

Nordic choral conductor education: Overview and research agenda

Dag Jansson, Pia Bygdéus & Anne Haugland Balsnes

ABSTRACT

The choral movement holds a prominent position in the Nordic countries, and choral singing is one of the top social activities in terms of the number of people involved. While all these choirs need conductors and depend on choral leadership competence, we have limited knowledge of the existence and level of available competence, qualitatively or quantitatively. Music academies and universities are key providers of competence and capacity to meet the demands of amateur and professional ensembles alike. This paper seeks to establish a picture of university/academy-based education in choral conducting, with focus on the Scandinavian countries. Existing research is scarce, and the overall aim of this initial effort is to provide a foundation for further research. We have pursued the following related research questions; which educational programmes exist, what are their profiles in terms of the underlying thinking and ensemble needs they serve, and what is the capacity in terms of number of students? A variety of research data has been gathered, including curriculum reviews and interviews with conducting teachers and students from selected institutions. Although we have been able to answer the research questions to some degree, the study opens a series of new questions, which suggest an agenda for further research.

Key words: choir, choral conductor, education, curriculum

1. Introduction

The choral movement holds a prominent position in the Nordic countries, and choral singing is one of the top social activities in terms of the number of people involved. While all these choirs need conductors and depend on choral leadership competence, we have limited knowledge of the existence and level of available competence. The music academies and universities are central in the provision of competence and capacity to meet the demands of amateur and professional ensembles alike. A number of shorter and less formal courses also exist, and these play an important part in serving the needs of the conductor population.¹

This study seeks to establish a picture of university/academy-based education in choral conducting, with focus on the Scandinavian countries.² Existing research is scarce, and the overall aim of this initial effort is to provide a foundation for further research. We have pursued the following related research questions; which educational programmes exist, what are their profiles in terms of the underlying thinking and ensemble needs they serve, and what is the capacity in terms of number of students. A variety of research data has been gathered, including curriculum reviews, interviews with conducting teachers and students from selected institutions. We align with an outlook on the choral conductor role which, with a broad brush, could be denoted a “qualitative and holistic” research tradition (Durrant, 1998, 2003; Gumm, 2012; Jansson, 2015; Varvarigou & Durrant, 2011).

Definition and delineation of the practice

The choral field is wide and varied, involving a large number of participants. It ranges from the professional music field to informal collective singing, within and outside institutions. It follows that choral leadership is equally varied, conceptually as well as regards practice—it is difficult to “nail” the role precisely (Jansson, 2018b). Another implication is that choral conductor competence is more situated than is explicitly discussed and consciously reflected in conductor education. We observe the multivalence of the choral field not least considering how a number of similar labels are used to denote the leader. Words like choral leader, choral conductor, choral pedagogue, and ensemble leader have, at times, the same meaning, and are at times used to highlight

1 Various kinds of less formalised training is at times brought into the discussion, although it is outside the primary scope of this paper.

2 The focus on Scandinavia rather than the entire Nordic region is purely a pragmatic choice, given the researchers’ locations and readily access to primary data.

a particular feature (Bygdéus, 2015). The prefix *choral* is used to distinguish from orchestral, although a number of ensemble situations are in fact mixed, and some educational programmes blend the two. The various labels may reflect a tradition, professional identity or aesthetic outlook, and institutions sustain a certain educational canon by how words are used interchangeably or distinctively. For the purpose of this study, we will not delineate the field or define the role in terms of including or excluding certain practices. Instead, we define the role and the implied competences according to their “centre of gravity” or focus—by how they are actually understood and nurtured within programmed education in academic institutions. Any ambiguity of terms used is therefore seen as a property of the role in its own right. Such an open-ended view also recognises that choral conductor education might be a rather blunt instrument in two particular ways. First, education is not necessarily targeted effectively at those working situations in which conductors find themselves (Balsnes, 2009). Second, there are ways other than academic education alone whereby conductors acquire their competence (Jansson, 2018a). Both cases represent salient features of the choral leadership practice in Scandinavia.

Definition and delineation of educational programmes

In this study, we distinguish between five major categories of educational programmes for choral conducting, which differ in terms of the type of degree awarded; (1) a master’s degree in choral conducting, (2) a bachelor’s degree in choral conducting, (3) a church musician’s degree with choral conducting embedded (“minor”), (4) music educator’s degree with choral conducting embedded (“minor”), and (5) stand-alone study units in choral conducting, at basic and advanced levels. While this taxonomy is straight-forward with regard to degree, it is more blurred as regards the extent and content of the choral leadership curriculum. For example, aural skills and score study could be part of a conducting study unit on one programme and a generic music topic on another programme. Because choral conductor competences share a number of elements with the generic musician competence base, it is simply not possible to quantify the “weight” of conducting in a programme. Moreover, because choral conducting competences constitute an open-ended skill set, there are no clear criteria for including or excluding a given competence element. Figure 1 illustrates that the boundaries are, to a large extent, arbitrary.

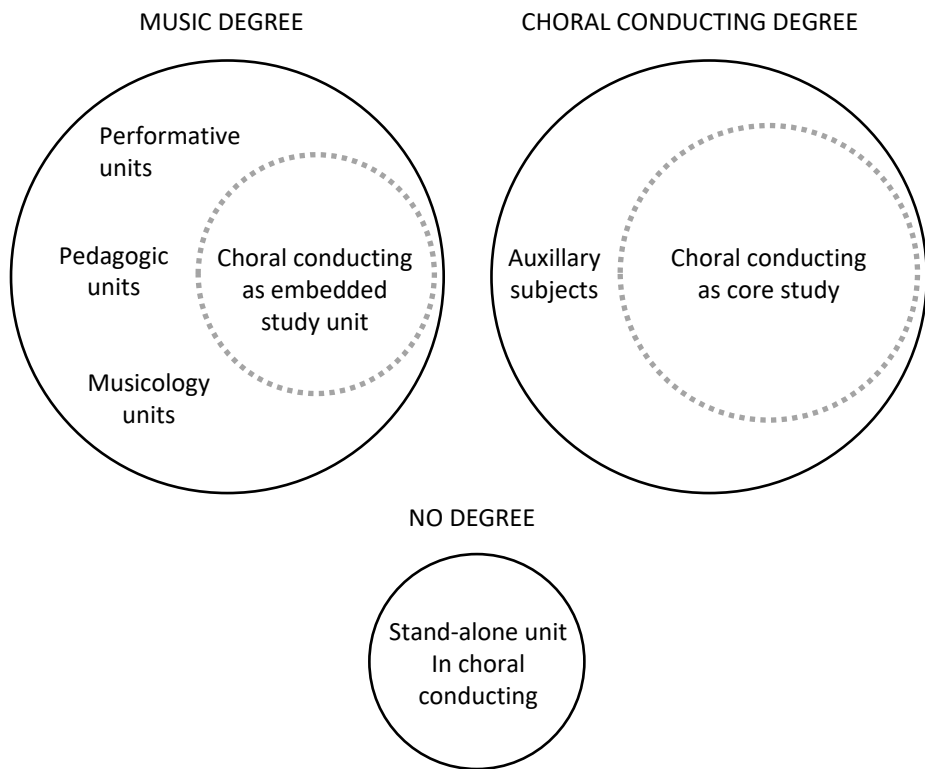


Figure 1: Illustration of blurred boundaries between core and auxiliary elements in choral conductor education

2. Research on choral conducting

When we investigate the conductor's role and conducting competences, it is not at all clear in which scholarly discipline and research tradition we find ourselves. The first challenge is to cope with the great variety of choral situations, from the community choir to the professional ensemble, adults as well as children and, not least, musical genres which call for different conceptions of choral leadership. At the same time, there is clearly some common ground, as evidenced by how quite different situations might form part of a conductor's work-life. The second challenge is that even within a single ensemble situation, the conductor faces competing demands, to the extent that they could be seen to represent different roles (Hunt, Stelluto & Hooijberg, 2004).

