

# Cultural diversity in Finland: Opening up the field for foreign-born artists

Emmi Lahtinen  
Center for Cultural Policy Research Cupore  
emmi.lahtinen@cupore.fi

## ABSTRACT

In 2018, around 7% of the population of Finland was born outside Finland, and this proportion is rising. Specifically, foreign-born artists have sparked discussion about the difficulties they experience in gaining entry to the cultural field as well as funding opportunities in Finland. This article reports on the 'Opening' research project (2017–2019), which investigated the situation of foreign-born artists in the Finnish arts and cultural sector. The major factors creating inequality for all artists in Finland are insufficient funding, fierce competition, and different forms of discrimination. The foreign-born artists face additional difficulties due to language issues, merits, such as educational degrees, gained from outside Finland, closed networks, and ethnicity-based discrimination. The research was financed by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, and it was carried out by the Center for Cultural Policy Research Cupore.

### Keywords:

Cultural diversity

equality

foreign-born  
artists

## Introduction

The issue of the status of foreign-born artists is becoming increasingly severe in Finland. As of 2018, there were 335,414 individuals (6% of the whole population of Finland) of first generation (i.e., born abroad) with a foreign background<sup>1</sup> living in Finland, and around 7% of all Finnish residents were foreign-language speakers (Official Statistics of Finland)—referring to a native language other than Finnish, Swedish, or Sámi languages. The share of foreign-language-speakers in Finland is expected to increase to up to 28% in the capital area by 2035, reaching as high as 34% in the city of Vantaa (Helsingin kaupunki, 2019). The total number of artists in Finland is estimated to be around 20,000<sup>2</sup>, but the share of foreign-born among this population is currently unknown, and there is also little research regarding them, such as their socioeconomic status. Thus, the main question guiding this article is the following: Do the structures, attitudes, and practices of the Finnish art and cultural field welcome foreign-born professionals?

The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture emphasizes cultural diversity and equality in its cultural policy, with the aim of promoting equal opportunities and participation for all—not only as audiences and consumers but also as producers and decision-makers (MinEdC 2017; 2019). Foreign-born artists have sparked discussion about the difficulties in gaining entry to the cultural field as well as funding opportunities in Finland. This is argued to diminish diversity and representation, especially in leading positions at arts and culture institutions.

This article reports on a research that was part of the wider 'Opening' project (2017–2019) which investigated the status of foreign-born artists in Finland. As a part of the project, the Center for Cultural Policy Research Cupore carried out a research that examined the competence, attitudes, and willingness of the Arts Promotion Centre Finland (Taike), the Finnish arts and culture institutions within the central government transfers system<sup>3</sup>, and the national art institutions (the Finnish National Museum, Finnish National Theatre, Finnish National Opera and Ballet, and Finnish National

Gallery) to recruit foreign-born artists and take diversity into account in their practices. Taike works under the Ministry of Education and Culture and is a national funding, expert and service agency for promoting the arts.

The 'Opening' project was initiated by Center for Cultural Policy Research Cupore, Culture for All Service<sup>4</sup>, and the Globe Art Point association (G.A.P.) that was founded in 2016 by Finnish and non-Finnish-born artists and culture workers to promote and support the status and working conditions of international professionals living in Finland. The project was financed by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

In this article, the term 'cultural diversity' refers only to foreign-born artists. It is important to note that the same challenges faced by the foreign-born artists can also be faced by others; however, Finnish artists with culturally diverse backgrounds, such as indigenous people (e.g., Sámi), native cultural minorities (e.g., Roma), and Finnish-born artists of colour, are difficult to unequivocally define, address, and research. Finnish legislation prohibits compiling statistics based on ethnic background; for example, Statistics Finland, which produces the vast majority of official Finnish statistics, compiles statistics based on nationality, language, and country of birth. Moreover, many of the challenges presented in this article are widely recognized in the arts and culture sector in Finland; thus, making structural barriers visible ultimately benefits all individuals within the sector.

## Implementation of the research

### *Research data and methods*

The research data was comprised of two web surveys carried out in 2018 and 2019. The first survey (later referred to as the "Directors Survey") targeted the directors of the museums, theatres and orchestras in the central government transfers system as well as the directors of the national art institutions. The second survey (later referred to as the "Artists Survey") was targeted at foreign-born artists and cultural workers. Both surveys mainly featured multiple-choice

<sup>1</sup> Persons whose both parents or single known parent were born abroad are considered to be persons with a foreign background.

<sup>2</sup> This estimate is based on information gathered from different 2-17 statistics of the Finnish artist associations and unions of Cupore as a part of a research project that mapped the development of the number of artists, their education, and the labour market situation in Finland.

<sup>3</sup> The the central government transfers system is part of the cultural policy management programme. The system covers around 40% of the operating costs of the museums', orchestras' and theatres' in the system (Hirvi-ljäs & Sokka, 2019). See: <https://minedu.fi/en/state-subsidies> [accessed 13.12.2021].

<sup>4</sup> The Culture for All Service promotes inclusive cultural services by offering information and tools for workers in the cultural field on how to improve accessibility and knowledge of diversity. The Service was founded in 2003 and is financed by the Ministry of Education and Culture. See: <http://www.kulttuuriakailille.fi/en.php> [accessed 13.12.2021].

questions along with the option to comment for each question further.

The Directors Survey (2018) addressed the year 2017 when there were 208 art and culture institutions in the central government transfers system: 123 museums, 57 theatres, and 28 orchestras. In addition, the survey was sent out to the directors of the Finnish National Museum, Finnish National Theatre, Finnish National Opera and Ballet, and Finnish National Gallery (which consists of three different museums; the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, the Ateneum Art Museum, and the Sinebrychoff Art Museum). In total, 99 institutions responded to the survey: 58 museums, 27 theatres, and 14 orchestras.

The number of respondents for the Artists Survey (2019) was 126. Just over half of the respondents were female, while 37% were male; additionally, 10% preferred not to say their gender or identified themselves as "other". Around a third of the respondents were aged between 25–34, while 44% were 35–44 years-old. The respondents' median number of years lived in Finland was nine years, while their median professional work history in Finland (also measured in years) was seven years.

