

# Orientation Towards Symmathesy and Organizational Markers as Means to Cultivate Art Talent Environments: An Empirical Study Researching the Emergence of Talent Environments for Young Artists

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## Abstract

This article presents a study on the development of art environments for young talented artists across 4 municipalities in the western part of Jutland, Denmark. Within this context and based on systems thinking, neo-systems thinking and a holistic ecological approach to talent development, the researchers identify and describe three transcontextual art talent environments (Off-Track, Film, Show-up). Based on the neo-systemic concepts of symmathesy (Together-learning), *the pivotal point* in this study, was to identify organizational markers in the development of a strong talent infrastructure across the municipalities. This to enable and cultivate the artistic potential of young people.

The research question of the study was: *Which organizational markers cultivate the development of art talent environments in the context of four Danish municipalities in the western part of Jutland?*

The study is based on interviews with seven different public servants from different municipalities in the western part of Jutland and build on a prior research regarding young artists within different artistic fields and their instructors.

Through a generic thematic analysis, four organizational markers were identified (organizing, strategizing, license to operate, and creative places). The paper argues that an orientation towards environments as a symmathesy and towards organizational markers can help organizations improve artistic talent environments across municipalities. Further, the role of public servants as talent stewards is discussed in the discussion.

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**Keywords:** Young artists; organizational markers; Symmathesy; talent development; talent environment; living systems theory; holistic ecological approach.

"Dance is for me a fluid language that can tell much more than words"  
Young Artist

## Introduction

This article presents a study into the collaboration on and emergence of talent environments for young artists (YA) in the western part of Jutland across four municipalities.

In Denmark, municipalities across the country have recognized art (music, dance, literature, painting, film, etc.) as a valuable contribution to the narratives about the municipalities, and thus an important approach to attracting new citizens, tourists, investment and prepare the ground for young people to stay in the municipalities instead of moving to bigger towns. To support this approach, the Danish Ministry of Culture in 2018 launched a project to strengthen the focus on two themes related to promoting art and these include: (1) Local Talent Environments, and (2) Young Elite Career Development.

In the first theme, the ministry wanted to support talent environment projects across the country to ensure that knowledge on the development of art environments was produced and

environments emerged. One of the projects that received support was the project described in this article, which connect 4 municipalities in the Western part of Denmark in collaboration with Aalborg University. The project was designed in two phases:

**First phase:** Identify emergent properties among young artists important to create talent environments. (Nørlem & Stegeager 2022).

**Second phase:** Identify organizational markers in the development of a strong talent infrastructure across the municipalities.

The project is based on research within the field of sport talent environments promoting a holistic ecological approach (Henriksen et al., 2010; Henriksen, 2015;) and on research in talent environments developed within the field of living systems theory (Nørlem & Stegeager, 2021; Nørlem & Stegeager, 2022). To this latter approach, the concept of symmathesy (Bateson, 2015, 2017, 2022, 2023) is introduced. The study seeks to identify organizational markers when municipalities and young people collaborate on creating stimulating and flourishing talent environments. The aim of the study was driven by the following research question:

(RQ1): Which organizational markers cultivate the development of art talent environments in the context of four Danish municipalities in the western part of Jutland?

In the following section, the status of contemporary talent research is outlined and the notion of symmathesy is introduced.

## Theoretical underpinning

In this paragraph, the theoretical foundation of the paper is presented. The paper is based on a group of theories collectively referred to as Systems Theory. It is important to emphasize that this does not pertain to the systems theory by the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann's, but rather the living systems theory developed by Ludwig Bertalanffy. Uri Bronfenbrenner, Gregory Bateson, Fritjof Capra and Nora Bateson.

