proper reviews that we get the “ordinary” visitors. The ongoing downsizing of mainstream media art criticism is very devastating for the whole field.



Thomas Nyqvist's exhibition 'Painovoima', 7.8.—5.10.2025.  
Photo: Jussi Tiainen

### How is your income generated?

A private foundation owns the company; they are also our financial backer. But we collect funding from various sources: from the Finnish state (Arts Promotion Centre Finland: Taike<sup>2</sup>, and the Finnish Heritage Agency), from the City of Helsinki, and from a landscape of private foundations, large and small, which is quite developed here in Finland. It is a patchwork of available funding sources, plus sales.

The Finnish Heritage Agency funds the exhibition fees for visual artists. Originally, this programme was only

2. Currently Taide- ja kulttuurivirasto (Kuvi).

for museums, but when they opened it up to non-museums, we immediately applied and received funding. The Agency finances eighty per cent of the artist fees. In Finland, this is part of the movement away from charging rent and towards paying a fee.

### What has been your biggest challenge in getting funding?

As a new organisation with a private foundation backing us, the biggest challenge was entering the funding system — both the public and private foundations — because our model was new to them.

We apply for running costs from several organisations. Some of them give us very little, but it is still important. And we do get operational costs covered by the state, by the Swedish Cultural Foundation, by the City of Helsinki and others.

We also had a four-year operational grant from the Kone Foundation, meant to promote our institutional growth, and they actually approached us, as they were looking for organisations to support.

### Do you apply for funding outside the art and culture field?

We have considered applying for European Union funding, but have not

done so yet because we are so small. Both my colleague and I have experience with EU funding from earlier jobs, and we know we are not equipped for it because of how much work it requires. We have also been looking into possibilities for collaboration with Finnish companies, but that has also proven to be quite time-consuming and difficult.

### Do you generate your own income?

We sell artworks, as mentioned, and sometimes publications, but that is not a significant part of our income. In theory, we can also rent out the space for events, but we almost never do because the space is rarely empty. Instead of renting it out, we collaborate with other organisations and give

them the space for free so that we can attract a few more visitors, for example, for performance events.

#### **How do you see your societal role?**

We define ourselves as uncompromising. We work for the public good. We offer the interested public something that they will be interested in — but in order to do that, we need to be interested in it. We always offer what we want to see ourselves; this is very important.

We try to make a difference. Showing what is not shown in other organisations here — in museums, kunsthalls or private galleries — and we try to do it in a way that differs from other institutions. We always try to give visitors a new experience of the space each time they come. Essentially, we reconfigure the space quite often.

We are not in the city centre. We are not on the outskirts or in the suburbs, but we are not in the absolute centre either, so it must be worthwhile for people to come here.

#### **Do you have a specific relationship with your place, the local community?**

We have initiated something called the Art Walk Kalasatama (Fishing Harbour Art Walk), together with several other organisations in the area (Galleria

Huuto, Galleria Ars Longa & Fönari, Kalasataman seripaja, Pitted Dates, Bio Arts Society), collaborating on free guided tours every second Sunday around the local area, in Finnish or English alternately. We think this is important because it connects the different organisations here.

We also have a good relationship with Helsinki City Premises Ltd., the city-owned company that runs Helsinki's historical market halls and wholesale areas. We try to contribute to developing the city in that way. So we are quite active locally — really locally, micro-locally.

#### **Do you work with volunteers?**

No, we never use unpaid labour at all.

#### **Do you have any experience or advice you would like to share with other institutions?**

Have a strong vision for what you need to do — and do not compromise.

We are generous to Finnish artists and we show many of them, but their share stays between 40–45% of our overall output over time. It is important that our programme remains international. We are also careful with gender balance, which stays around 50%.

I would also like to mention New Classics Finland (Uudet Klassikot),



Guided tour at 'Figure' Maria Taniguchi & Emilia Tanner's exhibition in May 2024. Photo: Mariia Averina

a programme funded by the state and by private foundations (The Finnish Cultural Foundation, the Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland, the Alfred Kordelin Foundation, the Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation) that supports art sales to private individuals. There is the possibility to receive a one-off grant, and for each sale to a verified private collector, the programme matches the price up to €5,000. The programme is mostly for galleries, artist organisations and other non-state actors, and we have been included. Most of our sales are to foundations, which do not qualify, so we only benefit when we sell to private collectors — and private collecting in Finland is relatively weak. It is an innovative programme, even if the gains for us are modest.

#### **If you had the opportunity to change something structural to improve conditions for art institutions like yours, what would it be?**

To make it easier for smaller, focused visual arts institutions not to chase high visitor numbers, and to make it easier for them to obtain more than one year of support if they show positive development in their audience numbers.

A broader wish is the creation of a policy for visual art. At the moment, there is no such policy in Finland. Visual art is an orphan within the cultural system: there is no coordination, no overarching thought behind it. Money is distributed in many directions with no consideration for coordination between the different funding streams.

# IHME Helsinki

Helsinki, Finland

Interview with Executive Director  
and Curator Paula Toppila



IHME Helsinki 2025: The Forest. Photo: Veikko Somerpuro

## Have you experienced changes in arts funding or societal changes that have affected either your economy or your activities?

IHME has existed for eighteen years now, and we have had different phases. The basic idea in our activity has always been to secure three years of funding.

We are a foundation that doesn't have funds. We have been given a donation and we use everything. We don't make a profit. Everything we do is for free. This is the basic concept of the work that we do and it is based on collaboration with other foundations.

It's a very special way of working. So far, we have never applied for any public funding. It's not very secure. We don't know how long we're going to be able to maintain this. It's always three years at a time – and then we have to look for another three years.

This already creates uncertainty. But I think every institution is in a situation of uncertainty, increasingly so because of the global situation. The environmental crisis is accelerating and the political situation is really worrying – in Europe and globally. It is a hyper-militarised time that we are living in and more funds are being directed into military defence. It makes it easier to make cuts to everything else because

security is considered primary. But as culture is one of the cornerstones of mental security, and what we actually defend is our country's culture and our identity, we should invest more in the cultural sector during times of crisis, not cut back.

