Readiness for and Resistance to Public Pedagogy in the University: Reflections from a Student-Led Festival

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Abstract

Historically, music universities' craft-centeredness and sedimented conservatory tradition have led them to focus largely on disciplinary exceptionalism, and thereby inadvertently position themselves as politically neutral and structurally siloed from society. Yet, they educate professionals who carry social responsibilities into public life. This article examines how a student-led arts festival can challenge this assumed political neutrality and reconfigure the university as a public space through the lens of public pedagogy. We analyse the Festival of Resistances, organized by two students of the Sibelius Academy and held in Helsinki in the summer of 2025 to promote voices against occupation in different parts of the world, including the protracted Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip. The festival was held in a public square next to the university building, suggesting physical closeness, but the institutional frictions surrounding its organization rather point to institutional distance. Using collective autoethnography methods, we reflect on the perspectives of the two main organizers, who are also co-authors of this article, to examine how artistic action in public space can disrupt hierarchical and siloed practices. Drawing on Hanna Arendt's notion of freedom appearing through collective action, we argue that music's performative and interruptive qualities become pedagogically significant when they turn educational questions into political ones. We argue that the educational potential of public pedagogy not only emerges from occupying public space, but also requires that students are recognized by the university and by themselves as educative agents. The complex negotiations around this recognition process are necessary to increase the readiness within institutions to link higher music education to social change, thereby bridging the siloes of the university.

Keywords

Collective autoethnography, festival, higher music education, public pedagogy, resistance, university

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Introduction

In this article, we draw on theorizations of public pedagogy (Biesta, 2012; Giroux, 2003) to examine how a student-led public music and arts event, the *Festival of Resistance(s)*, reconfigured the institutional space of the university towards contact with a multiplicity of publics. The Festival of Resistance(s) was organized by two students of the intercultural, multi-musical, and collaboratively operated Global Music Program of the Sibelius Academy, which, as the newest program among more traditional music programs at the Sibelius Academy, aims to provide a space that is low in hierarchy and pedagogically open for its internationally diverse students to develop transcultural music making. The festival was held in Helsinki in the summer of 2025 to promote voices against occupation in different parts of the world, including the protracted Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip. It occurred simultaneously within and outside the Sibelius Academy, involving students and staff in complex negotiations and raising pertinent questions regarding the ways that the university is siloed from society, as well as how to dismantle these silos through public pedagogy.

Universities are social spaces where the next generation of societal actors are equipped for the future. Included in the teaching mandate of any university is the development of critical professionals who can go on to either maintain or challenge societal power hierarchies and political values (Davids & Waghid, 2021). This mandate becomes more complex within music universities (or music departments within universities), which not only teach for the future but also often seek to maintain cultural, pedagogical, and musical traditions, and have repeatedly been described as deeply conservative institutions (Ford, 2010; Kingsbury, 2001; Perkins, 2013). Part of this conservatism is rooted in the idea and practice of political neutrality, which is in turn based on 18th and 19th century debates about craft-centred musical autonomy (see Paddison, 2001, for an overview) and more recent philosophical arguments for aesthetic education (e.g., Reimer, 2002). Our specific interest in political neutrality lies in the notion of a "sanitized" vision of music for music's sake (Woodford, 2019), also manifested in university communities that narrow the educational focus to musical matters alone, by for example, eliminating the political questions related to music performance (such as who gets to perform, what is performed, and where) (see Westerlund & Odendaal, 2025). Considering that the institution of the university can, and should, be seen as a political actor within broader society (Weimer & Nokkala, 2020; Davids & Waghid, 2021), it seems relevant to ask: How could the traditionally siloed (music) university consciously move from its quasi-neutral, modernist separation from broader society and societal issues towards a radically inclusive *pluriversity*—a world within which many worlds could fit (Escobar, 2017)? From a pluriversal perspective, university communities should not maintain (universal) silo mentalities where exclusive thinking and restricted expression are hidden behind a claimed political neutrality. Indeed, a music university community that "perpetuates 'neutrality' not only fails to equip students with political agency, but also indoctrinates them into the status quo" (Laes et al., 2024, p. 463). Instead, music communities within a university could value interconnectedness between different worlds and allow for opposing views by creating, writing, illustrating, acting, singing, and playing a *pluriverse* (Escobar, 2017). The complex ethical and value-driven questions of whether students should follow institutional norms or proactively change or transgress them, whether teachers should support students who want to promote political causes within their institutions or shield them from ideological capture, and whether leaders should protect the institution from politics or instead promote political action, involve university communities in fraught political negotiations (see Laes et al., 2025; Laes et al., in press).

