



Qualitative study of the work situation for musicians and theatre artists following the COVID-19 pandemic

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Foreword

Proba Research hereby presents the final report for the *Qualitative study of the work situation for musicians and theatre artists following the COVID-19 pandemic* on behalf of Arts and Culture Norway.

This project was implemented by Ida Gram (project manager), Rune Busch (project assistant) and Trude Thorbjørnsrud (quality assurance).

We would like to thank all our interviewees, who very kindly agreed to be interviewed and shared their experiences with us. We would also like to thank Anja Nylund Hagen, our contact at Arts and Culture Norway, for excellent communication throughout the project.

The draft report has been discussed with the client, while all assessments and conclusions are Proba's own.

Oslo, 23 January 2023

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Summary and conclusions

Summary

Proba Research has conducted a study on behalf of Arts and Culture Norway concerning the work situation for artists following the pandemic. This study was conducted between September and November 2022 and sheds light on topics such as artists' working life affiliation during and after the pandemic, the physical work situation, the relationship between production and distribution and encounters with audiences, conditions for international work and motivation and views on their own work. The study is based on fifteen qualitative interviews with artists in music and the performing arts.

The study shows that most artists were able to keep working during the pandemic, although several state that they experienced temporary setbacks in terms of motivation and that the situation was financially challenging at times. It would appear that the pandemic has provided a wake-up call in terms of working and income conditions for artists, and our interviewees have become more aware of how they should organise their work situation going forward. At the same time, a number of people say that they were given new impetus to create and produce art, and quite a lot of people benefited from the various funding schemes that were established to compensate for loss of earnings during the pandemic. The motivation to continue as an artist and take artistic risks remains unchanged, while there appears to be slightly less willingness now to take financial risks.

The study also shows that artists, like the rest of society, gained a lot of experience of working with digital tools during the pandemic. While digital meetings and digital studio production are examples of working methods that will continue to be applied, artists' attitudes towards streaming music and performing arts events are mostly negative. Our interviewees have different perceptions of whether audiences will return, and many express uncertainty about what the future holds for them. However, one consequence of the pandemic is that artists have become even more concerned about the value of audiences, how they can attract and make themselves relevant to audiences, and express a desire to know more about this topic.

Artists who operate internationally state that their travelling activities have returned to the same level as before the pandemic. However, they also say that international activity and collaboration have become more challenging as the financial circumstances of partners outside Norway are poorer, alongside the fact that touring internationally has become more expensive.

Background

The world entered a state of emergency with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first case of COVID-19 in Norway was recorded on 26 February 2020, and what are termed the strictest and most extensive peacetime measures in Norway came into force on 12 March (NOU 2021: 6). The cultural sector was one of the hardest hit by the infection control measures, with significant impact on finances in the sector, particularly in the first few months of the pandemic. At the same time, significant financial measures were implemented by the Norwegian authorities to compensate companies and workers for loss of income.

A survey of Norwegian artists (Kleppe and Askvik, 2021) indicates a limited drop in total income, but also major differences between different groups of artists, musicians and performing artists in particular reporting loss of income. The report also shows that the

pandemic has had an adverse impact on artists' mental health, but that relatively few of them fear they will be unable to work with art after the pandemic. The report "Kunst i tall 2021" [Art in Figures 2021] (Stampe et al., 2022) indicates a major drop in income in the music industry, and in particular the performing arts industry. A number of other reports also address the work situation for artists before, during and after the pandemic, and indicate a need for more information about artists' working life affiliation.

Issues

The primary objective of this study is to obtain information about the work situation for artists following the pandemic, their experiences during the pandemic, and how the pandemic has altered their working lives and motivation. A common theme in this study is the tension between artistic motivation and a desire for independence on the one hand, and the need for a certain degree of stability in terms of employment and earnings on the other. This topic has very much come to the fore during the pandemic. The study is based on five main issues:

1. How has the pandemic altered artists' working life affiliation, and what experiences and assessments have individual artists encountered throughout the period?
2. What impact has the pandemic had on the physical work situation for artists? How has digitalisation affected production, distribution and collaboration across different fields?
3. What aspects have artists encountered with regard to accessibility, capacity and "bottleneck problems"? What impact is this having on financial circumstances, the work situation, artistic quality and diversity?
4. How has the pandemic influenced artists' ambitions and opportunities for international activity and collaboration?
5. Has the pandemic resulted in changes to artists' motivation and self-perception?

Conclusions

Artists' working life affiliation

We find that artists who had established an artistic career before the pandemic – which is the case for most of our interviewees – were largely able to maintain their work levels and coped financially throughout the pandemic despite the fact that many of them say things were very difficult at times, and that they had to dip into their savings. The various funding schemes established during the pandemic appear to have worked well, and many of our interviewees applied for and were awarded funding.

Risk, unpredictability and uncertain income are largely perceived as a fundamental aspect of being an artist. Nevertheless, our interviews indicate that the pandemic provided a number of our interviewees with a wake-up call in respect of their work situation, working and income conditions and the lack of regulation in their industry. Although the willingness to take artistic risks appears to remain unchanged, more people are saying they have become more concerned with maintaining a stable and predictable income than was the case before the pandemic. One important insight from this study is that artists who run their own companies and wear many hats on behalf of their own organisations found the pandemic to be a particularly stressful time.

The physical work situation and digitalisation experiences

Our interviews show that artists have differing experiences when it comes to access to production facilities after the pandemic. While some say there are fewer venues than before, others are finding the opposite and state that access to venues is good. One

consequence of the pandemic for both performing and creative artists, as for stakeholders in other sectors, was that more people worked from home. A number of our interviewees say they will continue to do so, for both practical and financial reasons. Furthermore, many of them say that they scaled down the “circus” around production and distribution and did more of the work themselves. Examples are given in our interviews of how more local, independent and more artist-driven and artist-centred productions played an active part during the pandemic, in both music and the performing arts.

This study supports findings from a number of earlier surveys as regards experiences with production, distribution and collaboration via digital platforms: these show that many artists have negative attitudes towards streaming shows, for instance. This is because they feel that face-to-face encounters with audiences, gauging their response, are very important. That said, a number of people have gained experience with digital tools that they will carry on using after the pandemic. This includes the use of digital platforms for meetings, digital tools for composing and producing music, and development of visual elements.

[Production, distribution and encounters with audiences after the pandemic](#)

This study suggests that the production of art and culture was largely maintained throughout the pandemic. Those artists who had the requisite capabilities, capacity and motivation shifted their work from tasks related to distribution to tasks related to production. A number of artists found that productions ended up “queuing” when they reopened, and that gaining access to theatres and concert halls, particularly outside Norway, still presents a challenge.

Our interviewees have slightly different perceptions of whether audiences have returned to art and culture offerings, and the issue of absent audiences appears to be very important to our interviewees. When asked to explain why they think audiences are not turning out, they say that the pandemic has resulted in audiences developing new habits, that culture offerings cost too much, and a certain concern that elements of culture offerings are unappealing. Another explanation is that culture is regarded more as entertainment than as a source to inspire discussion and reflection. One important insight from this study is that the pandemic has made it even clearer to artists that art and culture are dependent on recipients for their value. This means that more people are increasingly keen to use new methods for reaching out to audiences – preferably larger, more diverse audiences. Co-creation and involvement are referred to as important initiatives in this regard. Artists are also requesting more information on what it takes to attract audiences, and what is needed for audiences to perceive culture offerings as relevant.

[International activity and collaboration](#)

International activity and collaboration are important for many artists as a source of work, income, artistic development and artistic status. Dancers in particular appear to be a group of artists for whom international activity is very important for their career development. The pandemic does not appear to have put an end to international activity and collaboration, but the interviews would suggest that cross-border collaboration has become more challenging since the pandemic. This is primarily due to the fact that partners in other countries are in a poorer financial situation, as a result of both the pandemic and the cost of living crisis that has been seen in recent months. Moreover, international touring has become more expensive. A number of interviewees also state that environmental and climate considerations make them want to travel less than they used to.

Motivation and views on their own work

The main impression gained from the study is that the pandemic did not alter artists' motivation to continue as artists. However, many experienced a sharp drop in motivation and inspiration for working with art during the pandemic, partly because they felt that the authorities downplayed the importance of art and culture: Cultural activities were the first to be shut down and the last to be reopened. Other artists saw the pandemic as an opportunity to develop their artistic practice and indicate that they were freshly motivated to produce new works and explore new formats.

The interviewees in this study can probably be characterised as relatively successful, most of them having well-established careers in the arts when the pandemic struck. This is reflected in the fact that none of them have changed professions, although some have taken on different tasks and affiliations within their fields. The vast majority of them also state that the pandemic has not altered their ability or willingness to take artistic risks, but their willingness to take financial risks appears to have diminished to an extent. The impression is that most of them coped financially throughout the pandemic, both because they had established careers and because they benefited from various COVID-19 schemes. Things many have been different if we had recruited a different selection of interviewees, such as artists with less established careers or artists straight out of education.

Assessment and summary

The impression from this study is that the pandemic has made artists more aware of their own work situations; both what it means to be an artist and their own motivation to work with art after the pandemic. They have also developed a need for a better general perspective and better regulation of income and labour conditions. For some, this means that applying for permanent positions in the art field – of which, admittedly, there are few – or focusing on second jobs that provide more sources of income and more predictable finances may now be of interest. Several of our interviewees already have permanent full-time or part-time positions that they want to continue with. That said, their artistic drive is strong and the need for independence is great, which is why many of them accept financial uncertainty as a consequence of pursuing their art. In this regard, it would take more than a pandemic to persuade artists to change profession, even though some of them suffered a blow to their motivation and were disappointed by the signals that the authorities were giving off to artists. Some of them also express disappointment that audiences view art and culture primarily as a source of entertainment, rather than as a source of reflection, debate and development. However, one clear finding from this study is that the pandemic has made artists even more aware of the value of having an audience. A number of our interviewees are concerned about how they can reach out to audiences again – preferably larger, more diverse audiences.

Many of our interviewees are concerned about the extent to which – and possibly when – audiences will return and have different perceptions and experiences. There appears to be a great need for more information about what it takes to be perceived as relevant and attract an audience. This study has given the impression that there is a need for more information about audience preferences, the mechanisms that arise in encounters between artists and audiences, and the framework conditions necessary for good encounters with audiences.

This study has also highlighted other issues and topics worthy of further research. One question is how things have gone for artists who are less successful than the ones included in this study. Another question relates to the situation for artists straight out of

education, who felt that their opportunities to practise their profession and build networks were severely limited. A number of people also mention freelancers as a particularly vulnerable group of artists about whom more information is needed.

Little research seems to have been done on the perspective of artists as employers. It is well known that many artists in the independent sphere are self-employed, but perhaps less attention has been paid to artists who employ other people. In this study, we have interviewed a number of artists who are also business executives with financial, personnel and administrative responsibilities – particularly challenging aspects during the pandemic. This is a topic that invites further research, given the emphasis in Norwegian cultural policy on culture as an industry.

1 Introduction and methodology

The aim of this study is to obtain more information about artists' work situation in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study is part of the project "Post-Covid Adaptation Models in Culture", which is a collaboration between Arts and Culture Norway and the Arts and Theatre Institute in Czechia. Proba Research has conducted the study on behalf of Arts and Culture Norway.

The collaborative project will provide information about artists' work situation and conditions in the international arena after the pandemic. This report sheds light on the situation for creative and performing artists working with music and the performing arts in Norway and their work situation and conditions after the pandemic. The report primarily provides information on how the pandemic has affected artists' work situation, working on the basis of five different topics: 1) artists' working life affiliation, 2) the physical work situation, 3) the relationship between production and distribution, 4) conditions for international work, and 5) motivation and views on their own work.

1.1 Background

The Coronavirus Commission's report (NOU 2021: 6) refers to the pandemic as the greatest crisis in Norway since the Second World War. The infection control measures affected many people severely, despite the fact that the Norwegian measures are described as less invasive than those in many other Western countries (NOU 2021: 6, 23). The Norwegian economy experienced the most severe downturn since the war years (1940–1945), and the report shows that tourism and cultural activities were particularly affected, value creation in the culture industry being almost halved in the first six months of 2020 (NOU 2021: 6, 435). The report "Sterkere tilbake" [Back stronger] (Bekeng-Flemmen et al., 2022), which presents a major investigation into the impact of the pandemic on the cultural sector in Norway, also points out that this sector was one of the hardest hit in financial terms, but that value creation picked up sharply towards the end of 2021.

The report "Kunstnerne og koronapandemien" [Artists and the COVID-19 pandemic] (Kleppe and Askvik, 2021), which is based on a major survey of various groups of artists, shows that total income among artists fell by just 1 per cent between 2019 and 2020. However, the same report also shows that there are major differences between different groups of artists. Primarily musicians and performing artists report a loss of income, with musicians experiencing the greatest drop in income from artistic pursuits. Popular musicians report the largest drop in income, down 22 per cent for income from artistic pursuits and 7 per cent for total income (Kleppe and Askvik, 2021, 55). Among performing artists, actors report the greatest drop in income. The same report also highlights factors other than finances and income, including mental stress as a result of the pandemic, views on the future and motivation to continue working with the arts. Many of the artists who responded to the survey said that the pandemic has had an adverse impact on their mental health. Despite this, for the most part it is clear that relatively few people fear being unable to work with the arts after the pandemic. However, the younger the respondents are, the more likely they are to express this fear.

The latest survey of artists (Kleppe and Askvik, 2023) – which, admittedly, is based on figures older than those presented in "Kunstnerne og koronapandemien" – paints a slightly different picture. This survey shows that 13 out of 16 groups of artists saw an

income trend between 2016 and 2019 that was higher than the trend in the rest of the population for the same period. If 2020, one of the years of the pandemic, is included, all groups of artists have seen a better income trend than the rest of the population (Kleppe and Askvik, 2023, 11). However, as the authors indicate, the fact that performing artists, in particular musicians, are not included in the study to any great extent presents a significant limitation. Kleppe and Askvik (2023) also refer to previous studies concluding that artists do not have significantly lower total income than the rest of the population, considering artists' income as a whole. However, there is a great deal of variation between different groups of artists. The authors also problematise the use of total income as a measure of working and income conditions. This is explained by the fact that

... if there is a desire in cultural policy to maintain an artist population of a certain size and artists are trained specifically for artistic work, the fact that artists are busy with other income-generating work to ensure their own welfare instead of working with art may be regarded as a problem (Kleppe and Askvik, 2023, 46, our translation).¹

The "Kunst i tall" [Art in Figures] reports show the income trend in the music, literature, visual arts and performing arts industries in Norway. Total revenue for 2021 is estimated at NOK 13.9 billion. This represents a drop of NOK 130 million compared to 2020, equivalent to one per cent. Looking at developments over the last two years, which mark the period of the pandemic, the culture industry has seen an overall decline of more than NOK 1.1 billion, or eight per cent (Stampe et al., 2022, 9). That said, there are a few major differences between various industries. The music and performing arts industry experienced major drops in revenue, in particular the latter, falling 53 per cent in 2020 compared to 2019, and a further 23 per cent fall in 2021. The performing arts industry experienced an overall drop of 64 per cent during the pandemic compared to 2019 (Stampe et al., 2022, 94). Although the figures relate to the industry and not individuals, they do, however, indicate the seriousness of the situation. One exception to the negative trend is *Den kulturelle skolesekken* [The Cultural Backpack] (DKS), which is an important employer for a number of artists, including some of the participants in this study. DKS saw a positive revenue trend between 2020 and 2021, up 117 per cent. According to the authors, this can be explained by the fact that the 2020 figures were very low, and that the figures for 2021 show a decline compared to 2019 (Stampe et al., 2022, 105).

