

Between a rock and a hard place: how artists negotiate distinctiveness in grant proposals

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ABSTRACT

Artists usually rely on subsidies to realize their artistic ideas. Though much is written about artistic and commercial logics in artistic practices, much less is known about how public and private grant organizations impact the field of cultural production (Alexander, 2018). Recent research showed the justificatory strategies artists use in their grant proposals (Peters & Roose, 2020; 2023). Yet, the process of grant writing itself is hitherto unexplored. Using Optimal Distinction Theory (Brewer, 1991) and building on recurring interviews with ten artists active in the Dutch cultural sectors and three focus groups with makers and funding organizations, discuss how artists navigate the logics of public and private funding bodies during the subsidy and grant submission process, and which strategies they use to position themselves vis-à-vis the funding organization and their peers.

Keywords

Artists; grant proposals; autonomy; distinctiveness; arts funding

Introduction

To realize their artistic ideas, artists often do not only rely on markets and audiences; they also need to navigate the complicated and competitive world of funding as well (Kackovic et al., 2020; Kleppe, 2007; Peters & Roose, 2020). Often justified to protect artistic autonomy, government support through public funding also leaves marks on artistic practices (Alexander, 2018). Previous research in e.g. Belgium (Loots, 2019; Peters & Roose, 2020), Korea (Shin and Kim, 2018), and the United Kingdom (Bertelli et al., 2014) has shown that political perspectives may trickle down to funding decisions, though these effects can be mitigated by installing third-party assessment such as (quasi-)arm's length funding organizations operationalized by external expert panels (D'Andrea, 2017; Lewandowska, 2019; Zan et al., 2012). Given that, in many countries, a wide range of private, philanthropic organizations institutionally mirror government funding practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), artists often need to uniquely position themselves within an even broader institutional context. Though the heteronomous and autonomous principles of hierarchization have been subject to a wealth of studies on creative work (Caves, 2003; Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007), the ways in which government and private grant organizations and their selectors operate have received much less academic attention within studies on arts and culture (Alexander, 2018; Feder & Katz-Geroo, 2012; Loots, 2019; Peters & Roose, 2020; Zan et al., 2012).

Grant organizations, either public or private, take a peculiar position between market and artistic logics. Being too entrepreneurial (or commercial) in grant applications might signal a repressed artistic quality or a lack of urgency for public support. Yet, being too autonomous – i.e. disconnected from audiences or societal issues – might come across as being too 'detached', non-essential and inward-looking (Peters and Roose, 2023). As such, artists are requested to develop specific knowledge and a diverse set of skills often in sharp contrast to their artistry. Thus, we argue that it is important to consider how artists distinctively navigate non-commercial avenues, such as public and private funds, grants and subsidies. Existing research (Peters & Roose, 2020; 2023) has shown how artists draw upon a variety of justifications or strategic devices in their application letters. Yet, as the authors highlight, we know much less about how artists decide between these justifications, and whether and how they can adjust them according to the (policy) context. By taking the application file as a starting point, these studies miss the deliberative processes that artists incur before their actual application. In an increasingly complex funding landscape (Bertelli et al., 2014; Gielen, 2005; Zan et al., 2012), deciding *where* to apply becomes as much of a question as *how* to apply.

To understand the artists' decision making across these different contexts, and within the different grant acquisition stages, we draw upon optimal distinction theory (ODT), which posits that individuals navigate their varied social identities (or social roles) based on a tension between the needs for similarity to and validation by others (i.e., group inclusion), and for uniqueness (i.e., differentiation). It seeks to explain how motivations and abilities, as well as the social context, affect an actor's (perceived) optimal distinction, and how that influences an individual's practices and self-presentation. Using this lens, we aim to unpack artists' challenges with navigating the arts funding landscape, translating their artistic ideas into bite-sized projects, and adhering to the criteria and demands of grant organizations. Based on recurring interviews with ten artists active in the Dutch cultural sectors, we ask the question: "how do artists navigate the logics of public and private funding bodies during the subsidy and grant submission process, and which strategies do they use to position themselves vis-à-vis the funding organization and their peers? Throughout their funding acquisition processes, we conducted two in-depth interviews with ten artists (before and after the application), held bi-weekly telephone check-ins, and discussed the results in three focus groups with both the participating artists and representatives of Dutch public and private funding organizations.