In this article, we explore the kind of student-led educational work that can be undertaken to reclaim or reinvigorate the public sphere within the university context. Through a discussion of the intersection of the public sphere and public space, we engage with the work of Hannah Arendt (1958) to outline a conception of the public sphere as a space for civic action based on distance and the conservation of a degree of strangeness rather than on commonality and common identity, and Gert Biesta's (2006, 2012, 2020, 2022) theorization that reconnects educational work and public pedagogy. While much of the scholarship on public pedagogy positions formal education as outside the interests of the public sphere, and considers public pedagogy as something that ideally takes place in informal contexts (see, e.g., Charman & Dixon, 2021, 2024), in this article, we explore its potential within the university, addressing the following research question:

What does the case of the festival reveal about the place and practice of public pedagogy within universities?

Our analysis in this article is inspired by collective autoethnography that can "shape individual perspectives and influence collective actions" (Lapadat, 2017, p. 593) and aims "to identify elements of […] collective experience that point the way toward meaningful change within [an] organisation" (p. 599). We analyse the authors' autoethnographic accounts from the festival day, based on Tuulikki's and Albi's experiences as spectators and participants, and Sami's and Mia's experiences as the main organizers of the festival, which are supported by artefacts and materials, such as videos taken at the festival, posters, and related texts created by Mia (course assignment, 2025) and Sami (Bachelor's thesis, 2025). While "conducting group research adds breadth to data sources and rigour to analyses" (Lapadat, 2017, p. 600), there are methodological and ethical challenges to consider, including "establishing shared goals, agreeing how the group will work together, and meeting timelines" (p. 600). The analysis is constructed as an interplay between reading the materials, co-writing reflections, and engaging in an ongoing dialogue among the authors. It is supported by the shared working and studying environment and physical context familiar to all the authors, namely the Sibelius Academy, which is part of one of Europe's largest art universities (the University of the Arts Helsinki), and accommodates approximately 1400 undergraduate music students. That the participants have different academic positions and aspirations, live in different countries, and have alternative perspectives on the phenomenon (as students, organizers, performers, activists, and researchers) were recognized as challenges, but also as a source of richness that supported the creation and analysis of the account.

The emergence of the festival

The university website states that the Global Music Department of the Sibelius Academy develops "a pluralistic and fluid approach to sound, music, culture, and identity, creating a pedagogical space where musicians are supported in developing their own voices, exchanging and merging practices, and creating through intercultural collaboration."[1] The term *global music* is here defined in an open sense as the application of multidisciplinary and collaborative inter-artistic approaches through pluralistic forms of musical expression, mediated by a broad range of musically, culturally, and socially engaged contexts, to nurture a strong sense of global citizenship and responsibility.

The study program of the Global Music Department is radical in many ways, as is, for instance, reflected in its visible effort to take a linguistic shift away from the still-prevalent and problematic term *world music*. According to Canadian researcher Juliet Hess, the term *world music* carries

