



The Business of Culture: Cultural Managers in Iceland and the first waves of the Pandemic

Njörður Sigurjónsson

Professor, Department of Social Science, Bifröst University.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1789-4285>

njordur@bifrost.is

Sigrún Lilja Einarsdóttir

Associate Professor, Department of Social Science, Bifröst University.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5312-8302>

sigrunlilja@bifrost.is

Finnur Bjarnason

Researcher, Department of Social Science, Bifröst University.

finnurb19@bifrost.is

Abstract

This study observes the impact of COVID-19 on the Icelandic cultural field from the viewpoint of cultural managers. The survey population consists of top and middle managers in Icelandic cultural organisations which ranged from sole proprietorship business organisations, small exhibition spaces and concert venues, to larger national institutions. Using the data about the effects of the “pre-vaccine” pandemic as a point of departure, we conclude that while managers of cultural organisations find that their own organisations have been affected by the pandemic, they worry most about independent cultural contractors. From the results it is evident that managers were faced with complex decisions regarding programming and operations. The toughest decisions have to do with the termination of contracts with part time staff and project-based workers. Even if only few of the organisations (16%) were forced to reduce the number of regular staff due to the pandemic, and only a third received emergency government support, a majority (93%) agreed that the pandemic affected their organisation, and most (75%) were forced to postpone or cancel activities and collaborative projects. In response to this reality, the Icelandic government has concentrated its support on aiding various independent actors in the “creative industries” in a broad sense, thus not only focusing on social issues, or the traditional arts, heritage, and public cultural organisations. The research question put forward is the following: “How did the first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic impact Icelandic cultural organisations, from the viewpoint of Icelandic cultural managers?” The aim of the research is to better understand the circumstances of those working in cultural management in Iceland, as well as how they have been affected by the COVID-19 crisis. The results also invite further discussion about the development of cultural policy emphasis in Iceland, towards a broader support for independent agents in the cultural industries in general.

Keywords

COVID-19, cultural management, Icelandic cultural policy, cultural managers.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is the biggest challenge to the cultural industries in Iceland since the financial crash in 2008. Since February 2020, services and businesses have had to either close or severely limit their operations whilst theatres, concert halls, museums, galleries, and other operations within the cultural and creative sector have either had to shut down or reduce their performances and opening hours, causing a significant loss in revenues. Given the extent of the lockdowns imposed in response to the pandemic, it is no surprise how much of a blow COVID-19 dealt the cultural sector, especially the live performing arts. Not only did this affect the cultural life of the public, but it also endangered the livelihood of cultural entrepreneurs, artists, and contract workers in the broader cultural industries. This was confirmed by official data published by Statistics Iceland at the end of October 2020, showing that salaries in the cultural sector were down 23% compared with the previous year in the period stretching to August 2020, even before the second wave of the pandemic had struck (Statistics Iceland 2020). Until early 2022, COVID-19 restrictions were hardened or loosened, following the status of the pandemic, creating severe uncertainties for managers in the cultural sector. When this article is written (February 2022), the latest variant seems to be coming to an end, after having quite rapidly spread through Europe and other continents, thankfully without causing a significant increase in hospitalisations. As the pandemic has yet to run its course, it is not clear what its overall effect will be but in Iceland, as elsewhere, COVID-19 has provided a difficult stress test for the arts and culture, ruthlessly exposing several dependencies and weaknesses within the sector.

This article examines the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on cultural policy in Iceland, using the findings of an extensive survey of practicing cultural managers. The research question put forward is the following: “How did the first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic impact Icelandic cultural organisations, from the viewpoint of Icelandic cultural managers?”

Our findings show that the pandemic had a severe impact on the organisations and that managers are overly concerned about the state of the cultural field. The managers’ concerns, however, are mostly to do with the economic well-being of artists and independent cultural workers who were left without income. Other effects, such as for instance that public needs for cultural experiences might not be met during lockdowns or the fact that many cultural organisations, such as theatres and museums, had to close their doors to the public in the early stages of the pandemic, are not seen as a major concern in answers to open questions. The managers’ concerns mirror the wider cultural policy discourse in Iceland at the time, which was adapted to help individual artists, contractors, and small project-based initiatives in the wider cultural industries. At the same time, the Ministry of Culture in Iceland was restructured, and its name changed from the “Ministry of Education, Science and Culture” to “the Ministry of Culture and Business Affairs,” which is indicative of a change in policy emphasis. We discuss these changes and their possible implications in the article, but we also want to emphasise that not much can be asserted or generalised from one survey during a time of crisis. Further research needs to be done on attitudes within the cultural field, and the cultural managers are only one part of the wider culture-political landscape, even if their position is worth studying. In our research we see cultural managers as important policy stakeholders and, since they are responsible for running cultural organisations, their opinion gives insight into the state of the field and how it might develop.

Icelandic cultural policy between Nordic welfare and creative economy

The role of managers in setting cultural policy is easily overlooked, and empirical research of cultural managers' experience and views in that context is scarce. However, as Paquette (2012) observes, "cultural policy relies on public/private agents, on users to implement state policies, and these users, in turn, shape cultural policy – not only by performing these roles, but also by imagining new identities, new ideals, that will eventually inflect cultural policies in unforeseen directions" (Paquette 2012: 15). The point is that to understand cultural policy we must listen to the mediators, agents, and users, and how they make sense of the cultural policy reality. Cultural managers have been described as intermediaries or ambassadors who enable cooperation between different disciplines (Mulcahy 2003; Kuesters 2010; Föhl, Wolfram & Peper 2016). The emphasis of the field is flexible, due to the nature of the operation and/or the project and job descriptions can vary between disciplines and organisations (DeVeraux 2009). The cultural manager, whilst navigating between culture, administration, and policy, thus inevitably leaves his or her mark on all three.