### *Holistic Ecological Approach (HEA)*

Henriksen et al. (2010; 2011; 2015) and Henriksen & Stambulova (2017) redirects the focus in talent development research from an intra-individual perspective of talent for a focus on the context and ecology in which talent emerges. They employed a holistic ecological approach (HEA), based on systems theory (Bertalanffy, 1969; Bateson, 1972; and Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In short, a holistic ecological approach (HEA) refers to a comprehensive and multidisciplinary perspective used to study and understand the interconnections between talent development and the broader ecological systems in which the talents operate. This approach recognizes that talent development is not isolated activities but is deeply embedded within social, environmental, and cultural contexts. In Mathorne et al. (2021), the researchers add that a holistic ecological approach (HEA) “focuses on the whole environment around a prospective athlete, advocating that although individual factors (e.g., biological and psychological) are important, they cannot stand-alone”. And further, “The HEA, which was inspired by influential frameworks developed in ecological and organizational psychology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Schein, 1992) suggests that successful talent development is contingent upon the integrated efforts of various stakeholders from both athletic and non-athletic domains and across various levels of an athlete talent development environment (i.e., micro and macro)”. Mathorne et al. (2021) p. 3.

### *Living systems theory – Neo systemic theory*

To further encapsulate the perspective on talent environments, this paper turns to the field of living systems theory (Capra & Luisi, 2014; Bateson, 2015, 2017, 2022, 2023). Based on systems theory and the notion of living systems as a specific kind of systems-within-systems, these authors propose that humans must be perceived as a part of nature – not something that is located outside or above nature.

Further, we have learned that when dealing with living systems, the many variables of developing interaction become untenable to consider in such mechanistic parameters. This change in

concept should spark a significant shift in our work, in the sciences, applied professions, communication, arts, that addresses or depends upon our understanding of life and evolution. The discourse with which we discuss and study the living world eg. Talent environments, should be representative of the living world, and should cautiously avoid connotations that imply or are derived from engineering

To this approach, Bateson (2016) introduces the concept of “*symmathesy*” to catch the essence of the learning processes in living systems. Symmathesy is a combination of two Greek words. From words like *symbiosis* or *synthesis*, she isolates the prefix “*syn*” or “*sym*”, which implies togetherness. This togetherness is then combined with “*mathesi*” which denotes “*to learn*”. Together it becomes “*symmathesy*”, which then denotes *learning-together, together-learning or mutual learning*. She defines it as “the process of transcontextual mutual learning through interaction” (Bateson, 2016, p. 169) and her preliminary definition of learning in the symmathesy becomes: “Learning in symmathesy is the perpetual process of positioning and repositioning, calibrating, shifting, and responding to responses within contexts of multiple, simultaneous interactions” (p. 179).

In a recent article Bateson (2022) presents the reader with a thought-provoking question, to exemplify the notion of symmathesy:

“A tree is learning to be on a hill; its trunk is at an angle to the hill, its branches reach toward the light away from other trees’ shadows, it grows in height according to the nourishment in the soil, and so on. The form of the tree is in-formed by the contextual and transcontextual mutual learning it is in with the other organisms it shares a hillside with. If you want the trunk to be at a 90-degree angle to the ground, instead of the angle the tree has found, the approach will be to manipulate the tree. To do so would, of course, upset the precarious balance the tree has found and other organisms living with the tree. It is better to ask, “How is it learning to be in its world?” and immediately notice how the perception moves from the tree to its contextual responsiveness. Is the crookedness in the tree? Or is it in the context?” (p. 103).

As we see in the example above, learning is not to be understood as a thing the reside in a singular living being but a contextual adaptation to the system that the being is part of. Thus, learning is a function of the complex interplay between the parts of the system. It is – to use another metaphor, like a dance constantly evolving without anyone defining where it must go, or how it should be danced. This is symmathesy as action.

In this paper we look at the ability and role of *organizations* to cultivate art talent. Thus, we aim to see how “symmathesy” as a concept and a perspective on contextual learning can help us identify organizational markers that emerge when municipalities and young people collaborate to create inspirational environments for young artistic talents.