## How have you worked on creating organisational resilience?

We are fortunate to be a small organisation that is very flexible and resilient. We don't have any forced structures that must be maintained. We are only two people working on a daily basis, and then we hire people that we need for each commission and other programmes.

I have directed quite a radical change in our organisation, which began in 2017. We were working with **Henrik Håkansson**, a Swedish artist, on the film *THE BEETLE*. This is when I started to think about how we are supposed to exist as art institutions. We show critical art that raises questions around the most topical issues of our time.

But we should also look at ourselves and how we work. What kind of processes are we supporting in our own work as institutions? And I want to talk about art institutions, even if we are very small and maybe should not even call ourselves an art institution, but I wanted to address all art institutions



IHME Helsinki 2022: Amar Kanwar's film screening.  
Photo: Veikko Somerpuro

with this question, because it is about the sustainability crisis of the planet.

It is an existential crisis – not just a crisis like any other in the history of civilization. It's something much more critical. This is why I think that the art and culture field is not outside that question. It is actually at the core of the question, because it's about cultural change: how we live, how we do things, how we think about things, and what our values are.

This is why we put ecological sustainability at the centre of everything – from how we run our office, how we

produce our artworks, and how we run the foundation itself. How is it structured, and what kind of expertise do we need?

We also wanted to study whether it is possible to become smaller but more impactful. Growth was never our target. Instead, we wanted to do something quite radical: becoming smaller, leaving the festival format behind and focusing even more on the art.

**Can you describe how you found new ways to develop your organisation?**

We changed our Board and Advisory

Board. I wanted to have an international Advisory Board because this would not only reduce my need for travelling, but it would bring a lot of new insights into the planning of the programmes and the thinking around them.

We also changed the structure of our Board so that there is representation in art, but also in science and climate work, because previously everybody in our Board and Advisory Board were contemporary art experts.

Because the Board is the legal entity responsible for the foundation's work, they need to be experts in what we are doing. And if we bring new fields of expertise – such as scientific approaches and climate work, like sustainability, into the art field – we need to have these views on the Board so that they can evaluate our work from an expert perspective.

I hired an eco-coordinator and, when we hired her, this role barely existed in the cultural field, but now it's more common. Sustainability learning should ideally involve everyone in the organisation – not just a coordinator – so each person considers how they can improve their own work.

**What kind of funding do you receive?**

IHME has one founder, who donated

funding in the beginning. So far, we have been able to find three foundations to support our work for a three-year period. We have received funding from foundations that support science and art.

We experience that it is more difficult now because all private foundations receive about three times as many applications. If they used to get two thousand; now they get six thousand.

One of the most important and fundamental changes in the Finnish foundation scene is that they have prolonged their grants. Several foundations nowadays give out three-year grants. It is very positive because how can you do good work in the creative field if you are under pressure and constantly in this loop of applying and applying, often getting half of what you apply for, and still being expected to do things as planned?

**How do you see your societal role?**

Art and culture are perhaps more important than ever and really should get more support. We need time and space where we can use our imagination and be inspired by the imagination of others and art can provide this. It is very stressful for many to live in these times of uncertainty.

When it comes to IHME Helsinki in

particular, the knowledge production around sustainability has been important on a societal level. We have published Ecoblog since 2020, and given many talks and run workshops in order to make sustainable practices the new normal.

One of the objectives of our foundation is to produce new critical art and this is why we challenge the artists to produce artworks that break barriers around what art is – and what it can do.

Another objective for us is to reinvent the connection with audiences: to reach out to new audiences, but also to rethink the audience aspect. This is why we have collected audience feedback in tailor-made ways since we started. We are really interested in how art can become meaningful and empowering to people. This is also why many of our commissions have a participatory dimension.

In 2021, we invited visually impaired and deaf people to attend **Katie Paterson's** incense ceremonies. We had experts teaching our audience workers how to welcome them and published a blog about the learnings. We always share everything, so other institutions can learn from our experiences.

#### **Do you use volunteers or interns?**

We have trainees – even from a comprehensive school and from an environmental school where they teach future sustainability leaders, and they want to learn in the field. Many people contact us because they know we have been doing pioneering work in this field.

They are also important for us; the one we have now will do the carbon-footprint calculation for this year. She will also be coordinating the EcoCompass certificate.

Another group of trainees that we like to take are immigrants who are learning the Finnish language. A part of this education is a training period with us, from two to six weeks. This has been an extremely good experience.

#### **If you had the opportunity to change something structural to improve conditions for art institutions like yours, what would it be?**

Artists, art and cultural institutions would do better if they secured funding for three-year periods, both from the public and private sectors. I believe they would perform better, but we also need structures of trust and appreciation towards artists and art and cultural institutions.



IHME Helsinki 2024: Cooking Sections, Maaleipä Challenge. Photo: Veikko Somerpuro

I believe in the power of civic society and thus I think that networks are more important in the future. Sustainable Visual Arts Network is one example that has members from all over the country.

The key structural societal change would be a citizen's income. It was tested in Finland and when people have a basic income and are freed from constant stress, they become healthier, more creative and more helpful, and this benefits society.

#### **Do you have any experience or good advice that you would like to share**

#### **with other institutions?**

The most important thing is that you are super attentive to what is happening in the world and ready to make changes and think creatively. In my opinion, there should – be more radical changes in how art and culture institutions work.

You need to ask these very basic questions and update your answers to the world of planetary and polycrisis: Why does our organisation exist? How do we do things? For whom do we do what we do? And avoid continuing as you have done for the last 20 years.

# KUBU

## Kimitoön Island, Finland

Interview with co-founder  
Tuomo Tammenpää



### **Have you experienced changes in arts funding or societal changes that have affected either your economy or your activities?**

No, we bought the house after COVID. We had made grant applications in the past, but mostly for individual projects. Applying for running costs was completely unknown, so the idea from early on was to try to build this gradually towards a kind of multifaceted or as anti-fragile a funding model as possible, not depending on any singular funds.

