

# **An Artistic Community and a Workplace: How Finnish Independent Theatres Interact with Money**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The article analyzes how money interacts with the practices and organizational activities of independent theatres in Finland in the 2010s. It discusses what kind of development the interaction entails or favors in the wider context of Finnish cultural policy. We share the results of Visio (2015-16), an empirical study and development project funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture and carried out with four professional independent theatres, which originated as group theatres, but are now institutionalized and operate with discretionary state subsidies. During the development project supported by Theatre Centre Finland, the study observed aspects of organizational development and learning as well as sustainable work in the said theatres. This was done via ethnographic and multiple case study methodologies. The study defined a theatre organization as a community for artistic work and a workplace for a diverse group of theatre professionals. The cases and the ethnographies were then reflected against current Finnish cultural policy. As descendants of the group theatre movement – arising from artistic ambition and opposition to commercialism – Finnish independent theatres have developed in different directions in their ideas of theatre, artistic visions, objectives, production models, and positioning in the field. Yet, there is a tendency to define independent theatres in opposition to theatres subsidized by law (the so-called VOS theatres), instead of laying stress on their specific artistic or operational visions or characteristics. This emphasis is present in public discussions, but also in the self-definitions of independent theatres. Money, and the economic affairs it underlines, strongly interact with the development, organizational learning, and working culture of Finnish independent theatres. Theoretically, we promote a Simmelian framework that stresses the socio-cultural dimension of money. Thus, we examine how the practices of the monetary economy are present in the practices and the development of independent theatres, and how this reflects their position within the current cultural policy and funding systems. Based on the above, the article suggests a more versatile approach to artistic independent theatres – one that emphasizes recognizing the heterogeneity of their operating models and artistic orientations, and their roles as diverse artistic communities aside from workplaces.

## **KEYWORDS**

Finnish independent theatre, Visio, organizational development, organizational learning, sustainable work, occupational wellbeing, everyday practices, artistic community, workplace, statutory funding, discretionary subsidies, multiple case study, qualitative analysis, ethnography

# An Artistic Community and a Workplace: How Finnish Independent Theatres Interact with Money

## INTRODUCTION

This article discusses how theatre practices and organizational activities interact with money within independent theatres in Finland in the 2010s. Consequently, it suggests what kind of development the interaction favors in the context of Finnish cultural policy. In the article, we share the results of Visio, a research and development project conducted by the Centre for Practice as Research in Theatre T7 at The University of Tampere, and funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland. The project focused on four independent professional theatres in the years 2015 and 2016, and the aim of the research involved was to gain more knowledge about the possibilities and challenges Finnish independent theatres face in their organizational development and with regard to their organizational, economic and artistic sustainability. The four development processes carried out with the participating theatres served as cases for a study on the organizational development and learning of independent theatres, which employed strategies and methodologies of multiple case study research and ethnography. Organizational development and related ethnographies were later examined in the context of the current Finnish cultural policy. In the study, a theatre organization was defined as a community for artistic work and a workplace for a diverse group of theatre professionals.<sup>1</sup>

The theatres that participated in the project operate outside the main public financing system for arts and culture in Finland – the system of statutory funding called VOS (the Finnish acronym for the system). They originated as group theatres, but are nowadays institutionalized and regularly operating, receiving the state's discretionary operational subsidies allocated by Arts Promotion Centre Finland.

The study itself emphasized a broad Simmelian framework that underlines the socio-cultural dimension of money: money and economic phenomena

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1 The article contains reworked and translated sections of Laura Pekkala's report *Kohti oppimista ja kestäväää työtä – organisaation kehittymismahdollisuudet valtionosuusjärjestelmän ulkopuolisissa ammattiteattereissa* (2017) for the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland, published by the Centre for Practice as Research in Theatre as part of the project Visio. Translations by Riku Roihankorpi and Laura Pekkala.

should not be discussed only via economic facts.<sup>2</sup> This hypothesis served as a backdrop for the theoretical frameworks of organizational learning and sustainable work, as the latter two were employed to produce comprehensive knowledge about the central challenges of learning and development in independent theatres. Through them, we now expect to establish arguments about how the practices of the monetary economy are present and presented in the practices and organizational activities of independent theatres, and how this affects their relations to current cultural policy and funding systems. As a result, the article suggests a more elaborate definition for artistic independent theatres – one that emphasizes their functions as artistic communities aside from workplaces.

The practices of Finnish independent theatres, those operating outside the system of statutory funding (VOS)<sup>3</sup>, have been studied relatively little. Statistical analyses have been compiled and published in *The Finnish Theatre Statistics* by Theatre Info Finland (TINFO). Theatre Centre Finland, a safeguard organization of the independent theatre sector, has compiled reports on their prospects. Researchers Anu Oinaala and Vilja Ruokolainen from the Center for Cultural Policy Research Cupore have studied the independent sector of performing arts in Finland in general and published two articles based on their findings. In their analysis, the independent sector (or the “free field”, *vapaa kenttä* in Finnish) is defined to include all organizations from outside the VOS system, ranging from established operators to temporary working groups and individual artists. *Vapaan kentän ammattilaisryhmien toimintaedellytysten parantaminen*, a working group report by the Ministry of Education and Culture that surveyed the situation of the independent sector in the context of cultural policy, was published in 2011. The conditions and the production and operating models of independent theatres are also illuminated by *Kiertueella henki kulkee!* from 2013, a report by the project TEKI-JÄ – Teattereiden kiertuejärjestelmä coordinated by the Centre for Practice as Research in Theatre T7. Researcher Timo Kallinen (2002) analyzes the Finnish group theatre movement from a historical point of view and exposes the typical operating models of independent theatres, albeit there are group theatres operating inside the VOS system as well. Yet, these previous reports and studies have not focused specifically on the everyday organizational practices of independent theatres.<sup>4</sup>

## INDEPENDENT PROFESSIONAL THEATRES IN FINLAND

From a monetary point of view, the field of Finnish theatre is determined by the VOS system (in effect since 1993), which means that certain established

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2 See e.g. Simmel 1997; Pyyhtinen 2009.

3 Finnish independent theatre organizations are not subject to the Act on the Financing of the Provision of Education and Cultures (Theatre and Orchestras Act 730/1992).

4 Teatterikeskus 2014, 2013; Oinaala and Ruokolainen 2013, 2017; Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2011; Kekäläinen and Salomaa 2013; Kallinen 2002.

operators are subsidized by law, while those outside the system are defined as independent theatres (the “free field”) that may receive discretionary subsidies but are largely self-financed. As noted, this article examines the latter group of theatres, more specifically four established operators in this particular group.