Artists all over the world were affected by the pandemic, and a number of studies (including Berge et al., 2021) indicate that the situation for Norwegian artists operating in an international market is also uncertain in the wake of the pandemic. Berge (2022) explains this by stating that artists who operate internationally were hit hard as they received little compensation for the loss of income resulting from the international element of their work.

The surveys referred to above provide a picture of the situation for musicians, performing artists and others during the pandemic. However, there is relatively little emphasis on the artists' own voices and reflections on how the pandemic affected their day-to-day work and motivation to continue working as artists. The purpose of this report is to highlight the voices and experiences of a selection of artists, both as a supplement to previous surveys and to identify topics and issues that may be of interest as subjects for further research.

¹ Original: "... dersom en har et kulturpolitisk ønske om en kunstnerbefolkning av et visst omfang, og man utdanner kunstnere til nettopp kunstnerisk arbeid, kan det anses som et problem at kunstnerne er opptatt med annet inntektsbringende arbeid for å sikre egen velferd i stedet for å jobbe med kunst."

It is not long since cultural activities reopened after the pandemic, and it is too early to conclude what consequences the pandemic will have in the longer term. There is a need to find out more about artists' work situation and conditions with a view to developing further artist policy and potential legal, political and economic measures to ensure that artists enjoy the best possible working conditions. Given this fact, the government has initiated work on a new report on artists. A fast track working group has been set up, tasked with proposing guiding principles for determination of reasonable payment for artistic work such as production, assignments and distribution. This working group is to submit its report by 1 April 2023.

1.2 Study implementation: methodology and data sources

The most important data in this study come from qualitative interviews with 15 artists working in music and performing arts in Norway. As one of the primary objectives of this study has been to obtain information about the work situation for artists after the coronavirus pandemic from artists' own standpoint, this is a very appropriate method that allows interviewees to explain their experiences and reflections. Besides the interviews, we have briefly reviewed relevant literature on the impact of the pandemic on the cultural sector and artists, primarily in Norway. This review has been useful as a way of contextualising our findings from the interviews, and also for developing relevant research questions for the interview guides.

All interviews are one-on-one interviews, conducted in person at Proba's premises (six interviews), via Teams or over the telephone (nine interviews). All the interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide that was devised in discussion with the client: this is enclosed with this report. Some of our interviewees were sent the interview guide prior to the interview upon request, while all of them received information about the purpose of the study and relevant topics and issues, as well as information about the processing of personal data.

The interview guide generally worked well, despite the fact it includes quite a lot of topics and survey questions. As comparing experiences among our interviewees was one of our objectives, we felt it was important to stick closely to the interview guide, but providing scope for our interviewees to place emphasis on the topics that interested them most.

The interviews were 45 to 60 minutes long and were transcribed. No audio or video recordings of the interviews were made.

The study was reported to and approved by Data Protection Services for Research at the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (formerly NSD). All personal data has been kept confidential, and only staff working on the project have had access to the interview reports.

1.2.1 More information about analysis of the material

We have conducted a thematic analysis of the data, based on the five main issues. We have placed emphasis on comparing findings across and within various groups of artists and fields of art, as well as factors such as professional experience, career history, age and geographical location. That said, we have been working with limited data, with relatively few interviewees from each field. We have used a number of quotations in the report to illustrate examples or descriptions of situations. All quotations are labelled with a short code in brackets, referring to the interview number and artist group/artistic field.

We use D to indicate dance artists/dance, M for musicians/music and T for actors/theatre. For instance, the code D1 indicates that the first interview was with a representative of dance.

1.2.2 Selection and recruitment of interviewees

One aim of the study was to obtain information about the work situation among a selection of artists working in the field of music and performing arts in Norway. “Artist” is not a protected title. Kleppe and Askvik (2021) discuss who is defined as an artist, and define the artist population on the basis of three criteria: awards from Government Grants for Artists, membership of a union for artists, and owners of sole proprietorships registered with an industry code relating to artistic activities (Kleppe and Askvik, 2021, 9–10).

Our study is not based on any such definition, although a number of our interviewees state that they received, or have previously received, grants for artists, and a number of them run sole proprietorships working with artistic activities. We did not ask our interviewees whether they are members of unions for artists out of concern for their privacy, but some of them did state, without being asked, that they received assistance from various unions for artists during the pandemic. We selected interviewees strategically and placed emphasis on recruitment of interviewees from the fields that were hit hardest by the pandemic insofar as they were prevented from practising their profession as performative artists to a lesser or greater degree.

Our recruitment is based on experience from previous Proba projects in the culture field, input from the client and aspects that we can characterise as the “snowball method”. Our interviewees include creative and performing musicians working in various genres, conductors, dancers, choreographers, actors and directors. A number of our interviewees are active in a number of roles and vary the work they do, either cyclically or in parallel. This means that one and the same person may be a performing artist, a composer, a choreographer, a director, a producer, an artistic director, a general manager, and so forth. We interviewed a total of six interviewees working in dance, five working in music and four working in theatre.

Our aim has been to recruit interviewees who are at different stages in their artistic careers, both fairly “new” and more established artists. Our interviewees are aged from 27 to 65, most of them being just under 40 years of age. Eight of our interviewees are women, seven are men. We have aimed to recruit interviewees who live and work in different parts of the country. We have also endeavoured to recruit interviewees with experience of international work, in the form of either touring and/or collaboration with artists and art communities outside Norway.

This last point – international experience/focus – means that we have consulted artists with a certain level of success, as Berge (2022) also mentions in his report. This also characterises our interviewees, and so the study perhaps represents those who generally coped with the pandemic relatively well, although a number of them report a decline in both motivation and income. Although our interviewees are relatively young overall, few of them are brand new artists. It should be noted here that the significance of age may vary in the professional groups included in this study: for instance, the retirement age for dancers is significantly lower than the retirement age in the labour market in general. The data would probably have looked different if we had used a different recruitment strategy and other selection criteria as our basis.

We applied the following criteria as a basis when recruiting interviewees:

- Experience/number of years working as an artist
- Age
- Gender
- Geographical location (place of work and residence)
- Cultural/ethnic background
- International experience/focus

All candidates were contacted by telephone or email and were provided with information about the study and the processing of personal data. About one-third of the people contacted said they did not want to participate in the study, primarily because they did not have enough time. Some also said that they did not want to take part unless they received payment. This feedback was communicated to the client, who decided that all interviewees should be offered a fee. However, none of our interviewees included in the study said that they required a fee for their participation, though all were offered a fee after the interviews were completed, and all accepted the offer.

2 Artists' working life affiliation

This chapter takes a closer look at what characterised artists' working life affiliation at the start of the pandemic, and what impact this has had on their work as artists and what they want to achieve in their future work situation. We also look at what changes they believe have taken place in "their" fields as a consequence of the pandemic, including the impact on dropouts and recruitment, as well as their experiences of applying for funding from the various COVID-19 schemes set up, as well as other funding schemes.

2.1 Patchwork economy and unpredictability

Working as an artist involves a great deal of uncertainty – this is not news. Both Kleppe and Askvik (2023) and Mangset et al. (2022) point to a number of national and international studies showing that artists have lower incomes than other professional groups with similar education levels, and a number of studies also describe how many artists live with constant underemployment or low income. Low income is explained by what is known as the "work-preference" theory, which implies that artists are motivated by artistic work rather than income (Kleppe and Askvik, 2023, 69). The fact that being motivated by artistic work is a strong driving force is also apparent among the interviewees in this study, and how artistic motivation and a desire for independence are balanced against the need for an acceptable working life and income, as well as how artists cope with this challenge, presents a recurring theme.

In an anthology on musicians in Norway, Røyseng et al. (2022) use a number of research articles to indicate how musicians choose to relate to the economic uncertainty associated with being a musician. One aspect of this is to build up what is referred to as "professional resilience"² (Røyseng et al., 2022, 292, our translation); that is to say, the mental capacity to endure an often-challenging profession. Another aspect relates to how musicians organise their ways of working, either by choosing "secure" careers in the form of permanent employment where they can use their music education to a greater or lesser extent, or by choosing a more precarious freelance existence as a "freelance project maker"³ or "freelance contributor"⁴ (Røyseng et al., 2022, 27, our translations).

When it comes to permanent employment for musicians, this includes the (relatively few) positions for musicians at the Norwegian Opera and Ballet, the philharmonic orchestras of Oslo and Bergen and the Norwegian Arctic Philharmonic Orchestra of Bodø and Tromsø, as well as positions for musicians associated with the Church of Norway. Teaching positions at music schools, culture schools and suchlike are also available. The impression from the interviews referred to in Røyseng et al. (2022) is that it is not unusual for interviewees to combine permanent positions with freelance assignments. This provides the opportunity for a steady and predictable income, while also allowing them an opportunity to develop as musicians through temporary projects and assignments. The most common approach appears to involve freelance work; working either as "project makers" who initiate and "run" various projects and generate work for themselves and others, or as "contributors", musicians working with various (temporary) projects, productions, orchestras and bands.

² Original: "profesjonell seighet".

³ Original: "frilans prosjektmaker".

⁴ Original: "frilans bidragsyter".

Røyseng et al. (2022) focus on musicians in Norway, but the introduction to the anthology points out that the trend towards more freelancers whose livelihoods are made up of an increasing number of different types of income sources is something that characterises the artist population as a whole (Røyseng et al., 2022, 11). This is explained by the fact that the number of artists in Norway has risen sharply in recent decades, and that competition for jobs and assignments has increased. Similar trends are discussed in Kleppe and Askvik (2023) and Mangset et al. (2022).

This literature supports a number of our findings, and most of our interviewees appear to have artistic careers in which they combine different types of tasks, assignments and sources of income in what is often referred to as a “patchwork economy”, which refers to combined income from many different pursuits and tasks (Hagen et al., 2021, 46–47).

In the case of musicians, this means – for instance – that they compose, produce and play/perform music, and that they combine different forms of working life affiliation. This means, for example, that they are employed externally by a company, institution or other organisation while also working on their own activities or for their own company. For actors, this may involve both directing and performing on stage. For dancers, this may involve both choreography and dance.

Many artists “wear a number of hats” in that they are performing artists, artistic directors and/or company managers, work with administrative tasks and have employer responsibilities in addition to their artistic responsibilities. According to those affected, this combination has proven to be particularly stressful during the pandemic. The interviewees explain this by stating that their management responsibilities are sometimes extensive, with lots of different jobs to do, from purely practical tasks related to infection control and physical arrangement of premises and performance venues to major decisions of a more strategic nature. Moreover, the pandemic brought with it a major financial burden, where consideration for the organisation’s finances had to be weighed up against consideration for employees and their opportunities to engage in work that would generate income.

A small number of interviewees in this study have permanent employment at a music or performing arts institution, and most of these people are employed full-time. However, having a permanent full-time job does not mean they do not have other jobs as well. Many of them do actually have other jobs as well, both to supplement relatively low fixed salaries and to help them develop as artists, as illustrated by this quotation:

[I work] in lots of places, but I’m in full-time permanent employment at [institutional theatre]. I’m on leave from there at the moment. It’s common. Everybody here has other jobs because of our finances and low pay. I work as a director at lots of different theatres, I’m a scriptwriter, I do voiceovers, record audiobooks, I freelance and have individual projects on the go (T3, our translation).⁵

This quotation refers to a working life that is relatable to a number of the interviewees in this study: They pursue what Hagen et al. (2021) refer to as “multiple job holding”⁶ (our translation), with various tasks, working conditions and forms of affiliation. About half of them were working as freelancers with sole proprietorships when the pandemic struck,

⁵ Original: “[Jeg jobber] mange steder, men er fast ansatt på [institusjonsteater] i hundre prosent stilling. Har permisjon derfra nå. Det er vanlig. Alle her jobber ved siden av på grunn av økonomi og lav lønn. Jeg jobber som regissør på mange forskjellige teatre, jeg er manusforfatter, gjør voice-ting, leser inn lydbok, frilanser og har enkeltprosjekter.”

⁶ Original: “mangesysleri”.

slightly fewer were employed by their own limited companies (AS), but a number of them switched from sole proprietorships to limited companies during the pandemic. The interviewees who switched to limited companies explain that this form of company provides more rights than does a sole proprietorship, and hence greater stability and predictability. The impression we gleaned from the interviews was that this discovery came as a bit of a surprise to several of our interviewees, and so the pandemic can be said to have provided them with a wake-up call in respect of rights, regulations and contracts, as emphasised by a number of our interviewees.

Most of our interviewees in the study appear to put together their professional “patchwork” using different sources of income from longer or shorter periods of work involving different tasks and forms of affiliation. They take on different roles in this regard – as creative artists, performing artists, directors, producers – or something else entirely.

2.2 Artists’ work situation during the pandemic

As we have seen in the previous sections, the work situation for artists is characterised by the fact that they combine different tasks, forms of affiliation and sources of income. This is frequently artistic work, but that is not their only pursuit. To earn sufficient income, some artists find it necessary to take on other types of work: both work where they can employ their artistic skills and work that requires no artistic skills at all. The recent survey of artists (Kleppe and Askvik, 2023) shows that work related to artistic pursuits – that is to say, work that requires artistic skills without directly being artistic work – increased between 2006 and 2019. There was an overall increase in this type of work among all groups of artists, but the greatest increase took place among artistic photographers, playwrights, non-fiction writers, art critics and popular composers. Kleppe and Askvik (2023) interpret this trend as a manifestation of increased competition in the artistic labour market, and that more artists have therefore had to take on another profession where they could employ their artistic skills (Kleppe and Askvik, 2023, 43). Increased competition and the need for a more stable income than can be earned by working solely as artists are also referred to by our interviewees, where the pandemic can be said to have provided them with a wake-up call in terms of how vulnerable and insecure the artist profession is.

A number of reports and publications refer to how artists’ working lives altered dramatically when the pandemic struck, particularly among artists working in music, dance, theatre and other art forms that rely on a collective to perform art in front of a physical audience. This total upheaval of their day-to-day working lives is also emphasised by the interviewees in this study when describing how the pandemic affected them. As we have seen, the artists in this study are at different points in their careers. Some of them have years of experience and have been through major or minor “crises” in the past, while others are fairly new to the industry and are just starting to establish a name for themselves as artists, both nationally and – to a degree – internationally. One thing they all had in common was the fact that the pandemic had a major impact on their day-to-day work, although there were differences in how the pandemic was handled, as well as the subsequent transition. The interviews also show that geographical location and reach were also significant. The coronavirus situation and the measures that were implemented varied, and while cities such as Oslo were more or less locked down at times, life went on more as normal elsewhere in Norway, including in art and cultural activities. However, everyone interviewed as part of this study stated that they had to find new ways of organising their work situations and day-to-day work.

