

# Locating Engagement: A Concept in Cultural Management. A Conversation with Ulrike Lorenz and Martin Tröndle

Engagement verorten: Ein Konzept im Kulturmanagement.  
Ein Gespräch mit Ulrike Lorenz und Martin Tröndle

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## Introduction—Engagement as Concept

We live in an age of physical and emotional disconnect. People in industrialized countries grow up interacting and communicating with greater speed and immediacy, yet seemingly with less depth than previous generations. Communities have become more socially and culturally fractured and politically polarized in the past few decades (RODGERS 2012; FUKUYAMA 2014), and social isolation, forced by the pandemic, has amplified this dissolution of societal and interpersonal engagement. Many public institutions across Europe and North America experience shrinking trust (STATISTA 2024; IPSOS 2023; UNHERD 2023; GALLUP 2022), which further challenges a sense of societal stability and certainty. These are all indicators that we are part of fundamental transitions that impact how we perceive the world around us and our role in it. The potential role of art and cultural institutions under these circumstances might seem limited at first sight, but recent surveys in Europe and North America confirm that particularly museums and libraries maintain a high level of trust and regard across the demographic spectrum (AAM 2021; STERNFELD 2022; BC MUSEUM ASSOCIATION 2022; DJS ASSOCIATION 2022; NEMO 2023).

How can arts and cultural organizations, cultural policy, and cultural management address and try to remedy such trends through engagement? Engagement here is understood as a multi-dimensional paradigm or concept that covers a wide range of relationships. Its interpersonal dimension concerns the connection between a person and their surroundings, between a person and an object, phenomenon, or thought, or between two people (hence the etymological origin of engagement

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in the Old French *engagé* suggesting a pledge or lasting commitment) (MERRIAM WEBSTER). Another dimension of engagement concerns the social and collective. Individuality collides and mingles with others and triggers feelings on a scale from belonging to alienation, inclusion to rejection.

Used by arts and cultural institutions, the engagement paradigm shifts yet again as engagement measures become more formalized to connect with audiences, communities, and various publics. In this context, the depth of connection and its repercussion varies widely. In fact, what is defined here as engagement assumes different names and definitions that reveal often vastly different intentions. Institutions apply outreach measures, create audience development strategies and participatory programming, and think about the potential and relevance of community engagement. This suggests that engagement manifests in various ways, internally, structurally, relationally, and transactionally.

Institutional modes of engagement are shaped by historically developed conventions and traditions. They determine how a people, or a community relate to, address, and disseminate art and culture. This means that culturally and historically shaped modes of engagement percolate through cultural policy and cultural management. Culturally and historically shaped assumptions about the role, significance, and the potential of art and culture determine both the potency and the limits of engagement and the policies, structural measures, and programs geared towards engagement.

In the following conversation I scrutinize engagement not so much as a strategy or method, which suggests an applied dimension of the term, but rather framed, more broadly, as a concept (in German: *Begriff*). This idea stems from the German political scientist Reinhart Kosellek's definition of *Begriff* as something that "must retain multiple meanings in order to be a *Begriff*/concept" (BRUNNER/CONZE/KOSELLECK 1972/1: xxii f.). Pointing out that "The meanings of words can be defined more exactly, concepts can only be interpreted" (BRUNNER/CONZE/KOSELLECK 1972/1: xxii f.) Kosellek alerts us to the fact that "thinking in conceptual (*begriffliche*) terms allows us to ask both what experiences and facts are conceptualized, and how these experiences and facts are understood" (KOSELLEK 2006: 99). In this respect, the conceptual perspective "mediates between linguistic and factual histories," it analyzes "convergences, shifts or discrepancies in the relationship between concept and facts that have occurred over the course of history" (KOSELLEK 2006: 99). Connecting the shifting meanings of the term: engagement, and

the discrepancies between the understanding and use of this concept both complicates and differentiates what we mean when it is invoked today. In a conversation with cultural scholar Martin Tröndle and Ulrike Lorenz, the former director of the Kunsthalle in Manheim and current President of Klassik Stiftung Weimar, I scrutinize this issue with a particular focus on Germany and the United States.