Finnish society – effectively, the operational environment of Finnish theatres – has significantly transformed in recent years. This is due to globalization, technological advancements, the decline of the welfare state, and various challenges concerning resources and the environment. The situation affects theatres as well. Public funding for the arts and culture has diminished,<sup>5</sup> and the demand for private funding is on the rise. The amount of self-financing of the theatres’ total income continues to rise and the pressure to increase spectator figures and ticket sales is considerable. This, despite the fact that self-financing already constitutes a significant portion of the income formation of independent theatres: an average of forty four percent<sup>6</sup> in 2015. The surrounding consumer society has long since become fragmentary and the consumer behavior of Finns has become more individualized over the past few decades.<sup>7</sup> Theatre audiences reflect these changes: instead of attracting or serving a single yet undefined audience, theatres now need to diversify their artistic approaches or to clarify their profiles in order to specialize in one artistic vision. In principle, the supply of arts and culture is generous, especially in the Helsinki (capital) region, and theatregoers have a variety of shows and genres to choose from. However, the rivals for theatres are not necessarily other theatres or cultural institutions, but other forms of recreational activity.<sup>8</sup>

These changes pose a considerable challenge for theatre organizations: their strained economic situation necessitates greater productivity, the issue of quality concerns not only artistic contents, but various additional services provided for the audiences, and new cultural policies and changes in the hegemonic stance towards culture at the societal level put pressure on their development. For example, Finnish theatres that receive public funding are expected to enhance their audience development, meaning increasing interaction with local communities and different audience groups. Due to these expectations, theatres need to develop new kinds of artistic contents and services. There is also a need to develop new production models and ways of making theatre that may challenge established working methods. Although one may say that small and flexible theatre organizations based on the en-

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5 The state funding for theatres, orchestras, and museums almost doubled between 2002 and 2013. The cuts suggested by the government programme of 2011 have been allocated to statutory state support from 2012 onwards. (Kangas and Pirnes 2015, 80)

6 Tinfo 2016.

7 Lammi and Mäkelä 2013.

8 See Klaić 2012, 48.

semble model<sup>9</sup> are more adaptive by default, creating a successful relationship with a new audience always requires explicit choices and significant reallocation of resources.<sup>10</sup>

As descendants of the theatre group movement that arose from artistic ambition and opposition to commercialism, Finnish independent theatres have developed into various different directions in their idea of theatre, artistic vision, objectives, production models, and positioning in the field of culture. Yet, there is a strong tendency to define independent theatres in opposition to VOS theatres, instead of laying stress on their specific artistic or operational visions or characteristics as artistic communities. This emphasis is present in public discussions, but also in the self-definitions of independent theatres.<sup>11</sup> Unsurprisingly, the debates within Finnish cultural policy also tend to situate independent theatres opposite to those subsidized by law.<sup>12</sup> One can therefore suggest that money and the economic affairs it underlines strongly interact with the development and the working culture of Finnish independent theatres.

As an employer, the field of Finnish theatre has transformed considerably since the beginning of the twenty-first century. The number of theatre professionals working in the performing arts has increased and, according to recent man-year statistics, those employed in professional positions amount to 3500 persons. The training of theatre artists has not increased, but universities of applied sciences provide education aimed at other professional positions in the arts sector. Theatre and other performing arts professionals with degrees from abroad also work within the Finnish labor market. The increase in the number of arts professionals is especially evident outside the VOS system, where the amount of theatre organizations has multiplied notably. In 2016, there were 130–140 professional independent theatres and theatre groups operating outside the VOS system.<sup>13</sup> Of these, forty-three received discretionary state subsidies and the amount has remained almost the same throughout the 2010s: in 2011 subsidies were granted to forty operators within the dramatic arts. However, the growth of the independent theatre sector took place from 2009 to 2011, as in 2009 discretionary state subsidies were granted to twenty-nine operators. For comparison, in 2015 there were forty-seven theatres subject to the Theatres and Orchestras Act<sup>14</sup> (including

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9 Here, as elsewhere, an ensemble means a theatre company with a recognizable artistic profile and a strong leader that operates with a distinct group of artists (Klać 2012, 37).

10 Tinfo 2016; Lavaste, Rautavuoma and Sirén 2015; Pekkala 2017, 18–9.

11 For the aesthetic and artistic premises of these discussions, see Johnson 2010, 34.

12 Kanerva and Ruusuvirta 2006, 45.

13 In addition to these, the statistics mention an undefined number of temporary artistic groups and productions by individual artists.

14 Kangas and Pirnes 2015, 90. A majority of the 'fixed' or institutional theatres is maintained by private operators, such as societies, foundations, or corporations.

the National Theatre), and the amount has not changed significantly during the existence of the statutory system.<sup>15</sup>

The growth of the field outside the VOS system resulted partly from the cuts in the state funding for VOS theatres, in that actors and other theatre professionals receive fewer contracts or visiting artist statuses from the VOS theatres. At the same time, the field of theatre has become more versatile as it welcomes and interacts with new genres, such as applied theatre arts. Many present-day theatres, theatre groups, and productions are multidisciplinary by default and cross the traditional boundaries of artistic practice. Thus, a great number of artists choose to work in the independent sector, harnessing their individual starting points and artistic visions.<sup>16</sup>

### **VISIO: BACKGROUND AND AIMS**

As mentioned, the project Visio was born out of the need to gain more knowledge about established Finnish theatres that do not operate under the statutory funding system. Studies on the independent sector remain relatively few despite the increase in the amount of related organizations in recent years. In most reviews and reports, the chosen approach has been quantitative, even as statistics do not necessarily describe the variety of theatre operators and the activities in the independent sector in sufficient detail.<sup>17</sup> In contrast to statistical views, Visio aimed to examine the concrete development activities and the everyday practices of independent theatres to better understand the logics of their operations in the context of the prevailing economic challenges. The research involved was thus designed to generate analytical information on the complex situation and activities of four present-day theatre organizations and, perhaps, to mitigate the problems faced by their peers. Through a multiple case study<sup>18</sup> and related ethnographic methods – the researchers' participation in and documentation of the development processes – it was possible to study the theatres' everyday activities that focused on organizational changes at close range, in their actual setting and from the viewpoints of the theatres themselves. The studied phenomena, their societal contexts, and the aims of the adjacent development project thus provided the guidelines for relevant methods and data.<sup>19</sup>

The theatres involved were Rakastajat Theatre from the city of Pori, Theatre Telakka and Theatre Siperia from the city of Tampere, and Myllyteatteri Theatre from Helsinki. Following the generational division of Finnish group

15 Tinfo 2016.

16 Ibid.(Tinfo); Helavuori, Kuukorento and Kuusikko 2016.

17 Quine 2009, 4.

18 Reflecting the premises of the present enquiry, Yin (2003, 18) notes that a case study "is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within a real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident."

19 Buchanan 2012, 356.

theatres presented by Kallinen (2002), the two longest running of the theatres, Rakastajat (est. 1991) and Theatre Telakka (est. 1996), could be defined as group theatres of the 1990s, and the two youngest theatres, Theatre Myllyteatteri (est. 2003) and Theatre Siperia (est. 2005), as group theatres of the 2000s.

