

Abstract

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THE REGIONAL ARTS COUNCILS

Finland has 13 regional arts councils, which together with the Arts Council of Finland and the state arts councils form part of the system for promoting the arts.

The main purpose of this audit was to evaluate the activities of the regional arts councils with respect to the objectives set for them. The audit focused on the regional arts councils' position and tasks and changes in them, finance and financial administration, external and internal direction, aid and grant activities, and monitoring and control.

The regional arts councils, originally the provincial arts councils, were established in the late 1960s on regional policy grounds. Council members are appointed by the provincial state offices. Administrative personnel are part of the provincial administration organization. The provincial administration pays them from its own funds. The Ministry of Education provides funds to the regional arts councils for the promotion of the arts.

Funding for the regional arts councils in 2000 totalled about FIM 35 million, of which the provincial state offices supplied about FIM 7.6 million or 22%. Annual expenditure averaged about FIM 2.7 million per council. The regional arts councils' annual expenditure has remained at the same level in real terms for the past 25 years. The significance of the entire arts council system is not very large in relation to the funding provided by the Ministry of Education in the arts and culture sector. The regional arts councils account for only a small portion of funding in this system.

The audit indicated that the budgeting of the regional arts councils' administrative costs has not taken place entirely according to the Act on the Arrangement of the Promotion of the Arts. Almost since the beginning expenditure has been budgeted to include profits from pool betting and lotteries. In 2001 FIM 7.5 million was budgeted in this way. In the opinion of the State Audit Office, the budgeting of administrative costs should be brought into compliance with the above-mentioned Act.

During the course of the audit it was quite difficult to obtain a clear picture of whether the regional arts councils have operated efficiently, economically and effectively in general. The basic reason is that there are no evaluation tools for this purpose. The audit nevertheless indicated that the regional arts councils clearly play a significant and important role in promoting the arts at the regional level.

The regional arts councils' external reporting does not provide a consistent picture which would allow a comparison of the regional arts councils' activities and results. In the opinion of the State Audit Office, such a comparison requires that the regional arts councils prepare standardized reports annually.

The audit indicated that the regional arts councils' position in relation to the state arts council system and the provincial administration is problematic. The regional arts councils have remained a very loose part of the system, although the entire system should be based on joint objectives. This is even more obvious in administrative development work, where the regional arts councils have mainly been viewed as part of the provincial administration. In the opinion of the State Audit Office, the regional arts councils should be linked more firmly to the state arts council system operationally and administratively. The regional arts councils' position with respect to the provincial administration should be reevaluated entirely.

In several connections proposals have been made to transfer the regional arts councils' administrative personnel from the provincial state offices to the Ministry of Education or the Arts Council of Finland. The parliamentary Committee for Education and Culture, for example, would like to see personnel transferred to the Arts Council of Finland. Although this matter has been included in the Ministry of Education's operational and financial plans, it has not led to action.

According to observations made in the audit, result management of the regional arts councils on the part of the Ministry of Education and the provincial state offices has been incomplete, unclear and inexact in many respects. This has been due to the regional arts councils' vague administrative position and partly to the fact that the information on which result management is based has not allowed effective direction. A similar deficiency was observed in strategic management: it has not been possible at the national or regional level to create an arts policy strategy which would at the same time have promoted the Ministry of Education's direction of the regional arts councils and the focusing of the regional arts councils' activities.

Grant and aid activities have traditionally formed the core of the regional arts councils' activities. Around FIM 14 million was spent for this purpose in 2000. Grants have surpassed aid quantitatively in recent years. In 2000 the regional arts councils spent nearly FIM 10 million on grants. The audit indicated that the legislative basis for arranging activities in this way is lacking, however. The Act on Art Professorships and State Artist Grants (734/69) and the Decree on Art Professorships and State Artist Grants (845/69) only contain provisions concerning state artist grants awarded by the state arts councils, together with the number of grants and the procedure for awarding them. If the regional arts councils are to continue awarding grants as well, the State Audit Office believes that provisions should be supplemented in this respect. The audit also indicated that administrative practices in the state aid process differ slightly from one council to another.

In the opinion of the State Audit Office, the monitoring of the arts sector by the regional arts councils should extend to the entire regional arts sector as well as cultural activities at the municipal level. On the basis of the audit, the regional arts councils' own evaluation of their activities should be made more systematic and broader in content. The internal direction, control and auditing of the regional arts councils' financial administration also require development measures, in the opinion of the State Audit Office.