Baltic and Nordic perspectives
on cultural policies and marketization of arts

When artists become entrepreneurs

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abstract

This article examines how cultural policy initiatives in two Nordic and two Baltic countries have addressed the idea of cultural and creative industries and artistic autonomy in relation to artists' work. Drawing on a thematic analysis of national cultural policy documents in Finland, Sweden, Estonia and Lithuania, the study explores the long durée of cultural policy shifts from a welfare perspective safeguarding artistic work from political and commercial influences toward increasingly market-oriented and entrepreneurial approaches. Despite differing historical trajectories, the Nordic and Baltic countries exhibit similar patterns in integrating arts and culture into the cultural and creative industries sector and adopting a market logic for artistic work. The document analysis reveals a more turbulent transition towards viewing artists as entrepreneurial market actors in the Baltic states, whereas the Nordic countries have incorporated these ideas more incrementally, partially because of the earlier adoption of neoliberal principles. In all countries the political goal of merging cultural and economic policies was transformative of the artistic sector, provoking both resistance and pragmatic approaches from the stakeholders.

KEYWORDS: Artistic autonomy, cultural entrepreneurship, cultural industries, cultural policy, Baltic, Nordic.

Art and culture are arguably more present in people's lives today than ever before. Increased leisure time, improved communication infrastructures, and expanded marketing efforts, particularly through social media platforms, have significantly enhanced access to and increased household spendings on arts, culture and leisure activities. In this context it is interesting to revisit policy approaches to forms of art funding and conditions for artistic work. This article focuses on the development of official cultural policies, including arts funding, in Nordic and Baltic countries. It explores the long durée of this development to detail how welfare politics, aiming to free artists from political and commercial interferences (Nordic countries) and state-socialist centralized model of art administration (Baltic countries) evolved to converge into a set of policies that fundamentally redefined art and culture as an economic sector. In turn, the policy approach to artists also changed: creators being primarily seen as entrepreneurs and commercial operators.

Since the late 20th century there has been a growing policy emphasis on the so-called *cultural and creative industries/sector (CCI/CCS)* as a new strategic economic sector where independent arts organizations and artists increasingly are expected to operate as self-employed actors or entrepreneurs. This development started in the United Kingdom in the late 1980s and was extended in the 1990s when New Labour revised the principles of a welfare state cultural policies that sought to make art accessible to all socioeconomic groups. They also reviewed the governmental model of art funding, which was organized at the arm's-length distance, where art councils set priorities and distributed funding in coordination with, but independently of, the government. The reforms were informed by the ideas that introduced a neoliberal market logic into the art sector: approached as CCI/


KULTUURKAPITAL
ARM'S LENGTH PRINCIPLE
ARTISTIC FREEDOM
FOLKHEM
SAVITUMAS
LOOMEETTEVÕTLUS
CULTURAL WORKERS
UNESCO
CULTURE COUNCIL
KULTŪRINIS VERSLUMAS

CCS, art and culture were expected to generate income, employment and exports of economic significance within a competitive market economy.[1]

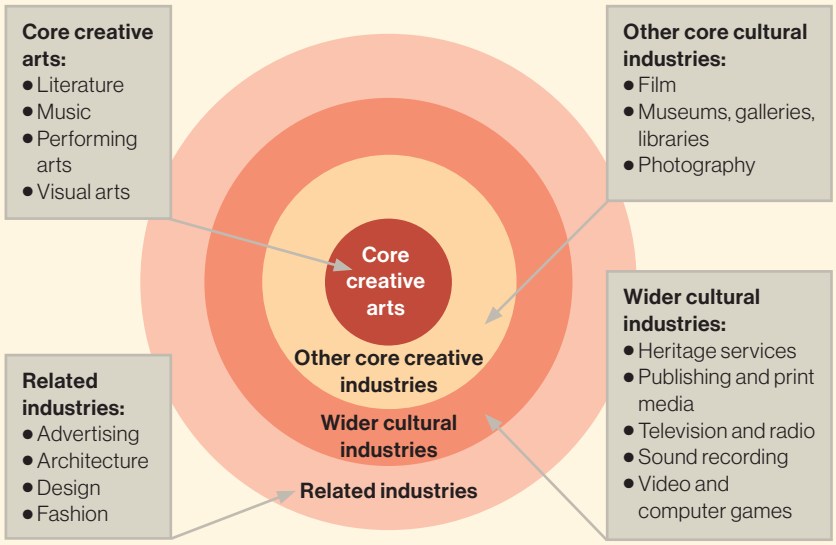
THE IMPLEMENTATION of these neo-liberal ideas in public cultural policy took shape of stimulating commercial activities, including entrepreneurship, adopting strategic management, instrumentalizing funding and outsourcing public services to non-governmental organizations and private enterprises. This policy approach was internationally embedded from its very start: the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) played a key role in emphasizing the economic productivity of art and culture by assembling and presenting statistical reports of the cultural and creative sector's contribution to wealth, gross value added, innovation and employment.[2] While UNESCO linked culture to economic and human development since the 1960s, the newly founded European Union (1992) too adopted an economic perspective on culture.[3] Throughout Europe, these reforms further crystallized and consolidated in national and international policy discourses on the creative economy that expanded in the 2000s.[4] In these discourses the figure of an entrepreneur was increasingly presented as a key – and ideal – subject of the work life.[5] In recent decades all these developments have resulted in ambitious national, international and regional governmental schemes to use the cultural and creative industries as an instrument for both economic development and social well-being.[6] This also entailed significant shrinking of arts and culture funding and strengthening expectation of artists to become self-employed market actors.

"ART AND CULTURE WERE EXPECTED TO GENERATE INCOME, EMPLOYMENT AND EXPORTS OF ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE WITHIN A COMPETITIVE MARKET ECONOMY."

While these developments have been widely researched in cultural policy scholarship, much of the academic debate on CCI revolves around big countries with large art markets. Furthermore, the intersection between the cultural industries and cultural entrepreneurship approaches and debates on artistic autonomy and artistic freedom remains insufficiently studied.[7] This article addresses this gap in knowledge by focusing on the selection of Nordic and Baltic countries, which are characterized by small domestic markets and a strong emphasis on social welfare. For instance, Sweden and Finland have had a long tradition of viewing culture as a public good supported through welfare policies rather than market mechanisms. As Estonia and Lithuania gained independence from the Soviet Union, they began reforms of what was then a state-dominated cultural sector and, in the early 2000s, incrementally introduced the concept of CCI as part of the Europeanization of national cultural policies. In this article we ask: How have the issues of cultural industries and cultural entrepreneurship been addressed in national policy documents in recent years? If and how is the idea of artistic autonomy constructed in the policy documents and does it clash or is reconciled with notions of cultural industries and entrepreneurship? The article draws on a specially conducted study of local policy responses to this changing landscape by examining how national public cultural policy programs, bills, and reports in Nordic and Baltic states have addressed artistic autonomy and the notions of cultural and creative industries.

