Balancing art and production work: Artists' experiences and perspectives

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores how performing artists experience the combination of art and production-related work, and how this shapes the sustainability of their work.

Contemporary artistic work is multi-dimensional and often combines creative, production, and management responsibilities, yet little research captures how this position is experienced from the artists' own perspective. This is the case also in performing arts that is the main context of this study.

This study draws on qualitative interviews with performing artists in Finland and autoethnographic reflections, and is informed by theoretical perspectives on artistic labour, definitions of work, and artists' wellbeing. It examines how artists experience the demands of their working life, with particular attention to which aspects of combining artistic and production work are supportive or burdensome.

The findings show that artistic and production work are often intertwined and experienced as both enabling and challenging. Structural conditions such as funding systems, fragmented work, and institutional support play an important role in shaping these experiences, alongside recognition and the broader valuation of artistic work.

By centering artists lived experiences, this thesis aims to understand and contribute to creating sustainable working conditions for artists. It emphasizes that sustaining an artistic practice requires addressing the structural and social conditions that allow sustainable working conditions for artists.

Key words:
artistic work, artists' profession, production work, performing artists, sustainability, working conditions, art field, structural conditions

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1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary artistic work is multi-dimensional and often combines creative, production, and management responsibilities. This is the case also in performing arts that is the main context of this study. Understanding how artists navigate the intertwined aspects of their work is important not only for gaining insight into artistic practice itself but also for examining broader questions of sustainable work, well-being, and professional development within the arts and cultural sector.

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the thesis by presenting the background and significance of the topic, reviewing existing research literature and identifying gaps, and outlining the research objectives along with the guiding questions that shape this study.

1.1 Background, topic and significance

Artists' work consists of much more than artistic creation. Contemporary artistic work is multi-dimensional and often combines creative, production, and management responsibilities. Alongside making art, artists frequently manage production-related tasks such as funding applications, budgeting, communication, scheduling, social media, and at the same time many artists also hold other than artistic jobs. According to Houni and Ansio (2013), artists are expected to understand contracts, operational environments, and funding systems while also managing budgets and developing skills in sales, negotiation, visibility, and marketing (p. 125).

These expectations shape artists' everyday working lives. For many artists, production tasks are not separate from artistic work but closely connected to creative processes. Planning, writing, organizing, and communicating often occur alongside artistic thinking and making. While this way of working can support continuity and autonomy, it also requires a lot of time, attention, and energy.

Having worked for many years both as an artist and in art production, I have become increasingly interested in the factors that affect artists' wellbeing at work, both in supportive and burdening ways. In this thesis, I examine the part of artistic work in which the artist combines artistic and production-related responsibilities, and how this combination shapes both the supportive and burdening experiences of artists in their work.

In my experience, at least some level of production work is a necessary part of building a career in the arts, yet combining artistic and production responsibilities can create strain within artists' work. Nevertheless, productive work can also work as a supportive tool for understanding and describing art, and by creating conditions, for example through funding, in which artistic creation becomes possible. This observation serves as a starting point for this study.

Artistic and production processes might often merge in practice. Producing art requires engagement not only with the work itself but also with its context, development, and communication. Decisions and actions related to production can shape how artwork is formed, described, and presented to audiences. From this perspective, production work can be understood as a part of the artistic process rather than merely an administrative function. Tasks such as writing project descriptions, funding applications, and communication materials often involve articulating artistic aims and situating the work within broader cultural contexts.

Yet, artists often experience that it is not the creative process itself that is mentally exhausting, but rather that time and focus are often consumed by work that maintains and enables the artistic practice in addition to the concrete act of creating art (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 156).

Approaching this thesis and subject as someone who has worked both as an artist managing production tasks and as a producer in artistic projects, and who has studied arts management, shapes my understanding of artistic work not only as a creative activity but also as a set of working conditions that directly affect artists' lives. While artistic and production tasks are closely connected,

much of the strain experienced by artists arises from structural conditions and a lack of recognition. If cultural and societal structures provided more stable support, time, and professional care for artistic work comparable to other professions, artistic work and careers could become more sustainable.

At present, however, the position of artists in Finnish society remains uncertain. Artists are valued as highly trained creative professionals capable of taking on diverse roles, yet their situation in the labour market is often precarious (Jakonen et al., 2021, p. 96). Unpaid work occurs across all fields of art, and preparatory work or ideation is rarely compensated or considered in funding decisions (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020, p. 7). At the same time, research shows that although many artists experience their work as meaningful and engaging, work-related stress is common and artists frequently report concerns regarding their mental wellbeing (Ruusuvirta et al., 2023, p. 8).

Understanding how artists navigate these intertwined responsibilities is therefore important not only for understanding artistic practice but also for examining broader questions of sustainable work in the cultural sector.

1.2 Research literature and research gap

Previous research has examined the socio-economic position of artists, fragmented labour structures, artists' wellbeing, and professional skills required in artistic careers (Houni & Ansio, 2013; Rensujeff, 2015; Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020). These studies highlight that artistic careers often consist of multiple roles, project-based work, and income from diverse sources.

Artistic work rarely fits traditional labour market categories. Artists often combine self-employment, short-term contracts, grant-funded work, and other forms of employment. As a result, artistic labour is frequently described as fragmented, hybrid, and uncertain (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020; Jakonen et al., 2021). At the same time, research on artists' wellbeing has demonstrated that although artistic work is experienced as meaningful and fulfilling, many artists face stress

related to financial instability, heavy workloads, and lack of societal recognition (Ruusuvirta et al., 2023).

The formulation of the research problem is supported by reading of literature within the relevant research field (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998, p. 24). The studies examined in this thesis provide valuable insights into artists' working conditions and wellbeing. However, less attention has been given to artists' experiences of balancing artistic creation with production-related work. In practice, artists often take responsibility for tasks such as funding applications, communication, budgeting, scheduling, and project management. This gap in existing research therefore forms the starting point for the analysis as a part of this thesis.

Despite the commonness of self-producing artists in the independent arts field, the reality of artists managing both artistic and production work has not been very widely explored. In particular, little is known about how artists themselves understand and experience this combination, what they perceive as supportive or burdening, and how these experiences influence their sense of sustainability and wellbeing in their work.

The research problem of this thesis is the limited understanding of how artists experience the combination of artistic work and production responsibilities in their everyday professional lives. It explores how artists navigate and experience this intersection, while highlighting how demands related to working as an artist and the position of artists in society, are shaped by broader structural conditions. More research about concrete, real life experiences is needed to bring light to the challenges artists working in Finland are facing.

1.3 Research objectives and research questions

The context of this thesis is to study the experiences of performing artists working in Finland who combine artistic practice with production-related responsibilities as part of their work. By examining how artists experience and describe their experiences, the study seeks to identify factors that are perceived

as supportive or burdening and to contribute to discussions on sustainable working conditions in the arts.

The research is guided by the following main research question:

How do artists experience the combination of artistic work and production-related responsibilities as part of their work?

This main question is explored through the following sub-questions:

How do artists perceive production work as a part of artists work: as a burden, as support, both, or something else?

How do appreciation and support structures shape artists' experiences in their work?

In what ways do institutional structures, such as funding systems, labour categories, and support systems, influence artists' experiences of wellbeing in their work?

Together, these questions aim to illuminate how artistic and production responsibilities intersect in contemporary artistic work and how this intersection influences artists' professional lives and how artists' working conditions affect their wellbeing at work.

This study focuses on performing artists working in Finland who combine artistic practice with production-related responsibilities. The findings are therefore grounded in a specific cultural and professional context and cannot fully be generalized to all artistic fields or geographic regions.

The empirical material consists of a small number of qualitative interviews and reflective autoethnographic insights. The purpose of the study is not statistical generalization but a deeper understanding of lived experiences and working realities. Qualitative research allows exploration of nuances that may remain invisible in broader quantitative studies.

Another limitation concerns the researcher's position. As both an artist and a producer working in similar multi-role environments, I share professional realities with the interview participants and know the interviewees personally. This position creates closeness to the research topic and may influence the interpretation of the material. Rather than attempting to eliminate this subjectivity, it is addressed through reflexivity and transparency throughout the research process.

For the purposes of this thesis, production-related work refers to tasks that are part of artists work but are not in many cases directly part of the act of artistic creation. These include activities such as funding applications, budgeting, communication, scheduling, coordination, and project organization. At the same time, the study acknowledges that in practice the boundaries between artistic and production work might often be blurred.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

> *The profession of an artist is unique: its outcomes lead people to experience aesthetic beauty and the growth of humanity, connecting us to one another and to society. At the same time, the profession is like any other: its practitioners deserve and need self-care, wellbeing, support, and opportunities to carry out the work itself (Ansio & Houni, 2013, p. 12).*

This chapter examines artistic work as fragmented labour shaped by structural, economic, and societal conditions in Finland. It reviews research on the concept of work, appreciation and recognition of artists' work, artists' wellbeing, and the skills required to sustain an artistic career and systemic conditions affecting the need of these skills. It develops a conceptual framework for analysing artists' experiences of their work, particularly how they combine artistic practice with production tasks, while reflecting on the challenges and sources of support in their professional lives.

First, the chapter explores the fragmented nature of artists' work realities and the diversity of income sources that shape artists' careers. Artistic work often does not fit into conventional employment categories or income-based definitions of work, which raises questions about how it is understood and positioned within labour market frameworks.

Second, the chapter examines appreciation of artists' work in Finnish society and its connection to artists' wellbeing. Artistic work is often experienced as meaningful and engaging, yet it is also marked by uncertainty, income instability, and various, fragmented responsibilities. Recognition and societal valuation directly influence how artists are able to position themselves and sustain their practice.

Finally, the chapter analyses the relationship between individual skills and structural conditions. While self-management, resilience, adaptability, and interaction skills are frequently emphasized as necessary for continuing a career

in the arts, these expectations emerge within fragmented employment structures, funding systems, and social security frameworks. By examining both skills and structural conditions, the chapter highlights the tension between individual responsibility and systemic support.

Together, these perspectives provide the conceptual foundation for analysing how artists experience combining artistic and production-related work in their professional lives.

2.1 Artistic work: fragmented labour, appreciation, wellbeing, skills and structures

This section examines how artists' work life situations are described in previous research and how they are structured. It focuses particularly on the fragmented nature of artistic labour and income sources that shape artists' careers, and the challenges that arise when conventional definitions of work do not suitably capture these realities.

By examining artistic work as fragmented labour, this section establishes the conceptual foundation for analysing the relationship between artistic and production-related tasks. While this chapter focuses on the broader structures and conditions shaping artistic work, chapter 4 will examine in detail how artists experience the combination of creative and production responsibilities, such as funding applications and communication practices, within their professional lives.

Artistic work is rarely limited to a single employment form or income source. Instead, it is built through overlapping tasks, unpaid and paid labour, grants, short-term contracts, and work both within and outside the arts sector. This fragmented structure raises questions about how artistic work is understood, valued, and positioned within Finnish labour market frameworks.

By analysing artistic work in relation to income, employment categories, and societal recognition, this section lays the foundation for understanding how

appreciation, wellbeing, and professional skills are affected by these broader conditions.

2.1.1 Artistic work and fragmented labour

How artistic work is described is often tied to artists personal experiences and forms of artistic expertise. The focus of artistic work can be on artistic work, artistic activity, art production, or work related to art. Artists' work primarily involves the act of creation. However, it also includes all the work that enables artistic creation (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020, p. 6). The visible outcome of artistic work represents only one layer of a much broader working reality. In practice, artistic work consists of multiple roles, tasks, and employment forms, and artists' careers are often built through diversity of labour.

Artistic work can take place in institutions and organizations or in different areas of the cultural economy, as well as in popular, street, or digital culture (Jakonen et al., 2021, p. 100). Artists move between different forms of work, combining artistic practice with for example teaching, project-based art and culture work, freelance tasks, and other forms of employment (Rensujeff, 2015, pp. 95–97). Clague (2024) argues that even artists known for major, high-profile achievements rarely reach such milestones by doing only one thing but engage in diverse forms of work along the way. Even after achieving recognition, many continue combining multiple roles to sustain income and find meaning in their work (Clague, 2024, pp. 1–2). *The Arts and Culture Barometer 2023* (2024) further confirms that fragmentation, diversity, and self-employment in the arts sector and in artists' work represent everyday and ordinary ways of working for artists (p. 12). Artists continuously handle their time, energy, and focus across different responsibilities.