Conventionally, the cases selected to a multiple case study should constitute a comprehensive representation of the phenomenon under investigation. However, case studies can also be “self-selecting”, emerging from encountered opportunities and evidence.<sup>20</sup> To be included in the study, Visio’s theatre organisations were required to meet some criteria. All of the Visio theatres operate with discretionary subsidies allocated by the Arts Promotion Centre Finland (Taiteen edistämiskeskus in Finnish), which entail that the theatres are able to respond to certain artistic criteria and maintain sustained, year-round, and financially punctual operations. The theatres thus exhibit established, systematically organized, and ongoing activities.<sup>21</sup> They were expected to maintain strong identities as independent theatres and to be committed to the development processes, thus providing the study a diverse and comprehensive sample. Selection of the cases was executed together with Theatre Centre Finland, which conducted a preliminary survey and series of interviews for collecting background information.

The theatres embodied several differences at the level of organizational structures and in their operations: they articulated different aims, conceptions of theatre, operation models, and working environments. Topical development needs varied depending on each theatre, and thus the development projects included activities related to different areas of organizational improvement, such as management and leadership, organizational structure, work distribution, or marketing and communications. Common objectives for the theatres were to clarify their artistic and operational vision as well as future ambitions, and to generate outlines for more strategic thinking, planning, and working conditions.

Through the project, the theatres – mostly operating with scarce resources – received support from the project’s personnel, consultation from experts, and tools for organizing their activities into a more sustainable direction. These tools included action and communication plans, project and financing plans, company manuals, and other documents produced together with the theatres’ artistic or other personnel. During Visio’s final stages, peer support and learning was arranged through a shared seminar for the project partners. A share of the project’s funding was allocated to the recruitment of a person in charge for each development project as a significant form of support. The theatres also allocated self-financing to the implementation of its processes in order to ensure their commitment to the project.<sup>22</sup> By exploring these

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20 Buchanan op.cit. 361.

21 Taiteen edistämiskeskus 2016.

22 The person in charge of the project’s research process was Laura Pekkala from

everyday development activities, Visio was not only able to analyze the work, learning, and organizational development potential of the theatres involved, but also to retrace the main challenges for development and learning in the work of independent theatres. A consequent aim was to resolve which factors enable the theatres to develop policies for sustainable work, a key element in interacting with financial challenges and potentials. The analytical framework for this empirical approach was provided by studies on dialogic leadership, organizational learning, the relations between occupational wellbeing and organizational success, as well as sustainable work.<sup>23</sup>

### **THE INDEPENDENT SECTOR: GROUP THEATRES AND THIRD SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS**

The independent theatre sector has often been discussed as a source and guarantee for the development and diversity of art and theatre. Compared to the VOS theatres, which operate and interact with statutory state support based on law and calculated principles, the independent theatres (usually with histories as group theatres) have been seen as more receptive to artistic risks and changes in operational strategies.<sup>24</sup> Internationally, the artistic leaders (and often founding members) of groups have acted as artistic pioneers with innovative attitudes towards aesthetic and ideological issues. This has contributed to the idea that thriving independent theatres may be more capable of coping with diminishing resources, as they are “nurtured” by “their own theatre ideas and aspirations.” The organizations of the independent theatres tend to be small and flexible, although one must note that the overall income of a single organization can become considerable in relation to the size of the organization.<sup>25</sup> Their audiences, generally smaller than those of theatres receiving stable subsidies, have attracted theatre “enthusiasts”.<sup>26</sup> Kangas and Pirnes note that groups within the independent sector tend to emphasize the renewal of art, experimentation, and specialized productions in their profiles, while the VOS theatres are criticized for “stagnation”. Statutory funding offers basic security for a theatre’s activities, which again creates preconditions to continuity, one of the main criteria of statutory funding.

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T7, and the director of the centre, Riku Roihankorpi, served as its PI. Theatre Centre Finland and its executive manager Maaria Kuukorento served as a specialist partner for T7. The artistic directors of the theatres contributed a considerable share of their working hours to the development projects, and each theatre received consultation from dedicated specialists and organizations in the field, namely Tomi Purovaara, Esa Kylmälä (Q-teatteri Theatre), Isabel González (Arts Management Helsinki) and communications and marketing agency Kumu Communications.

23 Pyöriä 2012; Syvänen et al. 2015; Kasvio 2014; Kasvio and Räikkönen 2013.

24 See Johnson 2010, 34.

25 For example, the gross income of the Rakastajat Theatre reached over 860 000 euros in 2015.

26 Klaić 2012, 45.

This creates tensions between the different sectors.<sup>27</sup>

All of the Visio theatres had begun to develop their organizational activities before the project, and thus the project was designed to support and accelerate these processes, and to provide potential alternatives for their orientation. As a hypothesis, developing operations specifically at the level of organizations was considered important, since the amount of freelance employment is constantly on the rise. In the context of mobile and insecure work – still, problematically, described as atypical in the field of the performing arts – the theatres of the independent sector are crucial operators as regards the subsistence and the career development of theatre artists. Their role as fulcrums for networking and the dynamic working culture of freelancers becomes increasingly significant. Although freelance employment and independence from any single organization are conscious choices for many theatre artists, theatre itself is a collective art form that requires production platforms and artistic communities to exist.<sup>28</sup>

As a majority of Finnish theatres in the independent sector have a background as group theatres, they tend to embody related production models. The latter were born out of artistic ambition, and the organizations were fashioned to implement the artistic visions and aims of the founders. Internationally, the first group theatres were formed already at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, and the concept of a theatre group became established in the United States in the 1930s. Finland has witnessed artistically ambitious small theatres since the 1910s, but the first proper surge of the group theatre movement emerged in the 1960s and the 1970s, when theatre artists assumed a more active role in societal and political discussions (as in other Nordic countries).<sup>29</sup>

Although the incentive for Finnish group theatres was composed of strong social elements, the boundary between change and stability can be drawn between generations of theatre makers: while the earlier generations held power in the institutionalized theatres, the younger generations had a voice of expression in theatre groups. At first, these groups toured with the aim of making theatre for those with limited access to the arts, and the first wave of theatre groups emphasized professionalism and democratic decision-making. In the following decades, the aspect of professionalism was overshadowed by performativity. The division between generations continues to color the independent sector, and the theatres involved in the Visio study represent two different generations of theatre groups, one from the 1990s and one from the 2000s. Today's independent theatres often promote their profiles as experimental and apt to renew theatre.<sup>30</sup>

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27 Kangas and Pirnes 2015, 95.

28 Helavuori, Kuukorento and Kuusikko 2016.

29 Kallinen 2002, 120.

30 Wilmer and Koski 2008, 128–129; Kokkonen, Loppi and Karjalainen 2002; see also Kangas and Pirnes 2015, 54.

While the overall image of the independent sector is heterogeneous, for many theatres, their background as a group theatre often determines their operations and decision-making processes, as noted above. When one examines the field of Finnish theatre it is therefore important to understand that different aspects of financing often usher communities of theatre makers to establish legally registered organizations. There are more funding sources available for registered activities than for non-registered groups. Thus, many theatres in the independent sector are typically associations, i.e., non-profit organizations. The chosen form of organization preconditions the organization's activities, but from a financial viewpoint, operating in the third sector as a non-governmental organization – like Finnish independent theatres do – appears to be beneficial.<sup>31</sup> In her quantitative analysis, researcher Minna Ruusuvirta states that the theatres in the third sector are more productive than theatres in the public sector, if one examines their spectator figures and the number of productions in relation to public financing. The comparison here thus emphasizes the role of public financing in the productivity of independent theatres.<sup>32</sup> However, a statistical analysis does not necessarily take into account, for example, the quality aspects or the different roles and public expectations imposed on fixed operators. It is also important to note that audience development was not in the main focus of Visio's research, since audiences were not directly in the focus of the development agendas of the theatres involved. Yet, creating relationships with different audiences seems to be a strong motivation for the development of independent theatres.