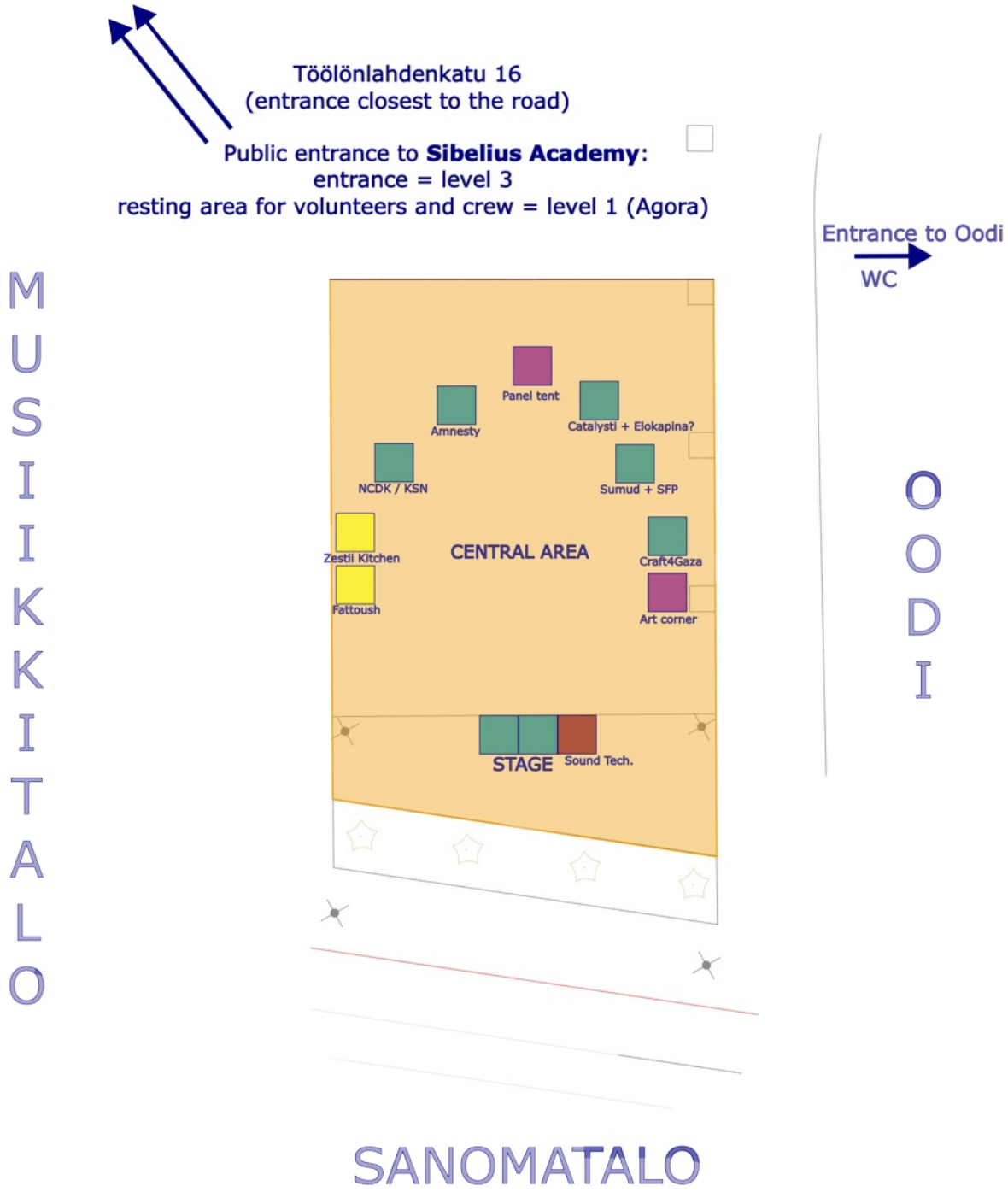
[1] https://www.uniarts.fi/en/units/global-music-department/ (Accessed on the 6th of November, 2025)

meanings that evoke the Western dichotomy of "Us" and "Them" (Hess 2013, p. 67). While *world music* studies remain marginalized within the institutional context, the Global Music Department represents an exceptional higher music education program with significant transformative potential. Here, traditions and musical practices are positioned as *different* from each other, but not in a hierarchical relationship; the differences are rather *centric* (Hess 2015, p. 343), since the culture and musics being studied are placed at the centre of knowledge formation. Hess notes that in traditional conservatoire settings—through the process of cultural commodification and the implementation of cultural tourism in the classroom—the ethnic becomes a kind of "spice in the bland soup of white mainstream culture" (p. 73). The Global Music Department, however, seeks to overcome this binarity by activating the students' identity formation through various holistic learning practices, striving to reach beyond this pedagogical divide.