The Artists Survey was mainly answered by artists rather than cultural workers, and, therefore, this article concentrates only on this group. The total number of foreign-born artists in Finland is unknown. G.A.P. has estimated the number to be between 1,000–2,000, but this number cannot be validated by statistics. Due to the number of respondents, the results of the Artists Survey do not necessarily present a comprehensive description of the status of foreign-born professionals in Finland; however, many of the issues addressed by

the respondents are quite convergent with those found in previous research (see e.g. Karhunen, 2013; Roiha, 2016; Saukkonen et. al, 2007).

In this article the results of the Artists Survey are compared with the results of the Arts and Culture Barometer surveys from 2017 and 2018. A collaboration between Cupore and Arts Promotion Centre Finland Taike since 2015, the Barometer is an annual report based on an annual survey that maps the current values and attitudes in the arts and culture field in Finland.

Additionally, 28 interviews were conducted to deepen the understanding and findings of the Directors Survey. These interviews focused on personnel of the Finnish National Museum, Turku City Theatre, Kuopio City Orchestra, and Taike. The institutions were selected based on the following criteria: the representation of different art forms, geographical characteristics, and number of personnel. Taike was selected due to its significance in enabling and supporting artists in Finland<sup>5</sup>.

This article specifically focuses on the Artists Survey and the Directors Survey. It should be stressed that personal experiences may contradict the overall survey results, and some forms of discrimination can be invisible when reporting statistics. Moreover, in terms of discrimination, when the subject of a study are personal experiences, it can result in over- as well as underestimations of the level of discrimination (Ministry of Employment and the Economy, 2012: 56). To increase the understanding on the topic, and for the sake of representation, the aim was to collaborate with foreign-born representatives throughout the research and the survey implementation, with the interview questions formulated in cooperation with this group as well.

Country of birth			
EU or EEA	%	Outside the EU or EEA	%
Nordic countries	9	Russia or the USSR	24
Western Europe	35	North America	15
Central and Eastern Europe	28	South America	17
Southern Europe	28	Africa	10
		The Middle-East	20
		Asia and Oceania	15

**TABLE 1. RESPONDENT PLACE OF BIRTH.**

Source: Artists Survey (2019).

<sup>5</sup> In addition to Taike, municipalities, private foundations, and organisations, among others, award grants for artists. This research focused only on Taike.

## Research target: foreign-born artists

Regardless of the difficulties in defining the actual numbers, the fact that the total share of foreign-born persons residing in Finland has doubled since 2000 from 3% to 6% indicates a corresponding rise in the number of foreign-born artists. According to the Artists Survey, foreign-born artists who live in Finland form an extremely heterogeneous group of individuals in terms of ethnic background, representing 34 different nationalities. Just over half (53%) of these artists are originally from European Union or European Economic Area (EAA) (Table 1). Russia (including former USSR) represent the most common birth country among the respondents, followed by, in order, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Peru, Spain, and Mexico.

The survey results are in line with previous research. Russian-, English-, and Spanish-speaking artists are over-represented among the foreign-language-speaking artists in Finland, whereas, in general, the some of the largest foreign-language groups, Somali- and Estonian-speakers, are under-represented (Karhunen, 2013, 110). In 2018, the five largest foreign-born population groups in Finland were

Russians (including former USSR) (72,012, representing 19% of foreign-born persons), Estonians (46,206, 12%), Swedes (32,654, 8 %), Iraqis (17,889, 5%), and Somalians (11,797, 3%) (Official Statistics of Finland).

A majority of the Artists Survey respondents (80%) reported living in the capital area of Finland, which consists of the cities of Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa, and Kauniainen. This appears as higher than the share of artists or foreign-born persons in general in the area. In 2018, the region of Uusimaa, containing the capital area, had the highest number of foreign-born people in the whole country (52.4%) (Official Statistics of Finland) while in 2010, nearly 60 percent of all artists lived in the same region (Rensujeff 2014: 38–39).

Nearly half of the respondents reported working in the visual arts, followed by, in order, media art, performance art, cinema, and photographic art (Table 2). On average, each respondent reported working within 2.5 art fields. It needs to be stressed that the results will not necessarily correspond with the actual share of foreign-born artists within the different art fields in Finland.

A majority of the respondents reported a high level of professional education, with 52% having earned

Art field	N	%
Visual arts	45	48%
Media art	26	28%
Performance art	21	23%
Cinema	20	22%
Photographic art	19	20%
Music	17	18%
Theatre	15	16%
Literature	13	14%
Dance	11	12%
Design	11	12%
Art criticism	8	9%
Environmental art	8	9%
Illustrations and comics	6	6%
Circus art	2	2%
Other	14	15%

**TABLE 2. RESPONDENT ART FIELDS.**

Source: Artists Survey (2019).

up to a master's degree and 17% up to a bachelor's degree. An additional 9% reported having a degree from a university of applied science. Only five respondents had no formal education or degree related to art and culture. Moreover, the majority of the respondents (76%) had received professional education from outside Finland. Of all respondents around half had obtained also a professional degree from Finland. Education received from outside Finland was most often from elsewhere in Europe (64%), North America (10%), South America (9%), or the Middle East (9%). Moreover, the female respondents had a higher level of education on average than the male respondents and were much more likely to have obtained their professional degrees from Finland.

The respondents were asked to rate their Finnish- and Swedish-language skills based on a self-evaluation. Finland is a bilingual country with two official national languages: Finnish and Swedish<sup>6</sup>. Forty-two percent rated their Finnish-language skills "very or fairly good", while 32% rated them "very or fairly poor".

## Cultural diversity in the Finnish cultural policy

The realization of cultural rights is an important foundation of and strategic goal for cultural policy in Finland. The opportunity to participate in the arts and express oneself freely are basic rights secured by, among others, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Non-Discrimination Act (2014), and the Constitution of Finland (1999). The realization of these cultural rights can be advanced by ensuring that all people have the equal opportunity to engage in art and culture services and participate in the cultural life in Finland both as recipients and creators (Lahtinen et al, 2017).