The multiple case study of Visio concentrated on organizations and activities at the organizational level, because, as a collective endeavor, theatre requires collective organizing. Even though the independent sector mainly employs freelancers and different collectives form around or between individual theatre makers, there is a need for more stable and solid consortiums. In the study, an independent theatre organization was then defined as a certain hub for the mobile and transient artistic work increasing in present society.

To a degree, the operations of different organizations can be defined as goal-oriented, formal, and rational. On the other hand, organizations are always complex. Through formality the organizations aspire to maintain rationality, predictability, quality, and productivity. The degree of formality, in turn, depends on the organization's aims, needs, and core tasks: with maximum formality, there are no exceptions to the performed tasks, and minimal formality allows the members of the organization to develop their own ideas and approaches. Other characteristics of an organization are, for example, size, the centralization of decision-making, and specialization. Specialization de-

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31 Marjatta Häti-Korteila (2010), who has studied development and management in institutionalized theatres, sees that from the viewpoint of development the status of municipal theatre (theatre as a municipal institution) is an especially negative option for an organizational model.

32 Ruusuvirta 2013, 234.

notes the distribution of work necessary for achieving a goal, either horizontally, or vertically.<sup>33</sup> The theatres involved in the project can be categorized as small organizations, at least on the basis of the small number of employees. Their formality is minimal and specialization remains minute. Therefore, their operational culture is flexible and the organizations themselves are light and of low hierarchy by structure. One may then justifiably suggest that a theatre organization with few ready-made structures possesses good prospects for development, as its flexible organizational structure allows fluent adoption of new operational models. In the field of theatre, the flexibility of an organization can also be reduced to aspects of financing: as discussed above, theatres operating outside the VOS system may have more chances for taking risks in decisions on artistic contents and production methods.

A further theoretical standpoint for the study was to analyze this situation in the frameworks of organizational learning and sustainable work, and to examine the latter two from the viewpoints of innovation, dialogic learning, wellbeing at work, and productivity.<sup>34</sup> The mentioned concepts contribute to our understanding of organizational learning, i.e., the ways in which an organization develops and changes in interaction with its financial and operational environments. Sustainable work, in turn, denotes a comprehensive responsibility for the environment, the members of an organization, financiers, and other interest groups. It operates with four dimensions of sustainability: economic, social, human, and ecological. This systematic approach, where working life can be seen as sustainable when all the mentioned dimensions are somewhat fulfilled, appears to be a useful approach when analyzing developing organizations.<sup>35</sup>

As a result, and in the light of the financial hypotheses, the research questions for the multiple case study were then 1) what are the main challenges for the development and learning of independent theatres, and why, as well as 2) how can independent theatres develop their operations towards sustainable work?

## **METHODOLOGY AND DATA**

While the multiple case study of Visio used the four development projects as its cases, a methodology of ethnography was employed to study organizational learning and development in their actual settings. Its research data consisted of thematic interviews, observations, existing documents, and documents produced by the theatres themselves. Thematic interviews were conducted with thirteen key actors working in the theatres: altogether five artistic directors, four members of the artistic ensembles, and four members of the production personnel. There was at least one representative of each

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33 Harisalo 2008, 19–23.

34 Syvänen et al. 2015; Syvänen et al. 2012; Senge 1990; Pyöriä 2012; Ojala and Jokivuori 2012; Kasvio 2014.

35 Kasvio 2014.

personnel category from every theatre/case. The interviews were conducted face-to-face during the year 2016 in the theatres or other places suggested by interviewees; one interview was conducted via the phone.

The interviews focused on the background information about the interviewees and their organizations, such as the organization's birth and development, key working processes and operational model, structures, personnel, and the tasks of the latter. Themes, such as the organization and distribution of work, communication and multi-professional co-operation, management and leadership, power relationships and responsibilities, vision and strategy, possibilities and obstacles of learning, as well as personal well-being at work were also discussed. Issues related to the interviewees' personal tasks, responsibilities, roles, competence, and development were addressed, and different aspects of sustainability in the organizations' activities were evaluated in connection with their future plans. Individual interviews lasted from one to one and a half hours and produced altogether 120 pages of literary material.

Alongside the interviews, data was collected by observing several organizational gatherings arranged as part of the development projects. In the present study, this meant participatory observation (field work). Field work was carried out in ten different development gatherings, which lasted from a couple of hours to entire working days. Their observation table included the categories of roles, interaction, space, and attitudes, and these were used to support the consistency of the observations. Four of the gatherings were arranged with Theatre Telakka, three with Theatre Siperia, and one with both the Rakastajat Theatre and the Myllyteatteri Theatre.

Depending on each case, the gatherings ranged from joint development sessions between the entire personnel of the theatre and its trustees to discussions between artistic directors and the mentors provided by the project. In the latter processes, Visio's researcher assumed a more active role by asking additional questions. The observations concentrated on the so-called formal level, which is defined by different administrative documents and organizational structures, such as operating plans, public declarations/statements, and artistic agendas. They also drew on the informal level, which denotes the unofficial interaction and hierarchies of an organization.

The study analyzed material that consisted of official documents in the form of operating plans from 2014 and 2015, memos and working papers produced throughout the projects, and brochures reporting on the theatres' operations and repertoires. This material helped especially in examining the relationships of the theatres to their operational environments. After data collection, the data was examined through a thematic analysis and cross-case syntheses to enable a comparative analysis.<sup>36</sup> In some cases, the information provided by the interviews received more weight in the final analysis. Furthermore, the fieldwork period in the theatres did not extend very far, although their operations were examined and documented for nearly a year. Participa-

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36 Yin 2003, 156–160.

tory observation appeared to provide more information on the organizations that arranged development gatherings for the entire staff.<sup>37</sup>

The value of these chosen approaches was to reach an everyday perspective on the theatre organizations, which is quite different from those provided by statistical analyses. While it may not allow far-reaching generalizations to be made, by studying four different theatre organizations it is possible to generate four different views on the independent sector, as well as on its development and development potential.