WE FIND IT STRIKING that cultural policy development features similar dynamics in what are quite different political and cultural contexts in the Baltic Sea region, which raises questions about policy convergence and its local impacts. For instance, creators in all four countries share concerns that have been recently voiced by UNESCO[8] and EU[9]: these organizations are no longer worried about the disregard of the cultural sector's economic role; instead, they issue warnings about a growing political pressure globally as governments and societal actors impose diverse constraints on artists' rights to express themselves freely and to autonomously carry out their work with reasonable working conditions. International organizations have also begun to critique the "dark sides" of the economization: for instance, UNESCO[10] posits that the uncontrolled marketization of the art world and excessive reduction of public support aggravates the already existing precarization of the labor markets, endangering artists' possibilities to freely express themselves. In the Nordic context, these issues can be seen in the so-called culture wars,[11] i.e. populist political parties questioning national cultural policies, practicing political interference in cultural funding,[12] and creating self-censorship among cultural workers.[13] Furthermore, populist parties consider artistic work elitist, suggesting that those high art institutions and contemporary art forms that are "consumed" by a relatively small number of audiences should not be extensively publicly funded.[14] These trends reverberate in the Baltic states as well: for instance, in Lithuania, following the initial boom of cultural infrastructure funded by the EU structural funds, new debates about artists' welfare, poor pay and working conditions in the cultural sector emerged in the last decade. But these debates did not replace the question of artistic autonomy: a recent appointment of a new minister of culture from a populist party, who promised to crack down on the "elitist culture", in 2025–2026, stirred a large popular movement and protest which called the government to recognize the sector-specific values and artistic autonomy. This mobilization led to the change of the minister.[15]

Furthermore, the field of cultural policy is organized in similar ways in the four countries. In Finland culture was included in the Ministry of Education until 2010, when the Ministry was renamed to include both Education and Culture. In Sweden the Ministry of Culture was separated from the former Ministry of Education and Culture in the 1990s. While Estonian and Lithuanian govern-



The concentric circles model of the cultural industries by David Throsby, 2008.

ments had departments for art and culture in the 1920s–30s, during the Soviet period their cultural ministries were directly accountable to the Moscow-based all-union ministry. In the 1990s, Lithuania first established a Ministry of Culture and Education and later a Ministry of Culture, while Estonia maintained a separate Ministry of Culture. Accordingly, the analysis is based on national cultural-policy documents produced by ministries, arts councils and related public authorities in Finland, Sweden, Estonia and Lithuania, supplemented where relevant by policy reports from other government bodies. The corpus covers the period from the emergence of cultural and creative industries discourse in the 1990s to the most recent policy documents available for the study. We conducted a thematic analysis focusing on three interconnected dimensions: the framing of cultural and creative industries and entrepreneurship, the allocation of responsibility for artists' livelihoods, and the construction of artistic autonomy. The comparison therefore concerns not only what policies say about culture and entrepreneurship, but also which policy domain and institutional actor assumes responsibility for these issues.

THE ARTICLE IS ORGANIZED as follows: first, we discuss the key concepts. Then we outline the national cases detailing the development of the cultural policy discourses as they embrace the notions of art and cultural entrepreneurship and negotiate the idea of artistic autonomy and freedom. We conclude with a discussion reflecting on the parallels and divergences among the cases, which reveal the need for comparative analysis beyond the traditional framework of analyzing policy transformation in the Baltic states as a form of "catching up with the West", and pointing out the importance of considering artistic autonomy and freedom alongside the debate on art and cultural entrepreneurship.

Cultural industries, artistic autonomy and cultural entrepreneurship

Cultural policy in many Western countries has undergone an ideological shift, increasingly positioning the arts within the economic framework of CCI. These developments and their underlying assumptions remain contested both within the cultural sector and in academic scholarship. In this section, we clarify our understanding of CCI, artistic autonomy and cultural entrepreneurship, while treating entrepreneurship not as a self-evident characteristic of artistic work but as a historically and politically shaped concept whose meaning requires empirical examination.

The history and definitions of CCI policy have been widely studied. Here it suffices to note that national and international actors have developed different definitions of this emerging economic sector. Many have been influenced by Throsby's model of cultural industries, which places the core creative arts – literature, music, performing arts and visual arts – at its center and distinguishes increasingly commercial activities further from this core.[16] Today, CCI is best understood as a flexible boundary concept rather than a unified category. Its vagueness has enabled diverse policy strategies while also generating critique and resistance. Despite these differences, CCI policy has generally contributed to positioning arts and culture within an economic paradigm. We use CCI to refer to these broader policy developments and cultural industries (CI) when focusing on artistic work.

The notion of artistic autonomy is equally complex and contested.[17] We distinguish between artistic freedom, artistic autonomy and aesthetic autonomy as related but analytically distinct concepts. Artistic freedom primarily concerns freedom of expression and protection from censorship and political interference, while artistic autonomy refers to the capacity and material, institutional and professional conditions that enable artists to exercise this freedom and determine the content and conditions of their work. Artistic freedom has been established as a fundamental right, notably in Article 19 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, while UNESCO's Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions from 2005[18] further recognizes artists' freedom of expression and creativity.[19] The notion of aesthetic autonomy has a particularly long history as part of the Western art, which informs cultural policies. In the policy context, aesthetic autonomy concerns the relative independence of art from external political and commercial demands.

TWO FORMS OF NEGATIVE freedom have historically been central to this understanding of artistic autonomy: protection from direct political interference through arm's-length cultural policy, and protection from excessive commercialization and market pressures. The former was institutionalized in post-war cultural policy, including in the Nordic countries during the 1960s and 1970s, through state-supported but relatively autonomous funding institutions.[20] The latter concerns the risk that commercialization and commodification make art increasingly heteronomous, subjecting it to consumer demand, corporate interests and market logics.[21] Alongside these negative freedoms there is a positive dimension: artists require adequate social and economic conditions to exercise autonomy.[22] Artistic autonomy

is therefore inseparable from questions of inequality and material security.[23]

Recent developments in Nordic and Baltic countries, including reductions in public cultural funding[24] and growing expectations that artists operate as entrepreneurial actors contributing to economic growth,[25] have raised concerns about the effects of economic instrumentalization on artistic autonomy.[26] These developments are part of a broader policy shift associated with the creative economy and New Public Management (NPM).[27] Since the 1990s, international organizations and national governments have increasingly emphasized the economic value of culture, market-like forms of governance and entrepreneurial forms of work. NPM, in particular, sought to increase the efficiency of public administration by introducing market-like competition, giving rise to new governance arrangements that have been described as pseudo-markets and quasi-markets.[28] The cultural sector nevertheless operates within a mixed economy in which artists combine self-generated income, sales, public and private funding, and other forms of support.[29]

Entrepreneurship has consequently become increasingly visible in cultural policy and practice. The arts and cultural sectors have been considered fertile ground for entrepreneurial orientations because artistic work is often short-term, uncertain and fragmented, and survival may require skills associated with entrepreneurship.[30] Entrepreneurship has thus become an important model of labor and worker subjectivity within CCI policy.[31]

THIS DOES NOT, however, mean that artists are inherently entrepreneurs or that entrepreneurial activity is necessarily equivalent to artistic work. The concept of the entrepreneur has a specific history in economic thought. Hébert and Link[32] locate the term in nineteenth-century French economic thinking, while Schumpeter[33] famously conceptualized the entrepreneur as an agent of innovation and economic development who creates new combinations in pursuit of economic value. Normative theories of entrepreneurship are important for understanding the historical construction of the idea, but they should not be treated as definitions of artistic work or as theoretical grounds for assuming that artists are entrepreneurs.