There are a few big funds here targeted at Swedish-speaking activities: the Amos Andersons Fond and Svenska Kulturfonden, which we knew existed, but we didn't know how to apply to them. Everything was new.

Then we started meeting with them, and that was probably the decisive change. They actually came to visit the house, and the municipality did as well, although the municipality has very limited cultural funds. In a way, the change was entirely positive, because we received support that we hadn't even known existed before.

### **How have you built your economic resilience?**

We started by buying the building – an old school – with our own money, our retirement fund. The first thing we checked was whether the municipality

could reuse the space. They had previously held their adult activities (courses and workshops) in the house, and in this way, we would be guaranteed rental income from the municipality. They have continued to do so, and they also buy our catering services and use us for their board meetings. In that way, the municipality rents our facilities, and that gives us an income.

The municipality also gives us some smaller project funding. And from next year, we are eligible to apply for bigger funds. Previously, it was only for associations. We are already in this cooperative (Osuuskunta Vinde), which works as an association and is non-profit, which is why we did not form an association.

So, we get local support as well as regional funding, but we have not applied for state funding yet. But we do receive private funds as mentioned. In the future, we will look more into all possible sources of funding, from local to state to Nordic and EU.

We try to keep our hearts and minds in the cultural operations of the house. We are on an island with a very active summer season. Many others operating on the island are only active in June, July, and maybe August. We are here all year round. In that way, we bring value to the region. And that general cultural purpose value should

be funded by private foundations and public funding. And we are receiving project funding for year-round activities and are still expanding on that.

However, we also provide meeting services, run a small café, a boutique and have art sales. And if we need to, we will probably be expanding these business services.

But we are very clearly separating which activities are for cultural purposes and bring value to the region, and what are other kinds of business services. That is part of our strategy.

We also generate an income through the exhibitions in the gallery. We have different kinds of exhibitions: open calls, where artists pay rent, and we have our own programme, where we pay the curator and the standard fee for exhibiting artworks. In addition, we also lend out the gallery to e.g., local school exhibitions.

We also get 30% in sales commission. But it is not generating a real income—some years nothing at all—and we have an entrance fee.

But it is definitely the rentals that provide us with the biggest income. It is also the most stable, and something we want to increase, especially the workshops and the local community's use.

### **Do you apply for funding outside the art and culture field?**

We are looking into that right now: both the local LEADER program (an EU funding program that supports rural development), as well as what kind of support we can apply for to improve our energy efficiency, including funds for the green transition as well as upcycling.

### **How do you see your societal role?**

We are in a rural area and it is hard to win local hearts. Many here say art is not for me. We try to say we are a Culture House; we have flea markets, you can play badminton and have a coffee. We are very aware of how we communicate.

We are outsiders here and we need to fight in order to win the local hearts. And that happens when there's a flea market or waffle day; then we have three hundred people in the house. But it is a slow, slow battle. But it is important for us: this house was a space for education and civilization for one hundred and ten years. We want to extend that for an extra hundred and ten years.

The balancing is between the international, experimental contemporary art versus a more "makery approach", which is our background – and then also to increase the well-being of the



The gallery space at KUBU.

elderly people who are the majority on the island. That is our strategy, and I think it's too early to say if we will succeed. The question is not for us to answer, but for our visitors.

Part of that strategy is also to show works by professional artists, local artists, amateur artists and children. The whole spectrum of artistic production.

### **Do you use volunteers?**

We have a group of ten people who are very active, and then there are around 50 people who are helping now and then. They come when we need to paint or clean up. So, we have these volunteer circles. But we need to expand this, preferably in a way where they are just doing it without our intervention. We would like them to have

a kind of real ownership of the house and the buildings.

Our plan is to gradually give them more power and, in that way, both strengthen the ties to the local community and give us more organizational resilience.

In a way, all work is currently volunteer work. We have had a few paid summer workers and, since last year, a lady helping us ten hours per week. But we (**Sari Kippilä** and **Tuomo Tammenpää**) are not paid; we donate our work. We do get grants for our own art practice sometimes, but otherwise we work here for free.

With regards to networks or collaborations, it is important to say that I still tap into the kind of media art practice and design practice I used to do. And

we are definitely tapping into the networks we have from media design, prototyping and “makerspace activities”.

This is something I see as a value for resilience in the future, and maybe even locally, when the funders see how many international connections we have; they might actually value that as something we bring here, and it fits very well into our residency program.

**Do you have any experience or good advice that you would like to share with other institutions?**

You can never overcommunicate.

Everything here is still very experimental. We try and we fail and sometimes we try and succeed. We would like to have a kind of open-source model as a place to exchange knowledge. A best-practice sharing place on how to do an event, how to do an exhibition, etc. That is something we would like to do, where we could transfer that knowledge to a completely different environment.

**If you had the opportunity to change something structural to improve conditions for art organizations like yours, what would it be?**

It would be valuable if the municipality stopped creating gaps between, for example, cultural activities and areas such as sports, exercise, wellbeing, or

hands-on creative work — all the way up to the more philosophical, contemplative aspects of art.

These areas are still treated as separate silos within the municipal structure. Yet we now have research showing how cultural activities positively affect wellbeing, which means they are also relevant to the healthcare budget.

Opening up that kind of cross-sector discussion would be extremely valuable and invite cultural professionals as creative problem-solvers to the decision-making regarding all aspects of the community, not just their underfunded corner of culture as arts.



The serigraphy space at KUBU.

# Deep Forest Art Land

Kibaek, Denmark

Interview with Artistic Director Søren Taaning



## **As an institution, have you experienced changes in arts funding or societal changes that have affected either your economy or your activities?**

Our challenge was that we represented a new model of what an art institution can be. When we started in 2010, we were a project-based organisation, but from 2016 we became a cultural institution with a small, fixed operating grant. The challenge has been to create a foundation that someone is willing to support, including a level of core funding.

