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# WORKING CONDITIONS AND INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF PROFESSIONALS IN DESIGN AND COMICS

Survey of the members of artists'  
organisations in the fields of design and  
comics

## ENGLISH SUMMARY

The report is based on a survey conducted by the Research and Information Unit of the Arts Council of Finland at the request of the National Council for Crafts and Design. The Council for Crafts and Design was first and foremost interested in gathering information on the international activities of the field, such as exhibitions, marketing and working abroad. The survey also provided an opportunity to gain information about the different professions of this heterogeneous field and about their working conditions.

The survey is based on a questionnaire, which was sent to the members of professional organisations in the field covered by the National Council for Crafts and Design. These consist of the following organisations: Ornamo – the Finnish Association of Designers, Grafia – the association of graphic designers, and Sarjakuvantekijät - the association of comics artists. Ornamo is a federation of professional associations with the following member organisations: Fashion Designers, Interior Architects, Craftsmen, Textile Designers, Industrial Designers.

The questionnaire was mailed in 1996 to a sample of Ornamo members, and members of Grafia and Comics Artists. Response rates and research populations in each group are presented below.

	Ornamo (designers and craftsmen)	Grafia (graphic designers)	Comics Artists
Members	1110	618	63
Questionnaires sent	555	618	63
Questionnaires returned	296	300	50
Rejects	18	—	—
Response rate	54 %	49 %	79 %
Research population (N)	278	300	50

The artists in the fields of crafts and design proved to cover a wide range of different professional groups with a large variations in characteristics among these groups. Table 1 presents the proportion of women, young artists and artists living in the capital area within each main group. It should be borne in mind that the variation was also high according to sub-groups within each group.

Table 1. Proportion of women, persons under 35 years and persons living in the capital area according to membership in Ornamo, Grafia and Comics Artists.

	Ornamo	Grafia	Comics Artists
Women	71 %	53 %	18 %
Artists under 35 years	16 %	26 %	48 %
Artists in the capital area	61 %	62 %	52 %
N	278	300	50

The number of women was highest among the members of Ornamo. It varied strongly according to sub-groups, fashion and textile design being female-dominated areas, whereas industrial design was a strongly male-dominated area. The vast majority of comics artists were men. In comics, as in most art fields, the number of women has, however, been rising.

Comics artists are by far the youngest of the groups, considering both the average age of individuals and as a professional group. As an organised group it is still fairly recent in Finland, their professional association being founded in 1995.

Heavy concentration in the capital area and in Southern Finland is a feature typical to all artist groups in Finland, and designers and comics artists are no exception. Over half of them lived in the capital area, and all in all over 80 % in Southern Finland (including the capital area).

Another feature typical to Finnish artists in general is the importance of direct public support. Artists' grants have a central role in the earnings strategies of most artist groups. Designers, however, present exceptions to this rule. According to earlier studies, the significance of public support for the income of designers as a group is fairly low, and even their attitude towards public support differs from that of other artists. For many artists in the design professions, it is a matter of honour, and also a sign of professional competence, to be able to earn one's living without public support. Among other artists a public grant often affords the only opportunity to concentrate on art work, and a major grant is also often considered as a sign of artistic approval and quality.

Table 2 presents the proportion of those who had applied for and received personal grants in the main groups of the research population. Only a minority of graphic designers had ever applied for a grant, whereas most of the Ornamo members (with considerable variation according to subgroups) and almost all comics artists had applied at least some time. Considering a given year, only one tenth of graphic designers had received a grant for that year, compared to one fifth of Ornamo members and one quarter of comics artists. It is, however, worth noticing that Grafia members had the highest proportion of grant receivers among applicants. In all groups, almost every other of those who had applied, had also received some grant for that year.

Table 2. The proportion of persons who had applied for and received personal grants according to membership in Ornamo, Grafia and Comics Artists.

