

# Becoming musical performance artists – Challenging organisational norms and traditional Municipal Arts School structures

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## Abstract

Music educational researchers in the Nordic countries have pointed out how municipal arts schools are organised based on, and tend to reproduce, anthropocentric values and approaches, and that such unequal norms and structures are to be challenged. Taking a border-crossing musical comedy project as a starting point, the specific aim of the current study is to illuminate how, and on what levels, organisational norms and traditional structures can be challenged, and what possibilities and new challenges that occur in a project taking place beyond the Anthropocene. To be able to grasp the aspects of becoming within the project and how that is related to aspects of organisation, we created a research entanglement based on post-human theory. Hence, situations seen as webs of relations were created, including the actors: humans with intellectual disabilities, musical performance students, educators, artists, researchers, and varied digital communication tools. Observations, video recordings, collaborative writing, qualitative surveys, and interviews produced material for analysis. Actor-network theory was applied aiming to describe how the constantly performed intra-active networks were constituted, as well as how the actors influenced each other. The results identify significant actors and trajectories in *Sammankomst*, that in turn challenge anthropocentric organisational structures of municipal arts schools.

**Keywords:** *musical comedy; municipal arts school; entanglements; actors; becoming*

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## Introduction

Municipal Arts Schools<sup>1</sup> are organised based on and tend to reproduce anthropocentric values and approaches, which implies that such unequal norms and structures

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<sup>1</sup> Municipal Arts Schools in Sweden offer after school educational activities with educated teachers in a variety of artistic art forms for a rather low cost. There are no national curricula, hence content and goals are locally formulated (SOU, 2016).

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should be challenged (Rønningen et al., 2019; SOU, 2016). In an anthropocentric world view, where humans are viewed as superior and the centre of attention, there is a risk that neo-liberal effectiveness and concurrence powers take over (Brennan & Devine, 2020). The anthropocentric structures and connected approaches seem to fit well into new public management where control and standards etc., make it hard to realise current policies (Monnin et al., 2019).

Hence, the condition of the Anthropocene must be addressed when crossing boundaries between humanities and sciences, as well as between cultures and natures (Brennan & Devine, 2020; Guattari, 2000; Haraway, 1988), which also concerns organising of activities within the frames of Municipal Arts Schools. As such, the Anthropocene calls upon music education scholars to see themselves as participants in a “becoming world”, where everything is interconnected and exploration takes place in a tentative, “trial and error” manner (Gibson-Graham, 2011). To challenge norms and structures related to both music educational research practice and to Municipal Arts School organisations, this study considers the interdependent and entangled relationships between humans and “the more-than-human world” in a Swedish musical theatre project – *Sammankomst [Cometogehterart]* – as an example of experimentation and inventively action via diverse adventures in living (Dumanoski, 2009).

### **Municipal Arts Schools in the Anthropocene**

Swedish Municipal Arts Schools are influenced by Anthropocentric, master-apprenticeship norms and values, established in arts communities and conservatoires. Activities are often organised by courses, run by “masters” in specific genres and styles, steered by effectiveness. For example, music teaching most often takes place in short one-to-one lessons (SOU, 2016). In addition, the most common participants seem to be girls from well-educated homes (Jeppsson & Lindgren, 2016). As mentioned, several Nordic scholars ask for flexible organisations of Municipal Arts Schools in line with current policy documents. To exemplify, Holgersen and Holst (2013) underline the need of understanding, openness, and flexibility to be able to develop collegial structures in municipal music schools. The same impetus becomes visible in Kronmann’s (2017) investigation, when it comes to similar educational institutions in Norway.