### ***Living systems as organizing***

In order to fulfill the ambition of this paper to identify organizational markers that cultivate artistic potential, a definition of the study’s perspective on organizations must be presented. In line with its theoretical rooting in living systems theory, this paper perceives organizations as complex, adaptive, living systems shaped by interconnectedness and relationships. Tzoukas and Chia (2002) defined organizations as “sites of continuously changing human action. Patterns that are constituted, shaped, and emerging from change. Organization aims at stemming change but, in the process of doing so, it is generated by it” (p. 577)

As mentioned above, our research focus is on the symmathesy emerging in the relationship between public servants of the four municipalities and young artists. The public servants who participated in this interview study, can in this respect be perceived both as representatives of the formal organization (the municipality) and as servants engaging in and developing new patterns emerging through their collaboration with the young artist. In our empirical study, we look for patterns of symmathesys in order to try to identify organizational markers that cultivate emerging art talent environments.

The above theoretical foundation is further elaborated in Nørlem and Stegeager (2021; 2022). It aims at supporting the complex understanding of organization as organizing, emergence and symmathesy at the same time. This becomes the field of research in the empirical turn following below.

### ***Empirical contexts, methods and data collection***

Below, the three art talent environments participating in this study are presented.

#### **1. The film art environment**

The film art environment is located at the main campus of the Danish Talent Academy and at the art center “The Butchery” in Holstebro. On the main campus students have access to a cinema, as well as professional equipment for film productions. “The Butchery” holds a cutting suite, common room, and an office room with its own office space available, which can be used as much as the young artists want outside of classes. The film art environment consists of two parallel parts: joint and the independent practice. In addition to one permanent teacher, teaching is largely conducted by professional guest teachers who, through hands-on workshops with their own expertise, introduce the students to many different methods and artistic works.

#### **2. The Off Track art environment**

Off Track is situated in a borderland of festivals and flourishing youth art environments. A living sanctuary where relationships are created and challenged on a foundation of fun, food, music, and much more. Through a festival with a focus on music, the intention is to show young people what dance, film, and other creative art forms can offer. Off Track seek to gather all young people in Lemvig (a small municipality in the most western part of Denmark) and the surrounding municipalities in a community that (as they say themselves) “brings culture down to earth”. Currently the Off Track festival collaborates with primary schools, secondary schools, cultural institutions, and artistic environments in the four municipalities. Each municipality has a talent consultant who is the local Off Track coordinator.

#### **3. The Show-Up art environment**

Show-Up is a talent project created by young artists in collaboration between the Danish Talent Academy and the four municipalities. It is a community of committed young people who actively contribute to cultural life. They experiment with art challenges, new inspiration, and the opportunity to test new ideas for the benefit of others across the four municipals including young people of all ages. Among other projects, Show-Up creates events where young artists affiliated with Show-Up create cultural and artistic days at the elementary schools in the municipalities.

## **Methods**

This study is a mixed method research combining fieldwork, participant observation, and interviews.

It is based on interviews with seven public servants from different municipalities (PS1-PS7) and builds on a prior interview study of six young artists (YA1-YA6) within different fields of art and five instructors (I1-I5).

In addition, 20 hours of fieldwork and participant observation were conducted at both strategic meetings, artistic rehearsals, and at the youth festival “Show-up” where dialogues on-site with youth organizers, facilitators, participants, and public servants, and politicians were conducted. Traditionally Fieldwork is a social practice concerned with the study of cultures. In this study, it is concerned with the emergence of talent environments through the focus of symmathesy (occurrence of together-learning). “It is a technique of gathering research material by subjecting the self – body, belief, personality, emotions, cognitions – to a set of contingencies that play on others such that over time – one can more or less see, hear, feel, and come to understand the kinds of responses others display (and withhold) in particular social situations”. (Maanen, 2011, p. 151).

