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The Art of Sound Programming: Partnering up and Harmonising Stakeholders' Needs and Wants

Abstract

In this cross-sectional case study, we dive into the different aspects that involves artistic programming in the classical music industry. Through eight semi-structured interviews with artistic programmers and artistic directors from six different (subsidised) classical music organisations in Amsterdam, such as concert halls and festivals, we get an insight of the connecting role of the artistic programmer within the symbiosis of the cultural sector. Topics such as quality uncertainty, quality assessment and stakeholder management are addressed with special focus on the policy mandates from the policy report of 2021-2024. These mandates include “the fair practice code” and “inclusion and diversity”. We found that the mission statement of organisations plays a central role in their operationalisation. We also found that the dominant strategy of programming is partnering up in order to share costs and risks, exchange ideas and making a bigger impact through reaching a broader audience. This study is a good steppingstone for future research in the field of artistic programming, a topic that has hardly been covered in academics.

Keywords: Quality uncertainty, quality assessment, stakeholder management, subsidies, audiences, gatekeepers, artistic values, economic values, social values, goals, mission statements, classical music organisations, non-profit organisations, policies, policy mandates, fair practice code, inclusion and diversity, access, equity, customer confidence, innovation, collaboration, partners.

Preface

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I cannot leave it unmentioned that it was certainly strange to write the vast part of this thesis during a national lockdown. The strangest thing to realise, is the fact that this whole research from the beginning till the end, including all the interviews, all took place on the same twenty-five square meters of my mini apartment.

Finally, I would like to thank my Wi-Fi connection for never failing to work. It was a true blessing to be able to make many late nights to work on my thesis, without having to worry about my internet.

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1. Introduction

It is important for music organisations to have a mission. This mission is translated to goals and values that relate to them. Classical music organisations are often so-called non-profit organisations, where non-commercial and nonpecuniary goals are pursued with financial support from local, regional and/or national/federal governmental agencies, corporations, private funds and families or individuals. Any profit that has been made, must be reinvested in the organisation and must be in line with its mission (Towse, 2010) (Voss, Cable & Voss, 2000). The reason why a mission is of great importance for a music organisation, is because it justifies the organisation's actions (Kotler & Kotler, 2000). The goals of music organisations are driven by different stakeholders and should thus be seen as part of a bigger framework. A good example of a goal is building a larger audience, which is related to raising more public awareness. The latter could be related to redefining the organisation's image and correcting a stigma. In the case of classical music organisations, such as the Royal Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, this stigma could be that it only puts traditional classical music concerts on the programme. In the case of the Grachtenfestival in Amsterdam, due to its name and origin, it is the association that the concerts are only in the big houses on the canals, the "grachtenpanden". Both organisations try to replace their outdated image through their current programming. For example, the Grachtenfestival started organising club evenings and the Concertgebouw "Tracks", both series to attract a younger audience.

The programming of music organisations, such as concert halls and festivals, is the embodiment of the mission and corresponding goals. Artistic programmers within music organisations play a vital role in this process. They need to translate all the input that has been given by different stakeholders into programmes that are being presented to the audience (Voss, Cable & Voss, 2000). However, it is impossible to comply with all the desires of different stakeholders whose interests may vary and thus might be hard to match. When listening to the desires of different stakeholders, programmers do not want to lose their artistic integrity. From reading literature of English philosophers Harry Frankfurt, Bernard Williams and Cheshire Calhoun, Mills (2018) formulated the definition of integrity as "being faithful to one's own values and projects" even though these values are threatened by others' principles (p. 10). These values and projects should not merely be personally important but also morally admirable (Mills, 2018). Thus, artistic integrity in the case of artistic programmers, means being faithful to what has artistic value for the greater-good.

There is a range of topics programmers have to deal with, namely artistic quality, stakeholder management and limited budgets. Artistic quality is closely related to signaling. Artists who won prizes in

prestigious competitions often have easier access because it is seen as a quality certification (Akerlof, 1978). Some major competitions have a big network and make deals with concert halls and festivals for the winners to have a confirmed performance opportunity. However, programmers also have the ability to programme musicians that they have scouted themselves, based on their own quality assessment.

Another topic artistic programmers have to deal with, is stakeholder management. For the field of programming, these stakeholders can be divided in three: financers, the audience and the artist(s). Often, in bigger non-profit music organisations in the Netherlands, a substantial part of financing comes from subsidies. These subsidies can be on (inter)national, provincial, regional and municipal or city district level. These different levels of subsidies are all interconnected and distributed through arm's length bodies. In order to be eligible to receive these subsidies on any level of the subsidy chain, music organisations have to apply with a proposal that is in line with the policy report including certain policy mandates. Once these music organisations receive the subsidy, they strictly have to stick to their proposal ("Hoofdlijnen Kunst & Cultuur 2021-2024", n.d.) as well as to the subsidisers' specific conditions. As Boerner and Jobst (2011) describe, the policy mandate of the subsidy suppliers can consist of general statements. As explained by Throsby (2010), most of these mandates consist of the following three objectives: excellence, innovation and access. These three objectives are already quite challenging to meet at the same time. Access in regard to the audience, is closely related to equity in terms of equal opportunities for artistic consumption by the community (Throsby, 2010). Access can be translated to the venue, but it can also be related to the price or to what is on the programme of the performance.

This year, with the proposal deadline for subsidy on municipal level for the period of 2021-2024, cultural organisations in Amsterdam were pressured under the policy mandate of "inclusion and diversity" in the "Kunstenplan" (Ekker, 2019). It was a wakeup call for all cultural organisations dependent on subsidies to take this policy mandate very seriously.

The other part of stakeholder management is the audience. The people that are nowadays counted as audience, are significantly more diverse compared to the past. Classical music organisations have to serve a much bigger audience because there is more awareness for equity. In the past, it was widely accepted that music organisations in western countries only reached an audience that represented a small part of society (Kotler & Kotler, 2000). This small part of society was homogenous and elite (Price, 2017). Nowadays, more diverse people can afford going to concerts and thus long for different kinds of music. To expand the audience, classical music organisations have to trigger these potential visitors. Other reasons why classical music organisations seek to expand audiences is subsidy cuts (Frey, 1999) (Finkel, 2006) (Bhansing et al., 2017). This results in more demand-driven programming, opposite to supply-driven programming.

The third stakeholder programmers have to work closely with, are the artists. Programmers have to decide which artist suits which concert best and negotiate about the fee that the artist will receive. It is also important to take the artist's artistic wishes into account when programming a certain repertoire. The mentioned topics that play a role between programmers and artists are taken from personal experience as a musician and programmer.

Lastly, limited as well as decreasing budgets are a challenge that programmers also have to deal with. In recent times, there is a lot of stress on "the fair practice code", which is a code of conduct and means that all artists should be paid a decent wage. "The fair practice code" translates to equity and economic efficiency because one of the aims of "the fair practice code" is improving a fair distribution of finances ("What is fair practice code?", n.d.) ("Hoofdlijnen Kunst & Cultuur 2021-2024", n.d.). In many cases, music organisations still fail to comply with this code because of limited budgets and being used to a certain work culture where most people are used to young musicians playing for free or a very little fee in exchange for exposure. I have seen this in practice from my own experience as a professional musician. The Concertgebouw, for example, still does not pay all young artists for the free lunchtime concert series in the Kleine Zaal. This is still a topic of discussion (Spel, 2019) (Kooke, 2019). Another example is Podium Witteman, where artists do not get paid at all to play in the tv programme. Again, I have experienced both examples in my personal experience as a musician. Also, it is often hard to measure what a decent wage is. Compared to other professions, a musician hardly earns a decent wage if you think about the number of hours studying invested built up over years. It is often said that doctors have most years of training behind them compared to any other profession. However, many professional musicians have started their instrument before their fifth birthday, putting in a serious number of hours. It is thus fair to say that musicians have a longer trajectory of training.

Compared to its neighbouring country Germany, the wage for an orchestra musician with a fixed contract is significantly lower in the Netherlands (Lebrecht, 2018). An example is the appointment of a first oboe player back in 2016. Since his former salary in a less famous orchestra in Bavaria, Germany, was double as high compared to what they offered at the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, he had his doubts to accept the new position (Smit & Voermans, 2016). This salary issue is a commonly discussed topic among musicians and a lot has been written about it in grey literature such as newspapers that I have referred to in this study.

The goals of music organisations convey to artistic programming. A lot of literature focuses on the so-called pure humdrum inputs of the organisations, which are the tasks that relate to economic incentives (Caves, 2003). However, there is little literature to be found about the artistic curatorship or programming within arts organisations. Towse (2010) expresses her frustrations towards the fact that

there is too much focus on the humdrum part when assessing the creative industries. Also, in literature, there is a clear separation between creators/artists and the humdrum inputs. The importance of programming is not expressed enough.

Hence, it is an addition to academic literature to combine the mentioned aspects and address the following main research question. How do artistic intermediaries in the subsidised classical music industry in Amsterdam balance artistic integrity with other stakeholders' goals? Sub questions that arise are: Which artistic, social and economic problems do programmers have to deal with? How do programmers balance economic objectives such as equity, efficiency and access with each other?