Concerning income, artists often earn their livelihood from several different sources (Rensujeff, 2015, p. 95). Artists frequently combine multiple forms of work, such as salaried employment, self-employment, and grant-funded projects, resulting in a diverse but often unstable income structure. Grants play a central role in sustaining both artistic work and basic livelihood, as well as enabling the production of diverse artistic practices. Despite their importance,

grants are highly competitive and difficult to obtain, highlighting the economic uncertainty in the profession (Artists' Association of Finland, 2025).

In continuation, artists finance their work from multiple sources, as they seek to maintain the possibility of engaging in artistic work alongside other work and life. Income may consist of gig-based work in the cultural sector or in other fields, such as teaching and museum work, exhibition and artist fees, copyright royalties, the sale of works, and funding referred to as grants, which are awarded for different phases of artistic work and for materials. All of these sources of income are important to artists (Vuorenmaa, 2026).

Yet, the research repeatedly shows that perceived employment does not always correlate with income and an artist's employment situation may be entirely different from their official employment status (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 238). Artistic work that is done without pay may exist alongside paid employment, yet it can still be seen as one's main work because it forms the basis of the artistic practice. Other forms of work may be experienced as side jobs, even when they might provide the majority of income for the artist (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020, p. 7). Building on this, not all artistic work is directly linked to making money (Jakonen et al., 2021, p. 100). Additionally, for an artist, a high level of education does not guarantee stable income or consistent employment opportunities (Artists' Association of Finland, 2025).

In 2025, the Artists' Association of Finland conducted an anonymous online survey to gather up-to-date information on the income and working conditions of professional visual artists, as well as their experiences of challenges related to the social security system. The survey provides detailed insight into how artists' incomes are formed and about the economic realities of their everyday lives (Artists' Association of Finland, 2025).

The survey highlights significant challenges related to the unemployment security system. Artists' work, which often consists of short-term contracts, small commissions, and fragmented income streams, is not enough included by current practices. The requirement to seek full-time employment does not align

with the realities of the field, where full-time positions are rare and livelihoods are built from multiple part-time roles (Artists' Association of Finland, 2025).

Unclear procedures and misleading guidance from employment authorities can result in unreasonable situations, including the cancellation of professional opportunities. Open-ended responses describe the system as exhausting and difficult to navigate, with some respondents experiencing unfair treatment. These systemic challenges can restrict both artistic work and creative practice (Artists' Association of Finland, 2025).

This situation is reflected also in the Art Pod podcast episode *Artists' Livelihood*, as the participants discussed how artists often have multiple sources of income, which means that from a labor market perspective, they often do not hold a clear position (Yosefin, Vainio, & Kask, 2023). Even in fields where public funding creates some steady positions, like theatres or publicly funded orchestras, most people still piece together a living from short-term and part-time contracts, gigs, grants, and occasional awards (Talaskivi, 2026).

For artists with migrant backgrounds, unemployment security challenges are further combined by tightened immigration policies and the uncertainties associated with residence permits and citizenship applications. Some migrant artists avoid applying for benefits out of fear that doing so could negatively impact their immigration status (Artists' Association of Finland, 2025).

Due to all of this, there is a need to improve both social security systems and the ways artists earn a living. The system should allow for a mix of self-employment, salaried jobs, and other income sources, while recognising that business activities are often secondary when an artist relies on grants and paid artistic work to make a living. Now, many artists do not fully use available benefits because they do not trust employment authorities, even though they already face low incomes and weak positions. It is important to create rules that actively support professional artistic work (Artists' Association of Finland, 2025).

Furthermore, beyond improving the system, long-term measures are also needed to strengthen the conditions that make artistic work possible.

Authorities need a better understanding of how artists work, and decisions should be clear and consistent (Artists' Association of Finland, 2025).

The Artists' Association of Finland suggest to promote these objectives through several initiatives, including raising artist grants toward the Finnish median income, expanding the exhibition fee system, creating more salaried opportunities for visual artists, and reinforcing public art funding (Artists' Association of Finland, 2025).

Although the survey focused on visual artists, the results reflect similar patterns in other creative fields by supporting earlier research indicating that artistic work across the fields is often fragmented and income comes from multiple sources, while social security and administrative systems fail to recognise the specific conditions of the artistic work positioning artists in a difficult, uncertain situation.

By framing fragmentation also as a structural feature, attention shifts from individual coping strategies to the organisation of work itself. Artistic labour should therefore not be seen as a deviation from "real work," but as a revealing case through which broader ideas and changes of contemporary work can be examined. From this perspective, artistic work could also help to imagine more open, accepting and flexible understandings of what work can be.

2.1.2 Need for broadening the concept of work

Artists' work does not fit into existing employment categories or conventional ideas of what work is (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 238). Formally and on a wider scale work is often defined in terms of income which means that work is seen as something from which one earns a living. For artists, the relationship between work and income is not always so clear (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020, p. 6).

Furthermore, the value of artists' work is not recognized in society to the same extent as that of other professions, which is reflected in situations where other professional groups involved in the same project receive compensation while artists do not (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020, p. 7). Unpaid work occurs across all fields

of art, as practice, planning, preparatory work, and ideation are rarely compensated, and these stages are often not taken into account in funding and support decisions (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020, p. 7).

In reality, artists' work extends far beyond the visible act of creating art. In addition to artistic production, artists often engage in other paid work and take responsibility for tasks that sustain their practice, such as applying for funding, preparing budgets, collaborating with others, managing communication and social media, and handling various administrative duties. At times, weeks or even months may pass without time to create art, as maintaining the conditions for artistic work requires continuous effort.

When artistic work is understood only as the moment of creation, a significant part of this labour becomes invisible and risks being treated as unpaid activity or a hobby. Time spent developing ideas, rehearsing, networking, applying for grants, and maintaining professional visibility is rarely recognized in statistics or compensation structures. Yet these activities are often integral to artistic labour and should be acknowledged and valued as work, as in any other profession. Consequently, common understandings of employment that focus primarily on income fail to capture the many nuances of artistic careers.

Additionally, measuring the use of time creates a disconnection between work and income. Working full-time as an artist does not necessarily mean that artistic work creates most of one's yearly income. Full-time work can be understood for example as the activity that takes up the most time, or as the work that is experienced as the most meaningful (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020, p. 7).

An artist's career is often not tied to a one particular organization, certain type of work, or linear professional progression, nor does it end when one works in another profession. At the same time, it is important to approach career interpretations critically, as perspectives emphasizing discontinuity and self-direction can accidentally normalize uncertainty and shift responsibility onto the individual instead of structural issues (Lehtelä, 2026).

The dominant form of employment in Finland is wage labor (Steel & Rinne, 2019, p. 64). This might affect the way in which work is understood. In Finland, the definitions and support structures used in the labour market are based on two main forms of work: employment as a wage earner or as an entrepreneur. From the perspective of artists, this framework is insufficient. For example, within a year, work in the arts may be carried out in a variety of contexts and forms, which also requires different interpretations of labour market status (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020, pp. 7–8).

Furthermore, stiff definitions of work result in complex situations for the artists regarding for example taxation and the structures of the social security system (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020, p. 8). The gap between conventional definitions of work and the lived experience of artists underscores the need for a broader, more inclusive understanding of what constitutes work (Houni & Ansio, 2013, pp. 18–20).

In my reading, artists occupy simultaneously hybrid, precarious and fragmented positions and the official idea of work fails to capture the many forms of artists' work. Nevertheless, like Lehtelä (2026) argues, when emphasizing mostly precarity of artists' work when discussing frames the artist's work as a problem to be fixed. The tension between the multi-sourced income structure of the arts and the criteria used to evaluate a career narrows the understanding of an artist's work. Precarity is a useful analytical concept for describing income uncertainty and the work ecosystem, but it becomes problematic if it turns into the primary framework for understanding an artist's career (Lehtelä, 2026). As in the arts, doing one thing may constitute a job, but doing several things builds a career (Clague, 2024, pp. 1–2).

Professional artists exist within the labor market system, but established practices and collective agreements do not recognize calling-based work as legitimate employment (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2018, pp. 56–57). Artistic work is rarely "just a job" (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 239). Yet it is work, and it should be treated accordingly. Artistic labour is often fluid and flexible, shaped by individual practices and changing working conditions. Conventional

understandings of work tend to exclude forms of labour that do not fit standard employment categories. However, this fluidity does not make artistic work any less real or valuable than other forms of work.

Work holds many meanings for Finnish people, including livelihood and social relationships affecting the conception of identity. Occupation can be a central part of a person's being, and work also affects emotional life. It can influence the sense of meaningfulness and impact dreams and visions of the future. Work can also provide a feeling of belonging as well as a sense of being a valued part of society (Steel & Rinne, 2019). Concerning this view, if artistic work is not recognized as legitimate work in a society where work itself is highly valued, this has consequences for how artists are able to position themselves and how they are positioned and appreciated. Conversely, when artistic work is acknowledged, it strengthens artists' capacity to build sustainable careers, avoid unpaid labour, and build clearer professional boundaries. These questions of recognition and valuation are therefore central to understanding the position and appreciation of artists in Finnish society.

2.2 Appreciation and position of artists work in Finnish society and artists wellbeing

This section examines how artistic work is recognized, valued, and experienced in Finnish society. Building on the previous discussion of fragmented labour and various employment positions, it further examines the artistic work to its societal position and its consequences for artists' professional lives.

First, the section explores the appreciation of artists' work. Artists are seen as educated creative professionals, but at the same time their position in the labour market and in public discussions is often unclear or uncertain. Societal perceptions, funding structures, support systems, and myths related to artistic professions shape how artistic work is understood and valued. Recognition is not only symbolic but structural, influencing how artists are able to position themselves and how they are positioned within the labour market.

Second, the section turns to artists' wellbeing. Artistic work is often experienced as deeply meaningful and engaging, yet it is also marked by uncertainty and instability. Wellbeing is therefore shaped not only by individual characteristics, but by broader structural conditions such as fragmented labour, unpaid work, social security systems, and societal valuation of artistic work.

2.2.1 Appreciation and position of artists work in society

The position of artists in Finnish society is uncertain. On one hand, artists are valued as highly trained creative professionals capable of taking on diverse roles. On the other hand, their situation in the labor market can be precarious. An artist may be seen at times as an employee, at times as an entrepreneur, and at times as a lifestyle or hobby artist. Moreover, societal perceptions of artistic work are unclear and sometimes even dismissive (Jakonen et al., 2021, p. 96).

The specific challenges of artistic work are shaped by labor markets, unemployment, and legislation, guidelines, and practices concerning social security. This reality is constructed for example by factors such as art education, institutions and organizations that manage artistic work, public and private grant systems, the domestic and international art field, institutionalized high art, and popular culture. Artistic work is also defined by various social contexts, including spaces and communities, tools and materials, and publication channels (Jakonen et al., 2021, p. 97).

Together, these structural conditions influence how artists' work is perceived and valued in society. Across all art fields artists experience lack of appreciation for their work (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020, p. 7). Artists often feel that society does not value them and that they are left on the margins (Houni & Ansio, 2013, pp. 238–239). For example continuous cuts to art funding send the message that the importance of culture and education is not understood (Rönkkö & Itkonen, 2025).

Furthermore, artists also experience persistent conceptions associated with artists and artistic professions (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020, p. 7). Artist professions

carry a wide range of mental images, expectations, hopes, demands, and myths (Houni & Ansio, 2013, pp. 18–20). For example the myth of a suffering artist working without pay is still alive. An artist in good well-being may be seen as superficial or lighthearted, whereas a struggling, anxious artist is often idealized. It is important to strip away the mythical images associated with the artistic profession (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 233). The work done by artists may also be perceived as entertainment, a calling, or a form of attention-seeking rather than as professional work (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020, p. 7).

The idea of artists as somehow unusual, or guided by a mythical calling, still persists. On the other hand, it is recognized that being an artist is work just like any other, and therefore should also be fairly compensated (Piispa et al., 2019, pp. 151–152). Beyond these mental images of artists and their work, artistic work is a form of professional work. It is done by people who are educated in a profession and who aim at earning a livelihood from their work (Houni & Ansio, 2013).

An artist may engage in artistic work day after day without earning much from it, yet the results of their creative work can still be widely visible and recognized in society (Ansio & Houni, 2013, p. 238). Vuorenmaa (2026) writes that artists need active support from society and organizations. Vuorenmaa (2026) also notes that the significance of art becomes especially evident during times of societal crisis, as engagement with art allows people to reflect on a wide range of phenomena, step outside the pressures of performance-driven everyday life, and reconnect with emotions and thoughts that may have been lost. Art can also help people understand one another. According to Vuorenmaa (2026), this capacity of art enriches society both mentally and economically and demonstrates the broader power of art.