Some scholarship on cultural entrepreneurship has emphasized similarities between artists and entrepreneurs, including creativity, risk-taking, flexibility and the capacity to cope with uncertainty.[34] Ellmeier, for example, describes the emerging creative entrepreneurial workforce in terms of flexibility, independence, mobility and psychological resilience.[35] Other researchers, however, have stressed the complexity and fuzziness of entrepreneurial behavior within CCI.[36] Such similarities are analytically relevant, but neither do they by themselves establish that it is necessary nor desirable to understand artists through the economic category of entrepreneurship.

Indeed, the relationship between artistic work and entrepreneurship is complex and potentially contradictory. The entrepreneurial ideal promoted in contemporary cultural policy is tied to self-reliance, market orientation, competitiveness and economic value, whereas artistic autonomy entails the capacity to determine aesthetic and artistic goals and practices without undue political, commercial or other external pressures. At the same time, artists may engage in activities that can be described as entrepreneurial in practice, such as organizing work, seeking income, building networks or developing audiences. The existence of such practices should not, however, be taken to validate entrepreneurship as an ideological and normative model of artistic work.

THERE ARE THEREFORE both similarities and important differences between the entrepreneurial and artistic ideals. The Schumpeterian entrepreneur, often described in heroic terms, is oriented towards creating new combinations, markets and sources of economic value,[37] whereas artistic work may be oriented towards cultural, aesthetic, social or other values that cannot be reduced to economic growth. As Klamer[38] argues, artists may contribute to the common good through art despite precarious working conditions. The relevant question is therefore not whether artists resemble entrepreneurs in some respects, but what the category of entrepreneurship comes to mean when it is applied to artistic work and how its adoption affects artistic autonomy. We therefore approach cultural entrepreneurship as an empirically open and contested concept rather than as an inherent attribute of artists. Our analysis thus focuses on the tension between entrepreneurial expectations and the conditions of artistic autonomy, while remaining open to the diverse ways in which artists themselves understand and enact entrepreneurial practices. In what follows, we use artistic freedom primarily when referring to protection from censorship and political interference, while artistic autonomy refers to the institutional, economic and professional conditions that enable artists to determine the content and conditions of their work. Our analysis focuses primarily on the latter.

"ENTREPRENEURSHIP HAS CONSEQUENTLY BECOME INCREASINGLY VISIBLE IN CULTURAL POLICY AND PRACTICE."

Nordic and Baltic cultural policies

As mentioned earlier, there is a strong policy isomorphism in the region: all countries have a Ministry of Culture or Ministry of Education and Culture that coordinates cultural policy on the national level, with municipal level and, except for Finland, regional dimensions. The funding systems in principle are also similar: the ministries directly and indirectly fund major cultural organizations, and all countries have specific art funding bodies that are more or less autonomous from the government. These actors form a coordinated and decentralized cultural-policy ecosystem in which the governments provide strategic direction and legal frameworks. For instance, in Estonia, the Ministry of Culture oversees strategic planning, funds major national cultural

institutions, and administers schemes for the arts, heritage, and creative industries. Complementing this is the Cultural Endowment of Estonia (*Kultuurkapital*) – a semi-autonomous, arm's-length funding body with its own revenue streams from cultural and gambling taxes. At the regional and municipal level local governments run their own cultural departments, fund theatres, galleries, museums, music and hobby schools, and support local festivals and public-art programs. The Lithuanian system is similar, where art funding is distributed by the arm's length body, the Council for Culture, which, however, does not have its own endowment and allocates funds from the government. In Sweden, all state authorities are autonomous and run on arm's length distance from the ministries, according to Swedish law. Since 2010 the Swedish regions have had their own cultural policy strategies and are responsible for the region's culture organizations in collaboration with the municipalities and civil society organizations with support from the Arts Council. Artists can apply for funding at both state and regional levels, and in some cases also from the municipalities. Historically there has been confusion about the responsibility for the cultural and creative industries policies. Initially it was assigned to the regions and the Ministry of Enterprise. However, lately the Cultural Ministry has taken a more visible role. The Finnish state administration of cultural policy is organized in a similar way to that of Sweden, with a strong position of artists' unions in distribution of Arts Council support. Unlike the Swedish system, Finnish municipalities, but not regions, play an important role in supporting local cultural activities; Finland also has significant national and regional private foundations supporting professional artistic work. Finally, both the Baltic and Nordic systems rely on strong and emerging artistic associations and unions. These organizations function as important intermediaries between the state and artists: they lobby for sectoral interests and participate in drafting cultural policy.

SWEDEN AND FINLAND

The trajectory of cultural policy development in Finland and Sweden aligns closely with that of other Nordic countries, where policy frameworks emerged from the ideological foundations of the post-World War II welfare state and were further shaped by the expansion of democratic principles during the 1960s and 1970s. In his analysis of Nordic cultural policy models, Duelund[39] delineates four distinct phases of transformation: Democratization of Culture (1960–1975), Cultural Democracy (1975–1985), Social and Economic Instrumentalization (1985–1995), and Political Colonization (1995–2007). Developments following 2007 largely represent a continuation of what Duelund terms political colonization of cultural policy, which has progressively evolved into a kind of economic colonization. Within this framework, artists are increasingly asked to position themselves as entrepreneurs or business owners, often involuntarily. This applies to Finland and Sweden, but there are important differences.[40] In this part we will highlight both the common developments and differences between Finnish and Swedish cultural policy regarding artistic freedom and marketization.

The origins of modern Swedish cultural policy can be traced to the 1930s, when the Social Democratic Party introduced its vision of the state as the "people's home" (*Folkhem*) committed to the welfare of all citizens[41]. This entailed rejecting the notion of art as an exclusive domain of the elite, and instead promoting culture as a universal right, accessible to all social layers. Consequently, the state should assume responsibility for guaranteeing equal participation in and access to art and culture. However, it was not until the 1960s that cultural policy as a distinct domain began to gain momentum through the government commission "Culture Council" whose efforts culminated in the first governmental cultural policy report in 1972[42] and the Cultural policy bill in 1974[43] with specific cultural policy objectives which have laid the foundation for all cultural policy initiatives in Sweden until 2009. Two objectives are of interest in this research. Firstly, that cultural policy should contribute to the protection of the freedom of speech and to create real opportunities for this freedom to be exercised, and secondly, to counteract the negative consequences of commercialism within the cultural field[44]. The Culture Council in Sweden rejected state or political interference in artistic practice. The term *arm's length principle* was not explicitly used in the government bill,[45] but the underlying idea was clearly present, which also applied to Finland. It was above all institutionalized through the establishment of the Arts Council of Finland (1967) – a new government agency – supporting artists and allowing them to participate in the decision-making on funding. The objectives and measures of the policy for promoting artistic activity were already formulated by the State Art Committee in 1965. In Sweden similar agencies, the Swedish Arts Council and the Swedish Arts Grants Committee, were inaugurated in 1974 and in 1976. Cultural democracy, accessibility of art independent of both geography and social class and giving high arts and culture an opportunity to flourish in a small market, were fundamentals common to cultural policy in both countries.[46]

In both countries there was a broad consensus on the neces-

KULTUURKAPITAL

LITHUANIAN COUNCIL FOR CULTURE

The Estonian *Kultuurkapital* is a semi-autonomous, arm's-length funding body with its own revenue streams from cultural and gambling taxes, which works as a complement to the Ministry of Culture. The Lithuanian Council for Culture works similarly, but does not have its own endowment.

sity of providing public support for artists and cultural activities according to the aforementioned ideas on supporting the work of artists. The Swedish Commission placed emphasis on artists', also called "cultural workers", working conditions addressing issues related to e.g. legislation on copyright, taxation and social security, on artists' funds and financial support for cultural mediators and organizers. The ideal was that cultural workers should be paid for their work, but in the end state support in the form of project funding and operating grants have become the most important funding for art and culture in Sweden.