The Ministry of Education and Culture's Strategy for Cultural Policy 2025 sets the framework and direction for the Ministry's development efforts, generating a vision in which "Finland is open and international, rich in languages and cultures, and a country that encourages renewal, creativity and interest in new ideas" (MinEdC, 2017: 3). The 2025 target areas regarding cultural policy and related strategic objectives are: 1) creative work and production; 2) inclusion and participation in arts and culture; and 3) cultural basis and continuity. There is no mention of cultural diversity as a part of the first target area, instead, the emphasis is placed on audience

development while the target area concerning inclusion and participation refers to differences between population groups. At the beginning of 2020, the Ministry created a working group to prepare guidelines on how to consider cultural diversity in cultural policy while bearing in mind the future population development in Finland. The working group published its final report in 2021 with recommendations on, for example, how to improve the working possibilities of artists of a foreign background (MinEdC, 2021).

Another working group appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture stated in their report, Indicative Guidelines for Arts (2019), that art itself, the fields of art, and the operating environment of the arts are in constant flux. Since the current support structures for the arts and artists in Finland were created, the number of artists in Finland has increased and diversified, and the making of art has taken on new forms of expression, work, and production. At the same time, the social status of artists has not improved, and the support structures for promoting the arts have not been able to respond to the aforementioned changes. This working group also emphasized that, in the future, more effort must be directed toward improving such funding and support systems as well as the social security of artists in order to secure the freedom, diversity, and equality of art; foster educational and cultural rights; and prevent inequality and social exclusion. (MinEdC, 2019.)

Migration and inclusion have been significantly discussed in Finnish cultural policy, but the associated resources and concrete actions have not fully kept pace with the societal changes and growing migration and there is often no legal demand for financial resources to improve the situation. Also, cultural policy documents in Finland tend to be fairly abstract without adequate accountability or resources to fully realize the objectives. Therefore, these policies have often not been effectively implemented in the arts and culture sector, or in the operations of the arts and culture institutions in Finland. (Pyykkönen & Saukkonen, 2015: 394–395.)

## Working in Finland as a foreign-born artist

### *Work history, current work situation, and income formation*

According to the Artists Survey, most of the

<sup>6</sup> The Swedish-speaking population percentage in Finland in 2018 was 5%. In addition, the Sami language users' rights are defined in law. In 2018, the number of Sami-speaking individuals was 1,995 (Official Statistics of Finland).

foreign-born artists' professional work history in Finland is varied and over-lapping: 71% described working mostly as a freelancer, one third had been mostly employees, one third grant recipients, and just under a fifth had done mostly internships. Permanent contracts appeared to be rare, with only 12% reporting such. For a clear majority, their work had been paid, but many had also done unpaid work at some stage of their professional career.

The Artists Survey results apply to the work history of most artists in Finland and currently, the artist's

position in the labour market is typically a patchwork, with multiple simultaneous income sources, only some of which relate to their artistic practice (Hirviljäs et al, 2020). In general, this is undesirable from the perspective of Finnish society and the artists themselves. The competence of artists and the investments made in their education, by themselves and by the society, are not sufficiently made use of, and the lack of work opportunities creates difficulties in earning income for the artists. (MinEdC, 2019: 42.)