In the Spring semester of 2024, Sami, then a second-year bachelor student in the Global Music Department, was preparing his end-of-year concert, envisioned as a suite for six percussionists and singers under the title *Pierrot et la guerre* (*Pierrot and the War*), a piece that served to underline the rapid expansion of global conflicts. During the preparation, the university's leadership addressed a general concern about the use of the institution's official communication channels and physical space to voice opposition to the ongoing genocide in Gaza, following the example of other universities in Finland that sought to limit student mobilisation at that time, thereby suppressing students' freedom of speech. Sami responded to this act of control by transforming the stage reserved for his concert into a site of protest against institutional silencing and the suppression of students' involvement in the pro-Palestine movement, a move that could be read through the lens of educational theorist Gert Biesta's "pedagogy of interruption" (Biesta, 2006). The piece meant to be performed was replaced by Sami's speech, after which he handed the stage to a key figure in the local pro-Palestine movement, a Finnish physicist and activist Syksy Räsänen, also joined by a Helsinki-based Palestinian artist.

The Festival of Resistance(s) emerged from this concert/intervention to highlight resistance to occupation, and was organized by Sami together with Mia, a master's student in ethnomusicology at the Academy of Music, University of Zagreb (Croatia), and at that time an exchange student at the Global Music Department at the Sibelius Academy. The festival, held on the 27th of May 2025, was designed as a focal point where artists whose engaged practice resonated with the festival's theme could meet activists and members of local non-governmental organizations that support regions of the world currently under foreign occupation (Picture 1). The festival, held outdoors on the Kansalaistori (Citizens' square) in downtown Helsinki, also aimed to "occupy" public space, thereby raising awareness of issues of occupation, colonialism, and racism in a space where many citizens and tourists congregate. The festival activities included two panel discussions, a musical demonstration, an art corner, a dance performance and workshop, three concerts, and a theatre-inspired participatory practice. The full-day festival drew between 50 and 150 participants at any time. The main communities represented through the partner organizations were Palestinian, Kurdish, and Sámi. Each partner organization had a stand where they presented their activities and information about the people, regions, and cultures they represented or supported.

Figure 1. The map of the festival, located between Musiikkitalo (Music house), where the Sibelius Academy operates, Oodi (National library), and Sanomatalo (Newspaper house).



While the festival was independently student-organized, the university was partly involved, as Sami performed his final bachelor's concert as part of the festival and received some technical support from his department, while Mia connected her involvement in the festival organization as part of her coursework for the Performing the Political study module. This module was a collaboration between the Global Music Department and the ongoing *Performing the Political*[2] research project, led by Tuulikki. Musiikkitalo, a concert venue and the main building of the Sibelius Academy next to the Kansalaistori (Picture 2), was used as backstage for the artists and as a break room for volunteers.



Figure 2. The main venue of the festival: Kansalaistori (Citizens' square), surrounded by Sanomatalo (Newspaper house) (right), Oodi library (left), and Musiikkitalo (Music house) behind the photographer (not in the picture). Photo: Tuulikki Laes

[2] https://www.uniarts.fi/en/projects/performing-the-political-public-pedagogy-in-higher-music-education/

Reflecting on the festival as public pedagogy

> It is actually a particular form of action that makes spaces public—and, more specifically, whether any such spaces can still allow for action that might be characterised as 'political'. (Biesta, 2012, p. 686)

