

Pauli Rautiainen

"EMME OLE VOINEET TÄNÄ VUONNA..."

Kielteisen taiteilija-apurahapäätöksen vuodelle 2006 saaneiden taiteellinen toiminta ja heidän arvionsa taiteilija-apurahajärjestelmän toimivuudesta

Työpapereita 46 – Taiteen keskustoimikunta

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ISBN 978-952-5253-68-9
ISSN 0788-5318

Taiteen keskustoimikunta
Helsinki 2008

ENGLISH SUMMARY

Working papers
Publication no. 46
Research unit of the Arts Council of Finland
Helsinki 2008

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"UNFORTUNATELY WE COULD NOT..." – EFFECTS OF DENIAL DECISIONS ON GRANTS

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In Finland, direct state support for individual artists plays a major role in the situation of artists. The Artists' Grants Act, adopted in 1969, established the support schemes of working grants, project grants and artists' professorships. Working grants for artists are the most important scheme of support both in financial terms and in terms of prestige. They are awarded for periods ranging from six months to five years. About 2,000 artists apply for working grants annually. Of these, 500 artists receive them. They represent all fields of art. The annual sum granted is the same for all recipients (€ 14,963 in 2006). The basic criterion for distributing state support for artists is artistic quality. The applicant's social and economic situation is not to be considered in the decision-making.

AIM, DATA AND METHODS

This study looks at the functionality and effectiveness of the working grant system from the viewpoint of the artist who receives a denial decision on his or her working grant application. The study has two parts.

The first part contains statistical analyses of how well the artists who received a denial decision on a working grant for the year 2006 succeeded in getting other forms of state support (i.e. project grants, travel grants, library

grants) for that year. The data has been obtained from the joint grant register of the Arts Council of Finland and the Ministry of Education (Harava-register).

The second part of the study contains the results of a survey based on recipients' assessments of the effects of the denial decision and the functionality of the working grant system. The study population consists of artists who applied for a working grant for 2006. A questionnaire was sent to a total of 712 artists and the response rate was 64 per cent.

RESULTS

In general, a denial decision does not have a very dramatic effect on either the artistic work or the financial situation of an artist. Despite the decision artists continue their artistic work, for which they manage quite well to find funding from other sources. In the field of free arts (ie. literature, visual arts, photography) the main sources of alternative funding are foundations, although in literature, library grants for creative literature work granted by a special governmental body (Board for grants and subsidies to writers and translators) have significant importance. In the field of the more institutionalized arts (i.e. theatre) the artist often gets a salary from art institutions.

According to the survey and statistical analyses carried out in the study, other forms of state grants do not generally have any special financial significance for the artists receiving a denial decision. The only major exception is the earlier mentioned library grant for writers. In other forms of state grants, the sum of money granted is often quite small and it is very rare that one artist should receive several different grants within the same year. Nevertheless, other forms of state grants sometimes have financial significance for individuals who have received a denial decision..

These artists often have several income sources and hold multiple jobs. They often get the money needed to finance their artistic work from jobs which are arts-related (i.e. teaching in an art school), but quite many work at least part-time or part of the year in a non-art job. Artists' financial need to

work in an arts-related or a non-art job in addition to doing their artistic work definitely influences their everyday life and artistic work. This study, however, has shown that this does not inhibit artistic work. Finnish artists seem to be used to the situation. In fact, previous studies have shown that multiple jobholding and several income sources actually characterise their working life and career .

Since the working grant application holds the promise of a more stable working environment and the opportunity to fully concentrate on uncompelled and freely chosen artistic work, a denial decision often has considerably negative mental effects. It is a disappointment which some can take as a major sign of personal failure. In such cases a denial decision devitalizes artistic work and can cause or worsen psychic problems. According to the survey negative mental effects are quite common, but only rarely do they become unconquerable.

This and previous studies have shown that getting a negative working grant decision is just a normal juncture, which happens quite regularly to every professional artist. Some get it more often and some less. Almost all the artists in the study population had previously applied for and got some kind of grant either from the state or from foundations. About 80 % had applied previously for a working grant and 40 % had also received one – although it is worth noting that the differences among different fields of arts were notable.

According to this study female artists in comparison with male artists more often face all the negative effects of a denial decision – whether we are speaking about unemployment, difficulties in financing artistic work or mental reactions to the decision. Female artists representing visual arts experienced extremely strong negative effects. This supports the findings of previous studies that although the working grant system itself seems to operate quite equally between sexes, its relation to other systems (such as the social security system) and real life situations seems to cause more problems for women than for men.

This study, in connection with the previous study about the functionality and effectiveness of the state's working grant system³³, shows how the principle of distributing grants to as many as possible has become one of the central metaprinciples guiding the grant decision-making process. Arts? councils tend to refrain from situations where large numbers of grants are acquired by one artist within a year or within the artist's career. It seems that the "to as many as possible" principle was adopted by the state support system during the 1990s. The decision to shelve the system of 15- year-long working grants made in the middle of the 1990s can be seen as the manifestation of that principle. That leads me to ask: Is the Finnish state support system in general level shifting from pure quality thinking towards some kind of social fairness? And does that shifting go back to explicitly made cultural political decisions or has it happened quite unintentionally?

³³ Rautiainen Pauli 2006: Taiteilija-apurahajärjestelmän toimivuus ja koettu vaikuttavuus. Selvitys valtion taiteilija-apurahan saajista 2002-2005. Taiteen keskustoimikunta. Helsinki 2006. (Publication contains english summary: Artists' grants in action: functions of the state working grant system.)