	Ornamo	Grafia	Comics Artists
Applied for a grant some time	80 %	42 %	94 %
Applied for a grant in 1995	41 %	18 %	54 %
Received a grant in 1995	21 %	10 %	26 %
Grant receivers % of applicants in 95	44 %	53 %	48 %
N	278	300	50

The respondents were asked several questions on their marketing activities abroad. Table 3 shows the proportion of those who had been active in marketing their work abroad in each of the main groups. There were considerable differences between different groups also in this respect. The vast majority of graphic designers had never tried marketing their products abroad, and the same applied to over half of Ornamo members, but only to one third of comics artists. About every other comics artist and Ornamo member had their works exhibited or displayed abroad. One half of comics artists had also succeeded in selling their work abroad.

Table 3. Exhibitions and marketing abroad according to membership in Ornamo, Grafia, and Comics Artists

	Ornamo	Grafia	Comics Artists
Exhibitions and other displays abroad	54 %	29 %	53 %
Has been working abroad	36 %	16 %	22 %
Has sold products abroad	38 %	23 %	51 %
Never tried marketing products abroad	56 %	75 %	31 %
N	278	300	50

Tables 4 and 5 present the main sources for financing exhibitions and marketing abroad. The main sources of financing exhibitions abroad were in most cases the organizer of the exhibition and own resources. Grants were a significant source for comics artists, and both Ornamo and Grafia members had in some cases other significant public support for their exhibitions (table 4).

Table 4. Financing of exhibitions abroad according to membership in Ornamo, Grafia, and Comics Artists

Main sources of finance*	Ornamo	Grafia	Comics Artist
Grants (public or private)	25 %	9 %	52 %
Other public support	26 %	22 %	—
Sponsor	6 %	11 %	13 %
Exhibition organizer	49 %	46 %	48 %
Private funding	10 %	2 %	4 %
Own resources	50 %	35 %	57 %
N	111	46	23

\* possible to choose several alternatives

Public financing or grants proved to be a significant source for funding marketing abroad only in a very few cases (table 5). Most of the respondents had used their own resources for funding marketing efforts abroad. Graphic designers had also often relied on private funding, which in most cases meant financing by their employer.

Table 5. Financing of marketing abroad according to membership in Ornamo, Grafia, and Comics Artists

Main sources*	Ornamo	Grafia	Comics Artist
Grants (public or private)	7 %	3 %	10 %
Other public support	19 %	3 %	—
Sponsor	4 %	5 %	—
Private funding	19 %	42 %	19 %
Own resources	79 %	56 %	81 %
N	107	64	21

\* possible to choose several alternatives

The respondents were asked whether they have experienced some difficulties in their attempts to market abroad, and about their opinions of the need to and means of developing and improving the marketing efforts. Most respondents considered it necessary to seek better and more effective marketing methods. Many of them pointed out that this calls for outside expertise, since the artist himself has neither the time and money nor the know-how to take care of marketing his work abroad.

Efficient promotion of Finnish crafts and design abroad requires co-operation between different authorities: Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Finance. This co-operation is often complicated by the heterogeneous nature of the field of crafts and design. The scale of production varies from an individual artist making unique works, through small-scale grafts, into design for industrial mass-production. This puts the producers often into difficult and ambiguous situations in relation to, e.g., taxation, often to the disadvantage of small-scale production. Another example of these complications is the difference in the support criteria of cultural policy (i.e. artistic quality) and industrial policy (i.e. economic feasibility).

The legislative task of the Arts Council and the nine national art form councils is defined as “the promotion of Finnish art”. The international dimension of this task has been given a high priority in the recent plans of action of the Arts Council. The policy measures currently available for promoting international activities are, however, rather limited. Finnish arts policy relies heavily on personal grants to artists and public support to arts institutions. There is very little room for project-oriented support. Excluding a modest amount of personal travel grants, the arts councils do not have specific appropriations directed towards promoting international activities.

The survey showed that there is a lot of interest in international exchange and marketing among the professionals of crafts and design. There are many, especially among the younger generation of artists, with a strong international orientation. There are several success stories, but also a large amount of unused potential. In its task of promoting this activity, the arts administration is in front of a challenge requiring also new types of policy measures.