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**Author(s):** Pyykkönen, Miikka; Sokka, Sakarias; Kurlin Niiniaho, Ari

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## Artrepreneurs and the autonomy paradox

Miikka Pyykkönen<sup>a</sup>, Sakarias Sokka<sup>b</sup> and Ari Kurlin Niiniahö<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Cultural Policy, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland; <sup>b</sup>Center for Cultural Policy Research (CUPORE), Helsinki, Finland

### ABSTRACT

In this article, we examine the views that young (under 35 years) freelancers and entrepreneurs who work as professional artists *in* Finland have of their work. We refer to them as artrepreneurs. Our data sample is composed of the responses of entrepreneurs and freelancers ( $n = 209$ ) from a survey data on young artists ( $n = 565$ ) collected in 2017. By using a set of quantitative methods we study the impact of different factors on the job satisfaction experienced by freelancers and entrepreneurs, the nature and motivation factors of their work, as well as their status and livelihood. In our interpretative framework, central concepts are the “hybridity” and “precarity” of artists’ work and “autonomy paradox”. The most important results of our study are that artrepreneurs’ work is more multidisciplinary and they have more sources of income than other young artists. They also handle the uncertainties of precarious working life better than other artists.

### KEYWORDS

Artrepreneur; hybridity; precarity; autonomy paradox; young artists; art work

## Introduction

In Finland, as elsewhere, artists’ work is characterised by a discrepancy between expectations and reality. On the one hand, administrative strategies include expectations that link artists’ work to economic growth, employment, entrepreneuriality and regional development (Gielen et al., 2018; Heian & Hjelbrekke, 2017; Pyykkönen & Stavrum, 2018). On the other hand, research on working conditions suggests that there are many problems related to the work of artists and the economic impacts of their work. Compared to other highly-educated professions, the income level of artists is very low (Mangset et al., 2018; OSF, 2019; Pärnänen & Sutela, 2014; Rensujeff, 2015; Throsby & Petetskaya, 2017). In terms of the Gross Domestic Product, the value added by the cultural sector<sup>1</sup> has slightly decreased over the last decade in Finland, contrary to expectations. Employment in the cultural sector fell in the early 2010s but after that, the number of people working in cultural occupations has steadily increased (OSF, 2018).

Nevertheless, young people in Finland are interested in becoming artists and working in the cultural sector<sup>2</sup>, but not because of economic factors. Earlier studies, as well as the survey data on which our research is based, indicate that young artists choose to become

**CONTACT** Miikka Pyykkönen  miikka.pyykkonen@jyu.fi  Cultural Policy, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä 40014, Finland

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artists, because they want to work with things that interest them, to fulfil their creativity and determine their working hours. Other reasons include making a societal impact and offering experiences to other people (Ansio et al., 2018; Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2018). At the same time, many young artists end up working as entrepreneurs because they have little choice (Sutela & Pärnänen, 2018).

In national strategies, cultural activities have been regarded more and more intensively from employment and business policy perspectives during the past 20 years (Jakonen, 2016; Pyykkönen & Stavrum, 2018). As a result, new foci of strategic and focused funding have been developed where individual professionals have been encouraged to adopt business models. Similar kinds of focus shifts have been detected in arts education curricula (Pyykkönen et al., 2019). Market-oriented strategic governance speech has not, however, decreased the basic funding of arts – but it has not grown either (Sokka, 2022). At the same time the number of professional artists has grown steadily, leading to “over-supply” of labour, leading to increasing amount of artists having to survive without salaried jobs or grants. Consequently, many have become, at least part time, freelancers and entrepreneurs (e.g. Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2018, 2020; cf. Menger, 2002).

In this paper, we focus on the work, working conditions and income of young artist entrepreneurs and freelance artists. Our research task is to study entrepreneurship among young artists and find out how they view the option of being an entrepreneur or freelancer from the point of view of work, working conditions and livelihood. We examine the impact of different factors on their job satisfaction as well as differences within this group. In this article, our research questions are: (1) How do young artist entrepreneurs’ and freelance artists’ work and livelihood differ from those of other young artists<sup>3</sup>? (2) How do they describe their work and working conditions? (3) What kinds of income and income sources do they have?