2. Aim and relevance of this research

The aim of this research is to develop a better understanding of which assets in which majority play a role in programming in the classical music industry, especially with concert halls and festivals in Amsterdam. In programming, all requests from different stakeholders come together and the results are what we see on stage. It is interesting to see how programmers in different classical music organisations deal with these requests. In this research we look at the various characteristics of classical music organisations and how these reflect to the programming. These characteristics include whether it is a concert hall or an annual festival, the way the organisation is financed, as well as its mission statement and goals. Another aim of this research is to add value to the not yet developed academic literature of classical music programming. Until now, programming is the grey area that has not seen the limelight yet. I would like to compare it with cooking. In recent times you mainly saw the ingredients and the result as a presented meal but there is little known about the cooking process, which is programming. We know that quality assessment plays a central role in the process, but is the notion of quality interpreted in the same way by different programmers? Another question that arise is how programmers interpret and tackle the different policy mandates. Policies are changing all the time due to social trends. Hence, the way of programming in classical music organisations also changes all the time. With this research we look at the zeitgeist of artistic programming.

This research is rather explorative in the sense that we research whether there are major differences and/ or similarities in operationalisation between the different cases of this study. The cases that I chose all have differing images and thus are not direct competitors in terms of audiences of each

other. However, there might be certain things that these classical music organisations could learn from each other. This could be relevant and thus beneficial not only for the organisations taking part in this research but also for organisations on national level or even international level. This research will also be relevant for anyone aspiring to work in artistic programming.

It is interesting to find out what the dominant strategy is in different classical music organisations. However, the main aim is to see a relation or lack of it between the different cases of programming, namely concert halls and festivals.

Finally, it is important to find the purpose for everything you pursue in life (Klamer, 2016). Since this is my master thesis, I wanted to do research on a topic that occupies me on a daily base and that I could personally gain a lot of knowledge from. At the moment of this research, I was both actively performing and developing a career as a gatekeeper in the form of an artistic programmer. As a side path of this research, I wanted to find out what the advantages and disadvantages are of balancing these two sides.

3. Theoretical concepts

3.1 Quality uncertainty and quality assessment

Tobias (2004) described that quality in theatres was perceived through assessment of the author, actors and the producer. Abbé-Decarroux (1994) argues that quality is difficult to assess and goes hand in hand with risk. In the performing arts industry uncertainty is present because consumers have incomplete information about the performance that they have not experienced yet. Classical music performances are so-called experience goods, “...you need to experience the good in order to have information about it and judge its quality...” (Towse, 2010, p. 151 & 152).

Caves (2003) argues that ‘nobody knows’ diminishes when art is being evaluated through different channels. This means that quality uncertainty becomes smaller when assessment goes through various certified people. Kawashima (1999, p. 270) also confirms this notion: “Information obtained from external programmers and other specialists will reduce the risk involved in booking something unknown, and such information is therefore highly valued.” On top of this, intermediaries sift out artists and projects/programmes from a massive stock that is available (Towse, 2010). This is done through assessing all the applications that were sent in and scouting new talents/projects. Intermediaries save opportunity costs for (potential) audiences.

The art sector thus needs evaluators who function as the middleman. Throsby (2010) stresses that the quality of a theatre/music production does not merely depend on one dimension of a theory on aestheticism. A similar statement was made in the “Hoofdlijnen Kunst en Cultuur 2021-2024” by Touria Meliani, alderman for culture in Amsterdam, who stressed that quality is not a static but a dynamic notion. She pointed out that in the process of quality assessment, we cannot merely compare to what is already there and known. We have to be more open to innovation and be more sensitive to visionaries. Thus, for the alderman for culture, quality is closely related to being innovative. Innovation means going beyond the artform and moving into novel directions (Throsby, 2010). Kleinschmidt and Cooper (1991) make a distinction within innovation between completely new products and a variation of existing products. Throsby (2010) labels quality as excellence and points out that this concept can be interpreted differently by various people. DiMaggio (1987) distinguishes two types of quality. The first type is related to innovation and the second type is related to the quality of performance, i.e. virtuosic performance.

Programmers use different channels to form their own conclusion whether an artist has the artistic excellence to be booked for the concert hall or festival. We will address an important channel for programmers in the next chapter.

In the following paragraph, a consequent situation of quality assessment is described, where you can see that the outcome is very much related to the goal/mission of the organisation.

In the final round of the Grachtenfestival Conservatorium Concours of 2020, there was an interesting discussion among the jury members. Two ensembles, one consisting of a sopranist (which is a male singer in the range of a soprano) and a harpsichord player, the other ensemble consisting of a high mezzo soprano and a pianist, were both very close to winning the competition. The jury members were divided in two through their opinions. One group argued the fact that the ensemble with the sopranist was more novel and technically more difficult. The other group argued that the ensemble with the high mezzo soprano was more polished and a finished product. After a long discussion, they turned to the programmers of the festival and asked, “what is the main objective of the Grachtenfestival?” When the senior programmer assured that the festival is focused on talent development, they decided to award the ensemble with the sopranist because in the end they believed that this ensemble is more promising and rarer. The main reason then why the ensemble with the mezzo soprano did not win, is that they believed that there was a smaller range of further development possible and that there are so many good mezzo sopranos out there, so she would not stand out enough. Differentiation, novelty and the predicted future development possibilities thus played a major role in this assessment.

3.2 Awards and informational cascades

Awards are important indicators of quality. Artists who have won awards and prizes, gain more prestige. This leads to a decrease in demand uncertainty and an increase in audiences' willingness to pay (Towse, 2010). However, awards and prizes can also be problematic. The classical music world values competition outcomes very highly and there is a tendency of "the winner takes all". From the observance of two music competitions lately, namely the Nationaal Vioolconcours and the Grachtenfestival Conservatorium Concours, it is remarkable that the differences between the winner and the ensemble or individual that did not win the (first) prize, is very small. However, the externalities of the buzz around the winner are out of proportion bigger, often resulting in an informational cascade. This occurs when private information signals are not taken in consideration (Bikhchandani, Hirshleifer, & Welch, 1992). Then, this can result in the winner being solely in the limelight and the runner up disappearing in a shadow. The consequences are thus very big. The fact that many people forget, is that jury panels in competition are represented by a small group of experts. In both competitions, the votes for the ranking were equally divided between the artist(s) who won and the runner up. In the first competition, it was solved through the chairman stepping back and letting the jury members vote a second time. In the second mentioned competition, they solved through a hefty discussion. This shows that the differences in artistic quality were minuscule. If there would have been different experts in the jury panel, the outcome might have been different. Since judgement is based on sensory experiences, in this case the ears and the eyes, it is subjective from person to person. This does not only apply to the classical music world but also to other art forms and even the food industry. In any case if it is not measurable quantitatively, it is subjective from person to person (Mets et al., 2017).

For programmers, it is important to be able to execute their own quality assessment when possible. This can be reached through attending the final round of a competition for example. This way, the programmer can listen with his/her own ears and make his or her own assumptions. However, as mentioned earlier, some prestigious competitions make a deal with festivals or concert halls that the winner of their competition is guaranteed a performance opportunity. Often these deals go hand in hand with financial agreements that make it more attractive to both parties (Kawashima, 1999). With these kinds of deals, opportunity costs for programmers are saved and costs are spread.

3.3 Stakeholder management

Programmers have to deal with different stakeholders that have agency. The stakeholders of programmers that we will discuss in the classical music industry can be divided into three groups, 1. the financers and 2. the audience, involving non-visitors, not-yet-visitors, real visitors, repeat visitors 3. the artists. The first two groups are interconnected with each other since the major financing body for non-profit music organisations is the government (international, national, regional and/or municipalities), which is tax money and thus the audience contributes to this indirectly by paying tax and directly by paying for a ticket (Boerner and Jobst, 2011).

The audience is formed of the people that attend concerts and the people that music organisations aim to reach, or potential attenders.

Financers provide unearned income, so not (ticket) sales. This unearned income can be divided in public funding, sponsors and private donors (Towse, 2010).

In the performing arts sector in the Netherlands, public funding is all interconnected. For example, if an orchestra does not receive public funding and plays in a venue that does receive public funding, the orchestra still receives public funding indirectly because the payment comes out of the venue's budget that is composed of public funding amongst others (Towse, 2010).

Frey (1999) and Castañer & Campos (2002) argue that arts organisations have more artistic freedom when there is a greater diversity of financers. Both papers also stated that it does not depend so much on the amount given by one source, but it is rather the multiplicity of sources that plays a greater role in arts organisations having more artistic freedom. Translated to programming, this means that with a greater spread of financial resources comes more artistic freedom in programming.

Financing can also come in a non-monetary form. For example, if you look at the Grachtenfestival, it can also come in the form of organisations such as hotels, museums and religion related buildings (i.e. churches, temples, synagogues and mosques) offering their space for free as a concert location. It is then seen as a collaboration or a sponsoring in kind between the Grachtenfestival and the organisation offering their space. Sometimes these organisations have their own wish list and programmers then have to take their preferences into account.

The third group of stakeholders are the artists, whom programmers have to deal with. Naturally, programmers aim to have the highest quality of musicians in their festival. High fees are often seen as signals of high quality, but they can be misleading (Towse, 2010). Higher fees are often related to artists being more established, older or coming from abroad (where sometimes higher fees are the standard). In a small country like the Netherlands, chances are rather big that not so many musicians for a specific genre

or musicians of high quality, live within the borders and thus have to be imported. This again not only means that the costs are higher but also means more complicated logistics. If there is a limited budget, programmers have to consider wisely how to divide this budget between more expensive musicians and less expensive musicians (Hiller, 2016). The aim is not having to trade-off quality over spending less but rather having the right timing for booking artists whose careers are on the verge of taking off. The audience are then not yet familiar with these artists and will be able to enjoy their performances for a lower fee. This strategy, combined with booking so-called “headliners” will increase the reputation of the classical music organisation (Hiller, 2016).

