SSOAR

Open Access Repository
www.ssoar.info

Learning from the Pandemic: Artistic Freedom & Mobility Beyond the Covid-19 Crisis (Summary Document)

Çakır, Pelin

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Kurzbericht / abridged report

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Çakır, P. (2022). *Learning from the Pandemic: Artistic Freedom & Mobility Beyond the Covid-19 Crisis (Summary Document).* (ifa Edition Culture and Foreign Policy). Berlin: Martin Roth-Initiative; ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen). https://doi.org/10.17901/akbp1.02.2022

Nutzungsbedingungen:
Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-SA Lizenz (Namensnennung-Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.de

Terms of use:
This document is made available under a CC BY-SA Licence (Attribution-ShareAlike). For more Information see: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0

gesis Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften

Mitglied der Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

Diese Version ist zitierbar unter / This version is citable under:
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-77262-1

Summary Document

Martin
Roth
Initiative

Learning from the Pandemic: Artistic Freedom & Mobility Beyond the Covid-19 Crisis

By Pelin Çakır

Abstract
The Covid-19 pandemic has hit the creative and cultural sectors hard; it has led to further risks and restrictions for artists, and hindered opportunities for cross-border mobility and collaboration. This brief summarizes the key findings and recommendations of a report that explores how to maintain spaces of artistic freedom in a world transformed by Covid-19.
The report provides the perspectives of vulnerable, marginalized, or persecuted artists, and the strategies they used to cope with the challenges of the pandemic. It also examines the strengths and weaknesses of mobility and temporary relocation programs in their response to the needs of those artists. Drawing on how the Covid-19 crisis has exposed the complicated and contested nature of risk, the report calls for a critical perspective towards the label of "artist-at-risk". By providing a closer focus on experiences in repressive contexts such as Turkey, the report develops recommendations to guide future attempts to support artistic freedom and mobility in the face of the pandemic's long-term impacts, further restrictions, or any future crisis of a similar nature.
The full report is available at:
www.doi.org/10.17901/akbp1.01.2022.

Screenshot from "Aorta"; Concept/ Choreography/ Performance: Dilan Yoğun; Camera: Fatma Çelik; Music: Cansun Küçüktürk; Thanks to: Emrah Karakurum
© Dilan Yoğun (www.dilanyogun.com/en)

Background

In March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic began to grow into a global crisis, which led to irreversible consequences in all spheres of life, including the arts and culture. Worldwide restrictions and measures aimed at mitigating the spread of Covid had an immediate impact on artistic freedoms. Closure of exhibition and performance venues and the cancellation of events have caused the creative and cultural sector to suffer from major economic challenges.

People working in the cultural and creative sector already had to cope with precarity, irregularity, and inadequate social security before Covid-19 hit. Covid has only exacerbated the pre-existing vulnerability of arts and cultural practitioners and exposed the weaknesses of the system. Many countries with poor cultural policies or economies treated art as a non-essential field and failed to implement measures toward the survival of the arts and culture in general. Some countries used the pandemic as an excuse to enact further restrictions on the freedom of expression, quash dissident voices, and control public space.

Artists in vulnerable groups like LGBTI+, refugees, individuals living in conflict zones, young artists, and artists who are targeted, marginalized, or persecuted because of their work or identities, faced additional economic, psychological, and social risks. While striving to maintain their practice under extraordinarily challenging circumstances, artists who have raised a dissident or critical voice in repressive contexts have faced criminalization, marginalization, and censorship.