The selection of data must occur in any scientific recording and exposition, but it is important that the principles of selection be stated. In the field we were guided by major assumptions, e.g.) that the role, behavior and relations of the public servants towards the young artists were somehow important. We therefore oriented ourselves towards contexts and sequences (symmathesy) where this sort of relationship played out. A broad range of fieldnotes were taken while participating in various events and classes were subsequently coded. However, as Maanen (2011) reminds us, fieldnotes are always incomplete, filled in later by memory of an accurate quixotic sort. Choices of topics, frameworks, and substantive domains emerge only after considerable thought and experimentation. Analysis never ends. “And all writing is of course rewriting and rewriting and rewriting. In short, learning in and out of the field is uneven, usually unforeseen, and rests more on a logic of discovery and happenstance than on logic of verification and plan. It is anything but predictable or linear” (Maanen, 2011, p. 153).

### *Warm data*

In addition to the above data collection, other rather curious types of data selection did occur. During the participation in dances, singing, writing workshops, selling food etc., a bodily sense of community emerged within the researchers. The notion of warm data (Bateson, 2022) is interesting in this perspective. In a special issue of the journal 'Unpsychology' Bateson (2022) begins her description of the notion of warm data with this poem:

Of all the things I write about,  
I find data that doesn't call to me.  
Its straight-edged corners make me doubt  
That soul or spirit have a place to be.

We gather facts and figures in a row;  
interrogate them all until  
cold results are all we know  
as sureness leads us where it will.

Yet, as we see the world as black and white  
with hard solutions all to hand,  
we miss a glimpse of something out of sight,  
another way of life we could demand.

Between the lines there lies a way:  
Warm Data can relax and dance and play.  
(p. 9)

Bateson's (2022) interest in science that goes beyond the traditional perspectives of information and data in an attempt to incorporate the moreness of the alive, brings her to suggest a broadening of the concept of data. She does this through the notion of warm data, which she defines as "...the information that is alive within the transcontextual relating of a living system" (p.14). Warm data can be a smile, looking joyfully in the eyes of others, mimicking behavior on the dance floor, a constant helping and reaching out to each other etc. It is both wiggly and unpredictable, and sometimes invisible. By introducing the term transcontextuality she seeks to dissolve the traditional separations we install when looking for data. This means that we sometimes categorize data into predefined traditional categories. Bateson (2022) challenges these preconditions and opens up for new perspectives and novel experience through warm data.

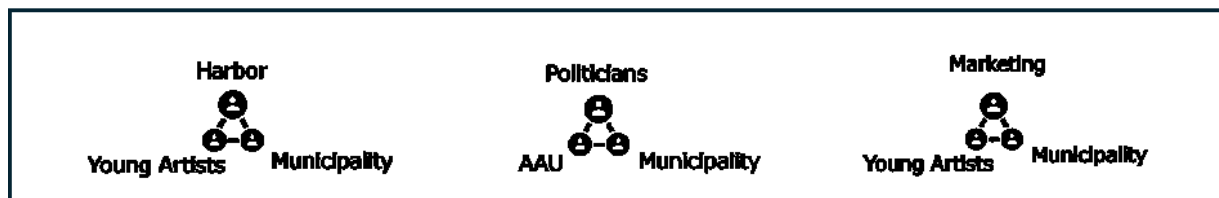
Orientating us towards warm data helps us temporarily grasp a sense of direction, a sense of wholeness, a sense of the living, and a sense of becoming. In our study, we tried to catch and temporarily sustain warm data in order to identify the sense of wholeness relating the traditional data to each other. As an example, warm data guided the researchers towards an understanding of youth ownership of the place. The leisure use of a stair on the harbor of Struer (a small city in one of the municipalities), smiling and dancing under the ceiling of the factory, painting street art on the walls, and floors etc.