Väkevä et al. (2017) as well as Kivijärvi and Kaikkunen (2015) focus on how voluntary music education can become more inclusive, and less exclusive. Even Elmgren (2019, 2021) has found several, partly systemic problems that affect Finnish music school students, namely *merit-based exclusion* and *hindrances to recognition*, which are related to the norms of the institution. Based on the new core curriculum (in force in Finland since 2018), the author recognizes that it might seem that the primary issues of a lack of creativity and exclusion are taken into consideration for the first time. However, even the earlier core curricula made it

possible to reconfigure teaching at music schools with quite a lot of liberty, although the change has been slow. In Sweden, there are no governmentally established goals for the Municipal Arts Schools, which makes it even harder to expect change and let Anthropocentric values dominate. Di Lorenzo Tillborg (2021) as well as Jeppsson (2020), including Jeppsson and Lindgren (2018), enlighten the current need of the democratisation of the Municipal Arts Schools in Sweden. Swedish policy documents as Kulturskoleutredningen (SOU, 2016), as well as local policy documents guiding municipals and institutions, state that Municipal Arts Schools should be open and available “for all”. But, the research studies mentioned above show that there are tensions between inclusive forces and elitist ideals in Nordic Municipal Arts Schools. Hence, traditional ways of organising music education are still dominant, even if interventions in the form of short-term courses have been tried out as well (Jeppsson & Lindgren, 2018). Therefore, democratising potentials are not fulfilled (Di Lorenzo Tillborg, 2021) and the responsibility for change seems to be put on the principals (Jeppsson, 2020). It is also stated that the principals are intertwined with and must relate to a lot of discursive powers, which in turn must be made visible to make change possible. Still, in a globalised area, the agenda of social justice and equity of educational opportunity seem to be counteracted by global discourses of neoliberalism, which are embedded in international performance indicators, tests, and scores. Even Municipal Arts-School-teachers are assigned with diverse, and often “unbalanced”, social, and professional roles. The anthropocentric structure, where individual teaching strategies and one-to-one-tuition dominates, seems to offer safety to teachers within the frames of Municipal Arts Schools (Elmgren, 2021), which contributes to reproducing of established norms. In conclusion, it seems that organisations that allow for long lasting inclusive activities in Municipal Arts Schools must be further studied and understood, to fulfil the impetus that they should be accessible and open for “all”.

Hajisoteriou and Angelides (2020) further underline that global preoccupation with efficiency and performance has contributed to the development of an instrumental model of education, where measuring is centralised, causing the de-professionalisation of teachers, which can be recognized in Municipal Arts Schools. Such a model has in turn restricted teachers’ opportunities to mediate social justice. Nonetheless, what the authors conclude is that teachers are not “trapped” in a trade-off between efficiency and equity, even with acceptance of that neoliberalism is an inevitable top-down policy framework. Neoliberal settings can still provide spaces for teachers to act as democratic actors by developing autonomous, active, and collegial professional identities.

### **A challenging project – aim and research questions**

*Kulturverket* is a municipal organisation in the Northern part of Sweden that employs professional artists and educators to work with arts- and culture-based projects. The

organisation has, through fifteen years and several funded projects, developed a working model labelled the Relay-model: “Kids tell the pro’s what to do”. For example, an opera can be initiated by five-year-old children composing music, transferred to older Municipal Arts School students who take the opera compositions a bit further, given to composition students at university level who complete the compositions, and finally the opera is arranged and refined by professional artists (Ferm Thorgersen & Georgii-Hemming, 2012).

Accordingly, all participants are seen and valued as co-creators, who take part in collaboration, visualising and generating ideas guided by *Kulturverket*. Such an approach is closely connected with organisational structures, collegial atmosphere, didactic tools, and relational situations where arts becoming is taking place (Ferm Almqvist, 2019). Since the fall of 2020, *Kulturverket* constitutes a part of the Municipal Arts School. Organisational negotiations are currently taking place regarding how *Kulturverket’s* border-crossing activities could be applied to the structures of the arts school. This includes measuring how many students are engaged during a semester, that the activities must be organised as courses, and that teachers must be employed within a specific subject area. In this article, we explore what the organisation of *Kulturverket* could contribute with when it comes to post-anthropocentric, border-crossing, equal possibilities for musical becoming. To make the exploration possible, we have chosen to investigate the three-year musical theatre project *Sammankonst* as an example. The project includes adolescents with intellectual disabilities<sup>2</sup>, adolescent folk-high school musical theatre students, and *Kulturverket’s* artists and educators, all contributing with ideas, life stories, and arts abilities. When the current analysis took place, *Sammankonst* had been running for one and a half years out of three.