Despite a few exceptions, our interviewees are characterised by the fact that they have a number of different jobs in order to obtain sufficient income, either in the form of various (artistic) assignments or a combination of artistic assignments, what Kleppe and Askvik (2021 and 2023) term “artistically related work”⁷, and “regular”⁸ work (our translations) in administration in the culture field, for example. Several state that they have had to or are used to “supplementing” their income with work that is not directly related to their artistic endeavours. This was true both before, and particularly during, the pandemic. Some interviewees indicate that they accepted work entirely unrelated to their work as an artist during the pandemic:

I went from having a lot to do to having nothing to do. Then I started doing a few hours in a bar. Then a few at a jeweller’s. And then I got a few gigs in fits and starts as everything started to open up. But my day-to-day working life became pretty much non-existent (M6, our translation).⁹

I started working at a nursing home – I needed to do something meaningful. There was a strong need for healthcare professionals in that situation, and I’d worked at this nursing home before. Then I was able to start working in a COVID-19 cohort. First and foremost, I needed to do something meaningful. And it was important to do other things without it feeling like a setback (T5, our translation).¹⁰

These two quotations illustrate the findings referred to above, namely the need to find other work during a time when their artistic activities and opportunities to practise their profession were severely restricted. On the one hand, there was a need for income, at least for artists who were not compensated for loss of income, or who received only limited compensation. On the other hand, the quotations highlight the need to do something else, to have something to fill their days with when they had no chance to practise their profession as artists, and in that case they ideally wanted work that they felt was meaningful in what many describe as a state of emergency.

2.3 Artists’ use of funding schemes and extraordinary COVID-19 schemes

A number of different funding schemes were implemented as a result of the pandemic to compensate for loss of income and encourage activity. There were a number of schemes to apply to in the cultural sector, such as the compensation scheme for the self-employed and freelancers provided by the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV), the compensation scheme and the incentive scheme administered by the directorate line at the Arts Council (now Arts and Culture Norway), and the extraordinary allowances announced via the Norwegian Cultural Fund and Government Grants for Artists.

⁷ Original: “kunstnerisk tilknyttet arbeid”.

⁸ Original: “vanlig”.

⁹ Original: “Jeg gikk fra å ha mye å gjøre til ingenting å gjøre. Så begynte jeg å jobbe litt i bar. Så litt i en smykkebutikk. Og så litt i rykk og napp med gigs etter hvert som samfunnet åpnet opp. Men arbeidshverdagen ble egentlig ikke-eksisterende.”

¹⁰ Original: “Jeg begynte å jobbe på sykehjem – hadde behov for å gjøre noe meningsfullt. I den situasjonen var det sterkt behov for helsepersonell, og jeg hadde erfaring fra dette sykehjemmet fra før. Da kunne jeg begynne i en koronakohort. Det var først og fremst behov for å gjøre noe meningsfullt. Og det var viktig å gjøre andre ting uten at det føltes som et nederlag.”

Moreover, special funds were announced via various organisations, foundations, private enterprises, municipalities and county administrations.

Bekeng-Flemmen et al. (2022) and others show that the compensation scheme and the incentive scheme could be used by artists to a lesser extent, but that several of the other schemes referred to above were important. This is also the impression given by the interviews in this study, where relatively few people say that they applied for funding from the compensation scheme and the incentive scheme. However, a number of interviewees say that they applied for funding from other Arts Council schemes (the Norwegian Cultural Fund), such as tour funding and project funding. Some interviewees say they were unfamiliar with the Arts Council's various schemes under the Norwegian Cultural Fund, or that they "couldn't muster the energy" to familiarise themselves with them as they came across as hard to understand.

Some of them applied for funding from NAV's compensation scheme for the self-employed and freelancers, and have different experiences of both the application process and the outcome. While some interviewees said it was easy to apply and were granted funding, others say it was "a hassle". The interviewees explain this by saying that it was difficult to understand the conditions that had to be met in order to be awarded funding, and what kind of information and documentation had to be submitted with benefit claims. The interviews in this study indicate that our interviewees have different experiences, motivations and skills linked with the actual task of filling in applications. Some of them feel that NAV is rigid, bureaucratic and difficult for artists to relate to, which to an extent appears to be because the art field is unfamiliar to NAV, and that there is no correlation between the terms used by NAV and in the art field. Similar experiences are described in some of the first reports on the impact of the pandemic on the cultural sector (Grünfeld et al., 2020). One example is that while NAV generally uses the term "wage" to describe income, this is often termed "fee" in the art field. This is emphasised by some interviewees as a source of misunderstanding, but that artists eventually came up with a solution. Others found it a challenge to work out what kind of information and documentation was required for the actual application to NAV to be approved:

I received unemployment benefit and leave allowance from NAV – that was useful. The actors' union says we receive wages and not fees, to make things clearer to NAV (T5, our translation).¹¹

I applied for funding from the compensation scheme for the self-employed under the auspices of NAV. I did get that, but I don't remember how much it was. It was a huge help. I was granted an extension on the deadline for submitting the Standard Industrial Form that they wanted, but you had to have a finalised budget in order to apply. And there was no retroactive effect, so it was almost a bit of a trap. It would have been better to just submit the Standard Industrial Form first. I think quite a few people got caught out by that. But when it all worked, it was great. You just had to understand it (D13, our translation).¹²

¹¹ Original: "Jeg fikk dagpenger og permisjonspenger fra NAV – det var nyttig. Skuespillerforbundet sier vi får lønn og ikke honorar, for å gjøre det tydeligere overfor NAV."

¹² Original: "Jeg søkte om midler fra Kompensasjonsordningen for selvstendig næringsdrivende i regi av NAV, der jeg fikk, men husker ikke hvor mye jeg fikk. Det var en kjempehjelp. Jeg fikk utsatt frist for å levere næringsoppgaven som skulle legges ved, men for å søke måtte man allerede ha et ferdig budsjett. Og det hadde ikke noen tilbakevirkende kraft, så det var nesten en litt sånn felle. Hadde vært bedre å bare levere inn næringsoppgaven først. Det tror jeg flere brant seg på. Men når den funka, var den super. Du måtte bare skjønne den."

These quotations indicate that a certain amount of “interpretation” was needed in order to find and make use of the NAV schemes, and that only a small number of our interviewees had the capacity to familiarise themselves with the system. Others applied for funding from the extraordinary allowances announced via the Norwegian Cultural Fund and Government Grants for Artists, and state that the application process was generally straightforward and that their applications were dealt with quickly. Grant funding is highlighted as particularly useful, and for some of our interviewees this was the first time they had been granted funding from Government Grants for Artists. Government Grants is a scheme that is emphasised as important by a number of our interviewees, not least because it essentially constitutes fairly “free” funding, less controlled than certain other schemes which have clearer eligibility criteria and requirements.

Other interviewees state that they applied for funding from the Fund for Performing Artists (FFUK), TONO, Creo’s crisis packages and extraordinary crisis packages and allowances announced by municipalities and county administrations. Some of them also applied for funding from local private organisations such as Sparebanken Nord-Norge, which announced special grants/funding during the pandemic.

The impression gained from the interviews is that many of our interviewees applied for funding, albeit from different sources, and that the vast majority were granted funding on the basis of one or more applications. That said, we do not have a precise overview of the amounts awarded. Schemes aimed specifically at the cultural sector are generally reported to be easier to apply for, although the larger COVID-19 schemes administered in the directorate line by the Arts Council (the compensation scheme and the incentive scheme) were felt to be less accessible. And despite a certain degree of frustration, a number of interviewees say that being an artist in Norway has some advantages:

I was at a conference in Prague – I feel a bit... Where you meet artists from other countries, I feel that we have a unique situation in Norway, with so many subsidy schemes. We have lots of money, but there are a lot of artists too. It’s very odd to take part in such discussions down there and see how little money they have, and yet they still achieve so much (D7, our translation).¹³

This quotation refers to a specific experience from one of our dance interviewees, but similar insights can be found in Mangset et al. (2022), which points out that Norwegian artists are relatively well off compared to their colleagues in other countries. This is partly due to the fact that Norwegian cultural and welfare policy is fairly generous, with relatively good public funding and grant schemes, and because Norwegian artists have greater job security than artists in many other countries (Mangset et al. 2022, 22).

2.4 Who dropped out, who got by, who emerged stronger?

A number of reports mention that artists in and outside Norway were hit hard by the pandemic, and that the pandemic helped to reinforce existing differences and vulnerabilities in the field of art and culture, albeit to varying degrees across different art fields. This study provides a number of examples of how the pandemic has affected artists’ working life affiliation, and suggests that the type of profession, working life

¹³ Original: “Jeg var på en konferanse i Praha – kjenner litt på den ... Der hvor man møter kunstnere fra andre land, så kjenner jeg at vi har en unik situasjon i Norge med så mange tilskuddsordninger. Vi har mange penger, men er også mange kunstnere. Det er veldig rart å sitte i de diskusjonene der nede og se hvor lite midler de har, og får til så mye allikevel.”

affiliation and more personal factors have all had an impact. In Norway, musicians and performing artists were the most affected by the pandemic on a financial level, and many lost large parts of their livelihoods almost overnight.

For several of the interviewees in this study, the pandemic helped to reinforce an already unstable working life affiliation, which has impacted on how they want to organise their way of working and professional practice going forward. This includes – for example – plans to apply for or maintain permanent part-time positions that provide more predictable income, both in terms of artistically related work and non-artistic work. For others, the pandemic has resulted in a shift or a change of profession, where interviewees have switched from a creative and/or performing role to production and/or management, for instance. None of our interviewees have left “their” field entirely, but their role and tasks have changed to a greater or lesser extent on the basis of a desire for more stable work and income.

Our findings on increased instability in working life correspond to concerns expressed in Bekeng-Flemmen et al. (2022), indicating that the pandemic has helped to cement or reinforce challenges and opportunities, and that the pandemic has helped to reinforce imbalances in the cultural sector. It is not possible to predict how this will play out in the long term, and it will be necessary to look at different data sources over time in order to obtain information about this. In this study, we look at how the pandemic helped to create movement and shifts in activity within the fields, and what impact this has had on stakeholders’ working life affiliation. Interestingly, other sources indicate that the number of people employed in the cultural sector in Norway increased during the pandemic (Cools and Wagelid, 2022). Our study is unable to provide specific answers as to why employment figures increased, but it does highlight changes in artists’ activities during the pandemic that have probably also had an impact on overall employment in the field and artists’ working life affiliation.

In this study, we asked our interviewees what they think of the development in the number of artists in “their” field during the pandemic, and also what they think about the situation in the culture field in general. We also asked them what they deem to be the impact on the recruitment of new artists and the loss of existing artists, and whether there are any artists or groups of artists that have emerged stronger from the pandemic. Many interviewees found this difficult to answer, and a number of them said they have little or no idea of “how things were” with the employment situation for artists as a result of the pandemic. They justify this by saying that they do not have a systematic overview of the situation after restrictions were lifted, and also that it may take some time before the long-term impact of the reopening can be perceived.

As far as our interviewees are concerned, the impression we get from the interviews is that most of them largely maintained their work during the pandemic and coped financially, although things were hard at times. Most of them say that the pandemic hit artists straight out of education the hardest, who in many cases missed out on networking opportunities on account of the lockdown and infection control restrictions. Some also mention freelancers, who were generally in a vulnerable position before the pandemic, and whose problems and challenges were exacerbated still further during the pandemic. A number of interviewees say that the people working with the “circus” around performing artists, such as sound, lighting and stage technicians, were hit hard, and some have left the industry. According to some of our interviewees, this was particularly evident when things reopened after the pandemic: it was difficult at times to access this type of expertise. Musicians in particular have indicated this, with the pre-Christmas shows in 2021 and the reopening in spring 2022 being emphasised as “bottleneck periods”: there

was a near crisis in terms of finding technicians and a constant worry that some of these people had moved on to other, more stable positions.

There are few clear answers to the question of who emerged stronger from the pandemic, at least when our interviewees were asked to look within their own field. As regards the field of music, some people highlight major artists who received relatively large amounts of funding from various COVID-19 schemes, but the main impression is that few people have strengthened their position through the pandemic. Instead, the majority mention a field that is not included in this study – namely film, and to some extent gaming – as well as streaming giants such as Netflix.

Although applications could be submitted to a number of financial schemes, a number of interviewees say these schemes were not particularly targeted towards artists and freelancers in general, and that they did not really fit their needs. Furthermore, a number of interviewees say it is difficult for some artists to work out how to apply for the various schemes, and that preparing good applications is challenging.

2.5 Summary

Overall, the findings from this part of the study indicate that the artists who had established their artistic careers before the pandemic were generally able to cope financially, although a number of them say they found it (very) difficult at times and that they had to dip into their savings. However, as indicated in the introductory chapter, the interviewees in this study – despite being relatively young – are not entirely new to their artistic careers. Furthermore, the selection criteria, first and foremost the requirement for a certain amount of international experience, mean that we have probably come across interviewees with a certain degree of artistic success that it would take more than a pandemic to wreck. That said, the interviews show that the pandemic provided a wake-up call for many people as regards working and income conditions. A number of them say they have become more conscious of securing their own finances going forward, by taking on more jobs and sources of income, for instance, or by changing company form, which secures more rights. A large proportion of our interviewees made use of the COVID-19 schemes established as a result of the pandemic, and the impression we get is that these were perceived to be useful and fairly well suited to their needs.

3 Physical work situation

This chapter takes a closer look at the impact of the pandemic on artists' physical work situation, both in terms of access to rehearsal rooms, studios and production facilities, and in terms of physically meeting with people, travelling, building networks and working with others after the pandemic. We also take a closer look at how digitalisation has affected production, distribution and collaboration across different art sectors, and whether this is likely to continue after the pandemic.

3.1 Access to rehearsal rooms, studios and production facilities

In their latest survey of artists, Kleppe and Askvik (2023) asked artists for feedback on a number of questions regarding attitudes, one of which related to access to production facilities. The survey generally shows high levels of satisfaction with the facilities, but as stated, a number of groups of artists are not included in the survey. However, dancers are represented in the survey, with less than half stating that they are satisfied with their working conditions (Kleppe and Askvik, 2023, 44–45).

The impression from the interviews we have conducted is that when it comes to access to production facilities, experiences vary. One consequence of the pandemic for both performing and creative artists was that more people worked from home. Several of our interviewees say that they made the necessary adaptations to their homes so that they could work from there, by building/installing their own studio and acquiring the necessary infrastructure, for example. Others already had their own premises for rehearsal and performance purposes, and some took the opportunity to upgrade existing facilities or build new premises. Some say that they continued to use their existing studio or office space outside the home, at least where this was possible while bearing in mind the infection situation and whether it was possible to comply with infection control rules. The impression from the interviews is that geographical location can explain some of the differences, as not all cities and areas were affected to the same extent by restrictions and lockdowns during the pandemic. Others, primarily dance artists, say that both rehearsals and performances took place outdoors, at least for a time.