Our data consists of the survey responses of artists aged under 35 years who identify themselves as entrepreneurs or freelancers by their own definition ( $n = 209$ )<sup>4</sup>, which were selected from a set of survey data on young artists ( $n = 565$ ) collected by the Center for Cultural Policy Research Cupore and the Arts Promotion Centre Finland (Taike) in 2017. The respondents are defined as artists based on their own identification. As our primary methods of analysis, we examined frequency distributions and cross-tabulations with chi-square tests and correlation coefficient tests. Although the data dates few years back, the case is extremely valid in Finnish cultural policy now, because Covid-19 crisis has raised the weak position of private actors into the spotlight (Luonila et al., 2022).

### **Artrepreneurs – the new normal in artistic work?**

In this article, the term “entrepreneur” refers to a person who is engaged in business activities with the purpose of making enough profit to pay him/herself a salary. There are various legal or tax- or labour policy-related categories for entrepreneurship such as self-employed person and own-account worker (“selling their expertise”), practitioner of a sole proprietor (“selling goods or products”) and company (general partnership, limited partnership, limited company and cooperative). The term “sole entrepreneur” usually refers to self-employed persons who work for themselves and who do not employ other people in their business. Self-employed persons receive all the income generated by their work but also bear all the work-related risks alone (Bögenhold & Klinglmair, 2016).<sup>5</sup>

In Finland, freelancers are classified as self-employed persons, who are self-employed by contracts with several employers and suppliers, but not committed to any long-term relationships with a single employer/supplier. They can find jobs and sell their labour independently or through temporary agencies and co-operatives, for instance. Their status closely resembles that of a sole entrepreneur who practises a trade and whose work and income are primarily based on assignments. Freelancers, too, sell their work to clients, and each order is governed by a separate contract. The price of their work is not fixed but may vary according to each contract. The difference between freelancers and other forms of sole entrepreneurship is that freelancers do not need to be registered entrepreneurs; instead, they are hired for short assignments by one or more buyers and receive either a salary or payment (Bögenhold & Klinglmair, 2016; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010).

We use the term “artpreneur” (Harvey, 2013, pp. 62–107) to mean both artist entrepreneurs and freelance artists, because in our study their employment status is similar. Their work is typically entrepreneurial in nature, and its meaningfulness and success are linked to their ability to control their own work. On the other hand, they also share similar problems and challenges. Both entrepreneurs and freelancers working in the arts field must cope with the uncertainty and instability of work and income. Besides their main occupation, most of them work on other assignments at least occasionally and the “other work” locates often in another sector than arts and culture. This diversity of jobs and statuses has been called “hybrid work” (Ansio et al., 2018; Bille et al., 2017; De Bruyne & Gielen, 2009; Oakley, 2009).

According to Eurostat (2019, p. 83), in most European, the proportion of self-employment and entrepreneurship in the cultural sector is higher as in other sectors. In Europe, approximately half of self-employed people working in the cultural sector are entrepreneurs or freelancers. The recent statistics from Finland show that 28% of people working in the cultural sector are entrepreneurs, while in other sectors this figure is 12%. As many as half of those who work in music are entrepreneurs (OSF, 2017).

Angela McRobbie (2016) argues that entrepreneurialism is becoming a “new normal” of the artistic work in the UK. Pyykkönen (2015) has proposed that in Finland too, not only entrepreneurialism but also entrepreneurship is becoming the new “normal” of work in the cultural sector, and that this development is related to a more general trend of entrepreneurialisation of society (see also Menger, 2002; Oakley, 2009; Pyykkönen & Stavrum, 2018). Pierre-Michel Menger (2002; 2015) suggests that one reason for the increase in entrepreneurship in the cultural sector is the oversupply of labour. According to him, other reasons are the general requirements of individual creativity and flexibility of work, which are typical especially in cultural sector. According to Annette Naudin (2017) and Susan Marlow et al. (2017) artists often start enterprises for being able to do arts and pursue their creative ideas professionally as multiple ways as possible in today’s versatile cultural labour markets. Sometimes entrepreneurship also makes income flows flexible in changing conditions (e.g. in the case of unemployment).

While artists’ work has become more entrepreneurial, it has simultaneously become more *hybrid*. Consequently, artistic work now takes place in various contexts and on various platforms (Abbing, 2002; Casacuberta & Gandelman, 2012). In a Finnish survey conducted in 2018, one-third of artist respondents had had only one employment status whereas a second third had had two employment statuses, and the last third

more than two employment statuses (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2019). Artists move between work assignments, funding sources and services in the private, public and third sectors (Markusen et al., 2006). Therefore, it is nowadays common that artists have various overlapping art-related jobs and assignments as well as education and occupations outside the arts (Dujardin & Volont, 2014; Woronkowicz & Noonan, 2017).

