

Bridging digital

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IO1 Report

Report on digital technology
in the performing arts sector in Sweden

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Overview	2
About Bridging Digital	2
Key Conclusions	3
Method	3
Our Sources	4
Reports and Surveys	4
Interviews and Webinars	5
Current Presence of Digital Technology	5
Challenges	6
Competence	6
Resources	6
Reaching and Connecting with the Audience	7
Conclusion	8
Reference List	10
Reports & Surveys	10
Other sources	11
Selected list of examples	12

Overview

The purpose of this report is to showcase and summarise the results from the mapping of the current status of competence and use of digital technology in the performing art sector in Sweden.

About Bridging Digital

Bridging Digital is a cooperative European Erasmus + project focusing on innovative practices and enhancing the digital skills in the creative and informal education sectors. The project's overall aim is to create a cross-learning between the creative-, the educational- and the technical sectors. Through a combination of learning digital techniques and creating new artistic formats with digital techniques as an integrated part of the artwork.

The creative sector overall lacks knowledge on how to use digital tools in more creative ways, both for teaching and for creating digital art forms that are more interactive and engaging for the audience. Digital technology as a part of their productions was not part of regular practices for many professionals in the culture sector across Europe prior to the covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions it brought upon the creative sector.

In Bridging Digital organisations in the cultural sector will cooperate with artists, multimedia experts and teachers in adult education to create a new methodology for using digital techniques to enhance the digital competence in the creative sector.

Bridging Digital is a cooperative project between four European partner organisations - City Culture Institute from Poland, Hellenic Adult Education Association from Greece, Fablevision from the UK and Intercult from Sweden. The partners have each chosen different focus areas and target groups in the cultural sector and adult education.

The primary target group for the Swedish part of the project are professionals in the performing art sector, such as artists, actors, dancers, technicians etc. We have estimated this group to consist of about 150 free, independent theaters and 100 established theater institutions. Our secondary target group is teachers in the same sector. Of these, 15 artists will take part in our upcoming case study, along with 5 teachers.

The mapping, the initial part of the Bridging Digital project, was performed in order to gather intel on the current level of competence and use of digital technology. Intel that will serve as a guidance for creating the most beneficial learning opportunities during the continuation of this project.

Key Conclusions

Based on the results from our desktop research and interviews conducted by Smart for the Digital Blackbox-project, we can draw a number of conclusions on the current status of digital technology and its use among professionals in the performing art sector in Sweden.

- Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic there has been a significant increase in the use of digital technology in the performing art sector.
- There is a widespread, a least perceived, lack of digital competence among those active in the sector.
- There is a widespread lack of resources for different kinds of investments in digital technology.
- The interaction between the audience and the performers is a central part of the performance, but many find it hard to replicate when producing digitalised performances.

Method

The primary target group for the mapping process, as well as the Swedish part of Bridging Digital as a whole, are the performing art sector in Sweden. This includes both independent theater groups and established theater institutions, including actors, directors, dancers, producers etc.

The information collected during this mapping process primarily comes from desktop research, with reports and surveys created by or commissioned by an authority or sector associations as sources. The information also comes from conclusions from the interviews for Digital BlackBox, a project with a similar goal. The conclusion was done by the interviewer.

We have also compiled a list of a number of performers who in some way incorporate digital technology into their works. A key source for this list was webinars from Stockholm Fringe Festival.

All partners participating in the project had a common set of questions to attempt to answer in the mapping process, these were:

- What are the key direct and indirect target groups for your project?
- Define the overall size sector of your target groups
- How many people from target groups will take part in your case study?
- How many people from your target group you may reach in the dissemination phase?
- What are the ways to disseminate results of your work to the sector – what indicators could you name that would provide you back info that the communication was successful?
- How broad is the use of digital technologies in the field you will be working with?
- How many organisations use DT?
- What kind of organisations use DT more than others?
- Where? Are there any differences between big cities and smaller towns/rural areas in the area you plan to work in?
- What kind of digital technologies are being developed and implemented in the field?
- In what kind of activities – production, communication, remote cooperation, artistic expression etc. What are the reasons to use them?

- How has the last year changed the use of DT in your field of interest?
- What new practices have emerged? Where did the innovation come from?
- Who had difficulties? Who coped best? Why?
- What are the key areas where you hope to introduce DT in the discipline of art/culture? Why?
- What are the difficulties in using DT in the field of your interest?
- What digital capacities does your target group need?
- Where can they learn how to use DT in their work?