Following Hanna Arendt (1958), the university can be understood as a space of appearance in which people become public through speech and action. This making of the public in educational spaces, as also articulated by John Dewey (1927), requires that people recognize that they are affected by the indirect consequences of others' actions and seek to address them together. Indeed, for public pedagogy to emerge requires more than social gatherings, and this form of collective life is held together by communication, shared concerns, and democratic participation (Dewey, 1927). Together, these perspectives suggest that the university is not a neutral container for public engagement, but a political space in which certain publics, concerns, and forms of appearance are made imaginable, legitimate, or possible. Drawing on this understanding, Biesta (2012) frames the educational work that can be done to support the public quality of common spaces and places through three interpretations of the idea of public pedagogy: as a pedagogy *for* the public (teaching the public), as a pedagogy *of* the public (communal action with instructional approach), and as the enactment of a concern for the public quality of pedagogical action. The latter expression of public pedagogy does not intend to *teach* or *erase* the political, but rather aims to show that educational questions are also political ones. As Biesta suggests, this approach may open up the possibility for democratic forms of human togetherness through which freedom (understood in Arendtian terms) can appear, and that contribute to spaces and places "becoming public" (Biesta, 2012). This approach to *publicness* is not commonly articulated in music education, and "public" engagements are usually conceived of as *social action through music* (e.g., Baker, 2021), assumed to be external or additional to music performance in academic contexts, and thus deemed to have less value and professional status (Westerlund & Karttunen, 2024). Hence, public pedagogy, as a conceptual starting point, shifts the focus from the social to *publicness* (Biesta, 2012), and from the teacher-student divide to non-hierarchical knowledge authority (Charman & Dixon, 2024), suggesting that both teachers and students share responsibility for engaging in this public educational work. In what follows, we consider what understandings this perspective on publicness and public pedagogy can bring to the relationship between the festival and the university, including the various resistances that were encountered in the process of organizing the festival. We also consider the festival as an expression of the curriculum and consider its implications for the university.

The festival and organizers as public pedagogues

> The space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action… Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever. (Arendt, 1958, p. 199)

When we started discussing the festival and Sami and Mia's understandings of what happened as part of our preparation for this article, it came as a surprise to them that we would consider them as public pedagogues. Mia had participated in a module focusing on public pedagogy that required creating a public event with a pedagogical approach. Despite gaining a theoretical understanding of the concept of public pedagogy, it took her time to realize that the festival she had been organizing simultaneously with the course would "qualify" as public pedagogy. Sami was equally hesitant to use the "title" of public pedagogue as a theoretical framing of the work they had done

together. Initially, he only wanted to take his bachelor's concert into a public space. In the process of arranging this event, he realized that organizing a festival could support his concert and its broader communicative aims.

The festival can be seen as a project of knowledge (Charman & Dixon, 2021) in which musicians, artists, and organizers were not acting as gatekeepers *of* knowledge, but rather providing a platform *for* sharing knowledge (Lazaric, Longi, & Thomas, 2008). This resonates with the idea of public pedagogy as challenging knowledge hierarchies (Charman & Dixon, 2021). Sami and Mia realized that they had agency and knowledge that they wanted to share. While they wanted to dismantle hierarchies in their organization of the event by providing an open space where anyone could participate, they were also curating the event, and could decide who to bring in and which spaces to use. However, in this curation they worked with an intent to get people to think and understand and thereby to initiate a dialogue, with an intent to generate a public space for "speech and action" (Arendt, 1958, p. 199). They brought their particular knowledges, and curated a space that brought their and others' knowledge to the fore. In this, their aim was not just to take or claim space for the sake of resistance; rather, they wanted to speak because of who they are and what they think is important, and to create a space where others could do the same. Their attempts thus align with Gert Biesta's (2020) idea of education as subjectification, of "arousing a desire for wanting to try to live one's life in the world, without thinking oneself in the center of the world" (Philippe Meirieu [originally in French] cited in Biesta, 2020, p. 98). In other words, through their speech and action, Sami and Mia, alongside other artists and volunteers, created a potential space for freedom and agency to occur (Arendt, 1958).