Alternatively, these competing demands might be viewed as different needs which must be balanced in order to enact musical leadership well (Jansson, 2015). These needs translate into functions which are headlined as *artist, craftsman, mentor and manager* (Jansson, 2018b). The conductor as artist is the one who creates meaning from the musical material and establishes an aesthetic idea of the sounding music. The craftsman moulds the sound towards this idea, by correcting errors, blending voices, shaping timbre, and unifying expression. The conductor mobilises, guides, and enthuses singers to come forward with their individual contributions, by understanding and responding to their needs—an act of mentoring. The conductor is also the one who organises the preparation process, which often includes a host of extra-musical issues—a managerial function.

The various functions of the role call for an array of skills and behaviours which are research domains in their own right. Conducting might be understood in terms of such widely differing subject matter as the semiotics of musical gestures (Billingham, 2001; D'Ausilio et al., 2012; Garnett, 2009; Godøy & Leman, 2010; Sandberg-Jurström, 2009), relational aspects of music-making (Atik, 1994; Green, 2005; Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009; Schiavio & Høffding, 2015), and the perception of choral sound (Daugherty, 1999; Daugherty, Manternach & Brunkan, 2013; Ternström, 1991, 1994, 2003). However, conducting remains an inherently integral phenomenon, and partial views tend to leave little room for the “gestalt conductor”, or how it all comes together (Durrant, 2003, 65). Moreover, the role itself appears in different guises, contingent on ensemble type, the particular phase of the music-making process and, not least, music culture and genre.

Choral leadership is situated at the intersection of three partially overlapping fields, as shown in figure 2; *musicianship, leadership and pedagogy*. The conducting practice emerged from the position of the ensemble member and has been shaped by the needs of the music and the given ensemble, reflecting its music-cultural era (Durrant, 2003; Schonberg, 1967).

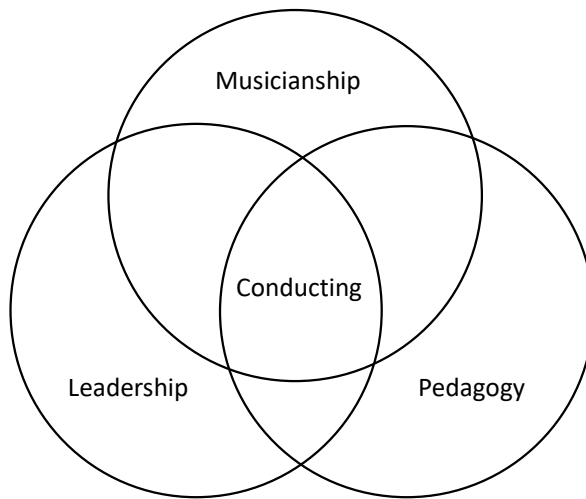


Figure 2: The choral leadership practice field

The conductor is first and foremost a co-musician in a situation where competences are shared with singers and instrumentalists alike. On top of these, musicianship is expanded to accommodate the dedicated functions of the conductor. Leadership is a vast academic field, and even a subset of the wider field of organisation studies. The intersection between leadership and musicianship is ontologically ambiguous. On the one hand, conducting may simply be considered a specific instance of leadership, which allows the application of general leadership theory in the music domain (Apfelstadt, 1997; Armstrong & Armstrong, 1996; Bush, 2011; Davidson, 1995; Dobson & Gaunt, 2015; Goodstein, 1987; Linstead & Höpfl, 2000; Wis, 2002, 2007). Conversely, conducting may be seen as an aesthetic practice which contains certain “leaderly features”, in which case aesthetics inform leadership, rather than the other way around (Bathurst & Ladkin, 2012; Koivunen & Wennes, 2011; Pearce et al., 2016; Sutherland & Jelinek, 2015). A special case of the latter view is the pervasive use of jazz as a way to understand leading and following (Hatch, 1999; Weick, 1998; Williamson, 2013).

The intersection between musicianship and pedagogy is experienced by most musicians, when they engage in teaching or guiding ensemble members. It is particularly pertinent for the conductor role, as rehearsing and teaching are analogous: “One might argue that everything involved in rehearsing and conducting can be characterized via a teaching paradigm, even in a professional ensemble environment” (Price & Byo, 2002, 236). Unsurprisingly, the great majority of research on choral conducting has

been carried out within a pedagogical frame (Geisler, 2010), in US high-school and college settings in particular (Cox, 1989; Grimland, 2005; Gumm, 1993; Scott, 1996; Skadsem, 1997; Yarbrough & Madsen, 1998). The didactic orientation of choral conducting literature is complemented by non-academic handbook-style writing—“how to be a good conductor”. However, studies of choral conductor education are scarce (Durrant, 1998; Varvarigou, 2014), which is why we, as researchers, developed an interest in the topic. Each of our doctoral dissertations addressed some underlying theme; Balsnes (2009) showed how an academy-educated conductor fails the needs of an amateur choir, whilst Jansson (2013) described how singers experience choral leadership, and Bygdéus (2015) addressed a series of approaches and mediating tools at the choral conductor’s disposal.

3. Analytical concepts

If we attempt to understand the various specific competence elements associated with choral leadership, we cannot avoid an eclectic approach to available theory and research. Any theory that sheds light on some aspect of the role would be useful, to a greater or lesser extent. However, when we study the *conductor gestalt*, we depend on some form of integrative framework. Varvarigou and Durrant (2011) have proposed one such framework to facilitate the discussion of education and curricula, bringing together various theories of effective teaching and learning choral conducting. The framework situates conducting education based on six parameters; learners, tutors, music repertoire and choir, process, and learning outcomes. We do not address these parameters systematically, but they do serve to situate some of the discussion points. Goodlad (1979) proposed five different manifestations of a curriculum which may be headlined as (1) ideal, (2) formal, (3) perceived (by tutors), (4) operationalised, and (5) experienced (by learners). The present study does not distinguish clearly between these, however, the collected data is a blend of three of them; formal curriculum via official web pages and administrators, perceived curriculum via interviews with tutors, and experienced curriculum via interviews with former students.