Theoretical framework

Autonomy and public and private support of artistic production

The artistic field is conceived as a site of struggle between an autonomy-oriented, ‘art for art’s sake’ end, and a more commercial, market-oriented end (Caves, 2000; Kackovic et al., 2020). The autonomous pole champions artistic production devoid of influence from other fields, including the market (Bourdieu, 1993). Artists and organizations that are, conversely, more interested in a market, focusing on sales rather than artistic quality, are operating in the heteronomous pole. Building upon this dichotomy, Alexander (2018) argues that Bourdieu has neglected another major player in the field, stating that “the relatively autonomous pole of the arts field has not only become more interpenetrated by the commercial field, *the arts field has also become interpenetrated by the state*” (p. 28, italics in original).

Public support for the arts has long been a common form of state intervention in most Western countries. Subsidies are explained to be safeguarding the autonomous pole; they are implemented to allow artists to focus on autonomous production regardless of markets (Alexander, 2018; Feder, 2018; Peters & Roose, 2020). Additionally, many private funds – often funds established by affluent individuals with the aim of supporting artists and artistic production – have become an integral part of arts funding in many Western countries. They differ in approach and aim, with some seeking to address societal challenges, whereas others focus on the career development of emerging artists. Their procedures and aims seem to be highly isomorphous, and while they seek to differentiate from today’s public funding organizations, they too address common market failures.

Value regimes of public and private funding organizations

Alexander (2018) and Peters and Roose (2023) demonstrate that such funding organizations – public or private – became essential to artistic production, leaving their field-external imprint on how artists operate, making grant writing into an artistic genre of its own. Most importantly, this penetration of the autonomous field has been driven by governments’ changing requirements for state funding, imposing a more ‘managerial’ logic and neoliberal jargon that stand in sharp contrast to the ‘art for art’s sake’ logic (Caust, 2019; Loots, 2019). Driven by a growing call for ‘efficient’ government expenditure of taxpayers’ money, ‘value for money’ has become a key term in government funding. Value became synonymous with measurable outputs (that are measured against inputs – i.e., funding), such as visitor numbers or diversity (Alexander, 2018). For artists, this means that gauging the aim of the selected funding organization(s), and therefore the type of project and tone of voice, can be a complex endeavor.

Yet, beyond these more structural developments affecting the artistic field on the macro-level, within organizations and panels equally, the weight of different discourses, justifications and criteria differ. Gielen (2005), for example, discerns four different types of value regimes based on the distinction between communal and singular regimes, and the distinction between the work of art itself (i.e. the content), and the context in which it is created. Besides regimes, existing studies also refer to panel-internal struggles to reach consensus. There is a wealth of research showing how groups develop their own evaluation standards, for example, when it comes to how books are evaluated (Childress & Friedkin, 2012). As a direct result of the different value regimes and organizational aims described above, clear benchmarks of artistic quality standards are lacking. For example, Loots (2019) and Lewandowska and Smolarska (2020) observe two ways in which panels develop specific ‘measurable’ quality markers to judge a proposal’s eminence. Lewandowska and Smolarska (2020) show that panels tend to seek compromises between the panel members’ different “orders of worth” (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). Such compromises mean that artistic productions that all panel members found ‘acceptable’ were ranked highest, whereas those that evoked more extraordinary cases were more likely to be left out. Another tendency is that of panel selection favoring well-established artists and organizations who “get repeatedly and disproportionately subsidized”

(Loots, 2019, p. 275). As such, new entrants to the field as well as mavericks (Becker, 1976) are less likely to receive funding, causing innovations to be hampered (Zan et al., 2012).

Logics and legitimation in artistic grant proposals

While not receiving as much attention as the dichotomous artistic-commerce stylized competing logics, artists' grant proposals have recently been subject to various studies aiming to explore the justificatory strategies of artists applying for such grants (Bots, 2024; Peters & Roose, 2020; 2023). Examining the letters accompanying Flemish artists' grant proposals, Peters and Roose (2020) show that artists engage in new strategies such as entrepreneurial jargon, or the managerial logic described by Alexander (2018) above. In their follow-up study, Peters and Roose (2023) discerned various 'justificatory strategies' artists employed to enhance their chances of success, particularly in relation to developments taking place in the broader political and artistic field. They argue that artists' strategies are not driven by their position in the field alone, but also that they are able to navigate what Bourdieu calls 'a space of possibles' (1983; 1996), allowing artists to put some parts or dispositions into action, and mask others according to their goals. In other words, artists can "strategically attune their justifications for obtaining grants to pressures brought to the grant proposal situation by the state context" (Peters & Roose, 2020, p. 955).

