

TRAMPOLINE HOUSE: A space of becoming



CASE STUDY

DENMARK



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EUROPEAN INVENTORY
OF CULTURAL VALUES



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 870691

Trampoline House: A space of becoming

Eva Myrczik

University of Copenhagen

Eva.Myrczik@hum.ku.dk

Department of Communication, University of Copenhagen, Karen Blixens Plads 8, 2300 Copenhagen S, Denmark

Eva Myrczik is a Postdoc researcher at the Department of Communication, University of Copenhagen. Her research centers around the intersection of digitalization and culture, focusing on cultural institutions and digital media. Myrczik has contributed to various anthologies about museum history, heritage and gender studies, as well as digital culture. Her articles have been published in the *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, *The Nordic Journal of Cultural Policy*, and *MedieKultur*. In the INVENT project, she is part of WP5 on digitalization of culture and cultural participation.

Abstract

This case highlights a community centre that operates at the intersection of artistic and social practice. Since 2009, the *Trampoline House* in Copenhagen has been working with and advocating for asylum seekers and refugees in Denmark and internationally. The project's practice is spanning across many different spaces and actors. In the following case description, we will focus on three aspects concerning its main characteristics. Multi-platform; Artistic practice with a social impact; Participatory, emancipatory, democratic, inclusive. This study further explores the role of (public) funding and the lack thereof for a cultural centre that combines artistic and social practice. Trampoline House exemplifies an understanding of culture in the broadest and most inclusive sense: being together, cooking, creating art, negotiating a so-called "culture of democracy", while at the same time contributing to established art exhibitions such as documenta fifteen.

Keywords: migration, art, activism, refugee rights, justice, participation, inclusion, cultural and community centre

Introduction: what, when, where, how and why

This case explores the ongoing development of the community centre Trampoline House (TH) in Copenhagen, Denmark. At its core, it combines social and artistic practices to promote inclusion through democratic and participatory processes. Trampoline House has existed in varying formats since 2009, always fuelled by the belief in social change through art. In 2020, the centre ran out of funding and since existed as a temporary *Weekend Trampoline House*. The project has been existing in different constellations and spaces, having started with workshops in asylum camps in Denmark and then continuing in cultural centres in Copenhagen. What has been constant is the ongoing workshops, meetings, social events, and thus negotiations of a shared space, a shared community. This case study applies several methods, including document analysis and an expert interview with one of the founders of Trampoline House. We have chosen to present this specific case since it exemplifies the following topics:

- Inclusiveness, as well as participatory practices facilitated by organization structures.
- The role of (public) funding and the lack thereof for a cultural centre that combines artistic and social practice.
- One organization with many roles and platforms: artistic, social, and activist.

Methodology and research design

This case study applied several methods to approach this multi-platform cultural organisation. By multi-platform, we refer to the project's practice being distributed among venues, different (international) initiatives and exhibitions, and online communication. Firstly, for background information and the initiative's historical development, we used document analysis. The documents include funding applications, reports, and website and social media entries. For further in-depth information about the project and discussions on challenges, we conducted a semi-structured expert interview with one of the founders and current General Manager, Morten Goll, on 10th November 2022. The discussed themes include the role of funding, organizational particularities, the driving forces of such a project, as well as cultural policy framework and recommendations for further improvement of public policy for this type of centre.

Furthermore, participation and observation of a public event at an established Danish art institution, Kunsthal Charlottenborg, on 21st September 2022, aimed at exploring the role of Trampoline House's contribution to the international art exhibition *documenta* in Kassel. For this public talk, founder and manager Morten Goll and artist and TH user Dady de Maximo Mwicira-Mitali discussed their artistic work process before the exhibition and experiences from *documenta fifteen*.

The background theory is based on literature about participatory practice and participatory cultures (Carpentier, 2016; Jenkins & Bertozzi, 2008), culture houses (Eriksson et al., 2018), as well as evaluation in cultural policy (Belfiore & Bennett, 2010).

What are the phenomena and questions for analysis?

We seek to explore and describe the development of a community, immigrant help center, and art space that initially had public funding. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic

lockdowns and the loss of public funding, the initiative has been in constant transformation. This case can, in particular, demonstrate and highlight important areas of interest, which will guide the following parts: The multi-platform character of the project; Artistic practice that directly impacts participation and inclusion; Participatory, emancipatory, and democratic community building.