Half of the respondents reported having worked

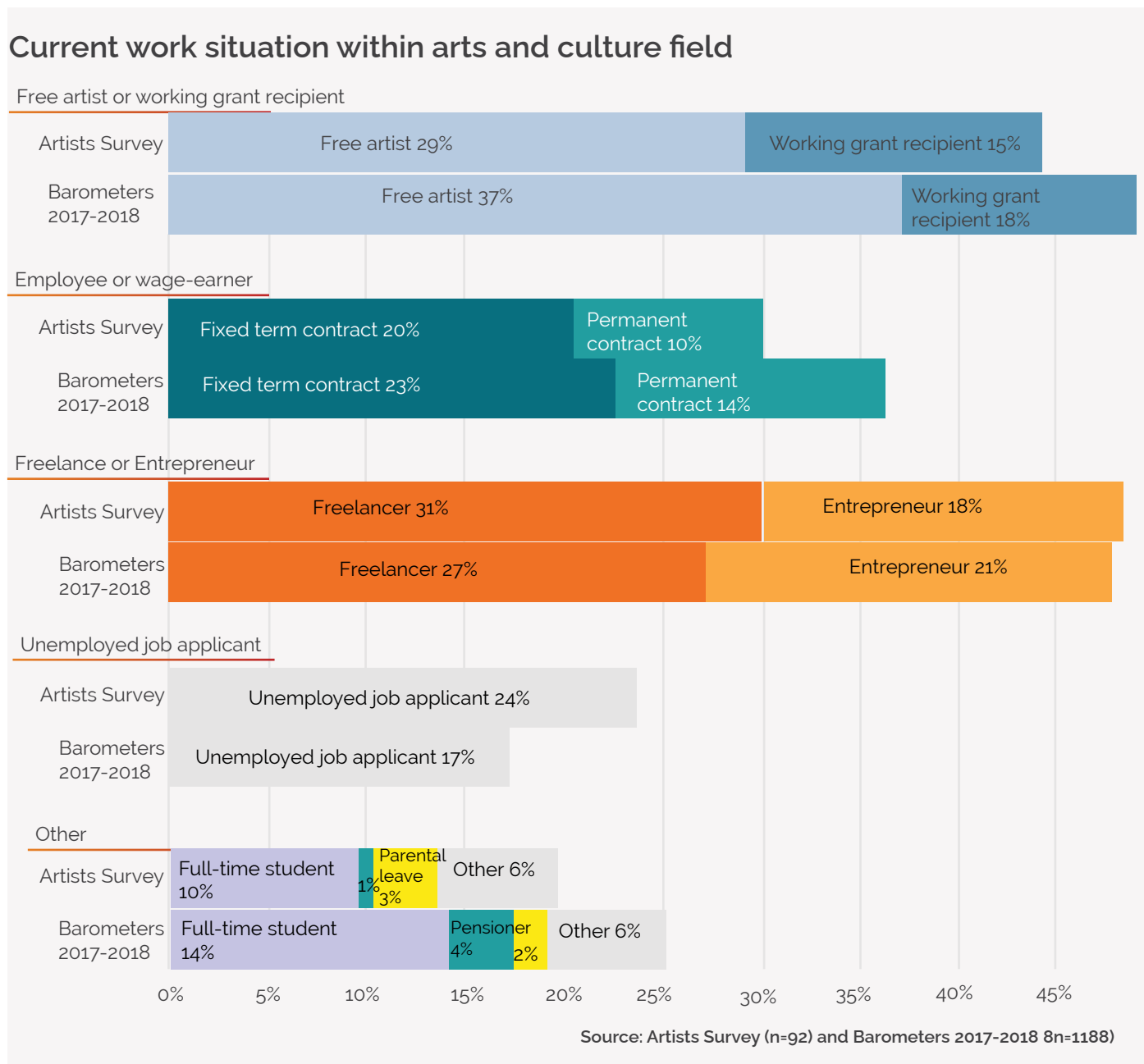


FIGURE 1. ARTISTS' WORK SITUATION WITHIN THE CULTURAL FIELD IN FINLAND.

\*Respondents were able to select more than one option. Artists Survey respondents selected an average of 1.6 options, while respondents in the Barometer surveys selected 1.8 options.

at Finnish arts and culture institutions. For most (86%), the job had been paid. A majority (62%) had worked in a position where they had been able to take part in the decision-making process or otherwise influence the work, program, or practices of the institution. However, many of the respondents described a lack of suitable positions in museums, theatres, or orchestras in relation to their own artistic practice, with many also assuming they would not be chosen because of their poor Finnish language skills or ethnic background.

No major differences were found between the foreign-born artists' current work situation and the overall situation of all artists in the cultural field in Finland (Figure 1). However, there is a higher unemployment rate of the foreign-born artists according to the Artists Survey. The number of Artists Survey respondents, however, should be kept in mind when comparing the results of the Artists Survey and the Barometer Surveys.

Also, Artists Survey respondents' current work situation can be seen to correspond quite well with the level of education among 54% of the foreignborn artists; this does not differ from the overall situation (55%) among all artists in Finland (Hirvi-Ijäs et al, 2018; 2019). In general, however, artists' high level of education is not evident in their position in the labour market, and the unemployment rate in the art sector is considerably high (MinEdC, 2019: 41). The results of the 'Opening' research describe a similar situation.

English was the most common work language currently used by the respondents (83%). In addition, over half also reported using Finnish as their current work language. Artists living in the capital area reported English as their work language more often than artists

living elsewhere in Finland.

### ***Seeking employment and recruitment practices***

Foreign-born artists reported actively seeking work and employment via open calls, open applications, and networks, i.e. via their professional contacts. Networks were considered to be the most successful method, being used significantly more by men (84%) than women (48%). It can be speculated whether men have more professional networks or if they use them more actively. The significance of networks can represent a problem for newcomers or for those who received their professional education and merits from outside Finland. The interviews revealed that, while permanent positions are always announced publicly, information regarding short, fixed-term positions is often distributed through unofficial channels, and, in these cases, networks and references play an important role.

There seems to be problems in the encounter between open positions at the art and culture institutions and the foreign-born artists. The directors reported receiving very few applications and contacts from foreign-born professionals. This had created an assumption that the number of competent foreign-born professionals in Finland is very low. In response, some of the foreign-born respondents reported that the open calls be interpreted as addressing native Finns only. The majority of the directors (79%) did not possess any training on how to reach or address foreign-born persons or people with culturally diverse backgrounds

How important do you consider Finnish- or Swedish-language skills when recruiting a person to a leading position requiring substantial knowledge of art and culture?	Very or fairly important
Cultural history museums	91%
Specialized museums	86%
Art museums	82%
Theatres	57%
Dance theatres	50%
Orchestras	38%

**TABLE 3 THE IMPORTANCE OF NATIVE LANGUAGE SKILLS FOR ART AND CULTURE INSTITUTIONS' LEADING POSITIONS IN FINLAND.**

during the recruitment process.

Closer analysis of the recruitment processes revealed that the majority of the open calls are made only in Finnish and, in some cases, also in Swedish. This can thus affect the ability of foreign-born artists to obtain relevant information. There are significant differences in the matter between museums, theatres and orchestras. Orchestras may handle all their recruitment via international recruitment channels and the selection process can be based mostly on applicants' musical skills, whereas theatres are strongly linked to the Finnish national languages.

When recruiting new personnel to a leading position, according to the directors, the most important factors are the diversity and quality of the applicant's previous work experience, relevant education and degree, good attitude and motivation, and strong team-working skills. The majority of the directors stated that leading position requires an understanding also of cultural diversity. Moreover, Finnish work experience was regarded more highly than international work experience, explaining, in part, what is considered by the directors as "the diversity and quality of previous work experience". In general, most of the directors stated that they consider proficient Finnish- or Swedish-language skills very or fairly important for leading positions, but in this regards there were major differences between the institutions (Table 3). Some of the less frequently mentioned factors were networks, other language skills, a Finnish degree, and references.

## ***Receiving grants from the Arts Promotion Centre Finland***

### ***Grant application and decision-making process***

Arts Promotion Centre Taike is a national funding and service agency working under the Ministry of Education and Culture. Taike's national arts councils, appointed by the Central Arts Council, make decisions regarding grants and awards for artists, artist groups, and organisations based on peer reviews. The members of the national arts councils are appointed for two-year terms based on the recommendations of recognised expert bodies in the Finnish cultural field. The members of the Central Arts Council are appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture for a three-year term and are recognised experts in the field of arts and culture. All of Taike's decision-makers concerning grants and awards are publicly announced on their website.

