

KALLE KORHONEN*

ARTS-BASED RESEARCH AND ARTISTIC RESEARCH PROMOTING NEW KINDS OF CO-OPERATION: A FUNDER'S PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

For a decade, the Helsinki-based Kone Foundation, a private funder of research and the arts, has been increasing its efforts to promote collaboration between academics and artists. In the paper, the author discusses the motivations behind such funding and gives examples of initiatives that have sprung as a result. He concludes with funder's perspectives on how to support and facilitate collaboration in projects which combine academic and artistic work.

Keywords

Research funding; artistic research; collaboration.

ISSN: 03928667 (print) 18277969 (digital)

DOI: 10.26350/001200_000109

“But why do you fund collaboration between academic researchers and artists? What is the reasoning behind it?”. These are questions that are sometimes asked in our context, since Kone Foundation is known in Finnish academic circles for its support for research and art. To start with, one must point out that collaboration between academic research and art is not our main concern: Kone Foundation funds humanities, social sciences and environmental sciences, as well as art¹. In this essay, which is not an academic paper, I will discuss the motivations behind funding collaboration between academics and artists.

1. DISTINCTIONS

To start with distinctions, in the context of Kone Foundation the term *arts-based research* is not used so much: we prefer to talk about collaboration between artists and academics. However, what the collaboration actually involves comes close to the meaning of *arts-based research* as defined recently by Janinka Greenwood: “arts-based research encompasses a range of research approaches and strategies that utilize one or more of the arts in investigation”².

We also use the term *artistic research*, which has a specific status in our catego-

* Kone Foundation, Helsinki, Finland – kalle.korhonen@koneensaatio.fi.

¹ Kone Foundation (www.koneensaatio.fi/en) is one of the principal private funders of research and art in Finland. Its annual funding budget is between 30 and 40 million euros. In 2019, 63% of the funding was awarded to research projects, 22% to projects combining research and art, and 16% to art and other cultural work.

² J. Greenwood, “Arts-Based Research”, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*, 2019. Accessed August 31, 2020. DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.29.

risation of academic disciplines. A grant application can be submitted in a category of artistic research if, and only if, the applicant's work will include both an academic and an artistic component³.

One must of course bear in mind that in some academic disciplines, and not only in artistic research, the work of a researcher can include activities that are traditionally categorised as artistic. To take an example, in arts and humanities, the skills of a philologist can include translating literature, and academic outputs include translations, whose literary qualities are evaluated by other scholars. This is, in my view, different from the photography skills of a biologist or an ethnologist, which do not have such an influence on the merits of the researcher.

Since the research funding of Kone Foundation focuses on humanities, social sciences, and environmental science, we do not fund so much what is called "Art and Science", co-operation between natural scientists and artists, although some such initiatives have been funded over the years.

Finally, obviously it is not always easy to distinguish between "academics" and "artists": it is increasingly common that practising artists have a PhD degree in art, and they can be classified as both academics and artists. Artistic researchers regularly either aim at a PhD degree or already have one. But most of the people working in projects combining artistic and academic work belong to just one of the two categories.

2. PREFERENCES

The reason why we avoid calling research "arts-based" is that we would like to see, in the projects combining research and art, collaboration on equal terms: if the research is arts-based, then the art created in the project is "based" on the collaboration with academics, too. On the other hand, Kone Foundation can fund a project in which art has an auxiliary or subordinate role to research, or the other way around. But we are especially interested in projects in which the roles of researchers and artists are more or less equal. We know that both academics and artists are specialists in creative problem-solving, and their co-operation can lead into new ideas.

In our experience, artists have traditionally applied for short and smallish grants, whereas every active academic with a doctorate must learn how to create multi-year research projects. Even in humanities and social sciences, projects involving several researchers have become more common than previously, at least in Finland. At Kone Foundation, we wish to see if the people from such different backgrounds can create projects in which the artists' roles would not be less significant and somehow subordinate to the scholar, and funding has been seen as an instrument of encouragement.

The funding of projects combining art and research at Kone Foundation began in the early 2010's. Already before that, artistic researchers had been funded with grants that included both a personal grant and funding to cover the other expenses of their artistic work. But with increased possibilities to fund longer and bigger initiatives, the foundation wanted to see if it could encourage actual co-operation.

³ We follow the ideas presented by M. Hannula, J. Suoranta and T. Vadén in their book *Artistic Research Methodology: Narrative, Power and the Public*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2014; see especially the preface, XI-XII. If a group is applying for a project grant from Kone Foundation and wants to classify it under artistic research, artistic researchers must have an important role in the project.

3. EXPERIENCES

It takes time to create new forms of co-operation. This has become visible in the fact that many of the projects funded by Kone Foundation which combine research and art have been operating with traditional forms. Artists have worked for a short time at the end of research projects, and researchers have been used as consultants at some point in artistic projects.

But there has also been work which embodies the idea of true collaboration between academics and artists. Liisa Raevaara, a Finnish linguist, was principal investigator in a project called *Art as Work and a Working Tool*, in which interaction researchers and performance artists worked together⁴. In my conversation with her and Elina Izarra Ollikainen, the leading artist in the project, Liisa and Elina gave a fascinating account of how the work proceeded. In the initial phase, the interaction researchers studied the artists, who were teaching performance to young people. However, soon both the artists and the academics began to ponder on the essence of their own work. This resulted in profound reflections and deeper understanding of the “nature” of academic work and artistic work.

Another research-and-art initiative funded in the second half of the 2010’s by Kone Foundation, with the title *Two Finlands: Is Inequality on the Rise?*, has been analysed by Inkeri Koskinen, a philosopher of science⁵. What she found out was interesting: the co-operation between social scientists and photographic artists began with what might have lead to a disaster, when a sociologist asked the photographers to produce hundreds of photos of Finnish living rooms and bathrooms. After some negotiation, a better mutual understanding of the roles of different professionals in the group was gained. In time, the co-operation led to many outcomes which received a significant amount of media attention. Still, co-operation in the production of knowledge between the sociologists and the photography artists was not achieved. Obviously the societal impact of the initiative cannot yet be assessed.

For a funder, however, probably the most important point was made by Maria Ohisalo, who participated in the *Two Finlands* project as a doctoral researcher, and is currently Minister of the Interior in Finland. She believed that the co-operation achieved in the project will live on in different ways: “But we should strive for a more systemic change. And envisage other projects in which people from different disciplines could work together longer, in concrete ways, every day for a long time”⁶.

⁴ See <http://urbduuni.fi/in-english/>. Accessed August 31, 2020.

⁵ I. Koskinen, “Miksi tieteilijöiden kannattaa tehdä yhteistyötä taiteilijoiden kanssa” [*Why It Is Useful for Academics to Collaborate with Artists*], *Ajatus*, 75 (2018): 93-120 [in Finnish]. <https://journal.fi/ajatus/article/view/77487>. Koskinen’s analysis contains important insights into arts-based research. Accessed August 31, 2020.

⁶ Quoted by I. Koskinen, “Että maailma muuttuisi paremmaksi”, in V. Lähde, J. Vehkoo, *Jakautuuko Suomi?*, Helsinki: Into Kustannus, 2018, 175-184 (183) [in Finnish, translated by the present author].