Established artists may, for example, rely on reputational trajectories (past performances) as a justificatory strategy, highlighting previously obtained grants and prizes, whereas those who have not been able to develop such reputations may move against prevailing norms and topics. More commercially successful artists may use entrepreneurial strategies, whereas less commercially successful artists can resort to the 'suffering artist' trope to emphasize their extraordinary passion for creation (Peters & Roose, 2020; 2023). However, what we do not know is whether and how artists deliberately used specific strategies in response to their own position, or the prevalent values in cultural policy. Therefore, while this study clearly shows how grant applications constitute a distinctive position and logic within the broader artistic field, we aim to move beyond the approach of Peters and Roose (2020, 2023) in two ways. First, given the strong government embedding of these 'state money' grants, the influence of the political field in these grants is more pronounced than in many of today's arm's length public and private grant organizations. Second, our research does not (only) look at the outcome of the artists' strategies – that is, the grant applications themselves – but rather at the position-taking processes that happen before, during and after submitting the proposals.

Optimal distinctiveness in grant acquisition

To gain better insights into these processes, we draw upon optimal distinctiveness theory (ODT), which posits that individuals and organizations make (strategic) choices when it comes to positioning themselves, as similar to others in specific groups, as well as distinct from relevant (peer) group members. ODT originated in social psychology, where it articulates that individuals derive their social identities from a tension between the needs for similarity to and validation by others (i.e. group inclusion), and for uniqueness (i.e., differentiation) (Brewer, 1991). It is built on the premise that fitting into a group (i.e. matching the group's identity) entails a certain level of self-sacrifice, specifically of individual autonomy and identity. What is important, however, is that both requirements – group inclusion and differentiation – need to be met to some extent, meaning that once someone is fully assimilated into a group, the need for differentiation is activated, and vice versa (Brewer, 1991). The balance between striving for inclusion or differentiation – or, in other words, optimal distinction – is therefore dependent on the social context. Understanding this process from the perspective of ODT means inquiry into the motivational and cognitive aspects of individuals seeking to relegating their sense of self to become part of a group identity.

Though increasingly embraced in organizational studies, the application of ODT in the arts and creative industries is limited, however, with only a few studies applying this approach. It has been applied to fandom

and musical style preferences (Abrams, 2009; Cohrdes & Kopiez, 2015). Within the organizational and management literature, Haans (2017) uses the angle to study how creative individuals navigate the competing demands between novelty and usefulness in creative sectors in the Netherlands. Considering that differentiation (or newness) is essential in developing creative products, it is remarkable that the lens of ODT and the competing demands between conformity and differentiation have not been more widely applied in cultural and creative industries research. Therefore, we discuss how considering stakeholder multiplicity (i.e. multiple grants and multiple levels of decision making) will further contextualize optimal distinctiveness studies and enhance our understanding of the conditions under which multiple optimal distinctiveness points exist in the cultural and creative industries (Zhao et al., 2017).

Data and methods

This study relies on an inductive, qualitative approach. We conducted recurring interviews with ten artists active in the Dutch cultural industries. As we aimed to cover a broad range of experiences, we used maximum variation sampling. Our sample includes artists from the full breadth of the cultural industries, different career phases, and various parts of the Netherlands¹ (Table 1). The artists were interviewed twice, before and after applying for funding (each lasting approximately 60 minutes), and we held bi-weekly telephone check-ins (approximately 15 minutes) in between the interviews to capture the artists' experiences and progress. In total, this equates to approximately 22 hours of interview data that was recorded, transcribed and coded using Atlas.ti in a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2001). Constructivist grounded theory aims to derive analytical categories from the data itself rather than from pre-conceived hypotheses, yet acknowledges the influence of pre-existing ideas and knowledge about the topic.

Respondent	Sector	Gender	Career phase	Project to be funded
R1	Music	F	Early	Album
R2	Publishing (author)	F	Established	Graphic novel
R3	Photography	F	Early	Book
R4	Heritage	F	Established	Art exhibition
R5	Photography	M	Established	Book and exhibition
R6	Theater	F	Early	Performance
R7	Film	M	Early	Film
R8	Music	F	Mid	Album
R9	Heritage	M	Mid	Exhibition
R10	Graphic design	F	Early	Documentary

Table 1: Sample of artists followed throughout their grant application process.

