

Summary in English: The report "Toimialojen edistäjät ja toiveiden tynnyrit. Taiteen tiedotuskeskusten toiminta ja asema." ("The operations and significance of arts information centers")

The research project carried out by the Center for Cultural Policy Research Cupore in 2018–2020 reviewed the operations and significance of arts information centers in their respective fields. Another objective was to develop ways in which the centers could monitor their own activities. The data consisted of self-evaluations by the information centers and interviews with their directors, a survey targeted at arts and culture professionals and documentary material. The project was implemented in close and fruitful interaction with the information centers. It was commissioned and funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture.

The group of information centers is not fully established. The subject group was delimited to members of the TAIVE network of arts information centers and through funding and textual data from the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. The Ministry funds all the information centers examined within the research project, namely:

- Archinfo Finland • Information Center for Architecture
- Frame Contemporary Art Finland
- FILI – Finnish Literature Exchange
- Music Finland
- Neogames • Hub of the Finnish Game Industry
- CircusInfo Finland
- The Finnish Film Foundation
- Dance Info Finland
- Theatre Info Finland TINFO.

The arts information centers are third-sector actors who each promote their respective field in their own way. Their position as recipients of the Ministry of Education and Culture subsidies represents a fairly typical situation for Finnish cultural policies, where the state supports, among other things, the activities of national and regional representational and service communities. The setting is interesting from the viewpoint of guidance: how deep into the civil society does national government aim to extend its guidance and to what extent does it support civic action arising from the practical needs in the different policy fields.

The Ministry of Education and Culture recognizes arts information centers as sectoral organizations and its strategic partners but does not define them through distinct characteristics or specify the contents of the partnership. The Ministry's subsidies for bodies recognized as strategic partners do however seem to entail the idea of implementing strategic objectives set by the Ministry more strongly compared to other recipients.

The arts information centers' activities originate in historical efforts to both promote certain artistic fields and increase their international presence and engagement. The first arts information centers in Finland were established in the 1970s in the fields of music, literature and film. In the early stages the Ministry of Education and Culture had no notable role in the activities, instead, the information

centers were strongly linked to the mandate of the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Trade and Industry from the perspectives of internationalization and export. Over the course of the 2000s the funding and guidance responsibility with regard to the information centers examined here was largely transferred to the Ministry of Education and Culture. Today the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, for example, regards certain art fields, especially music, as targets of its support system but clearly excludes others.

All in all, public governance recognizes and supports the fields represented by the information centers to a varying degree. The weighting of the public funding also varies in the total funding of the different information centers. One wish regarding the Ministry of Education and Culture system directly that was expressed by the information centers was for a more long-term approach to the funding. The centers have to apply for subsidies annually and the funding is granted for only one year at a time. They might not be notified of funding decisions for a calendar year until in the spring of the given year of operation. This hinders long-term operational planning. The short-term thinking was also identified as a problem with many other funding sources.

The information centers themselves commonly describe their purpose and tasks through their represented art field. The purpose and tasks are influenced by the different backgrounds of the centers, but what they all have in common is commitment to the promotion of their respective fields. There are also other bodies involved in varying degrees in the development and promotion of the different fields. The activities of the information centers include, for example, supporting artists, advocacy and lobbying in the field, networking, stakeholder engagement, compilation of statistics, information gathering and dissemination, promotion, mediation, training and cultural export. In the broadest context, the information centers aim to develop the field they represent comprehensively. In a limited context, they are only responsible for certain sets of measures. All the centers felt that the term “information center” does not describe the whole extent of their operations.

Only some of the information centers give out funding support. This is partly due the centers’ own demarcations, and partly due to the fact that the Ministry of Education and Culture only allocates funding support for some of the information centers to distribute further. Of the studied information centers the ones that distribute funding – albeit on very different scales – are Frame, FILLI, Music Finland, the Finnish Film Foundation and TINFO. In the responses to our survey the professionals from different fields of arts and culture saw allocation of funding as the most central measure for improving operating conditions in the represented fields. The other mentioned key measures were general advocacy and lobbying, international communications, promotion and marketing, development of competencies and enhancing collaboration between the different fields.