IN FINLAND, QUESTIONS that could not be covered by state support for arts institutions, other support for arts and culture communities, and direct support for artists[47], were brought up for discussion at the very first stages of building the welfare state arts support system. Nevertheless, short-term (max 5 years) Arts Council's grants became the basis of individual artists' income. However, already in the 1978 Government's Report to Parliament on Arts Policy, other measures to create employment for artists were called for. The most significant measure was to complement the grants system in 1982 by 15-year grants – nationally to a token group of ten artists at a time.[48] In addition, the role of private foundations as funders of artistic work had been important since the 19th century.[49] In conclusion, the first Nordic welfare states' cultural policy framework emphasized the principles of freedom of expression, artistic autonomy and protection against the pressures of commercialization, i.e. freedom to work as a professional artist and ability to fully concentrate on making arts in their work life.

In the beginning of 1990s, a new cultural policy commission was assembled in Sweden. The main directive for the new commission was to evaluate the results of the 1974 cultural policy, but a lot of attention was also directed towards Swedish national values and heritage as a consequence of the Swedish EU membership. By the 1990s, the number of professional artists in both countries had increased significantly compared to the 1970s, placing significant strain on the public support system. In Finland, the 1992 *Kupoli*[50] committee appointed by the state stated that artists should be encouraged to increase their income from their artistic work instead of grants. This caused a need to seek solutions to new questions of artists' employment, taxation and social security. However, the public sector was still seen as the most important source of support for artists.

IN 1997, the Council of Europe launched the report *In from the Margins. A contribution to the debate on Culture and Development in Europe*.[51] Regarding Finland, the Council encouraged productive cooperation between cultural and entrepreneurial sectors. It also emphasized the significance of cultural industries for other industries and the overall national economies. Regarding cultural industry, the 1999 committee report *Developing Cultural Industries in Finland*[52] cemented the term "cultural industry" in the Finnish cultural policy and started a new kind of cooperation between the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Trade and Industry, and the Ministry of Labor, which has become the norm after the millennium. The report states that "the narrowest way of defining cultural industry is the point of view of cultural entrepreneurship".[53] During the first decades of the new millennium, responsibility has been divided between ministries in such a way that business in the creative industries has been placed under the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, while more general policy on culture and artists' work has been placed under the Ministry of Education and Culture.[54]

The concept of cultural industry also began to appear in Swedish governmental commissions in the 1990s. In the cultural policy report *The Artist's Conditions*, they asked: "Is the artist a bohemian, an entrepreneur, or an employee?".[55] The report identified two distinct art markets: an institutional market, comprising public institutions and state-owned companies, and a private market, consisting of households and private enterprises. The policy expected to broaden participation in cultural life and, in turn, to stimulate demand for artistic products, thereby generating higher incomes for artists across both markets. However, by this time, both Swedish households and the cultural sector largely perceived art and culture as part of the public welfare, financed through tax revenues. Consequently, the growing number of artists faced mounting challenges in securing sustainable livelihoods. In the government report *Work for the artists,*[56] the commission highlighted the structural imbalance that prevailed in the artistic labor market. Many artists experienced long periods of unemployment between short-term engagements, and the fact that most operated as sole proprietors excluded them from the unemployment security system. To qualify for unemployment benefits, artists were required to dissolve their businesses, creating additional professional insecurity. At this time, discussions surrounding artistic autonomy were primarily framed in terms of artists' economic (in)security:

"BY THIS TIME, BOTH SWEDISH HOUSEHOLDS AND THE CULTURAL SECTOR LARGELY PERCEIVED ART AND CULTURE AS PART OF THE PUBLIC WELFARE, FINANCED THROUGH TAX REVENUES."

> **Artistic diversity, renewal, and quality presuppose professional cultural practitioners who can earn a living from their work and fully devote themselves to free and independent creation.**[57]

Artist organizations began to step in: for instance, in 1999, the new Theatre Alliance, funded by interest groups and a foundation based on collective agreement, offered affiliated actors a basic income between engagements, thereby reducing financial

insecurity. The model has since been extended to other art forms such as the Dance Alliance (in 2006) and the Music Alliance (in 2008).

In Finland, too, the situation of self-employed artists and artists' employment had been brought into discussion in the 1990s partly as a consequence of difficult times in the state economy. During the first decade of the 2000s, the example of the Swedish Theatre Alliance was discussed as a model for securing Finnish artists' income between miscellaneous forms of employment and employment services for artists were suggested. The proposal was never realized in Finland, but the idea of such alliances re-emerged in public discussion about artists' income 20 years later, along with suggestions of artists' salary and basic income. The diminishing scope of artistic work done outside employment or entrepreneurship was noted both in the proposal to pay attention to the volume of artistic training, and in the call to offer education in entrepreneurship for artists.[58]

THE MOST NOTABLE transformation in Swedish cultural policy discourse occurred after the phase that Duelund[59] describes as "Political Colonization," specifically following the Cultural Policy Commission of 2009.[60] Their report sought to fundamentally reshape the organizational structure of the national cultural policy by promoting and implementing market-oriented principles associated with cultural and creative industries. The Commission argued that market mechanisms and diversified funding provide the strongest guarantee of artistic freedom. They stated:

> **Commercialism alongside the issue of artistic quality has been the most politically and ideologically charged issue within cultural policy.**[61]

The Commission's report led to the removal of the objective of "counteracting commercialization" in the Government Bill 2009/10:3 *Time for Culture*. However, the proposed reforms provoked strong criticism from the press, political actors, and referral bodies, reflecting deep-seated tensions between cultural quality safeguarded by cultural autonomy and economic rationales. Finally, the most consequential change in Swedish cultural policy, of this time, was the introduction of the Cultural Collaboration Model, which decentralized responsibility by granting regions a greater role in managing cultural institutions and cultural life, supported by state co-funding. At the regional level, the cultural and creative industries were increasingly framed as key drivers of economic, social, and cultural development. This shift also introduced new expectations for artists, who were considered self-employed entrepreneurs or business owners often combining private income streams with limited public support. The government also initiated collaborations between e.g. the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Enterprise to further develop the CCI in Sweden.[62] But within the broader cultural field, this transformation was contested, as concerns about marketization and artistic autonomy persisted. The Arts Grants Committee published a critical report[63] with several international scholars and practitioners stating that art is *not* an industry like any other thereby questioning the concept of CCI and viewing the artist as an entrepreneur.

In the Finnish CCI policies, entrepreneurial work was by now mentioned as an equally functionable way of employment as grants and employment for artists, but: "in a small market functioning in a small language, such as Finland, public support of art has a lot of significance as a prerequisite of making art".[64] Toward the end of the decade, a lot of attention was paid to the supporting structures for creative industries and especially removing obstacles of their internationalization. The 2010 Ministry of Education and Culture's report *Creative growth and livelihood of artists*[65] included an attempt to bring together the discussions about artists' income sources and creative economy. Special features of artistic entrepreneurship are described:

> **Its goal is not growth, taking risks or entrepreneurship as a way of life. Entrepreneurship is a tool, not a goal.**

In this statement, cooperatives are recommended as a way of organizing freelance work[66].