### ***Selection and analysis***

After returning to the university, 500 pages of interviews were transcribed along with 100 pages of fieldnotes. The fieldnotes were coded after the situations from where they occurred as symmathesys

In our coding approach, we oriented ourselves towards organizing symmathesys. This included pieces of text expressing situations of:

1. at least three entities included in the dialogue. (see symmathesys below – figure 1.)



**Figure 1:** Symmathesys

2. A sense of mutual curiosity, openness, and appreciation present in the dialogue.
  - E.g., “In fact, I think that they themselves were quite good at understanding the seriousness of security having to be in place”. PS2
3. An idea of movement, transformation or mutual learning taking place in the dialogue.
  - E.g., “I think that there is competence in being able to work with mistakes, in the understanding of learning. In other words, learning typically comes through making mistakes. And it is also a competence of the young artists that they both know it and can understand it and can work with it and in some way also accept it. PS3

Further we approached the data three times over a period of two months inspired by Revsbæk and Tanggard (2015). They described how researchers engaged with emergent qualitative data over time. They state that observing how different parts of various interviews convey diverse significance to the listening researcher at different times and can become a method of continuously unfolding the empirical material in a reflexive, breakdown-oriented process of analysis. This has to some extent been our approach to the interview and observation data collected in the project. We re-engaged with the data in a back-and-forth movement while remaining observant of emergent patterns coming together as “emergent properties” over time (Nørlem & Stegeager, 2022).

## **Results – elements of emergent learning identified in practice as organization markers.**

In this section, we present the results of our analysis. In our data we looked for significant learnings emerging in three symmathesys. These symmathesys include: 1) The film art environment, 2) The Off-track art environment, and 3) The Show-UP art environment. The implication of this symmathesys perspective gives weight to data collected in the interactions, intersections, and relationality of the living. The findings fall into four broad categories describing different organizational markers present both in the support of and emergence of cross-regional art talent environments. Furthermore, the role of the public servants in the symmathesys, were identified and will be discussed.

### **1. Organizing**

The first organizational marker in our findings is named Organizing. The public servants collaborated with the young artists to create minimal organizational and dynamic structures that opened opportunities for combining activities and knowledge. They allowed for the young people to participate in a continuous renegotiation and adjustment of the emerging organizations so that

they matched the flow of activity while at the same time creating a sense of community or ownership and belonging to the emergent art environment - an identity.

“PS6 did a lot with the young artists and coordinated new organizings with them in advance of events and in course of time to create a fit to the current needs, and we could see that there was a need for us to have him as the project manager on this project, as he was not one of the traditional public servants”. (PS1)

“The young artists had someone to turn to and shouldn’t turn to the municipality directly. Sometimes, when I met them, they had changed the organization and brought another young artist on board, or created a new event etc”. (PS2)

When the above dialogue takes place in public offices, online, on the Harbor of Struer or in other locations, being in relation to this organizational marker, is a constant together-learning that takes place in the symmathesy, where both Public Servants and Young Artists are learning about how to organize, adjust, and deliver the needed results. Almost no time is spent on trying to define the organization, because no one actually knows what kind of organizing will be helpful in the current situation. Instead, the public servants allow for space to move with the potentiality of the situation and thus creates room for contextual learning. From our data, it seems very likely that mutual orientation toward organizing in the symmathesy is helpful in the creation of art talent environments – especially if both public servants and young artists can invite this marker into the dialogue.

## 2. Supporting "license to operate"

The second organizational marker is called License to operate. Research indicates that when talking about “*License to operate*” (Howard-Greenwille et al., 2008), we talk about the basic presence of dialogues on security in place at an event, handling the project economy, securing transport for artists across municipals, handling of traditional media, understanding the concept of politics in culture strategies in the municipals etc. This also applies to our research and is related to the emergence of an art talent environment. In the symmathesy, a call and need for support to navigate in this field and at the same time to learn from it became evident. The public servants demonstrated both a responsibility towards the municipality such that no one was harmed from an accident or money misused, and at the same time a responsibility towards the young artists and their learning potential was ensured. As shown below, the municipality was good at being aware of this need in the emergence of the art talent environment.

