

a/nordi/c

Think Tank for Art and Policies (2021-2023)

WRITTEN CONTRIBUTION TO UNESCO

INTRODUCTION

UNESCO launched an open call in 2022 for the 2005 Committee for Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Hereby UNESCO encouraged civil society organisations to submit written contributions on a targeted number of specific issues decided by the Committee. The call provided a valuable opportunity for organisations to share their priorities, concerns and suggestions with the members of the Committee, and contributions will and have already been taken into consideration during the Committee's discussions and inform future strategic decisions.

The open call focused on:

- Challenges faced in the context of COVID-19 in relation to the diversity of cultural expressions, both offline and online
- The importance of the participation of micro, small and medium-sized cultural and creative enterprises in the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions

This paper documents a/nordi/c's contribution to UNESCO's call:

WRITTEN CONTRIBUTION

PLEASE DESCRIBE THE MANDATE OF YOUR ORGANIZATION:

a/nordi/c (www.anordic.org) is a Nordic think tank created to bring the practice of the art world and the political reality closer together. The think tank is organized as an association according to Danish law and placed in Denmark. The board represents several countries from the Nordic region.

a/nordi/c works with the Nordic countries as a starting point and always with a global outlook. The work of the think tank rests on many years of experience from Nordic cultural organizations, a wide-rooted and decades of tradition for a free and independent art and cultural life in the Nordic countries. a/nordi/c was established in 2021. In all its practices, a/nordi/c invites the entire landscape from artists, the creative sector and researchers to journalists, organizations and policy developers into the conversation and knowledge development.

The content of this written contribution is based on the output of a meeting under the concept of Curated Conversations, held in Espoo, Finland on 14-15 November 2022. The discussions at the meeting were centered around the theme Artistic Freedom, with the aim of:

- Achieving a clearer and more nuanced understanding of artistic freedom and the challenges related to it.
- Documenting and gathering concrete examples and signals of change concerning artistic freedom within two subtopics: digital ambivalence and censorship and self-censorship
- Developing suggestions and concrete actions to change and transform existing structures

The meeting was attended by 30 participants including artists, cultural administrators, representatives from policy institutions and funders, researchers and cultural journalists. The group included:

- Adelheid Eshitok Seyfarth Gulbrandsen, Author
- Anastasia Trizna, Actor

- Anni Syrjäläinen, Senior Advisor, Nordic Culture Fund
- Benny Marcel, Director of Nordic Culture Fund
- Brighde Caimbeul, Student assistant, a/nordi/c
- Camilla Mordhorst, Director Danish Cultural Institut
- Christian Villum, Director, Sprængfarlig ApS
- Eline Sigfusson, Director, a/nordi/c
- Geir Lindahl, Senior Advisor, Nordic Culture Point
- Heiki Riipinen, Performing Artist
- Helene Øllgaard, Advisor & Project manager, a/nordi/c
- Helle Siljeholm, Artist & Choreographer, the Nordic Culture Fund
- Julia Lohmann, Professor of Contemporary Design Practices, Julia Lohman Studio, Aalto University
- Kai Lehtikainen, University Researcher, University of the Arts Helsinki
- Khaled Barakeh, CEO, Independent Artist & Creative Facilitator
- Kristoffer Ørum, Artist
- Leif Jakobsson, Board Chair, a/nordi/c
- Maria Hirvi-Ijäs, Specialist Researcher, Cupore
- Outi Kuittinen, Lead & Senior Expert, Demos Helsinki
- Sabina Westerholm, Director, the Nordic House Iceland
- Sara Whyatt, Consultant, Researcher & Expert on Artistic Freedom
- Solveig Daugaard, Post. Doc. at Art as Forum, University of Copenhagen
- Sunnuva Bæk, Project Manager, Nordic House the Faroe Islands

IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19. PLEASE SPECIFY THE MAIN CHALLENGES IN RELATION TO THE DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS, BOTH OFFLINE AND ONLINE.

The impact of the Covid-19 restrictions has been different in different industries and art sectors in the Nordic Countries.

