

Proposals for the new Arts-plan (Bergen Council) from Wrap, developed during discussions with various local artists and cultural workers.

The impulse behind these proposals began with the development of “What might a radical Arts Institution Look Like in Bergen”, an event developed and presented by Wrap during Bergen Assembly. Several artists and cultural workers approached Wrap following the original event, to express their interest in the material. Two follow-up discussions were then arranged by Wrap in order to listen to new thoughts on the material, and to collaborate on the development of those proposals that seemed most important to everyone. The follow-up discussions were attended by Leo Preston, Veronica Thorseth, Evelyn Holm, Andrea Spreafico, Liv Basberg, Ivar Vogt, Evy M. Sørensen and Cristian Stefanescu.

The individual proposals below could be interpreted / enacted as individual, stand alone proposals, but we feel that they each benefit greatly from one another, and are most relevant when seen in relation to each other.

We greatly appreciate the arts plan, and how it has assisted the development of Bergen's already thriving art scene. However, as artists and cultural workers based in Bergen, we agree that the proposals we have formulated here would significantly improve the scope for development and strategic improvement. During our discussions it was clear that the appeal behind exploring *what a radical arts institution in Bergen might look like* is related to the role and position of institutions within the cultural landscape, rather than a quest for yet another building. In discussing *who a radical arts institution in Bergen might be for*, it was clear that we were collectively interested in imagining a set of solutions that would address whatever issues people brought to the table. Thus our imaginary institution is for everyone who seeks it.

We hope the proposals set out in this document will be seen as an insightful impulse from a place within the heart of the Bergen art scene itself.

Proposal #1 - Central Bergen as an Art District:

We believe that the arts plan should propose that the area of Bergen between the seven mountains (central Bergen) be defined as an Art district.

The arts plan (Kunstplan) has stood for a broad political recognition of the arts, and of the significance of independent art production in Bergen. However, there remains very little recognition or understanding of the city's unique arts scene within the public sphere. How can we enhance the visibility of the arts, and ensure that people associate Bergen with a vibrant and progressive contemporary arts scene?

We propose that Bergen Council declares central Bergen to be an art district, accompanied by its enactment of concrete policies to that effect. We believe that this will drastically improve the visibility of, and participation in the arts in Bergen. Further, we believe it will improve cross-pollination of ideas, collaboration between institutions, and the development of a strong and attractive creative identity within the city.

This proposal encourages an open-minded interpretation of the concept of an art district. It is not a proposal to mimic other art districts where art initiatives are concentrated within an even closer proximity. It should rather be seen as a clear and inventive way of branding a small Nordic city, and a logical continuation of the arts plan, giving it a more visible face after all the work that has gone into it since 1997. Some may consider the idea of central Bergen becoming an art district to be laughable, but if implemented with sincerity, there is no doubt that it would be something a lot of people would talk about.

The Bergen Art District would not only help the visibility and promotion of art within Bergen itself, but would also make the Bergen art scene more navigable and attractive to visitors. The Bergen Tourist Board (Bergen reiselivslag) could be much more effective at communicating the rich diversity of Bergen's art scene, and the scope of contemporary art in the city. An improved understanding, particularly of the contemporary art scene, within the tourist board, would open many benefits to tourism.

Bergen has at various times identified a number of art-axes or "kunst-akser" where various institutions appear to form an axis. These seem to develop organically, and to be identified after the fact.

Although the art axis concept may have some merits as a planning tool, there are several clusters of art institutions in Bergen, and the concept of Central Bergen Art District might therefore be seen as an inclusive and constructive strategy, either in its own right or in addition to the axis.

Central Bergen Art District policy could / should include:

- Protection of spaces of artistic production and dissemination by pursuing an urban development policy that acknowledges such spaces as part of an art "reservation".
- Take steps to preserve affordability of spaces for artistic production and dissemination in the art district.
- Large scale building developments should be required to incorporate a percentage of space to be used for the benefit of the art district. The use of this space should be decided by an elected committee and / or based on strict criteria, and proposals should be collected on an open call basis.
- Available sites (empty buildings and open spaces) should be announced with open calls for artists who are interested in developing non-permanent work at these sites.
- The enactment of other proposals in this document would also serve to enhance the concept of Central Bergen Art District.