Another feature that characterises artistic work is *precarity*. By precarity, we mean uncertainty related to work and working conditions, which is usually manifested as short and insecure employment relationships, poor employment terms and low income (Diaz & Gielen, 2018; Kalleberg, 2009; Oakley, 2009). According to many researchers, in the cultural sector, this uncertainty is most often experienced by young people who work as entrepreneurs or freelancers (e.g. Dujardin & Volont, 2014; McRobbie, 2016). Precarisation and hybridisation are linked to one another (de Peuter, 2011); for example, in Finland artists engage in multiple assignments simultaneously to avoid the income losses and other risks related to their insecure position (Ansio et al., 2018).

When artists talk about their work motivation factors and job satisfaction, they all mention positive and negative aspects of their precarious but “addictive work” (about the term: Rowlands & Handy, 2012). The positive aspects are those that inspire and stimulate them in their work. We refer to these as “intrinsic motivation factors”, which in the work-life are usually personal non-economic rewards of work, and which increase the commitment to and persistence at work significantly (Fishbach & Woolley, 2022). Finnish artists are motivated by the freedom of their work, their autonomy, and the ability to use their creativity and do “art for art’s sake” (Ansio et al., 2018). At the same time, their working life is overshadowed by temporary work assignments, financial insecurity and, in some cases, the fact that not much time is left for the actual artistic work (e.g. Herranen et al., 2013; Jokinen, 2010; Karttunen, 2020). However, because of the positive aspects of their work and strong intrinsic motivation, they tolerate the uncertainties surprisingly well (Ansio et al., 2018; cf. Ellmeier, 2003; Rowlands & Handy, 2012). Our respondents fit the idea of increasingly self-managed mode of work that leads to paradoxical feelings about autonomy and flexibility (cf. Cañibano, 2019; Pérez-Zapata et al., 2016), leading to apparent validity of the concept of “autonomy paradox”, understood as workers’ perception of autonomy in some parts of the work paradoxically coming together with a lack of autonomy in other aspects of work.

## Data and methods

Our data consists of the Arts and Culture Barometer 2017 survey responses, from which we selected those relevant to our study. The Arts and Culture Barometer is an annual survey with a different set of respondents each year. Its purpose is to observe current attitudes, experiences opinions among artists, and it has been carried out in collaboration between the Center for Cultural Policy Research and the Arts Promotion Centre Finland since 2015.<sup>6</sup> The theme of the 2017 barometer survey was *young artists*, and the respondents were artists aged under 35 years.<sup>7</sup>

Various methods were applied to collect the data: a link to the questionnaire was sent to all persons aged under 35 years who had applied for a grant from Taika in 2016; three major grantor foundations disseminated the questionnaire link; art schools distributed it to their alumni; several artists’ organisations included information about the

questionnaire in their member communications; Taike's regional artists distributed the link to their networks; and Cupore and Taike disseminated it through their websites and social media channels.

There is no knowledge of the total number of artists aged under 35 years in Finland, because the number of artists working in Finland can only be estimated.<sup>8</sup> Being an artist is a free occupation that is subject to no official control and there are no official statistics or registers about the number of professional artists. However, compared to previous studies and grant applicants, the data in our study seems to represent the group of Finnish artists aged under 35 years: When looking at Taike's grant applicants in 2016, our data has a similar share of artistic fields and gender. *The Status of the Artist in Finland 2010* survey, which included a large set of data, also pointed to similar numbers (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2018, pp. 9–10; see Rensujeff, 2015).