Even though the profession of an artist is unique and its outcomes can lead people to experience aesthetic beauty and the growth of humanity, connecting individuals to one another and to society, it is also a profession like any other. As Ansio and Houni (2013) emphasize, artists deserve and need self-care, wellbeing, support, and opportunities to carry out the work itself (p. 12).

Structural and societal conditions and recognition and valuation of artists' work directly impact artistic careers. When artists experience their work as undervalued or unsupported, feelings of exclusion and non-belonging can emerge, influencing both professional identity and personal wellbeing.

2.2.2. Artists' wellbeing

Artists' work wellbeing is characterized by duality. Artists often experience strong engagement and a sense of meaningfulness in their work. However, at the same time artistic work involves multiple sources of strain (Ruusuvirta et al., 2023, p. 13). Finnish artists share many common features during their professional paths. Artists encounter competition, the search for one's place, difficulties in securing a livelihood and uncertainty (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 12). Stress factors common to artists across all disciplines include also the nature of creative work itself, as well as issues related to working conditions (Houni & Ansio, 2013, pp. 149-150).

To secure livelihoods, many artists must engage in work unrelated to their artistic practice, leaving little time for making art itself, which affects their wellbeing at work. Artists are also burdened by competition for grants, lack of feedback, and insufficient societal recognition (Ruusuvirta et al., 2023, p. 8). Additionally, structural faults like the absence of occupational healthcare, affect artists' wellbeing. Many artists face work-related health problems alone. Artists must often for example continue working while ill, they have limited access to vacation, and they struggle to recover from work-related fatigue (Ruusuvirta et al., 2023, p. 8).

Interviews with Finnish artists conducted by Houni and Ansio (2013) highlight the burden of responsibilities beyond core artistic work. Artists report being pulled in many directions at once, managing tasks related to operations and finances in their working environments, which can reduce the time and focus available for artistic creation (p. 154). Yet, artists experience that it is not the creative process itself that is mentally exhausting, but rather that time and focus are often consumed by work that maintains and enables the artistic practice in addition to the concrete act of creating art. An artist's work involves a variety of

tasks related to managing their own practice and many artists distinguish between the core artistic work and supporting tasks (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 156). In the interviews conducted by Houni and Ansio (2013), one respondent describes this work as “office work”, which includes constantly applying for exhibitions and grants, preparing portfolios, photographing works, answering and sorting through emails, creating exhibition posters and invitations, offering course drafts to different places and planning how to make a living. It also includes receiving rejections, recovering from them, and starting all the applications and planning from scratch again (p. 156). Building on this, many artists have considered changing careers, with particularly high rates in the performing arts (Ruusuvirta et al., 2023, p. 8).

At the same time, artists' well-being at work is supported by the ability to influence one’s work, goals, content, and schedules, as well as collaborations, networks, and contacts with other artists (Ruusuvirta et al., 2023, p. 8). Artists frequently experience flow and immersion in their work, which creates pleasure and a sense of satisfaction that comes from engaging deeply with their work (Houni & Ansio, 2013, pp. 238–239). Many artists also consider the most important measure of success to be satisfaction with one’s own work (Houni & Ansio, 2013, pp. 238–239).

Taken together, artists' work is engaging and rewarding, yet work-related stress is common, and over half express concerns about their mental wellbeing (Ruusuvirta et al., 2023, p. 8). Duality of experience can be spotted: burdening factors for wellbeing include for example financial insecurity, high workloads, and lack of recognition, while supportive factors include such as flexibility, autonomy, social support, and access to funding (Houni & Ansio, 2013).

Also other contradictions arise when talking about artists' well-being in society. Artists’ wellbeing is influenced by multiple factors, including uncertainty, constant change, fragmented labour, unpaid work, and societal valuation of artistic work (Houni & Ansio, 2013). Still, artists are increasingly expected to demonstrate innovation and enthusiasm in producing well-being for various work communities or other communities in need (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 11).

Assuming that an artist can provide well-being for others while simultaneously struggling with the challenges of their own professional path is both unrealistic and potentially harmful. The outcomes of artistic work provide broader societal value as they create experiences of beauty and growth and foster connections between individuals and society (Houni & Ansio, 2013, pp. 11, 12). At the same time, artists themselves deserve and require care, support, and opportunities to engage in their practice, just as in any other profession (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 12). According to Ruusuvirta et al. (2023), regular and sufficient income would best support artists' occupational wellbeing, yet this is seldom the reality.

General well-being is reflected in multiple areas of life, including work, where improvements can enhance overall perceived wellbeing (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 35). Artists' wellbeing cannot be understood in isolation, as societal valuation of artistic work directly shapes professional identity, sense of belonging, and the sustainability of their practice. These structural conditions also influence expectations around adaptability, self-management, and professional competence, providing a framework for examining artists' skills. Multi-role and fragmented working arrangements are often features of artistic careers, offering autonomy while simultaneously creating many demands. Recognizing these structural pressures highlight the importance of creating supportive conditions for artists rather than placing the burden on individual resilience.

2.3 Between individual skills and structural conditions

This section examines how the skills required in artistic work are shaped by the structural conditions within which artists operate. Building on the previous discussion of fragmented labour, recognition, and wellbeing, this section focuses on the relationship between individual capacities and the broader frameworks that are part of defining artistic work in Finland.

As research stated, artistic work is characterized by multi-role responsibilities, hybrid employment positions, and income uncertainty. Within this context, artists are often expected to develop a wide range of skills in order to sustain

their practice. Discussions of the profession often emphasize self-management, resilience, adaptability, interaction skills, and the ability to secure economic livelihood through funding applications, networking, and negotiation. These skills are frequently presented as necessary for continuing a career in the arts.

At the same time, these expectations are not neutral. They emerge from structural conditions such as fragmented employment, grant-based funding systems, social security structures, and societal valuation of artistic work. If the emphasis is placed mostly on individual competence, responsibility for coping with uncertainty and insecurity can shift onto the artist. In this way, precarious working conditions risk becoming normalized as inherent features of the profession rather than as outcomes of broader systems.

By examining both artists' skills and the structural conditions that make these skills necessary, this section highlights the tension between individual responsibility and systemic support. This perspective allows artistic work to be understood not only as a matter of personal resilience and competence, but as work shaped by institutional, economic, and cultural frameworks that influence what is required in order to sustain a career over time.

2.3.1 Artists skills and structural conditions affecting artists skills

Not many other professions affect a person's life and personality as comprehensively as work in the arts. Ultimately, each artist is individually responsible for their own work and for maintaining their working capacity (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 26). For most arts professionals, career development involves continuously expanding and deepening expertise within a changing practice. This can include applying artistic skills and skills also outside purely artistic work (Lehtelä, 2026).

Working in atypical employment relationships and often under financial pressure requires particular resilience from artists (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 11). It also demands self-discipline to be able to simultaneously think about content

of the work and creating conditions necessary for the realization of one's work (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 11).

Furthermore, managing one's mind and life is central to working as an artist. Self-related skills, such as evaluating one's own work, accepting feedback, tolerating change and uncertainty, and maintaining disciplined practice, are crucial skills tied to self-management. Also collaboration and interpersonal skills are important, as well as the ability to present one's work. Leadership and delegation skills also play a valuable role. Skills that support an artist's economic livelihood are essential as well, including building and maintaining networks, applying for funding, pricing one's work, and negotiating (Houni & Ansio, 2013, pp. 241–242). In *Kuvataiteilijan työhyvinvointiopas* (*Guide to Artist Wellbeing*; Finnish Artists' Association, 2022), the motivation and multi-professionalism of artists are also highlighted (p. 1).

Art-making is often at least partly solitary (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 241). Therefore, self-related skills are central to artistic production. Self-assessment, as an aspect of self-directed leadership, is crucial when there is no external evaluation, allowing artists to judge quality and progress independently (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 121). Discipline includes patience, repetition, and refining details, and this also applies in shared work where commitment to shared goals is needed (Houni & Ansio, 2013, pp. 121–122).

Skills related to the operational environment like contracts, funding, marketing, and budgeting are rated as less central than self- or interaction-related skills but they remain essential for ensuring economic sustainability (Houni & Ansio, 2013, pp. 124–125). Overall, these competencies allow artists to manage hybrid careers and to balance creative work with practical demands.

According to Rensujeff (2015) artists with multidisciplinary skills are better able to secure livelihoods through various work forms (Rensujeff, 2015, p. 70). The early stages of an artist's career often function as a filter for the continuation of the career, as only the most persistent and highly motivated artists continue despite uncertainty and pressure (Rensujeff, 2015, p. 13). Building on this view, discussions of the artists profession and its challenges often focus on qualities of

artists and the skills artists are expected to develop in order to sustain their practice. However, while discussing the artistic profession, emphasizing individual skills can shift attention away from the structural conditions shaping artistic work. In this sense, precarity can become normalized rather than addressed through systemic support systems.

Furthermore, artists must simultaneously manage the content of their work and the conditions necessary for its realization. Each individual artist functions as the central working tool, producing the content and interpreting the world through their artistic expression (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 11). Working under atypical employment relationships, often with financial pressure, demands resilience and self-discipline. Yet, perspectives emphasizing for example self-direction can normalize uncertainty and shift responsibility onto the individual instead of structural issues. A professional career in the arts should not require exceptional social, cultural, or financial capital (Lehtelä, 2026).

These observations highlight how skills act as tools for persistence and survival within the profession. Yet emphasizing individual competencies risks shifting attention away from the structural conditions that shape artistic work. Precarity can become normalized when the skills related to endurance and flexibility are framed as part of what it means to be an artist.

While developing the skills discussed above is valuable, it is equally critical to ask why these skills are necessary and to examine the systemic conditions that make them so essential. Furthermore, building an artistic career is not only a matter of individual strength or persistence, but also of the personal, social, and financial support systems available to the artist, as well as their broader life circumstances. These conditions differ greatly from one person to another.

Examining these skills is, of course, important and valuable for understanding the artistic profession and for developing ways to support artists and enable them to continue working as artists. As Rensujeff (2025) states, research and knowledge is needed to improve artists' working conditions and to develop, among other things, the state support system (Rensujeff, 2015, p. 15).

To summarize, while endurance, resilience, and adaptability are currently useful skills, they should not be requirements for practicing the artist's profession. Instead, attention should turn even more towards questions of recognition, support, and valuation, emphasizing systemic conditions that enable sustainable artistic work.

2.4 Analytical framework of the study

Based on the literature reviewed in this chapter, the study approaches artists' work through four connected analytical dimensions: fragmented work, skills, recognition and support, and wellbeing and sustainability. These themes reflect what shapes artists' everyday professional realities and guide the interpretation and understanding of the empirical material in this thesis.

First, the combination of artistic and production work refers to the way artists often combine artistic practice with a range of production-related responsibilities such as applying for grants, communication, project management, and all administration. Rather than existing as fully separate domains, these roles frequently overlap within artists' daily work.

Second, skills relate to the capabilities helping to navigate such hybrid work environments. These include both artistic competencies and broader professional skills such as organization, communication, and the ability to manage uncertainty and fragmented working conditions. While it is often discussed how artists need numerous professional skills to sustain their careers, this thesis argues that these skills are not only a normal part of working as an artist, and useful skills for everyone to learn, but they might also resemble survival skills, developed in response to structural pressures such as financial insecurity, lack of appreciation, and unstable working conditions. This is a subject of interest for later research.

Third, recognition and support address how artists' work is valued within social, institutional, and professional contexts. This dimension includes questions of societal appreciation, collaboration, and access to resources that enable artistic work to take place.

Finally, wellbeing and sustainability refer to the effects of these working conditions on artists' professional and personal lives. Experiences of workload, financial instability, or lack of support may influence both creative capacity and the possibility of sustaining a career in the arts.

Together, these four dimensions form the analytical framework of the study. They guide both the interpretation of the interview material and the discussion of artists' lived experiences throughout the empirical analysis. While the framework offers a structure for interpretation, the analysis remains open to themes that emerge from the artists' own experiences, allowing empirical insights and theoretical perspectives to inform and affect each other throughout the discussion.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This chapter describes how this research was designed and carried out. It introduces the chosen research approach, the research questions and unit of analysis, and the different phases of the research process. It also explains how the empirical material was collected and analysed, and reflects on my position as a researcher, including the role of autoethnographic reflection. Finally, the chapter discusses ethical considerations and the limitations of the study. The aim is to make the research process transparent and to show how the interpretations presented in this thesis have been formed.