The “Sterkere tilbake” report (Bekeng-Flemmen et al., 2022) provides examples of how the pandemic caused stakeholders in the field to run small-scale productions involving few people. The same report also shows that more local, independent and more artist-driven and artist-centred productions played an active part, in both music and the performing arts. Such experiences are also reflected in our study: for some of the musicians, one consequence of the pandemic was that they scaled back the “circus” around production and distribution/shows and did more of the work themselves. Some say they will carry on doing this, at least to some extent, because it is simpler and less costly, and because their experiences with it have been favourable.

The situation in terms of access to premises after the pandemic is less certain. Interviewees located in the larger cities, particularly Oslo and the surrounding area, say that access to premises is difficult to come by and has been for some time. The interviews provide no evidence to suggest that the number of premises has increased or decreased in connection with the pandemic, nor whether it has become cheaper or more expensive to rent premises. The interviewees in our study indicate different experiences of access

to premises after the pandemic. The interviews also show that some people's needs have changed as they have become accustomed to working more from home and have set things up so that they can compose and produce at their own (home) studios.

3.2 Travelling, relocation and networking

Despite people expressing concerns about the climate and environmental footprint associated with air travel in particular, there is not much in the interview material that would suggest the pandemic has put a permanent stop to travel in the culture field. The scope has perhaps decreased slightly as more people have become accustomed to digital meetings and would like to continue using them, and also due to the weaker economy in the sector. However, there is no doubt that face-to-face encounters are very important in a sector in which contacts and networking can be crucial as a way of establishing and maintaining a position in the field, as well as maintaining contacts over time. The impression from the interviews is that travel is back, both nationally and internationally, which surprised some of our interviewees:

I'm almost a bit shocked that things came back so quickly. It's full steam ahead again, with conferences, shows and so on. It was a bit surprising, really. There was a bit of talk about the environmental aspect, that people should travel less, but now it's full speed ahead again! But I don't think people will change their habits unless structural changes are made. I'd imagine that's what we're seeing now. And a lot of things were put on hold and have to be caught up on again now (M12, our translation).¹⁴

The last point is expressed by a number of interviewees, namely that there is enormous motivation to "catch up" on what was lost during the pandemic, and that there is a great need for people to meet in order to revitalise, continue and initiate artistic activity and collaboration. However, a number of interviewees say that the pandemic – in addition to considerations relating to climate, the environment and family – means they will focus on a more local level and travel a little less than they used to. However, the main impression from the interviews is that travel is more or less back to "normal"; that is, at roughly the same level as before the pandemic.

3.3 Impact of digitalisation on production, distribution and collaboration

The fact that the pandemic accelerated digitalisation has been documented thoroughly in a number of publications. Like the rest of society, the cultural sector adopted digital technology for meetings and other collaborative activities, but also for the production and distribution of art and culture.

The anthology "Estetiske praksiser i den digitale produksjonens tidsalder" [Aesthetic practices in the age of digital production] (Eliassen et al., 2022) provides a number of examples of how arts and cultural activities explored and applied new ways of reaching out to audiences. The introduction briefly presents new distribution formats such as virtual theatre productions, streamed shows and digital museum tours. Examples are

¹⁴ Original: "Jeg er nesten litt sjokkert over at det kom så fort tilbake. Det er fullt kjørt igjen, med konferanser, konserter og så videre. Det var egentlig litt overraskende. Det var jo litt snakk om miljøperspektivet, at en skulle reise mindre, men nå er det full peising på igjen! Men jeg tror ikke folk endrer vaner med mindre det gjøres strukturelle endringer. Det er vel det vi ser nå. Og mye ble jo satt på vent, og skal tas igjen nå."

also provided of how they were distributed via the video conferencing platforms Zoom and Teams, which people are now very familiar with. Social media such as Facebook and Instagram are referred to as the new art arenas, and the anthology has separate chapters describing how art was distributed from home, experiences with streamed shows and digital cultural policy aimed at children and young people. However, the editors write, if the transition to “more or less fully digital cultural activities”¹⁵ was rapid, “digital fatigue”¹⁶ spread almost as rapidly as digital enthusiasm (Eliassen et al., 2022, 11–12, our translations). Furthermore, they emphasise that “talking about ‘digitalisation of art and culture’ in reality involves talking about the development of the art and culture field in general” (ibid., 12, our translation).¹⁷ The pandemic is not understood here as something that represented a break with earlier practices, but rather as something that accelerated a development that was already well underway.

A number of our interviewees emphasise some of the same points. The impression is that several of them, primarily our interviewees from the music field, had some experience with digital platforms and production and distribution tools. This can be explained by the fact that the music field has been at the forefront of technological development compared to other art fields (see Hagen et al., 2021). The interviewees from the music field also appear to have utilised digital tools to the greatest extent to produce and distribute artistic works and expressions:

I think more people are making digital products, but that was starting to happen before the pandemic as well. And the technology has become cheaper, so it's easier to make videos and suchlike. And film dubbing too. There's a bigger market there. We've become more used to it – with visual vignettes, for example. The pandemic might have reinforced this trend. Perhaps some people have also focused more on this in the cultural field, more people have learned all about video and mixing and all that. I think it's been strengthened a bit (M12, our translation).¹⁸

I made a fair bit of music with other people online. And did a number of streamed shows, both from home on my mobile, but also via the studio. And a few online festivals, where more professional organisers had set up streams. I didn't make any money from it, it was more for promotional purposes in order to keep the artist project going (M15, our translation).¹⁹

These quotations reflect a number of lessons learned from the pandemic. Firstly, they testify to the fact that more people tried out digital tools during the pandemic, for both composing music and developing visual products. Secondly, they support findings from other research indicating that the pandemic accelerated the digital evolution that was already well underway. Thirdly, they highlight another important finding, which is

¹⁵ Original: “et mer eller mindre heldigitalt kulturliv”.

¹⁶ Original: “den ‘digitale utmattelsen”.

¹⁷ Original: “å snakke om ‘digitalisering av kunst og kultur’ i realiteten er å snakke om utviklingen av kunst- og kulturfeltet generelt.”

¹⁸ Original: “Tror flere lager digitale produkter, men det var på vei før pandemien også. Og teknologien har blitt billigere, så det er enklere å lage videoer og slikt. Og lydlegging av film også. Det er større marked der. Vi har blitt mer vant til det, for eksempel det med visuelle vignetter. Pandemien har kanskje forsterket denne trenden. Kanskje har flere også satsa mer på det i kulturfeltet, at flere har lært seg video og miksing og sånn. Tror det er litt styrka.”

¹⁹ Original: “Jeg lagde en del musikk sammen med andre på nett. Og hadde en del konserter på stream, både hjemmefra via telefonen, men også via studio. Og noen internettfestivaler, hvor proffere arrangører hadde stelt i stand i stream-opplegg. Jeg tjente ikke noe penger på det, det var mer promoteringshensyn for å holde artistprosjektet i live.”

discussed in Hagen et al. (2021): that digitalisation allows more people to produce and distribute media independently, without being surrounded by a huge apparatus, as was experienced by many people during the pandemic. And finally, they relate specific experiences with streamed shows where the purpose is to raise the profile, not to make money. Such experiences are in line with what other reports indicate (including Gran et al., 2020); that there was little to gain (financially) from digital shows, but that these were important – at least for a time – as a way of maintaining their own artistic activity and reaching out to audiences.

Some interviewees from the dance sector say that they used the pandemic to explore new ways of producing and distributing their work; by using film and game elements in their productions, for example. A number of interviewees from the dance sector also say that they trained and/or completed courses and dance classes on Zoom, while fewer appear to have developed productions that were intended for digital distribution only.

A number of our interviewees report, unprompted, a certain degree of conservatism (particularly) in the performing arts field, where attitudes towards digitalisation are characterised by either indifference or outright resistance. Much of the resistance can probably be explained by the desire for and the necessity of direct encounters with audiences, in addition to the fact that many people express a certain degree of scepticism about artistic works “living a life of their own” on digital platforms, with the artists having no control over the work or any debates and discourses linked with it.

The democratising effect of digitalisation and the opportunity for better access to art and culture for more people is referred to by a relatively small number of interviewees, with a few exceptions:

Streaming to people who can't attend shows, such as old people's homes and suchlike, might be nice. That would mean that more people could have cultural experiences (M11, our translation).²⁰

This quotation comes from an interviewee from the music sector, who has gained experience of streaming small-scale shows from his own home. But as stated, the interviewee is all alone in promoting such views, despite the fact that a great deal of attention has been paid to this perspective in other respects.

3.4 Summary

This study shows that artists' experiences differ when it comes to access to production facilities after the pandemic. While some find that few premises are available, others have found it easier to rent premises after the pandemic. Experiences differ when it comes to costs, too, but our interviews indicate that the pandemic is not the only factor affecting any increase in rental prices – this is also affected by the general price increase that has taken place in recent months. One consequence of the pandemic for both performing and creative artists, as for other sectors, was that more people worked from home. Many people will continue to do so, partly because they have made improvements and organised their home for production during the pandemic.

Overall, the interviews in this study do not add much new information regarding artists' attitudes towards digital distribution of music and performing arts. Instead, they support

²⁰ Original: “Det som kan være fint, er å streame til dem som ikke kan gå på konsert, sånn som til gamle hjem og lignende. Da kan flere få kulturoplevelser.”

findings from a number of previous studies, including Røyseng et al. (2022), which shows that many people have negative attitudes towards streaming shows and perceive limited potential for revenue. Hardly any of our interviewees say that digital distribution is capable of replacing face-to-face encounters with audiences, although some say that digital elements may perhaps supplement or contribute additional information in the form of teasers and shorts in connection with live shows and performances. However, this study does provide examples of the fact that a number of artists tried out different digital tools related to meetings, creation and production of music and visual elements. A number of them gained experience of independent production using new technology and enhancing their own skills, and several say that this is something they will continue to do even after the pandemic.

4 Relationship between production and distribution

In this chapter, we take a closer look at artists' experiences with accessibility, capacity and what are often referred to as "bottleneck issues", and what impact they believe this has on finances, the work situation, artistic quality and diversity. Inter alia, we ask about their experiences of demand from organisers and clients since the end of lockdown, and whether there is a tendency for productions to accumulate; that is to say, whether a "queue" of productions are waiting to be performed. We also highlight artists' experiences of bringing audiences back to concert halls and theatres.

4.1 Production of art and culture during the pandemic

The fact that physical culture offerings were more or less shut down during the pandemic has been mentioned in both the media and the research literature. The distribution and dissemination of art and culture were hit hard as physical venues were closed and performances, shows, exhibitions and other formats requiring audiences to attend in person were cancelled. This was one of the most obvious consequences of the pandemic for the interviewees in this study, which meant that a crucial part of their professional practice was no longer possible. As shown in Chapter 3, many people tried out dissemination using new formats, such as digital shows/streaming, small-scale productions and outdoor performances. On the whole, however, (much) less time was spent on physical distribution, and people who had the ability and opportunity to do so focused their efforts on production-related tasks.

Kleppe and Askvik (2021) show that art production was generally maintained throughout the pandemic, although there is variation both within and between different art fields. Bekeng-Flemmen et al. (2022) write that a review of applications to the schemes administered by the Norwegian Cultural Fund and the Norwegian Film Institute showed that "many artists adapted quickly and adjusted their artistic activities in order to maintain production" (Bekeng-Flemmen et al., 2022, 52, our translation).²¹ This adjustment also took place among several of our interviewees, although for some the motivation declined as the restrictions persisted:

I spent a lot more time on music production and programming, and learned more about it. Took a deep dive into an area that I used to get others to deal with (M12, our translation).²²

I recorded a new album and made loads of new music in the first year. Released an album in 2021, in the early winter. Then I went into the studio after that. Creativity and production levels were high at the outset, I was in survival mode. But at the end of the year, it all ground to a halt (M11, our translation).²³

²¹ Original: "mange kunstnere omstilte seg raskt og justerte sine kunstneriske aktiviteter for å holde produksjonen oppe."

²² Original: "Jeg brukte mye mer tid på musikkproduksjon og programmering og lærte meg mer om det. Dypdykka i et område som jeg tidligere har brukt andre til å gjøre."

²³ Original: "Jeg spilte inn ny plate, lagde masse nye musikk det første året. Ga ut et album i 2021, på tidligvinteren. Så var jeg i studio etter det. Det var høy kreativitet og produksjon i starten, for å være i overlevelsesmodus. Men da vi bikka året, så sa det stopp."

Similar feedback has been received from a number of the other interviewees, and not only in the music field. Interviewees from both the dance and theatre sectors say that they spent time developing new works, at least to some extent, and a number of them say that they explored new formats such as dance for film, worked on script development and planned new productions.

4.2 Bottlenecks and competition

Bekeng-Flemmen et al. (2022) writes that the shift in tasks during the pandemic, from distribution to production, appears to have created an accumulation of new productions after the pandemic, particularly in music and the performing arts (Bekeng-Flemmen et al., 2022, 8). It is hard to say whether this is actually the case, but the experience of our interviewees is that there is a wide range of offers after the reopening, and that there is sometimes major competition for access to concert halls, theatres and festivals. A number of them say they are excited about future developments and to see whether the demand from audiences corresponds to the great supply. In line with Bekeng-Flemmen et al. (2022), several interviewees also point out that there were more events taking place in the local area during the pandemic, and that this resulted in the emergence of a number of smaller festivals. This may mean that there are potentially more distribution arenas available, while our interviewees have found that competition for the most attractive arenas is intensifying. They argue that large, visible arenas provide more of an opportunity to reach out to large audiences, as well as generating higher revenues than what is offered by smaller arenas.

Several of our interviewees point out that several of the smaller festivals with local affiliation are in danger of disappearing. According to our interviewees, this may have an adverse impact on diversity and accessibility. Moreover, losing these festivals would bring about financial losses for organisers and subcontractors. In this respect, a number of people refer to smaller organisers as a vulnerable group on account of the pandemic, people for whom future prospects are uncertain. Several interviewees from the music sector point out that there is a lot of “catching up” to do with shows and festivals after the pandemic, and that competition is intensifying:

I'm anxious to see whether there'll be “room” for me next year. I think a lot of people will have to pass through the eye of the needle. And I'm a bit worried that festivals will “avoid taking risks” a lot now, so as to secure ticket revenues. That they'll go with more mainstream programmes (M12, our translation).²⁴

As a consequence, we'll be seeing less exciting repertoires. Programming will be more straightforward. Less experimental. It'll be easy to stay on the safe side. And nobody will take a chance on a newbie (M10, our translation).²⁵

The quotations above come from interviewees from the music sector, but interviewees from other art sectors also express a certain amount of concern for “safer” programming in order to attract audiences. Another factor emphasised by many, and which Ryssevik

²⁴ Original: “Jeg er spent på om det er ‘plass’ til meg neste år. Tror det blir mange som skal gjennom nåløyet. Og jeg er litt redd for at festivaler vil ‘safe’ veldig nå, for å sikre billettinntekter. At de programmerer mer ‘mainstream’.”