Icelandic cultural policy is best understood in a Nordic context (Duelund 2003, 2008; Kangas & Vestheim 2010). Historically Iceland has aligned itself closely with the Nordic model of cultural policy in that its cultural sector plays an important, welfare-oriented role in society. This applies not only to those who work and operate within the arts and cultural organisations, but also to the public (see Mangset 1995)¹. Accordingly, this welfare principle has underpinned the economic security of artists and organisations alike, on the basis that the arts are "a national resource for social and economic development" (Kangas & Onser-Franzen 1996: 19). This point of view is also present in a report published by the Council of Europe (Kern 2020) on the effects of COVID-19 on culture and the creative industries, where nations are urged to support the arts and thus sustain the "creative ecosystem".

Despite aligning itself with the welfare-oriented Nordic model of cultural policy (Mangset 1995), for the past 40 years a tension has been present between different paradigms, informed by an economic rational on the one hand and cultural values on the other. This tension, so much a part of the manager's reality, can be observed on a macro scale in public cultural politics, in the pull between an emphasis on instrumental values on the one hand, and cultural ideals on the other. Sometimes the "instrumental" story is that culture is, "fatalistically", or "more and more", being rationalised in terms of these extra political interests (Gray 2008), such as innovation or job creation. But other times the discourse, like a pendulum, swings in the other direction, towards emphasis on the intrinsic value of the arts, or culture for culture's sake (Harding 2017). For instance, it has been argued that after the financial crash in Iceland in 2009, there was a clear move in public cultural politics away from market principles and private patronage (Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir 2010) towards cultural participation and public support for culture for its own sake (Sigurjónsson 2021).

From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Icelandic government committed considerable resources to countering the effects of the paralysis of the independent cultural sector, in addition to the general economic response (Government of Iceland 2020). However, unlike the Icelandic government's emphasis on government organisations and the public's access to culture in the aftermath of the financial crash in 2008 (Sigurjónsson 2021),

1. COVID-19 highlighted the fact that the participation of the public, which is the backbone of the welfare model (see Bonet & Négrier 2018; Jancovich 2011, 2017), might in fact refer to a visiting public. Even whilst museums and other cultural organisations that stayed open were visited by Icelanders, this was far from enough to make up for the loss of revenues due to the absence of foreign tourists (see also Gestsdóttir et al. 2020).

there was a strong policy emphasis during the 2020-2022 pandemic on economic aid to small businesses, freelancers, and independent artists. These extra measures included an increase in the number of artists' stipends annually awarded through an arm's length process, as well as a fund aimed at compensating those who had lost at least 40% of their earnings. Although there were early indications that the government's measures were not targeted enough to be effective in assisting the artistic community, the Icelandic response in 2020 nevertheless compared favourably to the other Nordic countries, both based on per capita and as percentage of GDP, with only Denmark spending more (Berge, Storm & Hylland 2021). In March 2021, the total of 9 billion ISK had been provided by the Icelandic government in various grants and support funding for the job market, thereof 368 million ISK to individuals and organisations working within the cultural sector. Looking at the profiles of grant holders, 126 had received these grants, mostly independent artists and/or small, independent units with 5 employees or less. Maximum grant per unit was around 2-2,5 million ISK per month (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture 2021).

It seemed from the outset, as is also shown in our data below, that small businesses and independent cultural workers were particularly hard hit by the pandemic. This is especially true of the gig-sector, which includes independent contractors, artists, and cultural entrepreneurs who do not have a steady pay check to rely upon when a "gig" falls through. Concerts and music festivals, for instance, are heavily dependent on part-time or seasonal cultural workers. This is also worth considering in the context of a joint report issued by Icelandic artists' associations and industry organisations within the music sector (2020) revealing that in Iceland, as elsewhere, the popular music industry, the original gig economy, had emerged as particularly vulnerable during the pandemic. The impact on self-employed cultural workers like musicians has been profound and the loss of revenue of record sales, plus the drop of concerts, might have a more severe long-term impact, causing cultural workers to drop out of their professions and work in other sectors (see Reynisdóttir & Jónatansdóttir 2020).

The collapse of tourism during the pandemic is also a major factor. This is particularly alarming for independent cultural guides, tour providers, and owners of smaller exhibition spaces around the island, who rely primarily on foreign tourists for their income. These concerns were underlined in a joint report from the Icelandic Museum Association, issued in September 2020, confirming that 62% of museum guests are, in a normal year, foreign nationals - causing an inevitable decrease in revenues for museums during pandemic times (Gestsdóttir et al. 2020).

The pressure on the government to support more independent agents, creative start-ups, and cultural workers in a broader sense is indicative of a more general development in Icelandic cultural politics. The existing cultural model, based on the socio-democratic ideas of the welfare state (see Mangset 1995) and informed by Cold War incentives (see Hyde 2007), is seldom referenced without mentioning the benefits it offers to people and societies. This model was reinforced in Iceland after the 2008 financial crash and it is based on the belief that the (high) arts make people generally better and, by extension, improve society (Belfiore & Bennett 2010; Shusterman 2000). The new cultural policy paradigm sits on top of the old one and can be described (in the words of Peter Duelund, who detected similar development in the Nordic countries in the period from 1995-2003) as a process where "economic objectives have replaced educational and aesthetic objectives" (Duelund 2008: 18). The progression towards economic rationalisation is informed by the de-regulation that began in the 1980's and the increasing emphasis on neo-liberal values that followed. In post-pandemic Iceland, this trend has been confirmed by the establishment of a new

Ministry of Culture and Business Affairs, which replaced the former Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in November 2021. Whilst taking the positive effects of culture as a given, it uses economics as its chief measure, widening the definition of artistic and cultural activity to constitute the creative industries. Cultural participation here embraces any cultural activity which can contribute to the creation of economic value, sidestepping any other value judgements. This recent emphasis is reflected in different language, as can be seen when the Icelandic Minister for Education, Science and Culture announced plans to support the visual arts in March 2021:

Considering the size of the international market for art and the notable success of Icelandic artists there is likely to be a considerable growth opportunity for art. With increased public and private investment, the sector will be able to return considerably more value to the economy than it currently does (Alfreðsdóttir 2021 – our translation).