### Discussion Themes

Martin Tröndle is a professor of cultural production at Zeppelin University in Friedrichshafen, Germany. For decades, he has collaboratively explored the experiences of audiences in museums and music performances by looking at correlations between mental perception and physiological response (heart rate, respiration, and the like). His more recent work looks at the “motivations behind the not visiting and the preferences for, and impressions of, arts and culture organizations and events” (TRÖNDLE 2019: 2). Ulrike Lorenz’s understanding of engagement has been formed as the director of several visual art institutions, and most recently of the art museum Kunsthalle in Manheim (2008–2019) where she implemented, with her team, a widely discussed conceptual and architectural transformation of the museum (MONOPOL 2017; SCHULZ 2018). Lorenz is currently the president of the Stiftung Klassik in Weimar, which encompasses thirty-one museums and sites of cultural experience such as parks, castles, historical buildings, and literary archives. Her work concept in Weimar delineates the wide range of the engagement concept as it shifts the focus of “product centeredness” to “impact orientation” and from “reception” to “participation” (WEIMAR EDUCATION CONCEPT 2023). While Lorenz opens the wide umbrella of art engagement in her institutional practice and programming efforts, Tröndle’s inquiries into the art experience emerge as a crucial scholarly counterpoint in efforts to understand engagement, often through historically contextualized reflections on Germany’s cultural policy and cultural management framework.

To capture some key aspects of the dimensions of engagement in the cultural management discourse, the conversation is structured around four themes. They emerged from individual conversations with both experts and are supplemented with commentary by the author. These themes are distilled from responses about Tröndle’s and Lorenz’s understanding of engagement in their own practices as researcher / academic,

and arts and cultural manager, respectively. The first theme, “Situating Engagement, Cultural Education, Audience Development, and Non-Visitor Studies” assembles and reflects on terms and concepts that are regularly invoked in conversations about engagement. Discussing their respective weight in the German and U.S. cultural contexts helps to tease out the potency of institutional engagement. Theme Two, “Engagement and Belonging” demonstrates through examples and comparisons what engagement seeks to accomplish on an emotional, relational level: in the case of Mannheim’s Kunsthalle as an identity generating place, and, in Tröndle’s work, as the force that establishes physical closeness or proximity for art experience. The third theme, “Engagement, Exclusion, Non-Attendance,” teases out the differences in how arts managers think about audiences (and their absence or exclusion) depending on national cultural parameters that either heavily fund art and culture or don’t. The final theme, “Challenges” looks at the often-rigid organizational structures that pose difficulties for art institutional engagement. Overcoming the hierarchies and rethinking the work processes in arts and cultural institutions presents great challenges for arts managers on both sides of the Atlantic.

### **Situating Engagement, Cultural Education, Audience Development, and Non-Visitor Studies**

Martin Tröndle delineates what he identifies as central modes of engagement in his research: socially engaged art, audience development and non-visitor research. In this context, he mentions the work of German cultural historians Hermann Glaser and Karl Heinz Stahl (1974; 1983), and Hilmar Hoffmann (1981):

***Martin Tröndle:** Socially engaged art, audience development and non-visitor research are three different things. At least for the German-speaking context this can be clearly stated. Socially engaged art or the involvement of visitors has been practiced since the 1970s. It is primarily about a specific art form—like Beuys’ social sculpture or a specific political motivational style. Key words here are “culture for all,” “socio-culture,” “cultural education,” “participation.” Claudia Steigerwald has traced this historically in the volume Cultural Education as a Political Program. The protagonists [of this understanding of socially engaged art] were, among others, Hermann Glaser, and Karl Heinz*

*Stahl, and Hilmar Hoffmann. They referred to John Dewey and Theodor Adorno, and others. In a different constellation, socially engaged art is mostly about a socially and institutionally critical understanding of art, which has an actionist character and wants to change society in a certain way.*

Tröndle pauses to mention *Anthologie Kulturpolitik. Einführende Beiträge zu Geschichte, Funktionen und Diskursen der Kulturpolitikforschung* (TRÖNDLE AND STEIGERWALD 2019), a recent publication relevant to his topic. Referring to audience development, Tröndle also mentions his 2019 publication, *Non-Visitor Research*, which looks at non-visitation and infrequent attendance at arts and culture organizations to determine why it occurs. He draws on themes developed in these works throughout our conversation.

