October 2016. Vol. 20, No. 4 – Cultural Managers as "Masters of Interspaces" – Patrick S. Föhl and Gernot Wolfram

Welcome to the Fall 2016 issue of CultureWork!

This issue examines the theory and practice of cultural managers as "masters of interspaces" and ways in which this perspective informs cultural programming in certain European arts and culture sectors. Patrick Föhl and Gernot Wolfram, German cultural managers and educators, describe the multiple ways in which arts and cultural managers translate, mediate, cooperate, facilitate, and network to build relationships and broker with essential stakeholders. These approaches encourage purposeful, meaningful, and planned approaches to the "interspaces" found in the roles and organizations of arts and culture workers. Föhl and Wolfram describe the requirements needed for interspace management to succeed and be sustainable over time.

Regards,
Julie Voelker-Morris
Robert Voelker-Morris
Editors

Cultural Managers as "Masters of Interspaces"

By Patrick S. Föhl & Gernot Wolfram

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Introduction

This article explores the concept of cultural managers as "masters of interspaces." "Interspace management" is maybe the most important skill that modern cultural managers need to obtain. In this way, they can successfully fulfill their tasks and contribute to fruitful transformation processes within the cultural field. Here also, network theory comes into play. Basic network theories are used to lay a foundation for a better understanding of the mechanisms that underpin cultural interventions. The approach is written from a German perspective as well as against the background of many professional international experiences and seeks to contribute to the discussion about roles of cultural managers within ongoing transformation processes in arts and culture worldwide. This article evolved from a larger paper which was published by Patrick S. Föhl, Gernot Wolfram, and Robert Peper in the *Journal of Cultural Management. Arts, Economics, Policy* (2016). The concept of cultural managers as "masters of interspaces" was introduced by Patrick S. Föhl and Gernot Wolfram in 2013.

1. Cultural management and change

Changes in the area of arts and culture in Germany are often met with indignation and fear. There is barely any other area of public life in Germany where we regularly encounter this strong emotionalization of factual issues. But this discussion is not only a German one. Internationally one can see that cultural transformation is an important issue. Within postmodern discourses, cultural and socio-cultural institutions understand more and more that genuine art forms change, find new spaces, face technological and digital challenges, and audiences react in different ways of resonance and participation (Simon 2016). This is not a negative or positive development; it is a result of globalization and a changing of cultural ideas and goods.

We can already see a positive tendency with respect to these issues in the area of cultural development planning. More and more German states, municipalities and cities demand the specific competencies of cultural managers.

These managers can appear as external consultants or as employees of cultural administrations with explicit backgrounds in cultural management in order to control politico-cultural planning processes (Föhl & Sievers, 2013; see also Flood 2015). An ambivalent role like this can be found in international contexts as well (Föhl & Wolfram, 2012).

At an international level, we observe a changed understanding of new alliances and partnerships, especially between partners who traditionally were not considered part of the cultural scene. Not only cities – but also communities and regions – wish to achieve new cross-border visibility as a result of these alliances. In recent years, we have also witnessed an increase in the promotion of so-called "interface projects", such as in the area of cultural promotion by the European Commission, but also in numerous national culture promotion institutions. Here, items such as culture and social projects; culture and environmental protection; culture and tourism; culture and scientific theory; culture and business; culture and law; as well as culture and integration/migration have moved to center stage. Therefore, new "interspaces" are appearing for cultural managers who need to understand and moderate the logic underlying activities in other fields and embrace its specific approaches. In this context their work is tremendously changing. Cultural managers are challenged to translate the different approaches of management, the various expectations and experiences from different fields, not only of cultural work. Translation means here to formulate common goals for cultural projects with different partners and involvement of specific knowledge. For example, when speaking of relevance, inclusion of local stakeholders, and spaces of possibility and challenges.