Learning outcomes deal with conductor competences, that is, what it is we assume that choral conductors must master in order to fill the role. A holistic and comprehensive model of conductor competences is proposed by Jansson (2018b). Here, conductor competences comprise (1) the musical-technical, (2) the situational-relational, and (3) the conductor’s existential foundation. *Musical-technical competences* comprise score

proficiency, repertoire knowledge, aural/error detection skills, gestural vocabulary, vocal technique, language skills, and choir acoustics. These competences can largely be acquired outside the ensemble situation. Their relevance and relative importance will vary greatly, depending on the context. One of the most puzzling issues with regard to musical-technical competence is the significance of gestural skills. On one hand, this is the most iconic and defining feature of the role, and it is beyond dispute that a certain gestural proficiency is very useful. Conducting gestures serve multiple purposes, from basic synchronisation to unifying expression, also including the enhancement of singers' bodily preparation, and supporting a voice-friendly posture (Durrant, 2003; Fuelberth, 2003; Gumm, 2012). On the other hand, conducting gestures may not be a determining factor when assessing the conductor's effectiveness (Durrant, 1994). What is more, given the great variety of conducting styles, including those of legendary conductors, the gestural conventions of conducting are not as self-evident as is commonly assumed, and few gestures can be seen as emblems with consistent meanings (Benge, 1996; Luck & Nte, 2008; Luck & Sloboda, 2008; Scott, 1996; Wöllner & Auhagen, 2008). A troubling observation is that the importance of conducting gestures seems to oscillate between two end points; paramount, and of marginal significance. A key issue for any choral leader curriculum is therefore how gestural skills are positioned with regard to other competences, both in terms of time spent, how they are blended with other learning topics, and what attention they are given in students' time with real ensembles.

Situational-relational competences comprise overall rehearsal organisation and the host of possible interventions the conductor might execute at any given rehearsing moment and during performance. Also included is the ability to provide timely and appropriate guidance to ensemble members—mentorship. Because the choir is a “living instrument”, the conductor also needs to facilitate the spacing and placement of singers which both supports the intended sound and promotes the singers' security and ability to contribute. An overarching competence, which permeates choral leadership on multiple levels, is the ability to balance control with empowerment. This applies to every interactive moment, from correcting errors or letting singers self-improve to the choice of gestures and signals during performance.

The third competence layer concerns the conductor's *existential foundation*, which is partly about the quality of the commitment with which the conductor comes to the ensemble situation and partly about the potency of that commitment. The quality is characterised by presence, devotion, and sincerity. The potency is characterised by authority and aesthetic will-power. While the elements of the existential foundation

may seem rather elusive, they are in fact easily recognised and appreciated by choral singers, and notably, when lacking, the value of other competences is undermined (Jansson 2013).

To sum up, we rely on Varvarigou and Durrant's (2011) framework for situating conductor education and Jansson's (2018b) model of conductor competences. They provide a theoretical foundation for the interviews with tutors and former students, primarily by ensuring a comprehensive coverage of themes. However, the theories are not stringently applied in the analysis of the relevant institutions and available curricula, because data is largely available on a more aggregate level. However, wherever possible, the discussion ties back to these models. Furthermore, the models also guide the discussion of a research agenda for future work.

4. Methodology

In the process of compiling data on choral conductor education in Scandinavia, we have used several collection methods, qualitative as well as quantitative. Beyond a general survey of the field, which draws on an ethnographic tradition (Fetterman, 1989; Silverman, 1985), the study was designed as multiple case-study (Stake, 1995, 2000; Yin, 1989). In order to understand the overall picture of the choral field in Scandinavia, information about numbers and types of choirs, choral organisations and conductor supply was collected as background data. The sources were the choral associations in the three countries in question, and these were contacted during the autumn of 2016.

Denmark

Estimates of the number of choral singers in Denmark vary considerably. The organisation *Sangens hus* has identified around 50 000 choral singers in 2000 choirs.³ Pedersen and Jensen (2004) estimate that there are around 3000 choirs with at least 75 000 singers. *Europa Cantat*⁴ reports that there are nearly 150 000 Danes engaged in collective singing, suggesting that the unorganised field is larger than the organised one. The majority of choirs are found within churches, complemented by a variety of school

3 "Kortlægning av den danske korverden", unpublished report by Heidi Kudahl, 2013, issued by Sangens Hus. The calculations in the report were based on analysis of "Kulturvaneundersøkelsen" i 2012: http://kum.dk/Documents/Publikationer/2012/Bogen%20danskernes_kulturvaner_pdfa.pdf

4 "Singing Europe", report published by www.singingeurope.org in 2017.

choirs and community choirs. Half of Danish choral leaders are employed by churches or by education associations (“oplysningsforbund”). There are nine professional or semi-professional choirs in Denmark.⁵ Choirs are easily able to attract qualified conductors in the larger cities, while it is more difficult in rural areas. Several choral organisations aiming to promote choral singers in Denmark offer training courses for conductors.⁶ Half of the Danish choirs are organised in such associations, which comprise approximately 1000 choirs. They cooperate through the umbrella association *The Joint Council of Amateur Arts Associations* (“Amatørenes Kunst og Kultur Samråd”).⁷

Norway

The organised choral field in Norway comprises nearly 3000 choirs and more than 80 000 singers. More than one third of these are members of *Norges Korforbund* (the Norwegian Choir Association). The second largest association is *Norsk sangerforum* (the *Norwegian Singer Forum*). Two associations specifically organise church choirs (*Ung kirkesang* and *Norsk kirkesangforbund*); *Ung i kor* is an association which organises children’s and youth choirs, and there are several associations affiliated with religious organisations outside the Norwegian Church. More than 200 000 Norwegians sing in choirs (Balsnes, 2009) and *Europa Cantat* reports the total number of people who engage in collective singing to be 246 000, which suggests that the organised choral field is only about one third of the total. There is an ongoing process of creating more publicly funded professional choirs. The field ranges from the full-time professional *National Opera Choir* via the part-time *Norwegian Soloist Choir* to the newly created regional part-time project choirs.⁸

Sweden

Sweden holds the most prominent position in the Scandinavian choral field, in relative as well as absolute terms. *Europa Cantat* reports that 561 000 people are engaged in collective singing in Sweden, or 6% of the population, a higher share than Norway (5%) and Denmark (2.6%). While we do not know the number of choirs in Sweden,

5 Det Kongelige Operakor, Den Jyske Operas Kor, DR Vokalensemblet, DR Koncertkoret, Ars Nova Copenhagen, Mogens Dahl Kammerkor, Kantoriet i Københavns Domkirke, Vokalselskabet GLAS.

6 The largest is Folkekirkens ungdomkor with 475 member choirs and approximately 12,000 choral singers and choral leaders. The second largest is Kor72, which organises 278 member choirs with 8200 singers, and in addition has a separate youth organisation. Danske folkekor has 72 member choirs, most of which are traditional «folkekor». Other choral organisations include Dansk sangerforbund for male choirs and Dansk arbeidersanger- og musikerforbund (DASOM), whose members are both choirs and orchestras.