**Tröndle:** *Audience development has a different background; it is less normative and more pragmatically oriented. Art and cultural institutions are mostly concerned with reaching a new audience and winning them over to a particular art form or an art institution. This happens in different ways. It can be more educational or related to pure marketing measures. Many education and outreach-focused programs aim to turn rare visitors into frequent visitors and to lure visitors into the house at least once, to potentially retain them in the future. These programs grow out of the houses themselves; they are pedagogically oriented when it comes to education, or more marketing oriented when it is more about simply attracting visitors.*

*Non-Visitor Research is the scientific examination of why people do not, or very rarely visit art and cultural institutions. Of course, it depends on the definition you choose for the non-visitor. In different countries and cultures, different things count as a cultural visit. This might be watching TV, listening to the radio, or walking in a park. In the German-speaking realm, these activities wouldn't be considered a cultural visit. Here we rather envision visits to classic cultural institutions supplemented by socio-cultural and pop-cultural events. The question is also how often someone visits such an institution or event? Is it enough to go there once a year or once every three years? Do you go there voluntarily or just because you are accompanying someone, for example? Non-visitor research attempts to understand the motives for not visiting and to provide cultural institutions with assistance on how to reach these people. An essential term that we found in our research is "vicinity"*

or “closeness” (in German: *Nähe*). A sense of closeness can be established, we have found, through a clearly defined topic, through a specific production, through the way in which people are received at a place. These measures can increase the likelihood of turning non-visitors into visitors. In this respect, it could be said that non-visitor research can lay the foundations for audience development.

Distinctions, such as those made by Tröndle, recall positions on socially engaged art, or art and participation articulated by authors such as Claire Bishop and Grant Kester, discussed in great depth in *JCMCP* 2023/01 issue. But they also remind of arguments by community engagement author, Doug Borwick, and marketing consultant, Donna Walker-Kuhne both working in the United States. Walker-Kuhne defines audience development as marketing approach, which entails the “cultivation [...] of long-term relationships, firmly rooted in a philosophical foundation that recognizes and embraces the distinction of race, age, sexual orientation, physical disability, geography and class” (WALKER-KUHNE 2006: 10). While understood as a form of marketing, this definition expands on other, common definitions: “audience development is also the process of engaging, educating and motivating diverse communities to participate in a creative, entertaining experience as an important *partner* in the design and execution of the arts” (WALKER-KUHNE 2006: 10). Notably, Borwick carefully distinguishes and emphatically separates audience development from community engagement. He singles out community engagement as the only activity undertaken to improve the circumstances of both the arts organization and the community. In his view, audience development and audience engagement are both marketing strategies that ultimately only operate in the interest of the institution (BORWICK 2012). In contrast, community engagement should be part of a mission strategy for the arts organization, designed to build deep relationships between an organization and the communities in which it operates. This ultimately means that “community engagement seeks to develop trust and understanding which results, for the arts organization over the long term, in increased ticket sales and financial support as well as more arts-friendly public policy” (BORWICK 2017). Walker-Kuhne’s choice of terminology and Borwick’s distinction between audience development and community engagement ultimately address both the linguistics of engagement and the positionality of the author, within a critical discourse, towards the instrumentalization of the engagement rhetoric an author presents. Throughout her book, Walker-Kuhne—marketer and

consultant—blends ideas of community engagement with what she calls audience development, arguing for a more equitable approach and greater awareness of discriminatory practices in cultural institutional engagement approaches. Borwick bases his definition of the terms: audience development, audience engagement, and community engagement, on the degree to which each approach ultimately benefits either the institution or the community that is being addressed. In his assessment, only community engagement is truly and purely on behalf of and determined together with the communities that the institution supposedly engages with.

Ulrike Lorenz addresses the German context, in particular, to situate engagement, but from a different, cultural historical perspective. She initially—almost reflexively—associates engagement with cultural participation and education to then trace thoughts of engagement back to German Enlightenment and Friederich Schiller's (1784; 1795), and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's ideas on the role of art in society and its significance for cultural education and participation.