This is a constant balancing act between project funding and operations. Some foundations accept that a small proportion of operating costs is included. Private foundations accept limited operational funding, but primarily in connection with development projects. However, you cannot keep developing indefinitely; at some point, it becomes operations, and you are no longer new. There is then an expectation that the municipality will contribute to operational funding. This becomes problematic in places where the municipality is unwilling to provide support.

We can see that we cannot continue to grow without more substantial operational funding. It is important to note that, at present, we do not have buildings and therefore none of the expenses associated with building operations.

## **How have you worked to ensure institutional resilience?**

We have structured our organisation around our circumstances. We have a small operational unit, a cultural mediation and education unit, and a project organisation, which is the largest and which we can scale up and down.

This creates an agile model. We have a strong core and a range of projects that we initiate and then see which ones develop and succeed.

We also work with four-year strategies, rather than one-year projects.

## **How have you worked to ensure institutional innovation?**

Our core is art, nature and people. That is the foundation we stand on. The idea behind Deep Forest Art Land emerged from reflections on where public space is located, and whether there might be other places where art can meet its audience – and where artists can unfold their practices. Art has shifted, requiring different kinds of spaces. We created such a space.

Around this core, we work with four focus areas that must remain in flux: the framework (infrastructure, etc.), communication (target groups), organisation and strategy. These areas must continually adapt to the specific task or project at hand. This is crucial

when working as a project-based organisation.

This is the opposite of many art institutions, which begin with the framework and infrastructure. That can become a major challenge if you have a museum and want to reach a universal audience, but are constrained by a building that signals exclusivity and only appeals to 10 per cent of your target group.

We have learned that infrastructure is important. The path must be impeccably maintained, the works must be presented with precision, there must be a toilet and it must be located exactly where it is needed. We have focused on wayfinding and spatial framing. We think of the framework – the forest and nature – as the “warm” element, which creates calm and presence, allowing the art to open up to more people. This is the opposite of **Knud W. Jensen’s** thinking about “cold” and “warm” exhibitions. We provide a “warm” framework for works that can be genuinely challenging.

When we ask visitors why they came, they do not say art. They say they came for the forest. That is the “warm” framework. Nature cuts across boundaries; it can encompass many different people. It feels safe.

The family, in the broadest sense, is our target group. We have embraced the democratic educational ideal. We have succeeded in reaching those who do not normally visit museums and art institutions – “non-users”. They come because they believe they are visiting a forest. Communication is therefore important: we should not communicate that we are a museum or an art gallery.

We avoid the word “art” and instead say that it is an inclusive space, with a visual mode of mediation that can also be understood by non-Danish speakers. This attracts a broad audience. We have many international visitors who come during the season to pick berries.

**Can you describe a concrete problem you faced and how you solved it?**

Because we are a forest and not a museum, we faced a challenge regarding admission and payment. Staffing a ticket desk is a major expense. Our solution was to introduce voluntary payment of DKK 20 via Mobile-Pay. Around 15–20 per cent of visitors choose to pay.

We had previously tried voluntary donations, which generated nothing. Language and the placement of signage therefore matter.



**What is your funding strategy?**

We were established through a grant from the Danish Outdoor Council (Friluftsrådet). They were looking for projects that could encourage people who would not normally do so to visit a forest. We, in turn, were looking for a project that could create relationships between art and people who were typically non-users. It was a perfect match. We did not talk about art, but about the forest and interpretative objects. Today, we receive local support, national funding from the Danish Arts

Foundation, and grants from private foundations. Many of our grants come from outside the arts sector: Realdania, the Danish Foundation for Culture and Sports Facilities (Lokale og Anlægsfonden), and Friluftsrådet.

This is reflected in our funding strategy. We can position ourselves in relation to more foundations than most institutions; for example, we can engage with a public health agency. In our new strategy, we will also apply to the Rural Development Fund (Landdistriktspuljen).



Hannah Heilmann and Emma Sheridan's works at group exhibition 'Motherload' at Deep Forest Art Land in 2018. Photo: David Stjernholm

This is a forest in which we have created this project, and we have incorporated principles of universal design and universal access wherever possible. We have worked with Friluftsrådet as a partner – an organisation that is not interested in art, but interested in what art can do.

This is where we encounter structural problems. When we approach the municipality, we prefer not to speak solely with the cultural committee, as there is very little money there. We would also like to be in dialogue with other departments: outdoor and nature, social services and education, or business development and settlement. We have art in a forest, in a place where nobody used to go. Now, 50,000 people visit every year. Are we not also an attraction, a tourism asset, or an economic driver?

**What forms of earned income do you generate?**

We primarily generate earned income through voluntary admission, guided tours and our educational programmes for schools.

**How do you see your societal role?**

We contribute to fulfilling the task of democratic education. Our strength lies in our ability to address many groups beyond the middle-aged academic woman. At our site, the local metalworker also comes. In this way, we are more inclusive and can fulfil the societal task of making art accessible to everyone. This is a fundamental part of our foundation and strategy.

This is also why we work with universal design. We spoke with the Disability Council and discovered that there

are very few forests with wheelchair access. In this regard, we believe we make a difference and help address a societal issue. This approach can be transferred to other areas and societal challenges that art can help to address. It is also about shaping communication so that it aligns with broader societal agendas. Artists appreciate working in places that can offer new possibilities.

**How do you work with volunteers?**

Volunteers are important and require investment. We have a group of ten volunteers. This helps build resilience and local support. However, it also requires a social space, so we are working to establish a small clubhouse. It is essential to have someone responsible for volunteers who can nurture and develop the volunteer programme. You need to invest in this over several years in order to benefit from it – and we are not quite there yet.

**Do you have experiences or advice you would like to share with other Nordic art institutions?**

Take an interest in how others perceive you. This is a process we have recently gone through ourselves. We engaged an external agency to conduct qualitative interviews, which gave us valuable insight into how others experience us and what does not work.

