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Critical Friends: Recommendations

“Diversity, Accessibility and Inclusion must stop being used as topics or themes by institutions, organisations and practitioners and instead incorporated into their core structure and practises.”

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“An Inclusive and diverse cultural sector in the Nordics” is initiated by the Norwegian Ministry of Culture under the Norwegian Chairmanship (2017-2019) in the Nordic Council of Ministers. The project works to identify challenges and solutions for ethnic inclusiveness, both in the professional and volunteers cultural sector, to further gather and share this knowledge across the Nordic countries. The project has an art-centred approach to embrace diversity. It explores how organisations, institutions and artists can enrich the work they do by implementing a wide range of diverse influences and practices.

“Critical Friends”, an expert advisory group of black, brown and indigineous arts and culture professionals representing all Nordic countries, has been an important sounding board for the Nordic project. The handpicked advisory group represents a diversity of artistic expressions, cultural backgrounds and personal experiences and is competent in different fields of research and criticalities such as race and gender theory. A common thread that has emerged is the need for a critical voice against the structural discrimination within the Nordic arts and culture field, its unfair allocation of power and resources, as well as its’ homogenisation of white and western-based canons.

Following is a list of recommendations of implementations to secure an inclusive Nordic art sector.

NOTE ON DIVERSITY

Throughout this document diversity as term specifically includes race, ethnicity, culture and colour. Where these aspects are not included, Critical Friends would consider the institution or field to be white-normative. Diversity (mångfald/mangfold) is broadened to include a range of definitions and perspectives that are already present in the field, such as age, gender, and ability. These perspectives are also diversity, but their presence not as lacking in action plans, audience development strategies, funding structures, policies and/or law. It is clear that inclusion of diversity along the lines of race, ethnicity, culture and colour is truly lacking and what many find difficult to approach, achieve and measure.

Competence & Recognition

Education

The Nordic arts field is in need of a proper redefinition and broader views on what is considered cultural capital in order to generate a continuous flow of diverse perspectives within all levels of the cultural cycle. This would include validating a broader spectrum of traditional professional training systems, autodidact approaches, apprenticeships and foreign education. The Nordic arts field need, furthermore, to professionalise and recognize the competence possessed by non-western genres and artforms.

Funding

There is also a need to recognise that specific normative and institutionalised genres of art receive subsidy from early stage all the way to professional training and as practitioners. When artists practice alternative artforms, the entire cycle of training and professionalisation are shouldered by the practitioners themselves. Alternative routes to releasing funds, funding structures and government funding for training and professionalisation within non-traditional artforms in the Nordics must therefore also be given validation.

Allocation of resources

Allocation of time, space and resources is of the utmost importance in order to achieve a more diverse Nordic cultural sector, and in order to support an arts field that is truly free and supportive.

Critical Friends recommend the initiation of a concrete action plan for how to ensure training in diverse genres, support for diverse artists along the entire route of their recruitment, training, and professional careers. This action plan should be anchored at the highest level of the ministries and be enforced throughout all levels of the Nordic cultural sector. A holistic plan that looks at the cycle of education opportunities, professional development, allocation of rehearsal and performance space, theatre venues and funds, as well as training for cultural institutions to support and evaluate their 360 degree approach on diversity. Black and Indigenous People of Color led initiatives should be specifically supported in building institutions and structures that can support this process.

Accessibility

Accessibility is key for an ethnically diverse and intercultural art field, therefore, we must ensure that the arts field speaks volumes to each and every citizen in the Nordics. By applying a tax-payer perspective on representation, meaning that everyone who contributes is entitled to have access, at all levels of the cultural cycle, we will find ourselves reaching the most marginalized ones. This will be done by communicating on a broader spectre of channels, making sure that representation is implemented and by widening our perspectives on whose art is validated.

In addition, we recommend local engagement with schools and organisations where BIPOC art practitioners are given the power and resources to build activities and programs, using their expertise and firsthand experience as the most valuable resource in outreach policies. We strongly recommend to follow up with research aimed to uncover barriers, reveal potentials and implement systemic recommendations.