**Ulrike Lorenz:** *I realized relatively quickly that you can't translate [engagement] with the German term cultural education (kulturelle Bildung/kulturelle Teilhabe) because it is much more and much less at the same time. This concept of education is something deeply German. And I have to add, it's something that was largely invented in Weimar, above all, this cultural education. Of course, we know that Wilhelm von Humboldt was in Berlin, but it was in Weimar, with Goethe, and Schiller's [published] letters On the Aesthetic Education of Man—and his idea of “the education of the heart” or Herzensbildung, that was based on the idea of personality development as something deeply personal for which the individual human being, not the course of history, is responsible. And that has something to do with education. That is German. And for me, engagement is the explosive expansion of the relationship between sender and receiver, between institution and addressee, namely the joint creation of a real exchange relationship. And this idea is not new, certainly not in the Anglo-Saxon world. So, we always look at it with some envy and say oh, you are much farther along than us. But this definition became deeply clear to me in the specific urban, municipal, situation in Mannheim [embarking on the architectural expansion and programmatic reconceptualization of the Kunsthalle in 2009].*

Lorenz's definition of engagement closely resembles Borwick's understanding of community engagement. It also helps illuminate the difference between the two, which lies in Borwick's direct interlinking of those who are invited to engage and the institutions who are seeking a connection. Education (in German: *Bildung*)—that highly valued concept in German Enlightenment thought that still inspires contemporary thinking, informs how she—and art institutions in the German context today understand engagement. This concept was articulated by contemporaries such as Goethe, Schiller, and Immanuel Kant, who understood *Bildung* much more comprehensively than our contemporary conception of education as pedagogical pursuit. To these thinkers, aesthetic education was the emotional and intellectual formation of one's mind, informed by the ideal of art or aesthetic education as a socially changing moment that happens through the sensitization of people and the refinement of their character. Lorenz alludes to limits on the understanding of engagement that such a formational conception of engagement—through *Bildung*—might have. She acknowledges the essentialist and exclusionary nature of the understanding of the individual that is being educated as she remarks on what she perceives as an advantage of a more comprehensive understanding of engagement in the Anglo-Saxon (art institutional) context. As the next section shows, modes and strategies of engagement are not only deeply contextual, but also emotional and formed by cultural, social, geographic, and even historical factors.

### Engagement and Belonging

**Tröndle:** *The way you understand something [like engagement] is certainly different in every country because people come from different discourses. Every country has its own history and its own cultural character. But what you can probably say, and this has been shown very well in my research, is that both the psychological, that is, intra-personal as well as the sociological, the group-related, and the purely aesthetic characteristics [of engagement] can be weighted equally to the extent that it is the same for almost all visitors. That was exactly this concept of closeness. This goes from the production, from the way the theater actors speak on stage, what artistic material is being tackled, whether Hamlet is updated, whether there is a tetra pack on the stage—that was admired by the non-visitors in my study because none of them*



*could imagine that there would be a tetra pack in a traditional theater project.*

Tröndle's research involved inviting groups of non-visitors to theater and opera performances to test their reactions.

**Tröndle:** *Non-visitors remarked on their amazement that during the intermission everyone got a free drink and that they were treated the same as the others who had already been there many times. Engagement includes things like community building, the feeling of belonging, of being welcome, issues ranging from storytelling to ticket sales, but also about understanding the piece, how you sit, how far away the stage is, how strong the immersion is between this aesthetic content and what you see there, right up to the conversation during intermissions and the way you say goodbye. All these things belong together. And I believe that, even though I haven't tested it, this is actually cross-national and also cross-cultural, because every culture and every social distinction works through the fact that you belong to a group. In this group you can strengthen your self-esteem and self-actualization can take place, that is, you compare yourself with others. And I think that applies to every community, even one that may be completely foreign to me and you. But they also have rules. So, I think this concept of proximity is actually very useful for that.*

Tröndle's ideas about belonging to a group and about self-actualization and spatial proximity help define engagement as a matter of physical and spatial experience. While Tröndle's research is most concerned with individual, visceral responses that play out while sharing a space, Lorenz's observations refer to the relationship between the art institution and its urban environment and its impact on engagement. She draws on her experiences in Mannheim working on the restructuring and architectural expansion of the city's Kunsthalle—a temporary art exhibition space, traditionally without a collection. Founded in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, such spaces can be found in many German cities today. Lorenz also connects engagement to the popular education movement in Germany, associated with education reformer and museum director Alfred Lichtwark (1852–1914), and the education of children and workers, which included education in the arts. Mannheim's Kunsthalle's founding director, Fritz Wichert (1878–1951), was a strong proponent of this movement.