3.1 Research approach

In this thesis, the aim is to explore artists' lived experiences of their professional realities and to analyze the experiences of combining artistic and production-related work. Reflecting the aim, this study adopts a qualitative research approach that combines semi-structured interviews with autoethnographic reflections on the researcher's experience working as an artist and a producer. In addition, the literature review builds the theoretical foundation for the study showing what has been researched before, where the gaps might be, and which questions this research should be trying to answer (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2011, p. 10). Concerning this study, the choice of qualitative research is particularly fitting, as the approach is suitable for examining experiences, meanings, and interpretations. It can also be understood simply as a non-numerical description of the form of data and analysis (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998, p. 9). Additionally, the chosen approach allows participants to describe their working realities in their own words making it possible to explore how artists themselves define concepts such as wellbeing, sustainability at work, and professional responsibilities.

In qualitative research, the researcher's position is central as the researcher has freedom in their work allowing flexible planning and implementation of the study (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998, p. 13). Using a diverse range of methods, including the available data and the researcher's creative imagination such as experimenting with new methodological approaches or ways of writing, are part of qualitative research (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998, pp. 10, 13.). Additionally, in qualitative research, interpretation and understanding is often shared throughout the entire research process, and the process itself cannot always be easily divided into sequential stages (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998, p. 10). In this thesis, building the theoretical framework, discussing within artists and interviewing them happened mostly hand in hand, processes affecting each other, giving the freedom to respond creatively to participants' perspectives, discussions and to explore emerging themes.

Participation is also central to a large part of qualitative research (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998, p. 10). Following qualitative research principles (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998, p.12), this qualitative research focuses on a small number of cases to enable focused analysis of participants' experiences. Therefore, the empirical material of this thesis consists mainly of interviews with four art professionals working in the performing arts in Finland. Each participant combines artistic practice with production-related responsibilities and primarily operates as a self-producing artist in their art works, managing multiple aspects of their own projects. The participants were selected purposely, as their combination of artistic and production roles provides insight into the realities of self-producing artists. In analyzing the data, I aimed to situate the data within a broader social and professional context studied in the theoretical framework chapter. This approach reflects the qualitative research emphasis on quality over quantity and the importance of building a theoretical foundation to guide data collection (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998, p. 12).

Semi-structured interviews were chosen for this study because they combine structure with flexibility. Some parts of the interview are planned in advance while other parts are left open and flexible (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2011, p. 44). This flexibility made the choice of semi-structured interviews particularly

suitable for this study, as they allowed key topics, such as artistic practice, production tasks, wellbeing, and sustainability, to be addressed while also giving interview participants the freedom to bring up issues, paths and stories most important or relevant to them. The choice of interviews as a method was also guided by the view of humans as unique individuals and by the aim of getting closer to the artists studied, hearing their thoughts, and understanding their experiences in their own words. When the goal is to explore participants' opinions, perceptions, and beliefs, or to understand why people act as they do, interviews are a particularly suitable method. They allow in-depth exploration of subjective experiences and meanings. Interviews are also approachable for participants, being close to everyday practice, and they also allow the researcher to anticipate the practical requirements and preparations (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2011, p. 8).

At the same time, interviews are always context- and situation-dependent and the results involve interpretation, and generalization must be made with care (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2011, p. 9). Throughout this thesis, I have given attention to how the results are shaped by the specific context and situation of the interviews and aimed to make this influence visible. In summary, in this study, interviews were chosen as a method because they provide personal insights into the artists experiences and interplay between artistic creation and production responsibilities, allowing participants to articulate their own experiences that are central to them. This creates more in depth understanding how artists themselves experience and navigate their work realities.

In addition to the interviews, the study includes autoethnographic elements in a form of reflection on the researcher's experiences. By combining interviews with this reflective layer, the research situates individual experiences within a broader professional context building shared experiences. This approach allows for exploration of the research problem and produces data for thematic analysis, connecting artists' voices, existing research, and personal reflection in an analytical framework. Rather than treating the researcher's position as separate, it is approached reflexively and acknowledged as part of the knowledge

production process, informing both the creation of research questions and interpretation of the material.

3.2 Unit of analysis and research questions

The unit of analysis in this study is the experience of artists who combine artistic and production work in their professional practice.

The research questions stated in chapter 1 focus on how artists perceive and manage this combination and how these experiences relate to wellbeing, recognition, and structural working conditions. The questions are also connected to artists' experiences through conceptual framework developed in the theoretical chapter as this chapter examines artistic work through four themes: multi-role work, recognition, wellbeing, and skills.

Concentration in artists' experiences throughout the thesis builds connection between research questions, conceptual framework, and empirical material. It ensures that the analysis remains focused on the central themes of the study while still allowing unexpected insights and changes to come up from the interviews.

3.3 Research process and phases

The research process consisted of several phases. First, the study began with acknowledging the topic of interest. According to Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2011), at the beginning of a study, there is often a topic of interest and an area toward which the research is intended to focus. The topic area emerges from practical experiences, information received from experts, or from literature and study. A more in-depth review of the literature then helps to narrow and clarify the research problem. In this way, the problem becomes more concrete and turns into specific research questions (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2011).

Ideally, the research topic should be engaging but not too close to the researcher, so that suitable distance can be maintained and the subject can be examined from as many perspectives as possible. However, the issue is not so

straightforward as this view contains an illusion of objectivist research. Good and even objective research can also be conducted on topics that are personally close to the researcher. The necessary research distance and objectivity arise partly from the researcher's own theoretical reflection and conducted reading, and they can also be strengthened through conceptualization and the use of appropriate methods (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998, pp. 22–23).

Reflecting this, in this thesis, my interest in the topic emerges from my own experience of working both as an artist and as a producer. Through these roles, I have developed a personal interest in artists' wellbeing and in the working conditions that influence it. The topic is therefore close to me both professionally and personally. For this reason, in the theoretical framework chapter, I situated the subject also within the broader context of the position of artists in Finnish working life, in order to examine these experiences within a wider structural framework. This literature review then formed the conceptual framework used to interpret the empirical material.

Second, interview participants for the thesis were chosen based on their professional experience of combining artistic practice with production responsibilities. The aim was not representativeness but rather diversity of perspectives within similar working conditions.

Third, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interviews focused on participants' experiences of combining artistic and production work, the challenges and supportive factors they encounter, and their reflections on sustainability and wellbeing in their professional lives.

Finally, the interview material was analysed thematically in dialogue with the conceptual framework and with the researcher's own reflective observations.

Although these phases began and are presented in a particular order, they mostly progressed simultaneously. The development of the theoretical framework influenced the interviews and analysis, and, in turn, insights from these phases informed the framework. As Eskola and Suoranta state, in qualitative research, interpretation and understanding can often be distributed

throughout the entire research process, and the process itself is not always divided into sequential stages (p. 10).

3.4 Data collection of empirical material

This thesis builds on a combination of academic research, reports, and professional materials that together form its theoretical and contextual foundation. Previous research on artists' working conditions, income structures, and wellbeing, such as the *Arts and Culture Barometer* reports by Cupore (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2018, 2020; Ruusuvirta et al., 2023) and Rensujeff's (2015) study on the position of artists, provides an overview of the structural conditions shaping artistic work in Finland. These studies are supported by research on artistic labour, hybrid work and precarious practices (Houni & Ansio, 2013; Piispa et al., 2019; Jakonen et al., 2021), as well as discussions on changing career models in the arts (Clague, 2024).

In addition to academic literature, this thesis draws on other art and artist related and practice based materials. These include blog texts by Taiteen edistämiskeskus (Lehtelä, 2026; Rönkkö & Itkonen, 2025) and publications focusing on artists' wellbeing and working conditions (Suomen Taiteilijaseura, 2022) and Tuottajautopia Producer Utopia discussion (Vainio, 2023). Furthermore, the podcast Artpod is used as a source, as it addresses contemporary themes of artistic work, such as income and sustainability, from artists´ perspectives. Together, these sources situate the study within both existing research and ongoing professional discussions, helping to identify what is already known and where further exploration and understanding is needed.

The interview was chosen as the primary empirical data collection method in this thesis as the aim of an interview is to find out what a person has in mind. It is a form of conversation initiated and guided by the researcher (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998, p. 59). The empirical material of this thesis consists therefore of four semi-structured interviews with artists working in the Finnish performing arts field. The interviewees were Marianne Turtio, Milla Kurronen, Chen Nadler and Linda Holma. These interviewees were selected because they combine

artistic creation with production-related responsibilities within their own projects and work. Interviews lasted from 25 to 40minutes and they were recorded. The variation in duration reflected my intention to allow flexibility within the discussions, giving participants the space to explore topics and questions in a way that felt natural and meaningful to them personally concerning the topics.

For the interview, I prepared an interview guide of ready made questions to structure the conversations. Some questions were left out to give space for questions that took longer for the artist to answer or replaced with follow-up questions that emerged organically during the interviews, particularly when a topic appeared to resonate with or wake up reflections in the interviewee. This approach enabled a more in-depth exploration of themes that were especially relevant from the participants' perspectives.

The questions guiding the interviews are presented below.

Background and context

1. Can you briefly describe your artistic work and the kinds of projects you are involved in?

Artistic and production work

2. Which production-related tasks do you manage yourself?
3. How do these tasks fit into your creative process? Are they separate, overlapping, or inseparable from your artistic work?
4. Do you experience production work as supportive, burdensome, or both? Please provide an example if relevant.
5. Can you describe situations in which production responsibilities have been particularly stressful or draining?
6. Have there been moments when production work has felt empowering or supportive of your artistic practice?

Wellbeing and sustainability

7. How does combining artistic and production work affect your energy, focus, or overall wellbeing?
8. How do you manage stress, uncertainty, or work overload in your practice?
9. Do you feel that your work as an artist is recognized and valued, both professionally and socially? How does this affect your wellbeing?

Skills and strategies

10. What skills or approaches help you manage both artistic and production responsibilities?
11. Are there any skills you feel you still need to develop?

Support, recognition, and reflection

12. If you could change one thing about how artists and their work are supported or valued, what would it be? You are also welcome to conclude with any open reflections or hopes for the future.

In the midst of the interviews, and although initially planned, questions about artists' skills were only briefly addressed, as other topics felt more immediate and naturally guided the discussion.

There has been a growing shift from traditional question-and-answer interviews toward more conversational types of interviews. In a semi-structured interview, the questions are the same for all participants, but predetermined answer options are not used but instead, the interviewee responds in their own words (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998, pp. 59–60). Reflecting this, semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allow both structure and flexibility. While the interviews were guided by common themes, participants were encouraged and given space to reflect freely on their experiences and to emphasize issues that they considered important. This approach made it possible to explore how artists themselves define supportive and burdening aspects of their work. Instead of imposing exact and predefined categories, participants were invited

to describe their own observations, reflections and experiences on the realities of combining artistic and production responsibilities.

In addition to interviews, the study includes an autoethnographic reflective layer. My own experiences as an artist and producer provide added insight into the themes discussed in the interviews. This reflective approach helps connect personal experience with broader structural conditions and also to create experiences of shared realities between artists. This position of mine as a researcher was made clear in the interviews and it led to shared reflections also after the interviews, which made the situation more vivid and also emotionally supportive.

This compilation of empirical material is further complemented by insights from professional discussions in the Finnish art field, including podcasts, talks, and artist-led conversations. These materials help contextualize the interview findings within ongoing discussions about artistic and production work.

3.5 Data analysis

Before moving on to the actual analysis, I familiarized myself with the material, organizing and categorizing it (Ruusuvuori et al., 2010, p. 6). The approach involved thematization, identifying themes that could illuminate the research problem and allow comparisons of how often and in what ways specific themes appeared in the data (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998, p. 72). To support this process, I created mind maps by drawing, writing, and physically working with printed interview transcripts, cutting and rearranging quotes and excerpts to better understand connections between different ideas. These materials functioned as visual and conceptual collages, bit by bit forming broader patterns and helping to structure the emerging themes. I repeated this process during the analysis phase, connecting the emerging themes to the conceptual framework developed earlier.

While analysing the material, I reflected on questions such as: How should the material be approached and read? Which questions can meaningfully be asked?

Which parts should be selected as the core data and themes, what deserves focus, and what can be left out, and why? (Ruusuvuori et al., 2010, p. 9). I approached the material in a way that allowed for new clarifications, narrowing, and new perspectives (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2011, p. 10).

Furthermore, it was the research questions, together with my reading, choices, and reflections, that guided and structured how the material was handled (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2011, p. 10). The interview material in this thesis was analysed by identifying recurring key themes. To conclude, the interview transcripts were examined in order to find patterns and experiences related to the research questions and theoretical framework. These themes included, for example, the balancing of artistic and production work, the dual nature of production tasks as both supportive and burdensome, questions of recognition and collaboration, and structural conditions shaping artists' wellbeing.