Unequal allocation of resources

- A tendency has been that emergency funding was not evenly allocated between bigger institutions and freelancers which created an in-just situated. Lack of resources therefore lead to fights and competition between different sectors instead of building alliances and collaboration.

Sectors and institutions:

- In several Nordic countries, diversity in theater and dance productions comes from independent artist with no permanent venue. During the pandemic, institutions had to prioritize their own in-house productions which prohibited the engagement from independent artists.

- The right to perform was neglected. The first COVID support/funding was in some countries (i.e. Finland) offered only to online productions limiting the mode of expression, medium of distribution, and access. To get support, artists had to come up with new ideas, and could not just continue their practice.

- Some institutions were too quick to adapt to extreme close-down measures - a form of self-censorship. Especially larger institutions that are dependent on governmental funding, were over-sensitive about close-down measures.

- During the pandemic, film industry suffered from lack of distribution. For logistical and financial reasons cinemas couldn't premiere films.

Travel restrictions for artists and audiences:

- Artists could not travel in and out of countries, neither could the audiences. This had great impact on artistic practices not least in border areas of the Nordic region.

Lack of inter-ministerial communication

- Restrictions were taken by health authorities. Culture agencies and health agencies did not communicate sufficiently.

- There was a lack of Inter-ministerial communication and emergency plans that would consider the consequences of limitations for freedom of expression, employment, distribution, and access.

a/nordi/c would like to recommend UNESCO the following:

- To consider ways to monitor the interlinkages between new disproportionate restrictions on artistic freedom and the increased lack of financial viability in the culture sector, triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

PLEASE DESCRIBE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PARTICIPATION OF MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED CULTURAL AND CREATIVE ENTERPRISES IN THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF THE DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS.

- The participation of micro, small and medium-sized cultural and creative enterprises can strengthen the diversity of cultural expression in programs and activities of arts and cultural organizations by taking and being granted a more strategic role. The enterprises can address the complexity of artistic freedom and the diversity of cultural expressions in strategies, principles of practice, and educational programs.

- Cultural institutions and cultural enterprises can also create local and regional grassroot networks in the fields of culture, freedom of expression and other fundamental rights to share experiences and ideas for action.

- Cultural institutions and production houses, fx theatres can ensure diversity in the people they hire. Recruitment processes should include and target minorities.

- Arts and cultural academic institutions can take a role by including modules that provide students with an understanding of artistic freedom, its importance, challenges, legal protections both at international and national level, as well as on anticipating, responding to and ameliorating adverse reactions.

- Artists, institutions, enterprises and artist unions can work together to monitor attacks on artistic freedom in their own countries, take collective action and provide moral support. They should work more directly with media to encourage better coverage of issues related to artistic freedom and to create own media platforms for discussion and debate.

Online environments specifically:

- There is a lack of representation of minority languages online and the technical circumstances for that to be achieved. This means that minority languages in future will have more difficulty surviving in online environments where English language is dominating.

- AI decides what to censor and block/ban on the internet: There is no due process for challenging automated moderation, which means that artists can be banned for life from online platforms with no possibility to speak their case. Furthermore, it is difficult for artists to make their artwork available online, as google ranks arts very low.

- There is a need to ensure that artists and creative enterprises can explore and develop the digital infrastructure needed to tackle current challenges in protection and promotion of artistic freedom and the diversity of cultural expressions online. Currently, there are no laws, no policies, transparency & regulations in the digital development. Therefore, it is clear, that we need a common vision and mission across the eco-system from a bottom-up perspective.

a/nord/c would like to recommend UNESCO the following:

- To conduct multi-stakeholder consultations, on a regular basis, to collect data from various sources, including companies in the areas of cinema, visual and performing arts, music, publishing, media, design etc. in order to strengthen the global knowledge base about

how restrictive policy measures and weakened revenue streams, triggered by COVID-19, affect the vulnerability of artists' work conditions, and make possible further interventions against their fundamental freedom of expression.

- To work for greater transparency about the operations of digital platforms with regard to strengthening research, policy and evidence-informed practices to understand and address online censorship of cultural expressions, in particular content removal that do not comply with international law.