The specific aim of this study is to illuminate how organisational norms and traditional structures are challenged, and what possibilities and new challenges that could occur in a project, taking place beyond the Anthropocene-based structures of a Municipal Arts School, using a post-human approach. Three research questions were formulated.

- 1) What can the organisation model of *Kulturverket* contribute with when it comes to opening for post-anthropocentric approaches to the art learning activities?
- 2) How are actors intra-acting when *Kulturverket*, adolescents with intellectual disabilities, and adolescent musical theatre students are to create a musical together, and how is that related to the organisation of the activities?
- 3) What becomings are visible in the entanglements constituting *Kulturverket’s* project *Sammankonst* as a network?

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<sup>2</sup> Intellectual disability is characterized by several limitations in mental, emotional, cognitive, and functioning (cf. Rakgadi & Thupayagale-Tshweneagae, 2019).

## **A post-human approach**

To apply post-human perspectives on educational research can have consequences both when it comes to educational practice and what research is all about (Blaikie et al., 2020). Post-humanism offers specific understanding of humans as intertwined with other actors. The key idea of post-humanism is “entanglements” (Alaimo, 2016; Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010). The concept refers to an assemblage of entities and beings, of humans and more than humans, materialities, and discourses. Actors are, based on this approach, seen as non-distinct and non-autonomous. All actors influence other actors as well as the systems they are intertwined with. As a researcher, it becomes vital to recognise and take responsibility for the entanglements we are active in, and to conduct research in line with that. As educational researchers, it also becomes important to acknowledge educational situations as human-more-than-human-entanglements.

Accordingly, the conception of pedagogy is holistic, where boundaries are porous and students develop capacities to feel, think, and imagine themselves as well as subject areas relationally. Learners are, in other words, entangled, which, according to Blaike et al. (2020), get significant consequences for education and pedagogy regarding views of knowledge, curriculum, relationships, and participation. Hence, Blaikie et al. (2020) continues, “The point is to recalibrate teacher-learner relations, so they are neither hierarchical, nor potentially oppressive. Therefore, pedagogy can be seen as a co-created journey of discovery, rather than simple content delivery” (p. 4). The interest for educational scholars is, from post-human perspectives, to understand how learners and teachers are interconnected with space, beyond disciplines.

Taking on a post-human approach as a researcher offers possibilities to study how different processes are intertwined with each other, where human agency and becoming are entangled with and dependent of other actors (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 1991; Latour, 2005). The post-human is not seen as a singular, defined individual, but rather one who can become or embody different identities and understand the world from multiple, heterogeneous perspectives (Haraway, 1991). The world is seen as continually becoming and changing through overlaps, participation, and co-existence between humans, materiality, and discourses. Therefore, new approaches to research have been developed (cf. Alaimo & Hekman, 2008; Sørensen, 2009). To reiterate, it is important to take responsibility as researchers to acknowledge that there are no strict boundaries between us, our research area, the equipment we use, and the traditions we belong to; we are always parts of the phenomenon we study (Barad, 2007, 2010). The concept of intra-action refers to the constitutive relations that continually exist between human actors, materiality, and discourses; “Distinct” agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute sense, that is, agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don’t exist as individual elements. “Importantly, intra-action constitutes a radical reworking of the traditional notion of causality” (Barad, 2007, p. 267). Further, Barad (2003) uses the concept of

onto-epistemology (studying of knowing in being) and underlines that all processes of knowing take place mutually with processes of becoming.