## **THE CASES:**

### **THEATRE ORGANIZATIONS, THEATRE PRACTICES, AND MONEY**

#### **CASE 1: THE RAKASTAJAT THEATRE**

The Rakastajat Theatre, founded in 1991, is an independent and professional theatre based in the city of Pori in the Satakunta region. Two out of four of the founding members, Angelika Meusel and Kai Tanner, are currently the acting directors of the theatre. As the only professional independent theatre in the Satakunta region, it produces two to four premieres yearly, and a comprehensive visiting repertoire to its two venues. The yearly amount of spectators has been over 30,000 persons in the 2010s, and the theatre has paid attention to audience development in their strategic processes by developing its brand, reputation, and loyalty, especially among the local audience.<sup>38</sup> In 2015, the overall revenue of the theatre was 861,000 euros, of which the theatre itself produced 618,000 euros (seventy-one per cent). It received 150,000 euros in state discretionary subsidies, 45,000 euros from the city of Pori, and 45,000 euros in other subsidies. The theatre's operations are maintained by a registered supporters' society, whose board includes both of the theatre's directors, one staff member, and external individuals from, e.g. corporate life. The directors act as a team of artistic leadership and take responsibility for the organization's management, productions, and marketing. Daily activities related to production and administration are run by a full-time production secretary. During 2015, the organization employed eight full-time and eleven part-time employees, as well as various visiting artists. However, in 2016 the theatre had to terminate four permanent contracts and increase the amount of temporary personnel in order to stabilize its finances.

The economic sustainability of work is connected to the productivity and the financial status of an organization. An economically sustainable organization has a functional financial layout, its operations are competitive and profitable, and it is able to sufficiently renew itself in the light of future oper-

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37 Huttunen 2010, 39–43; see Atkinson 2001; Gordon et al. 2007, 43.

38 Financiers, stakeholders, and policy-makers are often tempted to use audience figures in order to make evidence-based decisions on the performing arts. However, as Michael Quine (2009) argues, measuring audience statistics does not necessarily provide thorough information on the diverse field of theatre.

ations. In turn, a sustainable way of organizing work preserves the organization's capability to employ individuals. From the point of view of an individual employee, economically sustainable work then provides a chance to earn sufficient income in the present and in the future.<sup>39</sup> For the theatres in the independent sector, the conditions of economically sustainable work are challenging: their financial situation is meager, and the layout for funding is often not in a shape to provide sufficient employment. Their operations include a significant amount of volunteer activities,<sup>40</sup> and those with contracts are often burdened with work. Thus, in independent theatres, the question of economically sustainable work is organically connected with social and human resilience. The artistic and operational visions of theatres (with background in the group theatre movement), in turn, are mostly based on the conceptions of theatre promoted by their founding members. The introduction of new members and employees entails the adoption of new visions, and this is a critical aspect for the independent theatres that consider themselves as (or strive to develop into) learning organizations. Crises often arise from reluctance to reach tradeoffs, so the weight of a shared vision is considerable in the resilient, mobile, and transforming organizations of the independent sector, especially at times of change and under uncertain economic conditions. At the level of operations, a vision and a strategy become a methodical mode of doing things, which denotes a proactive and systematic way of working towards goals, despite changes in financing.

In recent years, the Rakastajat theatre has developed its financial and organizational structures and the process continued during Visio. In previous years, the project had proven to be financially challenging for the organization's viability and therefore burdensome for its personnel. The increase in the theatre's operations since 2010 (partly due to a new venue with 250 seats in the cultural locus Kehräämö in 2009)<sup>41</sup> had happened rapidly and with limited control, especially because of the fast pace set for decision-making. The construction of the infrastructure for its new venue, and the launching of its activities therein, demanded for the reallocation of existing and acquisition of new resources. Securing the continuity of the operations in this situation required the directors to take notable economic risks, not least because the state's discretionary subsidies for the theatre had been cut for three consecutive years. The theatre needed to increase its self-financing significantly.

On the basis of the above, the theatre re-discussed its strategic focuses,

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39 Kasvio 2014, 124.

40 Oinaala and Ruokolainen 2017.

41 The Rakastajat theatre produces shows for two different venues, the seventy-five-seat Studio Hilikka and cultural locus Kehräämö. Due to managing Kehräämö, the theatre has increased its yearly spectator figures to over 30,000 spectators at best. Rakastajat hosts a yearly Lainsuojattomat festival for independent theatres, which is considered a central part of its operations. It also arranges restaurant, repertory, and catering services as well as educational activities for companies.

See: <https://www.rakastajat.fi>.

structures, and operating models during the project period. The new structure and operating model were designed to be more flexible. The biggest change took place in strategic and operational thinking: earlier the operations of the theatre were largely based on reacting to acute challenges (whether financial or operational), but now the aim was to become more strategic and methodical in attending to the theatre's profits and sustainability. Earlier, the volume of the operations did not agree with the resources, and occasionally the idea of growth had been seen as an intrinsic value, even at the expense of artistic work – the organization's fundamental mission and the core of its know-how. Several ideas for enhancing the situation were conceived during Visio, and they were prepared into a custom-made project. The new project was designed to reassert the theatre's main activities without adding an excessive burden to its resources. The condition for the project was the acquisition of separate funding, which also signals a change towards sustainability in the theatre's agenda: sustainable development of an arts organization is not possible without sufficient resources.

The development process launched a progression which focused on the fundamental mission of Rakastajat, which, instead of holistic growth, focused on its artistic work along with its contents and quality. This new course called for a considerable change in the thought of the organization and its management. The case also highlighted the significance of a theatre space for an independent theatre organization. A venue constitutes a fair share of the expenses of a theatre, and therefore its strategic importance must always be studied when discussing structural development. The venue choices of Rakastajat are affected by the theatre's location in a regional centre, where temporary performance spaces are not as easily available as in, for example, the capital region.

## **CASE 2: THEATRE TELAKKA**

Theatre Telakka is an internationally recognized, independent, and professional theatre founded in 1996 in the city of Tampere. Theatre Telakka came into being when three professional theatre groups initiated a collaboration to find a stage and a theatre space of their own. Together, they renovated an old storehouse building, which is nowadays a well-known cultural venue with a restaurant in the Tampere city centre.

Theatre Telakka and its stage, a separate organization of the cultural venue and the restaurant (Culture House Telakka), are located on the third floor of the Telakka building. Theatre Telakka operates with an ambitious profile that emphasizes new forms of theatre-making and first-rate productions of classic theatre pieces.<sup>42</sup> The repertoire is divided into three sections: the main repertoire, the visiting repertoire, and independent productions made by individual members of the theatre. The main repertoire of 2015 saw two premieres, while there were eight visiting productions and two productions

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42 See <http://www.teatteritelakka.fi/?lang=en>.

of the theatre's individual members. In 2016, Theatre Telakka was voted The Theatre of the Year in Finland for its systematic twenty-year agenda of producing innovative theatre at local, national, and international levels. During recent years, Telakka has carried out several productions through international and national collaborations, and audience development has emerged as a special form of activity.