Six months later the Culture Minister's job title changed from "Minister for Education, Science and Culture" to "Minister for Culture and Business Affairs." What this change in title and structure of the ministry responsible for cultural affairs in Iceland will entail remains to be seen and merits further research. However, it is our contention that these changes are telling of a policy shift that is helped by the growing importance of tourism for the Icelandic economy and the difficulties of the independent cultural sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. The role of the arts in defining and justifying nationhood has always been a high priority for Icelandic cultural policy (see Valtýsson 2011), and the early 21st century had further witnessed a paradigmatic shift in Nordic cultural policy towards nationalism (see Duelund 2008). The tourist industry in Iceland can now be seen to bridge the nationalistic and economic elements of cultural policy through the paradoxical branding and marketing of "uniqueness".

Methods

Little empirical research has been conducted into the cultural sector in Iceland and this is the first survey to directly focus on managers in the cultural sector.² The survey population consists of both top and middle managers in Icelandic cultural organisations in the fields of literary and music publishing, galleries, film/video/television production, performing and visual arts, libraries and archives, museums, historic sites and buildings (and similar tourist attractions), venues and other facilities for cultural activities. The formation of the population is a bit narrower than the UNESCO definition of the cultural industry and the EUROSTAT definition of the creative sector, by not including the sectors comprising design, architecture, and computer game design, as an example. In general, the occupation of the cultural and arts manager is quite broadly defined, in the context of all artistic activities, productions, organisations, and even limited projects, whether it is hosted within cultural organisations, exhibitions, festivals, productions, or education, both in the public

2. Prominent amongst the cultural research that has appeared is the extensive survey Menningarvögin (2010), conducted by the Social Science Research Institute of the University of Iceland, which aimed to gauge people's engagement with culture. When participants in this survey were asked whether they took part in the creating or maintaining cultural activities, around 14% claimed to have contributed to a cultural activity or organisation in the past 12 months. The ratio was higher amongst those with a university education (21%) and amongst those in management positions or with a specialist education (22-24%). Of those who had worked in culture, the majority had done so as volunteers (62%) and a minority under their own initiative (18%). Most had contributed to events or festivals (43%) but many had worked in the visual arts, crafts and design, drama, dancing or singing on stage, or in music (27-29%) (Dofradóttir et al. 2010).

or private field. In Iceland, the last decade has seen a steep decline in publishing, printing, and production for tv and radio whilst arts and entertainment, film, sound recording and music publishing, museums and other cultural activity have all risen (Statistics Iceland 2020a). This is in line with the trends of digitisation and moving online.

In targeting the survey, the term “cultural manager” was defined as someone who works for a cultural organisation and bears responsibility for one or more of its fundamental aspects. Hence, not only the heads of the organisations were included but also those in charge of marketing, production, outreach, and finance. The sample was compiled either by collecting professional email addresses on webpages of small and middle-sized organisations and larger national organisations or other available online information, or by contacting said organisations.

Although our definition of “cultural manager” was immediately challenged by our results, which showed that only a minority of the participants think of themselves as cultural managers (45% of the women and 36% of the men), we nevertheless believe that a firm understanding of the cultural sector is a prerequisite, even if one’s area of expertise is finance or marketing. Furthermore, official figures show that cultural jobs are intertwined with other industries, and in the year 2019 only a third of those working in culture were in professions considered cultural, whilst two thirds were in cultural jobs connected to other professions³. The ratio of self-employed or independents was also higher than in other professions, 24.5% vs 10.6% (Statistics Iceland 2019) and many of these secondary jobs, such as lighting, transport, sound, and logistics, saw a complete collapse in activity due to the pandemic. These professionals were generally not reached by our survey and are therefore only reflected in the data as contractors who were cancelled or not hired. Some of them are nevertheless represented and, although a small minority, were able to convey their message in open answers.

The online survey was conducted from September 23rd until October 14th, 2020, and 694 cultural managers were invited to participate. 470 of them accepted the invitation and 373 completed the survey (N=373) which provides us with 53% response rate. The exact size of the population is not known in detail, but given the acceptable response rate, the generalizability of the findings is in our opinion adequate, although we tend to be more careful than not to conclude about the whole population. Furthermore, the findings are descriptive of a situation in the pre-vaccine COVID-19 pandemic, where respondents were right in the eye of the storm, solving issues within their organisations.

The structure of the survey consists of four main parts: The first part included questions regarding the size, structure, and funding of the workplace. The second part consisted of questions regarding education and experience of the cultural managers. The third part, which is the focal point of this article, inquired about the impact of COVID-19 on participants’ workplaces, while the final part of the survey collected demographic data on respondents.