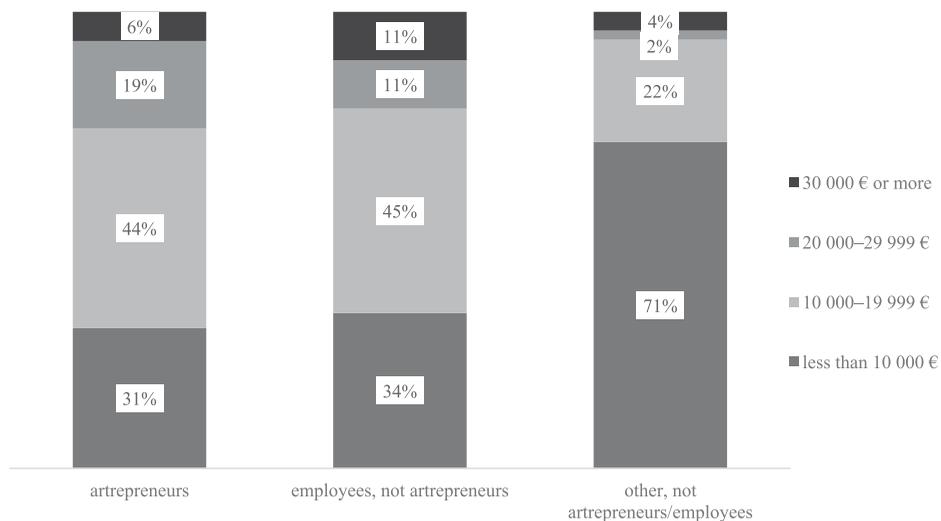
Altogether 565 young artists responded to the 2017 barometer survey. In total, the survey included nearly 50 questions. Most of them were presented as statements which were answered on a five-point Likert scale. In this paper, we focus on those sections of the survey that concern artists' work and livelihood and those respondents who chose "entrepreneur" or "freelancer" as their employment status (209 respondents, 37% of all respondents). We analysed these entrepreneurs in relation to those respondents who stated that their employment status was something else<sup>9</sup> (356 respondents, 63% of all respondents – out of them, 37% were employees, 30% full-time students and 30% free artists<sup>10</sup>) with the help of frequency distributions, cross-tabulations and measuring the dependencies between variables. We used correlation analyses and chi-square tests to determine the significance of the differences between categorical groups, namely between the entrepreneurs and other young artists. Any differences mentioned in this article are statistically significant.<sup>11</sup> After each thematic set in the questionnaire, the respondents also had the opportunity to write a complementary, open-ended answer. This provides also complementary qualitative data for our analysis. Citations presented in this article are based on these open-ended answers of the 2017 barometer.

The 2017 barometer survey did not include questions about the respondents' annual income. To obtain an approximate idea of entrepreneurs' livelihood, we complemented our data with data on the annual income of artists aged under 35 years derived from the 2019 barometer survey (see Figure 1), which focused on artists' livelihood (see Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020).

### Artrepreneurs among young artists

Based on our data, young artists hold a more positive attitude towards entrepreneurship compared to the entire body of artists: 40% of them hoped that an entrepreneurial attitude would become more widespread in different art fields (see Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2017; cf. 2018). This supports the argument proposed in previous studies that entrepreneurialism is increasing in the field of culture and art (e.g. Menger, 2002; Pyykkönen, 2015). Many researchers have explained young people's attitude by changes in education (Essig, 2017; McRobbie, 2016; Pyykkönen et al., 2019).

To describe the background of our focused group, those who work as artrepreneurs largely resemble the rest of young artists. There are, however, a few significant differences. Artrepreneurs were slightly older compared to other young artists. 64% of them



**Figure 1.** The total income, before taxes, of artrepreneurs, employees and other artists aged under 35 years in 2018. The Arts and Culture Barometer 2019.

were over 30 years old, while 53% of other.<sup>12</sup> Those with an arts-related master's degree work as an artrepreneur more often than other young artists (46–33%), but this difference is not statistically significant. Many young artists combine several ways of work, and this also includes mixing artistic work and studies. However, our data indicates that gender is not a significant factor affecting the level of artrepreneurship.

An analysis of our target group by artistic field revealed that many of them were performing artists. Those working in music (46%) and theatre (48%) were most likely to work as an entrepreneur or freelancer. In the other fields, the share of entrepreneurs or freelancers was 34%.

Those living in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area were slightly more likely to work as an entrepreneur or freelancer than those living elsewhere in the country. This was particularly clear in the field of music, in which the share of artrepreneurs was 67% in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area and 15% in the rest of the country.<sup>13</sup> Their share was also fairly high among those who work in the audiovisual sector and live in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, but the number of respondents from the rest of the country was not large enough to make a comparison. In visual arts, the corresponding figures were 43% and 21%.<sup>14</sup> In literature, those who live outside the Helsinki Metropolitan Area appear to be more likely to work as entrepreneurs (18–25%), but the difference is not statistically significant.

### Working as an artrepreneur

Those artists who primarily identify themselves as an entrepreneur or freelancer are often also engaged in other types of employment part-time. 34% of artrepreneurs in our data also worked as an employee at some point of 2017, the year of study. In performing arts, this figure was as high as 47%. During 2017, one-third (34%) of those who worked as

artpreneurs had also worked as free artists, and 13% had also been unemployed jobseekers and 12% students.