All the information centers engage in the compilation of statistics and production of information. The premises for the compilation of statistics however vary, in some fields the work is carried out by some outside actor, in others the needs for information production and compilation of statistics have been channeled explicitly to the centers themselves. According to the interviews with the directors, compiling statistics per field of art does not necessarily depict the situation of people

working in several art fields simultaneously very well and the artists themselves don't always find it easy or meaningful to posit themselves in one field of art alone.

The information centers' own evaluations of their operations seemed to be very much in line with each other and appeared by and large to be positive. All the centers regarded self-evaluation as a good instrument for monitoring and developing operations and were ready to also use the method in the future. Self-evaluation is a good way to map out operations within an organization and it can be embedded as a part of the strategic development of the organization. It also makes it possible to gain in-depth information on certain operating areas, but it does not by itself suffice as a means of evaluating all the operations of an organization. It is effective as a part of external evaluation, but even then it presupposes good communications between the evaluated organization and the evaluator. It always requires precise, openly expressed assessment criteria. In this project it was possible for the information centers to influence the formulation of the questions to match their operations specifically. This had a positive impact on the realization of the project on the whole.

The most negative reviews in the self-evaluations concerned the resources for the centers' own operations, a matter that is difficult for the centers to influence themselves. In some fields there were more possibilities to apply for funding from multiple sources than in others. In the self-evaluations many of the centers pointed out development needs with regard to monitoring their respective fields. Development needs were also seen in the evaluation methods and processing of feedback.

International presence and cooperation were an important point of departure for many of the centers. Most of the centers have identified international counterparts especially in the Northern countries and Europe in general. The centers cooperate with these partners closely and actively and perceive engagement in international networks as something important and rewarding. Through the networks they learn about prevailing practices in their fields in other countries and gain, among other things, collegial peer support.

Based on the survey, the actors represented by the centers predominantly view the centers in positive terms. The number of these respondents to the survey was however quite low (n=390), and does not as such allow for comprehensive conclusions. 62 percent of the respondents were fully or somewhat satisfied and 19 percent fully or somewhat dissatisfied with the operations of the centers. Around 51 percent agreed fully or to some extent and 27 percent disagreed fully or to some extent with the statement "the information center supports and advances my own opportunities to operate in the field". In the view of the survey sample, the information centers have room for development especially in these areas. In the interview responses criticism was also expressed towards an overly capital city centered approach in the centers and towards the lack of transparency with regard to the grants and other supportive measures.

Many of the respondents work in one or more fields that are not in their mind represented by any information center. The target fields of the information centers thus seem to respond only in part to the demands of a cross-artistic reality. The more marginal and cross-disciplinary art forms easily fall between the mandates of the information centers, which makes it more difficult for them to

receive funding, visibility and information. It can be assumed that multi-artistic practice that breaks artistic boundaries and traditions will remain common also in the future. It is therefore important for the sustainability of the arts and cultural field to recognize the multitude of art forms. Diverse and equal opportunities for the different art forms to be addressed in the operations of the centers would also safeguard the continuity of arts and culture. Many of the respondents to the survey remarked that the operations of the information centers could be developed from the viewpoint of different modes of operation rather than from a field-specific viewpoint – insofar as the measures overlap between the different fields.

The survey responses also highlighted a wish for the bodies that promote certain art fields to be better networked with both actors in their specific field and with actors in other art fields. Many of the respondents felt that the strictly art field specific division applied by the information centers corresponded poorly with their needs, as they commonly work across the boundaries of specific fields. Some suggested that the information centers could provide information more broadly than from the perspective of the field they represent. A few of the responses also questioned the very usefulness of information centers that serve separate art fields.

The results of the study indicate similarities in the needs of the different art fields, but in certain fields, such as music and literature, the needs are responded to by a large and specialized group of actors. In other fields, such as circus and visual arts, the structures are weaker and there are fewer actors promoting the field. In our review we identified various development areas, which the different arts information centers address with different emphases. The art fields would need to be reviewed in more detail to better bring out the field-specific differences in the operating structures and in the responsibilities for the comprehensive development of the represented fields. A wish for more detailed field-specific assessments was also expressed in many of the interviews with the centers' directors.

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