It has also been invaluable to be members of the local business association and the tourism organisation. This can provide access to potential sponsors and give you a network beyond the arts and cultural sector. It is important to be part of the local community through associations, you gain significant goodwill by being open and welcoming.

**If you had the opportunity to change something structurally that would improve conditions for art institutions like yours, what would it be?**

Encourage politicians to recognise that frameworks can be more flexible and allow room for the understanding that art institutions can take on societal tasks. In Lolland, for example, there is a major problem with vacant houses, and millions are currently being spent on demolishing them. One could establish a funding scheme where artistic institutions or artists could apply with solutions to this problem. This requires both that those designing funding programmes think more broadly, and that art and cultural institutions are able to imagine themselves as part of such solutions.

# Simian

## Ørestad, Copenhagen

Interview with Co-founder and Co-director  
Markus von Platen



Simian, Copenhagen, 2024. Photo: Simian

### **As an institution, have you experienced changes in arts funding or societal changes that have affected either your economy or your activities?**

We experience the funding landscape as developing in a generally positive direction. In our case, several foundations have gradually awarded us larger grants over recent years. For example, the New Carlsberg Foundation established an exhibition funding scheme a couple of years ago, which was a very welcomed new initiative.

### **How have you worked to ensure institutional resilience?**

Simian developed from a starting point that initially focused primarily on exhibitions. However, it quickly became clear to us that if we were to further develop our economy and reach, we would need to gradually incorporate additional institutional functions: mediation, audience engagement and – perhaps most importantly – the creation of a community around our activities.

I would argue that the community aspect is precisely where we have been most successful. We have created a format that is institutional in nature and which strongly addresses a sense of collective engagement around art. From this position, we have developed towards working with major international names and establishing collaborations with key actors.

At the same time, we are conscious that it is not sufficient to make art solely for artists. We therefore work continuously to reach a broader public. Our most recent initiative, Simian Atelier, is a programme offering free art education for children in the local area. This initiative follows naturally from our foundation and our commitment to contributing cultural value to the Ørestad neighbourhood, as part of the partnership agreement under which By & Havn (an urban development company) provides premises to Simian free of charge.

From the outset, our strategic approach has been to contribute to the local community while simultaneously fostering Simian's economic development. Along the way, we have developed organisationally and established a robust structure by aligning vision and financial sustainability so that the two reinforce one another.

Management (the four artists who founded Simian) continue to carry out the majority of the work. We have since employed a coordinator and additionally engage external expertise as required. Over the years, we have undergone organisational development parallel to our strategic expansion.

We have also revised the composition of our board, which now encompasses a range of competencies and profiles:



Catherine Christer Hennix with Ellen Arkbro and Marcus Pal at Simian in 2023. Photo: Simian

an art-professional profile, one with experience in international collaboration, and an ethnologist with a background in urban development.

**Do you have examples of how you have found new ways that have developed your institution?**

One initiative that I consider new is the project Under Festival, which we presented in May 2025. Here, we invited a large number of other self-organised actors to collaborate on a major joint project. This was an important way for us to demonstrate our hybrid position. We originate from a self-organised practice, but we also wish to demonstrate that we elevate this practice through an institutional framework. For this reason, the project represented a milestone for us – a new direction.

**What are your Funding Strategies?**

Our starting point is that By & Havn (an urban development company) has made our premises available free of charge for ten years with the aim of supporting local development and cultural life. We also collaborate with Balder Denmark (a real estate company) on our Simian Atelier programme, where they likewise provide premises at another location in Ørestad.

We are fortunate that since Simian's establishment, we have continuously received programme funding from the Obel Family Foundation, the Louis Hansen Foundation, the Augustinus Foundation, and the Danish Arts Foundation.

In 2025, we received municipal operating funding for the first time from the

Culture and Leisure Committee of the City of Copenhagen, which has just been extended for a three-year period. On top of this foundation, we have continuously added project-based funding from a range of foundations and grant schemes. Among local funders, Ørestad Grundejerforening and the Amager West Local Committee have supported several of our initiatives over the years.

Overall, we have undergone a development process in which we initially received smaller amounts from many foundations, whereas today we focus on securing larger grants from fewer funders. For us, this is an ongoing consideration when deciding whether to apply for multi-year funding. As Simian is continuously evolving, in some cases, it is more appropriate for us to

apply on an annual basis. We have not experienced any significant challenges in covering our operating costs, and several foundations are willing to support operational expenses as part of an overall annual programme.

**What forms of earned income do you generate?**

We do not generate income from admission, as entry is free of charge. We have a modest income from book sales and merchandise, as well as limited income from the sale of beverages during exhibition openings and events. On a few occasions, when it does not conflict with our programme, we rent out our premises. These revenues form part of our operating budget, but overall earned income constitutes a relatively small proportion of our economy.



'THE SPONTANEOUS DANCE FALLS. 2.1' by Stacey de Voe at Under Festival, Simian in 2025. Photo: Jakob Storm

**Do you work with interns or volunteers?**

We continuously engage interns for both longer and shorter periods. They are often artists or art history students, from Denmark as well as from abroad. Our interns are part of a dynamic structure in which tasks are distributed flexibly according to competencies and needs. They are actively involved in the work and contribute to both the development and production of exhibitions.

**How do you perceive your societal role?**

For us, it is about developing the art ecosystem and generating new currents that can inspire our visitors, inspire other artists, and also encourage other institutions to rethink how they operate. We founded Simian as self-organised artists, and over time, we have demonstrated an alternative institutional model that has proven viable. We see significant societal value in allowing things to grow from the ground up, both culturally and artistically.

In our dialogue with foundations, we also encounter support and recognition of the fact that we differ from many other institutions. We experience a clear understanding that it is important to make room for diverse types of institutions within the art field.