7 www.akks.dk

8 Edvard Grieg Kor, Kilden Vokalensemble, Trondheim Vokalensemble, Vokal Nord.

a simple extrapolation of the situation in Denmark and Norway would indicate 6 000 choirs or more. Choral singing in Sweden is supported by a somewhat different structure than in Norway and Denmark, comprising five “choral centres”, four of which are named according to their regional affiliation. *The Eric Ericson International Choral Center*, founded on the legacy of the late legendary conductor, tutor and “founding father” of the present-day Swedish choral field, even has a prestigious concert hall dedicated to choral singing—*Eric Ericsonhallen* in central Stockholm. The role of each choral centre is similar to the others, albeit with some variation in profile, as they all have the aim to promote choral singing in a broad sense. These centres are complemented by the largest choral associations: *Sveriges Kyrkosångsförbund* (the Swedish Association of Church Singers), *Sveriges Körförbund* (the Swedish Choirs Association), *UNGIKÖR*—an association for children’s and youth choirs, and *Föreningen Sveriges Körledare* (the Federation of Swedish Choral Leaders). A large number of choirs are not members of any associations. The two most well-known professional choirs are *Eric Ericson Kammarkör* and *Radiokören*. Moreover, there are three professional opera choirs (Gothenburg, Malmö, Stockholm) and a handful of other ensembles where singers are paid.⁹

Selection of institutions

The research team scanned the availability of academic programmes¹⁰ in Denmark, Norway and Sweden with focus on the following data: institutions offering programmes/courses in choral conducting/leadership, the number of student slots and/or degrees awarded over the last three years, who the tutors are, and the aim and orientation of the various studies. Websites were investigated, and administrative staff members were contacted via e-mail and follow-up phone calls with additional questions. The surveyed institutions are shown in table 1.

9 Ensemble Syd, Göteborgs Symfonikers Vokalensemble, Vokalharmonin, Voces Nordicae.

10 The selection included programmed college/academy choral leadership education in state institutions. Orchestral conducting was excluded, as well as non-academic schools (for example «folkhögskola») and courses organised by choral organisations or private persons.

INSTITUTION (LOCAL NAME)	INSTITUTION (ENGLISH)	ACRONYM	LOCATION
DENMARK			
Det jyske musikkonservatorium	The Royal Academy of Music	DJM/RAMA	Aarhus
Det jyske musikkonservatorium	The Royal Academy of Music	DJM/RAMA	Aalborg
Syddansk musikkonservatorium	Danish National Academy of Music	SDMK	Esbjerg/Odense
Det kongelige danske musikkonservatorium	The Royal Danish Academy of Music	DKDM	København
NORWAY			
Norges musikkhøgskole	Norwegian Academy of Music	NMH	Oslo
Nord universitet	Nord University	NU	Bodø
Universitetet i Tromsø	The Arctic University of Norway	UiT	Tromsø
Høgskolen i Innlandet	Inland Norway University of Applied Science	INN	Hamar
Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet	The Norwegian University of Science and Technology	NTNU	Trondheim
Høgskulen i Volda	Volda University College	Hiv	Volda
NLA-høgskolen Oslo	NLA University College	NLA	Oslo
Universitetet i Bergen	University of Bergen	UiB	Bergen
SWEDEN			
Kungliga Musikhögskolan	Royal College of Music	KMH	Stockholm
Musikhögskolan vid Luleå tekniska universitet	The music school at Luleå University of Technology	LTU	Pitå
Högskolan för scen och musik vid Göteborgs universitet	Academy of Music and Drama at University of Gothenburg	HSM	Göteborg
Musikhögskolan i Malmö vid Lunds universitet	Malmö Academy of Music at Lund University	MHM	Malmö
Musikhögskolan i Örebro vid Örebro Universitet	School of Music, Theatre and Art at Örebro University	Oru	Örebro
Ersta Sköndal Bräcke högskola	Ersta Sköndal Bräcke University College	ESH	Stockholm
Stockholms Musikpedagogiska Institut	University College of Music Education in Stockholm	SMI	Stockholm
Linnéuniversitetet	Linnæus University	Lnu	Kalmar/Växjö
Uppsala universitet	Uppsala University	Uu	Uppsala
Musikhögskolan Ingesund vid Karlstad universitet	Ingesund School of Music at Karlstad University	KAU	Ingesund
Umeå universitet	Umeå University	Umu	Umeå

Table 1: Overview of surveyed institutions

Five cases were selected for further scrutiny; the Royal College of Music in Stockholm (KMH), the University of Gothenburg (GU) in Sweden, the Norwegian Academy of Music (NMH) in Norway, and the Royal Academy of Music in Aarhus/Aalborg in Denmark (one institution which is treated as two owing to the difference in profile between the two locations).¹¹ The selection sought to ensure a balanced coverage of Scandinavia, as well as including the largest institutions. All five have master's programmes in choral conducting and they are located in the major cities of their respective countries. The Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen was not studied since their master's degree was launched as late as in 2017. In the interest of readability, in some sections of this paper, *location* is used to denote the institutions, rather than institution name or acronym.

In addition to curriculum reviews, the main tutors at these institutions were interviewed during the spring of 2017.¹² The interviews were qualitative and semi-structured (Kvale, 1996, 2007), following the same template. To some degree, the interviews must be considered as peer-conversations, because the researchers are active choral conductors. Based on recommendations from the interviewees, we identified candidates for student interviews—more precisely, choral conductors who had completed their degrees from these institutions during the last three years and were in the initial phase of their careers. Group interviews of these former students were conducted in each country during the spring of 2017, based on a common interview guide. A total number of twenty interviewees participated.¹³ Interviews were sound-recorded and analysed qualitatively, based on the broad theme categories of the interview guide. On the basis of the resulting case material, we sought common themes across institutions and countries.

5. Results

Tables 2 and 3 show which programmes are offered by the various Scandinavian institutions, in the sense that the curriculum exists. However, some of these do not currently have any students. In other words, choral conducting curricula must to some degree be considered a “void space”. Table 4 shows the number of students who have

11 The two campuses have completely different focus and approach—classical choral conducting in Aarhus, and rhythmic choral conducting in Aalborg.

12 Two individual interviews in Norway, two individual interviews in Denmark, two group interviews in Sweden (two in each)—eight tutors in total.

13 Four in Aarhus (group interview), three in Aalborg (e-mail exchanges because these students resided in three different countries), three in Oslo (group interview), one in Stockholm and one in Gothenburg—twelve former students in total.

graduated from the various types of programmes over the three-year period 2015–2017. There is significant uncertainty associated with the numbers on an annual basis for a particular institution and programme because there is generally no single source within each institution to verify the numbers. The sources comprise tutors as well as administrators. In some cases, the numbers cover the period 2016–2018, which then includes some enrolled but not yet graduated students. The fact that a conducting “class” is often composed of students admitted in different years and belonging to different programmes contributes to a rather non-transparent picture, also for the institutions themselves. By aggregating three-year totals, some of this uncertainty is reduced. The purpose of table 3 is to establish a picture of education capacity (where previously no such data existed), rather than attempt any accurate estimation at this stage.