In 2015, Theatre Telakka's overall revenue was approximately 300,000 euros, and the discretionary subsidy from the state was 130,000 euros. Self-financing added up to 85,000 euros, while the subsidies from the city of Tampere and other sources were 30,000 euros and 55,000 euros, respectively. The supporters' society of Culture House Telakka supports the theatre's operations with its revenues, while subsidies are allocated to venue expenses. The original idea of the founders of the culture house, according to which the revenues of the restaurant would finance the theatre's operations, has not become reality. The theatre employs one full-time producer and one technician with seventy-five per cent working hours. As well as productions and their marketing, the producer is in charge of the administration of the organization. Piia Soikkeli, the chair of the managing board and the artistic executive team, also acts as a part-time theatre manager and project-based producer mainly with project funding. The artistic executive team is in charge of the theatre's artistic principles and decisions. The artistic staff works under part-time and fixed-term contracts, while technicians and booking clerks work by the hour. In 2015, Telakka employed 50 people on contracts of varying durations.

Several studies show that wellbeing at work is a significant asset for an organization. It directly affects productivity. Although the principal reasons for improving wellbeing at work are usually socially motivated, it is also an economically profitable investment. Broadly put, work-related wellbeing includes the organization, its management, the operations of the work community and its different teams, work itself, as well as the opportunities to influence the structure and the pace of the latter. Even if all of the above features of an organization support wellbeing, an individual employee construes her wellbeing based on her own position and situation in the organization.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, wellbeing at work must be examined both from the point of view of an individual and the organization.

During Visio, Theatre Telakka clarified its job descriptions and the distribution of responsibilities together with the staff and the executive board members, in order to increase the theatre's productivity as well as wellbeing at work. Previously, the job descriptions of the personnel were seen as incoherent and fragmented, which raised a need to organize them into larger structures. The theatre also lacked a shared understanding and conception of the structure of its organization as well as a mutual schedule regarding the

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43 Pyöriä 2012, 7-14; Ojala and Jokivuori 2012; Syvänen et al. 2015; Manka 2011, 76.

organization's operations. These were included in the development agenda. Both the key personnel and the management board participated in collective development sessions in order to analyze the current and the potential roles of each member of the organization. Responsibilities were redistributed, and the board's expertise and input were made more efficient in planning the organization's activities. New tasks, roles, responsibilities, operational models, and structures were made visible by documenting the information in an operating manual, and by scheduling the theatre's main work processes<sup>44</sup> via mutual documents. These documents produced a shared understanding of the organization's functions, and could be used, for example, in orientating existing and new personnel as well as visiting ensembles. An overall agreement on how to organize the work helps in strategic planning and management. When there is a shared view about the core work processes, roles, and responsibilities, it improves well-being at work and, consequently, productivity. The strain on the key persons of an organization is reduced as their role in communicating between different duties is removed.

A main finding in Theatre Telakka's case was that those participating in the development process were able to form a shared vision and understanding of the distribution and the contents of the duties, and therefore of the future of the theatre. Joint meetings enabled the participants to appreciate their own and others' work in a more profound way. The theatre developed very concrete duties, tasks, and schedules. It proceeded to form long-term plans and, eventually, the overall vision of the organization. It can be argued that implementing this vision becomes more efficient with a shared conception of the duties and the schedules of the workplace.

### **CASE 3: MYLLYTEATTERI THEATRE**

The Myllyteatteri Theatre, founded in 2003, is a Helsinki-based professional theatre, which operates in Finland and internationally. It creates comprehensive artworks that emphasize the theatre's visuality. An equally important element in Myllyteatteri's art is the actor as well as the aesthetics, objects, music, sound, and lights emerging from the actor's work.<sup>45</sup> On average, it produces about one premiere per year and mounted a total of seventeen productions. In addition to its productions, Myllyteatteri participates in international projects and public arts events. It carries out educational activities and practical workshops on the Suzuki method and the Viewpoints technique, and both are utilized as elements of its productions. An established *modus operandi* involves the development of performance concepts, organization of arts-based encounters, and audience development through seminars, concerts, and public discussions.

In 2015, Myllyteatteri's overall revenue was 69,000 euros, of which the

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44 The main work processes of Telakka are planning of the repertoires, production, marketing, and technical management.

45 See <http://www.myllyteatteri.fi>

share of discretionary subsidies was 50,000 euros, and the income produced by the theatre 16,000 euros. Other subsidies amounted to an exceptionally small sum, 3,000 euros, as the theatre did not carry out any significant projects during that year. Its operations are administered by a supporters' society. Myllyteatteri does not have a venue of its own, but seeks a specific theatre space for each of its productions. These include actual theatre spaces such as the Ateneum Hall in one of the museums of the Finnish National Gallery, and various temporary spaces both indoors and outdoors. Not having a venue of its own is a conscious choice by the theatre.

The theatre started out as a group theatre, but has developed into an auteur theatre led by its artistic director, Miira Sippola. Nowadays the Myllyteatteri Theatre affiliates a relatively solid group of twenty artists from Finland and abroad, which embodies a converging conception of theatre and education regarding the training methods promoted by the theatre. The group trains regularly outside the production seasons in order to develop its shared artistic handprint, and the theatre aims to develop its strategy to support independent productions based on the shared aesthetics. The productions of Myllyteatteri have been large and in 2015 the theatre employed sixteen artists with production-specific contracts. The most comprehensive role in the productions is reserved for the artistic director, who, apart from the role of the director, acts as the production planner and the operative producer. During the production season the theatre employs a production coordinator who is in charge of various tasks related to administering and marketing the production. The theatre has availed itself of several different production models in the past, but recently the artistic director has borne the main responsibility for the productions as well.

In the beginning of the Visio project, Myllyteatteri invested in planning and coordinating a large national collaboration, but as the situation changed due to lack of financing, it chose to concentrate on clarifying its artistic vision and on developing a more effective production model instead. This sudden change in direction reflects the problems related to building a methodical working culture in small, independent theatre organizations. The uncertainty and the often nonrecurring nature of their financing, makes many of their activities unstable and project-based by default. At the same time, a theatre organization should be able to stabilize its operations precisely through methodical work and strategic thinking.

Learning requires change, and the imprint of change is either recognized or it remains subliminal. The aim in developing an organization towards learning is that the former is able to use the learning capabilities of its members and teams to reach shared goals. A learning organization is then based on the thought of continuous learning, as well as the active desire to develop the organization into a better functioning whole that responds to a shared vision and objectives.<sup>46</sup> On the basis of the analyses conducted in the multiple

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46 Syvänen et al. 2015, 142; Senge 1990.

case study of Visio, the relative obscurity or even lack of a strategy posed significant challenges for the renewal and learning curve of the theatre organizations. Without strategic and methodical thinking it becomes impossible to reach goals and govern the changing operational environment. However, even methodical approaches are not effective if the artistic and operational vision remain unclear. All of the above factors are relevant for the success of any organization, but especially so for the theatres in the Finnish independent sector, operating under financial insecurity.