The special character of artistic work is continuously brought up in the Finnish policy texts, and toward the end of the 2000s artists' salary was brought to discussion as a potential solution. Reports discussing this emphasized that artists could receive salary without losing their freedom to choose their means and topics. Also, the downside of working as a freelance artist outside employment or entrepreneurship was pondered:

> **Freedom of art is necessarily connected to freedom of expression, but situations where artistic work is not seen as work among others may lead to incomplete working conditions and to lack of constructs that protect an individual.**[67]

Enhancing artists' marketing and networking skills was mentioned as a way of helping businesses in the field to sustain and even grow.

THE DEVELOPMENT, which had already begun in Finland ten years earlier, re-emerged in Swedish national cultural policy documents in 2022. A new government inquiry "Creative Sweden!"[68] proposed a national strategy to promote the sustainable growth of businesses within the cultural and creative industries similar to the Finnish report from 2010. The Swedish report noted that 60% of all artists are business owners or entrepreneurs, and at the time the sector employed approximately 190,000 people, of whom 100,000 were sole proprietors. In the report *artistic freedom* was identified as a prerequisite for cultivating cultural values essential to innovation, robust democracies, value diversity, and the well-being and social cohesion of citizens. The old clash between commercialization and artistic autonomy was commented on by the commission:

> **We get the impression that cultural and media policy has distanced itself from cultural and creative indus-**

> **tries and companies [...] While the reality is that, in most cases, artists are actually entrepreneurs within the cultural and creative sectors.**[69]

This pragmatic approach to artists influenced the Swedish Ministry of Culture, which in 2024 introduced a new strategy for the cultural and creative sector, declaring it a "core industry" within the Swedish national economy. At the same time, the government reduced state funding for culture in the national budget, stating that the sector would need to seek financing from multiple sources and urged the sector to increase its efforts in international markets.

IN RECENT YEARS, these Finnish and Swedish visions of the growth and internationalization of creative and cultural entrepreneurship have resulted in less ambitious governmental visions. One reason for this is that the responsibility for cultural and creative industries has been divided between ministries: the creative industries have been placed under the ministries of economy, while more general policy on culture and artists' work has been placed under the ministries of culture.[70] To this day, both Swedish and Finnish artists' unions have continued to speak against unrestricted commercialization of artistic work. In addition to offering back-up in negotiations with commercial agents in the industry, they have continued to demand a social security reform recognizing the precarious labor market status of artists and cultural workers. In response, the working conditions of sole entrepreneurs and freelancers in the job market have been discussed repeatedly especially in Finland. For example, the Ministry of Education and Culture reports *Culture is always present* from 2022, *The Cultural Policy Report* from 2024, and Ministry of Employment and Economy report *Roadmap to the creative economy* from 2020[71] reflect these discussions, however, not many concrete, or, indeed, positive measures have been taken. Consequently, both Sweden's and Finland's current political and financial circumstances with significant cuts to arts and culture leave many independent artists waiting for sustainable solutions. In Finland private foundations have surpassed the state in amounts of direct support to artists. In Sweden, where arts and culture have enjoyed consistent state support since the 1970s, the recent government has now called on alternative financiers to step in. However, neither the existing legal frameworks nor Swedish cultural traditions yet seem to be conducive to such a shift.

ESTONIA AND LITHUANIA

Soviet occupation

Although modern cultural policy in the Baltic states was significantly shaped by dealing with the legacy of the centrally commanded political and administrative system of state cultural policy and cultural political economy, introduced by the Soviet government following the occupation and re-occupation of Estonia and Lithuania in 1940/1945, the overarching dynamic of shifting away from the welfare state model to neoliberal configuration of the arts and cultural sector also applies. Like in Sweden and Finland, as we show, the Baltic communities were critical towards marketization and entrepreneurship models, even though these were introduced as part of Westernization and de-Sovietization. Since the 1990s, both Estonian and Lithuanian policy makers selectively drew on the interwar experience of the 1920s-30s and pragmatically incorporated market-oriented elements of the international cultural policy.

THE SOVIET CULTURAL political economy was fundamentally state-driven: state agencies were the main commissioners of creative production. Due to the limited space, it is not possible to fully describe the Soviet cultural policy system, but for our purpose we would like to note the expansive and hierarchical administrative network that was established in the Baltic states. In Lithuania, starting in 1953 – once the armed anti-Soviet resistance was crushed – the republic entered the post-war reconstruction period, which entailed a rapid development of state-sponsored and state-controlled cultural institutions, alongside the emergence of an ethnically anchored, Lithuanianized version of state socialist cultural policy.[72] The Soviet Estonia followed a similar path: collectivist state ownership and centrally controlled cultural institutions mirrored the wider Soviet model, with differences shaped mainly by local leadership and historical-religious backgrounds. In all Soviet republics the Ministries of Culture were subordinated to the local *Politbureaus* and the Councils of Ministers, which in turn were subordinated to the all-union Moscow-based authorities. These ministries directly administered all major cultural institutions, including museums, theatres, cinemas, galleries, and presses. However, municipalities also operated local cultural administrations tasked with promoting the "cultural enlightenment" of the population through political education, as well as catering to cultural and leisure needs, a form of Soviet welfare state. Securing the population's wellbeing through cultural means was part of communist ideology. Collective participation in cultural activities was strongly encouraged, in line with socialist principles, and although the Soviet government paid lip service to individual artistic freedom, creative practices had to be subordinated to societal goals. State socialist culture was productionist: industrial enterprises built cultural facilities for their workers and promoted amateur cultural activities through clubs and competitions. A state-wide system of art training emerged through specialized schools, encouraging competition among amateur and professional artists, while official institutions distributed material resources and symbolic status through honorary titles, access to studios and monetary awards.[73]

"SECURING THE POPULATION'S WELLBEING THROUGH CULTURAL MEANS WAS PART OF COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY."

Soviet cultural production was also administered through the Artists' Union.[74] Access to tools, studios, and exhibitions depend-

ed on political loyalty. In the Soviet system, artists also organized into cooperatives to manage material resources; notably, artistic production destined for mass consumption subsidized "high art" even under Stalinism in the 1930s.[75] Distinctions between high culture and mass consumption were carefully maintained, shaping the artistic field in ways that mirrored cultural hierarchies on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Although culture and the arts served first and foremost ideological functions – to promote the Soviet system and shape "the Soviet man and woman" – their economic value was recognized. Following the 1960s *khozraschet* [self-financing] reforms, creative organizations were encouraged to generate revenue through subscriptions, sales, and performances. This opened limited but significant spaces for semi-market activity. Professional and amateur artists could, within constraints, sell cultural goods to improve their living standards – an underexplored domain of Soviet-era cultural entrepreneurship.

MANY SALES FORMED a shadow cultural economy, which was legalized during Gorbachev's reforms that allowed establishing private, profit-oriented cooperatives (1986–1988). In culture, some of the most successful cooperatives produced youth fashion garments, music and video recordings, magazines and newspapers, and operated entertainment venues, including small VHS screening rooms and music festivals. Towards the late 1980s, new television and radio frequencies were opened for privatization. Overall, an art-entrepreneurship perspective reveals a far more diversified cultural economy during the Soviet period than traditional scholarship tends to acknowledge: this must be noted when analyzing local responses to the Western programs promoting entrepreneurship.[76]

"AN ART-ENTREPRENEURSHIP PERSPECTIVE REVEALS A FAR MORE DIVERSIFIED CULTURAL ECONOMY DURING THE SOVIET PERIOD THAN TRADITIONAL SCHOLARSHIP TENDS TO ACKNOWLEDGE."

