The cover features a bright yellow background at the top, transitioning into a light purple background with white wavy borders at the bottom. The title is centered in a bold, dark blue font.

ROADMAP FOR THE POTENTIAL MERGER OF ORGANISATIONS IN THE VISUAL ARTS INDUSTRY

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A large, abstract yellow graphic consisting of several overlapping, rounded shapes that resemble a stylized sun or a series of overlapping circles, positioned in the upper left and top center of the page.

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Project partners:

The Artists' Association of Finland
Centre for Finnish Media Art AV-arkki
Frame Contemporary Art Finland
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The author of this report has been involved in several large merger and transformation processes in sports organisations, confederations of trade unions, development cooperation organisations, leader groups and the Martha Association. He has carried out comparative assessments of operations for the heart organisations in Varsinais-Suomi and Satakunta, as well as for organisations in the construction industry, Rakennusinsinöörit ja -arkkitehdit RIA ry and Rakennusmestarit ja -insinöörit AMK RKL. He has compiled reports on organisational activities, and association and volunteer activities to operators such as the EHYT Finnish Association for Substance Abuse Prevention, the Union of Journalists in Finland, the Finnish Psoriasis Association, the Finnish Confederation of Professionals (STTK) and the Industrial Union.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Implementation of the study	5
2. Main conclusions of the study	6
3. Comparison of the visual arts organisations	9
3.1. Brief description of tasks and functions	9
3.2. Rules	12
3.3. Number of members, membership criteria and membership fees	13
3.4. Financial and human resources	15
3.5. Exhibition and gallery spaces, office spaces	17
4. Conclusions from the comparison of visual arts associations	22
4.1. Administrative and operational synergies	23
4.2. Exhibition and gallery activities	24
4.3. Financial and human resources	25
5. Merger options and models	27
5.1. The association model	28
5.2. The federation model	29
6. Towards a merger of visual arts organisations	30
6.1. Grounds for a merger	30
6.2. Opportunities and threats related to a merger	31
6.3. About the roadmap for the merger	33
7. Benchmark organisations	37
7.1. Circus & Dance Info Finland	37
7.2. Music Finland	39
7.3. Ornamo	41
7.4. Conservatory Association of Finland	42
7.5. The Visual Art House	43
7.6. Lessons from the benchmark organisation	45
Info	49

ANNEX 1: Law Office Oili Kela Ltd: Advice on Mergers of Associations in relation to a Potential Merger of Organisations in the Visual Arts Industry

FOREWORD

The Artists' Association of Finland, in association with AV-arkki, the Centre for Finnish Media Art, Frame Contemporary Art Finland and the Visual Art House, commissioned the undersigned to carry out a study on the potential merger of visual arts organisations. The project was coordinated by the Artists' Association of Finland and AV-arkki. The Ministry of Education and Culture awarded a grant of EUR 40,000 for the implementation of the study.

The study explored the prerequisites for a potential merger of organisations and associations in the field of visual arts and produced information and tools as a resource for operators in visual arts to support the potential merger. The results are available to all visual arts communities that operate in Finland.

The study covered the potential consolidation of two different types of networks of organisations:

1. The Artists' Association of Finland and its six member associations: Artists' Association MUU, the Association of Finnish Sculptors, the Union of Finnish Art Associations, the Association of Finnish Printmakers, the Finnish Painters' Union, and the Association of Photographic Artists.
2. Media art associations with international operations: AV-arkki, the Centre for Finnish Media Art, the Finnish Bioart Society, M-Cult, and the Finnish Light Art Society FLASH.

The study also included Frame Contemporary Art Finland, although as a foundation it does not fall within the scope of the potential mergers. Pixelache ry (Pixeliähky), which was originally involved in the study, announced on 10 March 2025 that it was no longer part of the project. During the project, funding to the organisations that were the subject of the study was cut substantially. These changes are reflected in the information described below.

The roadmap described in this report is a tool for future development and debate. It describes options and steps to take in relation to a merger. No decisions or plans have been made about the merger, and no organisation or association is committed to the merger at this stage. The organisations involved will decide on a potential merger on the basis of information covered in this report.

The change is not an end in itself: it must benefit artists in the field of visual arts, the organisations and communities that support them, as well as the entire field of visual arts and its viability. Cuts to culture funding are forcing us to think about the functionality of how the visual arts communities are organised and how the available resources could be put to more efficient use. The organisations are not an end in themselves either, as ultimately their task is to improve the services, working conditions and livelihoods of their artist members.

I would like to thank the commissioner, the steering group, the interviewees and all those who provided comments!

Author of this report, Juha Heikkala, PhD, Juha Heikkala Consulting

1. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY

The study was carried out in spring 2025. Its practical implementation was divided into the following phases:

1. Establishing the purpose and implementation of the study in collaboration with the steering group
2. Analysis of the document materials: rules, annual reports and financial information
3. Interviews with the chairs and executive directors of the parties involved
4. Hearings with the boards, staff and member artists of the parties involved, and organisation-specific discussions
5. Interviews with leaders of the benchmark organisations
6. Writing, translating and publishing the report

The analysis of the documentary data focused on certain topics central to a merger process and, especially, on the essential differences and similarities in the activities of the organisations involved. It is difficult to provide detailed descriptions of their resources, for example, as information concerning their finances and staff can become outdated quickly in the current economic turbulence. Consequently, the study focused on key differences and similarities in operations and resources.

A total of 30 people were interviewed. Focused interviews were conducted, and they took 1-2 hours. The descriptions of the interview results do not include any details or direct quotes. The focus is on the connecting and separating factors that are essential in the context of a potential merger. It should also be noted that the chairs and executive directors interviewed were not asked for their views on merging visual arts organisations, instead they were asked to discuss the pros and cons of a potential merger, the related threats and opportunities, as well as conditions and obstacles. Each of the arts organisation involved in the process will form its position on the merger after the report has been completed.

The practical implementation of the study and its conclusions is ultimately the responsibility of the author who works independently within the scope of the assignment, relying on his professional skills and experience. This does not mean that he isolates himself from the objects of the study, quite the contrary. Interaction with the steering group, interviewees and artist members has been both necessary and fruitful to obtain a picture of the situation. The potential merger is not a new idea in the field of visual arts, but this time the assessment has aroused interest among the artist members.

Information about the progress and contents of the study was shared through the participating organisations' newsletters and membership communications in spring 2025. A stakeholder event was held for the boards and staff of the participating organisations on 14 April 2025, in which the preliminary results were presented. A similar event was organised for member artists on 16 April 2025. The author was also invited to participate in online events for the Artists' Association's member organisations to describe the implementation and key topics of the study.

The study is one phase in the potential merger of visual arts organisations, but ultimately it is up to the organisations involved to decide on the extent, conditions, time frame and how the merger will take place – if at all. The actual decision-making process and the related engagement of the parties will begin when the report has been completed. The report aims to offer a comprehensive picture of the conditions for the merger by highlighting facts and topics that should be discussed and used as the basis for any decisions. The parties are, of course, invited to provide new perspectives to the debate.

2. MAIN CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

The study involved a wide range of organisations in the field of visual arts: eleven in total. In terms of a potential merger, the Artists' Association of Finland and its member organisations form a natural entity; the Artists' Association of Finland has, after all, been uniting its six members under its umbrella for a long time. AV-arkki, the Centre for Finnish Media Art and media arts organisations form another, slightly looser entity in which AV-arkki invests in distributing media art to national and international markets, while the Finnish Bioart Society, M-Cult and the Finnish Light Art Society FLASH focus on the promotion of their organisation-specific content.

Frame Contemporary Art Finland is a contemporary art expert organisation and information centre that strengthens the position of Finnish contemporary art and promotes cooperation between contemporary art professionals in Finland and overseas. It differs from the other parties involved in this study, especially because it is a foundation. Dissolving a foundation and using the funds for purposes other than those for which they were originally intended is a very challenging and, in practice, almost impossible task. For this reason, this report does not discuss Frame's activities in more detail.

The chairs and executive directors of visual arts organisations interviewed for the study welcomed the commissioning of the merger study. Although the interviews did not ask for the organisations' official position or decision on a potential merger, some of the chairs and executive directors interviewed stated that it was either necessary or at least worth considering.

One of the member artists' greatest concerns and fears of a merger was the preservation or disappearance of diversity and multivoicedness in visual arts. Diversity and multivoicedness are characteristics that very much need to be preserved even in a potential merger. A merger of visual arts organisations would primarily concern the merging of administrative functions rather than of the contents of visual arts as such.

The idea of one or more merged organisations is to create an organisational platform that works optimally to promote diversity and multivoicedness in visual arts and offers better services to its members.

One of the objectives of the study was to identify any administrative overlaps and operational synergies that could be achieved with a merger. In this respect, the result of the study is quite unambiguous: clear overlaps and potential synergies can be identified, especially in advocacy activities (influencing), communication and member services.

Centralisation of advocacy activities would be necessary, in particular to increase the collective effectiveness of visual arts organisations, to ensure funding and to strengthen the role of visual arts in society and political decision-making processes in general.

Exhibition and gallery spaces are the visual arts organisations' 'user interfaces' to audiences that follow or buy art. Centralisation of these operations – with the related advantages and disadvantages – should also be discussed. Both advantages and disadvantages were seen in the decentralised model (separate exhibition and gallery spaces currently in use) and in the centralised model (shared exhibition and gallery spaces). However, the current exhibition and gallery spaces could remain unchanged even if the organisations' administrative functions were centralised. Sharing of exhibition and gallery spaces has been the subject of in-depth debate in recent years in the separate Visual Art House project (*Kuvataiteen talo*; see below for more details).

One of the motives for consolidating visual arts organisations is direct savings in, for example, staff costs. If the goal is to maintain or improve services for the entire combined membership, making savings from the already small number of employees does not seem like the right solution. Most of the organisations involved in the study struggle with a lack of sufficient staff and, consequently, vulnerability that becomes obvious, especially in exceptional situations.

A merger would create one or more visual arts organisations that would be more effective in their operations and more resilient to withstand future challenges.

After a merger, the Artists' Association of Finland and its member organisations could invest more in advocacy efforts and in improving the status of artists. The merged organisation would have sufficient centralised human resources for activities such as collaborative advocacy efforts, communication and services for its members. The manager(s) and experts could focus more on a specific topic and its development. Resources could be used more efficiently to achieve greater effectiveness in advocacy and communication operations and services. Similarly, AV-arkki, the Centre for Finnish Media Art and media arts organisations could merge into a federation, within the framework of which they could better invest in matters that are important to them and streamline the services offered to members.

When assessing a merger of visual arts organisations, four analytical options can be identified:

1. Operations continue as before (status quo)
2. Cooperation is tightened
3. Organisations are merged (legally)
 - a) The association model
 - b) The federation model
4. Another solution or model is created

There are two main models for an actual legal merger: the association model and the federation model. The former involves consolidating existing arts organisations under one organisation, either by merging others with one of the existing organisations or by setting up a completely new organisation into which all arts organisations involved merge. The latter refers to a three-phase model in which one of the existing organisations is turned into a federation, and the existing visual arts organisations become its member organisations. Each model has challenges and issues related to organisation-specific powers (representation) and allocation of asset, but these can be solved.

Continuing operations as before or tightening cooperation are certainly options, but they do not solve the challenges related to overlaps, vulnerabilities and the effectiveness of advocacy efforts. From the perspective of the Artists' Association of Finland and its member organisations, the federation model would not bring much added value in terms of synergies compared to the current situation, so from an analytical point of view, a legal merger would be a viable option. As for AV-arkki and media arts organisations, the federation model could well be a suitable solution for their closer and more efficient cooperation.

The most significant challenges in a legal consolidation are related to public funding, the practical success of consolidating the operations and the potential loss of members. With regard to public funding, it is difficult to predict whether the merged organisation would receive the same amount, less or even more grants than the existing separate organisations combined. The practical success of a merger largely depends on the shared ambition and willingness to invest in the creation of a new organisation. Regarding the potential loss of membership, it should be noted that a merged organisation that represents different fields of visual arts could offer a meaningful and attractive community with which to engage and identify even for artists who work in a multidisciplinary environment or cross the traditional boundaries of art forms.

A significant proportion of the funding for visual arts organisations consists of public grants. Funding cuts have weakened their already difficult position in the cultural field. The structures of artistic work are weaker in the field of visual arts than in many other fields of art. A key issue for the future of financing and administration of culture is the merger of the Arts Promotion Centre Finland (Taike) and the National Audiovisual Institute (KAVI) into the Arts and Culture Agency Finland. The agency is expected to start operations at the beginning of 2026. The impact of the merger on the financing of the sector was not known at the time of conducting this study.