The share of employees is partly explained by the employment of artpreneurs in jobs in the arts sector. For example, they may have temporary jobs in art institutions simultaneously with or in between working as an entrepreneur or freelancer. However, young artists also work in other sectors in jobs not related to art. In our sample, non-art-related employment was even more common than what has been suggested in previous studies: as many as 72% of young artpreneurs reported that they also worked in other jobs in addition to their artistic work. In performing arts, as many as 88% of entrepreneurs and freelancers answer that they also have other jobs. Teaching, event production and photography are the most common other occupations, but respondents also mention babysitting, massage and restaurant and construction work in their open-ended answers.

Being an artist is a real oddity among other occupations. While many people want to earn a living making art, the current funding system only supports a small portion of artists, and many work in other jobs to be able to continue working as an artist. Perhaps the idea of a full-time artist who makes a living from art and builds a career in it is an outmoded ideal and instead, we should acknowledge the diversity of people working as artists and look for ways to support artistic activities that arise from different social positions and life paths. (A multidisciplinary artist)

Neither artpreneurs nor other respondents in our data would want to work solely as entrepreneurs – of each group, mere 5% wished that they could work as entrepreneurs *only*. Various studies show that entrepreneurs and freelancers in arts and culture combine employment possibilities simply because they do not have the option of working as artists full-time or with permanent contracts (Gielen et al., 2018; Oakley, 2009), and that entrepreneurial mindset may mitigate the risks of precarity, but it also “intrigues” artists to take risks and imagine the precarious conditions more bearable as they are (Diaz & Gielen, 2018; McRobbie, 2016).

Especially artpreneurs but also other groups in our data hold a positive attitude towards combining different modes of employment. 59% of them expressed that they would like to combine different modes of employment in their future working life while employees (52%), unemployed jobseekers (44%) and grant recipients (32%) felt this way less often. It can therefore be said that young artpreneurs are quite accustomed to navigating between various jobs, assignments and projects, and handling the temporary and fragmented nature of work. It seems that they have adopted a hybrid working practice, which means that they seek their livelihood through actual entrepreneurship as well as other types of employment. Hence, it also seems that they can deal with the “autonomy paradox” better than the employees, grant holders or unemployed young artists.

When it comes to working as an artist, full-time employment is an absurd notion; when an artist makes art, it doesn't cease to be art if the artist earns their living partly or even mainly from other sources. (A performing artist)

Karttunen (2020), too, has examined the barometer data and drawn the conclusion that artistic work is characterised by both precarity and hybridity. The link between them arises from the tension between the idea of “artistic freedom” and

entrepreneurship, i.e. autonomy paradox. Those who strongly identify themselves as free artists, define the field of art in a narrow sense and reject work opportunities that, in their view, lie outside it. On the other hand, those who have a more flexible attitude towards working in other sectors or on market terms keep themselves open to more opportunities, at least in principle. Therefore, an entrepreneurial mindset expands the horizon of employment opportunities and thus also reduces the personal livelihood risks as there are various sources of income (cf. De Bruyne & Gielen, 2009; Herranen et al., 2013; Menger, 2002; Woronkowicz & Noonan, 2017).

Artrepreneurs (64%) experience more often than others (50%) that their current work activities match their education.<sup>15</sup> However, at the same time, they feel that their studies did not adequately prepare them for the demands of the fragmented working life in the arts sector. This was clearly manifested in the open-ended responses to the survey, in which young artists particularly highlighted the need for education that would better equip artists for hybrid work and entrepreneurial self-employment.<sup>16</sup>

Work is going through a major structural change. Not only in art but also in other professions. Artists' education should prepare them for entirely new forms and structures of work ... (A multidisciplinary artist)

Artists are among those professional groups in which self-employment has mostly increased in Finland in the early 2000s (Pärnänen & Sutela, 2014). This relates to education. Some respondents emphasised that in recent years, the number of arts degrees awarded has been too high. As a result, young artists' possibilities of working as professionals have become more limited. This was particularly clear in the responses of visual artists, who typically have a low level of income and difficulty to earn a living from art alone (Karttunen, 2020; Mangset et al., 2018). Number of visual arts graduates increased by 59% between 2000 and 2011, indicating growth in the amount of professionals active in the field (Herranen et al., 2013). As many as 40% of visual artist entrepreneurs in our data thought that there are too many artists working in the field of arts whereas only 16% of all respondents working as visual artist shared this view. In general, our data thus indicates that especially artrepreneurs are concerned about how the number of artists affect their possibilities to generate income.