While encompassing both the personal and the urban dimensions of engagement, both Tröndle's and Lorenz's thinking relates to what Oakland's cultural affairs manager Roberto Bedoya and his colleague Vanessa Whang discuss as the politics of belonging and dis-belonging and the concept of place. This concept is a cornerstone of the 2018 Cultural Plan for Oakland, where Bedoya defines the term as "about building the human capital of people as placemakers" (WHANG 2019: 38). According to Bedoya, the former director of the National Association of Artists' Organizations in the U.S. (1996–2001) and founder of the People, Land, Arts, Culture, and Engagement (PLACE) Initiative in Arizona, this includes "not only individuals, but also the collective 'we.' And not simply the collegial we of 'me and my friends' but the 'we' of those we don't know—which includes neighbors, passersby on the street, and fellow residents of our city" (WHANG 2019: 38). Belonging is deeply linked—in Bedoya's definition for the cultural plan—to the democratic American foundational principle and ideal of "'We the people'—we who belong to a just and equal society" (WHANG 2019: 38).

For Bedoya and Whang, the city is the communicating medium of culture that depends on a sense of belonging which is enabled by an "intentional and shared understanding of the assets and challenges of cultural diversity" (WHANG 2018: 31). However, Bedoya comes to this approach through a critical perspective of U.S. "creative placemaking" policies, which he finds "lack awareness about the politics of belonging and dis-belonging that operate in civil society." For Bedoya (2013), these policies are too closely linked to a "policy frame of urban planning and economic development," an approach, which lacks an understanding for the fact that "before you have places of belonging you must feel you belong" (BEDOYA 2013). Understanding a city's cultural diversity, but also a sense of the complexity of belonging, seems to ultimately have been Lorenz's understanding of urban engagement in Mannheim.

**Lorenz:** *In Mannheim I had the opportunity to start from scratch as the city was open enough, even for a bold idea [as the restructuring and architectural expansion of the Kunsthalle]. I found a fantastic institutional history there, which I thought couldn't have been imagined any better. That's the anchor that I'm hooking on to, I don't have to do everything myself, I can look back on 100 years. Popular education after 1900, was on the rise, social democracy, trade unions, workers, industrialization, that is, an industrial bourgeoisie that was prepared to invest in the workers, in their education, because they needed highly*

*educated skilled workers who were even expected to have a cultural horizon. By founding the museum, this industrial bourgeoisie defined for themselves a cultural horizon that was missing as of yet. And then a founding director who came from this popular education movement, a Lichtwark student, so to speak, and who developed his ideas in Mannheim, which was perceived throughout Germany as the Mannheim Movement, as a really striking new approach that was just beginning. This involved work with children in a non-ideological way, and to let the children speak and to incorporate that into one's own work, to carry on and to stand for that, personally. There is something about this physical mediation, a connection to this deeply personal concept of mediation. So, that was a lucky coincidence and point of departure for my work. I envisioned a museum concept and happened to be in a city that was very much influenced by its industrial and local bourgeoisie, that was patriotic, and which eventually produced personalities who ultimately gave me €50 million for a new building. So, the vision was a museum that works for this specific city. And I didn't immediately think about education and communication, but first thought that it has to be set in place, it has to be convincing.*

Lorenz points out that the museum building was actually the anchor and prerequisite for engagement practices that in their democratic spirit harkened back to early 20<sup>th</sup> century educational reform, which inspired the locally developed Mannheim School System. This system was based on the idea of a separation of students into groups with different levels of learning capacity and performance (REH et al. 2021). By physical mediation (*körperhaftes Vermitteln*) Lorenz refers to the experimental pedagogical strategies that this reform movement developed and that promoted individualized communication or mediation of knowledge rather than a top-down, authoritarian, and generalized one. Apparently, this democratized understanding of pedagogy inspires contemporary collaborative engagement practices both in Mannheim and elsewhere, as we can see in Bedoya's concept of place-making through belonging. Belonging is a sentiment that reverberates also throughout the next topic of discussion.

## Engagement, Exclusion, Non-Attendance

Lorenz and Tröndle both speak from a German perspective. Their observations and approaches are therefore formed by the challenges that the field of arts and cultural management faces in their respective geographic regions. Although the non-visitor is a comparatively recent subject of research in Germany, explorations into the topic began in the English-speaking world, already in the 1980s, in conjunction with research on leisure, lifestyle, and recreational preferences (TRÖNDLE 2019). In comparison, the perspective on non-visitors in the United States today seems to have shifted from earlier ones to take on a perspective informed by questions of social and racial justice rather than of lifestyle or leisure. Rather than asking, who isn't coming? arts and cultural managers ask who is being excluded and how can we work against this? or how can we create greater inclusion and equity? While German institutions also seem to increasingly work with cultural and social diversity, equity, and inclusion in mind, the German non-visitors research is also shaped by a cultural-political mindset that, in contrast to the U.S., understands public cultural funding as a core prerequisite of cultural engagement. In the following section, Tröndle and Lorenz reflect on issues of exclusion and non-attendance in tension with the idea of engagement.