No structural, organisational or administrative decisions automatically guarantee the preservation or disappearance of diversity and multivoicedness in a merged organisation. The merging organisations provide the framework within which the crucial points are, ultimately, the ambitions shared by people, decision-makers and professionals who work in the merged organisation and what they want to pursue and achieve. Much depends on mutual trust and the desire to find a solution that benefits all parties involved in this study.

3. COMPARISON OF THE VISUAL ARTS ORGANISATIONS

The purpose of the comparison of the visual arts organisations involved in the study was to identify the differences and similarities in the basic features of their activities as well as the opportunities and challenges associated with a potential merger. The analysis assessed the purpose and content of their activities, rules and decision-making processes, number of members and membership criteria, financial and human resources, as well as exhibition and gallery spaces. The comparison was made specifically from the perspective of a merger, which means that the report does not describe all organisation-specific content but focuses on topics relevant to the merger.

The analysis of the documents formed the knowledge base, which was verified and specified in the interviews with the chairs and executive directors. The interviews focused on the general assessment of the organisation-specific circumstances, as well as the prerequisites for and obstacles to a possible merger. The main conclusions are based on both the analyses of the documents and the interviews conducted.

The cuts (or increases in some cases) in funding for visual arts organisations at the beginning of 2025 show how quickly and significantly the situation of an individual organisation can change. Since the study is intended to stand the test of time and be useful for long-term solutions, the budget size categories and the number of person-years described below must be seen mainly as indicative figures. They outline the size and volume of activities of the organisations involved in this study.

3.1. Brief description of tasks and functions

The Artists' Association of Finland and its member organisations

The Artists' Association of Finland is an advocate and expert association in the field of visual arts that promotes the status and working conditions of visual artists and strengthens the role of visual arts in society. Activities:

- Influencing cultural policy decision-making and advocacy
- Offering services, support and information to professional visual artists
- Providing up-to-date information about the industry to decision-makers, the media and art audiences
- Developing practices and structures in the field of visual arts together with other art industry organisations

Artists' Association MUU is a national interdisciplinary arts organisation that represents and promotes new media art in Finland, including media, video, light and sound art, performance art, and conceptual and environmental art. Activities:

- Supporting artists' professional identity and working conditions
- Education, training and networking
- Having an influential presence in the field of cultural policy to promote artists' status and livelihood
- Achieving greater visibility and recognition for new forms of visual art

The Association of Finnish Sculptors is a national association for professional sculptors that promotes and presents Finnish sculpture and spatial art in Finland and abroad. Activities:

- Offering advice and information on sculpture and public art
- Safeguarding sculptors' professional, financial and social interests
- Contributing to the opportunities and conditions for practising the profession of sculptor and developing professional skills
- Exhibition and gallery activities

The Association of Finnish Printmakers acts as a national association of printmakers and drawers, promoting the recognition of printmaking and drawing and engaging in information sharing and exhibition activities. Activities:

- Representing professional visual artists and promoting the visibility of printmaking and drawing as part of the diverse field of contemporary art
- Providing exhibition opportunities for members
- Providing up-to-date information about grants, workspaces and competitions
- Offering training and advice on professional issues

The Finnish Painters' Union is a nationwide organisation of professional painters and works to promote visual arts and improve the professional and social interests of artists. Activities:

- Advocacy and societal influencing by itself and in cooperation with other organisations
- Organising gallery and other exhibition activities
- Art material and supplies shop and an annual arts sales event
- Member services include member activities and communications, professional training and advisory services, as well as legal advice and training

The Association of Photographic Artists is a national advocacy group that works to promote the social status and appreciation of Finnish photographic art and artists in Finland. Activities:

- Providing visibility, forums and networks for photography-based art and artists, while making its own contribution to society's cultural diversity
- Exhibition activities
- Providing information and advice aimed at the members as well as organising events and projects that promote photographic art

The Union of Finnish Art Associations is the umbrella organisation for regional art associations, the purpose of which is to bring together art associations operating in different parts of Finland and act as their national link between them. Activities:

- Influencing by participating in the social debate and issuing statements
- Building synergies and creative networks and creating and disseminating good practices and peer-to-peer experiences
- Offering training on organisational activities and other services to support the work of artists' associations
- Exhibition and residency activities
- A network of 23 art lenders and 32 gallery and exhibition spaces

AV-arkki, the Centre for Finnish Media Art

AV-arkki AV-arkki is a centre for Finnish media art, a promoter of media art, a data bank and a network builder, the activities of which are unique in Finland and overseas. Its purpose is to distribute Finnish media art and culture and enhance its visibility. Activities:

- Distribution of Finnish media art both internationally and in Finland
- Providing works and series of works for events across the world
- The distribution catalogue for professional use by curators, critics and teachers of arts organisations and film festivals
- Long-term archiving of the art form in cooperation with the National Audiovisual Institute (KAVI)
- Offering artists and performers advice on issues specifically related to media art (sales, licensing, storing, archiving, presenting practices, copyrights and technology, etc.)
- Developing the industry through projects with its partners
- Non-members can also offer their works to the AV-arkki archive; the services are offered to artists who are not members

The Finnish Bioart Society creates a multidisciplinary dialogue between art and science professionals and audiences. The society operates in Finland, regionally in the Nordic and Baltic countries and internationally. Activities:

- Organising exhibitions and events focusing on biology, ecology and life sciences, and promoting research
- Themes include the effects of climate change, ecological and social sustainability, bioeconomy and technologies, technological sciences, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML), various life forms, artistic-scientific collaborations

M-Cult promotes the development of media art and digital culture, as well as cultural and social innovations in the media. M-Cult supports the production culture of media art and participatory art, creates opportunities for operators in the field to produce new works, and makes the industry visible through communication and publication activities. Activities:

- Production, training, communication and publication activities
- Exploring new operating models and bringing together Finnish and international operators
- Hybrid and multidisciplinary art practice

The Finnish Light Art Society FLASH promotes the status of light art and its creators in Finland and internationally. The society is an association of light artists, curators, designers, light event producers and other people interested in light art. Activities:

- Organising exhibitions, training and other events
- Membership activities and communication on events in the field
- Social influencing and statements on topics related to the sector
- Light art database

3.2. Rules

Yhdistyksen säännöt ovat se perusta, jonka pohjalta ne toimivat. Säännöissä kuvataan The rules of an association are the basis for its activities. The rules describe the association's name, purpose and forms of activities, membership (membership types, criteria and fees), administration and decision-making (meetings and the board), authorised signatories, accounting period and auditing, as well as amendment of the rules and dissolution of the association.

Associations often use the Finnish Patent and Registration Office's template rules in drawing up their own. This is also the case with visual arts organisations, whose rules are quite similar in form. In terms of the possible merger, the key differences lie in the purpose and forms of activities, as well as the membership criteria, types and the bases for the membership fee. The main differences between the rules of the arts organisations are described below.

However, it should be noted that decisions are made with regard to the different points of the rules depending in part on the type of merger model chosen. Merger models differ in whether the members are individual, association or both. In relation to meetings, a decision must be made on whether one or two meetings are held each year, who has the right to vote, speak and attend, and how decisions are made (majority provisions). The composition of the board also depends on how comprehensively the different visual arts organisations are represented in the merged organisation and how the required representativeness is guaranteed.

In associations, the ultimate decision-making power is exercised by the association's meeting (annual meeting). The rules define the matters to be discussed at the annual meeting, the representatives, the chair and secretary, as well as decision-making and voting rights. All of the Artists' Association of Finland's member organisations, except the Association of Photographic Artists, have two association meetings a year; the Association of Photographic Artists has one. Similarly, the Artists' Association of Finland has one meeting each year. The Artists' Association of Finland also has a body of representatives, which consists of annually elected artist members, who represent the member associations. The body meets twice a year. AV-arkki, the Finnish Bioart Society and the Finnish Light Art Society FLASH hold two meetings a year, and M-Cult holds one.

At the Artists' Association of Finland's annual meetings, the representatives are ordinary members (member organisations), who select two meeting representatives per first forty paying individual members and one representative per subsequent forty paying members. In meetings, each ordinary member has as many votes as the number of representatives it is entitled to select. Each representative of an ordinary member has one vote. Decisions

at meetings are made by a simple majority vote. At the Union of Finnish Art Associations, the voting rights depend on the number of members of the association: 1-10 members = two representatives, 11-25 members = 3 representatives, 26-50 = 4 representatives and so on, up to 11 representatives.

As a rule, ordinary members are entitled to vote at the annual meetings of the Artists' Association of Finland's member organisations, and they each have one vote. Decisions are made by a simple majority vote. An exception is the Association of Photographic Artists, in which honorary members are also entitled to vote, and they have one vote each. According to the rules, voting by proxy is not allowed at MUU and the Finnish Painters' Union.

In the annual meetings of AV-arkki, honorary members are entitled to vote in addition to the ordinary members, and they have one vote each. In the meetings of M-Cult and FLASH, both honorary chairs and honorary members are entitled to vote in addition to ordinary members. They each have one vote. At the annual meetings of the Finnish Bioart Society, each member has one vote. Voting by proxy is not allowed at AV-arkki according to its rules.

The board (or the executive committee) acts as the executive body of an association. Its duties are described in the association's rules. The board may set up a working committee and/or various committees, such as an exhibition committee, to prepare matters. The sizes of the present boards of the organisations involved in the study are quite similar. A typical composition is a chair, one or two vice-chairs, and 5-8 members. Some of the organisations also have 2-5 deputy members. The terms of office of the boards in the organisations involved in the study are usually two calendar years, and half of the board members resign. The exceptions are the Finnish Bioart Society and M-Cult: the former's board has a term of one calendar year, and the latter has a term that is the period between annual meetings.

3.3. Number of members, membership criteria and membership fees

The members of the Artists' Association of Finland and the Union of Finnish Art Associations are organisations, while the other associations mainly have individual members. The Artists' Association of Finland has six national associations of visual artists as its members, and the Union of Finnish Art Associations consists of 61 local associations of visual artists operating across Finland. The Artists' Association of Finland also has supporting members and honorary members. In the Artists' Association of Finland's member organisations, the most common types of membership are ordinary members, honorary members and supporting members. The Finnish Painters' Union and the Association of Photographic Artists have candidate members and ordinary members. A member is usually admitted on the basis of an application, and a decision on acceptance is made by the board. At MUU, the Association of Finnish Printmakers and the Finnish Painters' Union, the decision is made on the recommendation of a membership committee.

Membership criteria and membership fees in the Artists' Association of Finland's member organisations

- MUU: Anyone who supports the goals of the association and who accepts and wants to promote its goals and has shown to be an active and professional artist
- The Association of Finnish Sculptors: A professional sculptor who is a Finnish citizen or lives permanently in Finland and has proven his/her competence as a sculptor
- The Association of Finnish Printmakers: A prerequisite for membership is art studies and artistic and professional activities
- The Finnish Painters' Union: Admission as a candidate member upon application, subject to art education and professional qualifications, a peer-reviewed level of works and CV
- The Association of Photographic Artists: Qualifications accepted include education/training in the field, exhibition activities, success in competitions and peer-reviewed acceptance as a member

In addition to these, MUU accepts visiting members who are foreign artists who temporarily live in Finland and are members of a similar association in another country or have qualifications comparable to those of an ordinary member. The board of Association of Finnish Sculptors can also accept friends of sculpture, i.e. persons and legal entities interested in sculpture, as association members.

The membership fees of the Artists' Association of Finland's member organisations vary between approx. EUR 100 and 150. The Finnish Painters' Union's membership fee of EUR 179 includes, as an option, Taidehti (EUR 66). It is common in the Artists' Association of Finland's member organisations for regular members (professionals) to pay the full fee and pensioners to pay 50% of the membership fee. Honorary members, members over the age of 80 and members on an unemployment pension are exempt from the membership fee. MUU charges applicants for new (ordinary) membership a processing fee.

The Artists' Association of Finland membership fee is determined by the number of individual members in the member organisations. The ordinary members of the Union of Finnish Art Associations pay a basic fee and a membership fee for each member set by the autumn meeting. Supporting members pay either a one-off or annual fee, honorary members do not pay any membership fee.

Membership criteria and fees in AV-arkki and media arts organisations

- AV-arkki, the Centre for Finnish Media Art: Professionals in the field of media art (not students or amateurs) who live permanently in Finland, are Finnish citizens or whose relationship with Finland is so strong that their production is considered to represent Finnish media art. Works can be offered to the archive even by those who are not or do not wish to become a member.
- The Finnish Bioart Society: Artists and researchers, cultural actors and people working in bioart-related fields
- M-Cult: Individuals working in the field of media culture
- FLASH: Individuals who accept the purpose of the society

AV-arkki's membership fee is EUR 75 for individual members and EUR 120 for organisation members. Individual members aged over 65 are not charged a membership fee. The Finnish Bioart Society's membership fees are EUR 30 for professionals and EUR 15 for students. M-Cult's membership fees are EUR 20 for members and EUR 10 for students. FLASH does not charge its members an annual membership fee but a one-off joining fee of EUR 30. The Finnish Bioart Society, FLASH and M-Cult charge applicants for a new (ordinary) membership a processing fee or a joining fee. The rules of AV-arkki allow for a joining fee, but it has not been charged.