Context / background of case (including cultural policy context)

This case touches upon policy and funding contexts on two levels. On the one hand, TH is highly impacted and reacts to a general political level. Due to working with and for asylum seekers and refugees, its circumstances are tied to immigration policy, while the funding for this type of social initiative is aimed at social and work integration of the asylum seekers. On the other hand, the public funding that this project has received was mainly to support their artistic practice, since the founders of Trampoline House all being (trained and practicing) artists. So, this case is situated at the backdrop of the intersection between cultural policy and social and immigration policy.

According to one of the founders of Trampoline House, the idea to work with social change arose at the time of the Muhammad cartoon crisis in Denmark (2005 and onwards), which was a very divisive moment and created a heated public discourse around religious and cultural symbols. The founders' idea was to reboot democratic dialogue by including the most ostracized people in Danish society due to their status as refugees and asylum seekers. This dialogue became more relevant and necessary in the following years when the refugee crisis led to more people arriving in Denmark. In parallel, political strategies did not aim at direct integration into Danish society but instead housed people in decentralized camps or centres. This group of artists thus decided to actively work on creating an environment and practice which creates opportunities for inclusion, initially by running small workshops in asylum centres around Denmark in collaboration with other artists. In that way they developed the idea of creating a space and project which could have a real social impact in direct collaboration with people who live in camps.

The following anecdote exemplifies many aspects of what makes this case worth exploring. According to the centre's co-founder, the name and idea evolved from an initial art workshop with people in Danish asylum and deportation camps. One participant commented on how the former Minister for integration¹ saw her role as creating steppingstones for people to cross a river with dry shoes. "He had read the interview, so he thought it was a neat image, but we need a little more than a steppingstone; we need a trampoline. Thus, it came to be called the Trampoline House."² (Morten Goll interview).

This anecdote illustrates several themes that make Trampoline House a particular case. Firstly, its practice is based on openness and ongoing discussions between all participants. Secondly, it shows that one of the defining characteristics is that the practice of TH is to leave the boundaries of comfort behind, such as going to camps if necessary. Thirdly, but not lastly, this anecdote shows the direct influence participants have, using the input from participants and even making it the official name of the project.

¹ Rikke Hvilshøj, Minister for Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs, February 2005 – November 2007.

² The author has translated all quotes from Danish to English.

Background: Trampoline House – Multi platform



Figure 1 The former building that housed TH between 2014-2020. (photo: Trampoline House by Anna Emy)

Trampoline House project timeline

- 2009, January: ADT (Asyl Dialog Tanken) workshops were initiated by three artists (Morten Goll, Joachim Hamou and Tone Olaf Nielsen)
- 2009, March: Test Site IQ for ten days at the Danish Art Academy's exhibition space Q
- 2010: The Trampoline House was officially founded and had its first address in Copenhagen
- 2014: Trampoline House moved into a bigger space, Copenhagen
- 2015: CAMP, Center for Art on Migration Politics, was founded
- 2020: The initiative had to close due to COVID and lack of funding
- 2022: Weekend Trampoline House - Copenhagen's Refugee Justice Community Center opened its doors

Throughout these 13 years, the project's size has varied dramatically in terms of employees, users, and building. In its current format, TH does not have a stable space that they can use all the time, but they are renting rooms for three days a week, and once it is Sunday night, they have to clean out everything.

Between 2009 and 2020, TH had been steadily growing. When the organization was the largest, it consisted of 8.7 full-time positions and about one hundred volunteers. Due to the lack of funding and the resulting loss of its venue, the TH now has no full-time staff (four hourly-based positions) and about 30 volunteers. Since they opened as Weekend TH, they have had about 90-110 users and active members, with around fifty coming from camps.

An article on the art news platform kunstn.nu, summarizes the precarious existence of TH very well: "CAMP closed in the autumn of 2020, and at the turn of 2021 came the sad announcement that the Trampoline House would also have to close its doors. It is extremely difficult to raise funds for the long-term operation of such places, which are forced to jump

from opportunity to opportunity with a fragile economy based on short-term and more or less random project grant money” (Jakobsen, 2021).

Multi-platform

In its organizational form, Trampoline House can best be understood as an umbrella. It is not restricted to the physical space; it is a multi-platform project that changes in shape throughout time. In the following, we will briefly present an overview of the main platforms and projects, by order of topicality.