Already in his first bachelor's concert, Sami wanted to "teach without being didactic". Here, he experienced an internal conflict: he wanted his message to be communicated, and the audience to really listen, but without coming across as a master or someone who "knows better". His solution to this dilemma was to engage in a discussion with experts on the Palestinian situation and position himself as not knowing, which is argued to be the 'method' for "recognising and differentiating authority from power" in the process of knowledge construction (Charman & Dixon, 2021, p. 35). He admits that this positioning was half-staged and half-genuine, but aimed at supporting the dismantling of the master-apprentice hierarchy that persists through much formal music education. In both his first bachelor's concert and the festival, there was a clear pedagogical intent to change the narrative around oppression, but Sami's approach to this was to generate a fluid pedagogical situation where nobody is fixed in the position of educator or expert (see Charman & Dixon, 2021). In this approach, he demonstrates a commitment to being an educative agent (Charman & Dixon, 2021) both in his concert and in the ways that the festival is organized. Bringing civic organizations and activists together with artists and performers created a space for the community to discuss uncomfortable topics that concern all of society. At its core, the festival was thus intended to engage the university in a public space that amplifies the voices of people who struggle against oppression and artists who support them, with the founding assumption that no one is free if some of us are not free.

Resistance as constraint and condition in the festival

> [P]edagogy's role lies not only in changing how people think about themselves and their relationship to others and the world, but also in energizing students and others to engage in those struggles that further possibilities for living in a more just society. (Giroux, 2004, pp. 63–64)

While the festival was mainly held outside on Kansalaistori, the organizers wanted to use a public foyer area (Agora) within Musiikkitalo as a place of interaction where performers and volunteers could rest. The space had been booked for the festival's use outside the hours when it is open to the public. However, there was a misunderstanding regarding the use of the space during the day, and security guards in the building were blocking people from accessing and using it. Instead of the space serving as an open space for potential interactions, firm boundaries were erected around it and a *container* perspective of the space highlighted that the venue was meant to accommodate only certain ideas, people, or activities—and not others (this juxtaposition comes from Lazaric, Longi, & Thomas, 2008). The use of the public space inside Musiikkitalo thus became controversial, and the building management was reluctant to allow students, volunteers, and artists of the festival access to the facilities, even though the space was open to the public until 9 pm.
Before the festival, the organizers had tried to establish a connection with the National Library Oodi, located on the opposite end of Kansalaistori square from Musiikkitalo, seeking the possibility of using the space there as backstage or for additional presentations. After a long delay in responding, the library finally agreed to reserve the outside space next to Kansalaistori for the festival "to avoid conflict", but did not offer inside space. Later, in our autoethnographic reflections, we had to consider whether the collaboration would have been more successful if the request had come from academic staff at the Sibelius Academy rather than students, as Oodi is frequently booked by the institution for performances. These experiences frustrated Sami and Mia, as they spent a lot of time negotiating without getting access to the public venues they hoped for. There was also reluctance to help with the festival organization within Sami's and Mia's own institution, the Sibelius Academy. Many restrictions applied not only to who could reserve the space (even professors have limited capacity to book spaces in Musiikkitalo), but also to how the space could be used (e.g., allowing only sitting and not other activities). Furthermore, equipment could not be lent for outside use due to "insurance issues".

While the Global Music Department had assisted as much as they could in the organization of the festival, the Sibelius Academy and Musiikkitalo management refused any help (material, logistical, or otherwise) despite the festival happening 150 meters away from the building and being organized mainly by two students of the Sibelius Academy. While the lack of help constrained the festival organization, which could have been experienced as resistance, Sami and Mia had decided to present resistance as a central condition of their festival by shaping a whole-family event with an emphasis on navigating common struggles through solidarity and peacebuilding. They tried to communicate this starting point and subtly navigate the meaning of "resistance" through the festival's visuals, through the curatorship of the activities organized during the festival, and the choice of organizations that would participate. Yet, the institution maintained a form of suspicion towards the festival and its purposes. In this way, the experience of resistance deriving from the institutional structures and authorities offered an ironic counterpart to the generative theme of resistance that characterized the festival. Biesta's framing of public pedagogy highlights that public action calls new beginnings into existence. In his view, resistance is not only critique—it is a *world-making* gesture (Biesta, 2022). While resistance brings forth force or power (Giroux, 2004)—for example, who gets into the building—the contradicting emergence of the resistance between the institution and the festival made public the background assumptions that usually remain invisible. This "making visible" is itself pedagogical.