**Do you have experiences or advice you would like to share with other Nordic art institutions?**

Our experience is that one should not underestimate audiences' ability and willingness to be challenged in their

understanding of what art can be. On the contrary, this often gives rise to the most meaningful encounters between artwork and viewer. It is the role and responsibility of art institutions – and particularly kunsthaller – to develop artistic discourse and thereby expand the audience's interpretive framework for art.

**If you had the opportunity to change something structurally in order to improve conditions for art institutions like yours, what would it be?**

I would look at how better opportunities could be created for the growth layer of self-organised exhibition platforms. There is a need for stronger and longer-term conditions for those who wish to contribute to new initiatives in the art scene. Unfortunately, very few manage to move beyond the first two or three years today. The Danish Arts Foundation, for example, could take the lead by not only providing start-up funding but also offering development programmes that provide guidance on building a more stable foundation. This would create more sustainable structures and a stronger and more relevant art scene in Denmark.

In addition, I would encourage a more international outlook when appointing leaders to Danish art institutions. I believe the Danish art scene would benefit from greater diversity among its leadership and from bringing a wider range of perspectives into play.



Simian, Copenhagen, 2025. Photo: Simian

# Rønnebæksholm Art Centre

Næstved, Denmark

Interview with Artistic Director  
Lotte Juul Petersen



Sankthans på Rønnebæksholm. Photo: Christian Brøms

**As an institution, have you experienced changes in arts funding or societal changes that have affected either your economy or your activities?**

There is now greater competition within the exhibition field, and it has become more professionalised. Today, expectations of what an exhibition must deliver are very high: artists must receive proper remuneration, there must be good conditions for artistic production, high-quality mediation, and meaningful audience engagement. This inevitably leads to higher budgets. The paradox is that no additional funding follows these increased costs, including the costs of day-to-day operations.

It has also had an impact that the Danish Arts Foundation's exhibition programme funding has shifted from being two-year to one-year support. At the same time, the scheme has been opened up so that the self-organised scene can apply, which is, of course, commendable. However, for art centres this means, on the one hand, that we move from one stepping stone to another, having to apply year by year, and on the other, that competition for funding has intensified.

Conversely, some private foundations have begun to offer multi-year funding for activities and exhibitions. This is an incredibly positive development and also demonstrates an understanding

of the importance of continuity and long-term stability in our operations.

**How have you worked to ensure institutional resilience?**

Næstved Municipality provides a basic operational grant to Rønnebæksholm and to Billedskolen Storstrøm (in collaboration with Faxe and Vordingborg municipalities). It has been a long-term political process to articulate our needs and to ensure that the municipality understands the level of operational funding required, and this year we have succeeded. However, achieving a stable financial foundation has taken time, and it remains something I will continue to work towards—precisely in order to realise the great potential of bringing art to a wider audience.

One decisive factor has been activating other funding streams within the municipality, such as capital investment funds. We have received DKK 2 million to develop the café, funding for a new website, and capital funds to improve accessibility in the park. In addition, we have opened up the institution through collaborations with others, both within the municipal framework and more broadly.

Cross-disciplinary work is part of our DNA. We have a large parkland and a productive garden, and the art centre itself is a site of cultural heritage.

These elements represent values that we have further developed and activated much more fully. We host concerts and literary events, among other things, in collaboration with the local library and Ensemble Storstrøm, and we have hosted The World Ballet at Rønnebæksholm.

We also hold more popular, community-oriented events such as the Midsummer celebration at Rønnebæksholm, which is an important artistic and cultural occasion for many people. We have also collaborated with Bon-Bon-Land (a local theme park based on BonBon confectionery characters), and we work with the Næstved Deanery on a podcast series about existence and life-altering circumstances.

Thematically and strategically, we also work with art and health, and art and nature within our artistic programme, thereby expanding our collaborative interfaces. Looking ahead, we aim to develop outdoor mediation and learning activities for schools.

**What are your foundation funding strategies?**

Each year, we apply to the Danish Arts Foundation (state funding) for a one-year exhibition programme. Their support is an important marker of quality, after which we approach a wide range of private foundations. During my tenure, we have increased support from the Danish Arts Foundation from DKK 150,000 to approximately DKK 350,000–400,000 annually.

We also apply to many local foundations that support community initiatives, as well as larger foundations with a more socially oriented focus, such as Nordea. Because we undertake so many cross-disciplinary activities, we also apply to music and literature funding schemes within the Danish Arts

Foundation.

We often seek foundation funding through collaborations or partnerships. This means that it is not always Rønnebæksholm that submits the application; sometimes it is our partners who take responsibility for the application process.

**What forms of self-generated income do you have?**

Meetings and conferences generate our largest share of self-earned income. In addition to the main building that houses the art centre, we have several other buildings that can be rented out. We have also become adept at designing tailored “packages” for groups, which include admission and lunch—and sometimes guided tours as well.

The Park and garden are also used for larger revenue-generating events. For example, we host a garden market in collaboration with the Danish Garden Society, attracting around 1,000 visitors twice a year, which also generates income through ticket sales.

We have a café and a shop that have now begun to generate a surplus, and we have conceptualised the café itself as an artistic experience. There is also income from admissions and guided tours. Finally, we have our membership club, Club Rønnebæksholm, with around 300 members, which also contributes financially.

**How do you work with sponsors?**

We have a small group of sponsors who have supported us loyally for many years, and many of them also hold meetings and events here. These are typically local businesses.

I have increased our sponsorship income this year, but it has not been



Café Haralda, designed by Studio Reflektor & Cecilia Westerberg. Photo: Jan Søndergaard

easy to clarify what sponsors gain from supporting Rønnebæksholm. As we are a municipal institution, the municipality also sets the framework for what we are permitted to offer sponsors.

We have attempted outreach to potential sponsors through letters, but this has not been particularly effective. There is certainly development potential in this area.