Myllyteatteri's organization development project focused on the theatre's long-term plans and on creating a production model that corresponds to the resources available for the theatre's given objectives. Myllyteatteri has collaborated with Arts Management Helsinki (AMH), a company providing production and expert services for arts organizations and freelance artists, and during the Visio research period the collaboration continued. The theatre and AMH created a joint production model (with responsibilities shared between the former's artistic director and AMH), whose purpose was to increase Myllyteatteri's methodical thinking and the lifespan of its productions, potentially resulting in better employability. Together, they discussed what the theatre's organization actually does, what it wishes to do, and what makes it unique. The collaboration between the theatre and an organization providing expert services is a good example of a light production model, which, when fully functional, enables the development of a small theatre organization while supporting the sustainability of its operations. It is then a version of the artist-producer teamwork model, but distances itself from actual artistic work in order to facilitate open, positive, and critical examination of all operations. Such collaboration must be based on a shared understanding of the theatre's aims, expectations, and roles, as well as the facts and preconditions of its artistic work – a shared vision.

The most relevant finding of Myllyteatteri's case was then, the thought of recognizing one's unique status as an operator. For this, one requires peer support. When the vision and the fundamental mission of an independent theatre are recognized and clarified, decision-making, the allocation of resources, and the focus of operations are likely to become more effortless. The specific qualities of a theatre organization must be nurtured and refined, not least because these are the qualities the organization communicates to the outside world. However, the qualities of this outside world are equally important: being an operator in the independent sector outside the Helsinki area is much more challenging for a theatre promoting experimental productions.

#### **CASE 4: THEATRE SIPERIA**

Theatre Siperia, founded in 2005, is an independent, professional theatre from Tampere focusing on productions with topical themes. It employs working methods that are based on devising and ensemble approaches, and aim

at a novel and recognizable artistic oeuvre.<sup>47</sup> Siperia still employs two of the founding members, Marika Heiskanen and Tuukka Huttunen, the first of which serves as its artistic director. With two premieres per year, Theatre Siperia has a total of twenty-three national premieres. In addition, the theatre cooperates on regular co-productions with other independent theatres and VOS theatres, and provides working life theatre<sup>48</sup> as a service for companies and communities to increase its self-financing.

The overall revenue of Theatre Siperia was 160,000 euros in 2015, of which the share of discretionary subsidies was 50,000 euros. The income produced by the theatre was 75,000 euros, and the subsidies from the city of Tampere amounted to 20,000 euros. Other subsidies were 13,000 euros in total. The theatre allocated the main subsidies to cover the expenses incurred by its venue and the producer's salary. The artistic work and other services were produced with the aid of other financial support, such as personal grants. If the bids for additional financing were not successful, the productions were subject to the risk implicit in ticket sales, which made the artists' commitment and the generation of their personal income somewhat complicated. In May 2017, Theatre Siperia moved out of its venue in Tampere, as the expenses for the premises had consumed most of its financing over the years. The theatre employed a full-time producer on a permanent contract, with duties including the management of productions, personnel, and marketing. The artistic director is in charge of the artistic work together with the theatre's artistic executive board, and coordinates planning, budgeting, and funding bids with the producer. The director's personal income consists of production-specific subsidies and grants, as in many other independent theatres. Other artistic personnel and technicians are employed for each production case-by-case.

The factors improving the innovativity and the creativity of an organization concern its operational environment, organizing, work community, and its members. Although innovativity is often discussed as a large and abstract – even distant – issue, it can simply refer to doing things in a new and different way at the everyday level in a theatre organization: things related to production and other key processes, technical management, meetings, communication and public relations, or interaction with new audiences. An innovative organization develops itself both internally and externally, by adapting its work to changes in its operational environment.<sup>49</sup> Over the years, Theatre Siperia had undergone many major changes in its artistic ensemble and personnel, and its future profile was seen to require further ideas and an increase in the collaborations with other theatres. The need to clarify the theatre's profile and brand was seen as a topical issue in developing its organization, and

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47 See <https://www.teatterisiperia.net>.

48 As a service, working life theatre means training, workshops, and performances that enhance wellbeing and interpersonal skills at work. See <https://www.teatterisiperia.net/tyoelamateatteri>.”

49 Syvänen et al. 2015, 15.

during Visio's research period Siperia thus improved its communications and marketing.<sup>50</sup> Beside this, the development of the theatre's future operations as regards the interaction between its structure, financing, and operating models were on the agenda.

Development activities were carried out together with the producer and the artistic executive board in order to turn the marketing issues into a team effort in the theatre's operations. By re-organizing related work and sharing responsibilities, it is possible to achieve better results and ease the workload of the producer. As with the other operations crucial for independent theatres, marketing requires shared goals and long-term plans. It provides the main support for the artistic vision and the operational aims of a theatre when its brand and identity are being reasserted. When the key persons – the artistic director and the producer – encounter several challenges simultaneously, the role of the managing board becomes increasingly important. A shared visionary working culture combined with co-directional marketing provides a sufficient and sustainable framework for the latter. A shared vision also enables discussing and learning from past difficulties.

## **CONCLUSIONS:**

### **AN ARTISTIC COMMUNITY AS A WORKPLACE**

In this article, we have discussed the organization development and the requirements for sustainable work in four independent theatre organizations in Finland. The multiple case study approach and the methodologies of ethnography enabled us to examine the theatres at the level of their everyday organizational practices, and to ask what are the main challenges for their development. Consequently, the organizational activities of the studied theatres were examined within the broader context of Finnish cultural policy in order to respond to the questions of why such challenges exist and how can independent theatres – because of or despite these challenges – develop their operations towards sustainable work.

In the light of the gathered data, and by comparing the cases discussed, we were able to identify the following categories of challenges in organizational development: vision, strategy and leadership, structure, resources, responsibilities and job descriptions, multi-professional co-operation and communication, well-being at work, and mobility. All of these categories can be considered as elements containing potentials for organizational development and as sources for sustainability, depending on the situation and other characteristics of a given organization. On the basis of this, we now proceed to discuss some further aspects linked to economy and money.

Analyzing the cases and their operational contexts indicated, to a degree, that the independent theatre sector appears to have assumed the shape of a network. As regards its working life, the independent sector can be seen as

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<sup>50</sup> Support for the development of marketing was acquired through a communications agency and the focus was on planning.

synonymous with the mobile work of freelance artists. The artists and other theatre workers operate with personal and organization-specific grants, in changing artistic configurations, and they are potentially affiliated to organizations only for the duration of different productions. The mobility of artists then determines the independent sector at large: mobility is a central element of the operational logic of the sector, and this affects the organizations within it. One of the main findings of Visio was thus the observation that there is a considerable need for peer support and inter-organizational learning. Systematic peer support organized between independent theatres would enable dialogic learning environments for everyday contexts of work, which, in the present article, denote teams and working groups represented by official organizations, but also unofficial artistic and/or multi-professional communities formed around collegial relationships and individual duties. At best, these would serve as dialogic spaces for renewal and development.<sup>51</sup>

All of the theatres studied developed their operations in order to reach an economically sustainable working life, and the research data shows that they always considered aspects of employment in their actions and production planning. When organized in a sustainable way, both economically and operationally, the budgets of the theatres of the independent sector provide work and sufficient income for theatre artists. The routes for an economically sustainable working life, in turn, are systematic operating models, lucid distribution of work, efficient production models, joint productions that prolong the lifespan of individual theatre productions, and, of course, paying regard to audience orientation in this activity. However, as organizations promoting artistic theatre, independent theatres do depend on public funding, and this has to be taken into account when developing sustainable work within them, and sustainable working life in the arts sector in general. In particular, the fact that they now need to apply for discretionary subsidies for a year at a time affects all long-term plans.<sup>52</sup>

A scarce economic situation and the ensuing paucity in resources were anticipated as challenges for development and learning, but the amount of discourse that revolved around financing was somewhat surprising. Art-making as the fundamental mission of an independent theatre was discussed, but a great majority of discussions concerned aspects of production, administration, and financial resilience. Although the emphasis on economic issues can

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51 Tikkamäki 2006; Argote 2013, 9, 147.