Weekend Trampoline House Weekend Trampoline House is the current format of TH. It is a voluntarily non-profit project coordinated by a staff of four part-time employees. Weekend TH rents the Copenhagen-based Apostle Church's parish house for its activities. The house is open Fridays and Sundays and offers a selection of the old Trampoline House's most popular and necessary activities: legal advice, language teaching, workshops, women's and children's club, house meetings, café, and folk kitchen.

documenta Following the invitation by ruangrupa to join the lumbung network and contribute to documenta fifteen in 2022, Trampoline House invited members and friends of the house to form an artistic team responsible for participating in the lumbung meetings and for developing lumbung collaborations and projects for the exhibition. Leading up to the exhibition, the team members hosted workshops in Weekend Trampoline House. They produced artworks and videos documenting life conditions in the Danish asylum, deportation, and integration systems. Due to Danish asylum legislation, which prohibits asylum seekers from leaving the country while their case is pending, many of the people who have contributed to the projects could not travel to Kassel for the exhibition that ran for 100 days. (Trampoline House, 2022)

CAMP / The centre was operative from 2015–2020 and located in the building of Trampoline House. Center for Art on Migration Politics was a non-profit exhibition space for art addressing questions of displacement, migration, immigration, and asylum. The idea was developed by one of the co-founders of TH, who, together with another curator under the name “Curatorial action” (Kuratorisk aktion), received funding from the Arts Council in 2013. CAMP produced exhibitions, events, publications, and education programs about migration and the questions this phenomenon gives rise to today. The centre worked with renowned international artists as well as less established practitioners, most with refugee or migrant experience, and gained international recognition for breaking new ground in exhibiting and communicating art that makes the human and societal challenges posed by migration present and relatable. CAMP’s exhibitions were also shown at more established arts and culture institutions such as Roskilde Festival, SMK and Louisiana – Museum of Modern Art. (CAMP & Nora El Qadim, 2020; Hansen et al., 2020)

People’s movement for the future of asylum children (Folkebevægelsen for asylbørns fremtid) In 2017, Trampoline House was one of the founding member organizations of *Folkebevægelsen for asylbørns fremtid*. The movement sees its role as a voice for asylum children's perspectives and wishes. This initiative is active in communicating its social activism in different arenas, for instance, on social media, on demonstrations, and via e-

petitions. As part of INVENT’s data scraping phase II³, this initiative stood out as one of the main actors promoting online petitions on immigration policies and the rights of asylum seekers in Denmark. This demonstrates that the practice and actions of such an initiative are not restricted to physical spaces and activities only.

Participation, inclusion

Trampoline House has a unique role in the Danish cultural landscape, as it “asks radical questions about democracy, integration and belonging while providing core services to its users, like legal advice, language classes and medical and psychological counselling” (Grøn, 2022).

Literature on participation highlights that to be able to call something true participation, where equal conditions for all exist, one needs to ask: Participate in *what?* (Jenkins & Bertozzi, 2008). This question can be further explored by drawing on research about cultural centres. For example, according to Eriksson et al.’s typology of cultural centres, Trampoline House can be considered an “artist / activist centre”.

A cultural centre, in general, is thus a particular cultural institution that often combines art and creative activities (with spaces and technical facilities for exhibitions, rehearsal, performances, workshops) with a focus on diversity (a variety of activities, users and user groups), civic engagement, involvement of volunteers and openness to bottom-up initiatives. The centres are normally closely tied to the local neighbourhood, they often run on a rather low budget (with a mix of public and sometimes private funding and tickets/fees), they offer open and flexible spaces and combine professional and amateur as well as cultural and social activities. (Eriksson et al., 2018)

Eriksson et al. have developed a model for six different forms of participation in cultural centres, including: attention, education, co-inhabitation, co-creation, publics, co-decision (2018, p. 19). If we apply this model to the multifaceted practices of the TH, we can see that they tick almost all of the boxes. We could then start matching these forms of participation to their different platforms, highlighting that different formats are better suited for different activities and outcomes.