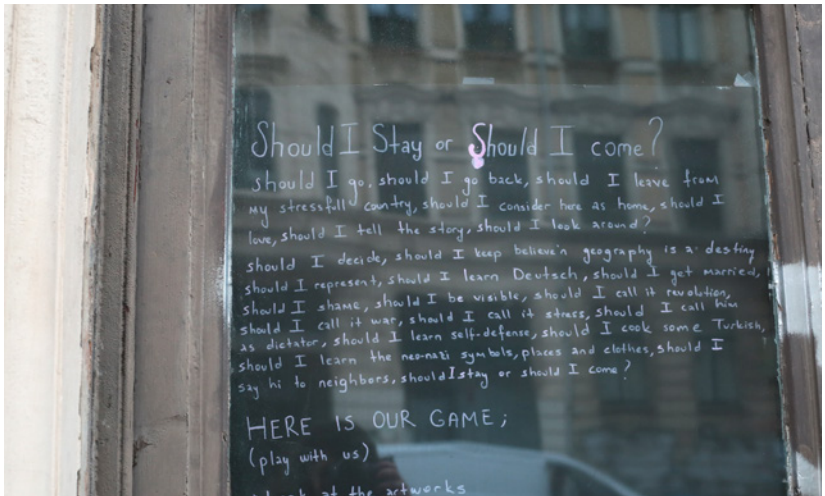
As the impacts of the pandemic seem likely to continue, it is necessary to learn from this experience to better prepare for future crises of a similar nature. This brief summarizes the findings of a report which presents ways to maintain spaces of artistic freedom based on lessons learned from the pandemic. The report is derived from research that explored the experiences of artists who are struggling with vulnerability, risks, and restrictions against artistic freedoms, as well as those of arts organizations supporting artistic freedom and mobility. This research was conducted between May and September 2021; it comprises a desk review of relevant publications, and 28 in-depth interviews with respondents from a variety of backgrounds. The report includes a focus on Turkey to illustrate a key context in which the freedom of arts is severely restricted and a growing number of artists are requesting assistance and protection.

Learning from the pandemic

The main needs that artists and cultural practitioners recognized in this period are improved legal and social status; adequate (and fairly distributed) state support for the arts and cultural practices; and more spaces to reconnect, share their work, and establish collaborative partnerships. Many specified the lack of social interaction as the major challenge imposed by the pandemic to their practice and overall wellbeing. The experience of crisis, intensified precarity, and deteriorating economic conditions during the pandemic has additionally complicated the definition of risk by exposing how economic, political, and psychosocial risks may be interlinked.

Artists and cultural practitioners in repressive contexts like Turkey and the Middle East had to struggle with unprecedented conditions, insecurity, and perpetual crises even before the pandemic. Having learnt from previous experiences, they responded to the challenges in this period by remaining flexible, diversifying plans and strategies, adapting their projects to changing conditions, maintaining close and caring communication, and strengthening their communities and trusted networks. They organized, found different forms of economic solidarity and social support, made use of digital tools and online platforms, and transformed limitations into creativity.

During the pandemic, artistic mobility and temporary relocation programs proved themselves to be inept at responding to emergencies and considering their ecological costs. Respondents criticized temporary relocation schemes for reproducing structures which further isolate or individualize artists, excluding those with limited



Filiz İzem Yaşın: Image from "Should I Stay or Should I Come", Window Installation, A und V e.V, Leipzig//20
© Filiz İzem Yaşın

Page 2,
top right corner
Filiz İzem Yaşın:
Size Wonderful,
Sadporn Series,
text: "Solidarity
makes you survive",
Leipzig//20
© Filiz İzem Yaşın

access to resources and weakening the local arts and culture scene by distancing them from it. However, mobility during the pandemic had an economically, emotionally, and creatively supportive impact on artists as well. When cross-border mobility or in-person residency became impossible, developing alternative formats (such as regional, domestic, hybrid, or virtual residencies), negotiating changes, and offering alternatives to participants all had positive impacts on artists.

Growing digitalization in the field served to compensate for cancellations and restrictions in physical encounters and allowed for broader accessibility and fewer economic or administrative burdens. However, practitioners had a common experience of digital fatigue and alienation, particularly when in-person practices such as festivals, exhibitions, or community-building events adapted poorly to online formats. Finally, as Covid revealed the vulnerabilities and the inadequacies of existing systems, solidarity became a key concept for the survival of particularly independent, dissident, or controversial artists and arts organizations.

Leman Sevda
Darıcıoğlu: Photo
from the performance "There is an
ocean between us",
Berlin, 2020
© Leman Sevda
Darıcıoğlu

Recommendations

1.
States should fulfill their responsibility and obligation to support artists, arts and cultural organizations, and to develop adequate cultural policies to address artistic freedom and mobility. The pandemic should not be used as an excuse to blanket the major problems in the field or to justify sanctions that further impede on justice and freedoms.

2.
Funding should be flexible and adapt to changing strategies to cope with crises and repressive contexts. As actors may need to change their plans or establish alternative models and multiple strategies to survive in a hostile environment, funding should be available without rigid conditions, administrative requirements, or expectations of output. Funding should be easily accessible to independent artists and local art actors with a variety of statuses and in remote locations or outside networks built according to privilege, popularity, or affinity. To provide more adequate support, donors are recommended to gain a better understanding of local dynamics, visit and collaborate with local actors, and maintain a connection and a proactive engagement with their practice.