	DENMARK	NORWAY	SWEDEN
Master and postgraduate programmes in choral conducting	Copenhagen, Aarhus, Aalborg, Esbjerg*	Oslo	Stockholm-KMH, Göteborg, Piteå
Bachelor programmes in choral conducting	Aalborg	Oslo	Stockholm-KMH
Stand-alone choral conducting units (>7.5 ECTS) - advanced level		Oslo, Tromsø	Örebro, Uppsala
Stand-alone choral conducting units (>7.5 ECTS) - basic level		Oslo, Tromsø, Bodø (Levanger),	Piteå, Göteborg, Örebro, Uppsala

*) Programme in performing music with optional choral leadership "major" (65 ECTS).

Table 2: Institutions offering programmes in choral conducting

	DENMARK	NORWAY	SWEDEN
Master programmes in music education with choral conducting	Copenhagen		Stockholm-KMH, Piteå, Göteborg, Malmö, Ingesund, Kalmar/Växjö, Umeå, Örebro
Bachelor programmes in music education with choral conducting (>10 ECTS)	Copenhagen, Esbjerg*)	Volda	Stockholm-SMI
Master in church music with choral conducting	Aarhus		Stockholm-KMH, Malmö
Bachelor programmes and intermediate programmes in church music with choral conducting (>10 ECTS)	Aarhus, Esbjerg, The Danish Church Music Colleges (3)	Oslo, Tromsø, Bergen	Stockholm-KMH, Piteå, Göteborg, Malmö, Stockholm-ESH

*) Including the "Brobygger"-programme ("Bridge-builder"), a hybrid between a music educator and a performing music programme.

Table 3: Institutions offering music programmes with choral conducting embedded

	DENMARK	NORWAY	SWEDEN	SCANDINAVIA
Master and postgraduate programmes in choral conducting	38	4	12	54
Bachelor programmes in choral conducting	6	6	4	16
Stand-alone choral conducting units (>7.5 ECTS) - advanced level	9	21	13	43
Stand-alone choral conducting units (>7.5 ECTS) - basic level	0	46	220	266
Master programmes in music education with choral conducting	5	0*	387*	392
Bachelor programmes in music education with choral conducting (>10 ECTS)	14	29	32	75
Master programmes in church music with choral conducting	2**	0	10	12
Bachelor programmes in church music with choral conducting (>10 ECTS)	8	24	52	84

*) The contrast partially reflects reality and partially the choice to disregard courses of less than 7.5 ECTS.

***) Numbers for the church musician colleges of the Danish Church are not included.

Table 4: Choral conducting education capacity. Total number of graduates during the three-year period up until summer 2017

Denmark

The three conservatories—in Copenhagen, Aarhus/Aalborg and Esbjerg/Odense—come from different traditions and have different profiles. *The Royal Danish Academy of Music* (KDM) in Copenhagen launched as late as in 2017 a master’s programme (“kandidatuddannelse”)¹⁴ in classical choral leadership. Church musician and music educator degrees are offered at bachelor’s as well as master level’s, both with the option of a specialisation in choral leadership.

The Royal Academy of Music in Aarhus/Aalborg (JMK) offers a master’s programme in classical choral leadership, as well as a two-year advanced postgraduate diploma (“solistuddannelse”). Similar to the conservatory in Copenhagen, choral conducting education is offered as part of church musician and music educator degrees, both bachelor’s and master’s. Campus Aalborg is uniquely focused on rhythmic choral leadership, with bachelor’s, master’s and advanced postgraduate degrees. These

14 120 ECTS.

programmes are also unique with regard to organisation and content. *The Danish National Academy of Music* (SDMK) has campuses in Odense and Esbjerg, offering master's programmes in classical choral conducting and church musician programmes at bachelor's and master's level. It also offers a blended education ("brobygger") which combines performative and educator trajectories, in which choral leadership may be embedded.

The church musician colleges in Vestervig, Løgumkloster and Roskilde offer two-year programmes (120 ECTS),¹⁵ in which there is a choice between specialisations in voice and choral leadership or organ and choral leadership. The programmes are of an "intermediate level", that is, neither classified as bachelor's nor master's, and specifically catering for positions in the Danish Church.

A notable feature of choral leadership education in Denmark is the specialisation in rhythmic music in Aalborg, which deserves special attention in this context. These programmes are unique and attract students from all across Europe. The programmes also stand out from the other programmes we have studied in terms of how they are organised and the methods used. Students may take part in the daily teaching sessions via digital video connection, supplemented by campus presence three times per semester. At these campus gatherings, students and tutors collaborate in a choir consisting of about 40 participants. The method being used has been developed by professor Jim Daus. His philosophy is to educate choral leaders who invite and inspire choral singers to be co-producers in the musical process, in contrast with the tradition in which the conductor, to a larger degree, pre-determines and instructs musical details. The method comprises three educational fields; (1) developing one's own musical-technical skills (intonation & pitch, rhythm & groove, sound & blend, interpretation & expression, and performance), (2) developing the "vocal painting" tool — an alternative approach to traditional conducting gesture/beat patterns, and (3) enabling the singers to expand their comfort zones for improvisation, by liberating voice, body and soul. Team-building is emphasised across all three competence areas.

Norway

Of the five institutions that offer programmes in choral conductor education, the *Norwegian Academy of Music* (NMH) holds a dominant position, both in terms of capacity and in terms of level. It is the only institution which offers a master's programme

¹⁵ Also offered as part-time studies.

aiming at professional ensembles, as well as a bachelor's programme. In addition, it accounts for the great majority of conductors being educated. There is apparently capacity around the country, but numbers are small and programmes are often not run. A significant contribution from NMH is how a large number of singers and instrumentalists are given a basis in conducting and ensemble leadership. It is beyond the scope of this descriptive study to assess the depth or value of these embedded conducting units. However, it is nonetheless very clear that they matter in terms of the number of individuals reached as a proxy for the number of choirs affected.

Sweden

There are 11 academic institutions which offer choral conductor education in Sweden. Three of these offer a master's programme in choral conducting; *the Royal College of Music in Stockholm* (KMH), *Luleå University of Technology* (Musikhögskolan i Piteå), and *the Academy of Music and Drama at the University of Gothenburg* (HSM).¹⁶ Only two institutions offer a master's degree in church music with the option of specialising in choral conducting; KMH and *Malmö Academy of Music* (MHM). Eight institutions offer music educator master's degrees (ämneslärarprogram musik) with the option of including choral conducting—in Stockholm, Piteå, Gothenburg, Lund, Ingesund, Örebro, Växjö, and Umeå.¹⁷

KMH is the only Swedish institution to offer a bachelor's degree in choral conducting. The various bachelor's programmes in church music and music education include choral leadership to some extent, but it is somewhat difficult to establish accurately how comprehensive the choral curricula are. Moreover, the actual numbers of students who focus on choral conducting within these bachelor's programmes from one year to another seems quite erratic. Courses offered may be listed, but are nonetheless not always held, either due to lack of applicants or budget constraints.

Several of the institutions offer comprehensive (15-30 ECTS¹⁸—some only 7.5 ECTS) stand-alone courses, at basic as well as advanced levels. Basic courses are offered in Gothenburg, Örebro, Uppsala and Piteå. Advanced stand-alone courses are offered in Uppsala and Örebro.

16 «Magisterprogram», 60 ECTS in choral leadership.

17 For reader-friendliness, institutions are at times mentioned by campus location.

18 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.