Taike's grant statistics are based on the

information provided in the grant application form: gender, language, county, and age. Each applicant marks their native language in the application form, with all languages other than Finnish and Swedish comprising the category, "other"; such applicants are referred to as "foreign-language applicants/recipients". This category can include persons with a Finnish background but whose language is "other" (e.g., Sàmi).

In 2018, Taike received nearly 11,600 grant applications. When looking at the grants in total, the ratio between the foreign-language applicants (5% of all applicants) and the foreign-language recipients (5% of all recipients) was the same, meaning the awardance rate was the same when studied the applicants and recipients by different language. The amount of grants (in Euros) awarded to foreign-language applicants was a bit lower (4%) (Karhunen, 2018). For the different grant categories, in 2018, working grants were applied for in total by fewer foreign-language applicants (4%) compared to project grants (6%). In many cases, the ratio between the foreign-language applicants and the recipients was almost the same. Compared to before 2018, there had been a rise in the number and share of foreign-language recipients in many grant categories; most notably, the share of recipients now exceeds the share of applicants for artist grants.

The reported reasons of the foreign-born artists by the Artists Survey for not applying for grants included not being familiar with the procedure, not being aware of relevant grants, not feeling like a potential successful candidate, and not finding anything suitable for personal artistic specialization and focus. Language was not mentioned once as a reason for not applying regardless of the respondents raising criticism regarding the lack of English information available. Taike only has application forms in Finnish and Swedish despite it being possible to apply in English.

In general, the respondents reported that they were pretty satisfied with the information available on existing grants, slightly less satisfied with the information on how to apply, and strongly dissatisfied with the lack of information available on the funding decision-making criteria and the decision-makers. Many of the respondents specifically complained about the lack of feedback on grant decisions. Some saw it as a valuable source of information to improve future applications, but, for others, it indicated a lack of transparency. This led to assumptions of favouritism and relationships between the applicants and evaluators; these were similar to assumptions reported by the Barometer



Survey respondents (Hirvi-Ijäs et al, 2018; 2019).

### ***Grant for cultural diversity***

Taike awards grants for promoting cultural diversity for artists, working groups, and private persons working as entrepreneurs. The purpose of these grants is "to enhance the opportunities of artists with immigrant backgrounds or who belong to other cultural minorities to carry out artistic activities and to participate in Finnish art life on an equal basis and to support art and cultural projects in Finland that promote cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue and combat racism". The total grant amount awarded in 2018 was 130,000 euros divided between 36 recipients, out of which 28% were foreign-language speakers.

The majority of the Artists Survey respondents considered the grant important, though many identified problems with it. The grant was seen important in promoting diversity and intercultural dialogue—especially in the current political climate—and as an important stepping stone for foreign-born artists to gain entry in the grant system in Finland. However, the grant was also seen to segregate foreign-born artists from others and label them as "immigrant artists". Criticism addressed whether the existence of the grant was seen by Taike as a sufficient measure for dealing with cultural diversity versus taking it into account in the criteria of all grants. Similar remarks have been made previously, suggesting that the grant does not seem to have functioned as an entry point for other grants and that special measures targeted towards minorities often actually segregate rather than prevent isolation from the dominant culture (see Karhunen, 2013: 113; Saukkonen, 2013: 33).

Taike has taken measures to improve this situation and has included 'equality and fair treatment' in the decision-making criteria of operational subsidies and grants for artists. This specific criteria is, however, not elaborated further. In addition, following the objectives stated in Taike's current performance agreement, during the period of 2017–2019, Taike aimed to increase the percentage of foreign-language applicants and recipients up to 6%. There has also been effort to increase understanding of cultural diversity among the national art councils by seeking more recommendations regarding persons with culturally diverse backgrounds.

Despite these measures, however, the issue of representation remains, and it is impossible to cover all fields of artistic expertise in the art councils. Karhunen

states that in a qualitative evaluation process of Taike's grant applications, the individuals' backgrounds cannot be determined and conclusive, and the decision-making cannot simply follow the share of applicants (Karhunen, 2013: 72). However, it is obvious that, when the decision-making is based on previous artistic merits, such as in Taike's case, the way in which the applicant's professionalism and quality of their previous artistic activities are assessed is crucial. Furthermore, it is essential to recognize how different artistic practices are assessed and valued and what kind of expertise is needed in the decision-making process.

## **Cultural diversity in the art and culture institutions in Finland**

### ***Diversity of the personnel***

In the Directors Survey the directors of the art and culture institutions were presented with statements and asked to evaluate how much they agreed or disagreed with them. The museum, theatre, and orchestra directors all identified cultural diversity as a strength in their work community. However, most museum and theatre directors felt that non-Finnish- or Swedish-speaking professionals do not have equal opportunities at their institution. Orchestra and dance theatre directors felt strongly that the opportunities are equal and appeared more likely to employ foreign-language-speaking professionals compared to museums and drama theatres.

According to a report of the Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis (2017), the representation of employees with a foreign background is the largest among performing arts institutions and orchestras in all Nordic countries. Meanwhile, museums typically exhibit the lowest percentage of persons with a foreign background (Kulturanalys Norden, 2017: 11). In total, the share of foreign-born employees at government-funded cultural institutions in Finland in 2015 was around 6% (ibid: 25). About 3% of the employed managers had a foreign background, and this percentage decreased during the study period (2000–2015). In other words, the diversity of the Finnish population is not reflected in the cultural institutions' personnel, and, in 2015, the cultural sector was estimated to be moving further away from reflecting the actual population (Ibid: 10–12.)