Our Sources

The following section will present a summary of our sources and what insights they have contributed with in this mapping of the performing arts sector.

Reports and Surveys

The surveys and reports used as sources in this mapping process are made or commissioned by either the Swedish government, an authority or by a sector association in the performing sector. Included are surveys and reports published both prior to and during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The sources focus either on the performing arts sector, address it as a part of a survey of the culture sector as a whole or of multiple fields of Swedish society, but they all address digitalisation of culture and/or the consequences of the covid-19 pandemic. Since the majority of them doesn't address performing arts exclusively the amount of information on the specific situation of the performing arts sector is limited, despite a significant volume of available material on the topic of digitalisation of the culture sector. Found in these sources is a number of recurring challenges and insights that seems to be close to universal in the performing arts sector and in some cases the Swedish culture sector as a whole. These challenges often interfere with their ability to develop their use of digital technology, for example in the way they interact with an audience.

The authorities who have authored the reports and surveys included in our sources are either focused on culture, such as Myndigheten för kulturanalys (The authority for cultural analysis) or Statens Kulturråd (Swedish Arts Council). Or have a responsibility related to digitalisation, such as Post- och telestyrelsen (Swedish Post and Telecom Authority).

Svensk scenkonst (Swedish Performing Arts Association) is a sector association in the performing art sector. Besides providing a more focused perspective on performing art than the rest of our sources, documents authored by them have also contributed valuable information to the mapping regarding the audience perspective on digital technology, through their survey on media consumption.

The government commissioned reports has first and foremost been mapping of the culture sector, in order to determine if there's a need for adjustment of the cultural politics, such as government issued grants.

Interviews and Webinars

For their project “Digital Blackbox” Smart, a Swedish daughter organisation of Intercult, has interviewed about 20 performing art producers on the forced digitalisation caused by the pandemic. The interviews address the challenges that they as producers have faced and what is needed to increase the digital competence in the sector. The answers from the interviews have been concluded by the interviewer into a number of conclusions, which all correspond well with the information we have gathered from the rest of our sources. ¹

As a part of the mapping we also listened in on webinars from Stockholm Fringe Festival (STOFF) an annual multidisciplinary arts festival. The 2021 edition took place in September, with a significant part of the programme broadcast live via Zoom. The programme included a number of conversations with invited creators about digital technology and performing arts. The discussions touch on the panelists’ experiences of both using digital technology as part of the performance and as a tool for cross-border collaborations. ² Since the by STOFF invited guests were so on the basis of their frequent use of, and high competence in, digital technology they shouldn't be used as representative examples for the digital competence in the Swedish performing arts sector. For this mapping they have first and foremost been used as a source of examples of the use of digital technology as an integrated part of the performances.

Current Presence of Digital Technology

According to several of the sources present in our desktop research the number of performing art institutions, groups and artists that create content with some kind of digital technology involved have significantly increased in conjunction with the pandemic. ³

The increase consists first and foremost of digitalised versions of performances, either recordings or live streams, who have been made available either through the institutions or artists own streaming service or via larger, third party websites such as Youtube. ⁴ Only a limited number of groups or individuals in the performing arts sector used digital platforms prior to the pandemic, mostly larger and public funded of which a majority can be found in urban areas. But as of the pandemic more smaller stages and artists have begun to create and upload digital content as well. ⁵

Apart from digitalised performance, made available through the internet, most of the performing arts sector in Sweden seems to be focused on trying out ways to use VR and in some cases AR. But the groups or individuals who incorporate the technology into the performance in that way are very few, at least the ones who are

¹ Smart, *Digital Black box*. <http://smartse.org/sv/digital-blackbox/>, 2021--10-05.; Email from Helen Riise to Pixie Hård av Segerstad, 2021-10-04.

² “EVENTS”, Stockholm Fringe Festival. <<https://stoff.ssboxoffice.com/events/?&genre=109&season=82>>, 2021-09-12

³ Post- och telestyrelsen, *Digital omställning till följd av covid-19*, 2021, s.21-22; Svensk scenkonst, *Framtidens Kulturkonsumtion*, 2021, s.20,22; SOU 2021:77 Från kris till kraft. Återstart för kulturen, 2021, s.121.

⁴ SOU 2021:77 Från kris till kraft, s.122.

⁵ Post- och telestyrelsen, *Digital omställning till följd av covid-19*, s.21-22.

somewhat established and well known. Invited guests at the STOFF-festival, such as Bombina Bombast, Darling Desperados and Robin Jonsson being some of the few Swedish examples.⁶

Challenges

Below is a compilation of the main challenges that professionals in the Swedish performing arts sector are facing when using digital technology.