3.4. Financial and human resources

In the context of a potential merger, it is essential to identify the size of the organisations, in terms of both their finances and their staff. Tables 1 and 2 show the budgets of the arts organisations. These are indicative figures intended to illustrate the size of the organisations' finances. Examined by budget, the largest member organisation of the Artists' Association of Finland is the Finnish Painters' Union (EUR 850,000) and the smallest is the Union of Finnish Art Associations (EUR 70,000). The budgets of media arts organisations vary between approx. EUR 200,000 and 400,000.

It is not practical to provide more detailed financial figures here. The study is intended to serve both visual arts organisations and other communities in the field in the coming years. Public funding for these organisations may be subject to further changes in the future, in which case the figures might become outdated rather quickly.

The main sources of funding for the visual arts organisations involved in the study are

- Government grants
 - Ministry of Education and Culture and Arts Promotion Centre Finland (Taike)
 - City of Helsinki
 - Wuorio Foundation's annual shares
 - Other sources (other foundations, projects, etc.)
- Membership fees
- Own fundraising activities
 - Sale of works
 - Exhibition fees and commissions
 - Other sales (supplies, books, etc.)
 - Investment and rental income

With regard to organisation-specific characteristics, it is worth noting that of the Artists' Association of Finland's member organisations, the Finnish Painters' Union receives a significant part of its income from commissions from the sales and tm-gallery, and from membership fees. Sales are also sources of income for the Association of Finnish Sculptors, the Association of Finnish Printmakers and the Association of Photographic Artists. The Association of Finnish Sculptors also receives income from exhibition commissions and funds, and the Association of Photographic Artists from gallery fees, which are charged for the time being. The Union of Finnish Art Associations has investment assets, and it owns a residency property. The Artists' Association of Finland receives income from office space rents and billable expert services as well as investments. The Artists' Association of Finland also has an art collection. Of the media arts organisations, M-Cult owns a residence property.

Visual arts organisations are quite small in terms of number of staff, most with human resources of about 2-4 person-years. The largest Artists' Association of Finland member organisations are the Finnish Painters' Union (7 person-years) and the smallest the Union of Finnish Art Associations (less than one person-year). Staff typically consists of an executive director and an exhibition coordinator or exhibition manager, and part-time and project-specific employees. Most of the executive directors work full time, though some work 70-80% of the full-time hours. The working hours of other employees vary significantly. Measured by number of employees, the media arts organisations are quite similar in size, with the number of person-years ranging from 1.5 to just over 2.

The person-years described in Tables 1 and 2 are indicative, as they mainly include permanent full-time and part-time employees. In addition to these, there are numerous employees on various temporary, fixed-term, hourly and similar contracts, especially in exhibition and event activities. An arts organisation may pay salaries and fees to almost a hundred people in a year.

Staff of the Artists' Association of Finland and its member organisations

- Artists' Association of Finland: Director, head of communications (80%), administrative coordinator (80%). Due to the funding cuts made by the Ministry of Education and Culture in spring 2025, the Association currently does not have a lawyer.
- MUU: Director as well as exhibition coordinator & technician; several part-time and project-specific employees
- Association of Finnish Sculptors: Executive director and exhibition manager, part-time exhibition and communication assistant, part-time production manager, employees on casual contracts, and a fixed-term part-time project worker divided between Associations of Finnish Sculpture, Finnish Printmakers and Photographic Artists (the New Classics project)
- Association of Finnish Printmakers: Executive director, two part-time gallery assistants and fixed-term part-time project worker divided between Associations of Finnish Sculpture, Finnish Printmakers and Photographic Artists (the New Classics project) (temporarily there is no exhibition coordinator)
- Finnish Painters' Union: Director, financial planning officer, supplies sales manager and exhibition coordinator as well as a part-time memberships and communications manager, two assistants on a salary subsidy in the gallery and in the supplies, project planner as producer; sales event manager, production managers and other temporary employees on casual contracts
- Association of Photographic Artists: Director, exhibition manager and association coordinator, association assistant and gallery technician and a fixed-term part-time project worker divided between Associations of Finnish Sculpture, Finnish Printmakers and Photographic Artists (the New Classics project)
- Union of Finnish Art Associations: No full-time employees

Staff of AV-arkki and the media arts organisations

- AV-arkki: Director (80%), programme coordinator (50%) and archive coordinator (60%)
- Finnish Bioart Society: Managing director (70%), artistic director (70%), and communications manager/residency coordinator (50%)
- M-Cult: Director (80%), technical producer (35%), communications coordinator (40%)
- FLASH: Director, producer on 12.5% of the full-time hours; finance and administration manager as an outsourced service

3.5. Exhibition and gallery spaces, office spaces

Each member organisation of the Artists' Association of Finland has exhibition and gallery spaces, and they are all rented. Their offices are also located in the premises. The Artists' Association of Finland co-owns the office premises with Kuvasto. The Union of Finnish Art Associations has had to give up the office and exhibition space for financial reasons. Of the media arts organisations, AV-arkki operates in the same rented office space as Frame. FLASH does not have permanent offices, but its administration operates virtually.










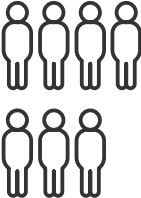














Exhibition and gallery spaces and offices of the Artists' Association of Finland and its member organisations

- Artists' Association of Finland: Offices in the centre of Helsinki, co-owned with Kuvasto ry (2/3), a tenant in the premises
- MUU: Exhibition and event space and offices at the Cable Factory (MUU Helsinki Contemporary Art Centre), rented
- Association of Finnish Sculptors: Gallery Sculptor and offices in the centre of Helsinki, rented
- Association of Finnish Printmakers: Exhibition space Gallery G and sales collection Grafoteekki, as well as offices in the centre of Helsinki, rented
- Finnish Painters' Union: tm-gallery, artist supplies shop and offices in the centre of Helsinki, rented
- Association of Photographic Artists: Gallery Hippolyte (two premises) and Korjaamo (one premises), as well as offices in the centre of Helsinki, rented
- Union of Finnish Art Associations: Given up the offices and exhibition spaces

Exhibition and gallery spaces and offices of AV-arkki and the media arts organisations

- AV-arkki: Offices in the centre of Helsinki, shared with Frame Finland and the Baltic Circle Festival, rented
- Finnish Bioart Society: Event space and offices in Kalasatama, Helsinki, rented
- M-Cult: Offices in Vallila, Helsinki, rented, a residential property
- Finnish Light Art Society FLASH: No fixed offices

Table 1. Basic information about the Artists' Association of Finland and its member organisations (2025)

	Artists' Association of Finland	MUU ry	Association of Finnish Sculptors	Association of Finnish Printmakers	Finnish Painters' Union	Association of Photographic Artists	Union of Finnish Art Associations
Number of members	6 member organisations	720 	522 	380 	1600 	481 	61 regional associations
Human resources	3 person-years 	3 person-years 	4,12 person-years 	2.5 person-years 	7 person-years 	3 person-years 	0.6 person-years 
Budget	300.000 € 	300.000 € 	400.000 € 	350.000 € 	850.000 € 	320.000 € 	70.000 € 
Other income, assets	Art collection, investment and rental income	---	Sale of works, exhibition commissions, income from the fund	Sale of works	Sale of works, gallery commissions, sale of supplies	Sale of works, gallery fees	Investment income, a residential property
Membership fee/person /year	Dependent on the individual members in the member organisations	Processing fee EUR 20 EUR 100 65+ and honorary members exempt from membership fee 	EUR 112 Pensioners 50% 80+ and honorary members exempt from membership fee 	EUR 155 65+ 50% 80+ and honorary members exempt from membership fee 	EUR 179 (incl. Taidelehti EUR 66) 65+ 50% 80+ and honorary members exempt from membership fee 	EUR 110 Pensioners 50% Organisation members EUR 200 	Basic fee and membership fee for each association member

	Artists' Association of Finland	MUU ry	Association of Finnish Sculptors	Association of Finnish Printmakers	Finnish Painters' Union	Association of Photographic Artists	Union of Finnish Art Associations
Number of annual meetings	2	2	2	2	2	1	2
Voting rights at the annual meeting	Dependent on member organisations	Ordinary members	Ordinary members	Ordinary members	Ordinary members	Ordinary members Honorary members	Dependent on the number of members of each association
Membership criteria	Artists' associations	Anyone who supports the association's goals, accepts and wants to promote them, and has shown to be an active and professional artist Assessed: professional nature of work and being active in the industry	A professional sculptor who is a Finnish citizen or lives permanently in Finland and has proven their competence as a sculptor Assessed: competence in the field	A prerequisite for membership is art studies and artistic and professional activities Assessed: Education and activities in the field	Ordinary and candidate members. Admission as a candidate member upon application, subject to art education and professional qualifications, a peer-reviewed level of works and CV Assessed: education and qualifications in the field, artistic competence and merits	Ordinary and candidate members Assessed: Qualifications accepted include education/training in the field, exhibition activities, success in competitions and peer-reviewed acceptance as a member	Regional artists' association
Board (executive committee)	Chair, vice-chair and 5 members and 5 deputy members	Chair, vice-chair and 5 members	Chair, vice-chair and 5 members	Chair, 2 vice-chairs and 5 members	Chair, vice-chair and 8 members	Chair, vice-chair and 7 members	Chair, 6 members and 2 deputy members
Human resources	Artists' Association of Finland: Director, head of communications (80%), administrative coordinator (80%). Due to the funding cuts made by the Ministry of Education and Culture in spring 2025, the Association currently does not have a lawyer	Director as well as exhibition coordinator & technician; several part-time and project-specific employees	Executive director and exhibition manager, part-time exhibition and communication assistant, part-time production manager, employees on casual contracts, and a fixed-term part-time project worker divided between Associations of Finnish Sculpture, Finnish Printmakers and Photographic Artists (the New Classics project)	Executive director, two part-time gallery assistants and fixed-term part-time project worker divided between Associations of Finnish Sculpture, Finnish Printmakers and Photographic Artists (the New Classics project) (temporarily there is no exhibition coordinator)	Director, financial planning officer, supplies sales manager and exhibition coordinator as well as a part-time membership and communications manager, two assistants on a salary subsidy in the gallery and in the supplies, project planner as producer; sales event manager, production managers and other temporary employees on casual contracts	Director, exhibition manager and association coordinator, association assistant and gallery technician and a fixed-term part-time project worker divided between Associations of Finnish Sculpture, Finnish Printmakers and Photographic Artists (the New Classics project)	No full-time employees
Premises	Exhibition and event space (MUU Helsinki Contemporary Art Centre) and offices and storage spaces at the Cable Factory, rented	Exhibition and event space (MUU Helsinki Contemporary Art Centre) and offices and storage spaces at the Cable Factory, rented	Gallery Sculptor and offices in the centre of Helsinki, rented	Exhibition space Gallery G and sales collection Grafoteekki, as well as offices in the centre of Helsinki, rented	tm-gallery, artist supplies shop and offices in the centre of Helsinki, rented	Gallery Hippolyte (two premises) and Korjaamo (one premises), as well as offices in the centre of Helsinki, rented	No office or exhibition spaces

Table 2. Basic information about AV-arkki and media arts organisations (2025)

















	AV-Arkki	Finnish Bioart Society	M-Cult	Finnish Light Art Society FLASH
Number of members	320 media artists and 6 production companies 	170 	75 	226 
Human resources	2 person-years 	2 person-years 	1,5 person-years 	1 person-years 
Budget	300.000–400.000 € 	200.000–300.000 € 	160.000–170.000 € 	170.000 € 
Other income, assets	---	---	Residency property	---
Membership fee/person /year	Individual members EUR 75, organisation members EUR 120. Individual members over the age of 65 are exempt from membership fee 	Member application processing fee Professionals EUR 30 Students EUR 15 	Processing fee EUR 20, students EUR 10 	One-off joining fee EUR 30 

Table 2. Basic information about AV-arkki and media arts organisations (2025)

	AV-Arkki	Finnish Bioart Society	M-Cult	Finnish Light Art Society FLASH
Number of annual meetings	2	2	1	2
Voting rights at the annual meeting	Ordinary members Honorary members	Ordinary members	Ordinary members Honorary members Honorary chairs	Ordinary members Honorary members Honorary chairs
Membership criteria	Professionals in the field of media art (not students or amateurs) who live permanently in Finland, are Finnish citizens or whose relationship with Finland is so strong that their production is considered to represent Finnish media art	Artists and researchers, cultural actors and people working in bioart-related fields	Individuals working in the field of media culture	Individuals who accept the purpose of the society and are interested in the field
Board (executive committee)	Chair, vice-chair and 5 members	Chair, 5 members and 2 deputy members	Chair, vice-chair and 5 members	Chair, vice-chair and 5 members
Human resources	Director (80%), programme coordinator (50%) and archive coordinator (60%)	Managing director (70%), artistic director (70%), and communications manager/residency coordinator (50%)	Director (80%), technical producer (35%), communications coordinator (40%)	Director, producer on 12.5% of the full-time hours; finance and administration manager as an outsourced service
Premises	Offices in the centre of Helsinki, shared with Frame Finland and the Baltic Circle Festival, rented	Event space and offices in Kalasatama, Helsinki, rented	Offices in Vallila, Helsinki, rented Residency property	No fixed offices

4. CONCLUSIONS FROM THE COMPARISON OF VISUAL ARTS ASSOCIATIONS

The chairs and executive directors of visual arts organisations interviewed for the study welcomed the commissioning of the merger study, and overall it was seen as a valuable contribution. Although the interviews did not cover the organisations' official positions or specific decisions on potential mergers, some of the chairs and executive directors interviewed stated that a merger was either necessary or at least worth considering – subject to certain conditions – a point which we will discuss in more detail below. The interviewees stressed that it would, of course, be the member artists of each organisation that would, ultimately, make the final decision in the case of a merger.