De-Sovietization, marketization and CCI

Both Lithuania and Estonia devised democratic models of art funding in the 1990s, a period that coincided with the vogue for entrepreneurship in public policy that dominated the decade.[77] However, the framing of the cultural sector as a component of the post-industrial economy, which was part of the late Soviet cultural policy, curiously disappeared from the 1990s cultural policy debates. In the Baltic context, the economic instrumentalization of culture was probably identified with the Soviet productionist ideology and tainted by the centrally commanded economy's failure to perform. In contrast to the economic role of culture, Baltic governments fully embraced the freedom of expression principle which was codified in constitutions and implemented through the governmental reform of the media and cultural sectors.

LITHUANIA

In the 1990s, the Lithuanian policy debates focused on the grave consequences of economic recession, but the proposed solutions were not marketization and entrepreneurship: policy makers and creatives called for continuation of state funding. Toward the end of the 1990s the number of directly funded cultural organizations in fact increased, not decreased, as the sector failed to generate income from the declining market.[78] Only in 2012 the legislative and executive functions of the Ministry were fully separated by establishing an arm's length institution, the Lithuanian Council for Culture.

THE FIRST STATE POLICY document, *Guidelines of Lithuanian Cultural Policy* (2001), principally focused on the public role of arts and culture as a source of national values, emphasizing their contribution to preserving the history and memory of Lithuanian statehood and nation. The *Guidelines* included the term "cultural industries," but there was no mention of the economic value of culture, and the industrial character of culture was not explored at length. In contrast, the notion of artistic freedom featured prominently, alongside with the intrinsic value of "national" art and culture was closely linked with democracy and sovereignty. The policy idea of CCI was introduced in Lithuania via the Open Society Fund in the first decade of the 2000s.[79] This policy innovation culminated with the Lithuanian *Strategy for the Promotion and Development of Creative Industries* (2007),[80] followed by subsequent strategies that were developed in relation to accession of the EU structural funds (culture becoming eligible in 2010), where cultural infrastructure was connected with the notions of growth.

Once backed with substantial funding, the idea that art and culture can have an economic impact – and contain a promise of economic wellbeing for creators – was embraced in Lithuania and led to the significant reshaping of the institutional and policy landscape. The National Association for Creative and Cultural Industries, established in 2008, lobbied for allocation of structural funds to creatives. The higher education sector introduced degrees in creative industries management which became top student choice in 2013. Pioneering academic studies of art entrepreneurship in Lithuania were published by the art historian Elona Lubytė, who also led the teaching in the area.[81] The same year the National Creative and Cultural Industries Association published a report where they used the term "entrepreneurship" (in Lithuanian, *verslumas*) estimating the international competitiveness of CCI.[82]

In this way, the idea of entrepreneurship, that artists should take charge of their own economic wellbeing, made its way into Lithuanian policy discourses.[83] The Ministry of Culture's policy

paper *The Development Directions for Cultural and Creative Industries (2015–2020)* (2015) noted that "artists are lacking business skills" and emphasized the need to support creative businesses. It established a priority area to grow CCI as part of the post-industrial, new technology-based development. Here the forms of the state support include "financial support mechanisms, clustering, marketing, encouragement of intersectorial collaboration and training in entrepreneurial skills [ER – in Lithuanian, *verslumo kompetencijos*]".[84] The Lithuanian long-term national strategy *Culture 2030* (2019) also included the term "cultural entrepreneurship," translated in Lithuanian as *kultūrinis verslumas* or "cultural business skills". Similarly, "cultural entrepreneurs" are translated as *kultūros verslininkai*. This direct translation sounds odd in the context of Lithuanian cultural discourses: the Lithuanian term *verslumas* has a very strong business and commerce connotations and does not contain reference to innovation and disruption as the English "entrepreneurship." Furthermore, the Lithuanian term also lacks the meaning of culture as an instrument of entrepreneurship more widely conceived, as in social entrepreneurship. It seems, in this way, that the Lithuanian translation of cultural entrepreneurship has followed the business-oriented model of cultural work, which probably explains why the term did not stick and is rarely used in everyday language.

CONVERSELY, THE NEW Law on the Fundamentals of State Cultural Policy (June 2024) reasserted the principle of artistic freedom positing that state cultural policy seeks to create "conditions to realise human cultural rights and freedoms" as the first priority, where the second priority is to "create conditions to acquire cultural or creative competences and to develop them". The cultural policy principles no longer emphasize nation building; this is toned down – last on the list – where "unique aspects of Lithuanian national culture" should be fostered and protected as part of the principle of "originality" (in Lithuanian, *savitumas*). They are framed in general terms around collaboration, diversity, internationalization, and, in response to the fast-developing digital and computer sectors, "respect to human creation," as it is noted that "culture is created by humans," where technology is "creation's instruments".

Just like in Sweden and Finland, the Lithuanian art practitioners, however, have little choice but to work in line with the cultural entrepreneurship model. In 2022, according to the Lithuanian Cultural Council, there were about 10,000 professional creatives in the country (data reflects the creatives registered with creative unions and those with a special artist status that enables access to welfare benefits). This constitutes a significant increase of the artists population, which was 6,976 in 2019. In 2021, 79% of artists were self-employed.[85] Salaries for cultural workers are at 67% of average salary and among lowest in the EU.[86] In 2021, a study found that only 21% of artists earn their living from creative practice, which is, however, an increase from 9% in 2001. In line with international trends, cinema and architecture are best paid in the cultural sector. Literature, which used to be highly remunerated during the Soviet period, brings in some of the lowest income.[87] At the moment of writing, artists' reliance on state funding remains high: public and private employment are about 50%/50% in the cultural sector. In 2024, the Ministry commissioned an evaluation of the "artists' creative and economic environment" which established that the median artist income forms only 78% of the average income and 21% of surveyed artists receive income that is below the national minimum pay.[88] To address the issues of low income and regulations, in 2023, the first artists' professional trade union was established and the debate about artists' working conditions has been launched. Despite significant investment in art infrastructure, 72% of Lithuanian artists work from home or in private studios.[89]

ESTONIA

Like in Lithuania, Estonia's cultural policy is anchored in the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, which defines the preservation of the Estonian nation, language, and culture as a fundamental objective of the state. This constitutional mandate is understood as a dynamic balance between safeguarding cultural continuity and heritage and fostering innovation, openness, and adaptation, which are seen as essential to cultural development in a modern society. The policy framework for culture was first comprehensively articulated after independence in 1998, when the Parliament of Estonia (Riigikogu) adopted its first post-Soviet cultural policy strategy.[90] A defining feature of this document was its attempt to reconcile innovation-oriented development with a strong commitment to national cultural identity and distinctiveness. Fiscal instruments, including tax incentives, were introduced, and the long-term sustainability of the cultural sector was explicitly emphasized.

