

Facts about the Arts  
Arts Council of Finland  
Publication no 22  
Helsinki 1999

Virpi Minkkinen

## Artistic Work and Grants A Survey of State Grant Recipients

### English Summary

Compared to many other countries, direct state support plays a major role in the situation of Finnish artists. Although the state grant system is considered an essential part of the public policy towards artists, little research has been undertaken on the opinions of the artists covered by the system. In this study, the state grant system is examined from the point of view of grant recipients. In 1997, the Arts Council of Finland set up a working group to evaluate the arts policy in Finland. The working group focused on direct state support for artists. In order to understand the living and working conditions of grant recipients and the role of public support, a survey was made on artists across all art forms.

This study contains the results of the survey carried out between April and June 1997. The study dealt with the significance of grant income for artists and their working conditions. In addition, it examined the usefulness of the state grant system. A mail questionnaire was sent to a total of 720 grant recipients, and the response rate was 75 per cent. The study population consisted of all those artists and artist groups who obtained state grants in 1996, covering all the art forms represented in the Finnish system of arts councils.

In Finland, the system of arts councils comprises nine national arts councils (one for each art form, i.e. architecture, cinema, crafts and design, dance, theater, literature, music, photographic art, and visual arts), and the Arts Council of Finland, which acts as a joint body to the art form councils. The arts councils distribute state support to professional artists. The Regional Arts Councils were not included in this study. In order to assess the meaning of state support for artists, this study examined the artists receiving public support from national arts councils or the Arts Council of Finland.

The grant system includes, for example, annual artist grants, which are given for a period of one, three or five years. They amount to about FIM 73,000 per year tax-free, which is at about the same level as the average

net income of the total labor force. There are also different kinds of project grants more in the nature of small-scale project funding. In most of the grant schemes, the economic situation of the applicants is supposed to have no effect on the distribution of grants. The grants are distributed mainly on the basis of artistic quality. Annual artist grants for three or five years, in particular, are awarded “to artists who have proved their creative capability”.

According to this survey, the majority of the grant recipients found the artists’ grant system quite useful. It is hardly surprising that the successful applicants had a favorable opinion of the usefulness of the grant system. Nevertheless, they identified some problems connected with the distribution of grants, such as the timing of the assistance and inflexibility in the use of grants. In addition, the majority of the grant recipients reported that some artist groups appeared to be occupying a more or less marginal position in relation to the grant system.

This study indicates that a state grant can have a significant effect on the working and living conditions of artists. For an individual artist, financial assistance may be useful for one or more specific reasons, such as enabling particular projects to be carried out, or allowing the artist to concentrate on creative work. Approximately one half of the grant recipients named these as the most important immediate effects of the grant on their professional lives in 1996. Moreover, a significant effect of the grant was that it gave the artist a secure income, relieving him or her at least temporarily from financial worries.

This study also revealed that grant money is not viewed only as financial assistance. The majority of the grant recipients reported that the grant had given them further encouragement in their work. On the basis of these results, it appears that a state grant may have a high prestige value. This holds together with the fact that state grants are important as a sign of approval and recognition of artistic quality. The distribution of grants is administered through artists and other representatives of the art field who assess artistic quality. A state grant can thus be an indication of artistic recognition gained through peer-group evaluation.

On the whole, the grant recipients proved to share many of the features considered typical to the economic situation and working patterns of artists. Artists usually have several different sources of income, and their earning strategies are based on balancing between artistic, arts-related and non-arts labor markets. Non-arts or arts-related work is an important part of the total earnings of artists. According to this study, the grant recipients rather seldom earned their whole income from artistic work. Even though grants provide artists with an opportunity to cut down on other, non-artistic work and to concentrate on artistic work, the income sources outside the artistic occupation were common. The majority of the grant recipients earned a part of their income from arts-related or non-arts work. The main reason for this multiple job-holding was financial.

The economic role of grant income was as important as that of artistic income. When artists were inquired about the proportion of grant income in their total income, approximately one third of the respondents reported that the grant accounted for over one half. Likewise, one third of the respondents had earned over one half of their income from artistic work. The differences between art forms were, however, notable. For instance, grant income played a more significant role in the fields of literature and cinema, whereas theater artists were an example of a sub-group who earned typically most of their income from their artistic work.

All in all, the state grant recipients proved to be a very heterogeneous group, with large variation in occupational status, professional practices, nature of artistic work, economic status, earning strategies, and relation to public support. The situation of the grant recipients varied considerably from one art field to another. Likewise, the state grant system appeared to have various functions for different artist groups, which are also documented in previous studies. It is therefore often misleading to speak of grant recipients as one group, even though certain common features can be found.