**Tröndle:** *Non-Visitor research is still a very, very small, young research field. There is a lot about visitor research and very little about non-visitor research. And the motivations are certainly different. Well, mine is scientific, per se because I don't make any money from it. From a historical perspective, there is this barrier concept, and the barrier concept, I am not sure where it originates. Perhaps among medical practitioners, doctors, psychologists, who start talking about physical and psychological barriers in the 1990s. So, it's not just about the fact that there are stairs that a wheelchair user can't use, but about psychological barriers, that you feel down, feel not like myself, not belonging to the group. It was then used that way in the German language. While doing my research on non-visitors, I realized that cultural institutions are not necessarily barrier institutions, and they shouldn't see themselves as barrier institutions, so to speak, but rather they should ask about how they can create closeness. And I think that's when that click happens in your head, then you've achieved a lot. And that also applies to everyone, whether it's a small group or a large house, it doesn't matter. Ask this question when making every decision, not just which art is the*

*hottest and which artist do we want to invite? But ask which group do we want to create closeness to and how do we create closeness to them? So how does ticketing work for them? How does storytelling work for them, what topics might they find relevant? How could we do a production? How do we welcome them into the house? What do we do with them, et cetera? We should always ask how to build closeness in these very different dimensions and not how to break down barriers.*

Tröndle's approach seems to be inspired by an earlier study with a colleague, Volker Kirchberg, that they titled eMotion: Mapping the Museum Experience. Kirchberg is a professor of cultural organization at Leuphana University Lüneburg. Their 2015 study looked at how an individual's experiences in an art museum were influenced by a wide range of factors including placement of objects, flow paths through galleries, the amount of time allotted for viewing art, and whether visitors came to the museum alone or with a companion. Their research supported the proposition "that the sensual encounter with art objects has great significance for the recipient" (KIRCHBERG/TRÖNDLE 2015: 181). They found that

the museum experience has a much larger effect on the visitor than one might have thought [...] and that the curator can indeed influence the visitor experience by paying more attention to the aspects of exhibition composition described by the eMotion research. (KIRCHBERG/TRÖNDLE 2015: 188)

From Ulrike Lorenz' arts manager's perspective, the question of barriers versus closeness achieves a more detailed articulation, especially in respect to what such closeness may look like. Unlike Tröndle, Lorenz also highlights her pragmatic need, in Weimar, to expand visitor numbers.

**Lorenz:** *The non-visitor is a topic that has been frequently on my radar, especially when I put my business-manager hat on and ask about cost-benefit considerations as we focus all our strength and resources on the already engaged audience. My young staff raises this issue regularly while I have resisted it somewhat, as I have a clear understanding of our regular audience and consider it to be very important. An interesting next category and a very interesting segment in Weimar is the strolling public. We have so much tourism, which, of course, we really like and that includes non-visitors. We ask how to pick up these random people, how to get them involved, how to trigger their interest, how to make them see something that they are not looking for. And then there is the third segment of non-visitors. We have found it is definitely worth taking a very specific and targeted look at non-visitors. And to*

*be honest, we don't have any other choice. If we want to significantly expand our visitor numbers, we depend on it, even though we don't need to earn money.*

Tröndle and Lorenz appear to come from very different positions concerning the non-visitor. Tröndle refers to the idea that a sense of closeness, rather than the assumption of barriers is central to tackling and attracting the non-visitor. Lorenz admits her own hesitation to engage with the question while leaving it to her junior staff, who presents interesting proposals for how to reach non-visitors in the document, *Educational Concept 2023*, a draft concept in which it appears that Lorenz and her staff have identified the non-visitor as an important point of reference to develop new approaches to audiences more generally. The Foundation's recent educational plan explains specific, non-visitor-focused approaches and offerings:

Through various and unusual collaborations with associations and civil society groups, new spaces are used together with open participation offerings and small events. New approaches to the theme years are also being experimented with to create points of contact with a wide variety of social groups, [...]. Cargo bikes bring the foundation's changing themes into everyday places in Weimar and the surrounding area in the form of pop-up workshops. There are also regular leisure groups such as: "Art and Coffee," which was established in cooperation with the women's center, or a "language café" which was set up as part of the co-laboratory [a temporary gathering space in Weimar]. This makes it possible to promote the anchoring in the region, which is urgently needed given the political tensions, but, in particular, to meet our diversification and participation goals as well as those of the political public" (KULTURELLE BILDUNG REPORT 2/22/2023).