52 The system of statutory funding in Finland is undergoing preparations for a major reform in 2016–17. A working group of specialists representing different sectors of art and culture was appointed by the Ministry for Education and Culture (OKM) in 2016 to discuss the reform. Needs for long-term funding possibilities for organizations operating with state discretionary subsidies have been considered. In a report published by OKM on 17 January 2018, the working group suggested that the present Theatres and Orchestras Act should be replaced by a law that advances and covers all forms of the performing arts. The eligibility for the VOS status should become temporary, and the status would be granted for three or six years at a time (with different criteria for eligi-

partly be explained through the research context of Visio itself, the current situation in cultural politics – the renewal of statutory funding – did have an effect. The growing demands for an increase in self-financing can be seen as a challenge for the development of strategic operations. If a theatre chooses to increase its self-financing at any cost, there is a temptation to resort to quick and easy solutions at the expense of long-term plans. The pursuit of continuous growth present in the operations of independent theatres is part of a larger process in the cultural economy, wherein the organizations of the public sector and the civic society adopt their operational means from the administration and the management of the private sector. This process results from a pressure on the public sector that is prone to increase the weight of the third sector as a provider of services.<sup>53</sup> The pressure is present in each of the cases studied. The results of Visio then support the above claims, although its research material does suggest that there are conscious counter-strategies for growth present in the theatres' operating cultures. One of the theatres refused to expand its operations simply because of the demand to grow (for growth's sake), and chose to concentrate on its fundamental mission of making art – a strategy that might be the key for sustainability. An interviewee from one of the theatres even argued that scarce resources can be seen as facilitators of creativity.

The theatres studied in Visio differ from one another in many respects: in how they were founded and how they have developed, in their visions and aspirations, in their strategies and attitudes towards growth, and in their organizational elements. Yet, operating in the independent theatre sector, outside statutory state funding, remains a unifying factor for them. It is an important building block of their identities, despite the fact that many of their peers have considered the VOS system as an alternative that provides a chance for long-term funding. As the study examined four parallel cases, it was able to reveal the fact that there is a pressure to homogenize the professional organizations of the independent sector. If continuous, a codirectional development in peer organizations may become a threat for their rationality and efficacy – and thus for their productivity and economy – especially when catalyzed by state-run regulation (through financing) and the growing societal influence of professions.<sup>54</sup> For example, the question of how to organize production-related work in independent theatres becomes interesting in this regard. In the studied theatres, the prevailing policy has been to employ

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bility depending on the duration of the status). The amounts of and the criteria for the discretionary subsidies in the independent sector should also be modified. According to the working group, the subsidies could be granted on a one-year or a three-year basis, and the criteria for the subsidies would vary according to the nature of a given subsidy. In addition, the state could introduce five-year development subsidies. See [http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/160473/OKM\\_1\\_2018.pdf](http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/160473/OKM_1_2018.pdf) (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2018).

53 Ruusuvirta 2013, 218; Ruusuvirta and Saukkonen 2015.

54 Harisalo 2008, 137–8.

one producer who is in charge of the productions as well as the overall administration of the theatre association, so that the artists may concentrate on artistic work and its realization. However, in practice, there is often so much work related to the management of the theatres that it is shared between the artists as well – the artistic director bearing the heaviest load. At the same time, a majority of the financing is allocated to cover the wages of the producer and the artistic personnel must participate in managing the productions pro bono. Although this policy remains problematic, it seems to be an ideal model among independent theatres to appoint a producer with a permanent and full-time contract. This raises the question whether there is a need to discuss new kinds of production and support structures within the independent sector, as the artist-producer model appears to be unprofitable from the point of view of sustainable work, unless there are extra resources at hand for this. In addition, and as regards independent theatres as artistic communities, the observation that exogenous (finance-based) demands for organizational renewal must be questioned becomes of central importance, especially in the context of arts organizations. Art itself contains the idea of development, or rather, evolution, and innovativity and renewal is always part of the artistic work and ethos. The expertise of an artist is about renewal, and in multi-professional theatre work new thoughts and viewpoints tend to accumulate. When the challenges for the development and the potentials of independent theatres are considered from this angle, the biggest challenges appear to concern organizations, structures, and resources, instead of motivation and attitudes towards work. Yet, there remains an additional challenge of how to embed the operating models inherent in artistic work into other operations performed by the organization, such as administration.

According to Visio's multiple case study it is possible to argue that the theatres in the independent sector are a truly diverse group of arts organizations in economic and operational terms, although its cases represent rather established organizations in the mobile 'free field'. At the same time, the recurring definition of small professional theatres as organizations of the independent sector takes place at the level of both systems and operations, and always with respect to theatres within the VOS system. The division into VOS and independent sectors resurfaces also in related research, as well as in the promotion of the theatres' interests. When one thinks about the general significance of theatre and art in a society, definitions that emerge from economic preconceptions may become problematic. The results of this study suggest that there is a need for further definitions and conceptions, which would draw on the self-evaluations of the organizations as artistic communities and workplaces. Consequently, there is a need for more categories within the qualitative discussions on cultural policy to better reflect the diverse field of artistic theatre.<sup>55</sup>

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55 In June 2017, the working group of statutory funding reform launched a report where they suggested four categories for allocation of state funding – in two categories,

A central question then is how the diversity and the individual characteristics of independent theatres can be attended to in the politics related to public discretionary subsidies. Our suggestion is that the theatres outside the VOS system require further definitions and designations that are not based on the bifurcation in funding, but on the recognition of the heterogeneity in the operating models and the artistic orientations in the field. Art and culture do not benefit from lack of diversity, and therefore categories within Finnish cultural politics – especially in the context of financing – require sufficient scope and further knowledge to produce and uphold appropriate demarcations. By recognizing and making use of different aspects of the diversity distinctive to artistic communities as workplaces, there is a chance to conceive a politics of theatre relying on artistic contents, instead of finance-based policies.

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money would be allocated according to calculating the FTEs (Full-time equivalent) as in the current situation, in one category, money would be allocated on a discretionary basis. Beside these, there would be a funding category for projects. The support would become temporary and applicants such as theatres would need to justify their support after certain intervals. Both artistic and organizational quality would be evaluated. See <https://webcast.reloadmedia.fi/player/?video=S20170941500590> (Sitra 2017).

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