## Artrepreneurs' income

### *Level and sources of income*

Multiple streams of income and a large share of income from sources other than artistic work are no doubt a reflection of the insecurity of artists' livelihood. In 2013, 62% of self-employed persons in the cultural sector reported that they experienced financial insecurity, for instance. In other occupational groups, this figure was around one-third. In general, there is a lot of variation in income in the cultural sector (Pärnänen & Sutela 2014).

According to our respondents, their art is more important than their earnings. More than 80% of young artists – including artrepreneurs – stated that, if necessary, they were prepared to make less money to be able to focus on their artistic work. As many as 52% of young artist entrepreneurs and freelancers responded that they are unable to earn an adequate living from their art. Still, the corresponding share was higher

(65%) for other young artists<sup>17</sup>, and artrepreneurs (40%) were more likely than other respondents (24%) to be able to support themselves financially through artistic work.<sup>18</sup> Of artrepreneurs, multidisciplinary artists (56%) were most likely and performing artists least likely (28%) to be able to provide a living for themselves by art.<sup>19</sup> The difference between artrepreneurs and the other groups was greatest in visual arts, in which 44% of artrepreneurs and 11% of other artists make a decent living from their artistic work.<sup>20</sup> One factor behind these differences may be that, according to their own view, artrepreneurs are more capable than others at determining the value of and putting a price on their artistic work. 60% of them represented this opinion, whereas less than half of other respondents held this view. The ability to determine the value of one's work was highest among those who work in music (73%).<sup>21</sup>

Entrepreneurs' earnings from full-time entrepreneurship vary considerably in Finland. There are around 182,000 sole entrepreneurs. They account for 64% of all enterprises. In 2016, the average annual income of employer entrepreneurs was €52,100 and that of sole entrepreneurs €26,800 (Sutela & Pärnänen, 2018). Nearly all cultural enterprises are micro-enterprises, and most of them are one-person enterprises. According to both international and Finnish surveys, the average income of cultural sector entrepreneurs is lower than that of all entrepreneurs, and this applies to both micro- and other enterprises (Arts Council England, 2018; Mangset et al., 2018; Pärnänen & Sutela, 2014). In Finland, the average annual disposable income of self-employed persons in the cultural and crafts sector<sup>22</sup> was €17,600 in 2012 (Pärnänen & Sutela, 2014).

A few studies have indicated that particularly young artrepreneurs often have a low level of income (e.g. McRobbie, 2016; Woronkowicz & Noonan, 2017). However, the income data based on the 2019 barometer survey (see Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020) does not fully support this finding: the income of young entrepreneurs and freelancers is comparable to that of employees in cultural sector. The chart above (Figure 1) describes the income distribution of artists aged under 35 years by income brackets. In the chart, the group of artrepreneurs includes persons who worked as an entrepreneur or freelancer during the year. Employees mean employees who did not work as an entrepreneur or freelancer. The group "other" comprises working grant recipients, full-time students and unemployed jobseekers. Half of all artists included in the data earn at least €20,000 a year, while few of those aged under 35 years achieve even this level of income. A clear majority of all young artists (74%) earn less than €20,000 a year. Only 6% of them achieve an annual income of more than €30,000. One fourth of artrepreneurs aged under 35 years earned €20,000 or more per year. Almost as many employees (22%) achieved this income level, whereas only few of other artists (6%) reached this level (Figure 1).

The total income in Figure 1 includes all work activities, not only artistic work. Particularly those who make less than €20,000 a year compensate their low art-related income by working in other jobs. In contrast, those who earn more than this mostly receive their income from artistic work. A closer examination of artrepreneurs' income sources reveals that despite their entrepreneurial way of working, as many as 39% of them received a salary or wage paid by an employer as their main source of income for their artistic work. In performing arts, as many as nearly 60% of artrepreneurs reported salary or wage as their main source of income.

While 34% of other artists report unemployment allowance or labour market subsidy as their main source of income, 22% of artpreneurs report this.<sup>23</sup> The difference is greatest among visual artists. A higher share of young artpreneurs (71%) than other artists (60%) state that they would rather accept a temporary job than receive unemployment benefits even if the net income would be the same.<sup>24</sup>

As referred in the introduction, the arts are heavily publicly subsidised in Finland and there are several public and foundation-based grant options open for artists. Young artpreneurs also apply for grants slightly more actively than others. 92% of them (compared to 84% of others) report that they have applied for grants from the Arts Promotion Centre Finland (Taike) and various foundations.<sup>25</sup>

It thus seems that entrepreneurs and freelancers have more diverse income streams than others, and they also actively seek income from different sources. This can possibly be explained by their “entrepreneurial work ethic”, i.e. that they more readily do different kinds of jobs to finance their artistic work. The entrepreneurial work ethic helps them to cope with the pitfalls of *autonomy paradox*. On the other hand, artpreneurs’ attitude towards receiving unemployment benefits can also be explained by the fact that entrepreneurs and freelancers are often excluded from unemployment benefit systems designed mainly for the employees.