In relation to COVID-19, participants were asked about the impact of the pandemic on their cultural organisation, the extent to which events had been cancelled or postponed; whether broadcasting had replaced normal activity and how; whether Icelandic visitors had

3. According to employment research from Statistics Iceland (2019) it is estimated that in 2018, 15,400 people aged 16-74 were employed in the cultural sector, which amounts to 7.7% of the total employed. Women made up a large proportion of that, or 58.4%, compared to 45.1% in other sectors, and the proportion of women has remained high for the last five years. 23.5% of those employed in culture were self-employed, compared to 11% in other sectors. Most cultural workers were engaged in arts and entertainment (15,6%), then museums and other cultural activity (13,7%) and thirdly film, sound recording and music publishing (12,4%) (Statistics Iceland 2019).

made up for the lack of foreign tourists; whether the organisation had received emergency government support; how the pandemic had affected their employee status; whether they believed the pandemic exposed a need to restructure the cultural sector, and, if so, how.

As previously mentioned, 373 participated in the survey:

- Women were the majority of respondents, or 63%, vs 36% men
- In terms of age, 23% were in the age group 31-40, 27% in the group 41-50, 29% in the group 51-60, 15% in the group 61-70, 3% were over 70, and 2% were 21-30
- 98% of respondents were Icelanders (by ethnicity)
- 63% had a postgraduate degree, 23% had a bachelor's degree, 7% had secondary school degree or vocational studies, and 7% had finished compulsory elementary education or other similar
- 39% had management education and 17% planned to do a management degree in the future
- 73% had a full-time permanent position
- 46% worked for a public cultural organisations, 16% at an NGO and 25% with an independent firm
- 31% described their occupation as a manager or director, 35% described their occupation as project managers, 12% as marketing directors, 10% as financial directors, and 12% as artistic directors
- 50% worked in a government-funded organisation, 37% for organisations who receive government grants on regular basis, and 11% did not receive any government grants for their operations.
- 37% had worked at their present organisation for 10 years or more

Findings

The focus of the analysis is the experiences of cultural managers amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The research question put forward is the following: “How did the first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic impact Icelandic cultural organisations, from the viewpoint of Icelandic cultural managers?” As expected, the COVID-19 pandemic had already significantly impacted the operation of the organisations and the managers were also asked about specific effects: if they had reduced the number of permanent staff, or if they had increased the number of permanent staff. The survey also asked if the managers had to terminate temporary contracts with part time staff or terminate agreements with contractors due to events that had to be postponed. Furthermore, the survey inquired whether the managers had honoured agreements with contractors on projects that were not possible to execute or even paid compensation for agreements that had to be terminated or postponed. The managers were also asked if they had had to change their operations during the pandemic, cancel operations completely, or if they had streamed cultural events online. In the end the managers were asked an open question about what the pandemic had revealed regarding the structure of the cultural field, its funding and further development.

In terms of funding for the organisations, our survey supported our assumption that the Icelandic cultural sector is largely dependent on government funding. Almost 90% of respondents work for an institution which receives some funding from the government or local authority, on either a regular or sporadic basis.

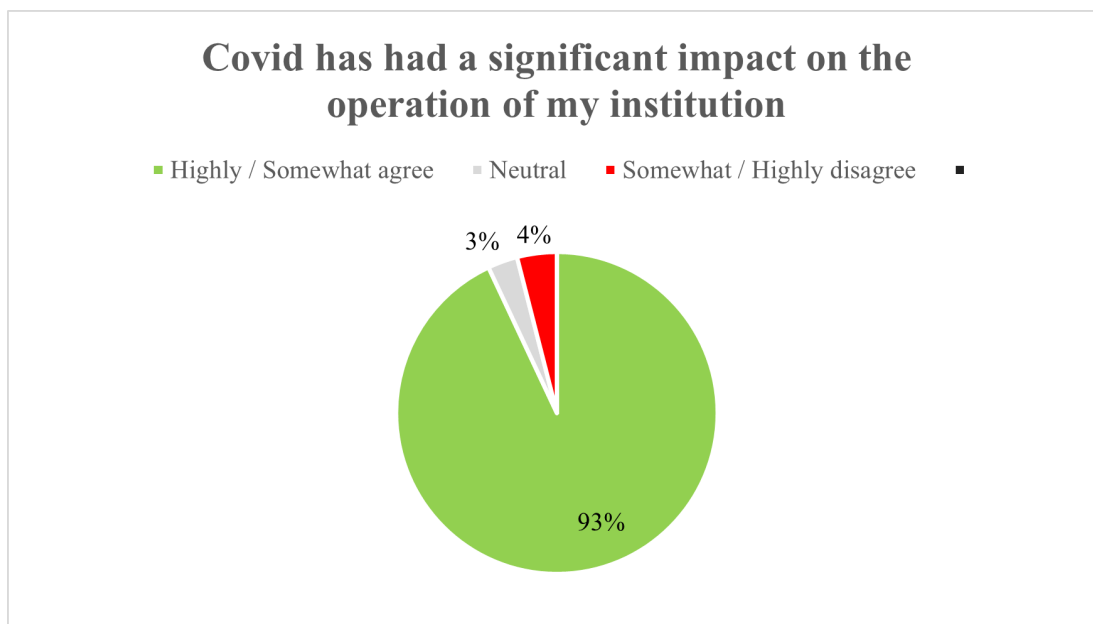


Figure 1: The effects of the COVID-19 on the operation of cultural organisations

Regarding the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, 93% of all respondents claimed the pandemic had affected their workplace in one way or another. In an open question, one of the respondents expressed that COVID-19 might cause a huge collapse in the cultural sector, and that it could take a long time to recover, even longer than the tourism industry. The main cause being the inevitable brain drain, with many skilled and educated workers turning from culture to other sectors. Another respondent wrote:

I work in book publishing. Book sales have fallen by 30-40% over the last year due to COVID. The biggest factors are that tourists are not coming to Iceland [in 2020] and therefore no tourist books are being sold, but also that Icelanders are not travelling abroad. 30-40% of all paperbacks in Icelandic are sold at the airport bookshop meaning that those published so far this year are struggling to break even whilst publishers are running at a loss. Most are praying that the traditional Christmas sales boost will not be affected, since it's the only thing that can save the industry.