3.4 Policy mandates

Non-profit music organisations are dependent on public subsidies and thus need to comply their goals to policy mandates (Boerner and Jobst, 2011). The direct financial dependency is different for every organisation. However, the main importance of receiving public subsidy, is the value certification. This can lead to other financing parties crowding in and seeing the value of financially supporting the subsidised cultural organisation.

For subsidy providers it is important to be able to measure social efficiency. Social efficiency means right allocation of sufficient resources to achieve objectives (Towse, 2010). A policy report with policy mandates is made for a period of four years in the Netherlands. This policy report functions as a performance indicator of social efficiency during monitoring and evaluation after the period of four years. In the policy report “Hoofdlijnen Kunst en Cultuur 2021-2024”, prepared by the Amsterdamse Kunstraad and presented by the alderman of Amsterdam for culture and education, a few policy mandates are mentioned. Next to the policy mandates of artistic relevance, the importance for the city of Amsterdam and “the fair practice code”, the focus is on the mandate “inclusion and diversity”. In this report, the last two mandates are not being put as general statements that can be interpreted vaguely as in most policy mandates according to Boerner and Jobst (2011). Especially the tone regarding “inclusion and diversity” in this report is urgent. The urgency of this policy mandate is so high that even a major part of the introduction is dedicated to this. The alderman for culture stresses on inclusion and diversity in the four different p’s, meaning personnel, programming, partners and public (i.e. audience) (“Hoofdlijnen Kunst & Cultuur 2021-2024, n.d.). This policy mandate urges action for change, which is the opposite of what Frey (1999) claims with the statement that governmental regulations inhibit change. Also Finkel (2006) describes governmental regulations as rather pushing towards programming the same things every year and standardisation. Amsterdam’s alderman for culture strives after equity by urging cultural

organisations to operationalise “the fair practice code” and tries to include local minorities more. This is also opposite of what is described by Finkel (2006), where governmental regulations in the UK lead to having less space for connection with local populations. The cases described by Finkel (2006) do not match with cases of a big metropolitan city like Amsterdam where the local population is far more diverse. However, the points that are addressed in this report, are in line with the proposition points for culturally sustainable development that are described by Throsby (2010). These proposition points stress in particular on equity and access for people with different cultural backgrounds as well as social economic class. The proposition points are mainly based on the Cultural Diversity Convention (2010). Since the four p’s described earlier include all sides of the organisation, it might mean drastic changes in the near future for some actors. It could mean hiring more diverse new employees when there is a job opening, but it could also mean programming more other music than just western (classical) music. It could lead to the pitfall of organisations strenuously having the same strategy and impending to lose its artistic quality or individuality of the organisation.

In the policy report, it is mentioned that complying with “the fair practice code” can lead to less performances. This indicates that cultural organisations are demanded to restructure their programming as well as the division of their budgets. Which strategy do the classical music organisations in this research choose to tackle this code of conduct? Do they find more sponsors, do they programme less or do they opt for younger and less experienced artists to justify the fees?

The action plan that has been formulated by the applying organisations must have included these terms. It is interesting to see how different organisations see their weaknesses and strengths on these aspects and how they see opportunity to make changes. For this research the focus was on how different organisations dealt with the policy mandates and what their interpretation was of these mandates.

3.5 Audience

The audience in the classical music sector in most countries is still quite homogenous and is greying (Werck & Heyndels, 2007) (Borgonovi, 2004) (Price, 2017). In my experience as a professional musician, there are some exceptions, for example Germany, where there has always been a stronger tradition of maintaining classical music and thus resulting in younger people also regularly attending classical music concerts. Also, in countries such as Singapore, the audience is not as greying. However, this is due to the fact that access to classical music on a high level has only developed in the last twenty years with the establishment of a professional symphony orchestra and the establishment of a high-level conservatoire.

The latter happening much later and having a greater impact on the quality of the overall classical music sector because local talents no longer had to go abroad to study music. On top of this, the quality of education also attracted foreign talented music students.

Sorjonen (2008) describes two ways to approach audiences: *reactive market orientation* and *proactive market orientation*. The first approach refers to responding to customer's already known expressed needs. This corresponds with audiences wishing to see well-known names of artists and hearing pieces that they are familiar with. The second approach refers to anticipating on customer's unexpressed latent needs. This means anticipating on the unconscious audience's desire to the unknown and the curiosity of the novel (2008). The *proactive market orientation* is related to taste formation because when audiences are exposed to new things, they acquire more information which leads to more informed future demand (Towse, 2010).

There have been several attempts made by classical music organisations to make their commodity more attractive to a wider audience. In the case of a symphony orchestra, it could be programming film scores or changing the concert format ("Essentials Specials", n.d.). For a concert hall it could mean programming different music styles than classical music. For a festival it could mean working together with locations that attract younger people. The aim of these mentioned classical music organisations is to reach new audiences without losing or excluding the regular audiences. When do you put something on the programme and what and how much focus should there be on certain programming (Boerner and Jobst, 2011)?

Kotler and Kotler (2000) describe a three-point strategy for museums to reach a wider audience. With this strategy we can easily draw a line to the classical music industry. In our case, the three-point strategy would be: improving the concert-going experience, community service and market repositioning toward entertainment. With the first point, they describe different aspects such as the accessibility of the venue and the cleanliness. However, this also involves extending the traditional concert format to a richer experience. This can involve small things such as a drink in the break, but it can also mean a dinner or an afterparty. Kotler and Kotler (2000) describe four main types of experiences audiences want to engage in. We adapt these examples to classical music audiences and extend on the examples. The first out of four main types of experiences is social experiences, which means people attending in a group and feeling connected with other members of the audience. The second main type is cognitive experiences, meaning that people come to learn new things. This could be attending a rare performance of certain music or hearing newly composed music. The third main type is object experiences, meaning that audiences come to see the beautiful or rare venue that for example usually is not accessible for audiences, such as private

houses. The fourth main experience is introspective experiences, where concerts trigger memories and associations, spiritual related feelings and a sense of connectedness to a certain culture and community.

The second point of the strategy, community service, relates to a sense of belonging and the classical music organisation being connected to their surroundings in terms of people, companies and fellow arts organisations. Classical music organisations can execute this strategy through organising seasonal events, partnering up with museums in the same town by organising a concert there and the same goes for companies. It also means providing access to people from the community that would normally not be able to attend for various reasons but in most cases financial reasons (Kotler and Kotler, 2000).

The third point of the strategy, market repositioning toward entertainment, involves reaching the non-visitors and the not-yet-visitors. The not-yet-visitors can be related to community service. The non-visitors would not appear anyway, so there is actually no point in trying to reach them because they would not respond. Through asking the community what their needs are, a classical music organisation could meet this need. This leads to the not-yet-visitors then feeling interested to come. However, this could result into demand-driven programming, where you let the audience vote for what you put on the programme. This corresponds to the earlier mentioned *reactive market orientation* (Sorjonen, 2008). On the one hand, you would expect that audience numbers would rise and the not-yet-visitors that voted would come. On the other hand, it is also expected that people would vote for things that are already known to them, leading to a more “easy listening” programme or “populist programming” as Price (2017) describes. Many classical music programmers often opt for the “sandwich strategy”, where something well-known to the audience is programmed with something unknown (Tiedge & Ksobiech, 1988). The pieces that are known to have popularity then function as a bate to trigger audiences and as a buffer if the unknown piece does not turn out to be in the taste of the audience.

4. Conclusion from the literature review

Artistic programming involves many different aspects with quite complex considerations to make. Quality uncertainty plays a big role in the performing arts industry because of the experience good nature of performances. Programmers are intermediaries who reduce the risk of quality uncertainty because they are experts who execute quality assessment. However, the process of quality assessment is subjective from person to person because it involves sensory experiences. It is thus important that quality assessment goes through different channels. This way, it makes the outcome more universally acceptable. Quality can be interpreted in different ways. It could relate to technical skills, but it could also relate to novelty and innovation. The way quality is translated depends heavily on the organisation's mission and the personal interpretation (of the mission) of the programmer. It also depends on the characteristics of an organisation, whether it is a festival or a concert hall. A festival has a concentrated time for presenting music where concert halls display a programme throughout the whole season. This also has an impact on how quality of artists is perceived by different programmers connected to various organisations.

Programmers in certain organisations are often tied to competition outcomes. Since the panel in competitions is made up of individuals with their own subjectivity, outcomes can differ with different panel compositions. The outcome of a competition can lead to an informational cascade in the form of "the winner takes all". This happens when the winner of a competition gets all the media attention and is being booked automatically for many concerts because of this status. It is important for programmers to be critical and use their own resources to assess quality, even in a prestigious competition. Again, different programmers from different organisations with varying mission statements, can have a different focus in their assessment.

Programmers have to juggle with the wishes of different stakeholders. Since programmers are financially dependent on different stakeholders, which consist of subsidy providers, sponsors, private donors and the audience, they have to justify their spending. A mission statement gives a certain direction in the justification. Similar to how quality is perceived, the selection of artists heavily depends on the classical music organisation's characteristics (i.e. festival or concert hall), mission and on the programmer's subjective interpretation of this mission.