While going through the material, I noticed that artists' skills did not really emerge as a theme I would feel compelled to explore further through interview questions, even if I had planned to do so. Other topics felt more natural to discuss and ended up taking most of the participants' time and interest even if the skills were discussed shortly on the side. Furthermore, as both a researcher and an artist myself, in the moment of the interviews, I felt somewhat uncomfortable or even artificial asking questions about what skills someone needs as an artist, or which skills they would like to develop further. It felt forced, almost pasted on. Also, it felt harmful, because these discussions, when brought upon artists from different directions, might create pressure or reinforce the narrative that artists themselves are responsible for surviving the precarity and developing these skills, rather than questioning or changing the structures that shape their work.

This made me consider whether discussions about skills and the qualities that seem to be necessary for working as an artist, are shaped more by external expectations than by the artists' own priorities. For the artists themselves, these skills are a daily necessity, constantly used and refined to sustain their work. What seemed more urgent were the conditions and structures that shape their

practice. Instead, conversations gravitated towards the underlying, revealing reasons why these skills or features, such as ability to deal with pressure and precarity, are needed in the first place.

The conceptual framework introduced in the theoretical framework chapter functioned as an analytical lens through which the material was interpreted. The themes of the conceptual framework were found from the data material and are analyzed more in section 4. Rather than separating theory and empirical analysis into entirely distinct stages, the analysis was conducted as a dialogue and a process between theoretical concepts and the experiences described by the interview participants. This approach allowed empirical insights to both illustrate and at times challenge existing theoretical perspectives.

3.6 About the research process and ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the research process. In research involving participants, the main ethical principles generally are informed consent, confidentiality, consequences, and privacy. Ethical issues may also relate to, among other things, the use of power and the researcher's conduct as a professional (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2011). Interview participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation and privacy. They were given the opportunity to reflect on their experiences throughout the process. They could decide if they wanted their names visible or not and they had the opportunity to change and edit their interview parts that were used in the thesis.

Reflexivity was an important part of this thesis process as I as a researcher share similar professional contexts with the participants and know them personally. It was important to remain aware of how my own experiences and perspectives might influence interpretation. Instead of trying to eliminate this personal perspective, it was acknowledged openly, serving also as a starting point for the thesis process.

As a part of the process, striving for objectivity is important. Objectivity can be understood as avoiding the influence of personal beliefs, attitudes, or values on the research even if complete objectivity may be difficult to achieve (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998, pp. 10–11). Objectivity comes from recognizing one's own subjectivity. In everyday life, we relate to people, ideas, and situations in many ways, always depending on the context. Research relationships are also a form of social interaction, but they differ from ordinary interactions. Unlike often automatic daily interactions, research requires all aspects of the interaction to be consciously examined, so that nothing important is overlooked. In this sense, objectivity arises from being aware of one's own subjectivity. This is an ideal that may be difficult to fully achieve but is an important goal (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998, p. 11). Reflecting this, in my thesis I aimed to recognize and reflect on my own preconceptions. In addition, my own perspective was clearly stated as a starting point in the research and throughout the thesis, which helped determine the design and type of the study more clearly (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998, p. 11).

Lastly, as qualitative studies can also be understood as case studies, their aim is not to produce empirically generalizable conclusions in the same way as statistical research (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998, p. 45). Highlighting this, the limitations of this research are acknowledged as the study is based on a small qualitative sample and does not aim for statistical generalization. Instead, it provides close and practical insights into artists' lived experiences and brings light to issues that may inform further research and discussion on sustainable artistic work.

4. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter highlights findings showing how artists experience the combination of art and production-related work as part of their practice. These findings result from interviews with four artists who balance production tasks alongside their creative work and are discussed within a theoretical framework formed earlier in this thesis to situate the insights in a broader context.

The empirical analysis is structured around the four analytical dimensions introduced in the theoretical framework: artistic work as fragmented labour, appreciation, wellbeing, skills and structures. These themes guide the interpretation of the interview material while allowing space for new insights emerging from the participants' experiences.

The aim is to explore how artists describe the relationship between artistic work and production-related responsibilities in their everyday professional lives. Particular attention is given to experiences of burdening and supportive factors, the role of recognition and collaboration, and the ways in which structural conditions influence artists' wellbeing in work. Rather than me imposing a definition of wellbeing, in this study, wellbeing is defined by the artists, drawing on their own experiences and perspectives. The analysis addresses the research questions by examining how artists describe their experiences of combining artistic and production work, and how these experiences relate to wellbeing, recognition, and structural working conditions.

Artistic practice rarely exists in isolation. It is closely connected to the practical work that sustains it, including project planning, communication, coordination, and administration. While previous research has explored the socio-economic position of artists, fragmented labour, wellbeing, and professional skills (Houni & Ansio, 2013; Rautavuoma, 2015; Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020), less attention has been given to the everyday balancing of artistic and production-related tasks

and how this affects artistic practice, professional wellbeing, and the long-term sustainability of artists careers.

The analysis draws on interviews with four performing artists in Finland, alongside my own reflections and experiences as an artist navigating similar situations and challenges. Even if the artists all work mainly in performance art, they represent a range of roles and working contexts, building understanding of the dynamics between artistic and production work.

Chen Nadler, a choreographer and dancer, frequently produces her own work while collaborating with musicians and other artists. Milla Kurronen, a multidisciplinary performance artist, manages nearly all production-related tasks for her performances alongside her creative work. Linda Holma, a dance artist, participates both in choreographer-led projects and co-initiated works while often taking responsibility for production tasks. Marianne Turtio works full-time as a cultural producer while maintaining her own artistic practice. In addition, my own reflections as an artist and producer provide further insight into the lived experience of combining artistic creation with production work.

Based on the interviews and reflections, several interconnected themes emerge. These include the blurred boundaries between artistic and production work, the balancing of creative and production responsibilities, and the dual nature of production work as both supportive and burdensome. Other key themes include the relationships with producers in providing support, as well as the challenges artists face in their working conditions. These conditions can significantly impact artists' wellbeing. The influence of structural limitations on artists' work, and visions for creating more sustainable futures were also discussed.

Throughout the chapter, empirical material, previously presented theoretical frameworks, insights from the Tuottajautopia Producer Utopia discussion (Vainio, 2023), and personal reflections are brought into dialogue to explore how artists experience these aspects of artistic work. After each section, I discuss the findings related to the research in the theoretical framework chapter.

4.1 Balancing artistic practice and production

A central theme emerging from the interviews is the balancing of artistic practice and production-related work. Working as an artist often means navigating overlapping fields of creation, management, and administration and being able to create art often requires engagement not only with the artwork itself but also with its context, development, and communication. When working as an artist, the artistic and production processes often overlap in actions or in thinking.

Interviews with artists conducted during this thesis process revealed a recurring theme: the duality and combination of artistic and production work, multiple jobs and the tension between creative freedom and structural responsibility. This duality also resonates with my own experience as a practicing artist, balancing the urge to create with the practical realities required to make that creation possible.

Marianne Turtio's (2026) reflections on her life as a cultural producer and performance artist illustrate these tensions. Her full-time role at Annantalo, Helsinki's children's arts centre, allows her to create programs that reach thousands of children. She describes this work as "winning the lottery.," a dream realized after pursuing the art field for some time. Alongside this joy, there exists also a yearning for her own artistic practice, which has been moved to the background because of the demands of full-time work and family life (Turtio, 2026).

> *I truly love my job, it feels like winning the lottery. I had always wanted to work in children's culture. After my theatre pedagogy studies, I tried to enter the field, but due to the difficult employment situation it didn't happen immediately. But eventually, I ended up here and I'm genuinely so happy! Of course loving this job does not remove longing also for my own artistic work (Turtio, 2026).*

For many artists, these experiences exist side by side, and I can relate personally as I deeply enjoy my work as a producer in the arts, yet I often find myself yearning for more time to focus on my artistic practice.

Turtio's (2026) ongoing collaboration on a children's performance describes also the slow, extended timelines that can often come with maintaining artistic life alongside other responsibilities:

> *It's not like we create this now and six months later something new. Instead, one process just continues and continues because there isn't enough time to fully commit to it (Turtio, 2026).*

This echoes what Milla Kurronen (2026) describes in her own experience as a multidisciplinary performance artist. Kurronen manages nearly every aspect of her productions, independently or shared in working groups, from marketing and social media to bookkeeping and creating merchandise while simultaneously developing various multi-artistic works and a solo piece. The scale of these responsibilities can sometimes drain energy from the artistic process itself, even when production skills are strong. She describes production tasks as sometimes supportive, yet often overwhelmingly wide, requiring a change between the "artist hat" and the "producer hat" (Kurronen, 2026).

> *Certain production tasks actually deepen the work and support its completion. But there is also an enormous amount of production work that has nothing to do with artistic creation. You can sometimes find creativity in it, but often it feels like wearing completely different hats. One day I wear the "artist hat," the next day the "administrator hat." They require very different mindsets*. So yes, it's both intertwined and separate *(Kurronen, 2026).*

Linda Holma (2026) further illuminates the ways in which production work intersects with artistic practice, offering both opportunities and obstacles. Holma (2026) frames production as a kind of a frame within which the artistic work exists:

> *I often think of production work as creating the frame within which the artistic work can then exist. The production tasks build the structure that makes it possible to create the actual art. Sometimes the frame feels very large and thick and the artistic picture inside, it feels small. At other times, it's the opposite (Holma, 2026).*

Reflecting this mental image of a frame, production work can help transform creative visions into tangible projects helping to secure resources, collaborators, and connecting the work to audiences. At the same time, this frame can sometimes become heavy and time-consuming, leaving less space for the artistic process itself.

In my artistic practice, the need to write project descriptions, funding applications, and communication texts might arise already before I have had time to fully enter and dwell in the creative process. I find myself describing the intentions, meanings, and outcomes of a work that is still mostly undefined or very much in the beginning of the process. In this way, production tasks can sometimes start to affect and form artistic thinking.

At times this early articulation helps clarify ideas. Writing about a project can sharpen intentions and reveal connections that might otherwise remain unclear for longer. In a way, production tasks can become tools for understanding and expressing artistic ideas and intentions and for situating the work within broader cultural and social contexts. Decisions related to production might then also, in a way, start to shape how a piece takes form, how it is described, and how it reaches its audience. From this perspective, production work is not merely administrative.

However, this course of the process can also create pressure to justify artistic work before it has even had time to develop through exploration and experimentation. I remain uncertain about what it means for the work to take shape under the pressure of justification for existing. When artistic thinking begins by explaining and validating itself in order to secure resources, the risk is that the work might start from the logic of justification rather than from

open-ended artistic exploration. I continue to ponder how this influences art, the art field and artists' work.

The interviews also reveal how artists internally negotiate between different ways of thinking, shifting between or combining roles, and how this process is easier for some artists than for others. Like Milla Kurronen (2026) described before, it feels like changing roles like hats. Marianne Turtio (2026) describes this as a dialogue between what she calls the “producer brain” and the “artist brain”:

> *Inside me there is both a strong producer and a strong artist. Sometimes that internal duality can be challenging. At the same time, it’s a gift. I feel incredibly fortunate that I have both “artist brains” and “producer brains.” Many artists are required to handle production work themselves, and that can be extremely demanding if you don’t naturally think in systems, structures and timelines. I do and that helps me. Still, I don’t think artists should be required to carry all that production responsibility. It’s unfortunate that it is in a way expected (Turtio, 2026).*

Linda Holma (2026) has similar reflections:

> *The difficulty comes from wearing too many hats at once. Being simultaneously performer, producer, and artistic creator is heavy. Each additional role increases the workload (Holma, 2026).*

Turtio's (2026) earlier reflection about how artists should not be required to carry all production responsibility themselves also raises the question of whether it is sustainable to expect all artists to have producer-related skills. What is also discussed is the way in which artists are expected to do the production work and have these skills, even if they might not be taught anywhere thoroughly.

Holma (2026) describes the situation:

> *Still, there seems to be an unspoken assumption that artists simply handle production work themselves, even though it isn't really properly taught anywhere (Holma, 2026).*

The interplay between creative imagination and practical organization is also discussed. While production skills and tasks can support artistic ideas and processes, they may also bring up structural constraints that might shape the creative process. This tension offers both opportunities and challenges as it can facilitate productivity and strategic thinking, yet it could simultaneously limit spontaneity or bring pressure and overextend the artist's cognitive and emotional resources. Turtio (2026) describes this interplay:

> *Concerning production related tasks, I'm able to articulate my ideas clearly. I understand how to frame a project so it's not only artistic floating or an internal feeling, but something readable and understandable for others. I know when a text becomes too abstract and when it needs grounding. I also feel compelled to make the process clearly structured for everyone part of the production process, even if the art itself would be abstract (Turtio, 2026).*

Co-existence of artistic thinking and production related thinking can sometimes generate tension, a kind of ongoing dialogue between what is possible and what can be imagined. Interviewees talk about similar dualities in which production work can frame art making and it often enables the work by securing funding for example, yet it simultaneously risks draining the energy and time from making art. Learning to navigate this tension, embracing incompleteness, sharing responsibility, and building patience emerges from the interviews as important tools for sustaining both artistic and personal well-being.