Competence

A recurring concern brought up in the examined material is a, at least perceived, lack of digital competence among those active in the field. This is explained as a product of their limited experience.

As mentioned above, most of the professionals in performing art had little to no experience with creating any form of digital content prior to the limitation on public gatherings due to the pandemic, which forced the performing arts sector to rapidly move their focus to digital formats.⁷ An increased level of competence is, according to previous research, a necessity in order to improve the quality of recorded performances and to use technology in order to evolve their work.⁸ Beyond competence in digital technology, producing digitalised performing art also requires a new type of artistic competence, in order to create a comparable digital version of the analog original, which was noted by Statens Kulturråd (Swedish Arts Council) already back in 2016.⁹

According to our mapping the amount of learning opportunities on digital technology in performing art is limited. Most of them have been hosted by sector associations and the examples we've been able to find is, with a few exceptions, in the genre of low budget, D.I.Y type of activities, such as selftape, how to run a social media account etc.¹⁰

Resources

The other significant challenge for creators of performing art in Sweden when it comes to using digital technology is a lack of resources. According to a survey commissioned by the Swedish government a lack of economic resources is effectively discouraging the performing arts sector from developing their work with digital technology.¹¹ For the groups and artists who first and foremost create analog and location based

⁶ "EVENTS", Stockholm Fringe Festival.

⁷ SOU 2021:77 Från kris till kraft, s.220-221.

⁸ SOU 2021:77 Från kris till kraft, s.126.

⁹ Statens Kulturråd, *Ökad digitalisering av offentligt finansierad kultur i Sverige*, 2016. s.18.

¹⁰ Dansalliansen "Lär dig filma dans", 2020 . <<https://ansok.dansalliansen.se/workshop/lar-dig-filma-dans>>, 2021-10-01.; TeaterAlliansen, *Verksamhet 2020*, 2021. <<https://teateralliansen.se/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/TeaterAlliansen-verksamhet-2020-Slutversion-2021-04-28.pdf>>, 2021-09-29.

¹¹ SOU 2021:77 Från kris till kraft, s.220-221.

performances, the creation of digital versions result in additional costs. As they need to dedicate resources for competent staff, technological equipment and other infrastructure, such as digital platforms, etc. Content available through the internet also results in an increased cost for copyrights.¹²

There also seems to exist a widespread uncertainty regarding the monetizing of digital content. According to the sector association Svensk Scenkonst (Swedish Performing Arts Association) a majority of the public funded institutions haven't monetized their digital content. In order to make it sustainable from an economic standpoint, they need both an increase in funding and new revenue models.¹³

And according to a survey done by Svensk Scenkonst the quantity of the audience interested in watching digital performing art is very low and those willing to pay for it is even lower.¹⁴ This creates an uncertainty regarding how a continued investment in digital technology can be made profitable, especially in a way that doesn't affect the rest of their creative work in a negative fashion. The increased amount of available digital content also contributes to an increased expectation regarding its quality.¹⁵ Possibly making it even harder to catch the interest of the audience.

As of now the type of investment needed to to develop their digital competence isn't something that many of the producers of performing art can financially manage. In order to achieve a continued development of the digital content produced there need to be a change to the current economic structures and cultural politics as they still only accommodate for an analog consumption of culture.¹⁶

This can be compared to concerts with popular music, which monetizing of content has been common since the start of the pandemic.

Reaching and Connecting with the Audience

An aspect where the difference between digitalised and traditional, on location stage performances is apparent is in the interaction with the audience. Even though many of the institutions and artists heard in the surveys have begun to produce digital content they express a longing for an opportunity to be able to meet an audience participating on location again. This is an aspect of performing art that appears to be central to audience members as well. According to Svensk Scenkonst's survey 67% claim that experiencing the performance on location among other people is a "very important" part of the experience.¹⁷

Even though a big portion of the material examined in this mapping process claims that digitally available content has the potential to reach a wider audience there exist, especially at publicly funded institutions, a concern over risking to alienate or

¹² SOU 2021:77 Från kris till kraft, s.122.

¹³ SOU 2021:77 Från kris till kraft, s.19; Svensk scenkonst, *Framtidens Kulturkonsumtion*, 2021, s.28.

¹⁴ Svensk scenkonst, *Framtidens Kulturkonsumtion*, 2021, s.30-31; Svensk scenkonst, *Framtidens Kulturkonsumtion*, 2020, s.33-35; Post- och telestyrelsen, *Digital omställning till följd av covid-19*, s. 29.