Sami and Mia also reached out to other students for support through the student union. However, a member of the student union said that they were not in a position to provide resources to the festival, since the union should not engage with political ideas and rather prioritizes projects

that "have a more direct impact on their own student community". This raises an interesting question of what kinds of needs students *should* have. Do these needs include the need to be educated in an institution that leads students to see themselves as part of the social and political environment and society in which they live? Does not education's role lie in energising students towards struggles for a more just society (Giroux, 2004)? Is the institution for the students, or are the students for the institution? As this example shows, the depoliticization of educational institutions reaches beyond controlled leadership to the students and how they internalize the institution's rigid structures. It reduces public activity and the institution's visibility in the public sphere, making all forms of generative resistance and the possibility of the pedagogical interruption disappear, and providing fewer opportunities for the students to think and act in various roles in society. As Henry Giroux (2004) states, it is the responsibility of public intellectuals, such as those studying and working in higher education, "to reclaim the language of the social, agency, solidarity, democracy, and public life as the basis for rethinking how to name, theorize, and strategize a new kind of politics, notions of political agency, and collective struggle" (p. 75).

Curricular implications of the festival

> ...the world outside of an educational institution's walls plays a critical role in the development of the people who work and study on the inside. (Burdick & Sandlin, 2010, p. 350)

The educational aims of the festival were twofold. On the one hand, the aim was to give a voice to artists, activists, and interested citizens and to make these voices public. On the other hand, and in connection with the institution where the organizers study to become professional musicians, the aim was to dismantle institutional hierarchies in which those in positions of authority decide the content, space, and audience of such public events. These aims generated resistance from various institutions around the festival, who, for various reasons, did not provide the kind of support that the student organizers had hoped for. The resistance manifested mainly as organizational, either by exerting power or by appealing to organizational guidelines, but perhaps also points to the ambiguity of the educational work of such institutions. The question we are addressing in this final section is what kind of curriculum would be needed within the university to welcome and celebrate acts of public pedagogy, such as the festival, rather than attempting to resist and control them.

Sami and Mia did not organize the festival as a separate activity from their ongoing studies at the Sibelius Academy. Instead, they intentionally organized the festival in close proximity to the Musiikkitalo building and integrated their study performances and assignments into the festival. This conscious choice opened the door for the university to be involved. By occupying Kansalaistori for the festival, they not only invited the general public to engage with the message, but also demonstrated to fellow students a process of politically engaged artistic action. Furthermore, by connecting their position as university students to the festival, they invited the institution to a type of pedagogical action that is not necessarily in the curriculum or actively supported by the institution, but is useful, essential, responsible, and needed. The resistances that the festival generated through positioning students as organizers or facilitators, and through its fluid positioning as both inside and outside various institutions, acted both as a friction to the realization of the event and as an initiator of critical thinking. What was important to Sami and Mia in this process was articulating core values that they aspire to, and working out how these core values could be implemented in their interactions with the various role players and in the execution

of the festival itself. This in itself is an important area of growth, and something that university curriculum designers could take note of.

The experience of external resistance to their agentic action of planning and executing the festival was a further important source of learning. While we noted the willingness of various actors, such as partner organizations, artists, citizens, the City of Helsinki, and department leaders, to support the festival, Sami and Mia experienced an unwillingness to help from the management of the Sibelius Academy and Musiikkitalo. To unlock the potential of public pedagogy as a "pedagogy of interruption", ensuring that "education not remain merely conceptual but that there is something real at stake in it" (Biesta, 2020, p. 98), means helping students to encounter the world they live in. The festival provided a prime opportunity for such pedagogical action from the university; however, institutional education most often aims at qualification through the provision of knowledge and skills along with socialization, the "hidden curriculum" of the institution's traditions, cultures, and practices. In addition to these, Biesta (2020) suggests the third and perhaps most important educational work is *subjectification*, becoming "a self" and having ownership and responsibility for one's actions. Hence, education for subjectification asks for an interruption of the institution's "flow of intentions and initiatives" (Biesta, 2020, p. 98) to encounter multiple publics and to open moments of awakening to the possibility of existing as a self.