75% of all respondents were forced to postpone or cancel activities but only 35% of all respondents claimed their organisations had received emergency government support. Out of the 65% of all respondents who claimed to have moved some cultural activities onto digital media such as Zoom and YouTube, roughly half had offered live streaming or recorded events, while 72% said their online presence had increased through use of social media (79%).

Table 1: Staff operations and contracts

Reduce the number of permanent staff	16%
Increase the number of permanent staff	1%
Terminate temporary contracts with part time staff and contractors	47%
Terminate agreements with contractors due to events that had to be postponed	19%
Honour agreements with contractors on projects that were not possible to execute	9%
Pay compensation for agreements that had to be terminated or postponed	3%

The results further revealed that only 16% of respondents had been forced to decrease the number of regular staff, perhaps reflecting the relative stability of the government backing of most of the organisations. 47% of respondents, however, had cancelled hiring contractors or temporary staff whilst 19% had been forced to back out of agreements with contractors, indicating that a certain proportion of work in the sector is outsourced to independent producers, not extensively covered by our survey, who may have little or no safety net in the case of events such as a pandemic. In this context, only 3% had to pay compensation for cancelled agreements. The respondents had various things to add where the survey allowed for open comments and qualifications. One respondent for instance said:

We have had to cancel events. The artists involved did not get any compensation. Very sad but this is the situation.

This comment was typical for the general concern the managers had for independent artists and freelance cultural workers, which were deemed to be worst off during the lockdowns. Another addressed the issue by saying that they took special measures to compensate these workers:

We took advantage of the “hlutabótaleið” [the government’s compensation allowance] to extend contract with part-time employees.

Others mentioned different ways of making the most of the government’s aid packages to hire freelance staff, especially students:

We got “summer-employees” [students] through a grant scheme by the Directorate of Labour and the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities. We hadn’t planned to have summer-employees, so this was very positive for the institution.

But some answers referred to the fact that this was still early days in the pandemic and that the managers were still trying to come to terms with what was happening:

Many things are uncertain concerning the effect of Covid on the organisation, both regarding contractors and funding.

In summation, the results of the cancellations were that unpaid independent contractors and artists suffered significant losses of revenue. One respondent claimed that whilst the institution managed to count on part-time staff, coping with insecurities in terms of opening hours, the uncertainty of the situation had had severe effects on long-term planning. In addition, a government initiative offering summer jobs for students had helped some in the summer of 2020.

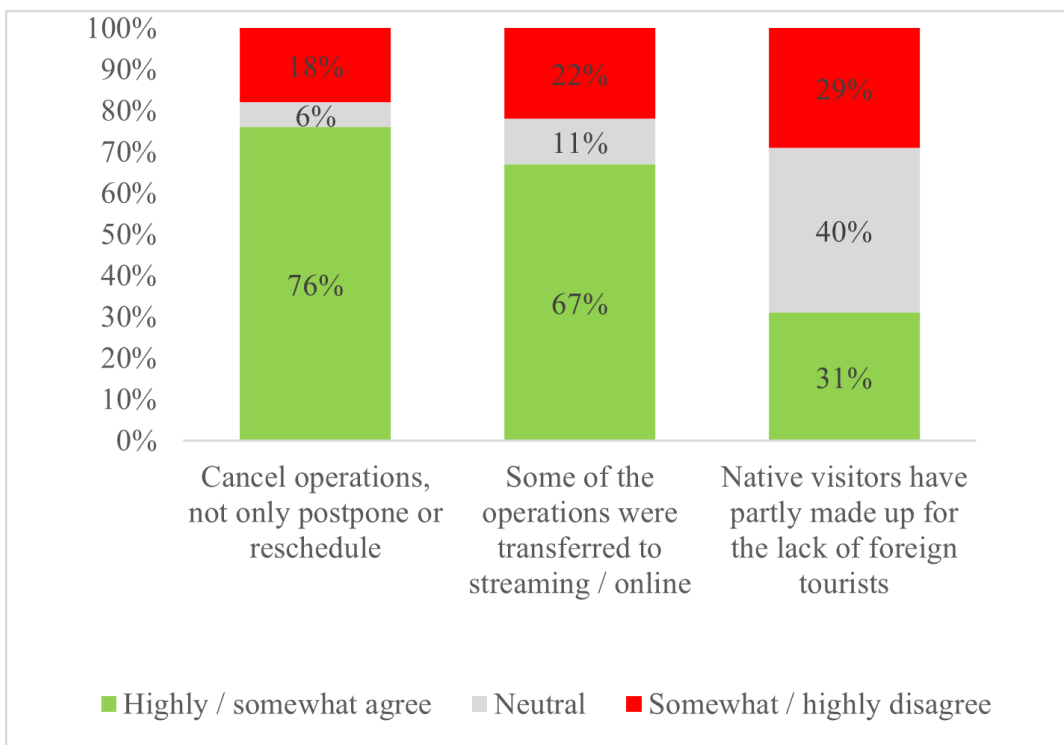


Figure 2: Operational changes

Figure 2 demonstrates how cultural managers had to change their operations during the pandemic in 2020 – 76% agreed that they had to cancel operations completely and 67% claimed that they streamed cultural events online. However, only 31% agreed that native visitors had replaced foreign visitors, in terms of revenues. One of the respondents wrote that the institution would have digitised more of its operations for online streaming through social media if the skills and knowledge had been present, as well as manpower and funding. Hence, the lack of skilled staff was considered a limiting factor.