PS1 is asked how he participated in Show Up on the harbor in Struer;

“When you arrange an art event with 200 young participants, you don’t necessarily want things to go wrong, like if 25 young people end up in the cold water of the harbor and die. After all, this is something that people and politicians in town might be insecure about. Especially if you say that a youth art center will be placed on a dark harbor and they themselves arrange everything. My role is to ask questions on security, economy etc. and assist in making it happen, if they themselves fail to deliver. (PS1)

Another public servant supplements this perspective:

“And then sometimes the young people came to me, and they said that they had some questions. It could be a lot of all these practical things with ... What about permits? What about toilet vans? What about fences? How do you deal with lifeguards? What about smoking? So yes.... in practical, how to run events?” (PS2)

In the dialogues, together-learning or mutual learning appeared as eg. When the public servant learned what the young people knew about security in a certain situation, and elaborated on their knowledge and actions. In this way a micro talent environment emerged. The same thing happened in relation to the Off Track environment.

“In relation to the budgeting process, we loosely monitored what they've bought for the events, and they managed it fine, I think. We spent little money. The learning is that first of all, the

budget is not huge. That's the one thing. What can go wrong! And then... we could just feel that in everything the young people talked about, that they were always conscious about saving money. They could ask; *if we can make it cheaper, is it maybe possible to buy X or Y?* So, we felt that they had an awareness of the importance to keep the budget – even though some of the shopping was a bit out of a traditional guideline of a municipality”. (PS3+PS4)

The learning identified under this organizational marker is a testament to how young artists grew into understanding the framework. This growth was also present when young artists arranged artistic events such as concerts, exhibitions, musicals etc. However, the young artists do not lose energy by drowning in procedures and budget control. It makes the public servant aware of how the young artists approach and talk about economy and security etc. without forcing too many structures on them at one time.

Mutual orientation toward dialogue, action, and awareness with respect to a “license to operate” in the symmathesy is helpful and necessary to the creation of art talent environments.

### 3. Creative spacemaking

The third organizational marker is creative space making. In our data, we noticed that release of artistic potential increased when young people experience having a space (temporary or permanent) in which they can express themselves (physical/virtual). It creates identity, belonging, continuity, opportunity and liberates ideas. Thorning et al. (2018) distinguished between five different qualities of a creative space as they write that a given space can be: 1) a knowledge processor, 2) an indicator of organizational culture. 3) a process enabler providing an appropriate infrastructure, 4) a social dimension, or 5) a source of stimulation. One of the spaces we visited and participated in was a part of the Show Up environment, where young people in the town of Struer long have been asking for their own cultural meeting place. From 2021 it became a reality, since Struer City Council decided to release funds for a new center for youth culture at Struer Harbor –

#### The Siloes.

“So, they’ve actually got a silo down there on the harbor, that the young artists can work from. With this opportunity to be able to gather a bunch of young people to do something creative, it is quite obvious that maybe something permanent can become of it”. (PS6)

“Young people need to know that we take them seriously and listen to them when they demand a new youth culture environment where they can meet and cultivate their interests in a strong and committed community. Therefore, we are now establishing a new and inspiring cultural center for young people at the port of Struer. It is the young people's own place and the young people themselves play a central role in the form of the present,” says chairman of the cultural and leisure committee PS7. (PS7)

In this example, the municipality acknowledged the need for a creative space where young artists can belong and unfold their potential in art and performance. The researchers also experienced an old factory in Holsterbro, and a traditional shop in the main street of Vinderup, a small town in Holsterbro municipality, which were transformed into creative spaces, supporting one or more of the qualities stated above. In addition to a physical space, we had the privilege of experiencing first hand the emergence of an online film art environment suddenly evolving during the national lockdown due to the corona virus. In this online collaborative space, young artists met across different disciplines within art, and worked together online with the solo access to concrete equipment;

“They have access to expensive filming equipment and to use the cutting applications for three days or they used access to projectors and a screen for movie views or we support the creative placemaking with a visit from an instructor or an audio technician online.” (PS3)



This combination of online sense of community and physical access to relevant filmmaking gear made the film environment a great success and in 2020 they won a talent award at the Odense film festival.