Through this festival, we recognise the need to build bridges between student-led initiatives and projects such as the festival and the institutions in or from which these are organized. Developing and authorizing pathways for such initiatives within the organization, whether through greater decision-making freedom for department heads, supportive policy decisions for management, or even allocating working hours for a responsible person in administration, could all support interruption as a pedagogical choice within the university. While the Sibelius Academy has a production team to support students' concert initiatives, as well as extensive music technology equipment, this team was unable to assist as soon as the project left the building due to bureaucratic and insurance requirements. However, projects that seek forms of publicness would need to take place in public spaces; not holding the festival in Kansalaistori and instead confining it to a concert hall would have limited the reach and impact of the event. Creating the possibility for these teams and equipment to operate outside the institution would be a further avenue of support for such student-led initiatives. As a whole, the festival provides a decolonial critique of the institutional structures through the use of public space and counterhegemonic educational activity by providing a reminder that there indeed is a world outside the walls of the institution (Burdick & Sandlin, 2010) that calls for public pedagogues and responsible intellectuals' world-making gestures towards social justice and solidarity.

Readiness for public pedagogy in universities

In this collective autoethnography, we have explored the Festival of Resistances as uncomfortably situated within and outside the university and the other public institutions that surround the square in which it took place. The inside/outside position of the festival produced both opportunities in the form of freedoms and new collaborations, and resistances from the institutions that could have been involved. Viewing the festival as a manifestation of public pedagogy allowed us to not only see the students who organized the festival as public pedagogues, but also to view the activities of the festival as public pedagogy. In this way, the artists as well as the public who attended the festival had the opportunity to engage in new ways of being public: not only *for* the public but also *of* the public and in the interest of the possibility of publicness (Biesta, 2012). Furthermore, the university itself has been presented with an opportunity arising from the

organization of the festival; it has an opportunity to become a more public institution, in which students and staff are challenged to consider the publicness of their artistic work and the pedagogical values that imbue this work. Enabling and encouraging students to address the diverse issues that concern them leads the university towards being a more pluriversal community (Escobar, 2017), one where many voices are given space and heard. While the festival was a single experiment, it highlights the possibilities of such public pedagogy interventions for students to grow into critical professionals and for the university curriculum to be developed in resonance with social change and community needs.

Through an Arendtian lens, the festival became not only a platform for a collective presentation of music and (political) opinions, but also a space where students appear in public through *action and speech* (Arendt, 1958). This shifts the focus from *what the festival represents* to *what becomes possible* when students appear, speak, and act in public (see Biesta, 2012). Hence, rather than approaching the festival through its possible political agenda—what seemed to be the primary concern of institutional authorities—the university might instead recognise the educational potential of the festival where the students can reveal themselves not only as musicians or learners but as public actors.

For universities to be ready for this kind of public pedagogy, and to become "vibrant critical sites of learning and unconditional sites of pedagogical and political resistance" (Giroux, 2004, p. 77), we encourage university leadership, teachers, and students to consider the following provocative questions:

- In what ways do public pedagogy experiments, such as the festival, help to open universities from institutional silos and assumed political neutrality?
- In what ways can such public pedagogy experiments be translated into the curriculum without compromising the core idea of activities such as the festival being a space of generative resistance?
- In what ways can universities provide more flexible resources in support of innovative and creative enhanced learning activities?
- In what ways can students, positioned as public pedagogues, challenge the master-apprentice logic in universities by acting outside the frames of the institution and introducing their own knowledge into learning and teaching situations?
- In what ways can pedagogical and political resistance be seen as a generative force that opens up spaces for transforming the social imaginary of the institution?

While a single case does not allow us the liberty to answer these questions for every university, it raises fruitful questions that can advance discussions about universities' readiness to share resources, address societal struggles, support their students as future professionals who carry social responsibilities into public life, and free themselves from siloed insularity in a move towards a pluriversity.

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