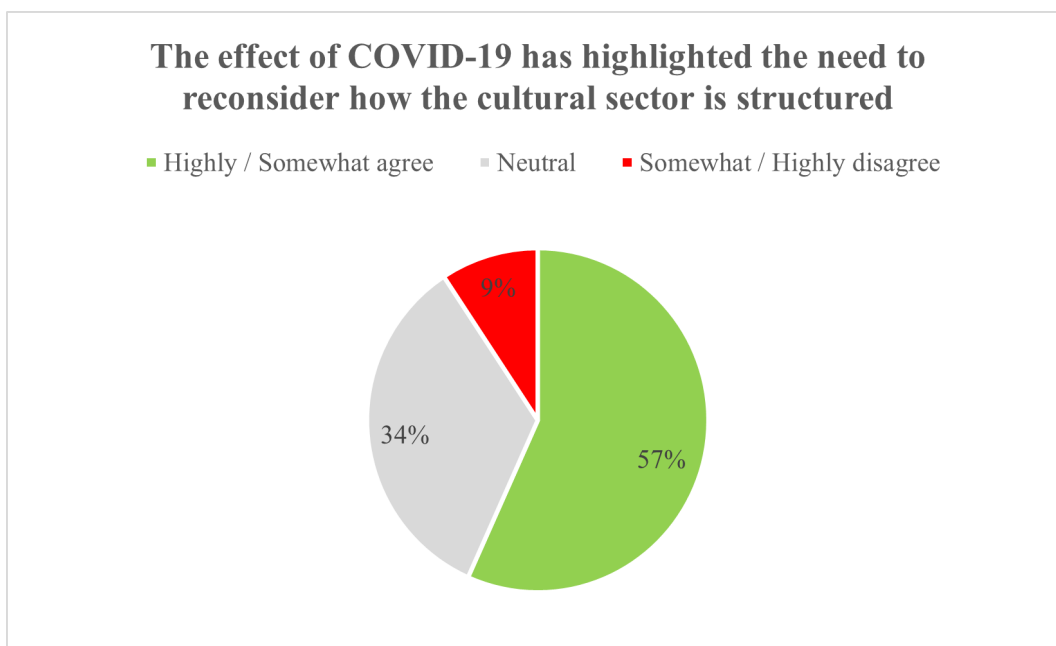


Figure 3: “The effect of COVID-19 has highlighted the need to reconsider how the cultural sector is structured”

When our survey respondents were invited to identify the severity of the pandemic's effect as a structural issue by choosing to agree or disagree with the statement: "The effect of COVID-19 has highlighted the need to reconsider how the cultural sector is structured," (see Figure 3) more than half (55%) of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed, 33% were indifferent, whilst only 9% disagreed.

When those who agreed were asked to rate several options for what a re-structuring might entail, allowing more than one option to be given the highest rating, 45% rated highest the option of "increased support for independent artists" which is in line with government efforts at the time, as discussed in the introduction. Likewise, 45% rated highest the option of "increased funding for culture in general", whilst 41% rated highest "tax incentives for contributions from the private sector". Although this question was of a general nature and was asked to those with a vested interest in increased funding, it nonetheless indicates that despite Iceland's comparatively high level of cultural funding, there is not a feeling that it is enough.

Discussion

Our survey of cultural managers reveals a profound effect on the cultural sector in Iceland, which is unsurprising given the pandemic has left few parts of society untouched. Some organisations have moved activity online where possible and have been able to hold onto their permanent staff, if not their contractors. As a result of our inclusive definition of a cultural manager as a person in a decisive role for culture to take place (intermediaries or ambassadors, see Mulcahy 2003; Kuesters 2010; Föhl, Wolfram & Peper 2016), it has been highlighted how differently the effects of the pandemic have been perceived in the various types of organisations. This was particularly clear in the open comments that many participants wrote. Those working for a larger government organisation with guaranteed funding, constituting 41% of the completed surveys, perceived the situation differently to those for whom the success of the current venture is a pre-requisite for the next one, or where survival is dependent on grants that must be re-applied for regularly. The latter group also contains most of those who work part time as cultural managers in very small organisations, or even as volunteers. They must further rely on contractors to deliver much of their content, although this is arguably also a hallmark of the larger organisations. This discrepancy in experience highlights the large range of situations with which a cultural manager may be presented, and which may be obscured by the aggregate term.

The question, of whether "the effect of COVID-19 has highlighted the need to reconsider how the cultural sector is structured" and the answers to it, also merit a further discussion. The way in which we have used the term cultural manager to some extent bestrides the gap between those working in the public arts sector and those working in the broader cultural industries. This reflects certain changes occurring in cultural policy discourse, since actors like cultural managers, as well as other actors, shape and influence cultural policy, and their voices and perceptions must be taken into account (Paquette 2012). Even if we describe these changes as a recent development here, linking them to the pandemic and the related economic concerns, this has perhaps been a long time coming. The COVID-19 pandemic and the government's response to it has arguably reinforced the new cultural policy paradigm by focusing on market failures in the cultural industries and the economic situation of those working in culture. The immediate danger of the shutdown was not defined as a loss of great art so much as a loss of livelihood for the many people working in the creative industries, revealed by surveys such as that of the music industry, which showed that many

people were falling through the cracks of the initial support system offered by the government (Reynisdóttir & Jónatansdóttir 2020). At the same time, the increasing importance of culture to Iceland's tourist industry was underscored, among others with a survey of Icelandic museums highlighting the shortfall left by the collapse in tourism (Gestsdóttir et al. 2020). The eventual response, however, represents a very large increase in funding for culture.