Our study indicates that the ability to co-create space together is extremely important when trying to foster talent environments. As our cases underline, Public servants must walk a fine line between offering enough support to facilitate the evolution of talent environments without taking over and thus excluding the young artist from the learning process. Mutual orientation toward creative space making and the power of place in the symmathesy is helpful to the creation of art talent environments and to the becoming identity of the young artists.

#### 4. Strategizing

The fourth organizational marker is called Strategizing. The word itself is once again inspired by Weick (1979) and Chia & Holt (2009). It invites us to look for movement and evolving public strategies. Traditional approaches to strategy in public offices (Mintzberg, 1998) tend to adhere to a stable, top down strategy in terms of different cultural visions, themes, and actions in a municipality. A strategy is an important tool in top management, and public servants must orientate their actions towards the expected outcome. In our data, we see examples of public servants setting the young artists free from the current strategy, while at the same time informing the strategists (top management in public office) about movements “on the ground” to incorporate these continuous changes in the current strategy. In this sense, the strategy becomes alive and a living framework to the young artists, not a straitjacket. Below PS1 explains how he tries to relate to the young artists on issues regarding strategy;

“There are a lot of strategic direction and structures we set up, from our world view (Public servants), and the young artists tend to challenge those structures, don't they? By becoming comfortable with each other (Public servants and young artists) and getting to know each other, it became more acceptable to challenge the strategic direction by through novel actions.” (PS1)

Further

“It was important not to try to steer them in any particular strategic direction. Instead, my goal was to give them the opportunity to learn themselves – empowering them to see the strategy that emerges. We decided to believe that they were capable of handling the challenges themselves (eg. strategizing). firm in the belief that if things went wrong, that would be a valuable lesson learned as well”. (PS1)

Strategizing in this respect can be seen as a back and forth responsiveness to both dialogue and to novel actions between the public servants and the young artists. These forms of interaction serve both the overall direction of the municipality, if the politicians listen, the authentic public communication about what is going on within the city or municipality, and the young artist learning while engaging in the above.

### Discussion

From traditional systems theory, we learned that context matters and that decoding contextual markers influence the actions and/or language in the context. In neo-systemic theory (Capra & Luisi, 2014; Bateson, 2015, 2017, 2022, 2023) we orient towards a constantly changing context as the organization evolves over time. This means that the actions creating the organizational markers above are interwoven and interlinked. The idea of the municipality as an organization is temporarily dissolved and the emerging art environments are constantly in a phase of becoming or accommodating, combining, and responding to responses in the present. In practical terms, our findings indicate that talent environments like those described in this paper cannot emerge through tightly scheduled and unalterable public procedures. Therefore, it is important to “dance the dance” so to speak, to orient one-self towards the warm data guiding the liberation of art potential, and to dive further into this “dance”. To further answer our research question, we asked the following question:

- What is the unique role of the public servant “in the middle”? and How is authority and empowerment balanced?

## Talent steward.

Across the four organizational markers, a new and interesting pattern of interaction emerged in the symmathesies in focus. It was as if the relation between the young artists and the public servants invited a new quality into the relationships. We call this quality *the talent steward*. When researching and engaging into the relationships and communication between the young artists and the public servants an interesting pattern in the symmathesies emerged.

The public servants who take a mediating role in the intersection between the rules and regulations of the municipality and the free flowing streaming of more or less impossible ideas amongst the young artists, explicated an ability to see potential, investigate possibilities, wonder with the young artists and ask probing and supporting questions in this way creating openings for talent propping environments to flourish. This could be called a coaching or growth mindset. We call the position they rotate into as *the talent steward*.