3.
To facilitate mobility during the pandemic and its possible aftermath, it is necessary to **further improve on the newly developed formats, hybrid forms, and strategies to enhance connection/collaboration and artistic practice in the face of increased restrictions, crisis, or emergency.** These strategies include the investment of extra time and effort in the fulfilment of health and travel requirements, the development of domestic and regional relocation alternatives, and the strengthening of social support. Future programs should be designed to be adaptable to the diverse conditions of the local contexts of partners as well as to administrative complications or emergency situations that may arise. They should be developed to be more sensitive to participants' health and wellbeing needs, as well as to the ecological costs of mobility.

4.
Digitalization should not come at the expense of quality, artistic value, human interaction, and social justice. Virtual formats cannot always replace physical encounters. Alternatives like using public spaces for artistic practice and hybrid formats for events and residencies to advance accessibility and maintain social interaction should be endorsed. Support is needed to improve digital security skills and infrastructure in disadvantaged and restricted areas.

5.
To overcome even stricter visa regulations, actors involved in temporary relocation should **advocate and negotiate diplomatically to address border regimes and migration policies**, which hinder access to protection by individuals at risk. Granting special travel permission to artists may facilitate their access to protection and support. Yet, to address these obstacles more systematically, advocacy should take into consideration that border regimes often restrict mobility indistinguishably or at the disadvantage of those who are more underprivileged. Among those whose cross-border mobility is curtailed by unachievable visa requirements, there are arts and culture agents who play a role in the healing and cohesion of the societies in a post-pandemic world.

6.
Actors in the temporary relocation ecosystem should extend their networks and practice to span other sectors toward cross-sectoral collaboration. They should **develop a coalition of a variety of actors to contend with the legal, economic, political, local, or global obstacles to artistic freedom and mobility.** Actors who can fulfill different roles such as advocacy, emergency or direct support, policy-making, and providing space, infrastructure or resources should be included to address the diverse needs and complex conditions of artists. Such collaboration should extend to regional, transnational, and semi-informal networks, as well as local civil society movements, and should reinforce local ecosystems by exchanging skills and resources.

7.
The provision of support and protection to artists who are threatened, marginalized, or persecuted needs to be decolonized. This is possible by liberating the understanding of "risk" from the top-down rules and expectations held by actors in positions of power. Decolonizing the approach would require being open to learning from others who have authentic experience and practice-based knowledge. Likewise, grounded practices and cultivating care through collaboration and communication will help actors understand and respond to diverse needs, preferences, and holistic conditions of supported artists. The mechanisms of support and protection across the divides of different positions of privilege and power should be sensitive to the biases of paternalism, exploiting the work of partner artists for one's own "savior" image, or (re)producing (or even fetishizing) artists' vulnerability or victimhood.

8.
Instead of relying on rigid scheme and top-down categories to identify whom to provide support or protection, programs should focus on building partnerships of solidarity **around the common cause of advocating for artistic freedom and maintaining an independent, non-conforming, grassroots arts and cultural practice under challenging circumstances.** Therefore the practice of solidarity **should be based on the principles of sustainability, responsibility, horizontality, and mutuality**. Discussion is needed on how to build cross-border partnerships and share resources, strengthen solidarity mechanisms across North-South and rich-poor divides, regardless of differences in nationality, race, language, or gender identity.

Imprint

The study "Learning from the Pandemic: Artistic Freedom & Mobility Beyond the Covid-19 Crisis" was commissioned by the Martin Roth-Initiative (MRI) and is published in the ifa Edition Culture and Foreign Policy. This summary document is also available in Turkish: www.doi.org/10.17901/akbp1.03.2022.

The MRI is a joint project of Goethe-Institut and ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen) and is funded by the German Federal Foreign Office.

© Martin Roth-Initiative/ifa, February 2022
www.doi.org/10.17901/akbp1.02.2022

MRI website
www.martin-roth-initiative.de/en
info@martin-roth-initiative.de

MRI research program
www.ifa.de/en/research/research-programme-martin-roth-initiative/

Graphics
by Weidner Händle Atelier