CRUCIAL FOR THE SUPPORT of the creative field has been the Cultural Endowment of Estonia (*Kultuurkapital*), originally created in 1919 by writers, operational from 1925 to 1941, and reinstated in 1994.[91] At the moment of writing, the Cultural Endowment operates under the Ministry of Culture and channels funding to the cultural sector. One of its core missions is to support talented individuals by enabling their professional development and to recognize outstanding lifetime achievements through honorary grants. Like the Lithuanian Council for Culture, it is organized as an arm's length body that functions through rotating committees of artists, critics, and institutional representatives, thereby protecting funding decisions from direct political or partisan interference.[92]

During its first decade after reinstatement, the Cultural Endowment pursued a model of egalitarian decentralization, distributing relatively small grants widely across the cultural field. While this approach contributed to cultural vitality and diversity, it provided limited economic security for cultural practitioners. Around 2010, the funding philosophy shifted toward selective centralization, with larger and more concentrated support directed toward strategically important organizations and internationally visible artists. This shift mirrored broader changes in Estonian cultural policy, in which competitiveness, visibility, and sustainability increasingly complemented traditional concerns with diversity and access. A tension between supporting "people" (artistic labor) and supporting "concrete"

(infrastructure and prestige projects) became particularly visible in debates surrounding the construction of the KUMU Art Museum, financed through the Cultural Endowment and opened in 2006. KUMU came to symbolize both Estonia's cultural ambition and an enduring dilemma in cultural resource allocation.



"It's so easy to be an artist", by Inessa Josing (2000) at Art Museum of Estonia. PHOTO: INESSA JOSING

LIKE IN LITHUANIA, the EU accession in 2004 introduced the wider discourse of the creative economy and cultural entrepreneurship into Estonian policy debates, largely inspired by UK and Finnish models. Designers, architects, and the audiovisual and entertainment software sectors benefited most from this shift. Fine-arts practitioners, however, remained skeptical, viewing entrepreneurship as a potential threat to artistic autonomy. It was only around 2020 that this resistance began to soften. Art auctions gained broader legitimacy, and new Tallinn-based galleries started to actively build primary markets for young artists, signaling a gradual cultural shift toward market engagement even within the fine arts.

In 2014, the Estonian Parliament published the strategic document *Basic Principles of Cultural Policy until 2020*.[93] It reaffirmed the role of culture as a driver of national and local development and recognized the central role of municipalities in organizing cultural life. As a result, Estonia's cultural policy operates within a multi-level governance framework that combines national cultural programs with locally developed strategies. In addition to defining the main directions of cultural development, the *Basic Principles* explicitly recognized the growing importance of creative entrepreneurship (*loomeettevõtlus*). The state committed to directing funding toward strengthening the competitiveness of creative enterprises and to investing in cultural infrastructure, with particular emphasis on tourism and regional development. The document also acknowledged the precarious position of freelance creative professionals and stated that individuals should be guaranteed access to health insurance regardless of income regularity, provided that their income was subject to labor taxes and that they were registered as entrepreneurs. However, as of 2026, this provision has not been implemented, revealing a persistent gap between policy objectives and practical outcomes.

IN 2021, THE ESTONIAN Government published *The Cultural Development Plan 2021–2030* (shortly referred to as *Culture 2030*),[94] which served as the successor to the 2014 strategy. Like in Lithuania, *The Plan* establishes long-term objectives for the cultural sector and situates cultural development within broader societal and economic frameworks, including the national development strategy *Estonia 2035*, thereby underscoring the role of culture for society as a whole. A central objective of *Culture 2030* is to strengthen cooperation between the cultural sector and the broader economy. The plan emphasizes the importance of the private sector as a sponsor of culture and proposes legislative changes to encourage private and corporate funding for cultural activities.

Between 2008 and 2013, responsibility for developing the creative economy lay with the Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, focusing on awareness-raising, the establishment of support structures, and the promotion of intra-sectoral cooperation. Since 2014, this responsibility has shifted to the Ministry of Culture, accompanied by a stronger emphasis on export capacity and cross-sectoral collaboration. Financial support is largely provided through the European Regional Development Fund, with more than 14 million euro allocated for the period 2021–2027, including state co-financing and beneficiary contributions.[95]

ESTONIAN CULTURAL POLICY consistently emphasizes the professional sustainability of cultural workers, with a strong focus on lifelong learning, skills development, and professional training. Entrepreneurship education has become increasingly central, reflecting expectations that cultural professionals operate in hybrid cultural and economic environments. At the same time, the state has committed to improving remuneration, including raising the minimum wage of state-employed cultural workers with higher education and professional qualifications to the level of the national average wage. In 2023, the average gross monthly salary in the creative economy (1,627 euro) remained below the national average (1,832 euro).[96] As a result, hybrid income models are very common with cultural workers combining artistic practice with teaching, grants, or non-artistic work. Public funding continues to be a cornerstone of the sector. About 14.6% of total creative-industries turnover originates from the public sector (around 372.3 million euro), underlining the central role of publicly financed institutions in ensuring economic stability.[97]

Empirical mappings show a sector that is economically significant but structurally fragile. In 2023, Estonia's creative industries comprised 13,760 registered and financially active enterprises (8.8% of all firms), generated 868.9 million euro in added value (2.3% of GDP), and employed 26,574 people, or 3.8%

of total employment. While the number of enterprises has grown strongly over time, employment peaked in 2015 and has since declined, indicating a shift toward micro-enterprises, self-employment, and project-based work. The average creative enterprise employed only 1.9 people, compared to 2.7 nationally, and many enterprises reported having no employees at all, particularly in the arts.[98] Just like in Lithuania, the normative idea of a self-sufficient, heroic and profitable cultural entrepreneur is a policy ideal that has little relation either to the structure of the sector lived reality or lived reality of artists.

There is, in this way, an ongoing concern by the national cultural policy makers about the lack of progress of the CCI approach in both Estonia and Lithuania. Interestingly, with the changing political context, particularly growing polarization in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the normative idea of entrepreneurship appears to recede, giving way to renewed debates about artistic autonomy and freedom of speech. In 2025 Lithuania saw the first mass demonstrations on the scale unseen since 1988–1989 as creative communities gathered to protest against impediment of the self-regulation of arts, culture and media sectors.[99] Estonian theatre community joined a pan-EU protest to demand the government to secure the freedom of expression.[100] These protests reasserted the importance of the arm's length model at the same time re-introducing the political role of arts and culture as key pillars of democracy.



The cultural community protests in Lithuania 2025 were the first mass demonstrations on a scale unseen since 1988–1989. PHOTO: ROBERTAS RIABOVAS/BNS

Concluding discussion

Artistic autonomy and cultural entrepreneurship in the changing cultural policy

In this article, we have explored the travel of ideas of cultural industries and cultural entrepreneurship to Finland, Sweden, Estonia and Lithuania, situating them within longer historical developments and different institutional trajectories. Finland and Sweden developed cultural policies within the Nordic welfare-state model, emphasizing freedom of expression, artistic autonomy, accessibility and public responsibility for supporting the arts. Arm's-length arrangements sought to separate political decision-making from artistic funding, while grants and other forms of public support aimed to secure the conditions for artistic work. Estonia and Lithuania followed different trajectories, shaped by nation-building, Soviet rule and the transition to democracy and market economies. These differences continue to shape how artistic autonomy, public support and market participation are understood. In both Lithuania and Estonia, the cultural industries idea initially met resistance from artists, who shared a Kantian approach to "disinterested" art, an aesthetic value which had a political significance in the local context, where all cultural values were subordinated to the communist ideology during the Soviet occupation. However, even in these post-Soviet societies, this Kantian position was eventually replaced by the official, pragmatist approach that art should be socially and economically useful and form part of export goods, a key area for growth for a small economy.[101] Resistance to CCI among artists and decision makers was also a feature in Finland and Sweden, where the pragmatic turn also took place, albeit somewhat later in Sweden than in Finland.