Representation

“We shall not be satisfied until each society is fairly reflected in our Nordic arts institutions”

Implement clear goals within policy documents, regulations and guidelines on a national level for all institutions and organisations receiving funding in order to ensure diverse ethnic representation on all levels. This includes the demand for having clear institutional and organisational guidelines for equity and intersectionality to further guarantee an intercultural perspective.

Evaluate the release of funding directed to “diversity” and assure that such is given on a reward basis. Institutions should receive funds in order to restructure their activities and support diverse audiences, students, performers and professionals. Demand results for achieved diversity.

Measuring Representation

“We do not do diversity, we recognize it - Zab Maboungou”

Develop methods to measure resonance and visual representation on and off stage as in audience. The measuring and studies needs to be done by a neutral third party and assure that the information is public and accessible. This measuring needs happen at all levels from early voluntary engagement and participation, training and education to performance as well as decision making posts. Both the institutions internal and external resonance and representation must be measured, and assessed with clear guidelines of when there is an acceptable level of resonance with diverse segments of the population.

Stages and venues who do diverse programming, audience development and strategies should receive funds and incentives in order to continue their work and further develop their competence as agents for a more diverse culture sector.

We recognize that it is easier to measure immigrant status than to measure identity and visual representations, which triggers discrimination, such as color. Such factors play a large role in participation, representation and resonance. Institutions must therefore find ways to measure and give attention to these triggers of exclusion and discrimination in order to ensure a discrimination free and inclusive field which exemplifies this through programming, validation of diverse artist and audience centered work.

Access and funding Grant Applications

Grant applications need to have expert boards also looking at diversity and ensure that applications sent from diverse artists are given equal and fair treatment. In order to assess the viability, level of innovation and quality of applications from diverse artists, and give a written assessment, experts with knowledge in diverse genres should always be present. If not, expert on these genres should be called in. This way falling outside of the western canon does not automatically disqualify or hinder the grant process. One solution is to share experts across the Nordic countries.

Special funds should be allocated specifically to support BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of colour) artists in building their

capacity and competence as their workload is often not proportional with their colleagues. Often it falls to them to educate the field, find formulations, terminologies and descriptions that resonates with both white and bipoc audiences to reach recognition, which validates the quality of their art. Often this terminology does not already exist and experimentation happens on the artists expense and risk, rather than seen by the field at large as with more established genres.

Institutional organization

The first step for institutional organizational change is the implementation of new recruitment processes that will result in more ethnic diversity, accessibility, and inclusion on all levels.

Arts & Culture unions and Trade unions ought to include action plans in their strategies and programs specifically to fight for equality in the arts field, including cultural diversity. They should always take a public and official stand behind and assist those artists & culture workers facing discrimination, racism, and further assist with solution-oriented consulting to the problems derivated from these, as they had done when it concerned gender equality.

Critical Friends call on each Nordic Ministry of Culture to specify their white papers stating proper and detailed guidelines on how the arts and cultural institutions should work with intercultural and ethnic diversity.

Organisations and Institutions, especially those receiving public funding, should commit to continuously update their knowledge and learn about different perspectives, resilience and intercultural skills. We ask these to consistently self-examine their organisations and evaluate their structural hierarchies, methodologies and guidelines on ethnic diversity. We further recommend cultural organisations and institutions to internally educate their staff in post-colonial theories and offer them fieldwork.

Critical Friends proposes the founding of a Nordic Council of Ministers initiated expert group, similar to CF, owning competence on diversity defined as an intersectional approach with a clear focus on ethnicity within the Nordic arts field. This expert

group must consist of a majority of experts of colour, communicating internally and working in accessible language (ex. english) to ensure access to those who don't speak scandinavian languages. They should mandate to define the Nordic art fields' parameters for measuring diversity within the arts, evaluating results as well as support and serve as consultants in relation to Nordic, national, and grassroot funded initiatives. This by allocating knowledge, expertise, best practices, disseminating experiences and competence throughout the wider Nordic arts field.

The best way to improve the institutional organization in ethnic diversity and interculture is by hiring BIPOC field practitioners for consultancy.

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