### **Performing the explorative study**

The post-human approach of the study, where nature and culture are seen as intertwined, agential, and entangled (Haraway, 1988), encourages experimental approaches. As mentioned, we as researchers were entangled with the actors in the project, which created a huge network of materials. The entanglements are situated in time and space and are all connected in a larger network that constitute the project. Our challenge was to handle the material in a way that made actors as well as actions, entanglements, and becoming visible and possible to understand. The chosen method of approaching the entanglements of know-in-being was actor-network-theory analysis. Hence, the situations were viewed as webs of relations, including human actors, digital actors, and discursive actors. The human actors in the study include the adolescents with intellectual disabilities intra-acting in the project, participating in the municipal organisation *Fritid för alla* [*Spare-time for all*], in this article spelled out FFA. The human actors also include the adolescent musical theatre students studying at a folk-high school programme; *Musikalakademin* [*Musical Theatre Academy*], in this article named MA. Folk high schools are non-governmental boarding schools situated at upper secondary school level. The artists and educators entangled in *Sammankonst* employed at *Kulturverket* as well as their guest artists and collaborators, leaders at FFA, and teachers at MA are labelled as human actors in the study. The four most responsible artists-educators at *Kulturverket* were a prominent composer/arranger, a music/Swedish teacher with extensive art- and craft experience, a poet, and a filmmaker. A professional librettist and a gamer were also intra-acting continually. The researchers in the study and authors of this paper are educated as music teachers and have worked in Municipal Arts Schools and in music teacher education. They have an interest in an equal music and arts education. The digital-material actors in the study are for example, the localities and working models, and the discursive actors in the study are for example, traditions and norms visible in *Sammankonst*. In the results of the study, all actors will be presented more thoroughly.

Above, we stated that the world is continually becoming and changing through overlaps, participation, and co-existence between humans, materiality, and discourses. Hence, the study is based on internet-related ethnography, where digital and physical situations and entanglements are seen as intertwined and not possible to separate (Postill & Pink, 2012). We intra-acted with other actors in the study during one year through analogue and virtual observations. We participated in repetitions and workshops at FFA, the Folk high school, and at general rehearsals and concerts, where we made field notes. We took part of activities via the communication tool Zoom, we got access to video recordings of workshops, interviews with FFA-members, and performances. The project leaders shared Google documents with us, including for



example fluid planning, tasks, text, and music. We conducted qualitative surveys with MA, individual interviews with FFA, and group interviews with *Kulturverket*. Hence, we were entangled with several actors and included in the network that constituted the project.

To guarantee that the participants would not risk feeling omitted or left out by being entangled in the study, the dilemma between treating, meeting, and mentioning the participants during all phases of the research, and on the other hand, communicating realistic results, was reflected upon continually among researchers and *Kulturverket*. In addition, principles of ethics were taken into consideration according to guidelines from *Good research practice* (Swedish Research Council, 2017) for research that involves humans. All participants involved in the research project were informed according to the regulations of informed consent. They also received information on how to withdraw from the project or how to withdraw specific artefacts from the produced research material. After being informed about details in the study, the participants provided written consent, which they mediated as well.

Actor-network theory was applied aiming to describe and understand the continually performed intra-active entanglements constituting the musical theatre project seen as a network (Callon, 1986; Callon & Law, 1997; Latour, 1986, 2003, 2005; Law, 1992, 1999). Actor-network theory, ANT, aims to describe how intra-active networks as natural and social worlds are seen as mutually emergent, entangled, and constituted and how included actors are influencing each other. Hence, ANT provides tools for exploring socio-material-discursive practices, constituted by relations between human and more-than-human actors (Latour, 2005). The transcribed interviews, the recorded workshops, as well the collaborative digital documents were analysed following the theory of ANT. The focus for the analysis was on how the human actors from FFA, MA, and *Kulturverket* participated and intra-acted with each other and with more-than-human actors in *Sammankonst*. Of interest was also varied forms of becomings, in the socio-material entanglements, exploring the query: What are the actors becoming through participation in the entanglements, and how is it related to the organisation of the activities?

Ahn (2015) describes that ANT-analysis can be conducted in three steps. Step one identifies what human and more-than-human actors are present in the networks. Step two attends to questions regarding what the different actors do in the networks and how they influence intra-active process. Step three describes the effects of the process as well as the different meetings and connections that occur as the actors are identified and connected (Ahn, 2015). The analysis identified significant actors in the organising and performing processes, which were co-extensive with the network. Hence, “different networks produce and define appropriate trajectories within the networks, which organize the actors’ movements in time and space” (Ahn et al., 2013, p. 9). Hence, the actors as well as the trajectories are connected in time and space, and are crucial to describe and investigate. The study presented in this article aims to identify significant actors in the musical theatre project, *Sammankonst*, focusing

on relational aspects of organising collaborative becoming within the project. The starting point for the conclusion of the outcomes of the ANT-analysis is the exploration of the entangled actors and their intra-actions, as well as the consequences for becoming, all related to the organisation of the project *Sammankonst*. Four examples were chosen that clearly and in diverse ways show the actors, how they are entangled, and how becoming occurs.