It is understandable that one of the biggest concerns for member artists regarding a potential merger of organisations is the preservation of diversity and multivoicedness on visual arts. Diversity and multivoicedness are characteristics that must not be lost under any circumstances.

A distinction should be made between content-related and administrative aspects. A merger of arts organisations, as an *administrative-organisational* decision, does not mean creating a mysterious body through which artistic *content* would merge to form a shapeless entity. The merger of visual arts organisations primarily concerns the merging of administrative functions, not the merging of the contents of visual arts as such. The goal of a merged organisation would be to create an organisational platform that is best able to promote diversity and multivoicedness in visual arts and offer better services to members.

The total number of employees in the visual arts organisations involved in the study is nowhere near large enough as to present a risk of creating some kind of uncontrollable bureaucratic machine. The Artists' Association of Finland and its member organisations, if merged, would form an organisation of no more than twenty employees. Similarly, if AV-arkki and the media arts organisations merged, the new organisation would have fewer than ten employees. These are still very manageable entities from an organisational perspective.

It is also useful to set a potential merger in the broader context of the shifting nature of the visual arts industry. Some of the chairs and executive directors interviewed drew attention to the changes taking place in the field of visual arts and culture and their impact on organisational activities and potential mergers. The new generations, in particular, operate and organise in new ways. The boundaries between artistic disciplines have been broken down, and the traditional divisions between artistic methods are being challenged. Transitioning between different art forms or disciplines seems to be increasingly common, and various hybrid models are being developed both within artistic practice and community activities. Method-specific divisions are more apparent in the administration of organisations than in artmaking itself. Traditional links to associations and members include multi-disciplinary, multi-method and multi-membership aspects.

There is a risk that traditional activities carried out by registered associations and organisations are perceived as old-fashioned and dysfunctional compared to digital or virtual organisations and communality, for example. There are signs that the new generations are not interested in traditional organisational activities. Free-form, project-based and loosely tied fourth-sector activities are now being conducted alongside organised and association-based third-sector activities. Members move more freely, and loyalty to an organisation can no longer be taken for granted.

Visual arts organisations have members who could be members of multiple existing organisations, and memberships of these organisations overlap. Some members might even be relieved to belong (directly) to a single, merged organisation. Members would pay a single membership fee and have access to all the services they need. A merger could also offer an opportunity for those who do not feel that their work belongs to only one artistic discipline.

4.1. Administrative and operational synergies

One of the aims of the study was to identify any existing administrative overlaps and potential operational synergies that could be achieved in the case of a merger. In this respect, the results of the study are quite unambiguous: clear overlaps and potential synergies were identified, especially in advocacy activities (influencing), communication and member services, in the case of both the Artists' Association of Finland and its member organisations and AV-arkki and the media arts organisations. The chairs and executive directors interviewed agreed on this, although some reservations and organisation-specific features were highlighted. Centralisation of advocacy activities would be necessary to increase the collective effectiveness of visual arts organisations, ensure funding and strengthen the role of visual arts in society and political decision-making processes in general.

The division of duties between the Artists' Association and its member organisations has already been modified so that the Artists' Association is responsible for advocacy activities through cooperation and interaction with its member organisations. The Artists' Association of Finland is the most important advocacy organisation in the field of visual arts, representing practically all professional visual artists who work in Finland through its member associations. However, as an organisation it is small and its resources are insufficient for the requirements of advocacy efforts and the amount of work involved. Additional 1-2 person-years would be required to run effective advocacy campaigns. While the division of labour between the organisations works under the current arrangement, when it comes to formulating joint statements and positions, it is not the most effective method of operating. There also seems to be room for improvement in terms of dialogue and communications in this regard. Influence could be increased by improving both the content and method of interventions, especially in relation to demonstrating social impact and the quick identification of issues raised by members.

There is a clear overlap in the communications of the visual arts organisations, and even the communication channels are usually the same. Every organisation has a website and an online newsletter, and they are all more or less active on social media, with the most common channels being Facebook, Instagram and X. Some also use Vimeo, YouTube and Threads. In a merged organisation, communications, especially shared messages, could

be focused through selected channels. The purpose of centralisation is not to get rid of any art form-specific features, and there should be differentiated communication alongside shared messages. Practical examples include the website and newsletters of a potential merged organisation, which would contain discipline-specific as well as shared content.

The membership services provided by the visual arts organisations are perceived slightly differently between different organisations. These services include sharing information, offering advice on professional matters and various training opportunities, strengthening community spirit and providing peer support. There is clearly a need for professional or legal advice, and it is in this context that it would be necessary to centralise and strengthen human resources operations – especially now that the Artists' Association has had to give up, at least temporarily, providing legal advice to artists. The importance of strengthening community and peer support must also be highlighted in this context. For visual artists, a significant number of work hours are often spent alone, so a breadth of networks and mentorship activities is an important element alongside advisory services.

Public art refers to art located in public indoor or outdoor spaces that is freely accessible to everyone. The Artists' Association is currently responsible for expert services related to public art, such as advice on competitions. These services are also endangered by funding cuts.

4.2. Exhibition and gallery activities

Exhibition and gallery spaces are 'user interfaces' by which visual arts organisations engage with audiences that follow or buy art. The centralisation of these operations – and the potential advantages and disadvantages – should also be discussed. This was the topic that the chairs and executive directors interviewed most disagreed on. Advantages and disadvantages were recognised in both the current decentralised model (separate exhibition and gallery spaces) and the centralised model (shared exhibition and gallery spaces).

From an analytical perspective, centralising exhibition and gallery spaces could strengthen communality in the industry, create preconditions for creative collisions across art forms and, in the best case, even result in savings. Potential disadvantages or weaknesses include thinning of the extensive exhibition network, difficulties in finding suitable spaces and locations and increasing costs. Much depends on whether the matter is viewed from the perspective of audiences and target groups or from the perspective of artists and exhibitors. Centralised spaces could be more attractive and functional for audiences and (new) target groups such as families, but for visual artists, specific exhibition and gallery spaces are highly important in terms of functionality and scheduling, as well as being a significant part of their identity as an artist.

Centralisation or decentralisation of exhibition and gallery spaces is not a crucial issue in terms of a potential merger. Existing exhibition and gallery spaces could well remain unchanged, even if the administrative functions of organisations, such as advocacy, communication and member services activities, are centralised.

The situation is different when it comes to office spaces. In terms of the management, operational coordination and shared organisational culture of the merged organisation, it would be important for management and staff to work in the same premises or at least have shared premises available if necessary. This is likely to increase costs, as the offices of the organisations are located in the exhibition and gallery spaces and cannot be turned into shared spaces or deliver actual savings. Staff working in a shared office would also be further away from exhibition and gallery activities and their customer interface. Another challenge could be the separation between administrative staff and staff in the exhibition spaces. The solution to this could be a combination of shared office spaces and home working.

4.3. Financial and human resources

The cuts in government subsidies in the culture sector over the last couple of years have also had a significant impact on the visual arts organisations' finances and ability to function. The Artists' Association of Finland, AV-arkki and Frame were among the organisations whose funding was cut in 2025. The general economic situation affects artists' professional and living conditions, which, in turn, is reflected in membership numbers and, consequently, income from membership fees. Sales of works and other fundraising efforts are important activities but alone are insufficient to solve the economic challenges that the organisations are facing. Uncertainty around funding seems set to continue, although changes in the political landscape may improve the situation.

Visual arts organisations' finances are also affected by overall increases in the cost of living and staff expenditure, as well as higher rents for office and exhibition spaces. Many organisations now collect exhibition fees instead of rent for exhibition venues, which is encouraging news for artists but means additional costs for organisations.

The organisations could develop their fundraising campaigns, but this requires significant effort and time, as well as investments in human resources or outsourcing of fundraising activities. The situation is challenging because the funding of the entire non-profit sector is undergoing significant change, which means there are many takers for money from private donors, consumers, foundations and projects. Finland also lacks the culture of charitable donations and patronage that is common in many other countries.

The art market is small in Finland and dominated by a few large commercial galleries, so no quick solution to the financial challenges of visual arts organisations can be found there either. There is some potential for growth in the construction and public art sectors. Developing fundraising activities in the direction of business operations is a possibility, but there are pitfalls: in 2023, the Finnish Painters' Union received a decision regarding taxes from the previous year, according to which income from exhibition activities is treated as business activity and taxed under the Act on the Taxation of Business Income, which means all income from these activities is subject to VAT. The Finnish Painters' Union has appealed the decision. Sales activities can also be organised under a limited liability company to prevent similar situations, but this would change the dynamics of operations.

One reason for consolidating visual arts organisations could be direct savings in staff costs, for example. This is certainly possible but not guaranteed. If the goal is to maintain or improve services for member artists, pursuing savings by reducing an already small number of employees would not seem to be an effective solution. Even if all the financial and human resources of the visual arts organisations were combined, their members would still have a wide range of different needs and expectations. Measures to achieve savings might increase the gap between demand and supply. Of course, if public funding and other financial resources continue to dry up, it may be necessary to reduce costs by reducing staff. A merged organisation would be better able to withstand such attacks than individual organisations.

Most of the organisations involved in the study have a problem with a lack of critical mass, referring to the number of employees required to ensure that an organisation can operate effectively and develop its activities. Visual arts organisations typically employ 2-4 full-time staff members, i.e. they lack a critical mass. Visual arts organisations are vulnerable as a result: even one person leaving can mean a halt in activities, at least temporarily. "Living on a razor's edge," as it was described by an executive director, and having "a disaster constantly knocking at your door" is not how resilient organisation operate.

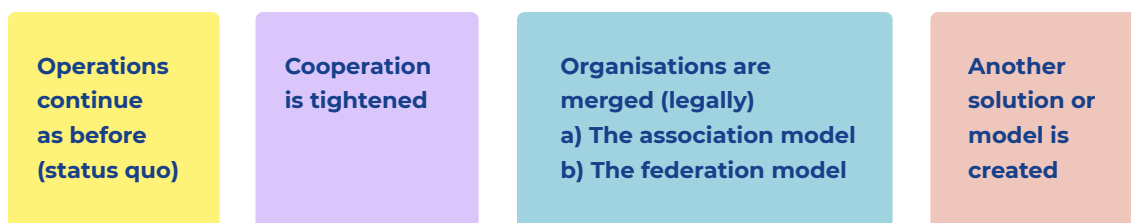
The lack of critical mass is reflected in the fact that "work is always carried out with minimum resources," especially in the smaller arts organisations. For example, executive directors – who should be focused on leadership, development, networking and fundraising – have to spend their time on minor everyday tasks and extinguishing fires, secretarial work and ensuring that support services function. Communication is usually the responsibility of the organisation's executive director, another task among many others. They do not have enough time to do everything they should, and their job descriptions are not commensurate with their actual working hours or pay rate. Their professional skills are mainly underutilised. Organisations also employ a large number of part-time or temporary employees for exhibition and gallery activities, and coordinating their activities, although valuable, requires significant HR investments.

A merged structure would enable directors to manage operations in a more professional and fluent manner, potentially allowing the resulting organisation to function better as an employer in general. In a small organisation, there are no opportunities for promotion, and even opportunities to develop or participate in training are highly limited, as is peer support. Employees work hard and are flexible and adaptable; they clearly work 'for the love of art' – but for how long? The population is ageing, and younger and older generations have different attitudes about work. All this will affect the availability of a skilled and motivated workforce in the long term, which also applies to the visual arts sector.