To go into more detail a closer look on the National Museums for Liverpool can help. The museum developed the project "House of Memories", an exhibition which reflects the power of memory for common visitors and people who experience dementia. "House of Memories" is an award-winning training program, which supports the lives of people living with dementia. It provides participants with information about dementia and equips them with the practical skills and knowledge to facilitate a positive quality of life experience for people living with dementia. (http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/learning/projects/house-of-memories/) Normally, one could say, this is not the task of a museum. Social work, support for people with dementia? But if one looks deeper into the project, it becomes clear that it deals with one of the oldest and still most relevant questions of culture: what kind of knowledge about our past can we keep? What hinders us to see the richness, the interconnections, the treasures of our history? And why is an ailment not always a deficit, but sometimes also a situation for specific sensitiveness? Reflecting these questions, it becomes clear that the "House of Memories" is not a social project. It is rather more the attempt to reflect one of the key terms of museums—memory–in an extended way. The curators and managers had to work together with social institutions, with application developers, digital experts, people with a socio-cultural background. The main focus of the exhibition was the development of a digital application (app) with which people experiencing dementia could have access to the exhibition. Due to their situations and memory loss, most of those with dementia could not visit the exhibition itself. The lights, the space of the museums, the rituals of seeing artefacts in a particular way are barriers. But these participants could join through the app, could decide how they wanted to stay with the material. And they could "hang" artifacts which they found important for themselves on a so-called "tree of memory" within the app, a tree which kept the pictures they chose within a symbolic picture. This is an impressive example how memory works.

In such contexts, cultural managers have to translate the main approaches of artistic knowledge and experiences, also discourses about artistic quality to people who are probably not familiar with these discourses. And they have to justify why culture should be a particular way to connect and to involve audiences which could proclaim, with good reasons, to have other options for commitment and engagement as well. Thus, translation in this context means to establish a process of explaining and learning on both sides, on the side of cultural work and on the side of newly involved partners from other fields. Cultural managers are responsible to avoid dominances by one approach. At the same time, they should protect and respect the specific needs of artistic work. That leads to the recognition that interspaces must be, first of all, justified as relevant spaces for cultural management, open for new debates and attempts for how cultural work can come closer to the questions audiences have within the 21st century. Interspaces are zones of negotiation processes where many ideas, voices and concepts come together. Cultural managers can help to structure this variety of approaches towards categories of artistic quality. This is probably one of the strongest tasks for the coming years.

The development described above poses the central question of cultural participation. Who is actually included in art projects and who remains outside the boundaries of cultural production? Many projects, including those in Europe's cultural capitals, would not have been conceivable in recent years without these expansions. As a result of the integration of certain social groups such as migrants, who are often marginalized within globalization, sociocultural discourses have also had a much greater influence on concepts of sustainable cultural work. This also applies to topics that span national borders. For example, the project "Imagine2020" (http://www.imagine2020.eu/), which spans nine European countries and brings together ten diverse, highly motivated and experienced cultural institutions, integrates climate protection and art on a high artistic level. Many international film festivals, e.g., the "Environmental Film Festival of Accra" in Ghana (http://www.effaccra.org/), rely on a similar orientation. It is easy to ascertain the reasons for these developments, as these kinds of interfaces always indicate important, topical sociocultural subjects at the respective venues as well. Here, visibility comes about as a result of networking and the recombination and sharing of resources.

2. Relationship management as a key task of cultural management

Taking into account the previous mentioned developments, it becomes clear that we are in the midst of witnessing a shift from traditional cultural management approaches to new ways of managing and organizing the arts not only at a national level in Germany but in many places of the world. We live in a century where the boundaries between different societal sectors have become blurred. The cross-border tendencies can be interpreted not only as a consequence of mere globalization but also as the result of constantly changing environmental conditions which include demographic and technological change; migration; financial crises; and decreasing resources to name only a few. Even if one might not immediately associate the fields of arts and culture with environmental changes, they are affected by them. Only looking at the aspects of media and digital development makes it very clear that innovations are affecting arts and culture more rapidly and the question is how to react. Even more importantly, we have to consider how to use them for audience building-strategies (Borwick 2012) and cultural practice – ultimately the digital spaces create new and lucid rooms for cultural production and discourse.