“It’s a bit of a challenge to work with young people who live in the present and who at the same time have to take part in processes that take – in their opinion - far too long, right?” PS1 Off Track. (PS1)

The example above, PS1, shows an understanding of the young mind and the challenges in combining this youthful impatience with the rigorous and time consuming working procedures of public organizations. This is an example of a plastic/dynamic mindset. PS3 from the Film environment expresses a similar mindset in his engagement with the young artists:

“Things can come from below, i.e., pure anarchy, no one having any direction whatsoever like some kind of grassroots movement. And then it can come from above, the hierarchical angle. That’s the school version, right? And then the young artists say that neither of these two approaches are good enough in principle, it must come neither from above nor from below, it must come from in-between. And from in-between means that I facilitate meetings that specifically try to offer several levels of engagement – places and situation that allows for them to express themselves”. PS3 - Film environment (PS3)

In this example, the public servant listens and adjusts his knowledge and material to meet the voices of the young artists. He challenges his own expert position and meets the young artists from an in-between-position. This position, has a both-and-quality, where learning emerges as together-learning in the present. As a final example, PS4 from the Show Up environment, continues her sensing into the organizational symmathesy on stress and other balances in the system:

“After all, we could feel that they (young artists) balanced the workload well. So it’s not like we had the feeling that any of them were about to collapse with stress, and others slacked off like crazy”. PS4 Show Up environment. (PS4)

Again, PS4 balances the interaction with the young artists, does not limit them but attempts to assist them in learning to know signs of fatigue, stress or other imbalances.

To conclude the discussion on the quality of “The talent steward”, we identified plasticity and movement in the symmathesy, between taking authority and facilitating empowerment. We experienced and documented a sliding between control and distributed freedom. It was as if a gentle back and forth movement took place in all the different symmathesies we engaged with. Defined by the words of Gregory Bateson, the talent stewards are like: The acrobat on the high wire who maintains his stability by continual correction of his imbalance (Bateson, 1979, p. 78).

## Conclusion/ findings

The pivotal point of this study was to identify organizational markers in the development of strong talent infrastructures across the municipalities. This to enable and cultivate the artistic potential of young people in the western part of Jutland specifically and to broaden art in general.

This paper contributes to the literature about artistic talent development and argues that an orientation towards *four* “organizational markers” can help organizations improve the development of artistic talent environments. These organizational markers include:

- (1) *Organizing*: The ability of the municipal to co-organize the young artists, to a point where the organizing is helpful and not limiting in relation to their potential.
- (2) *License to operate*: The ability of the municipal to assist young performing artists in the learning process of working with both their art, and the fundamental needs of festivals, programs, events, tours etc. These could be financial planning, security, cleaning up, writing up contracts etc.
- (3) *Creative space making*: The ability of the municipal to identify spaces (physical or online) that create sense of community, sense of home or belonging to the artists. It is important to include the artists in the co-creation of these.
- (4) *Strategizing*: The ability of the municipal to open up the strategy on culture, to be informed and co-created by the young artists on an ongoing basis (strategizing), in contrary to a four year strategy.

Further findings emerged in the discussion about the quality of the role of public servants called “*talent stewardship*”. Here, balanced work with the young artists between “control and freedom” was identified as important and in this role – “Working-in-between” – a more plastic, growth mindset was identified.

The limitation or struggles of this study is its inherent anti-reductionist approach, that try to keep the world and the work open and complex to capture emergence rather than fixed entities. It can challenge other scholars in grasping and researching further with the findings. The authors of this study will continue to learn and work with the complexities of neo-systems theory in talent research and hope others will follow.

This study shows potential towards the creation of art talent environments and invites further empirical studies on the unfolding of the organizational markers and the role of the talent stewardship internally in organizations and across fields. Further theoretical work on symmathesy in the field of organizational learning is also needed.

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