Curricula with different objectives

The five institutions that were studied more in detail (Aarhus, Aalborg, Oslo, Stockholm, Gothenburg), have different origins and histories, and therefore varying profiles. Aalborg is the only one with specific focus on “rhythmic choral leadership”, whereas the other four are within what we would label “classical choral leadership”. However, Gothenburg is the only one of these whose curriculum specifically includes children and youth choirs, as well as choir in musical theatre. From table 4, we observe that across Scandinavia some twenty conductors graduate each year with a degree specifically in choral conducting. These programmes aim for the professional field, as expressed by Fredrik Malmberg (Stockholm): “They are going to be able to stand in front of Radiokören [...] and fix it. That’s what it’s all about, right? [...] From the outset”. The number of candidates with choral conducting embedded into other music programmes, including single stand-alone courses, is tenfold. We can assume that this ratio reflects available work opportunities to some degree. While curricula may appear to cater distinctly to the “artist” or the “teacher”, the practice field is more open and fluid.

Although there are differences between the educational systems in the Scandinavian countries, the profile differences between institutions seem more important than the differences between countries when trying to understand the variety of curricula and approaches. For example, Gothenburg serves the Swedish choral field as it de facto is, whereas Stockholm more explicitly aims for top notch ensembles, of which there are very few. Aalborg takes a different perspective, aiming to develop choral leaders for the pop/rock/jazz genres, from small vocal groups to larger choirs, without specific regard for level as such. Oslo appears to have the most comprehensive range of available courses, which includes 30 ECTS stand-alone units in addition to bachelor’s and master’s programmes. What is generally wanting across the Scandinavian field is qualifying conductors to serve a broader variety of choral situations, including the workplace, health and community settings. Notably, the lack of training for children’s choirs is the most striking, with the exception of Gothenburg and a recently launched programme in Oslo.

One marked difference between Sweden and the other countries appears in table 4. A large number of music educators at master’s level graduate with choral conducting embedded. This observation reflects how choral leadership does in fact hold a more prominent position in Sweden. However, the picture is also skewed due to the granularity of our data collection; we chose to limit the study to conducting units of

7.5 ECTS and more, which eliminated quite a few Norwegian institutions offering basic courses.

Coverage of the competence layers

All institutions naturally cover musical-technical skills (the first competence layer), including gestural skills, aural skills, score proficiency, repertoire knowledge, and vocal technique. Whether these are taught as separate skills or are coached within the ensemble situation varies and is not fully transparent. The role of conducting gesture in these curricula is as difficult to pin down precisely as has been found to be the case in research (Jansson, 2018b)—central but not necessarily crucial. In Grete Pedersen's (Oslo) words, "gesture is just a small part of the picture, it is great when it works, but it is not enough". The rhythmic choral leadership curriculum in Aalborg expands the notion of conducting gesture beyond the classical tradition, through the concept of "vocal painting". Several musical-technical elements are also approached within a pop/rock genre frame here, such as sound, expression and performance.

The main vehicle for acquiring situational-relational competence (the second competence layer) is working with actual ensembles, comprised of paid singers or students. Working with ensembles is the scarcest and most costly resource, and all tutors ideally want more of it. To a larger extent than is the case with musical-technical skills, situational and relational mastery is inherently integral and is difficult to deconstruct. In the words of Carsten Seyer-Hansen (Aarhus), "[e]verything that involves the energy that flows between conductor and ensemble must be learnt within the situation itself. It is about mental presence, contact, breath and situational judgement. It is also about listening and understanding what goes on."

At the same time, tutors recognise that some of these elements could be addressed more explicitly, thereby taking more of a leadership and communication approach to the role. What this would mean in practice, however, is not clear. Studying leadership and psychological concepts might be of some use, but would increase the pressure on already fully-loaded schedules. At the same time, most of what choral conductors do is of a communicative nature and therefore unavoidable. Here, we find ourselves somewhat in an impasse.

The curriculum in Aalborg emphasises more than the other institutions the conductor's ability to develop the singers by building the team and enabling improvisation. Within the competence model, this exemplifies a shift in the control/empowerment

balance towards empowering singers more, making them explicitly co-responsible for shaping the music. In the words of Jim Daus, “Without such freedom in individual musicianship, it doesn’t swing—this is fundamental.”

The third competence layer—the existential foundation—is about how the conductor meets the ensemble as a human being, with all of his or her attitudes, inclinations and predispositions. Such competence is not easily addressed explicitly, however; it is impacted by the educator. Grete Pedersen (Oslo) aspires to develop conductors “who are not only respectful towards the ensemble, but equally to every member of the house staff—and not least to oneself. Conductors are there to serve the music, not themselves.” She is adamant about how students must move beyond mere mastery, that they must discover their unique contribution in terms of genre, context, aesthetic choice, line of musical projects, or in whatever format it might take. Here lies a demonstration of how important the conductor’s existential foundation is in completing the competence set. It is nurtured more than it is tutored.

A common theme across the various curricula is how the desired exceeds the possible. No time-limited programme can accommodate all elements in the competence model with any sufficiency, and the various elements compete for time and attention. For this reason, an academy curriculum is seen by tutors as a phase in a life-long learning project. The structure and execution of the various programmes (that which is denoted “process” in Varvarigou and Durrant’s (2011) framework) is to some degree shaped in a master-apprenticeship relationship—even explicitly stated, as in Aarhus. This approach is reinforced by how students across levels and programmes participate in the same “class”. Consequently, we can hardly speak of progression as an attribute of the curriculum, rather “progression is something which happens within the candidate”, as Seyer-Hansen formulates it. One newly graduated bachelor’s student considered her most important competence as knowing how to *find* the knowledge she needs in her conducting practice. One tutor, imagining an “ideal” programme, would have liked to put more demands on the students in terms of time and workload, unconstrained by formalities and ECTS standards.

6. Discussion

The “impossible” demands on a conducting curriculum

The notion of a “conducting curriculum” is somewhat ambiguous, at least dependent on whether we are considering a master’s programme in conducting, a music programme with embedded conducting or stand-alone units. With reference to the three-layered competence model (Jansson, 2018b), a complete programme accommodates most of the competence elements. On the other hand, a stand-alone course, especially at a basic level, only allows a limited selection of skill elements, for example beat patterns, score preparation and error correction. Despite the centrality of working with ensembles, leading a practice choir with conducting class peers is still somewhat constructed and artificial (Silvey, 2014). Most situations in real professional life are not with paid singers. In real-life choral situations, some of the tutorial pressure is removed, while at the same time the conductor faces a host of new challenges, not least leading people with more varied competence and motivation. Students having their own regular choir may be as important as a formal curriculum (which for bachelor’s students in Oslo is integrated).

When designing a choral conducting curriculum, a number of topics compete for time, and it is impossible to accommodate all needs and wishes. Based on our investigation we find three main axes of tensions inherent in conducting curricula, which we have chosen to label (1) choir type, (2) orientation, and (3) didactics, as shown in figure 3.¹⁹

¹⁹ These axes may be seen as subsets of elements in Varvarigou and Durrant’s (2011) framework; 1) choir and music, (2) learning outcomes, and (3) process.