As a "master of interspaces" it is the cultural manager who can be in the position to gain an overview about the existing network structures of a given field, to explore the stories behind the various relationships and to develop strategies for the reorganization of these structures. Hence, a reordering of structures can stimulate creative alliances and innovation. In this way, cultural managers, from a network theoretical point of view, act as "brokers" who bridge the gaps (so called "structural holes") between otherwise disconnected sub-networks in order to optimize the coordination between these fields and create synergies (see Peper 2016, who has introduced network theoretical aspects widely into the field of cultural management; see also Schiffer & Hauck, 2010). To be successful in this task, cultural managers first of all need to conduct a screening of the field which can involve different methodologies (such as a structural analysis, expert interviews or, more recently, an explorative network analysis). In an international context–not only in theories of cultural management but also in the practical field of cultural development planning– such a screening process is termed as "cultural mapping" (Stewart 2010).

3. Five types of broker-roles – Sharpening the interspace approach

Föhl and Wolfram (2014) introduced five types of roles that a modern cultural manager can adapt. Robert Peper then added systematizations from other scientific fields including sociology and organizational theory (Föhl, Wolfram & Peper, 2016). Against this background cultural managers can act as:

- **translators:** In most intervention cases cultural managers have to act like a "liaison officer" who show a high sensitivity for the interests of various groups. They have access to the thinking and language cultures of the actors from different departments/areas. Cultural managers are able to build bridges between these sub-groups. Hence, playing the role of a "translator" increases the possibilities to reduce the social distance between separated network clusters.

- **mediators:** The focus of a mediator lies even more on the task to act as an intermediary – not only between sub-networks that lack communication but also between groups whose relations are dominated by conflict. That especially counts in a more and more diverse world (The Moving Network, 2016). Cultural managers hold legitimacy (trust and agreement) on both sides which empowers them to play the mediator's role. In this role, cultural managers initiate positive communication where there would otherwise be either conflicts or no exchange at all.

- **cooperators:** This role is closely related to the (ideally) strong cooperative human nature of cultural managers. Due to the empowerment as short-term coordinators for the reordering of network structures, cultural managers do not only need to cooperate with local institutions but also with experts from outside the boundaries of the intervention field. They know how to track down the productive resources and to distinguish the contacts that can bridge communications.

- **networkers:** Every mentioned broker-role is related to networking-activities by nature. Still, this explicit "networker-role" highlights the ability and the need of cultural managers to improve and expand the network structures of a cultural infrastructure. This bridging-process reveals the dynamics that go along with the change of network structures. Cultural managers work here as experts for network structures and see strong and weak as well as hidden and not adequately respected ties within projects and communities.

- and **facilitators:** This concept draws on the assumption that cultural managers transport information between different stakeholders. This sounds like a trivial discovery but what appears to be an easy concept can turn out to be more complex than expected. The broker receives information from a group and passes it on to another group without being too strongly connected to one side. Cultural managers are most likely to play the role of itinerant brokers and liaisons.