Public subsidies are distributed under a certain policy mandate. For the period of 2021-2024, the policy mandate of the Amsterdams Fonds voor de Kunst is very strict in their demand for diversity and inclusion. This can be interpreted differently by various classical music organisations in Amsterdam, dependent on what their mission is and what their current situation looks like. How do different

programmers from various classical music organisations translate this policy mandate? Some literature claims that policy mandates constrain change (Frey, 1999) (Finkel, 2006). However, the policy mandate of the Amsterdams Fonds voor de Kunst urges action for change. This shows that the mentioned literature on this matter is obsolete. “The fair practice code” is also underlined in the policy report. This means that artists should get a fair share for their services. This leads to a change in culture where the value that is given to exposure is questioned. It also means that there should be enough financial resources for organisations to be able to execute this “fair practice code”.

A very important stakeholder for this research is the audience. For programmers, the audience exists of non-visitors, not-yet-visitors, real visitors and repeat visitors. It is still a common problem in many western countries that the audience is homogenous and greying. Sorjonen (2008) describes two different approaches towards audience relationship programming. The first approach is the reactive market orientation, where programmers respond to the customers’ already known expressed needs. This can lead to populist programming (Price, 2017) and endangers the artistic integrity. The second strategy is the proactive market orientation, where programmers anticipate on the unconscious desire for novelty. The latter is related to taste formation, because by introducing audiences to novel/unknown music, the audience gains knowledge which makes them better equipped to make more informed decisions in the future and thus decreasing the quality uncertainty. Kotler and Kotler (2000) came up with a three-point strategy to attract a wider audience in museums, which is a good example of what cultural organisations have to do to reach potential audiences. How do different classical music organisations in Amsterdam deal with this? Do they have a clear strategy? Do they see it as a necessity themselves or do they give just enough focus to justify towards subsidy providers?

5. Research Design

Qualitative research suited this thesis best because it gave more space for in-depth findings and patterns of relationships (Babbie, 2017; Bryman, 2012). The difference with quantitative research is that qualitative research gives leeway to different interpretations and individuality (Bryman, 2012). Since I was studying multiple cases at a single point in time, namely the year 2020, just before the new policy mandate applied (2021-2024), I chose a cross-sectional case study design (Bryman, 2012). These cases had certain key elements in common to make it comparative. These two common key elements involved

that the cases were all classical music organisations who served as a stage for performances in Amsterdam and all received funding from the municipality of Amsterdam through advice of de Amsterdamse Kunstraad (Hoofdlijnen Kunst & Cultuur, n.d.). The Amsterdamse Kunstraad is an arm's length body for the municipality of Amsterdam and relies on peer review through committees composed of experts in the field. The idea behind an arm's length body is that decisions about subsidy decisions will be made free of political influence (Throsby, 2010). The cases I compared can be categorised in two groups. These groups involved concert halls and festivals in Amsterdam. I decided to leave out symphony orchestras and classical music ensembles in Amsterdam because in terms of organisation, they differed too much in their method of programming from festivals and concert halls. The first major difference is the fact that symphony orchestras and ensembles have a fixed group of musicians that they have to work with. This means that the artistic programming always involves more or less the same group of musicians and that they have to take into account that the workload is well-balanced. This is something which programming teams in the other cases did not have to deal with. The second major difference is the decision makers in programming, which involves the chief conductor, the director of the orchestra, the artistic manager, the programmer and sometimes a committee of orchestra members.

Since the data should be comparable, the instrument that I used for my qualitative research, was the semi-structured interview. This interview form gave me the security to address all the topics. Additionally, it formed a more or less standardised method, yet also gave leeway for the interviewees to take side paths and elaborate on these (Bryman, 2012). The latter was important for this research because I wanted to look into all the different approaches from various programmers who also had differing backgrounds that influence their way of working.

Since there was a major focus on inclusion and diversity in the cultural sector in the Netherlands and because the alderman of culture from the municipality of Amsterdam has been particularly explicit in the policy mandate for the period of 2021-2024, I gave special attention to the situation in Amsterdam in my research. This means that I used the policy report for 2021-2014 as a reference for my desk research. Another source for desk research that I used prior to conducting the interviews was examining the organisation's website and reading the mission statements of the four from the six different classical music organisations that I approached. Two classical music organisations did not show their mission statement on their website. However, from looking at their activities and programming and speaking to the artistic directors of these classical music organisations, it became quite clear what their mission/goals were.

5.1 Sampling method

I have used purposive sampling since the cases needed to comply with certain criteria as mentioned earlier. I needed my personal network and research about the organisations' structure and employees to find the right people to interview.

I have addressed programmers and the (artistic) directors from major concert halls in Amsterdam, namely the Concertgebouw and the Muziekgebouw. I chose these concert halls because they are the only representative concert halls for classical music within Amsterdam. Next to that, I have addressed programmers and (artistic) directors from four major classical music festivals in Amsterdam, namely the Grachtenfestival, Holland Festival, Cello Biënnale and String Quartet Biënnale. I particularly chose these four festivals because they are all separate entities, and these are the most representative festivals in the field of classical music in Amsterdam. Similarities between these festivals are that the duration of these festivals are all longer than a week and they all receive funding from the municipality. Since I was in particular curious to see how these programmers deal with the new municipal policy mandates, which the alderman of Amsterdam for culture and education published in the policy report Hoofdlijnen Kunst en Cultuur 2021-2024, I have limited my sample to the city of Amsterdam. The reason why I put the cases of concert halls next to annual festivals, is because I wanted to see what the effect of implicit time restriction on the programming in annual/biennial festivals is.

The programming team and distribution varies in every case. For example, at the Concertgebouw the core programming team consists of six people (excluding assistants) while at the Muziekgebouw the artistic director is the head programmer and next to him there is one programmer. After asking them about the programming team, the artistic director explained that the artistic programming process is shared with the whole team. However, I only interviewed the people with the artistic programming title or artistic director title.

5.2 List of interviewees per organisation

Concertgebouw	<p>-programmer Grote Zaal Bank Giro Loterij zomerconcerten/ Zondagochtendconcert/ coordinator programming team</p> <p>Anita Crowe Interview on April 28, 2020 at 14.00 (video call)</p> <p>-programmer Kleine Zaal Mirjam Wijzenbeek Interview on May 6, 2020 at 14.00 (video call)</p>
Muziekgebouw	<p>-artistic/general director Maarten van Boven Interview on April 30, 2020 at 15.00 (video call)</p> <p>-programmer, own programme: the Rest is Noise Shane Burmania Interview on May 8, 2020 at 12.30 (video call)</p>
Grachtenfestival	<p>-senior/head programmer Lestari Scholtes Interview on April 27, 2020 at 11.00 (video call)</p>
Holland Festival	<p>-programming director music and music theatre Jochem Valkenburg Interview on May 1, 2020 at 15.00 (video call)</p>

Cello Biënnale	-artistic director Maarten Mostert Interview on May 11, 2020 at 21.00 (video call)
String Quartet Biënnale	-artistic/general director Yasmin Hilberdink Interview on May 15, 2020 at 13.30 (video call)

5.3 Time frame and interviewing method

The interviews took place at the end of April and beginning of May 2020. This was a very interesting time because the whole country was in a lockdown state. For this research, it meant that live interviews in person was not possible to conduct. All the interviews were thus executed through the medium of video calling. Luckily, all my interviewees were already used to this medium of communication. However, the quality of the wifi connection and the background noise that was picked up by the device's microphone, made it sometimes challenging to be able to hear well and thus made it even harder for the transcription. The advantage on the other hand, was the fact that I had a video recording and thus could see the facial expressions with the words. With certain topics it gave additional insight.

Except for one, all the interviews were conducted in Dutch. The reason for this exception was that this interviewee's native language was English and I prioritised that every interviewee should be completely comfortable in a language to express him/herself.

The duration of the interviews took between forty minutes and seventy minutes. The variety in duration was due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews and the differences in personalities of the interviewees. Some interviewees preferred more brief answers and others more extensive answers.

The interview guide was subdivided in different topics derived from my theoretical concepts. Putting signal words behind the questions helped me to recognise important data easier from the interviews. The interview transcriptions are the writer's archive and can be consulted on request. The interview guide can be found in appendix A.

5.4 Methods of analysis

The grounded theory method suited this cross-sectional research best because it is based on the constant comparative method and builds theory on an inductive basis. Another reason for this method of analysis, is the fact that the purpose of this research is not testing a theory but rather formulating it from the data. This design also gives the freedom to eliminate concepts that were addressed before collecting the data but do not make sense anymore after data collection (Babbie, 2017) (Bryman, 2012).

Additionally, in regard to the policy report “Hoofdlijnen Kunst en Cultuur 2021-2024”, in which the terms *inclusion* and *diversity* are central, discourse analysis has been beneficial. Discourse analysis involves the analysis of how certain terminology, rules and ordering of words can shape the actor’s interpretation (Seale, 2004). Since the aim was to compare the operationalisation of the policy mandates, it was also important to see how this text was interpreted by various programmers/ artistic directors from different classical music organisations in Amsterdam.