²⁵ Original: “Konsekvensen er at det blir mer ensformig repertoar. Programmeringen blir mer streit. Mindre eksperimentelt. Det blir lett å gå til det trygge. Og da gambler du ikke på en fersking.”

et al. (2021) mention, is that touring has become more expensive, partly due to higher prices for airline tickets and hotel rooms. The findings from our study suggest that this applies not only to music, but also to the performing arts. As we will see in Chapter 5, this applies not least to touring outside Norway, where higher prices combined with a culture industry under pressure make it difficult to gain access to theatres and concert venues and make transport and accommodation expensive.

As regards our interviewees' own experiences with gigs and demand after the reopening, the main impression from the interviews is that activity has picked up after the pandemic. This is explained both by the artists' desire to meet their audiences and earn money, and by the audience's desire for physical cultural experiences and the social encounters they involve. A number of our interviewees say they are fully booked and, on occasions, that they are under a great deal of pressure at work, driven by a strong desire to meet their audiences again, but also by a fear of having no work in the long term:

2022 was my hardest year. I was so afraid of not having work, so I agreed to everything I was offered. There are lots of little things, and an insane amount of travelling. A lot of one week on, one week off. I just can't do that anymore (D9, our translation).²⁶

It seems like 2022 was a crazy year where everybody wanted to get caught up. I think it's more than it used to be for the time being, but it's not sustainable. I've had some bookings with small festivals cancelled. It's as though a lot of people have started new things. It's very competitive out there, and the little people might not be able to compete with the big ones (M11, our translation).²⁷

These quotations testify to a number of factors: the fear of having no work, with the resulting income, visibility and development of their own artistry that this entails, but also the tendency towards overheated culture offerings in connection with the post-lockdown reopening.

There are also different views on the question of whether there is a tendency for productions to accumulate, and whether some works have "gone out of date". Some say that they are seeing a tendency towards accumulation, perhaps in respect of festivals in particular, where the reopening in 2022 and the summer of 2021 are emphasised as a busy period with fairly strong competition for performance venues, to which the above quotations testify. People who focus more on international work, perhaps primarily in the field of dance, report "queues" in a number of locations, particularly at venues outside Norway. There is a great deal of competition for space and (quotation, our translation) "very little money"²⁸, which is highlighted as a barrier to access. And while some interviewees say they feel that touring with works that are several years old is irrelevant, others believe that the field is a little too impatient at times and always demands the very latest works, which they deem to be unsustainable. Our interviewees have different experiences in this regard, and examples are given of touring with plays that were

²⁶ Original: "2022 har vært mitt vanskeligste år. Jeg har vært så redd for å ikke ha jobb, så jeg har sagt ja til alt. Det er mye smått, og sinnssykt mye reising. Mye én uke på, én uke av. Det orker jeg ikke lenger."

²⁷ Original: "Det virker som om 2022 var et crazy år hvor alle skulle ta igjen alt. Tror det er midlertidig mer enn før, men det er ikke bærekraftig. Jeg har fått kansellert noen oppdrag fra små festivaler. Det virker som om mange har starta nye ting. Det er veldig konkurranse, og de små kan kanskje ikke konkurrere med de store."

²⁸ Original: "veldig lite penger".

produced early on in the pandemic, as well as productions that were “put on hold” as they were regarded as obsolete.

4.3 The artists and the audience

While previous studies have mostly emphasised *whether* audiences will return, and if so to what extent (see, for example, Ipsos, 2022), in this study we have placed greater emphasis on exploring the artists’ experiences with audiences; both what impressions they have of audiences following the pandemic, and – not least – what role audiences play for them.

4.3.1 Will audiences return?

The interviews show that our interviewees have different experiences of whether audiences will return after the pandemic, and if so to what extent and in what way. While some say they are experiencing high demand and large audiences, others find it is taking time to get their audiences back. Our interviewees explain this sluggishness by saying that audiences have developed new habits during the pandemic, where cultural consumption primarily took place within the four walls of their homes and in front of a screen, and that these habits are hard to change. Other interviewees, on the other hand, have found that their audiences are “hungry” for art and cultural experiences, but that supply may be greater than demand and that ticket sales are suffering. However, the main impression from the interviews is that our interviewees are very uncertain about what will happen with audiences in the future. Some interviewees, perhaps from the performing arts field in particular, highlight ticket prices as a barrier for audiences, particularly young people:

As things are at present, things aren’t right. Going to the theatre should be part of people’s everyday lives, but only a few people have the opportunity to do that now. A student ticket costs NOK 500 – that’s too much money to just give it a go. The system is rigged all wrong. There’s probably less and less need for it – a bit like in the old days, when actors were clowns for the bourgeois. The play we performed in the spring was sold out, but we actors couldn’t have afforded to see it ourselves (T3, our translation).²⁹

This quotation points to a number of factors linked with attracting audiences. It explicitly recognises the fact that high ticket prices pose a barrier to cultural consumption, particularly when it comes to attracting younger audiences. However, it also tells us something about how common it is to use art and culture offerings; or, more precisely, how uncommon it is, at least for some elements of these offerings. Other interviewees mention similar experiences, reaching out to a relatively narrow range of audiences – often older, well-off audiences. The impression from the interviews is that a number of interviewees are worried that the pre-pandemic audiences will not return, and that they are wondering how to reach out to new audience groups.

²⁹ Original: “Slik det er i dag, fungerer det feil. Det å dra på teater skal være en del av hverdagen, men det er det bare få som har mulighet til nå. En studentbillett koster 500 kroner – da får man ikke testet om teater fungerer. Systemet er feil rigget. Behovet blir nok mindre og mindre, litt som i gamle dager, da skuespillerne var klovner for borgerskapet. Stykket som vi spilte i vår, der var det helt fullt, men vi skuespillere hadde ikke hatt råd til å se det selv.”

4.3.2 What role do audiences play for artists?

The need and desire to come face to face with audiences is a recurring theme in all interviews in this study. This comes as no surprise as our interviewees are performative artists, although they emphasise different elements to explain why encounters with audiences are important. It is about reaching out with their artistic expressions and ideas, about making contact and getting a response to their works. One fairly clear finding from the interviews is that the desire to make contact with audiences has been reinforced by the pandemic. Because without an audience, who is the artist? Many of the interviewees in this study have reflected on this, with the absence of physical audiences for almost two years being cited as problematic.

The role played by audiences for artists is a topic that concerns almost all our interviewees, and an area where there appears to be scope and a need for more research. The impression from the interviews is that encounters with physical audiences are crucial to both musicians and theatre artists. Many ask themselves “who they are” without their audience, and they express clearly how physical audiences were greatly missed during the pandemic. But why are encounters with physical audiences so important, and what is needed to attract audiences? We did not ask direct questions about the first aspect, but the topic of encounters with audiences does emerge naturally in the vast majority of the interviews in this study. On the one hand, the importance of physical encounters with audiences is justified by artists’ need for responses to their own work, expression or central ideas. This need to “reach out” is referred to in a number of places; including by Berge (2022), who mentions the desire to reach out to wider audiences with stories or ideas as a driving force for artists’ international activity and collaboration.

Moreover, according to our interviewees, something happens in encounters between artists, artworks and audiences that is absolutely crucial, as well as what happens in encounters between audiences. What this “something” is, and why it is deemed to be so important, is not something that our study will help us to obtain detailed information about: instead, this is a topic that is discussed in the sociology of art, as referred to in Mangset et al. (2022) and Danielsen (2006). The ways in which our interviewees describe these encounters suggests that it involves the sense of community that arises between auditorium and stage and the reactions triggered by the performance of a piece of music, a dance or a play. Such reactions and modes of expression make each concert, show or performance special, and can help to alter or develop the narrative, performance and/or basic concept.

Several of our interviewees also say that digitalisation – which became the dominant channel for art and cultural experiences during the pandemic – has made face-to-face human encounters even more important. This is true of encounters between artists and their audiences, as well as encounters between audiences. Digitalisation is described by some interviewees as alienating, force that makes face-to-face human encounters even more important, together with other developments such as war and general (political) polarisation.

Another interesting finding highlighted by several of our interviewees is the desire to involve audiences in the creation, development and performance of a concept or work to a greater extent. The interviews do not provide us with much information on how this is achieved in practice, but it is clearly a topic that it is worth investigating further. This desire is also closely linked with another important finding in the interviews: the artists’ desire to be relevant to their audiences:

For me, it's become even more important to include and consider the audience – there's no art without them. Maybe I'm more interested in encountering a broader group than before. Although I might have always thought that dance and contemporary art are accessible to a wide range of audiences, I want to adapt the format to reach new audiences. I want to reach an audience of people who don't seek out art on their own initiative (D7, our translation).³⁰

If I'm going to get funding, I have to think about what I'm going to do, how to make myself relevant to society. Art stands for itself, of course, but I also feel a responsibility to appeal to society. Before the pandemic, I was a bit like "I just create art". Now I'm more concerned about who I'm making art for (D9, our translation).³¹

These quotations are representative of opinions stated by several of our interviewees: that audiences are very important to them, and that they are curious about how to reach out to audiences both existing and new. Many are keen to explore this themselves, but they would also like more information on how to attract new audiences and how to make themselves relevant to larger, more diverse audiences. When asked whether artistic risk taking is sacrificed in favour of the desire to appeal to audiences, the impression given by the interviews is that this is not the case. However, the pandemic appears to have made it even clearer to our interviewees that art and culture are dependent on recipients for their value.

4.4 Summary

Overall, the findings from our study show that art and culture production was maintained throughout the pandemic. Interviewees who had the requisite capabilities, capacity and motivation shifted their work from tasks related to distribution to new and different tasks, and to tasks related more to production. A number of them say they found many productions "queuing" when they reopened, and that there is still a great deal of competition for access to concert halls and theatres, particularly outside Norway. The findings also show that our interviewees have different experiences of whether audiences have returned following the pandemic. While some are finding that cultural consumption habits formed during the pandemic are still lingering and that they are slow to attract audiences, others have found that audiences are eager to make the most of culture offerings.

The big question is how cultural practices will be structured in the long term – an aspect that concerns several of our interviewees. A number of them indicate how the pandemic has made them even more aware of how important audiences are to them. This is explained as their need to obtain feedback on their own work and input for further development, as well as the social dimension whereby people meet up face to face in person. A number of interviewees are keen to try out approaches for attracting audiences that were there before the pandemic and would like more information about this, and ideally to reach out to larger, more diverse audiences.

³⁰ Original: "For meg har det blitt enda viktigere å inkludere og ta hensyn til publikum – kunsten er der ikke uten dem. Jeg er kanskje mer interessert i å møte en bredere gruppe enn før. Selv om jeg kanskje alltid har tenkt at dansekunst og samtidskunst er tilgjengelig for en bredde av publikum, ønsker jeg å tilpasse formatet for å nå et nytt publikum. Jeg ønsker å nå et publikum som ikke oppsøker kunst på eget initiativ."

³¹ Original: "Skal jeg få midler, må jeg tenke hva jeg skal gjøre, hvordan gjøre meg relevant for samfunnet. Kunsten står jo for seg selv, men jeg føler også ansvar for å appellere til samfunnet. Før pandemien var jeg litt sånn 'jeg lager bare kunst'. Nå er jeg mer opptatt av hvem jeg lager kunst for."

5 Conditions for international activity and collaboration

This chapter takes a closer look at how the pandemic has affected artists' ambitions and opportunities for international activity and collaboration. We shed light on artists' point of origin and motivation for international activity, their experience of international activity and collaboration before, during and after the pandemic, and also whether the pandemic has provided favourable conditions for new ways of collaborating.

5.1 Artists' experience of international activity and collaboration

It is well known that art transcends boundaries, including in a physical sense. Many artists view international activity and collaboration as a source of new impetus and artistic development, while international markets can also provide an important source of income. In his study on the international activities of Norwegian artists and cultural workers, Berge (2022) points out that international activity has become increasingly important over the last few years. There are a number of reasons for this: both a general international focus that is not necessarily limited to the culture field, but also factors such as artistic and financial ambitions, coincidences and a spirit of adventure. Berge also emphasises another important reason, which is also mentioned by Hagen et al. (2021), that artists working within narrow or niche expressions perceive international activities as an opportunity to reach out to a wider audience than is possible within a Norwegian context.

In recent years, a new generation of Norwegian artists, cultural workers and their published works, whether in music, literature, visual or performing arts, have enjoyed international success. This has contributed further yet to increasing focus on the international element of Norwegian art and cultural activities (Berge, 2022, 12). Furthermore, international activity brings with it prestige, and having international reach is often associated with high artistic quality. This is also something that a number of the interviewees in our study emphasise, even though their experience of international activity and collaboration varies.

Berge (2022) writes that international activity and international collaboration are more important for some art fields than for others; in fact, for some it is crucial if they are to be "put on the map" as an artist. This is also a very important source of income. These findings are also confirmed by our interviews. Interviewees from the dance sector in particular highlight international activity in the form of touring and productions outside Norway as being very important to their recognition as artists and as a hallmark of quality. Almost all our interviewees from the dance sector have international experience, either from training and/or touring and guest performances abroad. International activity and collaboration with stakeholders outside Norway are cited as important for their own development, for picking up external impulses, and – of course – as an arena for performing and generating income. That said, a number of individuals working with dance query just how important performing and touring internationally should be in order to achieve status in the field, whether this is slightly overrated, and comment that it is not particularly eco-friendly or climate-smart:

I hope this pressure to perform abroad in order to receive funding for artistry becomes a thing of the past. Performing in other places in Norway should count just as much, it's not like you always perform in the major cities when you perform abroad (D1, our translation).³²

There's a kind of expectation that you have to do something on an international level if you want to make something of yourself in dance. I'm a bit against that. It's not environmentally sustainable (D9, our translation).³³

A lot of it involves travelling to some stage somewhere and then heading home. I think there's a lot of status attached to travelling. Why is it so important to present shows abroad, really? So there's an opportunity to think along new lines now, because there's a climate cost to travelling a lot (D4, our translation).³⁴

The above quotations provide a number of reasons as to why international activity is important, but indicate clearly that international activity is also closely linked with financial incentives and status, in the field of dance in this instance. This does not mean that artistic ambitions are unimportant, but that there are also a few more instrumental goals related to international activity: Berge (2022) also mentions this.

The interviewees working in the music sector have slightly more mixed experiences of international activity. For some, international activity is absolutely crucial – this is where the market and their revenue base can be found, partly because they operate within a genre or niche that is fairly narrow from a national perspective, and where the audience base is small. This issue is discussed in greater detail in Hagen et al. (2021) and is illustrated by the following quotation from one of our interviewees:

If I had focused only on Norway, I would have only had five weeks' worth of work in a year. I have an agency that works all over the world (M10, our translation).³⁵

For others, international activity is important but not essential, and for still others, international activity and collaboration sometimes provide a welcome “bonus”, but they focus mainly on Norway, largely on account of financial considerations:

You earn the most money in Norway, and rents are highest for both artists and musicians. We travel around the continent. But most of my income comes from the Nordic region (M11, our translation).³⁶

The actors interviewed in this study are the artists who have the least experience of international activity and collaboration, perhaps on account of natural reasons related to language. Some have trained and/or completed work experience in countries outside

³² Original: “Jeg håper dette presset på å opptre utenlands, for å kunne få kunstnerskapsstøtte, blir en saga blott. Det bør telle like mye å opptre andre steder i Norge, det er jo heller ikke slik at en alltid opptre i de store byene når en har opptredener utenlands.”