On the one hand, the staff in Weimar seems to take reflections about the non-visitor as an opportunity to develop more proactive approaches of engagement that offer spaces of encounter outside conventional cultural and artistic institutions (such as the library, or the museum), and even bring the conversation via cargo-bike to rural areas surrounding Weimar. Tröndle's suggestion of creating closeness, on the other hand, remains more open ended. Creating closeness is a starting point to rethink relationships with one's audience, but the idea of producing greater closeness might be misinterpreted as, in Tröndle's eyes, sufficient to dismantle institutional and attitudinal barriers that clearly continue to exist. What happens if that in-between space, that void between a potential visitor and the site of (close) encounter remains unbridgeable? Arts managers and scholars alike would ask what steps arts and cultural organizations might take to close that gap and reach the person who for whatever reason does not show up. A more proactive stance might suggest some of the measures that the Klassik Foundation in Weimar has developed. Others

suggest institutional and interpersonal and community collaborations and more pronounced activist-spirited interactions and resulting projects and programs (SANDELL/ JANES 2019). It certainly appears that we cannot ignore the existing barriers that arts and cultural institutions still present to open access. This is the case both in revenue- and foundational funding driven cultural environments, and those that rely heavily on public funding. Promoting closeness is one step, while dismantling barriers needs to happen synchronously (OLIVARES/PIATAK 2022).

## Challenges

Effective engagement is facilitated by, and is deeply intertwined with strong, self-critical, well-funded institutional frameworks that plan, administer, and assess their modes of engagement. The German arts and cultural organizational landscape in an era of great upheaval as institutions—smaller ones more often than large ones—face calls for greater accountability, struggle with economic and social neglect in ex-urban and rural areas, and grapple with the repercussions of the Covid pandemic's forced isolation and need to go digital. Lorenz has felt these challenges in Weimar in the former East German provinces, and she has noticed the contrast to the situation in pre-pandemic Mannheim, a city in Germany's south-western cultural periphery. Conversely, Martin Tröndle formulates more general thoughts on current institutional challenges.

**Lorenz:** *I come from the East German province, where you can now observe how culture can implode, governmentally, if it is neglected. This won't affect us as a large institution in Weimar, but small ones will just freeze up, they're completely calcified, which makes working on them difficult. And some of them will implode, but in small towns you can see what that means if now in this rich Federal Republic, in this state funding of 90%, 95%, if the money is no longer available there as it was in the past. Something perishes there. There is no self-conscious, deliberate shrinkage. Humans are simply not capable of it and don't take precautions in time, but rather wait until they are deep under water and then things vanish, perish.*

Lorenz's concerns and observations show the correlation between cultures of institutional funding, institutional engagement practices, and organizational structures, and their dysfunction, particularly in the

ex-urban and rural regions of former East Germany. What contributes to the problem of calcification is that on the country's eastern periphery, entire regions have experienced a significant population shrinkage since the fall of the Berlin Wall thirty-five years ago. Many young people have moved to larger urban centers or, simply to (mostly West German) regions with jobs. The question of calcification of arts institutions, but also of structural changes touches on a point that the Canadian educator, author and former museum director Robert R. Janes, and others, have raised in conjunction with engagement: How does an organization's administrative structure induce a sense of accountability and legitimacy in the perception of its staff and community? Looking at examples, such as Mannheim and Weimar, but also North American examples, such as the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Canada (which Janes directed during the 1980s and 1990s), or the Oakland Museum of California, USA (which I have researched in depth in terms of its extensive transformation in the last fifteen years), we can observe museums that were forced to structurally and organizationally transform due to social or economic pressures. Learning from such examples, Janes, together with the British museum scholar Richard Sandell, promote the idea that museums should take an activist stance, thus countering institutional calcification by cultivating engagement practices to foster immediate and sustained exchange with the museum's communities. For scholars and practitioners like Janes and Sandell, museum change needs to go along with systemic structural change including tolerating and working with uncertainties, frictions, and conflicts in the institution and in the community. Thus, dealing with conflict is another characteristic of the engagement concept as it suggests that addressing conflict is an important part of a deep intra-institutional rethinking process accompanied by a significant degree of risk taking and long-term commitment. Tensions are also more likely to occur in institutions that have already lost their dynamism and have calcified.