Based in the Directors Survey, in 2017, all dance theatres had at least one or more non-Finnish, Swedish, or Sámi languages speaking member on their staff, whereas majority of the museums had

Number	Museums, n=58	Theatres, n=27	Orchestras, n=13	Total, n=98
None	69%	37%	23%	54%
1-2	26%	33%	23%	28%
3-5	3%	22%	15%	10%
5-10	2%	7%	15%	5%
10-20	0%	0%	15%	2%
Over 20	0%	0%	8%	1%

**TABLE 2. NUMBER OF FOREIGN-LANGUAGE-SPEAKING STAFF IN THE ART AND CULTURE INSTITUTIONS 2017.**

none (Table 4). It needs to be noted that many of the museums in Finland are small and only have a few members of staff. The dance theatre directors agreed more frequently than others that the members of their staff should reflect the diversity of society. There was no clear opinion mentioned by most of the museum, drama theatre, and orchestra directors. The theatre and orchestra directors agreed more strongly than the museums that bringing about cultural diversity in their operations requires members of staff with culturally diverse backgrounds.

Other notable differences were also found between the museums, theatres, and orchestras. All disagreed more than agreed that a Finnish degree and/or education would lead to the greatest work competence at their institution. The orchestras and dance theatres disagreed with this statement more strongly than the others. The interviews, however, revealed that the professional level of Finnish degrees was considered easier to assess than foreign ones.

Many of the directors identified challenges in a culturally and linguistically diverse work environment. Of those who had worked in such a work environment, only 16% had not faced any problems. The most frequently faced challenges were communication difficulties, misunderstandings, and different work practices. The respondents who had not worked in such a work environment predicted to face more challenges than had been faced in reality when comparing to the number of those respondents who had faced challenges. The directors had faced challenges related to different artistic perceptions, however, more often than had been suspected. In total, a fourth of the respondents had never worked in culturally and linguistically diverse work environments.

### ***Competence and practices***

Many museum and theatre directors felt that they do not have the competence to take cultural diversity into account in their practices and operations, whereas the orchestra directors were much more optimistic in this regard. Less than a third of the institutions had received training on cultural diversity; these were mostly cultural history museums and other museums. Moreover, 44% of the orchestra directors saw no need for such training, and 64% of the theatre directors could not say if it was needed. This could indicate that, due to the lack of encounters with cultural diversity within these institutions' operations, the required knowledge and skills have not yet been identified (see Saukkonen et al, 2007: 25).

On a strategic level, cultural diversity was most commonly linked to audience development, audience work, events, programs, and exhibitions. Only every tenth directors stated that there was no mention of cultural diversity in their strategic documents, such as in their operation plan. At the same time, however, only a few of the directors reported that cultural diversity was linked to their human resources management or the development of the organization.

In the institutions' practices, cultural diversity was faced most often, in the following order, in relation to audience work, exhibitions, events, program, and networks. Around a fifth of the directors reported that they had never faced issues or questions related to cultural diversity within their institution's practices.

According to the directors, the biggest general challenges in taking cultural diversity into account in the institutions' practices and operations were insufficient resources and allowances for recruiting

new personnel. As such, the central government transfers system does not require taking cultural diversity into account in the institutions' practices. However, the system has recently been reformed, with the new Museums Act as well as the act on promoting performing arts being established in 2020. The purpose of the Museums Act is to strengthen individuals' and communities' understanding of and participation in culture and history; advance communality, continuity, and cultural diversity; and further well-being, equality, and democracy (Museums Act, 2019). The aim of the state contribution to the operating costs of performing arts units is to promote, from an artistic point of view, the diversity and cultural diversity of performing arts, among others (Laki esittävän taiteen edistämisestä, 2020).

## Experiences of discrimination

Personal experiences do not always provide a positive picture of foreign-born artists' situation in the cultural field in Finland. A clear majority (86%) of the respondents had faced hardship (most often economical) in their professional career in Finland. This is, as stated previously, a common problem in the cultural field in Finland and evident in multiple studies (see, e.g., Hirvi-Ijäs et al, 2019; Rensujeff, 2014). In addition, foreign-born artists experience hardship due to prejudice and discrimination based on ethnicity, leading to, in extreme cases, mental health problems. In general, artists in Finland experience their work as more mentally stressful and draining than other workers in Finland, the reasons for which include discrimination and harassment in the arts and culture field (Houni & Ansio, 2013: 149–163).

Of those who had worked in Finnish arts and culture institutions (60 Artists Survey respondents), 83% of men and 55% of women had faced challenges or problems. The country of their professional education did not affect the likelihood of encountering problems, but those who had lived in Finland only a short while faced more challenges and problems. Moreover, those using English as their work language encountered significantly more challenges than those who spoke Finnish. These challenges were caused most often by insufficient Finnish language skills, leading to limited work assignments, an inability to take part in decision-making, feelings that others were favoured, and a lack of transparency. Other mentioned problems included differences in work practices and an unwillingness to change or re-evaluate existing practices. This led to

respondents feeling like an outsider.

One study showed that the highest ethnic discrimination rates can be found at the recruitment stage (Ministry of Employment and the Economy, 2012: 72). Fortyone per cent of the Artists Survey respondents felt that their professional expertise was recognised and respected when applying for work or grants in Finland, while 39% felt the opposite. Respondent age, gender, or country of professional education did not affect the responses. A third of those who were born inside the EU or EEA area and 43% of those born outside the EU/EAA felt that their expertise was recognized and respected. Grant recipients and persons in employment relationship felt most strongly that their expertise was recognised, whereas entrepreneurs and unemployed persons felt the opposite.

The reported reasons for respondents not feeling their professional expertise was recognised and respected included the need to prove their professional skills and expertise repeatedly and more often than Finnish-born artists, a lack of recognition of the degrees or expertise gained outside Finland, and different artistic practices. One example of this was the response that artists' associations might not accept a foreign degree as proof of professionalism. The respondents presented a number of assumptions regarding discrimination without concrete examples, although recent reports and studies have shown that many Finns believe in the occurrence of discrimination based on ethnicity and that an applicant's name takes on a significant role when applying for work, especially in the case of Iraqi and Somali applicants (Eurobarometer, 2019; Ahmad, 2019).