³³ Original: “Det er en slags forventning om at du må gjøre noe internasjonalt hvis du skal være noe i dansefeltet. Jeg er litt imot det. Det er ikke bærekraftig miljømessig.”

³⁴ Original: “Mye handler jo om å reise ut til en hvilken som helst scene, og så drar man hjem. Jeg tenker jo at det er mye status knyttet til det å reise ut. Hvorfor er det så viktig å vise noe utenlands, egentlig? Så det er jo en mulighet til å tenke annerledes nå, det er jo en klimakostnad ved å reise masse.”

³⁵ Original: “Hadde jeg forholdt meg til Norge, hadde jeg bare hatt 5 uker jobb i året. Jeg har et agentur som jobber over hele verden.”

³⁶ Original: “Man tjener best i Norge, hyrene er størst både for artister og musikere. Vi reiser jo rundt på kontinentet. Men for meg er primært inntekten fra Norden.”

Norway, but the main impression is that their activities focus on Norway, primarily in the biggest cities.

Overall, the interviews in this study show that artists have different reasons for engaging in international activity and collaboration. Some of them have artistic ambitions related to the creation and distribution of artistic and cultural expressions, as well as the development of their own artistry. Others focus more on the opportunities for income and status that international activity brings. There is also variation in the extent to which artists operate internationally and the importance of international activity for their work as artists. How these differences unfolded during the pandemic is explored in greater detail in the next section.

5.2 International activity and international collaboration during the pandemic

Thus, the interviewees in this study have different points of origin and different motivations for working and collaborating internationally. For some, it is very important as most of their “client base”, revenue base and partners are in other countries, while for others, they focus on international activity and this is something they are working on building up. It is occasionally an important source of work and income for some, while for others it plays a relatively minor role. One common factor shared by all our interviewees who are dependent to a greater or lesser extent on international activity and collaboration, or who focus on international activity and collaboration, is that virtually all travel ground to a halt during the pandemic. For some, this had a dramatic effect and meant that “regular” work was effectively halted. This was true of international touring, for example, where most performances and/or shows were cancelled. However, the pandemic also brought with it something positive, as we can see from experiences with artist-driven local initiatives – as pointed out by a number of our interviewees – and illustrated by the following quotation:

... all in all, I feel the world became more locally oriented during the pandemic. A lot of people came back to [my hometown], and a lot of talented people were here and I could work with them. So it's provided a boost, really. Both for the art community and for the city. And if that's happened in a number of places, that's a good thing. Before the pandemic, everybody just wanted to head out and travel (M12, our translation).³⁷

Berge et al. (2021) write that even though travelling in the art and culture field came to a halt between the spring of 2020 and the winter of 2022, this did not mean that international activity was put on hold. Instead, Berge writes, “alternative and innovative ways of working”³⁸ were adopted (Berge, 2022, 15, our translation). Our survey also shows that artists shifted their efforts towards new tasks and new formats, that all interviewees gained a lot of experience with digital meetings, and that some of them used a number of digital tools and established practices that they will continue to use.

³⁷ Original: “... totalt sett føler jeg at verden ble mer lokal under pandemien. I [min hjemby] kom veldig mange tilbake, og veldig mange flinke folk var her og som jeg kunne samarbeide med. Så det har gitt et løft, faktisk. Både for kunstmiljøet og for byen. Og har det skjedd flere steder, er jo det bra. Før pandemien ville jo alle reise ut og vekk.”

³⁸ Original: “alternative og innovative arbeidsformer”.

Digital meetings are one of the things they will be continuing to use; not to the same extent as during the pandemic, but far more extensively than before.

5.2.1 Digital aspects from a global perspective

As discussed elsewhere in this report, few artists believe we will see livestreaming/live digital broadcasts of shows and performances in the future, and they are sceptical of or uninterested in digital distribution of shows, dance performances and theatre productions. From a perspective in which we examine the impact of the pandemic on international activity among musicians and performing artists, it is nevertheless clear that the exploration of new digital solutions has had an impact. This study shows that artists adopted alternative ways of working in the form of digital meetings, as did the rest of society, and some found new ways of collaborating “online”:

I think that as a producer, I’ve become more open to digital sessions with artists and suchlike. You can sit in your own studios and work together over Teams or Skype (M6, our translation).³⁹

Some altered their activities to include digital production to a greater extent, but the impression conveyed by the artists in this study does not indicate that this primarily took place in discussion with international partners. The interviews provide examples of dancers practising together, and some of them took digital dance classes over Zoom. Interviewees also tell of instances where dancers rehearsed together over Zoom or Teams and then synchronised their performances face-to-face directly before the performance:

You can use digital tools to show each other things and make preparations. We did that for one project. And then we met up two days before the premiere and linked it all together. It worked, but to do that you have to know each other well and have open structures (D14, our translation).⁴⁰

Other interviewees describe similar experiences, but indicate that this approach is probably not something they will continue with. Digital tools may be fine for meetings and coordination, but only in exceptional cases when it comes to rehearsing for collective performances.

5.3 International activity and collaboration after the pandemic

The impression given by the interviews in this study, first and foremost, is that travel and international activity have more or less returned to “normal” for those artists who normally operate in an international arena. That said, a number of interviewees – particularly dance artists – indicate that there is a “shortage of space” at international arenas; that is to say, it is difficult to gain access to theatres and perform both in Europe and beyond.

³⁹ Original: “Jeg tror jo at en som produsent har blitt mer åpen for digitale sessions med artister og slikt. En kan sitte i hvert sitt studio og samarbeide over Teams eller Skype.”

⁴⁰ Original: “En kan jo bruke digitale verktøy for å vise ting for hverandre, og gjøre forberedelser. Vi gjorde det i ett prosjekt. Og så møttes vi to dager før premieren og sydde ting sammen. Det gikk jo, men krever at man kjenner hverandre godt og har åpne strukturer.”

This may indicate that the pandemic has placed additional pressure on this group of artists.

Both dance artists and actors interviewed describe a sector that is more or less depleted of funds. There is often a greater desire for international partners or companies to come to Norway than for Norwegian artists to travel abroad. This is justified by the fact that Norway has good funding schemes for the culture field, while interest among Norwegian stakeholders in hosting international colleagues appears to be more limited. The interviewees explain this by saying that it is challenging on both a financial and a practical level, while the artistic and commercial benefits are low. Several interviewees also cite (their own) finances as a barrier to travelling abroad for work. This is partly explained by the fact that the pandemic has resulted in them depleting their own funds, but also because the general increase in prices that has taken place over the last few months has made international travel and accommodation very expensive, as well as other challenges:

We find that travelling is more difficult. Things cost more now, and in Europe there's still a great deal of unpredictability at airports, having to travel and get to where you're going. The entire transport system has collapsed, and travelling takes time – delays are crucial to whether or not you actually get there. It's an additional burden, and not particularly reliable. And the festivals need us to make financial contributions ourselves. We [in Norway] can apply for travel grants – other countries have very little of that (T8, our translation).⁴¹

A number of interviewees say that touring was very costly even before the pandemic, and that the situation is even more financially challenging nowadays. Combined with strong competition and uncertainty in terms of audience numbers and ticket sales, this means that many people are slightly hesitant about touring.

Also in line with Berge (2022) and Røyseng et al. (2022), several of our interviewees say that they want to travel less out of consideration for the climate and environment. Several of them state that this was a trend that started before the pandemic. That said, environmental and climate considerations do not appear to overshadow their motivation and need to tour internationally, but a number of interviewees indicate that they might perhaps consider travelling a little less and instead embarking on slightly longer tours or rehearsals when travelling abroad.

A few interviewees are clear that they wish to focus on local and national work to a greater extent, but this is due just as much to their lives and family considerations as to their desire to limit their environmental and climate footprint. The war in Ukraine is referred to by a number of interviewees, but not as a barrier to travel. Instead, emphasis is placed on the fact that war can be a source of artistic inspiration, and that the need for art and culture can be amplified in a war situation, as a source of support, comfort and inspiration, and as a way of promoting patriotism and national pride. The topic of challenges related to collaboration with Russian artists due to the war has been debated in the cultural sector on previous occasions, but in this study it is mentioned by few interviewees. International cultural collaboration as a way of building bridges and

⁴¹ Original: "Vi opplever at det er tøffere å skulle reise. Ting har blitt dyrere, og fortsatt er det i Europa mye uforutsigbarhet på flyplasser, at man skulle reise og komme frem. Hele kommunikasjonssystemet har ramlet sammen, og det tar tid å reise – det er forsinkelser som er helt avgjørende for om det går eller ikke. Det er en ekstra belastning og ikke så pålitelig. Og festivalene trenger at vi bidrar økonomisk selv. Vi [i Norge] kan søke reisestøtte – det har andre land veldig lite av."

preventing conflict is mentioned by some interviewees, but it does not appear to be a particularly important driving force.

5.4 Summary

International activity and collaboration are important for many artists as a source of work, income, artistic development and artistic status. As such, this study confirms findings from previous research, including Berge (2022) and Hagen et al. (2021). The interviews do not indicate that the pandemic has put a stop to international activity and collaboration, but there is no doubt that collaboration has become more of a challenge; primarily due to the weaker finances of partners outside Norway, but also due to general price increases that make international touring costly. A number of interviewees also refer to environmental and climate considerations as a reason for wanting to travel less.

This study suggests that the pandemic has given rise to new ways of collaborating, including internationally, in the sense that having digital meetings rather than travelling and conducting them face-to-face has become more common and accepted. This is in line with what happened throughout the rest of society. However, the impression overall is that many people are a little tired of digital collaboration and are keen to encounter other humans in person, be they fellow artists, partners or audiences. On the one hand, this may perhaps indicate that digitalisation has not provided many new opportunities for artistic collaboration; but on the other, it may be representative of digital fatigue after two years of pandemic and, for some, a significant decline in motivation. We will take a closer look at this in chapter 6.

6 Motivation and views on their own work

In this chapter, we shed light on what happened to motivation and self-perception among musicians and performing artists during the pandemic. We explain what the most obvious consequence of the pandemic was for their work as artists, both for their day-to-day work and, not least, for their motivation to work as artists. We also ask whether the pandemic has altered their willingness and/or ability to take financial and artistic risks, and whether the pandemic has affected their view of the place of art in society.

6.1 A new way of working

The pandemic resulted in new and changed ways of working for almost all our interviewees, but how the new way of working unfolded is rather different. Some went from being fully booked to having nothing scheduled, while others adapted fairly quickly and focused on other tasks instead. In this regard, the individual's profession appears to explain a lot, and the distinction between creative and performing artists is made clear. A number of our interviewees are both creative and performing musicians. They say that they shifted their focus during the pandemic to composing and producing music. Some were involved in a form of "rotation" where they composed, produced and performed scaled-down shows with relatively small audiences. Examples of this include outdoor performances and/or backyard shows, where they dealt with a lot of the work and "setting up" themselves; as is also mentioned in Bekeng-Flemmen et al. (2022). Interviewees who are mainly performing artists found that the new way of working was more a break with "normality".

Interviewees from the dance sector found that the most obvious change was the fact that collective face-to-face rehearsals were cancelled or scaled down, although geographical differences did have some impact. Almost all of them say they held joint practice sessions on Teams or Zoom, and a number of them say that they both practised and performed outdoors. Some took the opportunity to take digital dance classes, while others focused on new forms of work and distribution and started experimenting with new forms of expression.

The interviewees from the theatre sector also encountered major changes in which productions and performances were cancelled and some people were furloughed, while others found new jobs to work on. Again, geographical location appears to be of some significance – stakeholders outside Oslo were less affected by the restrictions linked to the pandemic.

Role and position also impacted on how the new way of working turned out, and interviewees who held managerial responsibilities in addition to being artists found the situation to be very challenging at times:

All the funding work meant more administrative work for me. I also noticed with older employees that they became very stressed early on in the pandemic and started to behave

accordingly. The working environment suffered. There was a lot of friction that wasn't anticipated (D1, our translation).⁴²

Being an employer involved going through all the regulations, all the restrictions and taking responsibility within the framework set out. It was a completely new situation – I was hit hard, just like everyone else. The pandemic caused some major trauma. I tried to the best of my abilities to find little loopholes so that my dancers got paid (T8, our translation).⁴³

These two quotations reveal a different perspective to the one highlighted so far in this study, namely the employer's perspective. Many artists have experience of self-employment. However, there is perhaps less discussion on artists employing other people. A number of our interviewees hold such responsibilities and have learnt a few lessons during the pandemic. These are performing arts companies, which – like many other organisations in Norway – fall under the umbrella of “small and medium-sized enterprises” (SMEs).

Employer responsibility and financial responsibility were perceived as burdensome by interviewees who held roles as general managers or artistic directors in addition to their creative and/or performing roles. The infection control rules that were introduced on account of the pandemic were new, and a number of interviewees also say that the constant demands for testing were perceived to be ethically challenging. Moreover, they were very concerned about how to cater for their audiences. Many of them say they were afraid of making mistakes. On the one hand, they did not wish to impose demands for testing and vaccination on employees and partners. But on the other, they were anxious about not attracting audiences, and about infecting audiences who did actually turn up. One of our interviewees also says that the organisations in the field have very little awareness of artists who juggle a number of roles, and are not very concerned with the employer perspective:

It's important for people to recognise those who create work too, because they receive no funding from the trade unions. All they've done is made the requirements more stringent ... It's important to have good working conditions and all that, but it's also important for the artistic work done by company managers and choreographers to be appreciated as well. I think many people feel nobody pays much attention to what they do (D1, our translation).⁴⁴

The quotation above suggests that there is little support in the culture field as regards issues relating to employer policy, and that challenges related to leadership are either unnoticed or unrecognised. Our interviews with other interviewees who have a leadership role bear witness to the fact that they feel a great deal of responsibility in terms of artistic, financial, personnel policy and human aspects. However, like the other interviewees in this study, they have carried on working even though the pandemic has

⁴² Original: “Alt finansieringsarbeidet førte til at det ble mer administrativt arbeid på meg. Jeg merka også på eldre tilsatte at de ble veldig stressa tidlig i pandemien og begynte å oppføre seg deretter. Det gikk ut over arbeidsmiljøet. Det ble mye slitasje som ikke var forventet.”

⁴³ Original: “Det å være arbeidsgiver var å gå gjennom alt reglement, alle begrensninger og ta ansvar innenfor rammene. Det var en totalt ny situasjon – jeg som alle var veldig rammet. Det var et stort traume som pandemien ga. Jeg prøvde på best mulig måte å finne små smutthull, slik at danserne fikk et honorar.”

⁴⁴ Original: “Det er viktig at noen ser de som skaper arbeid også, for de får jo ingen støtte fra fagforeningene. Det har bare blitt skjerpa krav ... Det er viktig med gode arbeidsforhold og sånn, altså, men det at kunstnerisk arbeid som gjøres av kompaniledere og koreografer, blir verdsatt, det er også viktig. Tror mange opplever at det er lite oppmerksomhet på det de gjør.”

challenged both their motivation and their finances. We will take a closer look at this in the next section.