### Work without income

One common issue related to hybrid and precarious work is unpaid work (e.g. Casacuberta & Gandelman, 2012; De Bruyne & Gielen, 2009). According to the 2018 barometer survey, 73% of all artists consider unpaid work to be a problem (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2019). In our data, the artpreneurs were more likely than other young artists (29–18%)<sup>26</sup> to report that unpaid work has not been a problem for them when working as an artist.

According to previous studies, people working in the cultural and creative sectors tolerate unpaid work, and work-related precarity and risks in general, because their work includes many positive aspects such as artistic value, autonomy, variety and creativity (Ansio et al., 2018; McRobbie, 2016; Rowlands & Handy, 2012). We have referred to these above as internal motivation factors. The problematic aspects of work are easier to bear because of a promise of a better future: one should tolerate precarious working conditions and poorly paid or unpaid work so that one can become well known and achieve a more secure position in the future. These factors are also mentioned in artists’ complementary responses to the barometer survey.

Unpaid work has been an essential and more or less self-evident part of my “career development”. (A multidisciplinary artist)

I worked without pay in the arts field for about 6 years before I began to receive reasonable pay for my work. (A visual artist)

It is possible that internal motivation factors and external risks are out of balance so that the undesirable aspects of work – such as low income, excessive workload and lack of career prospects – start to dominate the positive aspects. In such a case, the positive motivation factors turn into what Lauren Berlant 2010 () has called the “cruel optimism” of precarious working life. It may have negative effects on people’s careers and well-being.

In our studies, it was implied that it's [unpaid work] part of being an artist. That each artist must go through this phase, and afterwards they'll be rewarded. But there were no rewards, no jobs, only burnout and an unwillingness to take part in such educational frauds again. I've been thrilled about projects, companies, bosses and put my heart into my work, for which I've not received decent pay. (A multidisciplinary artist)

Young artists were also asked what they thought would improve their livelihood. As many as 72% of all respondents thought that basic income would be the best solution to artists' social security-related problems. Among entrepreneurs and freelancers, the corresponding figure was 73%. 14% of entrepreneurs wish that the support system for artists would be completely reformed. In their open-ended answers, many express the wish that the support systems should be developed to tackle the insecurities related to work and income.

Entrepreneurs also brought up the need to improve lobbying for artists' interests and generally raise the appreciation of artistic work to eliminate the insecurity in the arts sector. They, for instance, call for rules for public funding that would prevent the commissioning of work without pay in publicly funded projects.

## Conclusions

In this paper, we have focused on the views that young entrepreneurs (artist entrepreneurs and freelance artists) have of their work, working conditions and income. Their working conditions are as precarious as those of other artists. For all respondents to the barometer survey, being an artist is a profession, and working as an entrepreneur or freelancer is one way to pursue this profession – to sell one's work and its results. Young entrepreneurs regard themselves as artists among other artists but are more dynamic and innovative when it comes to finding income solutions in the work where self-motivation, precarity and hybridity alternate.

Previous studies have suggested that young entrepreneurs are likely to have low level of income. According to our data, however, their income level is higher than that of other groups of young artists. They are also more willing to accept various jobs and assignments, including ones not performed as an entrepreneur, or freelancer, or even relating to art. Thus, it seems that they can cope better with the hybridisation and precarisation of work than other labour groups.

As many as 60% of entrepreneurs still report having difficulties in earning a living from art and work in non-art-related jobs. Their situation involves the risk that there is an imbalance between their internal motivation factors and external risks. As a result, their low income, excessive working load, and lack of career prospects may start to dominate over the positive aspects of their work. Hence, as various studies on freelancer and entrepreneur artists have shown, the entrepreneurial mindset does not necessarily reduce the actual precarity but creates a mental shield to better tolerate the risks and challenges.

Our results do not suggest that entrepreneurship has already become the new normal or ideal of working as an artist, but it is clearly becoming an established option in the field of artistic work. These findings could be useful also outside Finland, perhaps especially in Nordic context. As known, the public funding of artists work is strong both in Finland and the other Nordic countries (Sokka & Johannisson, 2022). One of the current topics for debate around the working conditions of artists is how the existing structures could be

developed to offer an establishment for solving the pitfalls of the artpreneurs' autonomy paradox in ways, which could be feasible for them.