5.5 Coding

Once data was recorded, collected and transcribed, I started with open coding because I first needed to identify reoccurring key concepts and arguments (Bryman, 2012; Seale, 2004). Then, I used the results of open coding to shift to axial coding, which involves regrouping the data in concepts that belong to the same category (Bryman 2012; Seale, 2004). This meant that I looked at connections between the concepts. In order to make this concept categorisation process visual and thus more clear, I used colour coding, meaning that each category has its own colour so that it could be easily identified at a later stage (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). The last stage of coding has been selective coding, where the central categories were identified (Seale, 2004). These central categories form the fundament of the theory.

5.6 Matrix

I used a matrix with concepts from the interview guide so it would help me to compare the different cases. It also contributed to the coding process and vice versa. The matrix represents the cross-sectional design of this research and gives a clear overview of the different concepts in various organisations. Vertically, one can read all concepts for each independent organisation. Horizontally, one can compare the concepts between the organisations.

All the information written in the matrix, is derived from the interviews, except for the mission statement keywords. These were derived from the website of the organisation in question. However, two organisations did not put their mission statements on the website and were asked about their mission statement in the interviews. Therefore, with these organisations, it is stated “from interview” in the section about mission statement keywords.

The matrix helped to organise the results into concepts and helped to structure the large amount of data.

Concepts	Het Concertgebouw	Muziekgebouw	Holland Festival	Grachtenfestival	Cello Biennale	String Quartet Biennale
Quality assessment key points	(International) excellence, technical ability, people with an established name, world top artists, What is going to sell?	Technical ability, transcendental,	Distinction, social relevance, out of the box, risk taking, breaking genres	Ambition, promising	Technical ability, Being able to propose unknown repertoire Needs to fit in the overall line of the festival	Fantasy and creativity, own identity Being able to think with SQB about suitable programmes Needs to fit in the overall line of the festival
Important partners in quality assessment	Impresario, Experts	Network of new music organisations international, competition	International festivals of similar kind	Competitions, conservatoires, national festivals of similar kind (young talent development)	Personal, and personal network	Personal, and personal network
Important partners	International concert halls, mainly in Europe of similar kind,	International concert halls of similar kind, Asko Schönberg, Holland Festival,	International festivals of similar kind, performance locations	Gaudeamus, performance locations	Kronberg Academy For competition finalists: Delft Chamber music festival Nederlands Philharmonisch Orkest For education: Oorkaan Cello octet Amsterdam	Competitions, concert halls, colleague festivals
Budget justification	Excellence, keeping the tradition of classical music alive	Social, innovation	Social relevance, Risk taking	Reach all corners of Amsterdam, access for free/low price		Diverse in the broadest sense, young/old, traditional/modern, cultural background
Mission statement key words	Sublime, connects, enrich	Sharing the love for music, with as many as possible, surprise, striking, leading (in the sense of being ahead)	Serious pleasure, an insight of how the world is and how it could be	Promote, support the development	Not clearly stated on website From interview: The cello is the central theme Focus on young talent development	Not clearly stated on website From interview: Broadening the artform of the string quartet
Operationalisation of the mission statement	Connects > keeping the ticket prices as low as possible,	Having an open attitude, people need to feel at home	Working with a guest curator in residence	Bringing music in a more relaxed format to all corners of Amsterdam	Young talent development >	Breaking the traditional string quartet

	Balancing the programme through sandwich method	Striking > programming risky new performances that evoke curiosity rather than confirmation Surprise/leading > being the engine of new music	Taking big risks with out-of-the box programming Programming performances that add to the political debate	Coaching and promoting young musicians Free events and low-ticket prices	Competition and partnership with Kronberg academy Lots of educational programmes (Leerorkest, Oorkaan + Cello Octet) Educational programme with cello for refugee children	performance format through: time elasticity and crossover with other disciplines
Financing structure	Private, biggest part is ticket sales, hall rental to orchestras in residence, municipal subsidy only for the purpose of the historic building. Incidental fundraising from specialised foundations Sponsors, private donors Paint for the building is barter deal	Structural subsidies, ticket sales and hall rentals. Big part of subsidy is for risky programming, small barter deals with publicity agency	Big part subsidies (national and municipal), fundraising, ticket sales sponsors, private donors, barter deals (cars and locations),	Subsidies, big part fundraising, small part ticket sales, sponsors, private donors, barter deals (locations)	Subsidies, big part from ticket sales, fundraising, private donors, in natura: conservatoire of Amsterdam (based on loyalty)	Subsidies, big part from ticket sales, fundraising, private donors, barter deal with furniture company
Strategy for reaching a wider audience	Digital focus (internationally oriented), The rest is noise programming Working with guest curators	Local, connected to city district Working with guest curators	Working with guest curators HF jong Partnering up with artists from other disciplines with many followers	Working with different locations with a certain image (to reach younger audience and minorities) Club nights Going to all the (less central) neighbourhoods and reaching all the	Digital focus: podcast, social media	Marketing agency Partnering up with other organisations from other disciplines
Programming team	Specialised, one lead, quite horizontal, but also top down	Whole team, horizontal Interconnected, artistic director	Specialised small team	Specialised, top down small team	Artistic director, small core team of three people	Artistic director, Programmer, small whole team of four people
Inclusion and diversity > access	Hiring non classical programmers, hiring marketeers with non-western connections.	The rest is Noise programming mainly for younger audience	Addressing themes that different target groups feel affiliated with Working with guest curators	Going to all corners of Amsterdam also to more isolated elderly homes Partnering up with locations where people of	Education programmes Partnering up with non-western and non-classical music ensembles	Partnering up with other organisations from other disciplines Making the line up as diverse as possible

		Picknick concerts for residents of the neighbourhood		a certain target audience gathers		
	Workforce wise still work in progress	Workforce wise still work in progress	Workforce wise still work in progress	Workforce wise still work in progress and	Workforce wise still work in progress	Workforce wise still work in progress
Fair practice code	No direct responsibility but awareness programming free lunchtime concerts were affected	No direct responsibility But awareness	Direct responsibility	Direct responsibility	Direct responsibility	Direct responsibility
Obstacles	Money	Money > less space for risk in programming Availability of halls and artists	Money and different diary planning cultures (opera vs. Pop for example)	Last minute changes/time restriction, balance	Boundaries > does it fit in the theme, in the whole picture of the festival?	Money

6. Results

The formatting of the results is closely related to the order of the theoretical concepts discussed in chapter 3. We start with the background of programmers and a brief insight in what kind of personalities one can find in programming. Secondly, we discuss how quality is perceived in various organisations and which aspects play a role in the assessment. Thirdly, we move to the operationalisation of programming where we highlight the main features that foregrounded from the interview data. Then, we move to stakeholder management. Stakeholders in this research were mostly referred to as partners. In this paragraph we outline the functions of various partnerships. The penultimate topic is about the policy mandates for the coming period 2021-2024. We discuss the different ways of dealing with these mandates and also how it can be sometimes conflicting. The last topic is about how limited finances can lead to restraints and how these financial limits are perceived by various organisations.

6.1 The path to becoming a programmer

None of the interviewees had a straight career path to becoming a programmer. Four interviewees came from the musical practice side. Two were still actively performing and mentioned that it gave an advantage in their contact with artists because there is more of a mutual understanding present.

“Whenever I call them (i.e. artists), they respond differently when they know I am a cellist and a cello teacher. Often, I know them personally.” (Maarten Mostert, Cello Biënnale)

“Communicating is easier because you just really understand them (i.e. musicians) very well and you often know them personally.” (Lestari Scholtes, Grachtenfestival)

The others studied musicology, economy, communication science/political science. This shows that there is no clear recipe to become a programmer. Everyone started in a different function that eventually led to acquainting with programming. The most remarkable story was from the programmer of the Muziekgebouw, who started with working in the cloakroom at the Muziekgebouw before his interest in programming was noticed by the director at that moment.

The main thing that can be concluded from all the respondents, is the fact that there is no straight line to becoming a programmer and that knowledge of many different facets is favourable.

An interesting example is the programming director of the Holland Festival, who learned an extensive range of different instruments, such as saxophone, gamelan and Indian singing, to just name a few. He also used to be a music critic for the newspaper and worked for television.

Some of the interviewees also had a seat on a board or several boards of other organisations for which they are asked for advisory functions because of their broad range of expertise. Being on the board also adds to broadening someone's network.

"I can offer something (i.e. knowledge) that could help smaller organisations." (Yasmin Hilberdink, String Quartet Biennale)

"...Indirectly it does add to your network, that's quite handy, but I mainly do it because I think it's part of being in this position." (Maarten van Boven, Muziekgebouw)

Certain aspects that these programmers and artistic directors did have in common were, being visionary, broad knowledge on repertoire, an extensive network, high curiosity and prioritising actuality. Being visionary they know how to put all the different inputs into a coherent programme. Having broad knowledge on repertoire in combination with an extensive network is necessary because they are the intermediary between different stakeholders in the chain from idea to performance. Being curious is a trait that is important for finding new and innovative projects and artists. Prioritising actuality reveals which topics are important for society in current times. For one organisation actuality plays a more prevalent role than the other, depending on their mission.

"I just want to be able to sit in the hall and have the feeling that the creator of what I am listening at, lives at the same time as me...It helps me imagine what it feels like, to be in someone else's shoes, to see someone else's perspective, who for example lives in a very different place in the world and who has a different view on things, a different emotional response." (Jochem Valkenburg, Holland Festival)

6.2 Quality

6.2.1 The notion of quality

The way quality is defined, is heavily dependent on the mission and the goals of the organisation and the characteristics of programming. For example, whether the programme is especially dedicated to talent development or whether the goal is to have as many people as possible in the venue. In general, there is of course a certain standard description about what quality defines. All the interviewees mentioned quality signal words to describe this notion of quality that they all agreed on.