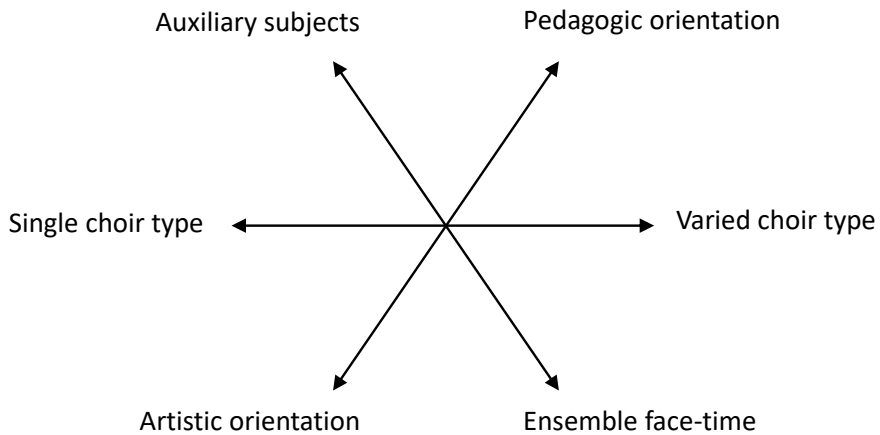


Figure 3: Axes of tension in the design of a choral conducting curriculum

While most curricula assume some sort of “generic choir type”, there are music genres and choral situations which are insufficiently addressed. It is challenging to accommodate the classical chamber choir as well as youth gospel choirs and rhythmic vocal groups. The orientation axis does not so much reflect a competition for time, but the weighting of learning outcomes, that is, attention to the various elements of the competence model (Jansson, 2018b). Some elements are more tutorial, whereas others are more aesthetic in orientation. Although it is always a blend, to put it bluntly, to what degree does conducting education favour the artist versus the teacher? The didactic axis is partially a competition for time and resources (if ensemble face-time involves paid singers), but just as much a question of developing a skill (error detection, for example) as a stand-alone element or integrated in the ensemble situation, together with all the other elements. In addition to these three axes of tension, “non-core” auxiliary subjects may at times be perceived to steal precious time and even be a nuisance. In sum, what we need to address in a choral conducting curriculum comes in the form of tensions and tradeoffs which are difficult to reconcile.

Conductor experience trajectories

Our focus is on conductor education at the university/college level—“academy education”. This delineation is in principle straight-forward. However, in practice, how the choral conductors who lead the thousands of choirs across Scandinavia have acquired their competence is extremely varied. The choral field is an amalgamation of leisurely

singing and increasing professionalisation, in which conductors with and without formal education operate with fluid boundaries. Similarly, while there is certain “seniority hierarchy” in terms of who teaches advanced and less advanced levels, the tutor population is still highly connected, also considering conducting courses outside an academy setting. It is not the case that a distinct tutor population teaches a distinct learner population. The tutor population in particular is an open-ended practice community (Wenger, 1998), with academy professors as key shapers of the conducting practice, but where various degrees of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Omidvar & Kislov, 2014) are involved. In simple terms, tutor competence and conducting competence trickles down, from professors via master’s degree practitioners, who also teach, to experienced practitioners who might also serve as mentors or at least as role models for choral singers aspiring to pursue conducting.

Among those conductors who do not have an academic degree in conducting, a number of different career paths and competence trajectories may have led to their current working situations. Research shows that six different points of departure exist (Jansson, 2018a), which are largely distinct, but also might appear in combination; (1) the educated instrumentalist, (2) the educated singer, (3) the church musician, (4) the music educator, (5) the musicologist²⁰, and not least (6) the apprentice choral singer. Each category might be the foundation of a conducting career, which is then built through practice and a range of more or less structured programmes, courses, and masterclasses offered by the choral associations. These observations reinforce how fluid the development path for a choral conductor might be. The precise taxonomy of academic education in choral conducting does to a large extent veil how the actual competence of real conductors out in the field has been acquired. The number of possible development trajectories are manifold, and the elements of such trajectories are depicted in figure 4.

20 Musicology is used in a wide sense, which includes performative and pedagogic research and practice.

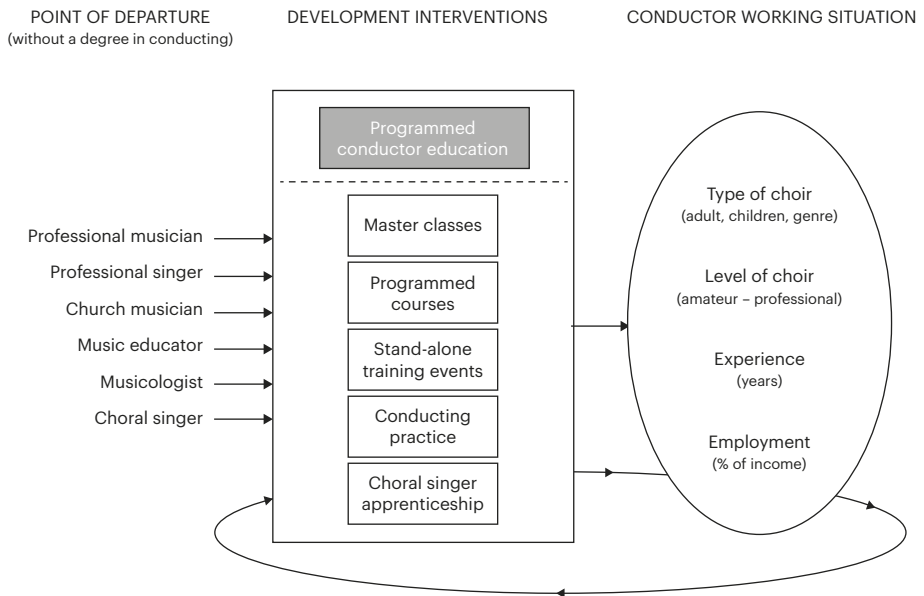


Figure 4: Choral conductor development trajectories

The choral conducting profession

A common feature across countries and institutions is that choral conducting education serves the professional and amateur choral fields alike. Given the quantitative dominance of amateur choirs, however, education will naturally aim for a more advanced level than the working positions as such demand. In turn, this “raises the bar” in terms of repertoire, and spurs choral development in an overall sense, which is partially an explicitly articulated objective. Although *professional* and *amateur* might be distinct categories with regard to the funding and working mode of choirs, it is worth noting that, with regard to competence and education, they appear on a continuous scale. Even master’s programmes often serve the professional and amateur choral fields in combination. With reference to Varvarigou and Durrant’s (2011) model, curricula are largely not explicitly situated in terms of the parameter “repertoire and choir type”, while being implicitly skewed towards what could be denoted as “advanced classical”.

There are innumerable roads which might have led to where choral conductors find themselves in their current positions. The significance of practice and experience can hardly be overstated, even for academy graduates. In Norway, only one out of ten

conductors are full-time choral conductors, and the majority of them have only one choir (Jansson, 2018a). This illustrates how choral conducting only partially constitutes a profession, whilst it is by the same measure in part merely a capability which is applied within a leisure activity framework. Moreover, this is rather a sliding scale rather than a set of rigid categories.