### **Actors, intra-actions and becoming in musical theatre entanglements**

The ANT-analysis identified significant *human*, *digital-material*, and *discursive actors* as well as paths in *Sammankonst*, which exemplifies intra-actions that in turn challenge anthropocentric organisational structures of Municipal Arts Schools. The individuals, groups of humans, material-digital and discursive actors intra-acted and created possibilities for the becoming of musical theatre artists, the actors' action. How they they influenced intra-active processes will be illustrated by four chosen entanglements concerning *manuscript writing*, *theatre activities*, *music making*, and *performances*. Finally, we will discuss the effects of the processes as well as the different meetings and connections that occurred.

#### **Human actors**

The significant groups of human actors were the adolescents with intellectual disabilities participating in *Fritid För Alla (FFA)*, the students enrolled in the musical theatre program at folk high school level i.e., *Musical Theatre Academy (MA)*, and the artists-educators employed at *Kulturverket*. In addition, leaders at FFA, teachers at MA, visiting artists, parents parents of the adolescents from FFA, and the audience were to some extent entangled, along with people working at the city's opera house and other institutions *Kulturverket* engaged in the process. Within the groups, the individuals intra-acted in varied ways depending on earlier experiences, goals with their participation in *Sammankonst*, and other individual prerequisites.

#### **Material-digital actors**

Material-digital actors, having a significant role in the entanglements, can be defined as organisational, communicative, and creative actors. *Organisational actors* in the entanglements appeared to be administration, economy, employment forms, the folk high school at MA, the localities of FFA the localities of FFA, time, and working models, such as the relay-model and Zoom-peer-learning. *Communicative actors* visible through the analysis were common digital information channels, digital and non-digital documents (including Excel sheets), digital banks of ideas, creative border-crossing hubs, Zoom- and Teams-meetings, YouTube, mood-boards, mobile-phones, filmed lessons, songs etcetera. Varied artistic expressions, studios, concerts (including sound/light/costumes), Sound Cloud, workshops, and avatar-participation were defined as *creative actors*.



### Discursive actors

The discursive actors found as vital in the material were the approach of *Kulturverket*, the musical artist school tradition, and norms related to disability. The attitude of *Kulturverket* is dominated by expressions as “We are better together”, “We learn from each other”, “Prestigelessness with high artistic level”, and “All ideas are important”. Flexibility, cross-arts activities, and being in the moment were other traits that constituted *Kulturverket*. The master-apprenticeship model exemplifies the musical artist school tradition where students expect teachers to tell them right and wrong, and norms related to disability, which can be exemplified by exclusion from high quality artistic work or conceptions of FFA’s “need” for possibilities to make their voices heard.

### Activities in entanglements constituting possibilities for musical artist becoming

To describe how the actors influenced the intra-active processes that were taking place, we will share four created entanglements: *The growth of a story*, *poetry-based drama*, *composition of songs*, and *a half-way concert*.

### The growth of the manuscript for the musical – becoming in writing

The manuscript for the musical was developed during 18 months. The participants from MA and FFA were invited to the writing of the manuscript before the COVID-19 pandemic. Personal stories and theme suggestions were gathered through messages on paper, photographs, and posters. A few themes were chosen for further development: *to be new in a group/at a new place*, *pride*, *love*, and *dreams*. *Kulturverket* told the participants from FFA that they would gather all their ideas, stories, and thoughts in a collective “treasure chest”. The same process took place with the participants from MA. All of the ideas were put into a Google document, where more ideas were continually added. Gradually, a professional librettist was intertwined in the writing process. He created several frame-stories that the two groups worked further with in guided workshops. The results were taken care of, and the manuscript was developed intertwined with the songs that were created in parallel. The roles that were handled among the participants were carefully treated. Some of the characters in the musical were pre-recorded and only visible via screen to diminish aspects of stage fright, which influenced the creation of the manuscript.