6.2 Personal motivation and views on their own work

In the interviews, we asked our interviewees whether the pandemic has affected their motivation for pursuing their art and whether they are planning to continue as artists after the pandemic. One main impression gained from all interviews is that the pandemic did not influence artists' motivation to continue as artists. None of our interviewees have changed streams entirely, although some have relocated within their field and are working on other things than before the pandemic. By this, we mean that some people have continued to work in their field, but that they focus more on different tasks than before. Performing musicians have taken over the role of producer or manager, for instance, and dancers are focusing more on choreography of performances rather than performing as dance artists. It is not always easy to say whether such changes are direct consequences of the pandemic. For several of our interviewees, new or additional roles may be a natural part of the development of their artistic careers, which can also be explained by the fact that many of our interviewees are relatively young.

In line with findings from Berge (2022) and others, a number of interviewees also state that the pandemic provided a welcome break and gave them time to reflect on their motivation for working as artists. This does not mean that they made major changes in their career choices, but that the pandemic gave them reason to reflect. However, with respect to whether the pandemic affected their motivation to remain as performing artists at that time, the feedback from our interviewees varied slightly. This variation can probably be attributed to personality and preferences to an extent, but the individual's profession also had a bearing on this. Of interviewees who are/were dependent on face-to-face encounters with colleagues, partners and audiences in order to practise their profession, a number state that their motivation suffered a blow during the pandemic:

I lost my spark a bit, I think. For the first two years of the pandemic, I didn't make any music. I was really just waiting for things to open up. I didn't enjoy playing music. Started thinking about other things. So that was probably the biggest consequence, that I stopped playing music for a while and focused more on management (M6, our translation).⁴⁵

When you work as a musical conductor, you work alone a lot. And when you don't know whether a job will come off, it really knocks your motivation for six. I didn't handle it well. But it was all about motivation, because I had good contracts and received a certain amount of compensation (M10, our translation).⁴⁶

The above quotations are taken from interviewees from the music sector, but we received similar feedback from interviewees in the performing arts field, both dance artists and actors. The uncertainty and unpredictability brought about by the pandemic

⁴⁵ Original: "Jeg mistet litt gnisten, tror jeg. De to årene som pandemien varte, har jeg ikke laget noe musikk. Gikk egentlig bare og venta på at ting skulle åpne opp. Syns ikke det var noe gøy å drive med musikk. Begynte å tenke på andre ting. Så det var vel den største konsekvensen, at jeg slutta med musikk litt og orienterte meg mer mot management."

⁴⁶ Original: "Når du jobber som dirigent, er det så mye alenejobbing. Og når du da ikke vet om jobben blir realisert, så er det en enorm knekk for motivasjonen. Jeg takla det dårlig. Men det handlet kun om motivasjon, for jeg hadde gode kontrakter og ble til en viss grad kompensert."

presented many people with challenges, particularly people who were planning national tours, and where the infection situation varied among different cities and regions. Various companies and groups were affected by last-minute cancellations, uncertainty linked with compensation for loss of income and insecurity and fear of infection and disease; while others who were more involved in composition and creative endeavours perceived the pandemic as an opportunity to develop new works and their own artistry:

I think it has a lot to do with timing – for some people, the pandemic gave them a chance to take back their artistry. That’s how it was for me. Artists who are a bit introverted had an advantage. And creative artists who had the opportunity to do a bit of deep diving (M15, our translation).⁴⁷

The pandemic motivated me a lot, strangely enough. I think I was welcomed so beautifully after I graduated, joined the talent programme and received funding from the Arts Council, so I had so much confidence and took every opportunity that came my way. I was actually really motivated, not demotivated (D9, our translation).⁴⁸

In other words, the interviews indicate that the pandemic affected artists in different ways in terms of their motivation to practise their profession at that time. Some say they felt almost paralysed, while others felt their composing and production took on new energy, and that they had a welcome opportunity to reflect on their own artistic careers and priorities going forward. In line with what is discussed in chapter 2 concerning working life affiliation, a number of people say that the pandemic has altered their ability or willingness to take financial risks. They have become more concerned with factors such as having a (somewhat) steady and predictable income by having various second jobs both in and outside the art sector, for instance. However, this is not just about the pandemic: it can also be an indicator that people are in situations or at phases of their lives in which they need greater financial stability.

When asked whether the pandemic has altered our interviewees’ willingness or ability to take artistic risks, the feedback is more or less unanimous: It has not. For a number of interviewees, it would appear that the pandemic has made them want to take greater artistic risks. This is explained in part by the fact that the pandemic made them reflect on their own artistry and has given them an even greater drive as artists. Another important element, well known from the research literature and discussed earlier in this report, is that unpredictability, risk and – occasionally – crises are a prerequisite for being an artist. In this sense, the pandemic can be viewed as one of a number of temporary troughs, as illustrated by the following quotation:

No, I just saw it [the pandemic] as a temporary halt – not an existential crisis. Rather, I felt I was “activated” artistically in a different way – I’m sure it wasn’t like that for everybody. There was no home office to head for – so many people started making

⁴⁷ Original: “Jeg tror det har mye med timing å gjøre – for noen var pandemien sjansen til å ta sitt kunstnerskap tilbake, sånn som for meg. Kunstnere som er litt introverte, hadde en fordel. Og skapende kunstnere som har hatt sjansen til å dypdykke litt.”

⁴⁸ Original: “Pandemien motiverte meg egentlig veldig mye, merkelig nok. Jeg synes jeg ble så godt ønsket velkommen etter jeg var ferdig utdanna, ble med i talentprogram og fikk støtte fra Kulturrådet, så jeg hadde så god selvtillit og grep alle muligheter som kom. Jeg ble egentlig veldig motivert, ikke demotivert.”

things online and streaming – or resorting to other solutions in the hope the situation would come to an end soon (T3, our translation).⁴⁹

This quotation, from an interviewee from the performing arts sector, highlights experiences that apply to a number of the artists in this study. The pandemic represented a dramatic upheaval in their ways of working, but that said, changeable and uncertain working conditions are the “norm” for many artists and can also lead to inspiration and development of new artistic and cultural expressions. A number of our interviewees say that art plays a particularly important role in times of crisis, as a commentary on what triggers crises and how crises unfold.

6.3 The place of art in society

While our interviewees’ personal motivation to continue as artists does not appear to have been affected to any great extent, many say that the pandemic has really opened their eyes in many ways to how art and culture are valued, and to the place that art has in society.

Views differ on the matter of whether art and culture have become more important in Norwegian society as a result of the pandemic. Some believe that art and culture have become more important than ever, not solely because of the pandemic, but also because of war, the climate crisis and general unrest in the world. The role of art and culture are emphasised as a source of reflection on what it means to be human, building bridges between people and providing a source of comfort and support in difficult times. However, others believe that views on art and culture changed during the pandemic, and not in a positive sense. A great deal has already been written about cultural consumption and expectations of cultural consumption (see also chapter 4), and a number of our interviewees in this study point out that it is more common nowadays for art and culture to be viewed as entertainment and/or as something used as a kind of identity marker:

I feel we’re a kind of peasant country that doesn’t have all that extensive a history of art and culture, politics and philosophy. There aren’t all that many general references to historical culture – there are far fewer cultural references. It’s like we have to do dinner and decorating and watch “Mamma Mia” – more towards the commercial product and not so much “art” (T5, our translation).⁵⁰

In other places, such as England and Germany, people are more genuinely interested in culture. You can see it in both the audience and their behaviour. In Norway, it’s much more important to go to the “right” shows. I find that people are more curious about new things in other places. It has something to do with Norway being the best country in the world in many ways, and that cultural practices in some places are more comforting and

⁴⁹ Original: “Nei, jeg bare anså det [pandemien] som en midlertidig stopp – ingen eksistensiell krise. Jeg opplevde heller at jeg ble kunstnerisk aktivert på en annen måte – det var sikkert ikke slik for alle. Det var ikke noe hjemmekontor å gå til – så mange begynte å lage ting på internett og stream – eller andre løsninger, i håp om at det skulle slutte snart.”

⁵⁰ Original: “Jeg opplever at vi er et slags bondeland som ikke har så lang historie med kunst og kultur, politikk og filosofi. Det er ikke så mange allmenne referanser til historisk kultur – kulturreferansene er veldig mange færre. Det må liksom være middag og pynting og se ‘Mamma Mia’ – mer mot det kommersielle produktet og ikke så mye ‘kunst’.”

important in places other than Norway. We have a very good life here, and that affects everything (M11, our translation).⁵¹

The quotations above testify to some of the same aspects that we discussed in Chapter 4, which include artists' perceptions of their audiences and what they see as driving forces and barriers to attracting audiences. Although the quotations above may give the impression that audience preferences are downplayed to some extent, it is important to emphasise that our interviewees are generally very concerned about their audiences. One consequence of the pandemic is that many people have become more preoccupied with appealing to audiences and involving audiences in their productions and performances. In other words, artists' motivation does not appear to have declined due to what some people view as unsophisticated attitudes among audiences, but awareness of audiences and a desire to remain relevant to audiences has increased. The only question is what it will take to persuade audiences to seek out art and culture offerings, and aspects to which artists should pay particular attention.

Far more concordant is the feedback we received to the question of whether the pandemic has affected individuals' views on the place of art in society. Hardly anyone believes that art and culture have become less important per se, but our interviewees are unanimous in their perception of the attitudes of the authorities to art and culture during the pandemic. The quotation below indicates how the authorities' assessments were perceived:

It was very demotivating to see how politicians failed to prioritise culture – cultural activities were the first things to be shut down and the last to be opened up. It was as if experiencing art and culture wasn't necessary. And it's a general social development that you may not encounter all that much on a daily basis. We mostly encounter people with an interest in what we do. But being told from the top that what you're doing doesn't count, that's demotivating (M10, our translation).⁵²

The quotation above comes from an interviewee from the music sector, but it represents the views of all the artists in our study. The perception that art and culture were devalued by the authorities was hard to bear and helped to bring about a further drop in motivation, as many describe it. Røyseng et al. (2022, 307) mention some of the same things, the shutdown of cultural activities being interpreted as a reflection of the low priority of culture in society. That said, a number of the interviewees in this study report that what they perceived as the devaluation of art and culture by the authorities provided a basis for further reflection on the place of art and the significance of their own work, and that they became even more certain that they wanted to carry on working as artists.

⁵¹ Original: "Andre steder, sånn som England og Tyskland, der er folk mer interessert i kultur. Det merker du både på publikum og deres atferd. I Norge er det mye viktigere å gå på de 'rette' konsertene. Jeg opplever at folk er mer nysgjerrige på nye ting andre steder. Det handler jo litt om at Norge er verdens beste land, på mange måter, og at kulturbruken en del steder er mer til trøst og viktigere andre steder enn i Norge. Vi har det veldig godt her, og det påvirker alt."

⁵² Original: "Det var veldig demotiverende å se hvor nedprioritert kultur ble av politikerne – kulturlivet var det første som ble stengt ned, og det som sist ble åpnet opp. Det å oppleve kunst og kultur var ikke nødvendig, virket det som. Og det er jo en generell samfunnsutvikling, som en kanskje ikke møter så mye i hverdagen. Vi møter jo mest dem som er interessert. Men det å oppleve fra øverste hold at det du holder på med, ikke teller, det er demotiverende."

6.4 Summary

The main impression gained from our study is that the pandemic did not alter artists' "resilience"⁵³ (Røyseng et al., 2022, our translation) and motivation to continue as artists in the long term. However, many report seeing a sharp drop in motivation and inspiration for their work with art during the actual pandemic. This is explained to an extent by what was perceived as a downgrading of art and culture by the authorities, with cultural activities being the first to be shut down and the last to be opened up. Others, however, saw the pandemic as an opportunity to develop their artistic practice and were freshly motivated and driven to produce new works and explore new formats and elements.

⁵³ Original: "seighet".

7 Summary and assessment

This chapter summarises the main findings and lessons learned and addresses the question that forms the starting point for this study, namely what aspects characterise the work situation for artists after the pandemic, and how they balance artistic motivation and autonomy against the need for acceptable working and income conditions.

We also describe some of the findings from previous research and studies that are of relevance to this study and what research needs have been highlighted. We also provide a brief discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of this study and the topics and issues for which further analysis may be important.

7.1 A study of the privileged?

To start with the latter, there is reason to believe that the framework for this assignment has had an impact on our findings. The study began in September 2022, a few months after society, including cultural activities, had reopened after the pandemic. As we indicated in the introductory chapter, we faced some challenges in recruiting interviewees for the study; primarily because our interviewees said that they were busy, but also because some of them indicated that they did not want to “work for free” after two challenging years in a field characterised by a certain degree of volunteer fatigue. The implication of this is that we have probably not spoken with the artists who were hardest hit by the pandemic as they prioritised income-generating work over being interviewed.

As Berge (2022) also mentions, some interviewees have emphasised that focusing on recruiting interviewees with a certain amount of international experience will result in responses from the most “successful” ones. This may be the case for this study as well, given the findings that none of our interviewees have changed streams entirely. This suggests that they managed to survive the pandemic financially and have continued working as artists. The vast majority say that the pandemic did not affect their ability or willingness to take artistic risks. However, more people have become more concerned with securing their personal finances by diversifying, which included taking permanent (part-time) jobs and ensuring more predictability. Things may perhaps have been different if we had conducted more interviews with a different selection of artists, such as artists straight out of education who were right at the start of their careers.

7.2 Pandemic was a wake-up call

Uncertainty, risk and variable income are fundamental aspects of artist life. Despite this, the impression from the interviews is that the pandemic nevertheless provided a wake-up call for many, and that the challenges related to (lack of) rights, formalised working life affiliation and pay and working conditions were brought to the fore. Although quite a few of our interviewees say they are aware of and have experience of various subsidy and grant schemes in the culture field, few have particular experience with more general welfare schemes administered by NAV, and little awareness of the obligations, requirements and rights involved in these schemes. A number of our interviewees held discussions with NAV during the pandemic and have slightly different experiences. Some gave up contact after a fairly short amount of time, some applied for funding from NAV’s

extraordinary scheme aimed at freelancers and sole traders, and some had their applications approved.

Partly as a result of their encounters with NAV, a number of our interviewees say they have become more aware of the advantages of running a limited company rather than a sole proprietorship, and several say they have changed to a different company form during or after the pandemic. Even though quite a few people say that the pandemic period was difficult, the main impression from the study is that most people coped reasonably well. This can probably be explained by the fact that most of our interviewees already had established careers as artists when the pandemic struck, with infrastructure and networks that allowed them to adapt to new tasks and/or provided a certain financial safety net. This was also important when it came to resuming artistic work after the pandemic.

