



Brief description

The Centre is one of the most important Youth Cultural Centres in Gothenburg. Since the official start some years ago over 400 youth-initiated activities of various kinds have taken place. The Centre has far-reaching participatory ambitions, 'by youth....for everyone' being the main motto. In the 1990's groups of young people took initiative to form a centrally located youth centre in an old municipal building. In 1998 there was a catastrophic fire in Gothenburg at a youth arranged Halloween party. 63 young people were killed and 200 were injured. This horrendous event is also a part of the history behind the Centre. In the aftermath of the fire, the question about the lack of meeting places became urgent. The Centre in its present form and place was preceded with a lengthy process and disputes about where to reside, how to govern it and what activities it should be opened for. Today, the centre offers activities that to a large extent are organized by young people themselves and around different themes and forms: movie and media, literature and poetry, theatre and play, dance and movement, images and arts, music, debates and society, design and handicraft and others. All events must be initiated and performed by young people aged 13-30. Employed staff members are there to facilitate the events. Among these there are Young Ambassadors. For one year they work as mediators between young people and the Centre.

What we have learned about participation

Participation is about inclusion and openness, but it is hard to fulfil that dream

The idea of inclusion and openness is conveyed through an air of comfort, friendliness, creative activities and amusement. This provides the atmosphere of a *safe haven* and *recognition* of one's person that some might not experience elsewhere. One of the Young Ambassadors was very excited about the place and told the research team that she finally had coming to be a part of a work place that fulfilled her hopes of companionship, inclusion and where openness was not just spoken, but also practiced.

"I had been at here before and seen others who worked there and felt that emotion ... that made me feel good to be a part of. [...] I think I have felt much better from it, if nothing else because of what the collective of those employed at my level has led to [...] and that's basically what it is about. It should be a meeting place, of course perhaps they don't refer to the employed, but absolutely for them as well, and it's so good that they have succeeded." (Jessy, BI)

Participation can lean towards a certain style of activism

The idea to work inclusive and targeting the city as a whole coming both from policy makers and the staff and the youth ambassadors, is very hard to fulfil. The leaning towards activism is obvious when looking at upcoming events:

In December a group will organize an evening with dance, music and theatre against racism. Another initiative is a workshop headed as 'Standing up to your beliefs in everyday life'. In the proposal form the organizing group writes that they just have started planning for activities in Gothenburg. The aim of the workshop is to invite participants to practical exercises about values and find ways to resistance in different situations (for example in schools, youth centres, youth organizations etc.) when someone is oppressed for example by racism, sexism, bullying, homophobia. The program group decides to make an appointment with the group to understand more about the exercises and trainings. (Field note)

How participation gatekeepers fulfil their role matters

In one of the observations we were invited to a meeting for prioritization between different ideas to understand what is seen as a legitimate activity. One thing became obvious, there are certainly not just individual or self-organized groups of young people that view the Centre as a resource, but many institutionalized actors seem to find this a platform to reach young people. For example, a coordinator from a Science Festival saw the Centre as suitable ground for awakening young people's enthusiasm for science, students from wanted to organize a workshop on norm critical approaches and a person with a State scholarship wanted to raise awareness about unaccompanied minor refugees.

Key Challenges Identified

A city centre flag ship project needs to address carefully how to fulfil its purpose to be a 'mirror of the city' and to consider what is involved in active outreach and openness. The relation between the permanent staff and the young ambassadors is of central importance to the functioning of the Centre and the challenge involved in supporting young people to move on after one year is a significant one.