“...you (i.e. the artist) have to **distinguish** yourself” (Jochem Valkenburg, Holland Festival)

“There has to be this **wow factor**” (Anita Crowe, Concertgebouw)

“...**fantasy and creativity**” “...**having an own identity...**” (Yasmin Hilberdink, String Quartet Biennale)

“...in the first place you need to be an **incredibly good player...**” (Maarten Mostert, Cello Biennale)

“...how **unique** someone is and how much **talent...**” (Lestari Scholtes, Grachtenfestival)

“...how much **expressiveness** an artist has...” “**technical ability** of your instrument...” (Shane Burmania, Muziekgebouw)

“...when someone **masters** the instrument and **rises above** the material...” (Mirjam Wijzenbeek, Concertgebouw)

“...having **control** over the craft” “...that leads to **magical moments...**” (Maarten van Boven, Muziekgebouw)

The notion of quality is further defined based on the mission and goals and this reflects to the actual programming. The Holland Festival for example, mentioned “serious pleasure” in their mission statement. The idea behind these signal words is that social relevance, actuality and political debates are an important fundament of the festival. Therefore, in the Holland Festival they look for performances that break boundaries in terms of culture, genre and traditional performance practice. These ideas lead to taking bigger risks in programming. The risk does not lie in the uncertainty about the quality of the performance but about how it is going to be perceived by the audience. Being a festival that presents many premieres, this adds up to the risk of how it is being perceived by the audience.

Another example is the Cello Biennale, where just being an excellent cellist, is not enough to be programmed. Cellists have to be able to propose (somewhat) unknown repertoire. The focus in this festival, is all the music involving the cello, except for the cello canon such as Dvořák’s cello concerto.

The way an organisation is financed also has an impact on the further notion of quality. If an organisation or certain programming is heavily dependent on income from ticket sales, quality is also defined in terms of the level of appreciation from the audience that can be predicted. For the Concertgebouw, ticket sales are a big source of income and they do not receive subsidies for their programming. Anita Crowe (Concertgebouw) mentioned that next to the general idea of quality as mentioned earlier, she also needs to think of “*What’s going to sell?*”. In the big hall of the Muziekgebouw, they need to make sure that if they programme something there, the hall should be sufficiently filled.

Shane Burmania (Muziekgebouw) speaks about (customer) expectation management and mentioned that “*quality beforehand*” plays a big role in the assessment. “*Quality beforehand*” translates to quality signals of the artist. This is expressed in number of followers on social media, number of CD recordings and reviews.

6.3 Operationalisation

6.3.1 Programming is autonomous

In general, the programming comes first and then organisations look for matching additional fundraising to increase the budget. Policy reports do give guidelines and organisations have to comply to these, but they do not have a big direct effect on the programming.

“*...the subsidies...do have criteria to which you have to comply, but they of course do not go into detail (referring to programming) ...*” (Yasmin Hilberdink, String Quartet Biennale)

Funding does have an influence on whether certain artistic projects are financially possible and all the organisations were facing the coronacrisis at the time of this research. This means that they were all fearing funding cuts for the coming period.

Shane Burmania (Muziekgebouw) pointed out the importance of subsidies. In terms of subsidies and funding, the sector works like a symbiosis, so subsidies for producing organisations (i.e. ensembles/orchestras) are as important for the producing organisations as for the concert halls and festivals. If a producing organisation receives less subsidy or funding, the effect is that some projects are not realisable. This then has an effect on the concert hall or festival not being able to programme it for their stage.

6.3.2 Balancing

Balancing or synonyms of this word, were often mentioned in the interviews. Some programmers/ artistic directors in this research expressed their wish to present more contemporary music to the audience but were afraid to lose their audience if they would programme too many contemporary pieces. Both Maarten Mostert (Cello Biennale) and Anita Crowe (Concertgebouw) use the earlier mentioned so called sandwich strategy, where some well-known piece is programmed with something unknown (Tiedge & Ksobiech, 1988).

“...I have to be a bit careful, make sure that I also put (i.e. programme) something logical, which is easier to digest.” (Maarten Mostert, Cello Biënnale)

“...I spend, you know, a huge amount of time on actually finding the right balance, you know. Is this violin concerto going to be, you know, the one that people want to listen to be played by this soloist? We balance it with, you know, if it's a less familiar work, we have a popular overture or, you know, we got Dvorak 9 in the second half.” (Anita Crowe, Concertgebouw)

Yasmin Hilberdink (String Quartet Biennale) keeps a close eye on whether her line-up has the right balance in terms of younger versus older artists, more modern versus traditional appearance, modern versus historical performing practice and a good variety of countries the artists are coming from. She also makes sure that the same string quartets do not appear more than twice in a row to make sure there is a good flow of new quartets in the festival.

“I really want that if you look at the line-up, it goes from young to old from all the countries that you can think of where there are quartets, to style and repertoire, so the more classical side or the more modern side and... Yes, also in terms of appearance. Some quartets are very hip, and others are traditional...”

(Yasmin Hilberdink, String Quartet Biennale)

Another form of balancing occurs in the Grachtenfestival, where one of the goals is reaching all corners of Amsterdam. This goal is literally translated to making sure that performances do not only take place in the city centre of Amsterdam, but also in all the less centrally located neighbourhoods, where there are hardly any cultural events happening. Through this, access is maximised.

“...that we do not only appear in the city centre, but really in all city districts” (Lestari Scholtes, Grachtenfestival)

6.3.3 Customer confidence

The art of programming is that you dare to take more risks over time to programme unusual pieces and that you are confident that audiences will still come. This happens when a certain following is built up. Audiences then trust that it will be a good performance because they are satisfied with the previous performances and commit to visit more performances. Overall satisfaction, trust and commitment lead to customer confidence (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999).

With customer confidence, audiences dare to visit a performance with unknown programming or an unknown artist because based on their previous experiences with the series or festival they attend, they believe it will be worth to hear and see. This is closely related to the earlier mentioned proactive market orientation, where there is anticipation towards the audience's unconscious desire for novelty. This desire for novelty often goes hand in hand with customer confidence because people want to be sure that what they are exposed to, is of good quality. Customer confidence thus minimises quality uncertainty among the audience.

“...if you have more experience and your festival is running for a longer time, people (i.e. the audience) will trust you (i.e. the festival programming) a bit more that the quality is good.”

(Maarten Mostert, Cello Biennale)

“...sometimes people tell me that they did not know the artists and that because it was The Rest is Noise (series at Muziekgebouw), it motivated them to come. That is actually always the purpose of such a platform, that people (i.e. the audience) have trust and thus get introduced to new things.” (Shane Burmania, Muziekgebouw)

6.3.4 Operationalisation of mission statement

Mission statements and goals give an insight in how organisations operationalise and how they justify their budget. For example, in the Muziekgebouw's mission statement, words like “sharing”, “striking”, “surprise” and “leading” foregrounded. “Sharing” translates to the organisation striving to have the image of openness, flexibility and accessibility.

“... (we) do not to be like that...that feeling that you must have an academic background to be able to enjoy music...” (Shane Burmania, Muziekgebouw)

“...it means for us that many people must feel at home here.” (Maarten van Boven, Muziekgebouw)

The words “striking”, “surprise” and “leading” in the mission statement, translates to the Muziekgebouw mainly programming contemporary performances which can be seen as risky. Therefore, their more risky programming is included in their subsidy application plan, because they need that financial space to be able to take the risk. The Muziekgebouw pleads for innovation and that is also seen in their collaborations with partners.

The Holland Festival, Cello Biennale and String Quartet Biennale are all important partners of the Muziekgebouw.

In the mission statement of the Concertgebouw, the words “sublime”, “connects” and “enrich” foregrounded. “Sublime” and “enrich” translates to programming the international top artists and thus offering the best of what is available. “Connects” translates to the overall experience of being in the Concertgebouw, where they do a lot of tracking on whether the customer experience is on the highest level of satisfaction. They make sure that the concert hall is always in top condition.

“...sublime to me and verrijking (i.e. enrich) means absolutely giving somebody the best musical experience. We're in one of the best halls in the world.” (Anita Crowe, Concertgebouw)

“...I think that the connecting factor lies within (the beauty of) the hall...” (Mirjam Wijzenbeek, Concertgebouw)

In the Grachtenfestival’s mission statement the foregrounding words are “promote” and “support the development”. “Promote” translates to the Grachtenfestival offering many concerts for free and “support the development” translates to coaching young musicians. The free concerts mean that the Grachtenfestival needs a lot of financial support in the form of subsidies, fundraising and sponsorship to be able to cover the costs.

A good example of coaching trajectory is the “nieuwe makers project”, i.e. the annual project where the Grachtenfestival chooses a young composer to create a new composition project with financial support of one big foundation. On top of this, the Grachtenfestival connects the young composer with professionals from the sector who can coach him/her in the development of the new work and his/her career.

6.3.5 Innovation

As mentioned earlier, the Muziekgebouw also houses the Holland Festival, Cello Biennale and String Quartet Biennale. These entities all have the same common goal, which is innovation. However, these various festivals all have a different way of showing innovation.

In the Holland Festival, innovation stands for breaking genres by working together with artists with a non-classical background.