These empirical findings illustrate that the relationship between artistic practice and production work is inherently complex, shaped by both opportunities and constraints. Production-related tasks can deepen creative processes, clarify artistic intentions, and provide autonomy, yet they can simultaneously generate fatigue, stress, and time pressure when worked on without sufficient support.

Furthermore, existing research also suggests that artistic work is often experienced as inherently dual. Artists often experience strong engagement and a sense of meaningfulness in their work. However, at the same time artistic work involves many sources of strain (Ruusuvirta et al., 2023, p. 13). Artists have to manage both the content of their work and the conditions needed for its realization (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 11). Houni and Ansio (2013) emphasize the burden of responsibilities beyond core artistic activities, such as administrative, financial, and operational tasks and how this multiplicity of roles often limits the time and focus available for artistic creation, as artists are being pulled in many directions simultaneously (p. 154).

While the ability to navigate the complex realities of artistic work is often seen as essential for building a career in the arts, it is equally important to critically examine the systemic conditions that produce these realities. Framing artistic careers primarily in terms of individual persistence risks overlooking the structural factors that shape opportunities, resources, and sustainability. Like Lehtelä (2026) argues, it is important to approach artists' career interpretations critically, as perspectives that emphasize discontinuity and self-direction can normalize uncertainty and shift responsibility onto the individual instead of structural issues (Lehtelä, 2026). As the findings suggest, building a career in the arts depends fundamentally on the availability and quality of support systems surrounding the artist. Shifting the focus from individual resilience to structural conditions is therefore necessary in order to address these challenges.

Furthermore, artists' work does not often seem to fit into existing employment categories or conventional ideas of what work is (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 238). How artistic work is described is often tied to artists personal experiences and forms of artistic expertise (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020, p. 6). By foregrounding artists' own experiences of their work, this research provides grounded information about artists' work and aims to be part of building a foundation for rethinking how working conditions in the arts could be developed from the level of systems and structures, enabling more supportive and sustainable environments for artistic practice.

4.2 Burdening and supportive factors

The dual nature of production work as burdening and supportive appears as another recurring theme in the interviews. Artists frequently describe production tasks as both supportive and burdensome. On one hand, production skills allow artists to structure projects, communicate ideas, and secure resources for artistic work. On the other hand, these tasks require significant time and emotional energy.

All of the interviewees describe situations in which the production work and skills support their artistic work structuring projects, clarifying ideas, or framing concepts for funders and audiences. Yet they also reflect how the weight of these tasks can be a lot. Kurronen (2026) describes how the combination can be both burdensome and supportive:

> *Both, but mostly the issue is volume. There is simply so much of it. It never ends. There's always more you could do. And the bigger the project, the bigger the team, the bigger the ambition, the workload increases exponentially. In a "normal" career path, when you advance, entry-level tasks often move to someone else. But in small art organizations and groups, nothing is ever removed from your plate. As you grow, you just accumulate more and more responsibility. You do increasingly complex tasks while still doing all the basic ones. That's what makes growth difficult. Growth doesn't necessarily make things easier. It might make them even heavier (Kurronen, 2026).*

Nadler (2026) notes that some production tasks, such as writing about her projects and art or planning long-term development and funding, might sometimes clarify artistic intent and ideas.

> *Some production work is supportive. Writing about the concept, for example, helps me clarify what I want to create, with whom, and why. It deepens the work and connects it to broader contexts beyond my personal interests (Nadler, 2026).*

Yet, Nadler (2026) also elaborates on how for example scheduling, budgeting, and coordinating large groups can become draining when worked on alone, consuming energy that would otherwise feed the creative process and art making. She also points out how learning to ask for help when needed becomes important.

> *Other tasks are much harder, especially scheduling for large groups or creating financial plans. I've learned to navigate this by asking for help from people who are better at these things. I'm not shy about asking for help. During intensive creation periods, when I'm fully immersed in the studio with collaborators, it's very difficult to manage production tasks at the same time. This overlap can feel like a disaster. There is often very limited time and funding for creation, so development happens under pressure. I try to complete as much production work as possible beforehand, so that I can focus on the artistic process once rehearsals begin. But without a producer, some overlap is unavoidable, and it drains energy from what I actually need to focus on (Nadler, 2026).*

Holma (2026) continues on the same subject:

> *Production work can be empowering. When I engage in it, I gain a sense of agency and ownership. Understanding the production processes means I'm not passively waiting for things to happen, I understand the structural realities that shape the field. But it can also be draining. When there is a lot of production work and time needs to be cut from somewhere, it's often the artistic work that gets reduced. And that feels paradoxical because the artistic content is the reason the production work exists in the first place. Production work can both support and undermine artistic practice (Holma, 2026).*

Also Turtio (2026) describes artistic and production work as overlapping and mutually supportive. She notes that her production skills help her articulate artistic ideas more clearly, for example in grant and residency applications, where abstract concepts need to be made understandable to others. At the same time, she highlights the challenges of this combination. Working full-time as a

producer limits her capacity to take on additional production responsibilities in her own artistic projects.

Research reflects these experiences, as many artists distinguish between the core artistic work and supportive tasks, noting that it is not the creative process itself that is mentally exhausting, but rather that time and focus are often consumed by work that maintains and enables the artistic practice (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 156). The burden of responsibilities beyond core artistic work pulls artists in multiple directions simultaneously, as they manage operational and financial tasks in their working environments, often reducing the time and focus available for artistic creation (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 154).

On the other hand, Rautavuoma (2015) argues that while working in a working group in theatre work, dividing labour into artistic and non-artistic categories can create a misleading distinction in which the artistic work is imagined as separate from production-related or technical work. This division constructs an artificial separation between artistic and non-artistic work. Rather than treating production or technical tasks as outside of artistic practice, all theatre work could be understood as artistic at its core, with different roles representing specific dimensions within that artistic labour. For example the producer of the working group directly influences the artistic outcome by defining and shaping the conditions under which the work takes place (Rautavuoma, 2015, pp. 109–110).

Rautavuoma's (2015) argument challenges the division between artistic and production-related labour by emphasizing that all theatre work ultimately contributes to the artistic outcome. This does not mean that everyone is an artist, but rather that each contributor could see themselves as a participant in artistic work (Rautavuoma, 2015, pp. 109–110). From this perspective, production work is not external to art making but one of its dimensions. Yet, as Houni and Ansio (2013) note, many artists personally experience the burden not in the creative process or art making in itself but in the surrounding tasks that sustain it (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 156).

In my view and reading, these positions operate on different levels. Conceptually, and as a part of art production where tasks and roles are shared, production and artistic work can be experienced as a supporting and meaningful part of artistic work. Concerning all of these tasks contributing to the artistic outcome is beneficial, for example creating shared ownership of the art work itself and tightening the working groups interest and work experience together. Experientially, especially when one is working both on art and production related work themselves, however, these dimensions of artistic labour do not often carry equal weight in artists' own practical and emotional experience. When time, funding, and institutional support are insufficient, production tasks do not as easily function as fully integrated elements of artistic labour but instead displace the time and energy required for art-making itself. In this situation, production-related tasks may begin to feel like a burden that is experienced as a necessary obligation rather than a meaningful part of the work.

At the same time, as also interviews stated, production work can also be experienced as supportive and meaningful. For some artists, it provides constant autonomy and control over artistic processes, decision-making, and working conditions, strengthening the connection between artistic meanings and how work is realized and communicated. Artist Elli Maanpää (2024) discusses in the Art Pod episode *Conversations about Art and Money: Can You Make a Living as an Artist?*, how production and communication tasks, including social media, are an integral and enjoyable part of Maanpää´s practice. The discussion also highlights how multidisciplinary skills and flexibility have become almost essential for sustaining a career in the arts today (Kallio & Häkkilä, 2024).

The tension, then, might not only or simply be between artistic and non-artistic work, but between sustainable and unsustainable working conditions. Where resources, support, and shared responsibility, like in working groups, are present, production can meaningfully contribute to the art and artistic process. Where they are lacking, production might be experienced as a structural burden.

4.3 Appreciation, support and wellbeing

The interviews also reveal the emotional and societal dimensions of working as an artist and how there is a lack of appreciation and support for the profession. Turtio (2026) reflects on feeling somehow more valued now as a salaried cultural producer than as a performance artist, illustrating how societal narratives around employment might influence the feelings of appreciation and also self-perception.

> *That feeling is deeply connected to societal structures. Even though I don't personally believe at all that artists are less valuable, those societal narratives still reach me personally (Turtio, 2026).*

Nadler (2026) describes dance as often being one of the least appreciated art forms in society, despite its significant transformative potential on social, individual, political, and collective levels. She further emphasizes that the recognition of artistic work is closely reflected in structures of income and support available to artists.

> *We work full-time without salary until funding arrives and even then, the compensation rarely matches the work already done. There is constant negotiation between past unpaid labor and hoped-for future support (Nadler, 2026).*

Also dancer Linda Holma (2026) reflects critically on the societal appreciation of artistic work in the current political climate, describing for example funding cuts and governmental priorities that tell about the lack of recognition for the arts. She situates this also within a broader structural issue, where different forms of knowledge are valued unequally. So-called hard sciences are prioritized, while artistic and embodied knowledge remain marginal (Holma, 2026).

Like Nadler (2026) earlier, Holma (2026) describes how this imbalance becomes particularly visible in the case of dance, which has a marginal position not only in society at large but also within the performing arts field itself. She

questions why embodied knowledge like dance is not more widely integrated into basic education and why competencies such as bodily awareness, spatial understanding, and social interaction are not more broadly recognized (Holma, 2026).

These observations highlight how the lack of institutional recognition shapes both the visibility and value of artistic work. As Holma (2026) concludes, the arts are still often framed as “nice hobbies” rather than as serious professional practices, supporting their marginal position within broader societal structures (Holma, 2026).

All of the interviewees describe pressures like financial instability, lack of societal recognition, and the expectation of unpaid labor. The precarious nature of artistic work like short-term grants, fragmented projects, and inconsistent income amplifies stress, reduces artistic freedom, and demands coping strategies such as self-care, external support, and personal reflection. These insights are deeply personal, yet resonate with the broader structural realities of contemporary art practice.

The question of support, here particularly the support and presence of a producer, also recurs in the interviews. During the discussion related to the interviews I bring up questions of how artists and producers could work more together. We start to ponder how an increased amount of shared study programs and courses could help foster mutual understanding and shared language.

Holma (2026) describes how during studies, collaboration between artists and producers was limited, and production-related aspects of artistic work were not strongly emphasized and continues to reflect artist-producer partnerships:

> *There isn’t much early collaboration between artists and producers during studies. If such collaborations started earlier, long-term working relationships might form more naturally. At the same time, close artist–producer partnerships require good personal chemistry. If*

> *people work very closely over many projects, it's not only about professional skill but also about personal compatibility (Holma, 2026).*

Nadler (2026) highlights that in school one collaborative course for artist and producer students existed, in which I worked as a producer for Nadler, but they were too brief and producers came late to the process.

> *I believe it would be beneficial to have shared courses over a longer period, learning together, understanding each other's roles, and practicing collaboration. Artists need to understand what producers actually do beyond writing applications and schedules. Producers likely have many skills that artists are unaware of. Building relationships takes time. Each artist may need something different from a producer. Some prefer to maintain control, others prefer to delegate. These dynamics require exploration (Nadler, 2026).*

Turtio (2026) recalls the relief of working with a dedicated producer during a festival organised by Art For All ry:

> *I could genuinely focus only on creating my performance. It was wonderful. People showed up, and I could simply be present in the work (Turtio, 2026).*

Conversely, her experience handling everything alone with a modest grant brings up how overwhelming it can be to manage all of the logistics, outreach, and audience development (Turtio, 2026).

Like Turtio (2026), Kurronen (2026) identifies the ideal solution as having a producer, someone to share or take over the operational and logistical aspects, freeing her to focus on the artist's work. When Kurronen was asked whether she would want to collaborate with a producer if the option existed, her answer was immediate:

> *Absolutely. Immediately. One hundred percent (Kurronen, 2026).*

Kurronen (2026) recalls a recent project where responsibilities were divided more clearly within a team, allowing her to concentrate more on artistic leadership. Even then, the tasks were extensive, involving choreography, sound design, costume design, and facilitation. This experience made visible how much work artistic creation itself already contains (Kurronen, 2026).