The provision of legal advice is highlighted in member services due to the juridification of society. Until recently, legal advice was provided by lawyers at the Artists' Association and the Painters' Union, but the Artists' Association has discontinued the service for the time being. There is currently greater demand for these services than there is supply, and the topics of interest are diverse: commissions and exhibition contracts, copyright, taxation and social security (pensions, unemployment security), as well as association legislation and labour law. Legal solutions and activities are key to both the professional status of artists and professional organisations.

5. MERGER OPTIONS AND MODELS

When assessing a merger of visual arts organisations, there are four options for analysis:



The first option is for the arts organisations to continue their activities without change. The Artists' Association of Finland would have the same role as before, as would its member organisations. The same would apply to AV-arkki and the media arts organisations.

The arts organisations have previously collaborated in areas such as advocacy and communications and sales of works. The Artists' Association of Finland has typically borne the main responsibility for joint advocacy activities and related communications. The Associations of Finnish Sculptors, Printmakers and Photographic Artists have cooperated in the sales of works. While cooperative activities can be continued and scaled up, this would not address the key points identified by the study in terms of synergies and vulnerabilities.

There are two main models for legally merging organisations: the association model and the federation model. The former entails consolidating existing arts organisations under one organisation, either by merging them with an existing organisation or by setting up a new organisation into which the existing organisations are merged. This is a two-phase process that results in a single organisation that individual and other members of the old organisations join as members. The second model entails a three-phase process in which an existing organisation is turned into a federation (central organisation), with the existing visual arts organisations becoming its member organisations. In this case, individual members continue to be members of the member organisations.

The interviews and other discussions did not reveal any viable options beyond those outlined above. The chairs and executive directors drew attention to issues such as the overall decline in non-profit activities and the way new generations operate and form communities online. The new organisation would need to be able to rise to these challenges and provide meaningful and engaging communities for existing and potential members for its activities to remain viable into the future.

The key features of the two main models for legal mergers and their sub-models are described below. Of the options presented, the association model would be applicable to the Artists' Association of Finland and its member organisations while the federation model would be relevant for AV-arkki and the media arts organisations.

The main concerns raised in the interviews would be addressed in the context of each model: how decision-making power in the merged organisation is divided and what happens to the assets and property of the merging organisations. One question that was

raised was whether wealthier associations would subsidise the activities of less wealthy organisations and how the power relations between large and small organisations would be arranged. Answers to these questions depend on which merger model is chosen. There are also questions concerning the allocation of membership fees and the sales of works and artistic supplies.

Oili Kela, Attorney-at-law (Asianajotoimisto Oili Kela Oy), who specialises in the legal issues related to associations and foundations, assisted in the structuring of the merger models. Oili Kela prepared a more extensive and detailed memorandum on the models under consideration, which is attached to this report. It will be used as support material if and when any decisions on a merger are made, prepared and implemented. If the merger goes forward, it is advisable that experts in association law be consulted.

5.1. The association model

A. Merging with an existing organisation

Interested visual arts organisations merge into one existing organisation, which is the receiving organisation. Its rules are amended to reflect this changed situation. The operations, staff and assets of the old organisations are transferred to the receiving organisation. Individual members of the old associations apply for membership of the receiving association. The old associations are dissolved after the transfer of operations, staff and assets.

B. Founding a new organisation

Existing organisations set up a completely new organisation that all interested visual arts organisations join. They transfer their operations, staff and assets to the new organisation. Their members apply for membership of the new organisation. All old organisations are dissolved after the transfer of operations, staff and assets.

Decision-making power in the association model

Typically, the decision-making power in organisations is arranged such that each (ordinary) individual member has one vote at the organisation's ordinary general meeting. This is usually the arrangement for associations, e.g. the Artists' Association of Finland's member organisations. This could also be the arrangement for a potential new organisation. If the new organisation chooses to share decision-making power in proportion to the memberships of the old organisations, a single member group can be formed from the memberships of each of the old organisations. The rules stipulate requirements and conditions for membership groups.

Membership groups can be divided into electoral districts, which elect delegates for the new organisation in accordance with the rules. If necessary, the distribution of delegates' seats may be amended as membership groups or numbers of members in electoral districts change. The rules may also provide for other member groups (for example, honorary and supporting members). Each membership group's right to attend meetings of the association, right to vote, number of votes and obligation to pay membership fees, as well as other rights, can be provided for in the association's rules.

At current meetings of the Artists' Association of Finland's representatives, member organisations have more voting rights (representatives) the more individual members they have, but it should be noted that each member organisation only has one seat on the Artists' Association's board, which makes almost all practical decisions regarding advocacy efforts. Thus, currently a combined model is used; the influence of each organisation within the Artists' Association is a reflection of the number of members it has, but in everyday advocacy operations all member organisations are equal and have the same power.

Assets in the association model

Assets here refer to organisation-specific income from membership fees and sales, property, bequests and similar assets. In principle, membership fees are funds that belong to the new organisation and are used to finance its activities. Different membership fees can be charged for different membership groups. If the assets of merging organisations are transferred to the new organisation, as standard the assets are no longer exclusively available for the use of the old organisations or their membership group but rather should benefit all members equally and the activities of the new organisation as a whole. An organisation may have divisions, each with their own accounts or budgets, but the finances of the organisation as a whole are, ultimately, the responsibility of its board.

A foundation or fund can also be set up with the assets and property of the old organisations. Typically, a foundation is established when merging organisations have assets of different sizes and/or accumulated assets are to be allocated to benefit the members of a particular association. Establishing a foundation is only recommended if the value of the assets to be transferred to the foundation is not insignificant.

Staff in the association model

Employees are transferred to the merged organisation in a transfer of business, meaning that the employees will transfer as 'old employees.' Employees' duties and job descriptions can be defined or changed once the new organisation has commenced operations.

5.2. The federation model

C. A federation formed from an existing organisation

In this model, an existing organisation becomes a federation (central organisation) that all interested arts organisations join as member organisations. Thus, the federation has member organisations as members, and these, in turn, have individuals as members.

Decision-making power in the federation model

The federation's rules may provide that the member organisations' voting rights at the federation's ordinary general meetings depend on the number of members in each member organisation. If the federation chooses to have delegates, the member organisations can be divided into electoral districts, each of which elects the number of delegates, possibly tied to the number of members, provided for in the rules. In the federation model, decision-making power can easily be allocated in relation to current membership numbers even without delegates.

Assets in the federation model

In the federation structure, the assets and property of existing member organisations do not need to be transferred to the federation, which means that they can remain under the control of the organisations to benefit their current members. If necessary, the federation could collect membership fees from both its own association members and the associations' individual members. A proportion of the membership fees collected by the federation are returned to the member organisations to finance their activities in accordance with the federation's rules and the detailed principles confirmed at the federation's meeting.

Staff in the federation model

In the federation structure, employees of existing member organisations would not be transferred to the federation but would continue to be employed by the member organisations.

D. A federation whose members are organisations and individual members

In this model, in addition to member organisations, the federation's direct members can include either all the individual members of the member organisations or individual members who apply for membership.

Decision-making power in the federation model

The federation's rules determine whether individual members exercise their voting rights in their capacity as direct members or are represented within the votes (usually no more than one) of the member associations.

Assets in the federation model

The same as option C above.

Staff in the federation model

The same as option C above.

6. TOWARDS A MERGER OF VISUAL ARTS ORGANISATIONS

6.1. Grounds for a merger

Organisations are not ends in themselves; they are meant to serve member artists in the best possible way. They are the platform and prerequisite for the implementation of services and functions aimed at members. The key justification for a potential merger of arts organisations is to strengthen the viability of the industry and ecosystem as a whole such that services and functions can be implemented efficiently and appropriately.

Merging could create an organisation (or organisations) in the field of visual arts that would be of sufficient size to constitute a critical mass, making it better able to withstand any future challenges than smaller and more vulnerable organisations. The merged organisation would have sufficient human resources for collaborative advocacy efforts and communications and to provide services for members. Managers and experts would have more resources to focus on specific issues and their development. Resources could be used more efficiently so as to achieve greater effectiveness in advocacy and communication operations and services.

A significant proportion of the funding of visual arts organisations consists of public grants. Funding cuts have weakened the already difficult position of visual arts organisations in the cultural field. According to an industry survey on visual arts (Visuaaliset taiteet Suomessa 2023), the structures that support artistic work in the domain of visual arts are weaker than in many other domains of art. In 2019, only 1% of government funding for the arts was allocated to visual arts.

Centralisation of advocacy activities would be necessary to ensure collective funding for visual arts organisations and to strengthen the role of visual arts in society and political decision-making processes in general. In the best case, the indirect impact of advocacy efforts would be visible in artists' working conditions and livelihoods. Services for member artists could be developed to better meet needs.

No structural, organisational or administrative decisions automatically guarantee the preservation or disappearance of diversity and multivoicedness in a merged organisation. While the merging organisations provide the framework, ultimately it is the shared ambitions of decision-makers and professionals who work in the merged organisation that are crucial. Much depends on mutual trust and a desire to find a solution that benefits all parties involved in the study.

As the old saying goes: 'Prediction is very difficult, especially if it is about the future'. We cannot know with certainty whether a merger would be successful, whether its goals would be achieved, how sponsors would react and so on. It is necessary to push the limits of our courage when mental obstacles, fear and uncertainty or an unclear vision of the future threaten to impede justified or necessary change.

Of course, visual arts organisations can continue to operate as they have or choose to tighten their cooperation, but is that enough? Can they afford not to merge? It is not just a question of what will happen if they merge but also what will happen if they continue as before. To Do nothing is a decision in itself.

6.2. Opportunities and threats related to a merger

Although the object of this study was the potential merger of visual arts organisations, it does not follow that a merger is the obvious choice or an inevitable outcome. Mergers present both threats and opportunities that must be carefully considered in the decision-making process. The main opportunities and threats of the three options are outlined below.

1. Operations continue as before

- Opportunities: Organisations continue their established and familiar activities, mutual trust, familiar organisation-specific identity is preserved, each organisation keeps its separate finances
- Threats: Overlap between activities, small organisations are vulnerable, resilience-to-crisis cycle is insufficient, cuts to public funding weaken the scope for activities, effectiveness of advocacy work is limited

2. Cooperation is stepped up

- Opportunities: Organisations continue their established and familiar activities, there is mutual trust, the familiar organisation-specific identity is preserved, each organisation keeps its separate finances
- Threats: Overlap and a need to streamline the use of resources, small organisations are vulnerable, opportunities to increase cooperation between legally independent entities and of resource allocation are limited, effectiveness of advocacy work is limited

3. Organisations are merged

- Opportunities: Effectiveness of advocacy work is improved to ensure the viability of the entire field of visual arts, resources are used more effectively, job descriptions are centralised to ensure a more functional organisation, vulnerabilities and resilience-to-crisis cycle is addressed
- Threats: No certainty about future government subsidies for the merged organisation, organisation-specific identity changes, willingness to change determines success, potential loss of members during the transition phase

It is quite possible that visual arts organisations will continue their activities or further tighten their cooperation. This would mean preserving their familiar organisational identities and continuing activities as normal. However, this may not be enough to guarantee a viable future for visual arts organisations, especially if the downward trend in public funding continues or organisations fail to step up their fundraising activities. Increasing membership fees is an option, but this might be difficult in practice, considering the financial position of members. Opportunities to increase cooperation between organisations are also limited as transferring resources between legally independent units is difficult. These options also do not solve the challenges related to overlapping activities, vulnerabilities and the effectiveness of advocacy efforts.

The most important question in terms of a legal merger concerns public funding: if a merger were to take place between the Artists' Association of Finland and its member organisations, for example, would the merged organisation receive the same, less or more funding than is currently received by the existing, separate organisations overall? There is no definite answer to this question. The organisations must also be prepared for a situation in the future in which the Ministry of Education and Culture will not continue to provide the current level of funding to all existing visual arts organisations.

Even if the *organisation-specific* identity of each artistic discipline changes as a result of a merger, it does not mean that the *discipline-specific* identity will change. Discipline-specific characteristics and brands can be preserved, and internal divisions and groups can be formed from the former organisations. What is essential is to preserve the contents of the artistic disciplines even if the *organisation-specific* form changes.

There is a risk that there will be a loss of members in the process of a transition as changes take place. In practice, this can be avoided by having individual members of the old organisations automatically join the new organisation by paying the membership fee. The change must be clearly communicated and justified to all members, of course, but it is advisable to be prepared for a certain loss of membership. The merged organisation could also offer an attractive alternative for artists who work in multiple disciplines or outside the traditional boundaries of the arts. The merged organisation's brand should be revamped to reflect the changed reality, and investments should be made in member acquisition right from the launch of the operations.