¹⁵ SOU 2021:77 Från kris till kraft, s.220-221.

¹⁶ SOU 2021:77 Från kris till kraft, s.121-122, s.134.

¹⁷ Svensk scenkonst, *Framtidens Kulturkonsumtion*, 2020, s.19; SOU 2021:77 Från kris till kraft, s.170.

exclude audience members by creating more digital and internet dependent content. Specifically elderly and underprivileged groups in society, due to a perceived lack of digital competence and access to technology among these groups.¹⁸

The increase of content available through digital platforms has also made it even more of a challenge, especially for smaller creators, to reach a possible audience. According to a survey commissioned by the Swedish government, the larger amount makes it difficult for the audience to find content other than what's available through the big mainstream platforms.¹⁹ A possible solution to this could be a digital platform dedicated to performing art, available for smaller creators to upload their performance to. A type of niche platform that does exist in other countries, but currently not in Sweden. In a study from 2016 Statens kulturråd shared an ambition to themselves create and host a national platform available to both commercial and publicly funded institutions from different fields in the cultural sector in Sweden.²⁰ This platform has, as of late 2021, still not been made into reality. Similar initiatives have since been proposed by multiple interested parties, especially during 2020 and 2021, such as the membership organisation Scensverige (Swedish Centre of International Theatre Institute) in spring of 2020.²¹

Although several of the artists and institutions heard in several of the examined sources claim to be interested in continuing to create and develop their digital content, many claim to be longing for a physical audience. Many also claim that they have an intent to continue producing digital content, but as more of a compliment to their regular, analog work and stage productions.²²

Beyond just improving the quality of their content, learning how to interact with the audience in new and more engaging ways when creating performing art for a digital platform seems to be the most beneficial subject for learning opportunities for professionals in the performing arts sector as of right now.

Conclusion

A large portion of the Swedish performing art sector began using digital tools as a sort of panic response to the restrictions due to the pandemic. And even though many of them claim to long for a physical audience, many of them say that they at least have the ambition to continue to make digital content. Though as the restrictions are being rolled back, as more of a compliment to their analog content. However there is an uncertainty in how to make it financially sound, while still being appealing to watch. Since the interest in Sweden for watching digitalised performing arts is, according to our sources, very low and paying for it is even lower.

¹⁸ Myndigheten för kulturanalys, *En översyn av pandemins effekter inom kulturområdet*, 2021, s. 9, 23.; SOU 2021:77, Från kris till kraft, s.22.

¹⁹ SOU 2021:77, Från kris till kraft, s.199.

²⁰ Statens Kulturråd, *Ökad digitalisering av offentligt finansierad kultur i Sverige*. s.36.

²¹ Scensverige, "Finns behov av digital plattform för streamad scenkonst?", 2020. <<https://scensverige.se/blog/2020/03/23/https-scensverige-se-pressmeddelande-streaming-pdf/>>, 2021-11-11.

²² SOU 2021:77, Från kris till kraft, s.122-123 ; Eric Sjöström, *Omstart för scenkonsten*, Svensk Scenkonst, 2020, s.28.

A way to increase said interest could be to make content of higher quality or something that's clearly different from a normal performance. In both cases they would most likely need higher competence and as well as resources in the form of equipment and infrastructure to accomplish that. They need to learn and possibly develop new ways to use digital technology, for example new ways to set up a livestream to make it more engaging than just watching a performance on a screen.

And this isn't a challenge exclusive to the performing art sector. According to our sources, of which many focus on the consequences of the pandemic in multiple different fields, most of the Swedish cultural sector have struggled more or less with digital technology during these last two years. But with the lack of resources and competence in common. With the film- and gaming industry and recorded music as the exceptions, digital technology wasn't that commonly used in the Swedish culture sector before the pandemic more or less forced the cultural field to resort to it.

According to some of the reports performing art is among the fields who struggle a little more, because they had an overall very limited usage of digital technology. A reason for this could be that there exists an opinion that performing art and digital technology, especially digital platforms, should be kept separate as they risk to "ruin the magic" of watching a live performance on location. That theater is supposed to be experienced live. This opinion brings us back to the aforementioned need to improve the interactions when creating performing art with digital technology.

It's difficult to say anything more precise about the struggles of performing artists since, as mentioned above, most of the reports and surveys included in our sources cover the whole culture sector or some even the whole Swedish society. But the need to interact with their audience and a, at least perceived, lack of competence, and a wish to increase it, is something that seems to be central to the field's relationship with digital technology as of now.