Nadler (2026) similarly describes the benefits of having production support, a collaborator who can manage production tasks, freeing the artist to be fully present in the creative process. In Nadler's description, the relationship between artist and producer is not only a practical arrangement but something that shapes the entire artistic process. The roles are not completely fixed or hierarchical. Instead, she describes an interest in the fluid space between them:

> *I believe that the relationship between producer and artist can be fluid, blending roles rather than separating them strictly. That in-between space is interesting and meaningful (Nadler, 2026).*

Yet, what also comes up is how structural and systemic factors complicate these collaborations. Funding difficulties, precarious employment, and rarely offered possibilities for working together make long-term artist–producer partnerships quite rare.

These observations point to a tension where artists are expected to take on production responsibilities, yet the educational and professional structures rarely provide the support or compensation needed to make this sustainable. This raises a broader question: why does this gap continue to exist? To me, it seems to reflect a lack of recognition of artistic work, where the profession is not fully valued or taken seriously enough to create structural change from the start. This lack of appreciation may begin early on, in how art is positioned within, for example, education. Rather than being presented as a possible career path, it is often framed as a hobby or merely as a source of wellbeing and leisure. As a result, this early undervaluing can shape both society's perception of art as a legitimate form of work and also artists' own understanding of their work, reinforcing the challenges artists are facing.

In many cases, working as the producer of one's own art is not a choice but a necessity and part of being an artist. There is often no one else available to take care of production-related work, especially in the independent arts field. Managing multiple roles requires time, energy, and attention, which can make artistic work tiring and demanding. Shared artist–producer relationships could create stability, mutual trust, and creative freedom to the art field. Yet, the already often recurred challenge of funding emerges. As Turtio (2026) summarizes:

> *One key issue is funding (Turtio, 2026).*

Engaging a separate producer for a project is often not so straightforward as funding opportunities are highly competitive, and planning, budgeting, and writing often must be completed before funding is secured. This can create situations where artists and producers work without pay until funding is confirmed, or producers might join projects only after many production tasks have already been completed. As a result, artists frequently manage production responsibilities themselves, even when this contributes to unpaid work, fatigue and work overload.

The challenges and opportunities of artists and producers, and collaborations between them were also reflected in the 2023 *Tuottajautopia Producer Utopia discussion* hosted by Mad House Helsinki and Taideosuuskunta Suin päin (Vainio, 2023). Framed by a utopian orientation toward positive change, the Tuottajautopia discussion reflected on current practices, structural challenges, and future possibilities in independent performing arts collaboration (Vainio, 2023).

Key issues that were discussed included the unclear scope of producer roles and how each producer should be able to define their work through their interests, the mismatch between expectations and available resources, and the challenge of how to involve producers early in artistic processes rather than only as administrators who can take part in the project later. Participants emphasized the importance of finding shared language between artists and producers, mutual understanding, and educational collaborations and pathways that would

support meaningful partnerships between artists and producers from the start of the career. Discussion explored also how responsibility could be shared more to create a feeling of shared ownership of the project for both artists and producers (Vainio, 2023).

Ideas and potential solutions discussed included educating artists and producers together to build mutual understanding from the start, creating alternative funding models and employment structures for freelance producers, developing platforms, get togethers like artist-producer dates, and networks to sustain long-term professional and social connections, and fostering trust and collaboration across disciplines (Vainio, 2023). Overall, the conversation highlighted that deeper collaboration and change could require personal actions but also structural change and cultural shift in how artistic and production work are recognized and integrated.

From my perspective, the emphasis on shared education for artists and producers is particularly compelling. Integrating these roles early could better support collaboration between these professionals. At the same time, while alternative funding models, networking opportunities, and personally built collaborations are important and promising, they require systemic and cultural changes that enhance sustainable and meaningful collaborations and working conditions for artists and also for producers working in the arts.

Furthermore, lack of support and appreciation affects the artist's sense of wellbeing. Kurronen (2026) describes how she needs art to feel good, yet the frameworks for making art can make the work tiring:

> *I cannot live without creating, I quickly feel the need to make something. But trying to fit artistic creation into capitalist productivity frameworks is exhausting. The expectation that creativity must produce measurable results drains the energy that art itself gives. For many people, having two jobs, one salaried position and alongside art work, might actually be healthier as living exclusively from artistic work can be extremely demanding (Kurronen, 2026)*

Holma (2026) reflects how financial precarity directly affects artistic capacity and wellbeing. She describes a period when her grant funding ended and she spent time unemployed. The situation produced anxiety and uncertainty. This experience made visible how strongly financial stress shapes artistic focus (Holma, 2026).

Nadler (2026) comes back to the hope of having a producer and reflects how support and caring for oneself is important.

> *Ideally, I would work with a producer. Creating is very intense for me, I'm fully immersed. Doing both artistic and production work together can be too demanding. Balancing this requires listening to myself. I also seek support from loved ones. Sharing difficulties helps. Self-care comes both from internal awareness and from external support (Nadler, 2026).*

Turtio (2026) points out a tension in artistic work: while artists possess deep creative potential that can support society both culturally and economically, artists themselves have to survive often without steady support.

> *Artists have immense creative potential that benefits society culturally and economically. But that potential is drained by constant survival stress (Turtio, 2026).*

Also research consistently shows that artists must navigate precarious conditions to survive in their professional environment. The position of artists in Finnish society is uncertain. Artists are valued as highly trained creative professionals capable of taking on diverse roles. Yet, their situation in the labor market can be precarious (Jakonen et al., 2021, p. 96). For example, unclear procedures from employment authorities can lead to unfair treatment, including the cancellation of professional opportunities. Artists describe the system as exhausting and difficult to navigate, and these systemic challenges can limit both their artistic work and creative practice (Artists' Association of Finland, 2025). Yet, for many artists, art is work in the same sense as in other professions and should therefore be equally valued and compensated.

The empirical findings of this study support earlier research, showing that the value of artists' work is experienced as less recognized in society compared to other professions (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020, p. 7). Artists often feel that society does not value them and that they are left on the margins (Houni & Ansio, 2013, pp. 238–239). Still, the results of artists' creative work can be widely visible in society (Ansio & Houni, 2013, p. 238).

Furthermore, earlier research shows how work holds many meanings for Finnish people. Occupation is a central part of a person's being, and work also affects emotional life, influencing the meaningfulness of life. Work provides a feeling of belonging as well as a sense of being a part of society (Steel & Rinne, 2019). In this context, when artistic work is not regarded as 'real' work in a society that places high value on work, it affects how artists can position themselves and how they are perceived and valued by others. This lack of recognition not only reflects societal attitudes but also reproduces structural inequalities, where artistic labour remains undervalued and not well supported. In contrast, recognizing artistic work as legitimate could strengthen artists' ability to build sustainable careers in these current structures, reduce unpaid labour, and build clearer professional boundaries.

At the same time, it is important to question why such recognition of artists' work remains conditional, why artistic work continues to fall outside dominant definitions of work, and even more importantly, why artists' work is even expected to conform to these definitions in order to be understood and valued. More broadly, this raises a question of how the common definitions of work could be made more inclusive.

To conclude, questions of recognition and valuation are central to understanding the position of artists and the appreciation of their work in Finnish society. The outcomes of artists' work lead people to experience beauty and the growth of humanity, connecting individuals to one another and to society, still artists profession is a profession like any other. Artists deserve and need wellbeing, support, and opportunities to carry out the work itself (Houni & Ansio, 2013, p. 12). The interview material shows that artists' wellbeing is

strongly shaped by recognition, societal appreciation, and the support they receive. Participants consistently described how lack of financial security, limited professional appreciation, and systemic undervaluing of art can amplify stress and constrain creative freedom.

In summary, the findings in this section show that artists constantly navigate multiple roles, working on both their creative practice and the practical tasks that make their work possible. This dual nature of artistic work can give artists more control and the chance to shape projects in a holistic way, but it also adds emotional and mental strain. Shifting between roles can strengthen flexibility, strategic thinking, and creative autonomy, but it can also create stress when resources, guidance, and collaboration are lacking. These findings align with research highlighting the fragmented nature of artistic labor (Houni & Ansio, 2013; Rautavuoma, 2015) and extend it by emphasizing how lived experience negotiates between empowerment and burden.

Collaboration with producers emerges as one support mechanism, allowing focus on making art itself, reducing emotional load, and creating space for deeper artistic exploration. At the same time, opportunities for such collaborations are limited by funding structures, short-term projects, and insufficient educational frameworks.

The findings reveal a gap between the expectations placed on artists and the resources provided to support them. While the ability to manage multiple roles and responsibilities can foster flexibility and autonomy, relying on individual resilience alone risks overextension, stress, and imbalanced career opportunities. This analysis aims to highlight that the challenges artists face are not merely personal but systemic, rooted in the undervaluation of artistic work and structural barriers in funding, employment, and societal frameworks.

For future development work, a central takeaway is that appreciating artistic work is essential in these existing structures. Although the artistic profession is unique, it must be recognized within societal structures. This recognition is essential not only for sustaining artists' unique work, but also for ensuring artists are treated as legitimate professionals and fully integrated into societal

structures that support their practice. Such recognition must go beyond symbolic appreciation, incorporating financial security, professional support systems, and inclusive definitions of work that reflect the diversity of artistic labor. Further research and dialogue with artists themselves are needed to inform policies and initiatives that strengthen their professional conditions and ensure that their work and wellbeing are fully supported. Structural change can help artists keep creating their unique work while also ensuring they have a stable and respected place in society.

4.4 Hopes and ideas for the future

After discussing their current working conditions, the interviewees were invited to reflect on their hopes for artists and for the future of artistic work. These hopes were not only personal dreams about their own careers, but also broader reflections on how artistic work could be supported and understood within society. Their hopes and visions touched on questions of collaboration, structural change, recognition, sustainability, and the possibility of building artistic lives that would feel both meaningful and sustainable.

Turtio (2026) imagines a future where artists would receive more stable support structures. One of her concrete hopes relates to structural funding models. She mentions the Irish basic income experiment for artists as an inspiring example, suggesting that even modest but stable financial support could fundamentally change artistic working conditions and affect wellbeing. The issue is not only the income level but also continuity. The cycle of grants followed by unemployment periods creates instability and constant stress. Her vision is therefore a system that recognizes artistic work as continuous. Turtio concludes:

> *I hope that cultural funding cuts will stop and that there would be more empathy and cultural understanding in political decision-making (Turtio, 2026).*

Similar hopes are expressed by multidisciplinary performance artist Milla Kurronen (2026). Her description of production work highlights the overwhelming volume of responsibilities that artists often carry alone.

Kurronen´s hopes grow beyond her own working conditions toward the broader ecosystem of the arts.

> *I hope cultural appreciation increases, and that more money and resources are directed toward the arts. The broader societal benefits of art and culture need to be better understood (Kurronen, 2026).*

Concerns about sustainability emerge also in the reflections of choreographer and dancer Chen Nadler. For Nadler (2026), the future is strongly connected to collaboration. Rather than constantly changing teams and structures with each new project, she expresses a wish to build long-term partnerships, particularly with a producer. She describes the importance of developing trust and shared understanding over time:

> *I hope to build a long-term collaboration with a producer, not changing producers with each production, but developing a shared path over time. Long-term dialogue and mutual trust are important to me (Nadler, 2026).*

Her reflections also point out the speed of contemporary artistic production. She describes a feeling that projects begin and end quickly, often leaving little room for deeper development. In contrast, she hopes for slower processes built on sustained relationships, community, and shared artistic growth (Nadler, 2026).

Kurronen (2026) further expresses a strong wish for increased cultural appreciation and funding. In her view, many of the difficulties faced by artists come directly from the lack of resources. The current situation, where huge amounts of artists compete for very small funding feels discouraging and structurally unsustainable. She describes the situation:

> *We are fighting over crumbs (Kurronen, 2026).*

Kurronen (2026) also encourages artists despite these structural frustrations. She speaks about the importance of community and persistence because most artistic possibilities unfold and open slowly over long periods of time.

> *I hope that artists find their true audiences, their own communities and people. That is fundamental for sustainability. For fellow artists, I wish courage to continue doing their own work… and patience (Kurronen, 2026).*

Dance artist Linda Holma´s (2026) reflections move also beyond individual working conditions toward broader cultural values. She questions why embodied knowledge and artistic understanding are still marginalized within education and society more widely. Dance, in particular, has a peripheral position even within the performing arts. This lack of recognition shapes not only funding structures but also the ways artists themselves perceive their work (Holma, 2026).