Tröndle also addresses the notion of calcification and the need for organizations to adapt to new realities. He questions, however, whether such adaptation processes are unique in the nonprofit or cultural sector. Citing scholars such as American organizational theorist Karl Weick and the Austrian political economist Joseph Schumpeter, who coined the term "creative destruction," (SCHUMPETER 1943: 81ff.) Tröndle reminds us that reinvention for the purpose of attracting customers in the for-profit realm has quite a long history.



**Tröndle:** *Avoiding calcification and keeping organizations structurally nimble has been subject to organizational theory of the last four decades or so. They don't call it engagement; they simply call it customer needs or customer orientation. They call this adjustable entity a learning organization. One of their big stars, Karl Weick, asks who decides when and with what fervor which papers are burned? suggesting that organizations burn their own papers, so to speak, in order to reinvent themselves again and again. Joseph Schumpeter spoke of the creative power [of destruction], and also said that good entrepreneurship is part of a constant act of reinvention. It ultimately means that if you take such a step, that the organization prevents its ossification. If it instead does the same thing for years or decades, however, it will be overtaken by its competitors and will no longer be attractive to potential customers. In the art discourse, which considers itself so different, the exact same thing happens. Organizations that do not receive public funding and that do not change will simply disappear, including cultural organizations. It doesn't matter if it's a museum or something else. Those with public funding last longer because they are in this bubble. But that's exactly what has happened in German-speaking countries in the last ten years. Due to the many changes we have experienced, such as digitalization, Corona, and then this terrible war, [in Ukraine] we suddenly realize that our cultural/art houses probably just can't do it like they have for the past fifteen years. A recent survey by the German Orchestra Association, found that of the association's 164 orchestra members, they have lost, on average, thirty percent of their audiences over the last eight years based on their sales data. Thirty percent! While orchestras of course still receive public funding, every politician asks themselves at some point why you need this money if nobody goes there? And that's why organizations have to change.*

Tröndle's highlighting of organizational theory and the forces that determine institutional survival in the for-profit world is helpful to understand the threats to any institution or organization, whether for profit or for the public good. Besides Karl Weick, economists such as John P. Kotter (KOTTER 1995) have discussed parameters for successful institutional change. The latter has served as inspiration to the efforts of Lori Fogarty—CEO of the Oakland Museum of California—to bring about structural transformation at her institution. However, considering the profit-gearred focus of for-profit organizations alone (Weick's and Kotter's exclusive concern) leaves out a nonprofit organization's unique

motivations to engage: their intrinsic and mission-determined role to contribute to the public good—as the U.S. arts manager would point out. U.S. arts institutions may languish when they calcify structurally, but at the same time, their fate is sealed if they fail to engage with or to understand their audiences. The German art and cultural landscape, as Ulrike Lorenz points out, is so reliant on (and accustomed to) public funding that the pressure to prevent institutional calcification has been low and the need to know one’s public even lower. Her experiences, and the engagement measures she and her team in Weimar have developed, show potential for a multi-pronged approach for art and cultural engagement: through meaningful place-making, through leaving one’s own territory to meet one’s audience where they live, through seeking non-ideological dialogue, and by being open to structural, systemic change.

Martin Tröndle’s and Ulrike Lorenz’s observations reveal some of the constant wrestling with challenges that takes place throughout the art and cultural engagement concept. Although they focus primarily on a Germany-specific context, they evoke universal, external realities of cultural policy and public funding, with access and individual art experience, and with challenges of organizational structures and hierarchies. In themselves these are all familiar issues in cultural management. However, seen through the engagement lens and with a glance at conversations in the United States, they reveal the thread that runs through the shared ambitions of meaningful engagement: identifying and seeking social connectivity, dialogue, and effective, ongoing communication through art and culture. Using engagement as a filter—as a measure and point of reference—helps to link questions of managing the arts (through audience development, community engagement, and institutional activism), with the overarching relevance of sense of belonging, and challenges to the idea of art and culture as a public good.

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