7.3 Funding schemes worked

A number of studies have shown that a relatively large amount of funding was allocated to the cultural sector during the pandemic. That said, Cools and Wagelid (2022) – for example – indicate that most of the funds from the major COVID-19 schemes administered by what was then the Arts Council (now Arts and Culture Norway) went to a relatively small number of large organisations. Kleppe and Askvik (2021) point out that many artists benefited from the NAV compensation scheme for the self-employed and freelancers, as well as the extraordinary allowances announced via the Norwegian Cultural Fund, Government Grants for Artists and the Norwegian Film Institute. The increase in the number of people employed in the cultural sector during the pandemic, according to Statistics Norway's employment statistics (discussed in Cools and Wagelid, 2022), may also be an indication that the cultural sector managed to maintain activity during the pandemic, although there are differences between different fields within the sector.

The interviews in this study bear witness to the fact that many people applied for, and to a greater or lesser extent were granted, funding from the various schemes that were established to mitigate the financial impact of the pandemic. This is true of schemes administered in the directorate line by the Arts Council (now Arts and Culture Norway), the Arts Council's schemes under the Norwegian Cultural Fund, Government Grants for Artists, NAV and a series of schemes run by foundations, organisations, municipalities and county administrations. Even though various application regimes were sometimes perceived as inaccessible, rigid and time-consuming by our interviewees, the impression is that the various COVID-19 schemes worked quite well overall, again with the proviso that the artists included in this study are not representative of the field. The main impression from our interviews is that artists themselves are aware that the financial conditions that allow them to pursue their art in Norway are quite favourable compared to their artist colleagues and partners on an international level.

7.4 Motivation for being an artist remains (almost) unchanged

The motivation to continue working as an artist appears to remain more or less unchanged among our interviewees, and a number of them indicate that the pandemic made them even more certain that they want to pursue their profession as artists. None

of our interviewees say they considered giving up being artists: it would take more than a pandemic to break them.

As mentioned previously, uncertainty, risk and financial uncertainty are in many ways a prerequisite for being an artist, and the “normal state” involves creating and communicating under different conditions, with flexibility, creativity and an exploratory approach as the driving force. In this regard, the pandemic can be viewed as one of a number of – transient – crises. This does not mean that motivation was not adversely affected among some of our interviewees. Our interviewees have quite different experiences in this respect: while some say “they hit a wall” when the pandemic happened and “everything” was cancelled, others found new inspiration and desire to compose, develop new works, produce and communicate on new platforms or in new formats. Individual personalities and preferences probably have a part to play here, as well as the field in which they operate, of course; and the distinction between creative and performing artists is clear. While creative artists were able to use the pandemic period to develop new works, performing artists who rely on performing in front of audiences face-to-face were deprived of the opportunity to practise their profession. Our interviews also show that artists with management and employer responsibilities found the pandemic to be particularly stressful. This is explained by the fact that there were lots of administrative, financial and HR issues to be dealt with, as well as issues related to their own artistic work and less time for their own artistic endeavours. That said, the pandemic also gave some people a much-needed “breather” and time to consider what they wanted to do with their lives and their careers as artists. These are findings that are also presented by Berge (2022) et al. This thought process is still ongoing for some people, even though they have continued working as artists.

7.5 Society’s attitudes to art and culture

One unanimous item of feedback that we received from our interviewees relates to the Norwegian authorities’ attitudes to the art and culture sector throughout the pandemic. Although significant funds were allocated to the sector in order to prevent financial losses, the political signals from the top were perceived to be highly demotivating. To summarise the feedback received from our interviewees, the cultural sector was “the first thing to be shut down and the last to be opened up”. This gave artists the impression that their work and role were undervalued.

Many are also questioning how art and culture are actually valued in Norwegian society. Our interviewees indicate that art and culture in Norway are primarily regarded as entertainment, and that Norwegian audiences are not particularly curious about new forms of expression. Moreover, many believe that the way in which cultural expressions such as theatre and classical music attract a relatively small, older and well-off group of people is problematic. This may be an indication of the fact that this form of art and culture is not perceived as relevant and accessible among other parts of the population, at least not in its current form.

New cultural consumption habits, unsophisticated attitudes to art and culture and high ticket prices are cited by a number of interviewees as barriers to returning audiences. It is also pointed out that plenty of cultural offerings have been available since reopening, resulting in strong competition. One challenge for artists, therefore, is how to maintain motivation for their own work while also making their own art and artistry relevant to audiences. This is a factor that the interviewees in this study appear to be very concerned

about. While some interviewees stress audience characteristics and high ticket prices as barriers to cultural consumption, others are concerned with how they can attract larger, and ideally more diverse, audiences. This study does not provide such specific examples of what this work involves. A number of interviewees, particularly in the dance sector, are concerned with how they can involve new and different communities and involve audiences in the co-creation and implementation of productions to a greater extent. Interviewees from both the music and performing arts fields say they are curious about audience preferences and what prevents people from seeking out art and culture offerings. These are topics that invite further research and investigation, some of which is already in progress under the auspices of organisations such as Arts and Culture Norway and Audiences Norway. Such studies will also be interesting as a (qualitative) supplement to surveys such as Statistics Norway's Norwegian Cultural Barometer.

7.6 Artists' views on digitalisation

The significance of digitalisation for the production and distribution of art and culture has been discussed in a series of research projects and reports. This study confirms some of the well-known findings indicating that parts of the cultural sector tried out formats such as streamed shows, digital productions and performances and, like the rest of society, digital meetings. People were most enthusiastic about this at the outset, as confirmed by previous research findings. Livestreaming is one example of an aspect that some of our interviewees experienced during the pandemic period, but this is something which they would generally prefer not to continue to use. However, this study also provides examples whereby more people tried out digital tools when developing and producing music, either together with others or by doing more of the work themselves. Many of them say they will carry on using such tools, because they have had good experiences and there are both financial and practical advantages to doing more themselves, with a scaled-down "circus". Our interviewees have a great deal of experience with digital meetings on account of the pandemic, and this is something that they will continue to pursue, at least to some extent. They state that this is because such meetings are practical and straightforward, at least where a relationship has been established, and because it is both cheaper and more beneficial for the environment and climate.

When it comes to distributing art, the general attitude is that face-to-face human encounters are what truly matter. This attitude can be understood in light of audiences as a source of artistic motivation and artists' perceptions that art and culture are dependent on recipients if they are to have value. However, a few interviewees also state that digital elements or vignettes can work as a supplement to live performances and shows in some cases. Some have also become more curious about, and used, various digital elements in their productions. The resistance to digital distribution not only involves the need to encounter face-to-face audiences but can to some extent also be explained by other artistic considerations and artists' fears that they will lose control of their own work when it "lives on" on digital platforms. Encounters with and responses from audiences are perceived as important, but the notion that the work will live on "outside the room" makes artists feel less free and behave differently. According to some interviewees, this can lead to artists taking fewer risks than would otherwise have been the case.

7.7 Overall assessment

The need to obtain more qualitative information about the work situation for artists after the pandemic, from the artists' standpoint, provided the starting point for this study. In this study, we have shed light on various aspects of artists' working lives, what characterises their working life affiliation, what motivates them and how they organised their work as artists during the pandemic. We also asked them what they will be emphasising going forward, now that society and cultural activities have long since resumed, but the long-term consequences of the pandemic are unknown.

In this report, we have discussed a number of characteristics of being an artist, as presented in both national and international studies. One recurring theme is how risk, uncertainty and unpredictability are a fundamental criterion when it comes to being an artist, but also how motivation, flexibility, "resilience" and a desire for autonomy are driving forces that "trump" the need for financial and professional security.

This study shows that the pandemic brought about significant upheaval in our interviewees' way of working, but that they have nevertheless chosen to carry on working as artists. This can probably be explained by the said driving forces, not least very strong artistic motivation and a general acceptance of risk. Moreover, there is once again reason to emphasise that the artists included in this study had established artistic careers and generally coped financially, partly with the help of funding from various COVID-19 schemes. However, this study also confirms findings from other research, which indicate that Norwegian artists are relatively well off compared to their artist colleagues in other countries, thanks to both a generally aggressive and generous welfare policy and a corresponding cultural policy, as well as a relatively efficient labour market. With this as a point of origin, it is perhaps easier to cope with the tension between artistic motivation and autonomy on the one hand, and the need for acceptable working and income conditions on the other. Cultural policy also appears to be under pressure, however, and while a number of our interviewees are concerned with the fact that cultural policy must be generous in order to ensure diversity of expression, some say that being too dependent on public funding places them in a vulnerable position.

In the previous chapters, we have discussed our interviewees' experiences and assessments of working as artists before, during and after the pandemic. We have confirmed and supplemented some of the findings from previous research, including how many artists combine their efforts and income base by way of "multitasking" and combined income, that the driving force encouraging them to reach out with their artistic projects or ideas is more important than making lots of money, and that digital productions cannot replace face-to-face encounters with audiences. Moreover, to an extent the study "tops up" the findings from "Sterkere tilbake" (Bekeng-Flemmen et al., 2022), for example, which showed how initiatives driven by artists emerged during the pandemic, as well as artists' experiences with local small-scale productions and outdoor formats. The findings also confirm that international activity is important for some artists, for reasons relating to artistic, financial and – not least – status considerations, but that the financial repercussions of the pandemic, in combination with general price increases and climate and environmental considerations make operating internationally more of a challenge.

This study has highlighted a number of issues and topics worthy of further research. One important question is how things have gone for artists who are less successful than the ones included in this study. What will they be doing after the pandemic? Have they continued working as artists, to what extent, and how do they balance artistic motivation

and autonomy with the need for satisfactory working and income conditions? And what about artists who have given up being artists – what are they doing instead? In our interviews, a number of interviewees state that artists have left their field in favour of more secure professions and more stable incomes, the extent or the choice of profession being unknown. One particular concern relates to artists straight out of education, who missed out on opportunities to practise their profession and build networks in a field in which personal relationships can be crucial to getting work. A number of people also refer to freelancers as a particularly vulnerable group during the pandemic, and more information is needed about them.

Little research seems to have been done on the perspective of artists as employers. It is well known that many independent artists are self-employed. However, there is less understanding of the opportunities and challenges for artists as employers of several other people, and as managers of what are often categorised as “small and medium-sized enterprises” (SMEs). In this study, we have interviewed a number of artists who, as well as being performers and artistic directors, are also business executives with financial, personnel and administrative responsibilities; particularly challenging aspects during the pandemic. Given the emphasis on culture as an industry in government cultural policy, it may be worth exploring further how this perspective is handled, both by people who manage art and culture enterprises and the stakeholders with whom they work in government, the business community and organisations.

One topic that concerns many of our interviewees is what it takes to attract audiences and how they can make art and culture relevant to more people. This is a topic that paves the way for examination of a number of sub-issues. Inter alia, questions are asked about how different segments of the population perceive the importance of art and culture, which arenas they prefer to visit and why, what happens in encounters between artists and audiences, and why audience encounters are important in a wider context. A number of the artists interviewed in this study are keen to try out new forms of audience participation, and refer to involvement and co-creation as ways of reaching out to new audience groups. There are already a number of surveys in progress that are shedding light on audience behaviour and audience preferences from the perspective of major cultural operators, but perhaps there is also reason to take a closer look at artists’ perspectives on audiences and why encounters with audiences are so important to them. Our study gives the impression that artists are in need of information in this area, while this type of information is relevant to both cultural authorities and the wider public.

Annexes

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Interview guide

Project: <i>Qualitative study of the work situation for artists following the COVID-19 pandemic</i>
Date of interview/executing consultant/Proba researcher Name of interviewee Profession Educational background Place of work and employer(s) Place of residence Age Experience as an artist – number of years/full-time/part-time/freelance/employed/any time spent abroad, etc.

1. Motivation and views on their own work <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can you start off by telling us a little about your work situation before, during and after the pandemic?• How has your way of working changed?• What was the most obvious consequence of the pandemic on your work as an artist?• Has the pandemic affected your motivation for performing? Why? Or why not?• Has the pandemic affected your view of the place of art in society? Why?• Do you think art/artistic expression has become more/less important in our society than before the pandemic? Do you feel that the art you create/work with makes a difference?• Has the pandemic changed your willingness or ability to take artistic risks? If so, how?• Has the pandemic changed your willingness or ability to take financial risks? If so, how?• Who in your field, or which organisations in your field, have been particularly affected by the pandemic, do you think?• Has anyone emerged stronger from the pandemic?• Do you believe any changes will persist?
2. Working life affiliation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has the pandemic affected your working life affiliation and how you want to work? (keywords: permanent employee, freelancer, project employee, combination of several positions, etc.)• What was your working life affiliation when the pandemic hit? (keywords: permanent employee, freelancer, project employee, combination of several positions, etc.)• Did you apply for funding from the various COVID-19 schemes and other funding schemes? If so, what was your experience with this?• To what extent have challenges and opportunities that existed in your field before the pandemic been amplified/altered?• What impact do you think the pandemic has had on recruitment of new artists and the loss of existing artists?
3. Physical work situation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How is the physical working situation for you/your field after the pandemic, such as access to rehearsal rooms, studios and production facilities?• Are there more/fewer premises available than before the pandemic, for example? Is renting premises more expensive/cheaper than before the pandemic?• What opportunities are available for physically meeting with people, building networks and working with others after the pandemic? What is the situation as regards travelling, relocation and opportunities to work nationally and internationally?• What activities or parts of your work were carried out in ways that were new or different during the pandemic?• Will you be building on/further developing/continuing these experiences/practices going forward?• (If the response does not come naturally: Did any of this involve digital production or distribution?)• How do you think your attitudes to digital production and distribution compare with general attitudes to digitalisation in the field that you represent?• Have you found that digital formats can replace/complement/supplement “live”/physical productions?• Are digital forms of collaboration here to stay for you/your field, or might this just have been a flash in the pan on account of the pandemic? What is required to continue digital practices with a view to securing revenue and creating good art?
4. Relationship between production and distribution

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How has the pandemic affected demand from organisers/clients/partners/customers, etc.? Do you have more/fewer jobs now than before the pandemic? Are you experiencing a rush of jobs or a standstill in the field? • Is there a tendency for productions to pile up because the pandemic has created imbalance between production and distribution capacity in the sector? • If so, how does this affect you/your field? Who benefits/loses because of this?
<p>5. Conditions for international activity and collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your experience of international activity and international collaboration? (Keywords: international projects, international ensembles, bands, groups, touring, performances, sales, etc. in Norway or abroad) • What is your motivation for working/collaborating internationally? • How has the pandemic affected your international activities and any international collaborations you are involved in? • Has collaborating internationally become more/less attractive? (Keywords: Funding schemes and the need for artistic inspiration can promote motivation, while environmental and climate considerations, war/conflict, etc. can inhibit/reduce motivation.) • There was no compensation from the COVID-19 schemes for loss of international activities/work. What impact has this had? • Has the pandemic given rise to new ways of collaborating/working, and what are the potential consequences of this? (Keywords: digitalisation, collaboration/working practices, more emphasis on local affiliation, smaller formats, etc.)
<p>Finally</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there anything else you would like to add? • Are there any questions/topics you think we have not covered that you would like to address? • Do you have any questions for Proba/the contractor? Please contact Anja Nylund Hagen, anja.nylund.hagen@kulturradet.no, if you have any questions about how the Arts Council will be using the results.