

‘Free to lead?’ An inquiry into the role of academic freedom during change processes in Nordic higher music education

In recent time there has been an increased focus on institutional change in higher music education, often disseminated through a scholarly emphasis on the importance of empowering the student voice (e.g. Holmgren, 2022; Gaunt et al., 2021; Zhukov & Sætre, 2021; Minors et al., 2017). However, various members of higher music education fulfil different institutional roles, some of which are more affected than others by the current calls for change. As the mandates of (higher) music education are under negotiation, scholars discuss how institutional members should partake in change processes and, indeed, *who* should be enabled to act (e.g. Angelo et al., 2019; Karlsen, 2019). The resulting landscape presents a research gap in which academic freedom in higher music education is inextricably linked to institutional politics and organisational survival. Against this backdrop, we ask the following: how do leaders, administrators and student partners navigate institutional change in higher music education, and what limitations are put on their freedom to lead?

This research project follows the development of a Centre for Excellence in Nordic higher music education, from its initial ambitions to its final outcomes. Though the case study is in its early stages, the centre has existed for nearly ten years and thereby presents a broad scope of material to be analysed. At the NNRME conference, we will present empirical data in the forms of qualitative interviews (with management, staff and students connected to the centre) and institutional documents (i.e. strategic plans, annual reports and other publications, as well as internal applications and meeting minutes). In the analysis, we consider change processes in the institutional setting to be mediated by organisational structure and members (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) and institutional pressures from the field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). We combine these frameworks from organisational institutionalism with narrative inquiry (Czarniawska, 2007) to identify significant events in the centre development. Finally, we will discuss the role of academic freedom in the centre development and present preliminary findings to illustrate how institutional change can be mediated in a higher music education setting.

References (DOIs):

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