

# FRAGMENTATION IN DIVERSE CULTURAL DEMAND

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Art as well as science is closely tied to individualism, i.e. to individual ideas and performances necessary for the development of man in personality and character. As developmental devices, new arts and cultural products may produce a strong impetus to change both the tastes and the convictions of people. As is well known, the arts change individuals and they can be important tools for major changes in the society. Such changes may in turn direct us to increases in human knowledge and understanding. The arts can play a major role in advancing knowledge and understanding.

## **Fragmentation and Diversification**

It is often the close interrelationship between artists and art loving people that makes it possible for the individual artist to sometimes create his own small group of "fans", a supportive art loving group, albeit usually a small one. Even if the group does not form in the artist's lifetime, the group may later form and long after the death of an artist there will continue to exist enthusiastic admirers or lovers of his art. The number of artists with their own original output, their own personal touch, is continually growing in a prosperous society.

But, the existence of art loving minorities and of elite art may mean an inability of all but a few to enjoy that particular art. Virginia Lee Owen asserts that when such elitism becomes so extreme that only a few can appreciate it, at least the relevance of the art is subject to question.(Owen, 1982) Unless art is subject to changes in fad and fashion, it may well be that while the number of individual art products is fast increasing there is no corresponding decrease in the number of products being revered from the past. This situation will tend to create and maintain a large and growing number of separate art loving groups.

An important idea in the economics of these conditions is that the art product will tend to be fragmented in an increasing number of outcomes and the cultural demand will be more and more diversified.

The fragmentation of art products may be looked upon as a consequence of competition between a large number of individuals or small art producers. In sectors with tendencies to monopoly or cartel the fragmentation process may be limited or halted. The fragmentation of products in the cultural sector is obviously a parallel to the ever increasing number of different products and brands of products else for individual consumption in other consumer markets. With an increasing standard of living and an increasing disposal income of households and individuals everybody will try to satisfy his (her) more or less specialized or sophisticated demand (needs, tastes, habits, interests). Thus the consumers can also foster more varied supply of specialized products. The result will be a growing number of product markets.

The fact of the matter is that in these numerous product markets there might be consumer hegemony in some markets and producer hegemony in some other markets, which depends on a number of social (or sociological), historical, technological and economic factors.

As a result, the diversified cultural demand and the fragmentation of art consumption ought to be studied and explained through sociological, historical and economic methods and if possible by combined research. The sociological, historical and economic factors are in fact strongly interwoven. Therefore, from my point of view, in the study of arts demand ordinary consumption models in economic theory are not too useful. The utility theory of household or individual behavior with the indifference theory can not tell us too much.

## **Arts Demand**

The nature of the art consumer good is different from many other goods. Art demand cannot often be compared with consumption of ordinary consumer goods which are immediately used up with a temporary satisfaction for the consumer. Art consumption may be a kind of lasting investment in the consumers personality and immaterial capital, which for some renders long-term satisfaction. It may be compared with an enduring process.

The main sociological and historical factors of explanation are the following: 1) traditions, 2) scattered population in a huge area, 3) many social groups with different group habits, 4) group tastes, group inter-

est etc., 5) high level of education and sophistication of the population with a large number of individual, 6) individual and social priorities, and 7) wide ranging specialization of employment and vocations.

Important economic factors include: 1) high and increasing standard of living, 2) high and increasing level of disposal income for private consumption, 3) arts and cultural products as a profitable sector for investments of a private fortune, 4) propensity for conspicuous consumption when passing an income threshold

All these factors will foster and advance sophisticated and diversified cultural demand. But this trend can be counteracted by strong forces on the supply side. While there is an obvious tendency all over the free world towards a strong increase in the number of books (titles) being issued every year, the opposite trend may be seen regarding newspapers.

Another proposition to consider in looking into arts consumption is that while diversified art loving minorities are due to the factors listed above, these factors can change from one geographical area to another. Therefore, there may be considerable differences in the structure and strength of the art loving minorities among countries, even in Europe.

A fourth idea may also be raised. Fragmentation in art products and diversified demand is often due to lack of technological and economic superiority in one or a few of the supplying sectors. In some instances when or where the costs and prices of cultural goods are too high for a necessary market demand, the necessary supply might be provided by art lovers themselves as amateur artists and technicians as a sort of hobby or leisure time activity. The alternative is a complete omission of special cultural products. There may of course also be other reasons for amateur art activities in theaters, choir, band of musicians etc., which may or may not make them to strong lovers of professional arts. Leisure activity connected with art can be a kind of education transforming the person from more or less passive art consumer to a professional art producer, an artist.

It may also happen that the cultural demand has such a strong element of fanaticism that the demanding individuals or groups are willing to pay for the goods at any price.

### **Art and Other Leisure Consumption**

We need also to distinguish between cultural demands for instantaneous pleasure in goods as theater or music performances and

demands for lasting or permanent goods as paintings or sculptures. The lines between these two categories of cultural goods are, however, not firm and absolute, because for example, a theater performance seen or a book read may often have a lasting spiritual effect on the mind and in the heart of the consumer. It may merely entertain or it may influence the character and the discrimination in a man and thus be a kind of investment in the personality.

Compared to cinema visits and attendance at religious services, the art visitors with 10 or more visits a year are very few. Looking at the data in Table 1, Norwegians in 1987 were far more frequent visitors to go to a movie than a live arts performance. Fully 32 percent had attended 3 or more movies, but only 6 percent had attended 3 or more classical concerts. In Table 2, the older Norwegian data reveals the same pattern. Thirty-five percent had attended 3 or more movies, but only 4 percent had attended 3 or more classical concerts. Culture lovers are definite minorities.