6.3. About the roadmap for the merger

The purpose of this study was to draw up a roadmap for the implementation of a merger. However, this report can only describe the steps up to a certain point, and the visual arts organisations themselves will have to consider and resolve a number of issues. Mergers always entail unconsidered issues and details that need to be clarified or resolved. Some of the key issues that need to be resolved in the context of a merger are described below.

1) Organisations involved in the merger

One of the first issues to be resolved is determining the organisations that will be involved in any merger(s). From this perspective, the Artists' Association of Finland and its member organisations would form a natural entity, while AV-arkki, the Centre for Finnish Media Art and the media arts organisations would form another.

Secondly, it must be ensured from the outset that all organisations are serious about tackling the issues and challenges related to a merger. Each organisation must also invest sufficient time and energy in preparing for a merger.

2) Choosing the merger model

From the models described above, the association model would be applicable for a potential merger of the Artists' Association of Finland and its member organisations, while the federation model could be suitable for AV-arkki and the media arts organisations. As noted above, the federation model would not create much added value over the current situation in the case of the Artists' Association and its member organisations, so a legal merger would be a viable alternative. As for AV-arkki and the media arts organisations, the federation model could be beneficial in terms of creating synergies. Such a federation would represent a new form of operation for the media arts organisations involved in the study and need additional funding to work.

Mergers are not treated in the same way in the Associations Act as in the Limited Liability Companies Act, the Cooperatives Act and the Foundations Act. The rules of the organisations also do not contain any provisions in the case of a merger, though it would have to take place by agreement between the parties. A good tool here is the merger agreement, which records all the relevant aspects of the merger (see below for more details).

A merger must be carried out in accordance with the Associations Act and the rules of the organisations involved. In practical terms, this means that the decision to amend the rules of an organisation or to dissolve an association is made in the manner specified in the relevant section. The decision to dissolve or terminate an association is made at the association's ordinary general meeting. For all other visual arts organisations involved in the survey, dissolution requires at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of the votes given at the meeting; at the Association of Photographic Artists, the decision must be made by a $\frac{5}{6}$ majority of votes.

3) Strategic guidelines of the new organisation

As an independent legal entity, the new organisation would decide on its strategy, i.e. its mission (what, why and for whom it exists) and its ambitions (what kind of future it seeks), as well as the content and key areas of its activities. In practice, however, there would need to be shared ideas about the future organisation before a merger, ensuring the purpose and grounds of the merger are transparent and the merger receives sufficient support. Although the duties and job descriptions of the employees are ultimately decided by the new organisation, the merger agreement could outline some of the contents of the new organisation's activities.

Considering the organisation-specific comparisons described above, these preliminary outlines could cover familiar content such as management, financial and human resources management and communications (general, influencer, member service and public art communications), social and professional advocacy work, lobbying and stakeholder cooperation, artistic and professional support for members, legal and other advice, training, peer support and strengthening the community, public arts expert services, sales or works and art form-specific expert groups, committees, galleries and exhibitions. It should also be stated explicitly in this context that the special and diverse nature of various art forms represented by the organisations would be honoured in the new organisation.

4) Rules of the new organisation

It is advisable to use the Patent and Registration Office's template for associations as a basis or reference when drafting rules for a new organisation. Depending on the chosen merger model, the rules of an existing organisation could be amended to reflect the changed circumstances or rules could be drawn up for a newly established organisation. The rules should be shown to the Patent and Registration Office in advance to avoid unexpected issues arising at the time a decision is made.

Issues to be decided during the preparation of the rules cover the name of the new organisation, its purpose and forms of activity, members (membership types), membership criteria and bases for membership fees, the number of annual meetings, decision-making and representation, composition of the board, accounting period and auditing, authorised signatories, amendments to rules and dissolution of the association. It is especially important to agree on the rules for membership types and criteria and the basis for membership fees as well as decision-making power at the annual meetings.

In a merger of associations, it should be noted that board members cannot be appointed in the same way as delegates. There may be specific qualifications required for board members, but all members must be able to nominate candidates for the board and participate in the selection.

5) Scheduling mergers

If it is decided that the visual arts associations should merge, the schedule for the process could look like this, for example:

- Autumn 2025: Discussions are held with the boards of the parties involved in this study and member artists on what conclusions can be drawn from the study with regard to a potential merger
- 2026: Decisions are made on whether to proceed with a merger and, if so, an outline is developed for the schedule and parties involved
- 2026-2027: If a decision is made to proceed with a merger, necessary preparations are started
- 2027-2028: The necessary decisions are made on a merger and dissolution, and the merger is implemented
- From 2028 onwards: A new organisation becomes operational

This schedule is indicative and aims to demonstrate the essential phases of a merger. Ultimately, of course, it is up to the visual arts organisations themselves to decide how quickly the potential change should or must be achieved. Of course, a merger could take place earlier than described above.

The practical steps and key topics in setting up a new organisation are divided into three parts: preliminary preparations, decision-making and communication, and monitoring. The purpose of preliminary preparations is to ensure sufficient support for a merger and plan the implementation of the merger process carefully. The merger agreement records the key issues and principles related to the establishment and operations of the new organisation. It is advisable to ensure effective communications during the merger process and to engage, as appropriate, boards, employees and members, especially in dealing with matters that specifically concern any of these parties. The decision-making process concerning a merger includes two main phases: deciding to undertake a merger and winding up the activities of the old organisations. After these decisions, it is time to launch the activities of the new organisation, prepare its strategy and establish a new operating culture.

Preliminary preparations

Preliminary preparations by the board

- Establishing or ensuring a shared ambition, including the grounds and need for a merger
- Responsibilities, obligations and powers of the parties involved in the merger process
- Process plan: Preparation, communication and engagement as well as decision-making
- Scheduling and phasing decisions in the merging organisations
- Preparation of the merger agreement
- Preparation of the merger proposal for the annual meeting

Merger agreement

- Background, grounds and objective of the merger
- Merger model, rules and main lines of activities
- Phases of the merger and decision-making process
- Responsibilities, communication and engagement
- Memberships, staff and administrative arrangements

Decision-making and launch

Agreeing on a merger

- Final decision to merge at the annual meeting, taking into account the association's rules and the Associations Act
- Approval and signing of the merger agreement

Termination (dissolution) of the organisation

- Notice of dissolution to members/the annual meeting (the board prepares)
- Decision to dissolve in two consecutive ordinary or extraordinary meetings in accordance with the provisions on qualified majority voting
- Post-merger: Notice of dissolution to the Patent and Registration Office; final report by the rapporteur and archiving

Launching the new organisation's operations

- Selecting the board (at the annual meeting)
- Transfer of staff, assets and property to the new organisation
- Drawing up the strategy, including an HR plan
- Establishing a new operational culture

Communications and follow-up

Communication plan

- Crystallisation of the core message
- Who communicates, to whom, how and when
- Crisis communication management

Involvement in preparations

- Boards, staff and members
- Handling open questions and issues to be resolved
- Processing of the contents of the merger agreement

Follow-up and evaluation

- Defining success criteria
- Reporting on the status of the process to the board

Figure 1. Practical steps and key topics for setting up a new organisation

Merger agreement

1. **Merging parties (organisations):** Which organisations are merging?
2. **Background, grounds and objectives of the merger:** Why are the organisations merging and what is the goal?
3. **Method or model of merging:** Which model is chosen?
4. **Phase of the merger and timetable for the decision-making process:** At what phases and within what time frame are the decisions on establishment and dissolution made?
5. **Responsibilities and obligations:** What are the roles of stakeholders, such as chairs, board members and executive directors in the management, preparation and practical implementation of the merger process?
6. **Communications and engagement:** How should the merger be communicated and parties concerned in the preparation process engaged?
7. **Outlines of the activities:** What is the name of the new organisation, what are its rules and the main purposes of its activities?
8. **Membership:** Who are the members of the new organisation, what are the membership criteria and how are membership fees determined?
9. **Staff:** What is the status of the employees in the merging organisations in the merger (transfer of the business, i.e. will staff be transferred as old employees to the new organisation)?
10. **General administration:** How will key administrative issues be handled, including asset transfers and debt management, transfer of fixed assets, business premises, insurances and tax obligations, termination and agreement of cooperation and service agreements, accounting, merging and maintenance of member registers, etc.?
11. **Other issues to consider:** What other things should be taken into account in the merger process?
12. **Place, date and signatories:** Who should sign the merger agreement (chairs, executive directors)?

7. BENCHMARK ORGANISATIONS

Mergers are not a new or rare phenomenon in the non-profit sector. There is always something to learn from mergers implemented by other organisations – both successes and failures. The organisations that were selected as benchmarks in this study are Circus & Dance Info Finland; Music Finland, which promotes Finnish music in international markets; Ornamo, a non-profit association of professionals in the field of design and applied arts; and the Conservatory Association of Finland, a cooperative body of music conservatories and polytechnics. The main findings from interviews with senior officials within these organisations are described below.

This section also utilises knowledge obtained from major structural change projects, in which the author of this report has been involved. These include the merger of Suomen Liikunta ja Urheilu (SLU), Nuori Suomi and Kuntoliikuntaliitto into Valo (2010-2012); the establishment of a new joint central organisation by the member unions the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK), the Finnish Confederation of Professionals (STTK) and the Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland – Akava (2015-2016); the merger of development cooperation organisations Kepa and Kehys (2017), the mergers of the Etpähä and Päijänne Leader associations and Piällysmies and Rajupusu Leader (2021-2022) and a project to reorganise the structures and procedures of the Martha Association (2023-2024). At the end of this section, essential lessons learned from these mergers and the selected benchmarks are described.

7.1. Circus & Dance Info Finland

Dance Info Finland (founded in 1980) and CircusInfo Finland (founded in 2006) merged in 2022 to form Circus & Dance Info Finland. The groundwork for the merger had started a few years prior in joint discussions. Both information centres understood that a merger would make sense in terms of organising their activities, especially since they had similar rules, forms of activities, positions in the industry and operators. In this respect, there are many similarities between the cases of these two information centres and the organisations that are the focus of this study.

The purpose of the activities of both information centres were almost identical: their rules described their responsibilities as being the promotion of the development and social status of the art form in question, as well as maintaining international contacts. The information centres had collaborated throughout the 2010s, which provided a basis for discussions about the merger.

In 2017, the information centres started to update their strategies, and it was then decided that these updates would be implemented partly through a shared process. The annual meeting of Dance Info Finland approved a strategy in spring 2018, which included exploring various forms of cooperation and the possibility of merging with CircusInfo Finland.

The boards and staff of the information centres held meetings between 2018 and 2020 to assess and compare the activities of the two organisations and prepare the necessary

analyses. Various synergies that can be achieved through a merger were identified at these meetings, such as cost savings brought about by eliminating overlaps and the release of human resources for more centralised tasks – topics that have also been covered in this study. Closer cooperation and integration of activities through shared facilities was also seen as an option but considered insufficient.

The analyses identified threats and challenges associated with a merger, as well as some opportunities and strengths. The threats were much the same as those highlighted in this study with regard to the visual arts organisations: a decrease in expertise, increased distance to the field, disappearance of an organisation that is important for the identity of an artistic discipline, the loss of a voice in advocacy work and cuts to funding. There was also a fear that the larger organisation, Dance Info Finland, would swallow the smaller CircusInfo. Other challenges included different membership bases, different relationships with operators in the sector, different histories and the different stages of development of the sectors.

The identified opportunities were also familiar: the elimination of overlaps, especially in administration, synergy benefits and more efficient use of resources, a more effective voice and more powerful advocacy efforts, increased expertise, developments in services and new funding opportunities. The extensive and ever-growing cooperation between the information centres was seen as a strength, which then laid the foundations for a merger. The situation is similar for the Artists' Association of Finland and its member organisations as well as AV-arkki and the media arts organisations in that the collaborative activities already carried out form an essential basis for a potential merger.

The grounds for the merger were summarised in spring 2020 as follows: The purpose of the merger would be, with the help of the stronger and more effective organisation, to maintain the existing services and service level and develop new services and activities for the circus arts and dance sectors. The objective was, thus, the same as in the case of the visual arts organisations. Synergies achieved by the creation of a single organisation and the elimination of operational, financial and administrative overlaps would free up resources and enable the development of services, skills and expertise. The financial and other risks associated with small organisations (including cuts to public funding) could be better addressed when developing activities in line with the needs of the circus arts and dance sectors, which were undergoing change. The resilience of the organisations was also an issue in this case.

The boards of the two information centres decided in early 2020 to continue discussions on a potential merger. Open discussion sessions were arranged for the member communities in the same year. In August 2020, the boards discussed the rules and the merger agreement, and in October of that year meetings of both associations were expected to agree the merger. The Dance Info meeting resulted in a unanimous decision in support of the merger, but the CircusInfo meeting did not quite materialise the majority of votes required to pass the motion.