Although it has been outside the scope of this study to assess the employment market for choral conductors, the qualitative data show strong indications that the following hypothesis holds—in all three Scandinavian countries:

(1) In the major cities, there is an excess capacity of choral conductors. Even mid-level amateur choirs receive several applications from academy-educated conductors when they have open positions.

(2) Outside the major cities, and particularly in rural areas, competent choral conductors are in high demand. There are more positions than candidates.

It is reasonable to assume that the funding of the choral field impacts the number of full-time conductors. Even if public funding of amateur choirs does not directly fund conductor salaries, but rather predominantly projects, the overall financial stability of choirs will indirectly enhance choirs' ability to pay conductors. Funding of the choral field is an important premise for the demand for conductor education. Along the same line of thought, the choral field is also an alternative professional route for musicians and music educators who find that their primary orientation is not viable or attractive enough. Conversely, the prevalence of part-time conductors makes the transition to non-conducting and even non-music jobs rather fluid. Given the prevalence of part-time conductors and the freelance nature of work with choirs, conductors often find that they need competences beyond the role itself, ranging from marketing and project management to funding and lobbying. However, a widened competence menu such as this is in no way different from any other profession.

7. Limitations of study

In this paper's attempt to provide an overall view of choral conducting education in Scandinavia, a series of shortcomings and limitations become rather obvious. The most striking is that Finland is not included (nor is Iceland), Finland being a significant

country in terms of conductor education as well as in terms of the prominence of the choral field. We would have preferred a full Nordic view, but the researchers' access to primary data at this stage favoured a Scandinavian view. We realise that by attending to academic institutions only, we miss out on a multitude of less formal training opportunities, which in terms of how many conductors are reached may be quite significant. A related issue is that we have not systematically addressed the connection between formal education and life-long development, in other words, the importance of education versus practice. We also realise that the depth of coverage for each institution is limited, and we may not have done justice to every aspect or every quality apparent at any given institution. On a related note, the capacity numbers are associated with various kinds of uncertainty, partly because they seem to be highly variable from one year to the next, and partly because the institutions do not always have a consistent view themselves. The numbers must therefore be judged on an initial effort basis, and a starting point for more systematic scrutiny. The least obvious limitation, but perhaps the most difficult to cope with, is that we have not established a clear borderline between what lies within and without the conducting curriculum. In our defence, though, this may not primarily be a methodological problem, but rather an inherent "fuzziness" of the choral conducting phenomenon—the choral conductor role is quite distinct in terms of its functions, while its competence boundaries are fluid and situated.

8. Conclusions and research agenda

We have made a first attempt to establish an overall picture of choral conductor education in Scandinavia. The large number of conductors who serve the vibrant Scandinavian choral field have acquired their competence in a multitude of different ways, where university/academy-based education is only one element. The prominence of choral leadership in the various programmes ranges from basic and limited in scope to advanced level conductor programmes. The open-ended nature of the choral conductor competence set makes it difficult to precisely describe the significance of choral leadership within programmes for church musicians and music educators.

In the research process, a variety of themes which deal specifically with education emerge, but equally there is a series of related issues. Despite the apparently straightforward research questions articulated at the outset, answering these is a rather complex endeavor for three reasons: First, choral conductors operate in a very wide

array of situations, from informal community choirs to professional institutions, including every age group and a multitude of music genres. Second, the role itself is exceptionally rich and complex, and cannot be sufficiently understood by resorting to a single scholarly domain alone. Third, there are numerous development trajectories leading to the competences conductors put to use in their current practice, of which academic education is one component. At the same time, the field is largely under-researched.

The areas of knowledge touched upon in this paper have different relevance for different constituencies. It is therefore difficult to make unequivocal priorities in terms of future research on the conductor role and conductor education. However, we see a research agenda comprising four broad strands of work:

- (1) The choral conductor role, its contexts and identities
- (2) The choral conductor competence model
- (3) The choral conductor curriculum and life-long learning trajectories
- (4) The economic situation and professional conditions of the choral conductor

The choral conductor role, contexts, and identities deal with how the conductor may be situated in a multitude of different choir types, social settings and music genres. Even if the choral conductor appears in widely different guises — as a teacher, as a community leader, as an artist — there is nonetheless something common to all these appearances. We need to understand better the common ground as well as its contingent variants. The particular issue of gender, which is not addressed in this study, clearly deserves more attention with regard to tutors, learners, and choral singers. According to *Europa Cantat*, the gender mix of choral singers in Sweden is 59% female/41% male, slightly more balanced than in Europe overall and the USA.²¹ The majority of senior tutors in Stockholm and Gothenburg are male, whereas in Oslo they are predominantly female. Does this have any bearing on recruitment into the conductor ranks and the professional identities of future conductors?

The choral conductor competence model is a label for all the skills and predispositions which impact the enactment of the role. But it is also about understanding the integrity of the role and how the various elements come together in real choral situations. We need to verify and deepen our understanding of what the role encompasses, what it means, and how it unfolds when rehearsing and within the musical flow. While we to

21 Share of females with year in parenthesis: Sweden 59% (2012), Europe 67% (2014), USA 63% (2008).

some extent understand the various competence elements, we need to improve our understanding of their relationships and significance in different settings. Furthermore, to what extent do curricula reflect the needs of conductors entering their careers and the demands of choirs?

Choral conducting curricula across the various institutions clearly have many features in common. At the same time, exactly what is contained within a given course or a whole programme is often ambiguous, because elements are partially explicitly stated (aural skills or repertoire studies, for example), and partially implicit or included based on the personal judgement of the tutors. The tutors of the prominent institutions are highly experienced practitioners, and the inherent logic of the education provided is stronger than can be extracted from curriculum descriptions alone. Although this study focuses on structured programmes in academic institutions, there are a significant number of shorter courses and classes which connect to a large number of choral conductors out in the field. Despite their limited scope, these are key elements of a great variety of choral conductors' development trajectories. Research on conductor educational programmes should therefore be extended to include the life-long learning path of conductors.

Choral conductor competence cannot be understood without some regard for the professional conditions in which they operate. Choral conducting is a profession in its own right, but offers only a minority the opportunity of a full-time or part-time living, within institutions or as a freelancer (Jansson, 2018a). In order to influence policy makers and public funding of choirs, it would be useful to possess a better understanding of the economics of the choir field in general, as well as for the choral conducting profession. Supply and demand conditions in the "choral market" should be of interest for several constituencies, academic and non-academic.

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Associate Professor

Dag Jansson

Oslo Business School, Oslo Metropolitan University

Pilestredet 35

0166 Oslo

Norway

dag.jansson@oslomet.no

Senior Lecturer

Pia Bygdéus

Linnæus University, Department of Music and Art

P G Vejdes väg

351 95 Växjö

Sweden

pia.bygdeus@lnu.se

Professor

Anne Haugland Balsnes

Ansgar University College

Fredrik Franssons vei 4

4635 Kristiansand S

Norway

balsnes@ansgarskolen.no