Just over half of the Artists Survey respondents did not feel they are treated as equals with Finnish-born artists. The major reported reason for this was the inability to speak the Finnish language. Other mentioned reasons included, again, a lack of networks, closed circles, assumption regarding favouritism, a lack of recognition of professional merits gained from outside Finland, the system being created to support Finnish-born artists, discrimination, racism, and harassment. A strong sense disbelief and disappointment in Finnish society and the cultural sector was evident in some of the responses.

Some of the Artists Survey respondents reported that they felt being seen as a representative of only their native country or ethnicity. The question of racialization cannot be adequately discussed based on the research data here, but there is evidence that it should be taken seriously. Aminkeng Atabong (2016) suggested that the

existence of race is often ignored in Finland. Replacing race with culture makes it difficult to understand the concept of race and racialization. Using culture and ethnicity to mark differences between population groups silences the racial experiences of the racialised people (Aminkeng Atabong, 2016: 16–17.) In a society like Finland, whiteness is an unquestioned norm that all others are compared with and valued against (ibid., 28–29). Ultimately this has an effect in how those who do not represent the white Finnish population are seen in society—whether they are seen as representatives of their own ethnic group only or whether they are represented in diverse individual roles in the Finnish society.

## Conclusions

This article aimed to address the status of foreign-born artists and study their experiences working and operating in the cultural field in Finland. According to the research, a majority of the challenges and problems faced by the foreign-born artists living in Finland are linked to economic difficulties. Grants are difficult to obtain and often too small to fully cover living expenses. A lack of permanent or long-term employment relevant to artists' specific practices creates uncertainty for many. Discrimination and harassment are also common. These are all generally identified problems in the Finnish cultural field. In addition, foreign-born artists face a number of challenges in their professional career due to language problems, merits gained outside Finland, and discrimination based on ethnicity. When the factors pile up and a person meets with discrimination on multiple counts, it is clear that the possibilities for equal treatment become substantially lower.

All the addressed challenges by the foreign-born artists recognised in this research have been identified in previous studies (MinEdC 2012; Karhunen 2013; Saukkonen 2010; Lammi & Protassove 2011). Therefore one can ask why have the previous observations have not led to better improvements. The directors of the art and culture institutions identified cultural diversity as a strength of a work community but the directors of museums and theatres specifically reported hesitating in hiring people who have not mastered any of the national languages. Their positive attitudes towards cultural diversity are too often deflated by lack of financial resources, time, and skills. Differences in work practises, quality conceptions, and artistic perceptions were also mentioned as challenges in culturally diverse environments.

At times, the research findings indicates a certain protectiveness by native Finns as well as an apparent openness towards cultural diversity. This is evident, for example, when professional Finnish degrees are valued more highly than foreign ones. The central government transfers system has recently undergone a reform, and it will remain to be seen if this reform will place any demands on institutions or introduce new tools for measuring and evaluating their operations and practices. Based on the present research, there is a recognized need to encourage these institutions to more explicitly integrate cultural diversity in their everyday operations.

It appears that the structures, practices, and attitudes in the cultural field of Finland do not fully support the employment and work possibilities of foreign-born artists, especially those lacking sufficient Finnish- or Swedish-language skills. Working in English can also have negative effects on, for example, career development. While the possibility of working in English may increase one's work opportunities, it may also prevent future career development due to the national language requirements. The higher the position, the more likely it is to require Finnish- and/or Swedish-language skills.

Although language is an important factor in creating inequality, concentrating on it bypasses the complex issues of race and racialization. More research in the Finnish context is needed regarding the mechanisms of racial discrimination not only concerning foreign-born persons but all persons who find it difficult to enter the Finnish art and culture sector for such reasons.

The report by the working group appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture (2019) emphasises the importance of diversity and equality and highlights that more effort must be focused on improving the funding and support systems as well as the social security of artists. The working group also acknowledges that the funding and support system of Taike has been criticised for its lack of transparency. These are all similar issues addressed by the Artists Survey respondents. A major obstacle regarding the grants of Taike is the lack of accessible information regarding the decision-making process, which causes assumptions and reduces accountability.

What is needed to advance the situation of foreign-born artists in Finland is the sufficient implementation and the willingness of everyone in the arts and culture sector to advance cultural diversity and equality in their practices. So far, it is unclear

whether there will be set mechanisms for monitoring the new acts and terms and whether sanctions will be installed. Overall, training, mentoring, and re-evaluation of established practises are endorsed as steps towards greater inclusion. The results of this research show that the majority of the Finnish arts and culture directors would welcome a more culturally diverse cultural field in Finland but lack an understanding of how to identify and dissolve practices and structures fostering inequality.