Table 1. Forms of participation at Trampoline House, based on model by Eriksson et al. (2018)

Form of participation	Platform / practice	Example
<i>Attention:</i> Attending and paying attention to cultural activities together with (imagined) others	Former TH building, including the CAMP exhibition space Weekend TH	Exhibitions at CAMP Events at Weekend TH
<i>Education:</i> Taking part in learning activities	Weekend Trampoline House	Classes on weekly schedule: Danish and English language, democracy

³ The report can be found here: <https://inventculture.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/INVENT-REPORT-AdvocatingforCulture.pdf>

	Creating a “space of becoming”	workshops, homework help
<i>Co-inhabitation:</i> Sharing spaces together with other citizens or cultural agencies	Trampoline House with CAMP (until 2020) Trampoline House (until 2020) as incubator and facilitator of other projects	CAMP exhibition space was inside the Trampoline House: shared workshops, etc The Weekend Trampoline House rents rooms from a church
<i>Co-creation:</i> Making specific objects, events or processes together	Weekend Trampoline House	Workshops with asylum seekers from camps, art projects, documenta
<i>Publics:</i> Engaging in collective verbal or discursive interaction	Trampoline House and Folkebevægelsen	Online activism and petitions
<i>Co-decision:</i> Engaging in equal and shared decision-making	Trampoline House structure	“Culture of democracy”, assemblies, weekly house meetings

This overview shows how many different roles this project has, which can be intertwined. It highlights the importance of the social organization of Trampoline House as a complex network or assemblage of people. This overview also highlights that some forms of participation lend themselves to different setups through different platforms.

As described, TH exists in different formats and is by no means restricted to one physical place, rather the cohesion lies within the mindset and the idea of the project. However, many of the fundamental and foundational practices of the project rely heavily on physical get-togethers and meetings in which trust and common understandings are established.

Brief analysis of the public funding

To highlight the tight connection between artistic practice and the core of Trampoline House, we will briefly explore public funding and the rationales behind allocating this money. The nature of funding also exemplifies this project’s multi-platform and -actor character.

When we, for example, look at the funding allocated via the Danish Arts Foundation, there are no direct funds given to Trampoline House. However, CAMP as well as the individual artists have received some funding. For instance, CAMP was awarded in 2019 with a 50.000 kr. (approx. 7.000 €) prize in the category of “Visual art of the year.” As part of the reasoning statement, the Foundation writes: “[...] CAMP has looked at major issues of coexistence, integration, identity, displacement, and exile. CAMP is a unique and inclusive space, an active and debating platform for the ever-present debate on belonging, immigration and integration.” (Statens Kunstfond, 2019). The support is appreciating the social impact of the art.

In 2021, Morten Goll received an individual working scholarship for three years (“Det treårige arbejdslegat,”) explaining that “With his work at Trampoline House, Morten Goll has been a particularly prominent figure on the Danish art scene. With his tenacious, in-depth and insistent work on refugee and immigration policy, Morten Goll has shown us that art can make a difference” (Statens Kunstfond, 2021).

TH’s participation in documenta fifteen resulted in a substantial amount of funding. With this support, they were financing the process leading up to the exhibition, organizing many workshops, and study trips to refugee camps (e.g., in Nairobi), supporting transnational and international collaboration. For instance, workshops with artists, writing, poetry, contemporary dance, film making.

So, when we look at the *public* funding the Trampoline House has received in the last few years, we can see that it was predominantly the art practice that has received the *public* funding and recognition for their practice. However, as was pointed out in the interview, they need funding of roughly five million kroner to operate TH as intended with a big space (as will be explored in the following parts). Thus, this type of funding is not sustainable for creating and operating a social space with these ambitions. Most of the substantial funding supporting the everyday work, employees, and operations is from *private* foundations.

Description of the concrete mechanism of emancipatory practices

Artistic practice for social and societal change

The idea of TH is heavily tied to artistic thinking and practice. However, the primary motivation behind this project is an anti-movement, an attempt at balancing out perceived injustices. TH is based on criticism of the artistic and political systems and derives its main driver from those opposing views.

Tiredness in relation to the art world. How we had all acted in the art world. It's very much about the symbolic representation. [...] All art is political and therefore it's important for me to keep an eye on what kind of cart you're being strapped to. Are you the horse or are you the cart? You can be exploited by a campaign and so on. [...] We need to go out and actually work with social change here now. [...] The Trampoline House has been established on that basis. [...] We always considered what we were doing to be art because it was derived from the practice that we've been developing since 2000. [...] Because we became an institution, we didn't need the art world. Artists need the institution to be exhibited. We did not.