¹ Not mentioned in the table to avoid revealing the respondent's identity.

Our analysis consisted of three steps. First, in order to gain a better understanding of the process that occurs before submitting the final product (i.e., the grant proposal), we looked for patterns in the broader grant acquisition procedure. Based on extensive inductive open coding, we discerned two main consecutive steps, and five activities that were present in each of the artists’ grant application procedures (Table 2). Second, within each of these activities, we looked for signals of optimal distinctiveness, and particularly to tensions between assimilation and distinctions. Here, we are explicitly informed by the existing theory around this topic. As such, this was more of a deductive analysis. Third, based on these interviews, we developed vignettes of three fictional artists (an early-career photographer, a mid-career theater maker, and a late-career DJ and producer), which were discussed in four focus groups (each lasting approximately 1.5 hours) with both the artists interviewed for this project, and representatives of Dutch funding organizations (approximately two of the interviewed artists and two representatives of public and/or private funding bodies). These focus groups served to validate the steps and activities model developed based on the interviews, and led to some minor changes in the model (e.g., a change from a linear five-step model to a two-step model including five non-linear activities).

Phase	Activity
From idea to a project plan	Translating
	Planning
From project plan to (grant) application	Fitting
	Calculating
	Transforming

Table 2: Grant application process model

Results

Phase 1: from an idea to a project plan

Translating

The first activity within this phase is translating an idea (e.g. for a music album, book, or exhibition) into a project. Artists have plenty of ideas but translating an idea into a concrete project is often complicated. Respondents indicate that they mainly think in an imaginative way. **R8**, for example, explains how her 'working language' is creative, which she cannot easily put into sentences. She experiences a 'misfit' with the language that is expected for grant applications. **R6** experiences a similar challenge, and elucidates how her peers tend to express themselves:

“I have a lot of friends in dance in general, people I know from the dance sector. They’re just not equipped to pen down... Their language is physical. Their language is not letters, or words, while they can really make the most beautiful things.”

This applies to a variety of cultural sectors, not only those that are visual or performative. The request by funders to conceptualize an idea as a project, sometimes leads to the feeling of not being understood, or even a feeling of ‘unfairness’ that creators are forced to speak such a ‘foreign language’. In this activity of translating an idea into a project, artists are less strongly oriented towards other groups that they may or may not want to be part of, but they are looking for ways in which they can connect their artistic ideas to

different forms of financing. The focus is, therefore, in this phase, largely on the assimilation side of the optimal distinction, especially because they already experience a large 'distinction' or discrepancy between their work practice, and the group of people they want to convince of their quality as artists.

Planning

The next challenge for artists is to develop a detailed project plan for their idea. The first problem was that artists envision a certain start date for their project but realize that the yearly deadlines of funds do not correspond to it. **R7** for example struggled with the different deadlines of funds when drawing up a project plan:

“In an ideal world, you would naturally want to apply for all your funding at the same time. However, what strikes me is that funds have very different dates in terms of, when you can apply, when you get a response... So yes, some for the project we're talking about right now, well, [name of fund] has already been excluded, while other funds—we still have to go and apply for, because they're not open yet.”

Respondents often did not perceive themselves as financially or planarily proficient, and experienced risks in financial project planning. Such as **R6**, who observes:

There are rules that you can only apply for a certain proportion of the budget, which means that you must apply for five funds [to finance your project], for example. That's a lot of work, and if you don't have people to check your work or assist you, the risk is very high, because I don't know if I can do that. I'm trained as an actor and creator, and I'm not trained to write plans.

In this phase of *planning*, artists are constantly looking for funds and financing opportunities within the group to which they belong (photographers, visual artists, theater artists, etc.), and must plan their project around the deadlines and criteria of the appropriate financiers. Within the planning activity, *artists* are mainly focused on *inclusion* and *assimilation*, and less on *distinctiveness*.