## REFERENCES

- AHMAD, A. (2019). When the Name Matters: An Experimental Investigation of Ethnic Discrimination in the Finnish Labor Market. *Sociological Inquiry*. Volume 90, Issue 3. 468–496. doi: 10.1111/soin.12276.
- AMINKENG ATABONG, A. (2016). *Is There Such a Thing...? A Study of Antiracism Education in Finland*. Helsinki: University of Helsinki.
- Constitution of Finland (1999). Access method: <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/1999/en19990731.pdf>
- Eurobarometer (2019). Discrimination in the European Union. Special Eurobarometer, 493. Brussels/Luxembourg: European Commission.
- Helsingin kaupunki (2019). *Helsingin seudun vieraskieliset väestön ennuste 2018–2035*. Helsinki: Helsingin kaupunki, kaupunginkanslia, kaupunkitutkimus- ja tilastot. Tilastoja 2019:3 [Accessed on 15.8.2019]. Access method: [https://www.hel.fi/hel2/tietokeskus/julkaisut/pdf/19\\_03\\_14\\_Tilastoja\\_3\\_Vuori.pdf](https://www.hel.fi/hel2/tietokeskus/julkaisut/pdf/19_03_14_Tilastoja_3_Vuori.pdf)
- HIRVI-IJÄS, M., KAUTIO, T., KURLIN, A., RENSUJEFF, K. & SOKKA, S. (2020). *Taiteen ja kulttuurin barometri 2019. Taiteilijoiden työ ja toimeentulon muodot*. Cuporen verkkojulkaisuja 57.
- HIRVI-IJÄS, M.; RENSUJEFF, K.; SOKKA, S.; KOSKI, E. (2018). *Taiteen ja kulttuurin barometri 2017*. Nuoret taiteentekijät. Cuporen verkkojulkaisuja, 47.
- HIRVI-IJÄS, M.; SOKKA, S.; RENSUJEFF, K.; KURLIN, A. (2019). *Taiteen ja kulttuurin barometri 2018. Taiteilijoiden ja taiteen liikkuvuus*. Cuporen verkkojulkaisuja, 51.
- HIRVI-IJÄS, M.; SOKKA, S. (2019). *Suomen taide- ja taiteilijapolitiikka 2019*. Tietovihko 2. Kulttuuripolitiikan tutkimuskeskus Cupore.
- HOUNI, P.; ANSIO, H. (eds.) (2013). *Taiteilijan työ. Taiteilijan hyvinvointi taidetyön muutoksessa*. Helsinki: Työterveyslaitos.
- KARHUNEN, P. (2013). *Maahanmuuttajataiteilijat taiteen tukijärjestelmässä*. Helsinki: Taiteen edistämiskeskus.
- KARHUNEN, P. (2019). *Taiteen tuki taiteen ja kulttuurin edistämiseen*. Taiteen edistämiskeskus. Access method: <https://www.taite.fi/documents/10162/52418/Vuosittilasto+2018.pdf/4adfaaa3-1ed7-592e-c434-7e68eeca01df>
- Kulturanalys Norden (2017). Kultur med olika bakgrund. Utländsk bakgrund bland anställda vid statligt finansierade kulturinstitutioner i Norden. Stockholm: Kulturanalys Norden.
- LAHTINEN, E.; JAKONEN, O.; SOKKA, S. (2017). *Equality and accessibility in cultural policy*. Fact sheet – Center for Cultural Policy Research.
- Laki esittävän taiteen esittämisestä (2020). Access method: <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2020/20201082>
- LAMMI, A. & PROTASSOVA, E. (2011). *Suomen venäjänkieliset kulttuuripalveluiden käyttäjät ja tuottajat*. Helsinki: Venäjän ja Itä-Euroopan Instituutti.
- Ministry of Education and Culture (2021). *Art, Culture and Diverse Finland: Final Report of the Working Group for Cultural Policy, Immigrants and Promotion of Cultural Diversity*. Finland: Publications of the Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021:5.
- Ministry of Education and Culture (2019). *Indicative Guidelines for Arts – Proposal by Working Group on the Key Objectives for Arts and Artist Policy*. Finland: Publications of the Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019:5.

- Ministry of Education and Culture (2017). Strategy for Cultural Policy 2025. Finland: Publications of the Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017:22.
- Ministry of Education and Culture (2014). Taiteen ja kulttuurin saavutettavuus. Loppuraportti. Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2014:15.
- Ministry of Employment and the Economy (2012). Discrimination in the Finnish Labor Market. An Overview and a Field Experiment on Recruitment. Publications of the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, 16/2012.
- Museums Act (2019). Access method: <https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2019/en20190314.pdf>
- Non-discrimination Act (2014). Access method: <https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2014/en20141325>
- Official Statistics of Finland (OSF). Foreign-Language Speakers [e-publication]. Helsinki: Statistics Finland [referred: 9.8.2019]. Access method: [https://www.stat.fi/tup/maahanmuutto/maahanmuuttajat-vaestossa/vieraskieliset\\_en.html](https://www.stat.fi/tup/maahanmuutto/maahanmuuttajat-vaestossa/vieraskieliset_en.html)
- Official Statistics of Finland (OSF). Population structure [e-publication]. ISSN=1797-5395. Annual review 2018. Helsinki: Statistics Finland [referred: 20.6.2019]. Access method: [http://www.stat.fi/til/vaerak/2018/02/vaerak\\_2018\\_02\\_2019-06-19\\_tie\\_001\\_en.html?ad=notify](http://www.stat.fi/til/vaerak/2018/02/vaerak_2018_02_2019-06-19_tie_001_en.html?ad=notify)
- PYYKKÖNEN, M.; SAUKKONEN, P. (2015). Vähemmistöt, monikulttuurisuus ja kulttuuripolitiikka. In Heiskanen, I.; Kangas, A.; Mitchell, R. (eds.) Taiteen ja kulttuurin kentät: perusrakenteet, hallinta ja lainsäädäntö (pp. 375–402). Helsinki: Tietosanoma.
- RENSUJEFF, K. (2014). Taiteilijan asema 2010. Taiteilijakunnan rakenne, työ ja tulonmuodostus. Helsinki: Taiteen edistämiskeskus.
- ROIHA, T. (2016). Suomeen pakolaisina ja turvapaikanhakijoina vuosina 2011–2016 saapuneet taiteilijat. Helsinki: Taiteen edistämiskeskus.
- SAUKKONEN, P.; RUUSUVIRTA, M.; JORONEN, T. (2007). "Tulossa on jotain juttuja". Kyselytutkimus pääkaupunkiseudun taide- ja kulttuuritoimijoiden suhteesta maahanmuuttoon ja monikulttuurisuuteen. Cuporen verkkojulkaisuja, 2/2007.
- SAUKKONEN, P. (2010). *Kotouttaminen ja kulttuuripolitiikka. Tutkimus maahanmuutosta ja monikulttuurisuudesta suomalaisella taiteen ja kulttuurin kentällä.* Cuporen julkaisuja, 19/2010.
- SAUKKONEN, P. (2013). *Monikulttuurisuus ja kulttuuripolitiikka Pohjois-Euroopassa.* Cuporen verkkojulkaisuja, 19.

To cite this article:

LAHTINEN, E. (2021). Cultural diversity in Finland: Opening up the field for foreign-born artists *European Journal of Cultural Management and Policy*, 11 (2), pp. 20-33.