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2021-11-11.

Selected list of examples

The following pages presents a selected list of performances by Swedish performing artists and groups who incorporate digital technology in their works:

Bombina Bombast, with Danish film studio Makropol. *The Shared individual*. 2016.

<<https://www.bombinabombast.com/sharedindividual>>, 2021-09-15.

Description: A camera live streams from the point of view of an actor on stage, to VR-headsets worn by the audience members.

Bombina Bombast. *A.I.-partiet [The A.I. party]*. 2020.

<<https://www.bombinabombast.com/kopia-p%C3%A5-fast-feed-1?lang=en>>, 2021-09-15.

Description: A performance that has been compared to an escape room, focuses on interactivity. Uses VR, projections and 3D-animations. The story centers around a political party run by an A.I.

Bombina Bombast. *The Big Boo*. 2021. <<https://www.bombinabombast.com/the-big-boo>>, 2021-09-15.

Description: Point of view (First person perspective), through a VR-headset, from one of the characters in a movie.

Darling Desperados. *The art of facing fear*. 2020.

<<http://www.darlingdesperados.com/the-art-of-facing-fear/>>, 2021-09-15.

Description: Theater play performed during 2020 live through Zoom, created by the Swedish independent theatre group Darling Desperados. It was performed with multiple different casts to accommodate different time zones. The play also incorporated elements of improv, based on audience members' testimonies during discussions in breakout rooms halfway through the play.

Darling Desperados. *The Road*. 2021. <<http://www.darlingdesperados.com/>>, 2021-09-15.

Description: Performance created by artists from South Africa, France and Sweden.

Combination of 3D animations, virtual reality and live theater. The show can be seen both live and online.

Folkteatern. *Urgent Drama*. 2020. <<https://fjardescenen.folkteatern.se/node/19>>, 2021-10-08.

Description: A series of short plays created by international writers for Fjärde Scenen [Fourth Stage], their stage dedicated to performances created for digital platforms. By themselves describe as a "emergency response" to the pandemic.

Jonsson, Robin. *Other than human*. 2020. <<https://www.robinjonsson.net/other-than-human>>, 2021-09-15.

Description: A dance performance/lecture with a small robot. Focus on the interaction between Alex, the robot, and the human participants.

Jonsson, Robin. *Alone together*. 2021. <<https://www.robinjonsson.net/alone-together>>, 2021-09-15.

Description: A VR-dance performance created by Swedish choreographer Robin Jonsson.

VR-sets and controllers are used by both dancers and audience. Also digital avatars of both the audience and the performing dancers. Focus on interactions between the dancers and the audience. Performed live, with the dancers in motion capture suits.

Kungliga Operan [Royal Swedish Opera]. *Half Life – The Ultimate VR Experience*. 2018. <<https://www.operan.se/media/video/the-ultimate-vr-experience-with-the-royal-swedish-ballet/>> , 2021-10-08. Description: A performance of Half Life by Sharon Eyles recorded from 60 different angles, to create a VR-environment. Created in collaboration with a Swedish production company specializing in virtual reality.

Magma Dans. *Residens i Gnosjö*. 2021 <<https://helenafranzen.se/>>, 2021-09-15. Description: Three recorded dance performances, only available through scanning an associated QR-kod, located at the same location as the video was recorded.

Smålands Musik & Teater, Riksteatern [National theatre] and Operahögskolan i Stockholm. *Opera extravaganza!*. 2018. <<https://www.smot.se/opera-extravaganza/>>, 2021-10-08. Description: Opera performance with the orchestra and singers on two separate geographical locations, without noticeable lag. Possible due to new “fiber optic” technology.

Unga Klara, De kommer drunkna i sina Mödrars Tårar [They will drown in their mother's tears] <<https://www.ungaklara.se/scen/de-kommer-att-drunkna-i-sina-modrars-tarar>>, 2021-11-10. Description: Example of already existing performance that has been modified to better fit a digital format.

Stockholms Konstnärliga Högskola [Stockholm University of the Arts] and Glimåkra Folkhögskola, Studentarbete [Student projekt] <<https://www.uniarts.se/aktuellt/nyheter/lyckat-studentsamarbete-med-hjalp-av-digitala-losningar>>, 2021-11-13. Description: An interdisciplinary collaboration between students from two different courses (dance teacher and ceramicist). A dance performance inspired by and performed in front of a video showing the ceramicists working.