Phase 2: from a project plan to a funding application

Fitting

The most important of these three activities is *fitting*, which describes the way in which artists work on an application to make it fit within the existing schemes of funding, grants, and financing options. First, many respondents – even the more experienced ones – feel that filling out funding applications is a different world, one with its own jargon and vocabulary. They feel that application procedures are not written for the artist, but by and for the fund. For example, **R1** described the ‘overarching point of irritation’ as “[*that*] *there were things that made me think: you could have made this so much easier.*” Here, too, artists are looking for a connection with this other world and have the feeling that they are letting go of some of their own interests to be able to invest in the necessary knowledge of the application procedure. This knowledge – of the legal aspects, but also of the fund itself – was then used by the artists to profile themselves as *appropriate*. For example, **R3** describes how she adapts her project plans to the fund based on the language used:

“What I do find difficult is that you really must look for the language, and speak the language of the fund. This is very different for each fund. And that's why, yes, in the project plans, you write funds to the mouth, so to speak, to what they're looking for [...] you're obviously going to magnify the requirements that they're asking for.”

Second, many artists experience the need to deliver a ‘ready-made’ project. This means that the translation process described above alone is not enough. Instead, they are expected to look into a ‘crystal ball’ and conduct a significant amount of preliminary work. **R2** shares her considerations in this regard in the following way: “[*that*] *is sometimes simply difficult ... Then you have to say: how many people are going to see it, what kind of audience? I have no idea.*” Several artists felt forced to ‘lie’ in their applications, because they could not make firm statements about predicted audience sizes. This creates a tension between

the *group inclusion* in the direction of the funds – fitting within the desired format – and the artistic integrity of the project, which cannot always be fully planned long in advance.

Third, criteria-based selections clearly unlocked artists' desire for inclusion; their willingness to comply with the criteria at stake is very strong. However, inclusivity is a daunting challenge, perceptible in the discrepancy between the self-identification of artists and the target groups that different funds address. A few of the artists in our sample had no training within their creative field; they identified themselves as self-taught, and therefore as distinct from most members of their peer group. For example, **R3** experienced that “*your project has to fit exactly into the picture [that funds and committees envision] and I don't fit into the picture, because I am an autodidact.*” Interdisciplinary work was a recurring theme too, with some artists stating that they fell ‘between two stools’, either because they were explicitly excluded, or because they felt that more interdisciplinary projects were ‘risky’, with especially more distinctive projects not being appreciated by existing funding programs.

Finally, some artists felt that funds also adhere to some more implicit criteria; that assessors have specific ideas about what ‘good’ projects are, and that those ideas are being informed by the premises of ‘high culture’ and risk avoidance. For example, **R2** and **R5** stated that the way they work did not fit with the ‘high culture’ focus of many funds and assessment panels. These panels, in their experience, sometimes tended to “*see projects as not in their own right*” because they are not “*complex*” visual arts, literature, or photography. **R3**, for example, felt she was not always taken seriously because of her ‘positive’ and ‘society oriented’ project.

Calculating

Almost all funding applications need to be accompanied by a detailed budget. Of course, budgeting is a natural part of many economic activities, but in writing a grant application, it becomes explicit. In this activity, too, the tension between *fitting in* and *differentiation* frequently recurred. First, artists have to adapt to the fund and the type of funding by filling in a budget format. Filling out such budgets requires sound financial knowledge. Artists often do not possess this knowledge (in the beginning), which means that they must invest substantial time before they get a grip on the financial aspect of a project plan. A particular challenge in this context is budgeting *fair pay* for all involved in a project, especially when the funding that will eventually be obtained is uncertain. For example, in the film and television sector, where,

“from the conceptual stage onward and starting with the earliest funding request, you have to get the whole crew together, actually plan everything, because you also have to submit a schedule, so you are actually, ... you have already set the whole project in motion, everything is already in place, you have already told everyone, ‘You get paid that much, and if we get less, you get paid that much...’” (**R5**)

There may be a vicious circle at play in sectors that strongly rely on labor inputs: to be able to *distinguish* themselves and realize their first professional projects, early-career artists tend to keep their project budgets as low as possible. But by not being able to pay themselves a reasonable wage and relying on the cheapest workers, their professional development may be inhibited. Which, in turn, will not allow them to pay themselves and professional collaborators reasonably in any future endeavor. Here, too, the question arises as to the extent to which artists can colour 'outside the lines' (distinction), or whether they feel that they cannot deviate from the norm, including codes of a fair practice.