SINCE THE 1990S, all four countries have experienced a growing policy emphasis on the economic dimensions of culture and on cultural and creative industries. This has brought entrepreneurship increasingly into cultural-policy discourse. Across the countries, policymakers have presented cultural entrepreneurship as a means of strengthening artists' economic self-reliance and reducing dependence on public funding. Yet our analysis suggests that this should be understood primarily as a policy project and discourse, rather than as an established social reality. How far artists actually identify with entrepreneurship and what entrepreneurial activity means in artists' everyday work, is a question policy documents cannot answer directly. Recent research suggest that it varies considerably. Our analysis is based mainly on policy documents and where we refer to artists' responses, we also draw on different kinds of positions documented, in public debates and in previous research, rather than on direct empirical study of artists themselves.

Cultural entrepreneurship as a contested policy project

The policy idea of the artist-as-entrepreneur draws partly on a romanticized representation of entrepreneurship, in which artists and entrepreneurs are seen as sharing qualities such as self-motivation, risk tolerance, independence, creativity and the capacity to create novelty under conditions of uncertainty.[102] These similarities should not, however, be treated as evidence that artists are inherently entrepreneurial. Rather,

they are part of a discourse through which particular qualities and forms of behavior are constructed as desirable for artists. In the policy material examined here, entrepreneurial orientation is repeatedly presented as something artists should develop.

This distinction is important because cultural entrepreneurship is not a neutral or self-evident category. The Schumpeterian entrepreneur, for example, is conceptualized as an individual agent of innovation and economic development who creates new markets and economic value.[103] Such a model cannot simply be transferred to artistic work. Artists may organize their work, seek income, develop audiences and take risks, but these practices do not necessarily make economic growth, profit or market expansion their primary objectives. Nor does the existence of entrepreneurial practices establish entrepreneurship as the appropriate identity or normative model for artists.

OUR FINDINGS instead suggest that entrepreneurship functions as a contested translation of artistic work into economic and policy terms. It is promoted as a solution to precariousness and limited public funding, but the conditions under which this solution is expected to operate are themselves politically produced. Cultural markets are not functioning commercial markets, but mixed and subsidized ones, in which artists combine grants, employment, self-employment, sales, private support and unpaid work.[104] Although an early ideal of cultural policy was to educate the masses in arts and culture so that they would become consumers on an art market there is no perfect market for arts and culture in the Nordic and Baltic countries. Rather, the ideas of CCI increasingly appear to refer to an imaginary market that struggles to materialize. The entrepreneurial ideal therefore sits uneasily within the actual institutional and economic conditions of artistic work. Digital platformization, streaming and generative AI further complicate an individualistic model of the entrepreneur by redistributing agency and value creation across platforms, technologies and networks.

"ENTREPRENEURSHIP CAN THUS FUNCTION SIMULTANEOUSLY AS A POSSIBLE SOURCE OF INDEPENDENCE AND AS A POTENTIAL SOURCE OF NEW FORMS OF EXTERNAL CONTROL."

Entrepreneurship and artistic autonomy

Across the four cases, we found a persistent tension between entrepreneurial expectations and artistic autonomy. Previous research does not suggest that artists uniformly reject entrepreneurship. Interest in entrepreneurial skills and practices has increased, particularly where public funding and stable employment are limited. In Finland, for example, younger artists appear more familiar with entrepreneurship and somewhat more positive towards it.[105] Yet studies also indicate that entrepreneurial practices may be adopted pragmatically rather than as an affirmative professional identity: entrepreneurship can be understood as one of the available ways of organizing work and income.[106]

THIS DISTINCTION between entrepreneurship as practice and entrepreneurship as normative identity is central to our interpretation of these developments. Artists may undertake entrepreneurial activities without accepting the policy discourse that presents the entrepreneurial artist as an ideal. Conversely, being formally classified as an entrepreneur may have consequences for social security and access to unemployment benefits, as documented in Sweden, Finland and Estonia. Such conditions can produce what has been described as compulsory entrepreneurship: artists are encouraged or required to assume entrepreneurial forms without necessarily acquiring the economic security associated with entrepreneurship.[107]

The relationship with artistic autonomy is consequently ambivalent. On the one hand, generating income independently of public funding can reduce artists' dependence on policy priorities and funding criteria. On the other hand, dependence on clients, markets and commercial demand may influence what artists create, for whom, and under what conditions. Entrepreneurship can thus function simultaneously as a possible source of independence and as a potential source of new forms of external control. The issue is therefore not whether entrepreneurship is inherently compatible or incompatible with autonomy, but under what institutional and economic conditions particular entrepreneurial practices expand or constrain artists' capacity to determine their work.

Our findings also show that the idea of artistic autonomy has not disappeared with the rise of cultural and creative industries policy. On the contrary, artistic unions, cultural-policy authorities and other actors in all four countries have continued to question the treatment of art as an industry and to emphasize the distinctive values of artistic work. This reflects the longstanding modernist construction of the cultural field around artistic freedom and relative independence from economic values.[108] For more than two decades, cultural-policy debates and research in the four countries have repeatedly problematized marketization, thereby reasserting artistic autonomy as a policy concern.

AT THE SAME TIME, the conditions underpinning autonomy have become more fragile. Public funding cuts and the expectation that cultural markets can provide sufficient income weaken the positive freedom of artists to sustain themselves without depending on commercial success.[109] This reveals a central contradiction in contemporary cultural policy: artistic autonomy may be formally affirmed while the material conditions required to exercise it are increasingly shifted towards individual responsibility and market participation. Recent scholarship similarly calls for renewed attention to art and culture as valuable in their own right and to the lived conditions of creative workers.[110]

An unresolved and empirical relationship

The comparative perspective does not therefore reveal a simple transition from publicly supported art towards market-oriented entrepreneurship. Rather, it shows a recurring attempt to reconcile artistic autonomy with expectations of economic self-reliance, entrepreneurship and market participation. The form this tension takes varies according to national policy legacies: aesthetic and common-good arguments are particularly visible in Sweden, pragmatic concerns about autonomy and livelihoods in Finland, post-Soviet understandings of artistic autonomy in Estonia, and questions of precarity and collective representation in Lithuania.

The contribution of this study is consequently not to establish a simple opposition between entrepreneurship and artistic autonomy. Instead, it demonstrates how entrepreneurship has been promoted as a policy solution and how this discourse has been translated into different institutional contexts. Across the four cases, entrepreneurship remains only partially established as an artistic identity and cultural policy objective. Artists continue to combine governmental and private grants, employment, self-employment, commercial income and unpaid work, while the meaning and significance of these practices remain contested.

Entrepreneurship should therefore be treated neither as an inherent characteristic of artists nor as a self-evident response to changing economic conditions. It is a politically and institutionally constructed category whose meanings and consequences must also be examined empirically. The key question for cultural policy is consequently not whether artists should become entrepreneurs, but how particular forms of entrepreneurialization reshape the economic, institutional and professional conditions of artistic work – and, ultimately, the possibilities for artistic autonomy. The tension between entrepreneurial expectations and artistic autonomy is thus not merely a temporary transition but an unresolved and constitutive feature of contemporary cultural policy.

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