However, discussions about the merger continued in early 2022, and this time the focus was firmly on the concerns of the circus sector, including the small size of the circus sector in comparison to the dance sector, as well as concerns that the smaller art form would not be able to make its voice heard in the new association. These concerns were addressed by amending the proposed rules for the new association and the merger agreement with

regard to membership criteria and the composition of the board and expert groups, for example there would be an equal number of board seats allocated for both sectors. In general, the aim was to ensure equality between the two disciplines by stating explicitly that the new association would represent both circus and dance sectors and that it would convey the voice of both fields to cultural policy decision-making processes. It was also decided that the operations of the new information centre would be assessed in three years' time. An important tool to support the consolidation process was the merger agreement, which recorded the solutions and principles regarding these concerns.

In June 2022, the extraordinary meetings of both information centres resulted in a decision to approve the merger agreement and rules. Circus & Dance Info Finland was founded in August 2022. The new association prepared an action plan for 2023 and applied for an operating grant from the Ministry of Education and Culture for 2023. The staff moved to the shared offices in October 2022, and actual operations began at the beginning of 2023. The employees of the old information centres were transferred to the new one as old employees through a transfer of the business.

Even in the case of the circus and dance sectors, the primary goals of the merger were not so focused on saving money as enjoying the benefits of synergy, more efficient use of available resources and the preservation of existing services. By listing both information centres' activities and person-years in terms of labour, overlaps and opportunities for centralisation were identified. In short, centralisation resulted in a single message and communicator. The same applied to the centralisation of resources in influencing activities (advocacy work), with communications covering both artistic disciplines. Savings were also made through the use of a shared office space, shared systems and shared occupational health care services, for example.

7.2. Music Finland

Music Finland is a leading expert in music exports and a service organisation that enables success stories and long-term careers. It acts as an advisor and partner for the Finnish music industry at different stages of internationalisation and helps its customers find new partners, showcase their music to buyers across the world and grow their audiences on international markets. Its customers are music professionals and companies that aim to expand to international markets and export their music.

Music Finland was founded on 1 January 2012 with the merger of the Finnish Music Information Centre (Fimic) and Music Export Finland (Musex). Both associations wound up their activities and set up a completely new organisation to which they transferred their activities. The idea was to start operations with a clean slate.

There was some overlapping in the functions of Fimic and Musex, especially in terms of international operations and music exports. The reasons for the merger were familiar, in particular the elimination of overlaps and the achievement of synergies. In addition, the memberships of the organisations included largely the same organisations. It was also important that the bodies that funded their operations, the Ministry of Education and Culture (Fimic) and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (Musex), responded favourably to the merger. In addition to the ministries, the member organisations themselves were and still are significant sources of funding and there is a willingness to invest in Music Finland's operations when relevant and necessary.

The establishment of Music Finland proceeded quickly after the decision to merge the two associations was made in autumn 2011. The initiative for the merger came from the respective boards, where the matter had been prepared on the basis of joint discussions. A lawyer was also helpful in clarifying practical matters. The organisations and staff were transferred to the new organisation as old employees and moved to shared premises. There was no need to reduce the number of employees, but as a result of voluntary attrition, the total number of employees decreased slightly. The new organisation recruited a new executive director. All eight member organisations were represented in the composition of the board, with each having one seat. Since Fimic and Musex had received funding for 2012, their funds were included in the accounts alongside those of Music Finland for that year, until the operations were dissolved for good.

Internal strategy work was started at Music Finland after the merger, which defined a vision for the organisation's aims and activities. The organisation's customers and representatives of its member organisations were involved in drawing up the definitions. The executive team, which included officials from both of the former organisations, played a huge role in managing the changes resulting from the strategy and in coordinating operations and human resources. The chairs of the boards of the former organisations acted as important facilitators but delegated the practical implementation of the strategy to the executive team.

The starting point for the strategy process revolved around fundamental questions about the identity and nature of the new organisation. Music Finland's selection included a wide range of music genres, and its customers were a heterogeneous group of companies, sole traders, cooperatives, associations and individual operators. It was necessary to offer a more detailed and transparent definition of the organisation's activities and explain why and for whom they were being conducted. The result was a paradigm shift in the organisation – a change in mindset. New concepts were introduced, and the use of terms such as 'customers' and 'services' was introduced. Customers (customer segments) were defined in terms of service design, and operations were seen as services (service path).

Initially, there were concerns about the relationship between art-driven (non-commercial) and commercial activities. The fear was that large companies would erode the artistic focus and stifle creativity. Focusing on services and customers was a daunting prospect at first, but it quickly became a habit and natural part of the language of Music Finland. It was not a matter of commercialising all operations but rather changing the mindset to put musicians, composers and performers at the fore and ensuring an organisation is in place to support their international activities.

7.3. Ornamo

Ornamo (formerly Suomen Koristetaiteilijoiden Liitto Ornamo, 'the Decorative Artists' Union Ornamo', and the Finnish Association of Designers ORNAMO) is a non-profit association founded in 1911 for professionals in the fields of design and applied arts. Ornamo's task is to protect the interests and promote the visibility of its members, and to encourage networking and cooperation. It has about 3,000 members from the fields of product and industrial design, textile, fashion and furniture design, interior architecture, digital design, strategic planning and consulting, as well as craft and design and applied arts. Ornamo is a community of designers and a platform for activities, it provides a framework for its members to build connections in a wide network of colleagues and surveys design skills.

In 2005, Ornamo underwent a structural change aimed at merging all five member organisations into Ornamo. The merger was not implemented completely. Taiko, the applied arts organisation; MTO, the fashion designers' organisation; and the Industrial Designers TKO wound up their activities, while the Finnish Association of Interior Architects SIO and the Finnish Association of Textile Artists TEXO continued operating. In addition, Artists O, a society for professional artists working in the field of material-based arts and applied arts, was founded in 2006.

These last three organisations are called Ornamo's member organisations. They are part of the communal and operational platform that Ornamo maintains and through which its members can explore places and opportunities for networking, knowledge sharing and design development. The Industrial Designers TKO, Fashion MTO and the Ceramics Interest Group continued to operate at Ornamo as interest groups. Members of the member organisations gather to discuss current themes, exchange ideas and find inspiration. The groups organise events, prizes and exhibitions for their members, some of which are also open to all Ornamo members. What is essential in Ornamo's model is that engaging members does not require heavy organisational structures that can easily paralyse operations. Instead, low-threshold inclusion aims to ensure broad and comprehensive member participation and focus on topics that the members find interesting and inspiring.

An important consequence of the restructuring of Ornamo concerned its membership: all members of the above-mentioned organisations returned to Ornamo as members (not all members of Ornamo are members of a member organisation, however, as these have a separate application procedure). Membership fees are also paid to Ornamo, which uses them to provide member services, such as training, sales events, personal professional advice, networking opportunities and peer support. Member organisations are provided with services such as membership administration and a register, member invoicing, as well as workstations and meeting rooms with equipment in Ornamo's offices, i.e. services related to basic administration that allow member organisations' employees and trustees to focus on what is important to them. Ornamo also collects membership fees on behalf of its member organisations and passes the funds back to them.

At the time of the restructuring process, the administration was reduced by abolishing the body of representatives. Each ordinary member has one vote at the annual meeting, and only ordinary members, not students or free members, have voting rights. The board is composed of the chair and 6-10 members under Ornamo's rules. Currently, Ornamo's board has a chair and eight members. Any member can stand as a candidate for the board. The board is elected by nationwide online voting. Members vote for a candidate from a list for each seat on the board. This ensures that instead of voting for one representative of an artistic discipline, all candidates and the interest of the entire community are taken into account more comprehensively. Under Ornamo's rules, equal regional and professional representation must be considered when electing the board.

Ornamo set up the Ornamo Foundation in 1994, the purpose of which is to support and promote the work of Ornamo members in the areas of design represented by the membership and to make their achievements widely known. The Ornamo Foundation owns several significant funds and bequests in the field of design, the proceeds of which are used to make annual grants and awards to designers and artists who are Ornamo members.

The Ornamo Foundation is an independent legal person, a separate legal entity that is not part of Ornamo's 'group structure'. However, Ornamo's board appoints the Foundation's board after consulting its member organisations. At least two board members must be chosen from outside the members of Ornamo and must have expertise in either finance, law or industry and commerce. Ornamo has outsourced the Foundation's legal services.

By setting up a foundation for bequests, Ornamo has managed to avoid the risk associated with structural changes, i.e. the lapse of bequests. The bequests are also still earmarked, i.e. they are targeted for a specific purpose described in the will. This is the procedure that the visual arts organisations could adopt to solve any concerns related to organisation-specific bequests or assets in general.

7.4. Conservatory Association of Finland

The Conservatory Association of Finland, founded in 1986, is an interest and cooperation organisation for music conservatories. It serves as a national advocacy organisation for vocational education providers in the music and dance sectors. Its purpose is to promote the status of the secondary-level education and vocational qualifications in the music and dance industry as well as to act as a collaborative forum for its members. Most of the association's funding comes from membership fees. In addition to the executive director, the association employs a project coordinator.

The association has 16 educational institutions as its members, which offer vocational music education. The members operate across Finland. Some members are private educational institutions while others operate under municipalities or educational consortia. Students can obtain basic degrees in music and dance as well as professional degrees in music production in the member institutions, and most of them also offer a wide range of study programmes in music and dance.

The association carries out advocacy work, with the aim to ensure that its members have the prerequisites for organising high-quality education in the music and dance sectors. The association also conducts various studies and research projects to support the development of vocational education in music. It monitors the developments in the attractiveness of the sector, the placement of graduates in further studies and work, and the developments in the quality of the education.

Monitoring the developments in the sector is essential for both the association and its member institutions. Changes in the operating environment, such as regional centralisation and a decrease in the number of children and young people, also have a direct impact on the situation of music schools. Of the study options in vocational education, pop music and music technology have been on the rise for some time, while classical music has lost some of its appeal. A common concern is the decrease in the number of students in each institution and the interest in fewer instruments. Vocational education and its funding are also changing. This may lead to a weakening of the position of the smallest music schools, which may lead to debates about mergers. There is thus demand for goal-oriented and effective advocacy work.

One response to keeping up with the developments in society is the Vision 2030 for the Finnish Music Education project. Completed during 2019–2020, this collaborative effort brought together all the actors in the field at all levels of education. The vision is crystallised in three main themes: music education has an impact on society, music education allows cooperation and continued learning to flourish, and equitable music education is facilitated by suitable structures and resources. These main themes include 25 concrete proposals for action through which the desired vision can be attained. The project has sought to achieve a shared understanding of development needs, goals and actions in music education, and it has significantly improved cooperation between the different operators. The Conservatory Association is responsible for coordinating the vision efforts together with the vision working group.

As part of the vision work, a two-year project, A Future-Proof Educational Culture, was launched in autumn 2024 with funding from the Jane and Aatos Erkko Foundation. Its aim is to promote the implementation of the themes of the vision and to support educational institutions in responding to structural changes in society. The project includes three large-scale pilots, one of which is the potential merger of three music schools. The project is coordinated by the Conservatory Association of Finland.

Within the Conservatory Association, cooperation between member institutions takes place in the collegial body, which meets five times a year. It operates under the Association's board, which prepares the agenda for the meetings with the executive director. The body consists of the headmaster or other representative from each of the sixteen member institutions. The collegial body plays an important role in guiding the Association's activities, dealing with shared issues and supporting the community spirit of its members.

Each member institution has the same membership fee, and they all have the same number of votes at the meetings, regardless of their size. The members have been happy with the system as all members are represented in the collegial body and are able to voice their views on essential decisions and solutions. Even the composition of the board – the chair and three ordinary members and three deputies – is not perceived as a problem for the same reason. Equal participation and shared ambitions can be achieved in ways other than sticking to official principles and practices that are tied to the rules.

7.5. The Visual Art House

The idea behind the Visual Art House has been to form a house that gathers all visual arts under one roof. Its mission is to widen the audiences for the visual arts, to enhance the vitality of artists and the sector, and to strengthen the social relevance of the visual arts. The House is made up of leading artist-led organisations, under whose leadership the Visual Art House is becoming the newest, most vibrant centre for contemporary art. However, the aim of the project has not, as such, been to consolidate the organisations in the Visual Art House but to create a new kind of ecosystem. It has been modelled on Dance House Helsinki and the House of Text.

The starting points for the Visual Art House have been described in the preliminary report (2019) and the project report (2021) drawn up by Riitta Heinämaa, M.A. The project was launched by the Artists' Association of Finland and its six member associations with AV-arkki, Frame, Galleria Huuto, Ornamo and Kuvasto, the copyright society for visual artists.