“...he (i.e. the artist) is actually from a different angle (i.e. genre) of electronic music. He performs on pop festivals and writes music for Netflix series...he is a bit of an outsider, but he has created an opera for us before and now he has created something else of course.” (Jochem Valkenburg, Holland Festival)

In the Cello Biennale, innovation stands for presenting the unknown and unheard pieces. Many of these pieces are contemporary pieces but this festival also preaches for the forgotten pieces or the pieces that are not in the cello canon. On top of this, they break the tradition of letting one cellist play a full recital. Instead, a recital in this festival is always shared between various cellists.

“Whenever I talk to cellists who want to do a programme proposal, I always tell them “Don’t come the Dvořák cello concerto again”, make a proposal with something that I haven’t heard before” (Maarten Mostert, Cello Biennale)

“...I never have one cellist that plays a whole recital, but three or four that play in the same evening. I think it’s interesting to distinguish yourself in that way from a normal concert...” (Maarten Mostert, Cello Biennale)

The String Quartet Biennale also translates innovation through breaking the normal concert format. However, in this festival it is done through time elasticity, which means that the starting time and the duration of the performance is amended (The, 2019). Yasmin Hilberdink gave a good example of a special performance that took place in 2018, the Impossible Voyage:

“... (it was) a concert that took six hours with eleven different quartets (i.e. pieces), played by three different string quartets...the concert ended at two o’clock at night” (Yasmin Hilberdink, String Quartet Biennale)

6.4 Stakeholders

6.4.1 Flexibility

The main challenge with different stakeholders, is that you need to be flexible without losing quality and in the case of festivals, making sure that it stays within the theme and the core identity.

Lestari Scholtes mentioned that sometimes certain city districts come up with a request, one month before the festival, when the whole planning is basically ready. She explained that it is then the art to be able to come up with a programming very quickly without losing quality and making sure that it fits the location as well as the festival’s identity.

“...then you have to come up with something (i.e. programming) quickly. However, you also have to see whether it is feasible in terms of production, technical requirements, whether the producer has time for it

and whether there is enough budget, so you are constantly communicating with different parties...”
(Lestari Scholtes, Grachtenfestival)

Jochem Valkenburg mentioned the difficulty that different halls and artists from various disciplines, work with divergent time horizons which makes it challenging to plan. Opera companies plan five years ahead where pop bands only plan a couple of months ahead.

“...this sticky wicket...that’s an often-occurring situation...diaries often don’t align...” (Jochem Valkenburg, Holland Festival)

Shane Burmania also mentioned a similar obstacle.

“...the availability...sometimes from the concert halls...we often programme individual concerts (i.e. not part of a series), so we are dependent on artists’ diaries who are on tour...” (Shane Burmania, Muziekgebouw)

6.4.2 Partnering up is key

The dominant strategy for all organisations in this research, is partnering up with others for various purposes. The first purpose for partnerships is quality assessment. Organisations exchange a lot of information with organisations of a similar kind. This way the quality uncertainty about projects/artists is diminished, because it goes through different assessment channels (Caves, 2003).

Another purpose of partnering up is to share costs and thus risk. In the Holland Festival they often do co-productions because it is not financially feasible for one organisation to realise a big project.

“Some organisations produce projects themselves. Manchester International Festival for example, has budgets where we could only dream of...However, this means that they can give a bag with money to a creator and say “create something beautiful with it”, but often these kinds of organisations don’t have enough money to realise it on their own. Therefore, they knock on less financially wealthy festivals like us, though equally interested, to ask for a co-production contribution. Thus, we pay a little bit of the creating process. They get the premiere and after that the production is ours.” (Jochem Valkenburg, Holland Festival)

The Muziekgebouw even created a collective to be able to keep the flow of innovation.

“Muziekgebouw stands for innovation, and if you want to keep the flow, collaboration is needed, because we are not able to do it on our own. Many other festivals and ensembles are also not able to do it on their own. Therefore, we thought “Isn’t it better to join forces and create a collective?” So that is what we did!” (Maarten van Boven, Muziekgebouw)

6.4.3 Visibility

Another reason why organisations have partnerships, is to gain more visibility for their own organisation and the artists that are closely affiliated with the organisation through winning the festival competition for example. The Cello Biennale and the Grachtenfestival both have a competition within the festival. The Cello Biennale’s important loyal partner is the Kronberg Academy. They made the agreement that cello students from the Kronberg Academy get the chance to perform in the Cello Biennale and the finalists of the Cello Biennale competition, get a chance to participate in the masterclasses of the Kronberg Academy. Both organisations make agreements on how they divide the out-of-pocket costs.

The Grachtenfestival has an agreement with the Concertgebouw that the winner of the Grachtenfestival Conservatoire Competition gets to perform in a lunchtime recital.

6.4.4 Reaching a broader audience

The Muziekgebouw has a quite close partnership with the Holland Festival, Cello Biennale and the String Quartet Biennale. This leads to bigger audience numbers and more variety in programming in the Muziekgebouw. The festivals thus work as a catalyst for the concert hall.

“...it’s interesting to see that this (i.e. partnerships) leads to bigger audience numbers because they are independent entities with their own budgets.” (Maarten van Boven, Muziekgebouw)

Partnering up with artists and ensembles who have their own entourage can help with reaching a different audience. Also partnering up with certain hip locations can help with reaching a younger audience.

“...with our marketing agency, we do research in where we can find partners who could give us more visibility, with whom we could collaborate, which would lead to reaching those people (i.e. a broader audience).” (Yasmin Hilberdink, String Quartet Biennale)

“...with that project, we collaborated with a British producer and DJ, who has massive street credibility, a completely different world, but there was a clear connection between him and that Stockhausen project and it worked very well. Through him, we could reach a new audience and make them enthusiastic. We don’t just do this because it’s clever marketing wise...Artistic (goals) are always a priority.” (Jochem Valkenburg, Holland Festival)

6.5 Policy mandates

6.5.1 Fair practice code

The fair practice code is a current ongoing debate about fair pay for artists. It was also included in the national policy mandate for the subsidy application of the coming period (2021-2024). In general, the festivals in this research show that they have direct responsibility over this. In the case of concert halls, they have indirect responsibility because they book through an impresario or often book a whole ensemble who has to distribute the fee to their individual players. However, responsibility is felt among some of the programmers from the concert halls. Shane Burmania mentioned that when you work together with a partner who provides the artists, it is important to monitor whether all the artists get a fair pay. One aspect that programmers often do struggle about is whether young musicians, who are still studying, should be paid or not and how much they should be paid. Since young musicians in school often do not have to live of this income, it is debated that they do not “need” it.

The Concertgebouw was being criticised because they did not use to pay musicians who played in their free lunch time concerts. Now, they have changed this to paying all the musicians who have finished their music studies. However, with students, it is seen as part of their development. Often these concerts are booked through conservatoires.

Yasmin Hilberdink (String Quartet Biennale) stressed on the awareness of organisations not to exploit musicians referring to musicians often being asked to do a small extra performance for a small event within a festival without being paid extra. In other professions this would be unthinkable but in the art sector there is a grey area about what is acceptable and what not.

Shane Burmania (Muziekgebouw) expressed his worries about a holistic approach at the time of this research’s current situation of the corona crisis, where all concert halls are closed, and all live concerts are thus cancelled. Concert halls and festivals as well as most musicians want to stay visible during these times. However, it is financially challenging because live streaming and video recordings cost extra

money. Next to paying for these digital services, you should pay the artists but with the loss of ticket sales income, there is a lot less budget available to distribute.

“...sometimes we want to do a special streaming...but what is our position in this if there is no income from ticket sales that would normally cover the costs? We also want to be there for the musicians because they are part of the ecosystem...the reason why we can exist too...” (Shane Burmania, Muziekgebouw)

6.5.2 Inclusion and diversity

All the interviewees in this research agreed that the policy mandate for inclusion and diversity is a good way to create more awareness about the inclusion and diversity parameters. Within programming in various organisations, there are different interpretations about what inclusion and diversity means. At the Concertgebouw they created more diversity in their programming through hiring a specialised programmer for pop and jazz. At the Grachtenfestival, inclusion is also interpreted as reaching out to elderly homes that are not centrally located in the city. However, in general, all the programmers and artistic directors also interpreted this policy mandate as having a more culturally diverse and especially more non-western programming. The programming in every organisation in this research already has “inclusion and diversity” on their agendas and wish to further develop this.

It was interesting to see how various organisations have different ways and focus points in executing more inclusion and diversity. At the Muziekgebouw they organise picknick concerts, especially for the people living in the city district Amsterdam Noord. In the Holland Festival, they invite a guest curator/programmer in residence with a high social relevance factor.

In terms of workforce, all organisations in this research still struggle to diversify. This is a process that needs time. The interviewees all agreed that it is still work in progress in terms of diversifying the workforce.

Organisations find it difficult to hire employees with a culturally diverse background, because they often do not apply for the job. On the other hand, it was also mentioned that the reason why so few people with a culturally diverse background apply for a job in their organisation, is the fact that the workforce is very homogeneous at the moment with people from an all-western background. This might be the reason that people with a culturally diverse background do not feel comfortable enough to apply for the job.

“At the moment, the workforce is very white. I can imagine that people with a different cultural background feel a threshold to work for us” (anonymous, since this is quite sensitive information)

6.5.3 Conflict

Next to being overall positive about the policy mandate of “inclusion and diversity”, some organisations also feel conflict within this since most of the core identities of these classical music organisations are based on the Western tradition of classical music. Thus, the conflict is between change and tradition.