Figure 1: Roles of Cultural Managers as "Masters of Interspaces" (after Föhl, Wolfram & Peper, 2016)
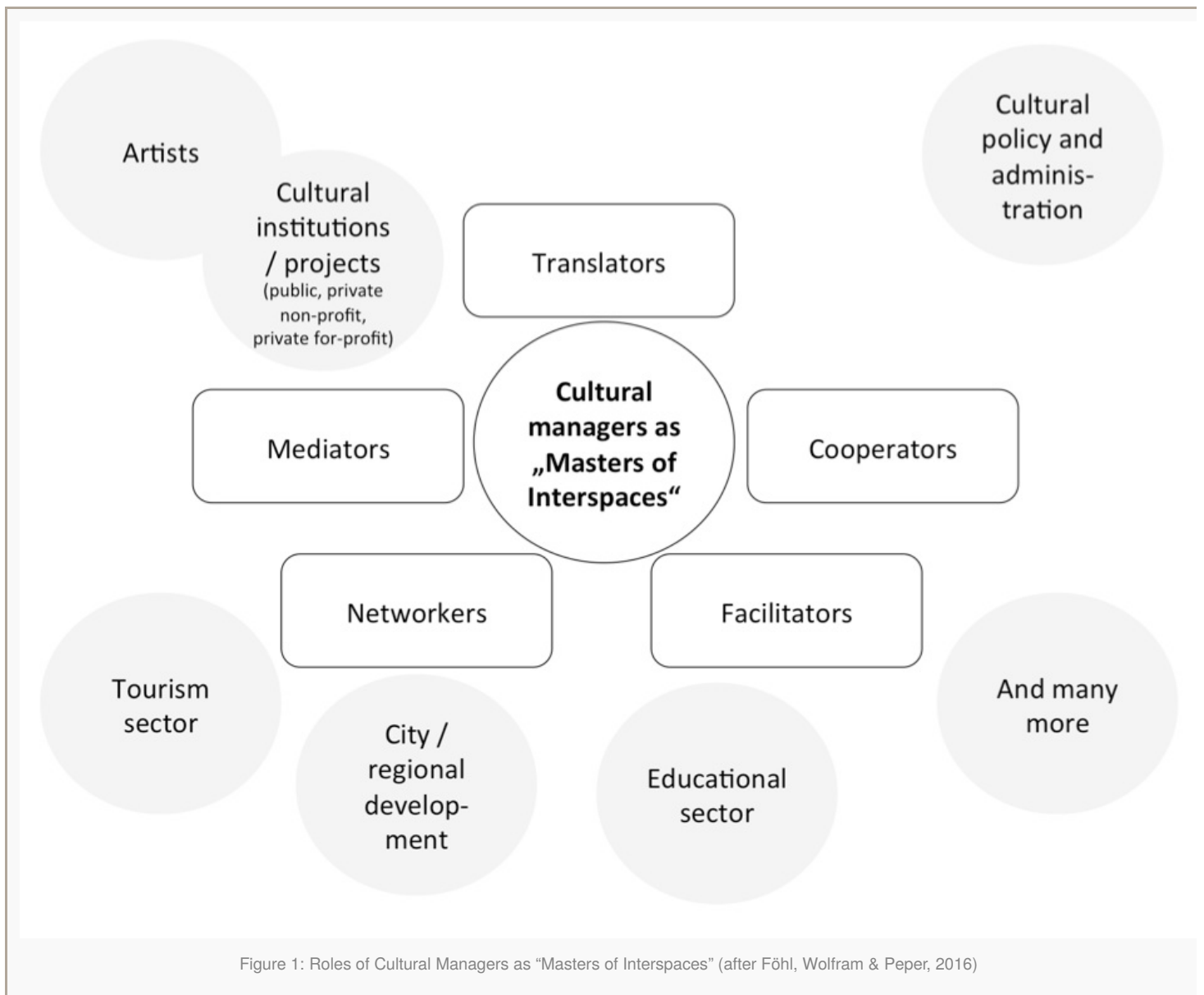
Important in this context is the fact that cultural managers should not only define this role for themselves. They need also, within all these dimensions, an accompanying process of empowerment through the involved stakeholders and partners.

4. Prerequisites for successful "Interspace Management"

There are, however, a few requirements for interspace management to succeed sustainably. For fair and credible cultural management to work in the long term, it should embody the following aspects:

- **Role clarity**: Cultural managers must not try to assume the role of cultural politicians – unless they want to take on a corresponding political office – or think they could act as a substitute here, because they were not elected for this role and therefore do not have any democratic legitimacy for it either. Cultural managers need role clarity within each of their projects and? context. Not an easy task since they are working in interspaces. Therefore, this issue needs special attention.