The ANT-analysis implies that intra-actions took place within the manuscript writing entanglement between the human actors and their personal stories, digital-material actors such as paper, common Google Docs, digital mediating, as well as discursive actors in the form of songs, the instructions from *Kulturverket*, the professional writer, certain traditions relating to the musical artist school tradition, and norms related to disability. The actors are possible to see as non-distinct and non-autonomous. They influence each other, the entanglement of writing, and the development of the story. All of them become writing actors, creating, and created by, different trajectories that offered full participation. The flexible employments, the holistic approaches, and the open ways of using time and space seem to encourage the process of becoming.

Poetry based drama as entanglement – becoming in theatre activities

As an exercise towards acting and training in taking the perspective of the other, the MA-students participated in a drama workshop, where they reformed poems created by the FFA-participants. At that time, they had, according to the COVID-19 pandemic, turned to having their meetings with *Kulturverket* via YouTube. On this specific occasion, *Kulturverket* guested FFA's live streamed cafe evening and created intra-actions with the audience through a photo-challenge, which created the starting point for the writing of poems based on experiences of the pandemic. The audience was asked to send pictures portraying the theme "isolation". Four of the pictures were chosen for further investigation: a picture of someone watching the Netflix show "Valpakademin" [The Puppie Academy], a picture of a window with curtains and a view, a picture of a cat (sfinx), and a picture of a watch. After the live stream café, a smaller group from FFA met via Teams where the poet from *Kulturverket* brought them the chosen pictures. The pictures were shown one at a time, bringing forth participant discussions and formulations of themselves in relation to the pictures. The group was then offered to write lines in the chat, and the poet added wordings from the discussions. A collage poem was created in the form of a mind map. Four poems were created like this and were later read out loud by the participants. The poems were recorded and, together with the pictures, poetry-movies were created by *Kulturverket* and the MA-students who acted in the dramatisations.

As an introduction to the drama exercise, the MA-students firstly took part of a recorded tutorial where one of the FFA-members talked about his improvisation theatre experiences and gave tips and instructions. The MA-students were really hooked and later told the researchers that they forgot that he had a disability. The MA students took part in improvisation theatre activities, which were recorded via a green screen. Later, based on an impro approach, the MA-students performed their impressions and interpretations of the "isolation poems". The movies showed a lot of presence, feelings, imaginations, and reflection. Finally, members from FFA's earlier poetry session took part of the recorded drama pieces, where some phrases from their poems were recognized by the members. They reacted in varied ways. Some laughed, some were impressed by the skills among the MA-students, and others were annoyed because they felt misunderstood.

One significant actor in the described entanglement is the relay-model, developed by *Kulturverket* during several years. The model can be seen as a discursive actor and it intra-acted with other actors involved; the human actors (the poet, the participants from FFA and MA, the FFA-teacher), the digital-material actors (the mediating devices), as well as other discursive actors like the poems and the drama pieces. The intra-actions influenced the participants' becomings in varied ways. Through the intra-actions, the actors also got the chance to understand each-others' perspectives and become clearer about their own experiences. Norms regarding who can write poems, who can be a tutor, and who can be involved in improvisational theatre were entangled in processes of becoming. The ANT-analysis suggests that the world described in the manuscript example is continually becoming through overlaps of artistic activities, several forms of participation, and co-existence between humans, materiality, and discourses.

### Composition of songs – becoming in music making

Among the participants, some had previous experience in writing music and/or lyrics and others did not. All of them were at one point in the project encouraged to write songs inspired by the developed themes for the musical. All participants developed their works in close intra-action with the leaders from *Kulturverket*. Workshops were organised focusing on text and music creation.

Firstly, the MA-students were encouraged to write two lines of lyrics based on a theme, then to create a melody to the text, and then record the outcome on their cell phones. *Kulturverket* gave them feedback on their recordings and encouraged MA to build on their melodies to create a part of a song, record and send it to *Kulturverket* for feedback. In the next workshop, MA and *Kulturverket* collaborated in the music making process to finalise the songs. They could be defined as typical musical theatre songs. Some of the students went out of their comfort zone, encouraged by *Kulturverket*, as they were not used to create music. This is consistent with masters and traditions within the genre, where performers sing and act but rarely write music.

