



Summary on cultural organisations in Finland, based on country report

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Introduction

Within the research that was initiated by the HEISE project and was mainly focused on higher education institutions, five arts organizations also took part. Sibelius Academy was responsible for this part of the research and five semi-structured interviews were conducted with managers and experts from arts organizations, mainly located in Helsinki. This section provides a general overview of the current situation in arts organizations.

Stakeholders' perceptions and understandings of the concept of societal impact

The stakeholders from art organizations understood the concept of societal impact as a very broad term. For example, they refer to it as an artistic value or as an important part of marketing strategy and audience enlargement, and not so much as a management issue that is strongly linked to the organization's core tasks.

When considering societal impact within the arts organization, the concept is mainly understood as the link between the arts and society. For example, it is linked to equality of access to the arts, the influence of the arts on the wellbeing of citizens, etc.

According to those interviewed, social impact concerns various levels—individual, functional, project, organization and society—both locally, regionally and globally. Impact can (also) be generated by a single person, for example as the result of active participation in art performances or (social) media, and in collaboration in networks.

The respondents did not make a clear difference between impact, outcomes and outputs. The perception of issues regarding causality varied among the interviewees.

In addition, societal impact seems to be highly context-specific and depends on the mission of the arts organization. This means that every organization needs to create their specific way of defining societal impact, which should be carefully aligned with the mission and strategy of the organization.

Mapping of stakeholders' current practices in measuring societal impact

Not all arts organization in Finland evaluate societal impact on a regular basis. They follow the instructions of the Ministry of Culture or other funding bodies (the city or foundations) but without any systematic approach.

The performance management of the Ministry of Education and Culture determines certain indicators for art organizations. Additionally, each organization has, in practice, other (including qualitative) indicators/key performance indicators for internal use. Most of the indicators concern outputs and outcomes rather than long-term impacts, but not all.

The perceptions within the arts organizations of societal impact vary. Further discussion on societal impacts is therefore vital.

Usually, the measurement of societal impact is not done in monetary terms. All the arts

organizations interviewed for the study are operating in the public and non-profit fields, which indicates that success in general and success in societal impact cannot be reduced to numbers or money only. However, numbers seem to be important indicators for many organizations, but instead of money, the figures relate to the number of concerts, public discussions, audience attendance, performances, etc.

Even if all arts organizations are not explicitly and systematically measuring the long-term impact of their activities, they do follow, for instance, the opinion of the audience and the public in general.

Arts organization, similarly to educational organizations, feel that qualitative information about the societal impact of their operations is not valued highly enough, although that type of information is crucially important to understanding the variety of impacts each organization is making. They also lack knowledge of different methods—both quantitative and qualitative—of measuring societal impact, which hinders the creation of systematic procedures for societal impact assessment.

The role of societal impact in managerial decisions

There seems to be know-how in relation to societal impact at lower levels of management in art organizations (e.g., people who work more closely with different target groups), but this knowledge is hard to articulate and translate into a framework that could reach the top management and policy makers. In addition, arts organizations lack knowledge about evaluation procedures, and more precisely about the right indicators to use in strategic decision-making.

Management and societal impacts is an area that is slowly developing in the field of the arts towards more systematic activities, and more efforts are needed to build capacity in this particular area.

Conclusions

Arts organization appear not have a clear and systematic approach toward the procedures for measuring and managing societal impact. The concept is regarded as a link between the arts and society at a more abstract level, and not as a management issue that is clearly linked to performance indicators. The interviewees demonstrate the clear need for capacity building in better understanding of the concept of societal impact at all levels of management, as well as in the field of evaluation. Although it is understood that societal impact concerns long-term changes, the challenge remains how to evaluate these long-term impacts, and how to evaluate any causalities.

Reference for quotation

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