Our data did not cover detailed information about the types and forms of artpreneurial work the respondents undertake. That would be a topic for further research. More detailed data would be needed to answer the range of work and the working context that artpreneurs have. Covid-19 situation revealed that arts and culture still need strong public funding. The continuing crisis has presented a possibility to examine the current cultural policy structures and priorities and may also give opportunities to rectify the exposed gaps and vulnerabilities. The situation has showed in large that the current structures, principles and practices of art funding are not able to tackle the difficult challenges of cultural work.

New kinds of policies and funding mechanisms would be needed for moderating the insecurities of work life and for making the work life more sustainable for all the art workers, not just for the employees and grantees, but also "private actors" such as freelancers and entrepreneurs. It was therefore not surprising to find out that such stabilising mechanisms like basic income are popular among the young artists; in their view, it would enable smoother transitions between different employment statuses and multi-sectoral work activities.

## Notes

1. Statistics Finland includes a wide variety of activities to cultural sector like amusement parks, games and advertising. Artists' work mainly falls under the category "artistic, theatre and concert activities", that accounts for slightly less than 10% of the total value added of the cultural sector (around €6.5 billion in 2017) ([http://tilastokeskus.fi/til/klts/2017/klts\\_2017\\_2019-10-16\\_tau\\_001\\_en.html](http://tilastokeskus.fi/til/klts/2017/klts_2017_2019-10-16_tau_001_en.html)).
2. See <https://www.oph.fi/fi/uutiset/2019/korkeakoulujen-yhteishaussa-opiskelupaikka-yli-48-000-opiskelijalle> (in Finnish).
3. In our data, the term "other young artists" refers to grantees and "free artists", employee artists, students, and unemployed artists.
4. Respondents chose their labour market status out of 22 categories and they were able to choose more than one category. "Entrepreneur" had five subcategories and "freelancer" three subcategories according to the different ways of performing entrepreneurship and freelancership.
5. In our data "entrepreneur" can refer to a person who runs business through (i) a trade name, (ii) a limited company, (iii) a limited partnership, (iv) a partnership, or (v) a cooperative. These were the categories of entrepreneur in the questionnaire and are the typical entrepreneur positions in Finland. Also when we use term 'entrepreneurship' in our article it can refer to entrepreneurial identity, activity or mentality performed by a person belonging to any of the aforementioned categories.
6. See the themes of all barometers: <https://www.cupore.fi/fi/tutkimus/tutkimushankkeet/taiteen-ja-kulttuurin-barometri>.
7. The definition of young people as aged under 35 years is based on Taiké's categorisation.
8. Number of people working as professional artists in Finland is estimated to be around 20,000 (e.g. Houni & Ansio, 2014).
9. The respondents could choose more than one employment status. When the comparative groups were formed, it was ensured that no respondent was included in both groups.
10. One-third of free artists also chose the status of "unemployed jobseeker" and one fifth the status of "grant recipient".

11.  $X^2 < 0.05$ . We made comparisons in the categorised data by using cross tabulations and assessed the statistical significance of the observed differences with chi-square tests and their correlation with either Cramer's  $V$  test or Spearman's test depending on the scale.
12. However, the correlation is weak:  $V = 0.110$
13. A fairly strong correlation:  $V = 0.512$
14. A moderate correlation:  $V = 0.243$
15.  $V = 0.161$ . This may also be explained by artpreneurs' educational background, which often includes a master's degree in arts.
16. Here, we refer to the open-ended responses to the question "The content of artists' education should be improved to be more diverse – YES, in what way? / NO, why not?".
17.  $V = 0.193$
18.  $V = 0.167$
19.  $V = 0.275$
20.  $R_s = 0.331$ ,  $V = 0.373$
21. The greater share in music most probably relates to agreed rates that orchestras, music institutions and music schools use when hiring freelancers and entrepreneurs. Also many theatres have fixed rates, which affect the value determination in that sector. In some arts industries, such as visual arts and literature, agreed rates are missing almost completely. However, this is a matter, which would need a further exploration.
22. Statistics Finland includes sole entrepreneurs, own-account workers, freelancers, and grant recipients into the category of self-employed persons (Pärnänen & Sutela, 2014, p. 3). The group is not directly comparable with our group of artpreneurs, but this comparison provides a rough idea of their income level.
23.  $V = 0.118$
24.  $V = 0.150$
25.  $V = 0.109$
26.  $V = 0.144$

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