The Trampoline House finds it essential to clarify that the project’s aim is not to be a social centre; they do not employ social workers or other specialists for social work. However, one can easily claim that the outcomes and impacts of their existence are related to the societal values of culture.

Our motto has always been to include people from day one. Get them into the labour market. Let them live with the rest of us. But then establish more Trampoline Houses that can help ... when people have problems with integration, where they are in danger of maybe just becoming an enclave where they only talk to each other and don't learn Danish. And all those things that you complain didn't happen in the 80s. If you had more Trampoline Houses and you could give to people some tools to understand Danish culture. How they help to change the

culture, so there is room for them. Then you could really make a really impactful inclusion process. (Morten Goll interview)

This project has successfully managed to engage people from camps and permanent residence in Denmark for over ten years. A fundamental part of this role is to avoid a situation where people are seen and treated as “others” while refugees and asylum seekers are branded as “victims.” This understanding removes agency and dignity from people by objectifying them as needing help (Morten Goll interview).

The Trampoline House has always been about creating a space where people can come in and this space will enable them to find a better version of themselves. It's super important if you're living in a camp where they're doing that on purpose, that you can develop as little as possible. It's worse than a prison. At least there you get education etc. You don't get that in a camp. It's destructive to people's self-respect but also to their development. [...] we have an analysis of what the camps do to people - now we have to do the opposite. [...] (Morten Goll interview)

One of the various ways of enabling equal and successful participation has been to establish a (financial) structure that allows people who live in camps to join and participate physically. Since most camps in Denmark are located in relatively isolated areas, the people who live there have very restricted access to culture and less so to participate in cultural events, ergo cultural participation is by design not encouraged. Therefore, one of the main fundamental contributions of Trampoline House is to refund public transport tickets for the people to leave the camps and come to Copenhagen. This intervention within the cultural policy approach to cultural participation may sound like a seemingly small contribution, but in terms of access to culture it is one major hurdle to overcome.

Trampoline House – Zone of becoming

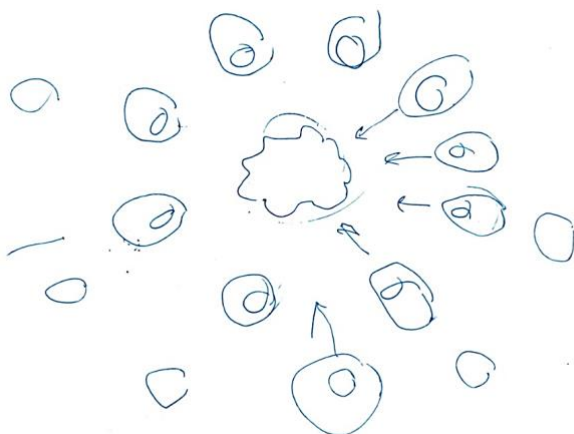


Figure 2 Trampoline House's Weekly Assembly negotiation process. Drawn during interview by Morten Goll.

The weekly assembly is one of the essential mechanisms of establishing this joint agreement. Appreciating that TH's users are from asylum camps means being aware that people come from different countries with different languages and cultures. In those weekly meetings, the users and volunteers of the house get together and discuss topics related to TH's workshops, programs, etc. Figure 3 illustrates this negotiation process. The middle is a common understanding, which is created through dialogue between the participants – who each individually brings their understandings and cultures. Once a new person joins this group, the negotiations are resumed.

Concerning those assemblies and meetings, the need for a physical space becomes apparent in conversation with the co-founder Morten Goll. Although TH constantly exists throughout various crises, in different forms and shapes, Goll says that the ideal state was when they had their ample space. He explains that it is vital for several reasons: First, for such an idealistic project, a spatial demarcation of an area in which a different set of more equal rules apply is crucial. The social rules are negotiated between the users yet having this *safe space* that represents the existence of this form of togetherness is not to be underrated. Third, the space is also important for supporting other projects and acting as an *incubator* for other initiatives. A permanent space furthermore promotes identity building, as it allows people to reflect and explore their *individual needs*. Moreover, it serves as a physical demonstration of the *project's legitimacy*.