As tourism has become increasingly fundamental to Iceland's economy over the last decade, the importance of culture for defining and marketing the country's characteristics has become ever more apparent, attracting visitors to admire Iceland's landscapes through the use of culture, and marketing its arts through use of landscapes. Much of the art used to export ideas about Iceland and attract tourists is popular, like Sigur Rós, Björk, or Arnaldur Indriðason, and would usually thrive in the market without subsidies to correct *market failure*, as was the case during the pandemic. Although this supports the fundamental aspect of the welfare principle, the economic security of artists and organisations as an economic resource for the society (see Kangas & Onser-Franzen 1996; Kern 2020), it would appear that the economic emphasis is becoming the dominant paradigm, evidenced by a decoupling of culture from education and the establishment of the new Ministry for Culture and Business Affairs. The old cultural policy relied on the idea that it is the state's responsibility to provide its citizens opportunities for self-improvement through cultivation (Belfiore & Bennett 2007; Rastrick 2013). Its heavily subsidised elite art forms have nevertheless been considered the bedrock upon which popular art stands, and this may well ensure continued support.

While we might have expected the managers of public organisations to mention the effect of the pandemic closures on their guests' "quality of life, open-mindedness, tolerance, and participation in cultural activity," (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture 2013), their concern is primarily the economic effects. There are no specific concerns voiced over social or even national issues, which in the past typically characterised cultural policy rhetoric in Iceland. Part of this might be caused by the design of the survey or the fact that the respondents are addressed as "managers" and thus they take on a certain role when they answer, giving a more rational-economic flair to their opinions than in a different context. Together with the naturally small pool of respondents, these are some of the limitations of the current study. Despite that, it is clear that the managers' responses to the survey questions show that their primary worry is the "independent contractors" rather than "national identity", "social engagement in the arts", or "cultural participation." They also mention the need to increase financial support for independent artists and "tax incentives for contributions from the private sector."

Conclusion

The research question of this article was the following: "How did the first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic impact Icelandic cultural organisations, from the viewpoint of Icelandic cultural managers?" Using our own survey of cultural managers in Iceland we found that, as in most other countries, the cultural sector in Iceland has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Icelandic cultural managers were asked about the impact of the pandemic on their organisation; the extent to which events had been cancelled or postponed; whether broadcasting had replaced regular activity and how; and if Icelandic visitors had made up for the lack of foreign tourists. The respondents were also asked whether their workplace had received emergency government support; how the pandemic had

affected their employee status, whether they believed the pandemic exposed a need to restructure the cultural sector, and, if so, how?

In response to the survey, cultural managers emphasised the need to focus efforts on individual artists, contractors, and small project-based initiatives during the pandemic. This response, and the fact that the cultural policy issues such as access, participation, and inclusion, which were prominent after the financial crash in 2008, were not mentioned in any context at all, led us to speculate about possible changes in cultural policy emphasis in Iceland. The government's rationalization of the increased financial support for culture has primarily been stated in terms of economic aims and the need to protect independent businesses of the broader cultural industries. Also, in the midst of the pandemic in November 2021 the former Ministry of Education, Science and Culture was restructured and renamed as the Ministry of Culture and Business Affairs. This is a clear shift in emphasis from what was proclaimed in the *National Cultural Policy* from 2013, where the focus was on education, wellbeing, participation, and citizenship.

Overall, the financial support and the response of the Icelandic government has been deemed proportional. There is now an unprecedented amount of money going to support the culture business in Iceland. However, putting this into the context of Icelandic cultural policy, past and present, we argue that the dominant trends of economics and tourism in Icelandic cultural policy indicate that the COVID-19 emergency has reinforced a cultural policy paradigm which is focussed on the creative industries in a broad sense. It is not yet clear to what extent this will lead to a re-evaluation of long held policy priorities, such as a focus on cultural participation or the subsidies of flagship public organisations, or if the development might indicate a further change of policy emphasis in the aftermath of the pandemic.

References

- Alfreðsdóttir, L. D. (2021). "Björt og litrík framtíð myndlistar á Íslandi". Published in *Morgunblaðið* March 4th 2021. Retrieved from <https://framsokn.is/nyjast/greinar/bjort-og-litrik-framtid-myndlistar-a-islandi/>
- Belfiore, E. & Bennett, O. (2007). "Rethinking the social impact of the arts". *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 135–151.
- Belfiore, E. & Bennett, O. (2010). *The Social Impact of the Arts: An Intellectual History*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Berge, O. K., Storm, H. N. & Hylland, O. M. (2021). "Covid-19-pandemiens effekter på kultursektoren i de nordiske landene". *Telemarksforskning rapport nr. 617*. Retrieved from <https://intra.tmforsk.no/publikasjoner/filer/fil.asp?fil=3818>
- Bonet, L. & Négrier, E. (2018). "The participative turn in cultural policy: Paradigms, models, contexts". *Poetics*, vol. 66, pp. 64–73. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2018.02.006>
- DeVeraux, C. (2009). "Practice versus a discourse of practice in cultural management". *Journal of Arts Management Law and Society*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 65–72.
- Dofradóttir, A., Arnalds, Á. A., Sturludóttir, G. J. & Jónsson, F. H. (2010). "Íslensk menningarvog: Könnun á menningarneyslu Íslendinga". Reykjavík: Félagsvísindastofnun háskóla Íslands. Retrieved from https://www.stjornarradid.is/media/menntamalaraduneyti-media/media/ritogskyrslur/islensk_menningarvog_skyrsla_lokaeintak.pdf
- Duelund, P. (2003). *The Nordic Cultural Model. Nordic Cultural Policy in Transition*. Copenhagen: Nordic Cultural Institute.
- Duelund, P. (2008). "Nordic cultural policies: A critical view". *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 7–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286630701856468>