Transforming

The last activity concerns combining funding applications and dealing with rejections. Rejections were experienced as doubly painful: first, as a rejection of the individual quality as an artist (*distinction*), but also as a rejection as a potential 'part' of a group (e.g. photographers, visual artists, etc.). The former came up frequently in the interviews. It “becomes very personal when, when you get a rejection, because you just start to doubt your quality,” **R6** states. Rejections were often found to have a negative effect on someone's motivation to develop projects, or even their career. A few artists talked about (temporarily) not wanting to pursue their artistic practice after a rejection, because it hit so hard. At the same time, some creators also

experience the opposite, such as **R3**: “[A rejection of something] you put your whole heart and soul into, and that you believe in very much and... that also awakens a fire, of wanting to prove the opposite.” Successfully transforming a project, therefore, does not just entail a practical component (of rewriting and adjusting) but also a psychological one, in which the extent to which artists learn from failure and can convert their disappointment into new applications may impact their future successes.

Moreover, applications are written to fit within the requirements and frameworks of a specific fund. This means that artists must be able to transform these applications and the project according to the character of a new funding program. This also applies when artists combine multiple funding sources; then, the project must also be 'sold' to different stakeholders. For example, **R9** talks about “*designing projects differently*” depending on the signature of the fund. Once again, there is a tension between the requirements of the various funds and the artistic quality and artistic autonomy of the artist. After all, when a project is written strategically in many directions (i.e., the inclusion in different groups), one runs the risk of becoming perceived as ‘neither fish nor flesh’.

Conclusion and discussion

Based on recurring interviews with ten artists active in the Dutch cultural sectors, we ask the question: “how do artists navigate the logics of public and private funding bodies during the subsidy and grant submission process, and which strategies do they use to position themselves vis-à-vis the funding organization and their peers? Our research shows that artists consistently navigated five steps, which each yielded their own tensions between strategically positioning themselves as similar to the fund or other artists, and strategically distinguishing themselves from peer groups (Brewer, 1991). Broadly speaking, the assumption of ODT that assimilation requires a certain level of self-sacrifice, especially concerning individual autonomy and identity, clearly shows, as in each activity respondents actively sought to position themselves as ‘worthy’ of receiving funding, yet struggled to fit within the ‘straightjacket’ of funding procedures, criteria, and proposal and budget forms. Respondents recurrently spoke about the struggles of ‘learning a new language’, and emphasized that investments in formally and informally fitting into the mold of a grant recipient both took away time from their artistic activities, and often required adjustments to their projects that – they perceived – were detrimental to their artistic quality and identity. Yet, slightly contradictory to the ODT assumptions (as formulated in Brewer, 1991), the need to highlight distinctiveness was less pronounced than expected. Most respondents focused on rather traditional forms of funding, and, in their application procedures, felt reluctant to stand out with ‘distinctive’ projects. Those that already stood out (by being self-taught or interdisciplinary) perceived this as a threshold rather than an advantage. Instead, distinction was primarily sought, for example, by including exceptionally low personnel costs (which harmed the artist rather than the project). A potential explanation can be found in the fact that grant applications and artistic production more broadly are highly individualized (cf. the idea of the ‘artistic genius’ and the high number of freelancers in creative work), meaning that artists already tend to be perceived as autonomous.

These findings highlight that the grant application process is perhaps a more complex navigation between autonomous and heteronomous poles than often assumed (Alexander, 2018; Bourdieu, 1993; 1996). Though on the administrative level, application forms and budgets require adherence to field-external forces, yet – in the perception of the respondents – the evaluation of the grant applications was often firmly embedded in autonomous principles that rely heavily on ideas of art for art’s sake and an avoidance of explicit commercial or even societal goals. This shows that – even though grant evaluation panels might adhere to different value regimes depending on their composition (cf. Gielen, 2005) and internal dynamics (Lewandowska and Smolarska, 2020; Loots, 2019). It also mirrors Lewandowska and Smolarska’s observation that projects that are deemed ‘acceptable’ for everyone (i.e. not too strongly embedded in one of Boltanski and Thévenot’s (2006) orders of worth) are most likely to be successful. At the same time, and very much in line with Peters and Roose’s (2020; 2023) findings, artists are able to engage with a variety of justificatory strategies. Yet, what our research adds is that these strategies do not only vary across different career stages and artistic reputations, but also across different funding bodies. Artists – or at least

those successful in grant acquisition – are versatile in adapting their projects to fit the variety of value regimes of different funding bodies. This requires a profound sensitivity for the cultural policy field, as well as for the (implicit) language and orientation of funding bodies. This confirms Alexander's (2018) point that the political field, and, by extension, arguably also the civic field (arm's length public and private non-commercial funding bodies) has a profound influence on the field of cultural production.

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