Central to the practice of a participatory and inclusive art exhibition space CAMP was the fact that they were situated in the same building as Trampoline House, as one of the founders and curators explains in an interview:

“Because right outside the exhibition space, there’s Ahmed,” she says, pointing to the cover of the recently published CAMP status book. Here, a man emerges from beneath the deck of a boat and peers out anxiously. The photo is from Barat Ali Batoor’s series *The Unseen Road to Asylum* (2013), which was included in CAMP’s first exhibition *Camp Life: Artistic Reflections on the Politics of Refugee and Migrant Custody* in 2015. “After you saw the exhibition, just outside the exhibition space, you could talk to twenty people who were on a boat similar to the one shown in the photo in the exhibition.” (Jakobsen, 2021)

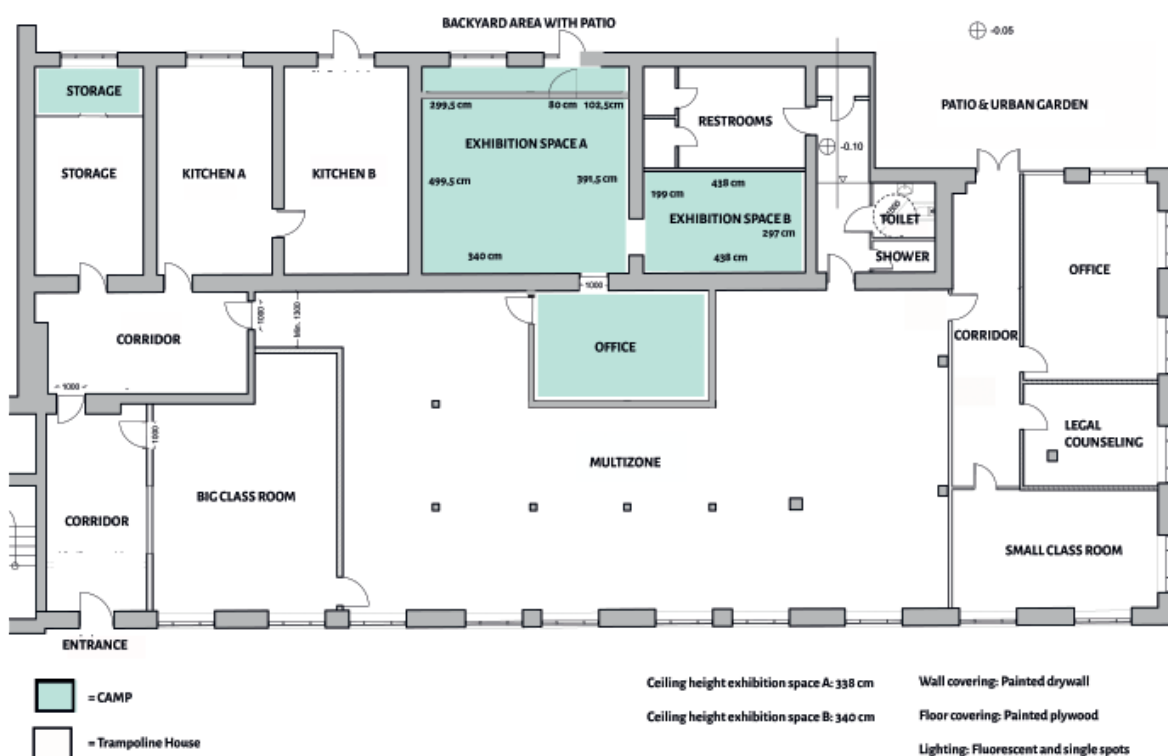


Figure 3 Floor plan of CAMP's location in the heart of Trampoline House's premises (until 2020) in Copenhagen's Northwest Quarter. (Image from CAMP Status, p.52)

Analysis and reflection on challenges / achievements / impacts of emancipatory practices

One of the most exciting parts of this case study is the in-betweenness of this project. Trying to do something different, not being a part of the establishment, while at the same time being acknowledged by the art world they use as their 'anti- motivation.' TH does not belong to the establishment while creating an important space for others to belong is one of the central tensions that characterize this project.

At the same time, the most obvious challenge for this type of project is funding. On the one hand, the project needs to fit into one category of cultural institution neatly. On the other hand, this project's beginnings and many facets of this project are artistic and centred around artistic practice. However, only the initial funding relied on public art funds. Although the individual participants might (still) receive funding for their artistic practice from the Arts Council, the organization of Trampoline House does not and cannot rely on this type of funding.