- Föhl, P. S., Wolfram, G. & Peper, R. (2016). "Cultural managers as "masters of interspaces" in transformation processes: A network theory perspective". *Zeitschrift für Kulturmanagement*, vol.1, pp. 17–49.
- Gestsdóttir, G. D., Gylfadóttir, H. M. & Ólafsdóttir, Þ. B. (2020). "Áhrif COVID-19 á safnastarf á Íslandi". Retrieved from <https://safnarad.is/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/C19-sk%C3%BDrsla-LOK.pdf>
- Government of Iceland (2020). "Efnahagsaðgerðir vegna Covid-19". Retrieved March 12, 2021, from <https://www.stjornarradid.is/rikisstjorn/covid-19/#Tab5>
- Gray, C. (2007). "Commodification and instrumentality in cultural policy". *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 203–215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286630701342899>
- Gray, C. (2008). "Instrumental policies: Causes, consequences, museums and galleries". *Cultural Trends*, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 209–222. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09548960802615349>
- Hafsteinsson, S. B. & Árnadóttir, H. B. (2010). "Menningarstefna og fagurfræði". Reykjavík: Þjóðarspeggillinn, Rannsóknir í félagsvísindum XI, s. 413–426. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/1946/6840>
- Hyde, L. (2007). *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books.
- Jancovich, L. (2011). "Great art for everyone? Engagement and participation policy in the arts". *Cultural Trends*, vol. 20, no. 3–4, pp. 271–279. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09548963.2011.589708>
- Jancovich, L. (2017). "The participation myth". *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 107–121. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1027698>
- Kangas, A. & Onser-Franzén, J. (1996). "Is there a need for a new cultural policy strategy in the Nordic welfare state?". *The European Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 15–26.
- Kangas, A. & Vestheim, G. (2010). "Institutionalism, cultural institutions and cultural policy in the Nordic countries". *Nordisk Kulturpolitisk Tidsskrift*, 13(2), pp. 267–286.
- Kern, P. (2020). "The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Cultural and Creative Sector". Brussel: KEA. Retrieved from https://keanet.eu/wp-content/uploads/Impact-of-COVID-19-pandemic-on-CCS_COE-KEA_26062020.pdf.pdf
- Kuesters, I. (2010). "Arts managers as liaisons between finance and art: A qualitative study inspired by the theory of functional differentiation". *Journal of Arts Management Law and Society*, vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 43–57
- Mangset, P. (1995). "Kulturpolitiske modeller i Vest-Europa". G. Arnestad (Ed.). *Kulturårboka*. Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget. Pp. 12–41.
- Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (2013). "Menningarstefna" Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið. Retrieved from https://www.stjornarradid.is/library/03-Verkefni/Menningarmal/menningarstefna_2013.pdf
- Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (2021). Rúmlega 350 milljónir kr. í menningartengda tekjufallsstyrki. Retrieved from <https://www.stjornarradid.is/efst-a-baugi/frettir/stok-frett/2021/03/17/Rumlega-350-milljonir-kr.-i-menningartengda-tekjufallsstyrki/>
- Mulcahy, K. V. (2003). "Entrepreneurship or cultural Darwinism? Privatization and American cultural patronage". *Journal of Arts Management Law and Society*, vol. 33, no. 3, pp. 165–184.
- Paquette, J. (2012). *Cultural Policy, Work and Identity: The Creation, Renewal and Negotiation of Professional Subjectivities*. Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge.
- Rastrick, Ó. (2013). *Háborgin*. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.
- Reynisdóttir, M. R., & Jónatansdóttir, B. (2020). "Áhrif COVID-19 á íslenskan tónlistariðnað". Reykjavík: Félag íslenskra hljómlistarmanna, Félag hljómplötuframleiðenda, Samtök flytjenda og hljómplötuframleiðenda, STEF, Tónlistarborgin Reykjavík & Útflutningsskrifstofa íslenskrar tónlistar. Retrieved from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f0314f402ff316dfaaaa141/t/5f0321c938bdf707c8f4bfeb/1594040789664/FINAL+Report+Covid+%28%29.pdf>
- Shusterman, R. (2000). *Pragmatist Aesthetics*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Sigurjónsson, N. (2021). "The Political-Aesthetics of Participation: A Critical Reading of Iceland's National Cultural Policy". *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 190–203. <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.2000-8325-2021-02-07>
- Statistics Iceland (2019). "Starfandi í menningu 2019". Retrieved July 29, 2020, from <https://hagstofa.is/utgafur/frettasafn/menning/starfandi-i-menningu/>

- Statistics Iceland (2020). “Áhrif kórónuveirufaraldursins á atvinnugreinar menningar”. Hagstofa Íslands. Retrieved from <https://hagstofa.is/utgafur/tilraunatolfraedi/ahrif-koronuveirufaraldursins-a-atvinnugreinar-menningar-tt/>
- Statistics Iceland (2020a). “Fjórðungur þeirra sem starfa við menningu sjálfstætt starfandi”. Retrieved from <https://hagstofa.is/utgafur/frettasafn/menning/starfandi-i-menningu-2019/?fbclid=IwAR0ozJ0idYHJh2OQrA9xsModHPCjzc0P0Sq1FTaq-T8cgEivzZAXzRHtZyY>
- Valtýsson, B. (2011). Íslensk menningarpólítík. Reykjavík: Nýhil.