Proposal #2 - Municipal art lawyer

We propose that the arts plan should include the aim to establish a position within the council, attached to the department of art and culture, that specifically deals with issues regarding art district development and / or property used by art institutions and independent artist initiatives. This person should have a legal background (lawyer).

Proposal #3 - A prestigious, rotational curatorship with institutional resources

We propose that the arts plan should include the establishment of a project that compliments the existing municipal program of grants, awards and residencies.

Our suggestion is to award the use and autonomous artistic leadership of a visible, central space in Bergen on a rotational yearly basis. Proposals would be submitted for a one-year term, outlining an artistic program with emphasis on experimental strategies for curating and production, to be selected by a committee. Proposals should also be required to specify a team of co-workers and collaborators that *could* have an international reach.

Some of the most obvious benefits of such a project would be as follows:

- To provide artists and curators with unique opportunities and public exposure, while showcasing the breadth and diversity of Bergen's experimental art scene.
- To help the development and cross-pollination of new approaches to artistic production and curatorship.
- Provide a radical and inspiring addition to Bergen's established institutions, which have long-term leadership.
- Provide a suitable platform where practitioners from institutional and non-institutional backgrounds can collaborate.

This new approach to arts infrastructure would provide a stable, professional context in which innovative new approaches to production, curating and presentation could be elevated from the less stable, less resourced environments that are generally associated with independent art.

We suggest that such a curatorship could be situated in different buildings depending on availability and other considerations, so as not to require a permanent site. Rather than requiring a permanent location, we suggest that such a project would require a small permanent staff (possibly no more than one administrator / producer).

Proposal #4 - All-inclusive map showing all sites of artistic production and presentation

We propose that the arts plan should aim to support the production and distribution of a comprehensive and all-inclusive map of Bergen showing every site of production and presentation in the city. This map would be available at all major hotels, tourist information sites and cafés. It should contain a brief description and contact info for each site.

The production and distribution of such a map could be undertaken in various collaborative constellations such as:

- Collaboration between Bergen Council and major art institutions such as Kode, USF and DNS.
- Collaboration between Bergen Council, BAS and engaged independent artists.
- Collaboration between Bergen Council and organisations such as Bergen Sentrum AS and Bergen Reiselivslag.
- Collaboration between Bergen Council and Kaskjerbergen.

Proposal #5 - Inclusive listing

We propose that the arts plan acknowledges the importance of a comprehensive, inclusive and unbiased listing of all art and cultural events taking place around the city. We understand that Kaskjerbergen is making great progress with this. It is important that such an initiative is able to survive, maintain an inclusive profile, and be visible.

Proposal #6 - Acknowledgement of the hierarchy of visibility

We propose that the arts plan should acknowledge the challenge of visibility, and the dangers of locking institutions and initiatives into preconceived positions. This would be beneficial for the development of a more multifaceted arts scene in Bergen.

The Arts Plan should highlight the importance of aiming for democratic and inclusive strategies to provide all projects and institutions with opportunities to be visible.

We propose to combat the hierarchy of visibility by providing better opportunities for programmers and curators to be noticed. Institutions should be recognized for their new ambitions and ideas, not only their traditional place within the arts infrastructure.

Proposal #3 responds to these issues concretely.

Proposal #7 - Retaining experience within the art work force

The arts plan should include measures that encourage artists to continue working throughout a long-term career within the arts.

Retaining people and experience within the artistic workforce will prevent the loss of important experience and knowledge within the art scene. A constant loss of experience leads to poor development. The aim should be to nurture a variety of experience that can be processed and passed on in order to develop a mature and sophisticated art scene with both young and experienced artists.

One effective measure that would address this issue would be to prioritize more working grants (arbeidsstipend) for artists in Bergen.