Limits appear in other countries as well. In Table 3 citizens of Denmark were not frequent visitors to cultural events in comparison to popular culture such as movies. In 1987, only 7 percent went to opera while 35 percent had gone to see a film. In the U.S. as shown in Table 4, cultural participation is not great.

But what is perhaps most important in the fragmentary data in the four tables is that the cohorts may be small, but their interests are very diverse. The wide range of arts and cultural product and its consumption probably can be seen to be diverse and suggestively, it may be becoming more so. This latter point is of course, the major inference we pose for research.

However, there might be a number of minorities that specialize their interests and consume by visiting only one kind of art. This seems less the case in the U.S. data where a close examination has revealed that people who are arts oriented tend to attend and consume a wide variety of art products. Nonetheless, sociological studies show that art loving minorities with a strong preference for one kind of art, very often are illiberal or intolerant towards other art loving groups, which are looking upon as inferiors or underdeveloped. Larger groups of art visitors to more popular kinds of arts, as folk music, folk dance, religious music etc. are in general more tolerant towards other arts.

**Table 1. NORWAY: Participation in Different Kinds of Cultural Activities,  
by persons 16-79 years old in 1987)**

Type of activity	Total	Number of times during the last 12 months			
		0	1-2	3-9	10 and more
Visited cinema	100	54	14	16	16
Visited theatre or opera	100	71	18	10	1
Visited classical concert	100	86	8	5	1
Visited jazz, song or pop concert	100	84	10	5	1
Visited art exhibition	100	72	17	9	2
Visited museum	100	73	19	8	1
Participated in choir, orchestra, corps, band	100	92	0	1	7

Source: Survey of Level of Living 1987

**Table 2. NORWAY: Participation in Different Kinds of Cultural Activities  
by persons 16-74 years old in Norway (Per cent, 1977)**

Type of activity	Total	Number of times during the last 12 months				
		0	1-2	3-5	6 and more	
Visited cinema	100	49	16	13	22	
Visited theatre or opera	100	72	16	9	4	
Visited classical concert	100	87	9	2	2	
Visited jazz, song or pop concert	100	88	8	2	3	
Visited art exhibition	100	75	16	6	4	
Visited museum	100	68	21	7	4	

**Source: Survey of Level of Living 1977**

**Table 3. DENMARK: Participation in Different  
Kinds of Cultural Activities, by persons  
16-74 years old (Per cent, 1987)**

Type of activity	One visit or more	No visit or no answer
Opera	7	93
Musicals	15	85
Ballet	7	93
Revue	29	71
Plays	30	70
Children plays	11	89
Theatre, total	50	50
Motion picture theatre	35	65
Church	53	47
Classical concerts	12	88
Folk music	13	87
Jazz, beat, rock	20	80
Pop concerts etc.	17	83
Art museum, gallery	37	63
Other museums	34	66

**Source: Torben Fridberg: Danskerne og kulturen, Kbh. 1989,  
Social Forsknings Institutttet, Rapport 89:8, pp. 181**

**Table 4. U.S.A. Participation Rates for Various Arts Performances and Leisure Activities by Selected Characteristics, 1985**

(Percent of population 18 years old and over who participated at least once in the 12 months prior to the survey.)

Characteristic	Attended at least once
Jazz performance	10 percent
Classical music performance	13
Opera performance	3
Musical plays	17
Plays	12
Ballet performance	4
Art museum or gallery visit	22

**Source:** Based on survey conducted by the Bureau of the Census for the National Endowment for the Arts. Statistical Abstract of the U.S. 1989.



## The Pluralistic Society

How do these ideas discussed above relate to a pluralistic society? A pluralistic society is a society where the power is spread among many groups of interest and where omnipotent power elite is not accepted. Even in pluralistic societies there can be differences concerning tolerance towards opinions, viewpoints and habits among the population. Some opinions or interests may get higher priority than others. Some will stay in focus while others would be looked upon with skepticism in mass media, in the population and among politicians. In every country or society there will at any time be some prevailing traditions, interests and opinions although there might be a general liberal attitude towards other traditions, interest and opinions. The power elite, although tolerant in general may have a propensity for some interests and opinions and an indifference or disregard for other. Regarding arts some arts and art loving minorities may be looked upon as subordinate or poor, of bad quality, being "foreign", "American" etc. Some arts may, due to tradition, have a superior position.

In Norway, theater has for long had a protected position and a high rank in the population and in the parliament, because of Henrik Ibsen, the famous Norwegian dramatist. Opera and ballet have never gained a parallel position. Symphony orchestras have attained a protected status, mainly, I believe, because of Edvard Grieg, the famous Norwegian composer. In other pluralistic societies there may be different priorities.

But, in pluralistic societies traditions may differ but another word for tradition may be lack of knowledge, lack of opportunities for other kinds of art etc. It requires effort and time to change well established traditions.

Nonetheless, fragmentation in the supply of art products and diversified cultural demands is an essential and necessary element in a pluralistic and evolutionary society. It is just as important as diversity of political ideas and parties, in scientific ideas and methods etc.

The increasing diversity and fragmentation of cultural markets and their devotees has several consequences. The fragmentation of the supply and the diversified cultural demand counteract possible economies of scale in the cultural sector. In the wake of the fragmentation and diversification, there follows costs disease, income gap and need for subsidies, donations etc.

The major conclusion is that this prevailing trend to more and more fragmentation of art products and the continual diversification of cultural demands from art-loving groups and minorities creates new economic and political problems. These problems have to be studied carefully and deeply in relation to other topics: market segmentation, producer sovereignty, consumer skill, multiculturalism as national policy. Will the trend imply a disaster or a favor for the culture?

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