- **Independent position**: Cultural managers act between the conflicting priorities of cultural policy, cultural organizations, and artists, and in their respective fields as well. As employees within cultural organizations, they form part of the functional system of cultural organization (here, too, they should act as integrative enablers). As external advisors, such as in cultural development planning, or as external project developers, though, they should assume independent positions as mediators, which allow them to have an integrative influence. Rather, cultural managers are mediators, translators, cooperators, networkers, and facilitators who act on the part of cultural policy as well as on the part of cultural players to empower cultural development processes as well as individuals. This makes credibility in the sense of independence in judgment and in the recommended behavioral patterns indispensable. Naturally, the same applies when culture is imparted to a (potential) audience.

- **Fair play**: Cultural managers work in (international) networks and especially assume a role of making sure that the players are more or less equal. Institutions must not outdo or dominate individual players. Recipients of public (international) grants must make sure not to block other players – who may perhaps not be visible to the public sector yet – from view due to their understandable particular interests.

- **Translation is key**: Cultural policy is a functional system of policy with specific forms of logic, rules, and its own vocabulary that members of the cultural scenes often fail to understand. Here, cultural managers act as translators–and as justifiers. In politics, investments require specific grounds which all too often encounter the difficulty that investments in the cultural field are successful in a different context of impact in terms of structure, time, and participation. This also counts for all the other "interspaces" mentioned above such as culture and tourism which needs an ongoing translation process between tourist experts at one side and cultural workers, artists, etc. on the other side (Föhl & Pröbstle, 2013).

- **Upholding of values**: Cultural managers must point out the special value system of cultural work. Art does not develop as a result of rules; but rather, by experimenting, forming networks, and discourse orientation. These have been the value systems of western societies since the Age of Enlightenment, which must not be lost due to the imperatives of the creative business or structural constraints to save.

- **Empowerment and visibility**: Cultural managers have the task to make virulent themes, good practices, and unknown actors of the community visible. Therefore, they need a set of methods such as network analysis/cultural mapping or participatory workshops for building a fundament to empower people to partake in cultural development processes and to put central issues that should be discussed in the middle of everybody's attention.

- **Strong management skills**: The "Master of Interspaces"-approach does not question the cultural management-education in general. It shifts the attention more towards practices of communication/facilitation and mediation. Executing these practices still needs a lot of management skills; for example, while managing a cultural planning process.

5. Cultural management of Interspaces

In summary, we can confirm that cultural managers have always worked – and still do – in the numerous interspaces of cultural fields and that these interspaces and interfaces are currently growing larger as described. One need only mention the expansive development of cultural tourism and cultural education on the cultural political agenda in many countries around the globe. Sustainable and meaningful development, though, can only succeed if cultural management keeps with the times. Thus – as the formerly mentioned "broker"– it has to translate, negotiate, coordinate, and reveal spaces of possibilities for participation that ideally take place in the spaces between culture and education as well as culture and tourism and so on. Otherwise, we run the risk of these horizontal fields to degenerate into fig leaves of allegedly innovative cultural policy or desired results not being attained because the respective poles fail to meet. This creates the chance to assume a new relevance of meaning – for different creative projects as well as for the inclusion of local stakeholders. Hereby, the cultural manager opens the view upon new spaces of possibilities precisely where many previous approaches had obviously not found any far-reaching effects in dealing with the virulent social challenges.

These lines show the necessity and urgency of the need for thinking about cultural manager roles in these distinct ways for 2016 and beyond. It is important to reflect the roles of culture managers to guarantee a timely development of cultural management education and to shape positions in the practical field accordingly.

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Authors

Patrick S. Föhl, PhD, is director of the Network for Cultural Consulting, Berlin. He conducts various cultural planning projects in Germany and beyond. Dr. Föhl is lecturer and trainer at multiple universities and institutions worldwide. His main research fields are transformative cultural development processes, audience empowerment and modern roles of cultural managers. For more information see: http://www.netzwerk-kulturberatung.de/en

Gernot Wolfram, PhD, teaches as professor for Media and Arts Management at the Macromedia University Berlin. His research fields include topics like cultural participation for migrants and refugees, international arts management and cultural management in the context of peace work.

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