**How do you see your societal role?**

I see our work as contributing to a welfare agenda. Through our artistic and educational programmes, Billedskolen, the garden and our various activities,

we help to create healthy communities. In this sense, we are preventative in our approach and engage with major agendas around wellbeing, particularly for children and young people, including accommodating individuals with special needs.

We also offer something distinct, particularly in relation to art and community, and nature and community. We offer spaces for immersion and contemplation. Through our activities for children, we enable them to experience analogue processes and gain hands-on experience through working manually in our workshops.

More broadly, I believe that through art we can offer experiences that open up the world, recognise and give visibility to voices that have not previously been heard.

In relation to the municipality, we can contribute widely and see significant development potential in the value inherent in our status as cultural heritage, and in the educational and formative ideals embedded in our history. This forms the basis of our outreach programme, through which we have engaged around 1,300 children and young people this year.

We also contribute to the health agenda: for example, we host some of the municipality's internal stress management programmes. We have carried out projects within social institutions in the municipality, contributed to the commissioning of a permanent artwork at Næstved Hospital, facilitated writing programmes at Oringe Psychiatric Hospital, and hosted programmes for relatives at Rønnebæksholm in collaboration with the National Centre for Art and Mental Health. We also collaborate with Marjatta's STU programme on a project that ensures access to art for young people with special needs.

With regard to the local community, I believe we both carry a responsibility and have significant opportunities through art.

**In relation to local anchoring, do you also work with volunteers?**

Our work with volunteers is extremely important and creates immense value. It requires commitment from us, but it gives a great deal in return. Not least, it strengthens our local relevance and creates a sense of local ownership, as well as fostering strong communities. It also supports the municipality's ambition to involve civil society.

The volunteers run the garden. Even though we employ a gardener, we simply could not maintain the garden without them. Together with our skilled gardener, they also hold deep knowledge of the site. It was also the volunteers who helped me recruit a new gardener, as they understood what the role required. We also have volunteers who assist at events.

Recently, we have professionalised our volunteer programme by introducing a new cooperation agreement, partly to clarify their role as ambassadors for Rønnebæksholm. Previously, the arrangement was trust-based; it is now formalised, including what volunteers receive in return (information meetings, annual passes, inspiration trips and an annual New Year's reception). The agreement also enables us to obtain criminal records and child protection checks.

Looking ahead, I would like to explore new ways of recruiting volunteers, particularly with the aim of engaging younger people.

**Do you have experiences or advice you would like to share with other Nordic art institutions?**

Open up the institution — but always with art as the point of departure. One must not forget who one is. Make art relevant within a broader context.

Share with others. Enter into collaborations and do not be afraid to step slightly outside your own disciplinary expertise. Be strategic about partnerships: invest in them and ensure continuity, so that they can become part of your operational model—just as we have done with our collaboration with the local library and the author events with Ensemble Storstrøm. We draw on their expertise and, in return, reach entirely new audiences.



'Portalen', 2021, Randi & Katrine. Photo: Torben Petersen

**If you had the opportunity to change something structurally in order to improve conditions for art institutions like yours, what would it be?**

I would abolish the so-called foundation VAT, which requires a 17.5% VAT payment on private foundation funding granted to municipalities, regions and state institutions, and which disproportionately affects municipal institutions. This is critical because some foundations stipulate that the VAT must not

be deducted from the grant itself but must be found elsewhere.

We are entirely dependent on private foundations, and this therefore has a major impact, as it effectively diverts funding away from the art.

# Mapping resilient strategies: main findings

## 1. Many Models of Resilience

The report demonstrates that institutional resilience and innovation take many different forms. The models are not determined by organisational structure, size, income sources, national context, or whether an institution is public or private. Instead, resilience is shaped primarily by **local context**.

Many of the organisations describe themselves as **hybrid**, deliberately breaking away from established institutional formats. A significant number are **artist-led or artist-initiated**, some closely connected to artistic practice. This segment of the art ecosystem appears to offer particular freedom to develop alternative institutional models. These experimental configurations function as important laboratories for rethinking how art institutions can operate, organise themselves, and relate to society.

Smaller organisations can also benefit from being **agile and flexible models**, allowing them to develop organically in response to changing needs, resources, and ambitions. Compared to larger institutional structures, these organisations can adapt more quickly and experiment with new forms of governance and practice.

## 2. Local Embeddedness

One of the strongest findings is the close link between institutional resilience and the ability to build **deep, lasting relationships with local communities**. In some cases, this also includes strong ties to local businesses. Institutions that see themselves, and are seen by the local community, as part of the local social fabric are more likely to survive and remain relevant.

This is also why tapping into the tradition of the **“community house”** makes sense for some.

Resilience is not solely an economic issue. Rather, it depends on whether institutions are able to demonstrate **clear societal value** through their presence and activities. This reflects a Nordic tradition of understanding art and culture as a shared societal concern rather than a specialist field.

## 3. Opening Up

There is a clear ambition to **open up, to give access** and to **include**. A general understanding that the purpose of the organisation is to be instrumental in giving universal access to art.

Access is understood broadly: not only physical access, but also the **mental**

**and cultural barriers** that limit access. Several organisations deliberately avoid the word “art” in their communication, instead presenting themselves as inclusive spaces or community houses. This strategy has proven effective in attracting audiences who do not normally engage with art institutions, including families, migrant workers, and so-called “non-users”.

Another striking find is the awareness of the role infrastructure plays in making art spaces feel welcoming. How crucial it is to consider the framework around art. This includes practical elements such as how to enter, wayfinding, seating, and accessibility for all, both inside and outside, as well as the overall atmosphere. Several institutions describe their ambition to create a **“warm” house or place** — a space that offers safety, comfort, joy and pleasure, not only artistic challenge.

Institutions are increasingly examining their infrastructure critically: how spaces, furniture, and technical equipment can be shared, repurposed, and used to create **institutional generosity**.

There is also a strong focus on **universal design**, ensuring that people with disabilities can participate fully.