Most of the public funding since starting the actual Trampoline House project has relied on offering social initiatives. Morten Goll explains:

In 2019, we were at a point where we needed to reinvent. Either we needed a few more years to get the labour market project up and running, or we needed to invent a new project that would keep the Trampoline House going. There was Corona, there was a lockdown, so I sat almost a whole year all alone in that huge house writing fund applications. I had some professionals overseeing it, we wrote the best applications we've ever made, I'm convinced of that. Both in terms of our methods, but also in terms of the way we tailored them to what the foundations wanted. But there were four big applications and they were all rejected. I'm pretty sure it was about the fact that we were still working with asylum seekers and rejected asylum seekers. Because none of the big foundations can accept them. (Morten Goll interview)

Goll describes how, due to the lockdown phases in 2020 and the lack of funding, he found himself in an empty building, writing many big applications for funding. However, none of the proposed projects received funding. Reflecting on the reasons, he believes that the funding for social projects directly relates to nationwide politics, which throughout the existence of TH have shifted from a humanitarian to a rather pragmatic and openly anti-immigration agenda.

It is also something whether the political shifts. It has been difficult after the paradigm shift. When politicians go so hard. All the big foundations that have the money, they're pulling out because they're conservative, they're systemic. Others are doing something directly that goes against the political discourse. The small

foundations, the ones that give 100,000, they are more indifferent, they are more activist. You can easily raise between 5 and 800,000 for the operation we have now in this Trampoline House. ... but you can't raise five million in this political climate. There are simply none of the big foundations that dare go into it. (Morten Goll interview)

He also criticises the evaluation model of current funding practice. Especially socially oriented projects demand a simple evaluation practice that heavily relies on quantitative outcomes and impact measures. Explaining the downside to such an approach, Goll mentions having to evaluate an individual participant's development through schemes and forms, interrupting and formalizing an ongoing process of creating trust. Most TH users are very restricted by having to follow strict rules within the Danish immigration system. Since the TH seeks to counterbalance this strict, often inhumane system, applying those methods creates complex power structures.

The following can serve as an essential point of attention in cultural policy: if the understanding of culture is relatively narrow, it thus might inevitably exclude social aspects of culture. For example, suppose projects that rely on public funding cannot apply because they are at the intersection of artistic and social practice. In that case, the future cultural policy will create a dilemma. Recent literature on cultural policy (Belfiore & Bennett, 2010; Oman, 2021) has shown a clear agenda aiming to achieving social impacts (e.g., well-being) by supporting cultural initiatives. Thus, it is recommended that funding schemes be designed to include more socially motivated projects.

This case illustrates cultural practice that does not neatly fit into the framework of cultural policy. The question is whether, from a policy point of view, one can start imagining policies and funding schemes that manage to converge social and cultural aspects.

Conclusion

The case describes actual participation, facilitated and, most importantly, lived by the organizers of Trampoline House, i.e., participation in decision-making processes and power relations (Carpentier, 2016). The co-founders of Trampoline House take their democratic approach seriously, saying that they have created a "culture of democracy" through their inclusive and artistic practice. At the centre of this culture of democracy is the commitment to let people engage and be who they want to be while providing a safe environment for everybody (Morten Goll interview). As described in this case, the TH is in a constant negotiation process of establishing a society where people feel included, respected, and of use.

It is a fascinating case, as many different aspects of the TH practice have culminated in 2022 when their participation at the *documenta fifteen* art exhibition has further established their standing in the art world. On the other hand, TH has a core institution that has yet to be able to re-establish itself after its bankruptcy in 2020.

Trampoline House is an example of successful artistic and participatory practice. But in parallel, its multi-faceted activities are hard to categorize according to existing funding schemes, which might be the main reason for a rather unsustainable economic situation.

Trampoline House actively seeks to create societal values of culture through a participatory practice, especially for those that, due to their legal (immigration) status, have the most

negligible chances of active participation in Danish society. This case study has explored an initiative founded and organized by artists, which works as a reaction to specific trends in immigration politics. Their focus is on integration by inclusion and participation.

Acknowledgements

We want to thank especially Morten Goll from the Trampoline House for taking the time for this interview.

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