Within the FFA-group, participants could choose to be involved in the music making in relation to the developed themes in the musical. The participants, who chose to involve themselves, identified as song writers or becoming artists who liked to perform on stage. They worked mainly individually and intra-acted with text- and music specialists at *Kulturverket*. The music making processes within the members of FFA differed from each other in how they were initiated and developed. Some of the FFA-members started with an idea about the groove, which they communicated via mood-boards with clips from internet. Some of the lyric contributions from FFA were initially quite long and complicated texts, while others sent ideas about musical styles via recorded verbal messages, or shared, created texts adjusted to fit the form of a song via Google document tables. *Kulturverket* treated all ideas from FFA in close collaboration with the composers in order to develop music and lyrics suitable to fit the musical theatre, as well as the ideas of the composers. During the recording sessions in *Kulturverket's* studio, some of the members from FFA sang and recorded their own songs, and others got a demo of their song recorded by *Kulturverket*, so they could practice the vocals themselves. The leaders from *Kulturverket* expressed that they themselves learnt a lot through taking part of *Samman Konst*, trying to understand and adapt to the strong ideas from FFA. The FFA-members also learnt a lot by taking in feedback, adjusting in collaboration, and by practising singing. Compared to the MA-songs, the style and form of the FFA-songs varied within the popular music genre.

Significant actors within the composition processes belong to all three groups. The human actors (the composers, the music and lyrics specialists from *Kulturverket*), the digital-material actors (cell phones, mediating devices, studio equipment, shared Google documents), and the discursive actors (the musical story, traditions and teaching approaches building on *Kulturverket's* approach and working models). It becomes clear that composition processes seen as entanglements offered becomings as composers and singers in varied ways. The professional composer/arranger employed by *Kulturverket*, who also is committed to arranging music for prominent orchestras, also experienced new becomings in intra-actions in *Samman Konst*. The intra-actions were

experienced with both the FFA-members, who had strong ideas regarding how the music should sound, and the MA-students who were rather steered by their education tradition. The digital-material actors, as cell phones, mood-boards, and Google Docs tables, became significant in the composing entanglements.

### The half-way concert – becoming in performance

Half-way through the project, a concert at a public scene was arranged, where songs that did not make the cut into the final version of the musical was performed. It included professional musicians, sound engineers, light engineers, ticket administration, audience, and conscious choices of costume. The concert had the form of a radio show; *Radioverkstan* – broadcasted live – a radio show that *Kulturverket* and FFA have collaborated on for about ten years. A general rehearsal was held before the concert. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this constituted one of the few occasions where the three groups of human actors involved in *Sammankonst* met. The stage was created as a café with a panel sofa, where a journalist led a conversation between FFA and MA panelists as well as other participants, together with a local politician and one the researchers, in between the songs. Also, pre-recorded movies were included, where the FFA-members told a few words about their songs. One of *Kulturverkets* leaders produced the concert in collaboration with the journalist. The FFA-members seemed to be closely intertwined with the leader from *Kulturverket* as well as to their leaders at FFA, whilst the MA-students were mainly supported by their teacher from MA. Another of the *Kulturverket* members acted as bandmaster and intra-acted with the orchestra as well as with the artists and the producers. FFA- and MA-members sat mixed together in the sofa and around the café tables. Some of them intra-acted with high fives and encouraging gestures. Ten songs were intertwined with talks and the concert was framed by the *Radioverkstan* jingle. Five FFA-members performed their own songs, supported by one or two singers from the MA in the background. Four MA-students performed songs written by classmates. One FFA-member could not be present because of the COVID-19 pandemic and one of the MA-students performed the song he had composed in his place. At the end, end all singers, together with the audience and the orchestra, performed a song written by a FFA-member. The text to the song was projected on a big screen, so the audience could sing along.

It became clear how significant actors intra-acted within this process of becoming musical artists. The professional human, material-digital, and discursive actors appeared as significant. The concert entanglement offered everyone involved to the becoming as actors in a professional atmosphere. In other words, the natural and social worlds of the concert were mutually emergent and entangled, and further constituted how the included actors were influencing each other.