Organisations or institutions without a building, can be seen as an advantage, as museums and galleries inherently create barriers and thresholds. Without walls, it becomes possible to **reinvent the connection between art and audiences** in new ways.

## 4. Diverse Funding Strategies

A key condition for resilience is access to **long-term or multi-year funding**, both public and private, and with a basis covering some operational costs. This is not always possible, and most have diverse funding strategies relying mainly on project funding.

Many institutions have successfully activated funding from **outside the cultural sector**, including municipal development funds and EU programmes related to rural development, tourism, climate action, and social sustainability.

These funding sources offer significant opportunities but are often complex, time-consuming, and require specialised expertise. As a result, most organisations aim for **diversified and anti-fragile funding models**, avoiding dependency on a single source.

**Sponsorships** tend to be modest and are most successful when rooted in long-term relationships with local

businesses. **Crowdfunding** stands out in one case as a powerful tool when strong local solidarity and societal relevance are already established.

**Passive donation schemes**, however, generally produce limited results.

### 5. Earned Income

Earned income is generated through **a wide range of activities**, including ticket sales, rentals, cafés, shops, memberships, consultancy work, and events. The specific mix depends less on national context than on available facilities and local conditions.

For institutions without large cafés, **space rental** often provides the most stable income and can function as a financial backbone, particularly where organisations own or control buildings.

Some institutions are also exploring alternative forms of **passive income**, such as renewable energy production, reflecting broader sustainability ambitions.

### 6. Volunteers and Interns

Both volunteers and interns play a significant role in creating organisational resilience, and at best, this relationship is an exchange that creates value for both parties.

For many organisations, volunteers are absolutely crucial. They contribute

practical labour, sometimes specialised knowledge, and help to foster **local ownership** and **social value**. However, engaging volunteers is also an investment and requires clear structures and long-term commitment from the institution.

Interns have a different role. They are often part of the organisation as part of a learning process and bring **new knowledge**, specialised skills, and **fresh perspectives** and ideas to the organisation. Many organisations depend on interns because of limited resources, on the other hand, potentially making it more difficult to retain expertise and institutional knowledge over time.

### 7. Rethinking the Societal Role of Art Institutions

Many art institutions are actively reassessing their societal role and repositioning themselves as **community-centred organisations** with a clear sense of social responsibility. Their work increasingly extends beyond the exhibition of art to encompass a wide range of societal functions, including urban and rural development, wellbeing, education, social inclusion, and democratic participation.

Through approaches such as universal design, inclusive communication, and engagement with local history, these

institutions are able to reach audiences far beyond traditional art publics. Several explicitly frame their activities as **contributions to broader welfare agendas**, particularly in relation to children, young people, and vulnerable groups.

Within this context, art is understood not as an isolated cultural activity but as **a tool for addressing wider societal challenges**. As a result, many institutions position themselves as creative problem-solvers within society at large.

### 8. Breaking Barriers

**Cross-disciplinary collaboration** is central to many resilient strategies. Institutions increasingly work across sectors such as education, health, environment, tourism, and social services, and argue for more flexible political and administrative frameworks that recognise the value of art beyond the cultural silo.

This can have implications for governance, including the composition of boards, which may need expertise from fields such as sustainability and science.

## Tools to Share

- Adjust your organisation to your purpose: ask why, how and for whom you exist.
- Take a strategic approach to board composition, ensuring the right mix of competencies, networks, and knowledge
- Build relationships locally
- Critically assess your infrastructure: accessibility must be considered both physically and mentally
- Identify and address communication barriers
- Make use of municipal capital and investment funding
- Explore funding opportunities outside the arts and cultural field, such as urban and rural development, social initiatives, and funding for the green transition

- Consider collaborations (for mutual projects and funding)
- If you manage buildings or facilities that can be rented out, activate these assets strategically
- Volunteers create significant value and local ownership, but require clear structures, aligned expectations, and, where relevant, formal collaboration agreements
- Interns can contribute fresh perspectives and new ways of thinking
- Work across sectors – including engaging with local organisations and networks beyond the arts and cultural sector

# Conclusion

The cases in this report show that resilience in the Nordic visual arts field is not defined by a single model, but by diverse approaches shaped by local conditions, organisational values, and available resources. Rather than stability alone, resilience emerges as a dynamic capacity: the ability to adapt, rethink structures, build alliances, and respond to shifting political and economic realities.

Across the cases, common strategies include diversifying funding, strengthening local engagement, and opening up to cross-sector collaboration. At the same time, the findings highlight structural challenges that cannot be addressed by organisations alone. Long-term sustainability depends on supportive funding frameworks, policy development, and continued recognition of the role of art and culture in democratic societies.

By sharing these experiences, the report contributes to an ongoing Nordic dialogue—one that is essential not only for navigating current uncertainties, but for shaping the future conditions of contemporary art in the region.

## About the Author

**Anette Østerby** is an art historian and curator who has worked as a freelance curator at Louisiana, chief curator at ARKEN, and Head of Visual Arts at the Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces. She was responsible for the Danish Arts Foundation and the Danish Pavilion in Venice from 2004–2022 and is currently a board member at Kunsthall 44Møen and the Ferlov Mancoba Foundation.

## About the publishing organisations

**Bildkonst Sverige**, founded in 2023, is an association of visual art organisations in Sweden. The member organisations include major art institutions, commercial galleries, kunsthalls, as well as small independent art organisations throughout the country.

**The Association of Art Centres in Denmark**, FKD, was established at the end of 1992 and today includes 17 art institutions. The art centres are all exhibition venues that arrange art exhibitions, but do not have permanent collections. FKD sees it as a special task to present international contemporary art; to be a platform for new experiments and to create dialogue between Danish and international art.

**Frame Contemporary Art Finland** is an advocate for Finnish contemporary art. Frame supports international initiatives, facilitates professional partnerships, and encourages critical development of the field through grants, visitor programme and curator residencies, talks, exhibition collaborations and network platforms. Frame is the commissioner of the Pavilion of Finland in the Venice Biennale.