6.6 Financial restraint

Money forms the biggest restraint for artistic programming in various ways. The main restraint is felt in artistic freedom because it limits the amount of risk that can be taken in programming.

Both concert halls in Amsterdam felt the pressure of selling enough tickets limits the freedom to be able to programme things that are far less known. Especially for an organisation where the core activity is presenting new music, which goes hand in hand with quality uncertainty and thus risk, it is a paradox that there are not enough financial resources to take too big of a risk.

Yasmin Hilberdink (String Quartet Biennale) mentioned that being innovative often includes having to work with workers from other disciplines. For example, if you would like to work with a light designer, there are sunk costs to cover. Often, there is such a limited budget for these things but without these extra things like working with light design, you are seen as not being innovative.

In general, financial restraint is felt in not always being able to completely realise your creative ideas because you are bound to a budget.

“You work with your kind of creative, you know, musical side in one hand and your Excel spreadsheet in the other hand. And the two have to go together... I can have the most beautiful and wonderful ideas in the world. And if that doesn't balance out, then it's gone.” (Anita Crowe, Concertgebouw)

7. Conclusion

There is no straight path to becoming an artistic programmer in the classical music industry. It takes a lot of experience on other jobs that relate to the tasks of an artistic programmer and of course a deep knowledge of (classical) music is required in order to meet programming criteria nowadays like innovation, diversity, inclusion, vision and actuality.

The notion of quality has many different facets, which includes the general idea of what quality is, which is connected to a collection of certain artistic skills and the programmer's translation of quality digested through the mission and goals of the organisation. Many programmers/artistic directors in this research found it challenging to describe quality of artists through the eyes of their organisation because it is subjective, yet it should resonate with the majority of the audience. The latter becomes easier when there is a higher customer confidence level with the organisation.

Missions, goals and themes, help to guide programmers to make a coherent programme. In general programmers feel autonomous and feel no direct artistic intervention from subsidy providers. However, subsidies are an important source to make projects realisable because of the market failure characteristics in the art sector. Thus, indirectly, if less subsidies are provided, it results in limited artistic possibilities in the creation process.

Partnering up with other organisation or ensembles maximises artistic, social and economic capacity. Classical music organisations survive through collaborating with others. Financial considerations play an important role in partnerships. It reduces the risk and thus gives more artistic freedom.

The policy mandates are all taken seriously and have a big influence on how programmers operate. The "fair practice code" mandate gives a major amount of awareness. However, the way this mandate should be operationalised, is an ongoing debate. The boundaries are not always clear because of the music sector cultures. It is the responsibility of the programmer as well as the artists to guard these boundaries. Is it right not to pay young musicians who are still studying? It is often seen as part of their learning trajectory and justified with "exposure". These musicians might not be fully professional yet, but in a culture where boundaries are sometimes unclear when to pay or not, it is holistic to educate these young musicians at an earlier stage that they should receive a fair pay and help them define for themselves what a fair pay includes.

It was remarkable to hear about one certain orchestra being mentioned by numerous interviewees that is seen as an important partner for being seen as more diverse in their programming. Some of the interviewees were aware of the fact that this orchestra is on the programme of many organisations. If all these organisations work with the same orchestra that is labelled as diverse, this leads to standardisation.

On the other hand, it could be a positive thing because then the general audience gets more acquainted with this style of this orchestra and thus leads to inclusion of new norms.

The policy mandates gradually make organisations change in certain directions. This is somewhat conflicting because it could mean a trade-off for traditions that support the core values of the organisation. Path dependency is the key to move forward in the right directions.

Artistic programming is all about balancing the left hemisphere of the brain, the logic, with the right hemisphere of the brain, the creative part. Artistic integrity is the starting point, but it is also important to tick all the boxes of the many non-artistic objectives that need to be considered.

The art of artistic programming is to be as creative as possible within the boundaries and with a minimum amount of concessions. The dominant strategy of all the cases in this research is finding partners to collaborate, share costs and risks, exchange ideas and making a bigger impact through reaching a broader audience. The cultural sector is a vast network where creators, performers, concert halls and festivals cannot stand alone. Festivals need a venue, and in many cases, this venue is a concert hall. A concert hall gets value through the performances that take place there. Creators need performers to give life to their work. It is like a symbiosis, where things are interdependent, and the role of the artistic programmer is to harmonise everything to make it coherent.

8. Limitations, future research and strengths

Varying organisation structures gave an imbalance in the number of interviewees that would fit this research. In order to get a very detailed understanding of each organisation, it would have been beneficial to speak to other employees who are not in the programming team but in close contact. For example, a valuable addition would have been interviewing the managing director of each organisation. On the other hand, in some cases for the current research, the managing directors had only worked there for one year, so this could have resulted in limited information from these people.

Since the classical music sector works as a symbiosis, it would have been interesting to include producing classical music organisations such as orchestras and ensembles. This would give more insights since some ensembles are in such close contact with concert halls and festivals about their artistic views. However, due to the time limit, and the different nature of programming within orchestras, it was not feasible to include them.

Regarding the policy trends, it would be valuable to research these topics on a national level or even international level. It would be interesting to see what kind of impact on the programming the finance structure in different countries has.

The advantage of this study is the fact that it is a cross-sectional case study of classical music organisations in Amsterdam, which is one of the main cities for the cultural sector in the Netherlands. Therefore, it is a good indication for what the cultural climate on national level is like.

Another advantage of this study is the time frame, because a new subsidy period was just around the corner. Therefore, addressing the new policy mandates could not be more relevant.

9. Reflection

Many organisations that were included in this research are highly dependent on their ticket sales. It always brings in a certain risk. However, these organisations have built up a fundamental amount of followers, audience members who are repeat visitors. Therefore, in normal times, there is not so much to worry about. There is confidence in getting enough ticket sales. However, at the time of this research, concert halls were closed and thus ticket sales were impossible. All the organisations mentioned their dependence on online visibility through many live streamed performances. However, what is the meaning of a live concert if being in the intimacy of a shared space, listening to the same performance with individual ears, is prohibited?

Doing this research at times of the corona crisis, augmented the fact of the interconnectedness of the cultural sector. A good example from this research is the Concertgebouw, who is heavily dependent on orchestras and ensembles paying rent to use the space. The monthly costs of the building are high and without the orchestras and ensembles, the Concertgebouw is running a massive loss. The lockdown broke up the needed connections and resulted in the cultural sector being on the verge of collapsing.

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Appendix A

Interview guide

1. What is your background? (Education, career path so far) *[indirect path through initial musician career/ direct path through musicology]*
2. Why did you want to become a programmer?
3. How did you end up in this organisation?
4. Do you fulfill other functions next to your job as a programmer for this organisation? If yes, what other function(s)?
5. (If other function(s)) Does this other function complement your job as a programmer for this organisation? If so, how? If not, does it hinder? *[balancing artistic career with programming]*

Quality assessment key points

6. How do you describe quality of an artist in your role as a programmer? *[technical skill, novelty, innovation]*

Important partners in quality assessment

7. In the selection process of artists, who are the important regular partners for you? This could be a competition or a festival, a conservatoire, an impresario. *[agreements, financial advantages, confirmation of quality]*
8. Do you have certain agreements with these partners? Could you give an example? What are the characteristics of this agreement? *[financial, visibility]*

Mission statement + Operationalisation of the mission statement

9. Your mission statement is ... How does your programming reflect this mission statement?
10. What are the main goals of your organisation? To what extent do you stick to these goals when programming? *[personal input]*

Budget justification

11. When booking an artist/artists, what are the main points you need to look out for in your role for this organisation? (Artistically and economically) *[novelty, excellence, price, awards, reputation]*
12. How is your organisation financed? *[municipality, private, subsidies, main sponsors, main subsidy provider, ambassadors, friends]*
13. Which of these financiers have an important stake in the programming? *[municipality, sponsors, ambassadors, friends]*
14. Do you also receive non-monetary support from organisations or individuals? i.e. locations offering their space? *[ambassadors, hotels, sponsorship deals, brands, drinks, food]*
15. Which of these non-monetary supporters have an important stake in the programming? *[preferences, religion, mission, identity, prestige]*

Strategy for operationalisation of the policy mandate

16. In the policy report Hoofdlijnen Kunst & Cultuur 2021-2024 is explicitly mentioned. The policy mandate from the AFK (Amsterdams Fonds voor Kunsten) for the coming period is “inclusion and diversity in four p’s”. Do you feel it means making big changes for your organisation? Why yes/ why not? *[limiting, all the same strategy, desperate, quality, forced]*
17. Do you feel the policy mandate will threaten the freedom in programming? If so, how? *[quality, forced, decline, purpose]*

Strategy for reaching a wider audience, including ancillary services

18. What strategies do you have in your programming to reach a wider audience? *[easy, location, novelty, timing, themes]*
19. What kind of extra services do you offer your audience to make the concert going experience more pleasant or interesting? *[beverages, extra, food, experience]*
20. Do you have influential partners for these extra services? Do these partners have a stake in the programming? *[themes]*
21. What are the limitations you face when programming? *[financial, talent from abroad, age, external pressure]*
22. Which event and/or series within your organisation are you most proud of and why? *[personal, artistic, challenge, believe, novel]*
23. Is there anything you would like to add?