### Becoming musical artists – through processes, meetings, and connections

The ANT-analysis implies that the porous border-crossing entanglements offered the actors to feel, think, and imagine themselves and the different aspects of musical theatre work relationally. Human, material-digital, as well as discursive actors were involved in processes of becoming and intra-acting over borders. Views of becoming a musical theatre artists expanded, as well as what knowledge and material actors that contribute

within the entanglements. A fluid curriculum, invited as a discursive actor, continually re-created within existing frames, seemed to encourage high quality artefacts, and competent musical theatre artists. The relationships between the human actors, as “teachers” and “learners” showed to be flexible and constantly changing dependent on earlier experiences, impetuses, and norms that had to be challenged. In addition, other human and more-than-human actors were invited in varied ways to contribute to meaningful becoming. As seen in the examples above, the physical and virtual environments used in *Sammankonst* together with the actor’s encouraged co-creation of knowledge and skills are processes of becoming. In line with Blaike et al. (2020), *Sammankonst* represent non-hierarchical non-oppressive relations, and “can be seen as a co-created journey of discovery, rather than simple content delivery” (p. 4).

### **Post-human holistic *Sammankonst* challenges anthropocentric Municipal Arts Schools**

The introduction of this article started with a description of how Nordic Municipal Arts School of today to an extent still are organised, where strong traditions that fit well with neo-liberal approaches are at play and where policies as “Municipal Arts Schools for all” are hard to fulfil (Di Lorentzo Tillborg, 2021; Jeppson, 2020; SOU, 2016). Research also showed that organisation, as well as approaches amongst collegial groups, must be changed to be able to open for “all” (Holgersen & Holst, 2013; Kronmann, 2017). Hence, development is needed in order for Municipal Arts-School-teachers to recognize their students as humans and let their ideas and voices be heard and listened to (Elmgren, 2019, 2021; Ferm Thorgersen, 2015).

The ANT-analysis implies that the musical theatre project *Sammankonst* run by *Kulturverket* opens for and encourages intra-actions between human actors such as artists, educators, adolescent musical theatre students, adolescents with intellectual disabilities, digital-material, and discursive actors. The intra-actions encourage participants becomings as musical theatre artists through writing, theatre activities, music making, and performance. What could Municipal Arts Schools learn from such insights?

When it comes to organisational issues, *Kulturverket*’s non-traditional forms of employments, working hours, and flexibility could be viewed as something that make the stated intra-actions, entanglements, and becomings possible. Artists and pedagogues with broad specialities work side by side and help each other when needed. They use their work hours in varied ways, and they often change localities for their project activities. *Kulturverket*’s collegial approaches build upon thoughts that ideas are encouraged, tried out and taken care of. They articulate that “we are better together”, and this results in the challenging of traditions and norms established within the field of music education. Regarding didactic challenges, it seems like *Kulturverket* has developed competencies among the employed that make it possible to organise entanglements that allow varied becomings. When needed, *Kulturverket*

invites other actors to complete their skills and knowledge. Artistic skills, pedagogic skills, digital tools and literacy, tasks, procedural models, as well as time and space are intra-actively used and developed in relation to becoming towards high artistic levels. Finally, focusing on relational aspects in the described entanglements, intra-actions seem to be constituted by openness, curiosity, mutual respect, recognition, and artistic engagement, which lead to the participants' becoming as musical artists, independent of background and functional variations. Hence, building on *Kulturverket* as a good model, a change in several areas seems to be needed for Municipal Arts Schools to be in line with current policies in the Nordic countries.

*Kulturverket* as an organisation works contradictory to neo-liberal powers established in the Anthropocentric world (Brennan & Devine, 2020; Monnin, 2019). A great responsibility for changing practice is put on principals and leaders (Jeppsson, 2020). They alone cannot change the direction of neo-liberal winds. What is needed in all organisational, collegial, and political areas is the introduction or reinforcement of holistic views on knowledge and competence. This approach would allow all actors to participate, in line with Swedish policy documents on what Swedish Municipal Art Schools should strive for (SOU, 2016). Border crossing intra-actions in between different actors in Municipal Art Schools are crucial to overcome segregation and stagnation in the organisation. Finally, there is a need for trusting Municipal Art School educators to use their time, space, and skills in flexible ways, aiming for meaningful becomings.

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