The preliminary study assessed the kind of need that the Visual Art House would fulfil and what benefits it could offer artist organisations, other operators in the field of visual arts, professional artists and visual art audiences. Similar to this study, the project identified the benefits of synergy brought about by the shared premises and explored the possibilities of offering an interesting hub for visual arts operators. A special topic under study was the organisation of exhibition activities through space-related cooperation. The advantage of the Visual Art House was seen in its ability to bring together a very diverse group of operators to form a kind of cluster or hybrid, either under the same roof or close to each other. Such an ecosystem would be a resource that, at its best, would generate new innovations and procedures.

The reasons behind the project are also familiar: obtaining savings by combining support functions, freeing up resources and focusing them on activities such as communications, sales, marketing and community engagement, as well as developing customer services and services for artists. The preliminary study states that development work is difficult under the current operating model since the organisations' resources are tied to the practical execution of the operations. The preliminary study further states that by cutting overlapping activities, the operators could focus on their core tasks, such as advocacy efforts, producing various member services, organising exhibitions and promoting the expansion of international activities, as well as promoting, selling and distributing works of art. The operating conditions for artists would be improved as support for practising the profession would be more easily and efficiently available.

The idea of the Visual Art House is based not only on administrative-organisational streamlining and the creation of ecosystems but also on structural and procedural changes to artmaking and art itself, especially in terms of an increase in the diversity of art – i.e. the same topics to which the chairs and executive directors interviewed for this report drew attention. The art field is polarised into a small but successful group of top artists and a large group of artists on low incomes. The number of small art collectives has increased, and the revenue model for the arts sector is, at least partly, in a state of flux. Moving between different forms of art, techniques and expression in a way that challenges and breaks down barriers, together with cooperation between artists and scientific experts, could lead to new combinations of arts and professions. The proportion of immaterial and temporary art is likely to increase, examples of which include media art, performance art, participatory art and temporary installations. The gallery rotation may be speeded up (pop-up and event-like exhibitions), and art will spread beyond conventional spaces.

The idea of and arguments for the Visual Art House are therefore very similar to what has been identified in this report as regards the potential merger of visual arts organisations. Changes to the operating environment force a critical assessment of the structures, practices, resources and operating conditions of visual arts organisations. The Visual Art House could also have led to an organic merger of the organisations. At the time of conducting this study, the Visual Art House project was in ferment, and it is not clear whether it will continue to operate.

7.6. Lessons from the benchmark organisation

Arguments

Merging visual arts organisations is not an end in itself: the goal is to preserve the viability and development of the entire industry or ecosystem. This ecosystem includes artists, arts and artist associations, curators, producers and managers, artist-led galleries, art museums and other art institutions, commercial galleries, residency operators, other organisational operators (festivals and events), teachers, researchers and critics, educational institutions, cultural and scientific institutions and sources of funding. Ultimately, the aim is to improve the services and working conditions of the members of the organisations. Well-functioning organisations are a means to achieve this, not an end in themselves.

For the benchmark organisations, the arguments for a merger are the same as those identified in this report: eliminating overlap and achieving benefits from synergy, freeing up resources to focus on key activities, streamlining measures to organise and make operations more professional by centralising job descriptions, and, consequently, improving the effectiveness and profitability of operations. At the same time, measures are taken to prepare for changes in the operating environment and to strengthen the organisation's resilience.

For a change to be successful, one must be able to see 'the goal behind the goal': the big picture of the direction in which the entire visual art industry wants to develop. As in the case of the Conservatory Association of Finland, the entire sector can contribute to projecting a vision for the future, building a shared image and understanding. Even in the field of visual arts, carrying out efforts to realise such a vision could be a good starting point for the establishment of a new organisation or organisations.

Handling concerns in a brisk and open manner

During the study, the concerns and doubts expressed by the member artists were strikingly similar to those mentioned by members of the benchmark organisations and during the merger processes in which the author has been involved. There is a fear of the emergence of some formless administrative structure, the disappearance of the characteristics and voice of the individual art forms, the abolition of the organisations that are important for artists' identities and decreased expertise and an increased distance to the field. Attention is drawn to different membership bases, histories and developmental phases of artistic disciplines.

If attention is drawn to the differences, it is the differences that stand out. If attention is drawn to the similarities, it is the similarities that stand out. In general, it is typical for organisational actors to emphasise their own uniqueness. They speak in the context of the content represented by their organisation, whether a hobby, illness, belief, professional identity, etc. Yet, as organisations all organisations are remarkably similar, which is why the focus of this study has been the merger of arts organisations as an administrative-organisational solution.

In practice, however, it is noted that among the benchmark organisations and during the merger processes in which the author of this study was involved concerns and doubts receded quite soon after the decision on the merger had been made and the new organisation had started operations. It does not follow from this, by any means, that critical questions should be ignored or dismissed – quite the contrary! Testing preparations in a critical yet constructive manner will ensure that the merger has the necessary support and that the activities of the new organisation are based on solid foundations. A clear lesson from failed mergers is that the most difficult issues should be dealt with without hesitation at the very beginning of the merger process.

New procedures and approaches

There is a risk when organisations merge that focus is turned exclusively on structural aspects. It may be believed that rules or administrative models can automatically eliminate mutual doubts or distrust. No structural, organisational or administrative solution, as such, can guarantee mutual trust and frictionless cooperation in the merged organisation. The organisations create a collective framework, with the essential elements being not only shared ambition but also shared procedures and approaches.

If there are concerns about the balance between the different art forms represented by the new organisation, a structural solution could be to establish and maintain art form-specific expert groups, as in the case of Circus & Dance Info Finland. This can be a painstaking solution that adds to administrative operations, especially if there are several merging organisations and art forms involved. It may be necessary to set up expert groups, at least in the initial stages of the merger process, to ensure an art form-specific sense of uniqueness and identity.

Instead of having fixed structures, the activities of the new organisation can be considered part of the visual arts ecosystem and a platform from which each art form sets up unofficial interest or action groups, providing a community for engagement – a place where member artists can focus on discussing visual arts instead of getting stuck in bureaucracy. This is the model used at Ornamo. The question is: on what approach are the new organisation's activities based? Could the Conservatory Association of Finland serve as a model, in which all member institutions are represented and jointly prepare board decisions and solutions? Could Music Finland's approach be applied, in which the focus is on customers, i.e. composers and musicians, and their professional support needs?

Thorough preparations and proactive leadership

A key prerequisite for a successful merger is a shared view of what the merger is expected to achieve and what the merged organisation will do. A shared view comes from the inclusion of all parties, good preparation, comprehensive communication and proactive leadership. In the successful mergers in which the author was involved as a consultant, the parties were brought together by the hired officials for each organisation, working in collaboration with the consultant, building a strong basis for collective meetings through thorough preparations. The preparations included concerns and issues to be resolved, such as the composition of the board and the schedule of the merger and decision-making processes. In the example of the circus and dance organisations, success depended on the handling of concerns and doubts as well as proactive and comprehensive communications.

Proactive leadership is a key condition for a successful merger. Necessary solutions, decisions and changes are not implemented by themselves. The boards must act as initiators and the chairs as key agents of change, while the executive directors must provide support in their preparatory work. The boards prepare each organisations' position on the merger and their potential participation through joint discussions. Staff and member artists should, of course, be involved in the process, but management has the power and responsibility to make preparations for big decisions concerning the organisation's future. Ultimately, it is the association meeting where the decisions regarding a potential merger are made.

Tolerance for incompleteness

When preparations for a merger are underway, it must be ensured through proactive communication that each participant from the organisations involved understands the demanding nature of the merger process in terms of the time and other resources required: the basic activities of the existing organisations must be maintained while the work of establishing a new organisation is conducted and preparations are made for the dissolution of the old organisations.

The adage 'well begun is half done' applies in this situation, too. The preparations for a successful merger describe the stages of the process, the roles and responsibilities in the management and execution of the transition and the resources and costs of the transition phase, as well as how inclusion and communications are handled. These descriptions also serve as the basis for the merger agreement.

Even the best plans are not always sufficient, as they can only describe the steps of the merger process to a certain point. In reality, a merger always brings with it new issues and details to be clarified or resolved. In transition processes, such as a merger, a high level of tolerance for incompleteness is required. It is typical for board members and member artists to require tangible examples and detailed descriptions of the new organisation's activities. If the desired outcome cannot yet be seen or described, it is advisable to provide an explanation of the process and a time frame for any open questions to be dealt with.

Creating a new organisational culture

A merger does not end when the decisions concerning the merger have been made; the actual work begins when the new organisation starts its operations. The organisations' employees may move to shared offices, a strategy will be drawn up for the organisation, directors will be selected, job descriptions and duties will be determined and the organisation's brand will be updated to reflect the new situation.

Active change management also means bringing old organisational cultures together and instilling a new one. The potential updating of structures, i.e. duties and job descriptions, is accompanied by the creation of shared operational processes for functions such as advocacy activities, communications and member services. The executive management or, possibly, management team plays a key role in implementing the changes derived from the strategy and in coordinating operations and employees. This means gradually forgetting the old procedures and looking forward, while remembering to monitor and evaluate the transition process and celebrate and reward successes.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT CHECKLIST					
	Intent	Tools	Plan	Action	Change
GUIDING QUESTIONS	Is there a need for a change? Is a change desirable?	What tools are available to implement the change?	What are the steps to implement the change?	What concrete actions will we take to implement the change?	What is the desired change?
KEY CONTENTS	Arguments for the change - Why is the change being made? - What happens if no change is made?	Tools - Assessments and studies - SWOT analysis - Transition plan	Phases - Goal and arguments - Phases and decision-making - Inclusion and communication - Leadership	Action - Definition, prioritisation and phasing of actions - Issues to be resolved and handling them	A vision of what is changing
THINGS TO DO	Obtaining a picture of the situation	Selection and application of tools	Preparation of the transition plan	Engaging in implementation	Defining the goal of the transition
THINGS TO BE CONSIDERED	Check the process - Check the resources required - Define the change agents and their roles and responsibilities	Recognise individuals' readiness to change - Consider different perspectives and emotional reactions to change - Focus on solutions	Engage interested parties - Specify the forums for discussing issues - Listen, ask, answer	Lead the implementation - Explain the process - Ensure quick successes in the early stages	Describe the change - Explain what is changing, why and how

Figure 2. Change management checklist

INFO

Steering group

- Annukka Vähäsöyrinki (Artists' Association of Finland), member, chair of the steering group – Teemu Mäki (Artists' Association of Finland), deputy member
- Hanna Maria Anttila (AV-arkki), member – Virve Leikola (Finnish Light Art Society FLASH, Anttila's deputy), deputy member
- Juha Huuskonen, member – Emmi Vainio (Frame), deputy member
- Joonas Ahlava (Visual Art House), member, replaced later by Satu Kalliokuusi (Visual Art House)
- Sanna Rekola (third-party expert member), member
- Hanna Hannus (Artists' Association of Finland), secretary of the steering group meetings

Interviews – Chairs and executive directors of the visual art associations

- Teemu Mäki, Chair, and Annukka Vähäsöyrinki, Executive Director, Artists' Association of Finland
- Minka Heino, Chair, and Timo Soppela, Director, MUU
Siiri Haarla, Chair, and Elisa Lientola, Executive Director, Finnish Painters' Union
- Iina Heiskanen, Chair, and Riikka Tuomarla, Executive Director, Association of Finnish Printmakers
- Ville Mäkikoskela, Chair, and Karoliina Korpilahti, Executive Director, Association of Finnish Sculptors
- Anna Niskanen, Chair, and Henna Harri, Executive Director, Association of Photographic Artists
- Jenni Turunen, Chair, and Riikka Puumalainen, Association Coordinator, Union of Finnish Art Associations
- Elena Näsänen, Chair, and Hanna Maria Anttila, Director, AV-arkki, the Centre for Finnish Media Art
- Taru Elfving, Chair, and Eliisa Suvanto, Managing Director, Finnish Bioart Society
- Aku Meriläinen, Chair, and Jussi Koitela, Director, M-Cult
- Virve Leikola, Executive Director, and Annukka Ketola, Financial Manager, Finnish Light Art Society FLASH
- Juha Huuskonen, Director, Frame Contemporary Art Finland

Interviews – Directors of the benchmark organisations

- Sanna Rekola, former Executive Director, and Tove Ekman, Executive Director, Circus & Dance Info Finland
- Heli Lampi, Head of Communications and Promotion, Music Finland
- Salla Heinänen, Executive Director, Ornamo Art and Design Finland
- Taija Lähdetie, Executive Director, Conservatory Association of Finland

Experts

- Oili Kela, LL.M., asianajotoimisto Oili Kela
- Juha Viertola, LL.Lic., Finnish Diabetes Association

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