Holma (2026) emphasizes the broader value of artistic knowledge, particularly embodied forms of learning that develop spatial awareness, physical intelligence, and social understanding, capacities that are useful in many fields. Her hope is that appreciation for artistic knowledge would begin earlier also in formal education and become more integrated into societal thinking. At the same time, Holma highlights the importance of economic security and continues to reflect:

> *A sense of safety would free creative energy (Holma, 2026).*

Her hopes therefore include structural changes that would provide better stability for people working in arts. These might include increased cultural funding, improved social security systems, or broader models such as basic income. Ultimately, Holma´s vision is one where artistic work no longer has to constantly justify its existence (Holma, 2026).

When these experiences of artists are viewed together, a shared pattern can be seen. The artist's hopes mostly focus on creating conditions where artistic work could be practiced sustainably and meaningfully. Collaboration, long-term partnerships, financial stability, and societal recognition appear repeatedly as key themes. The participants imagine a future where artistic and production work would not constantly compete for time, energy, and legitimacy. Such

changes would not only benefit individual artists but could also strengthen the cultural field as a whole, allowing artistic ideas to develop more fully and reach wider communities. What also becomes clear is that artistic work holds great value for society, but the structures surrounding it often fail to support it well. The future envisioned is therefore not simply about improving individual working conditions, but about rethinking how society recognizes and supports artistic work and profession.

These experiences, hopes and visions of the artists are reflected also in existing research. Repeated cuts in art funding suggest a lack of understanding of the value of culture and education (Rönkkö & Itkonen, 2025). Research also indicates that for example unpaid work seems to be both a resource issue and a habit issue. There is not enough money to pay artists salaries or fees in relation to the amount of work they do, and society does not recognize the value of artists' work in the same way as that of other professions. There are many examples of situations where all other professional groups involved in the same project are compensated for their work, except for the artists. Therefore it seems that this is also a habit issue. The field operates according to established practices without actively trying to change them. These practices then spread within the internal structures of the arts sector (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020, p. 7).

At the same time, the importance of art in society becomes particularly clear in moments of societal crisis, when engaging with art allows individuals to reflect on diverse experiences, step away from the pressures of daily life, and reconnect with emotions and thoughts that may have been overlooked. Art can build mutual understanding, which enriches society both mentally and economically, highlighting the wider impact and power of artistic practice (Vuorenmaa, 2026).

Art supports the well-being of people. Likewise, artists need active support from society and organizations. Yet currently, the career paths of Finnish artists share many common stress factors. At different stages of their careers, they all face similar challenges: competition, finding their own place, financial difficulties, uncertainty, and working conditions where it's often not easy to work in (Ansio & Houni, 2013, p. 12). Therefore, it is important to create rules that actively

support professional artistic work. Long-term measures are needed to strengthen the conditions that make artistic work possible. Furthermore, authorities need a better understanding of how artists work, and decisions should be clear and consistent (Artists' Association of Finland, 2025).

The Artists' Association of Finland (2025) suggests several initiatives of which some were mentioned also in the interviews of this thesis, including raising artist grants toward the Finnish median income, expanding the exhibition fee system, creating more salaried opportunities for artists, and reinforcing public art funding (Artists' Association of Finland, 2025). Furthermore, as discussed before, stiff definitions of labor market status lead to complex situations both in taxation and in the structures of the social security system. (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020, p. 8). The gap between conventional definitions of work and the lived experience of artists highlights the need for a broader, more inclusive understanding of what constitutes work (Houni & Ansio, 2013).

In conclusion, the reflections of the interviewees on hopes and visions, and the theoretical framework research, point to a shared aspiration among artists for structural change, increased societal recognition, and sustainable collaboration models. Participants envision futures where artistic and production work coexist with less tension, supported by funding, long-term partnerships, and educational frameworks that foster connections between artists and producers. Moreover, the focus on community, trust, and long-term collaboration emphasizes that artistic sustainability relies also on social and network practices and possibilities.

The findings of this analysis aim to underline that artistic work should be understood as professional labor with complex dimensions that extend beyond strict definitions of work. Effective policies and societal recognition must address both the systemic barriers and the undervaluation of artistic work.

Furthermore, to inform effective development work, further research on artists' lived experiences and direct engagement with artists are necessary. By actively asking artists about their experiences, challenges, and needs, development work can be grounded in the realities of those it aims to support. By integrating

structural support with acknowledgment of the hybrid and changing nature of artistic work, it is possible to strengthen both the sustainability of artists' careers and the broader role of art and artists in Finland.

In concluding this chapter, it feels important to reflect on art and its creators. Art is often made by those for whom it is a deep inner need. For many artists, creating is more than work, it is an act of sharing, of connecting, and of giving form to what cannot easily be expressed otherwise. Through art, we can experience the wonders and strangeness of existence, the hints of hope and curiosities around us. Art captures the present while opening new paths and reaching toward what was, and what might be. Without art, and without the many voices and perspectives of artists, something vital would be missing from the way we experience and understand life.

To nurture and support these diverse voices, I hope for a shared curiosity and a desire to understand ways of being and working that move beyond commonly established ideas and systems. In this, as in so many areas, art can provide tools for imagining what could be, encouraging us to break and change patterns. Through its various processes and diverse practices, art encourages us to try, experiment, and grow.

5. CONCLUSIONS

> *For me, art is not just work, it is life, how we live and work together (Nadler, 2026).*

This chapter concludes the study by summarizing the research, presenting the main findings, and answering the research questions. It also reflects on the extent to which the study was able to address the research questions. Finally, the chapter discusses the implications of the findings and suggests directions for further research.

5.1 Summary of the research

The aim of this study was to explore how artists experience the combination of artistic work and production-related responsibilities as part of their professional practice. The empirical research focused on four performing artists working in Finland and was based on qualitative interviews alongside my own autoethnographic reflections as a practicing artist and a producer.

This study draws on a theoretical framework that views artistic work as fragmented labor shaped by structural and societal conditions, with attention to recognition, wellbeing, and the interplay between individual skills and systemic support. This framework guided the interpretation of the interviews and my reflections, helping to situate artists' experiences of combining creative and production work within broader institutional and structural contexts concerning artists and their work position in Finland.

The research approached artistic work as a form of labor that extends beyond creative processes to include production work such as planning, coordination, communication, and administrative work. Rather than treating these parts of artistic work as fully separate, the study examined how they are combined in practice and how this combination is experienced by artists.

The analysis was initially structured around four themes: fragmented work, artist's skills and structures affecting those skills, recognition, support and

wellbeing. In the interviews, however, artists' skills emerged as a less central theme, while discussions of art and production work, artists working conditions, appreciation and support were emphasized. This shifted the focus toward the broader societal and institutional factors shaping artistic work.

This research is situated within my perspective as a multidisciplinary artist and producer. Absolute objectivity is therefore not claimed but rather the study reflects both my understanding of the field and the experiences of the participants. Readers are encouraged to consider this context when evaluating the transferability of the findings to other settings.

Overall, the study aimed to better understand the realities of self-producing artists and situate these experiences within the structural and societal conditions that shape artistic work today in Finland.

5.2 Main findings and reflections

The main research question of this study examines how artists experience the combination of artistic work and production-related responsibilities within their professional practice. The findings show that artists experience this combination as simultaneously enabling and exhausting. Production work, such as project planning, securing funding, and administrative tasks, is often necessary for making artistic work possible, requiring significant time, energy, and responsibility. There is often a need for changing roles, described by artists as “changing hats”, between art and production work. Yet, these tasks are sometimes also very much intertwined, both burdening and supporting each other. Production tasks can foster autonomy, clarify artistic ideas, and contribute positively to creative development. This tension between burden and support emerged consistently across interviews and resonates also with my own experiences as a practicing artist.

Participants described production work as both supportive and taxing. While planning, securing funding, and communicating ideas provide structure, clarify concepts, and make sure artistic work gets funded, they also demand time,

energy, and emotional investment. These tasks sometimes overshadow the creative work affecting wellbeing. Furthermore, most often it is a matter of time and resources that makes the work tiring. This duality directly addresses the first sub-question: production work is simultaneously supporting and burdening, offering resources and possibilities while increasing workload and responsibility.

The second sub-question explored how recognition and support structures shape artists' experiences. A recurring theme was the lack of societal and structural recognition and support for artistic work, which contributes to undervaluation, unpaid labor, and insecurity. Limited access to support also intensifies the challenge of combining artistic and production work, as resources, like time and money, are limited. Participants emphasized also the importance of collaboration and mutual understanding, echoing also my reflections on how artists and producers might work more effectively together. In conclusion, lack of appreciation and support create structural imbalance affecting artists working conditions and wellbeing. These findings also support previous observations on how artists experience various burdens (Houni & Ansio, 2013), highlighting the need for systemic support.

The third sub-question focused on institutional and structural conditions and their impact on wellbeing. Participants described how funding systems and fragmented work shape the combination of artistic and production work and influence feelings of sustainability in their work. The work load of combining it all from production work to artistic practice was experienced as heavy as a result of lack of resources and support. These challenges are framed in the analysis as largely structural, treating the difficulties in balancing creative and production tasks as a matter of working conditions rather than personal skills.

Moreover, artists' skills, included in the original framework, did not become a central theme in the interviews. Instead interviews emphasized structural obstacles over individual ability. An important realization during this thesis process was that focusing on artists' skills can blur the topic of systemic challenges, making them appear as issues of personal ability rather than

broader working conditions. Furthermore, this thesis then suggests that the underlying tension lies not merely in managing multiple roles, but in navigating between sustainable and unsustainable structures. Therefore, during the process, focusing on artists' skills began to feel like an outside perspective on artists' lives, a need shaped by external expectations rather than something internally meaningful or crucial for artists themselves to discuss in this context. As this thesis focuses on artists' own experiences, the shift in focus and leaving skills as a subject aside felt like a natural development.

Wellbeing emerged as another important theme. Artistic work itself was described as meaningful and something needed for wellbeing, yet conditions such as financial insecurity, high workload, and lack of recognition create stress in artists' work affecting sustainability. This highlights that challenges in artists' work are not about artistic practice itself, but they often arise from the conditions in which work is carried out.

Participants were also invited to reflect on their hopes for their own careers and the future of artistic work. Their visions extended beyond personal hopes to larger questions of societal recognition, structural change, and sustainability. Participants imagined futures built of collaborative practices, financial stability, slower phase, long-term partnerships, supportive structures and environments where working as an artist would be sustainable rather than a constant struggle for survival. Furthermore, across interviews, it became clear how artistic work and results of it hold great societal value, yet the structures surrounding it often fail to support it well enough. In conclusion, the future envisioned by participants is about rethinking how society recognizes and sustains artistic labor. As the Artists' Association of Finland (2025) notes, beyond improving the system, long-term measures are needed to strengthen the conditions that make artistic work possible.

One theoretical insight of this study is to highlight that, while personal skills are important, the combination of artistic and production work and the challenges the combination entails can also be understood, discussed and studied more as a structural feature of contemporary artistic labor rather than an individual

issue. By centering artists' lived experiences, the study shifts attention from personal adaptation to the systems and conditions that shape artistic work. In this context, discussions that focus narrowly on skills risk reinforcing an individualizing perspective, placing responsibility on artists to adapt rather than addressing structural conditions.

By combining interview findings, reflective insight, and theoretical framing, this study demonstrates that supporting artists meaningfully requires structural change as well as recognition of the complex realities of artists work and in this case, combining creative and production responsibilities. To conclude, the challenges are not merely inherent to artistic work itself but are shaped by the conditions in which creativity is practiced.

Key findings in short:

Combining art and production work is simultaneously supporting and burdening: Activities such as planning, securing funding, and managing administrative tasks are often essential for supporting creative practice, yet they require substantial time, energy, and responsibility, taking time from making art, affecting wellbeing.

Structural conditions shape artistic experiences: Funding systems, short-term contracts, fragmented work and stiff definitions of work create systemic challenges that affect artists' work, highlighting obstacles in the environment rather than pointing to individual skills of artists.

Recognition and support are crucial: Insufficient societal appreciation and limited institutional support contribute to undervaluation, insecurity, and stress, affecting both the perception and sustainability of artistic work.

Collaboration and producer support matter: Participants emphasized the importance of collaboration and support from producers, raising questions about how systemic changes could make these forms of support more possible and accessible.

Wellbeing is context-dependent: Artistic work is highly meaningful, but high workloads, financial instability, and lack of support structures can undermine sustainability and overall wellbeing.

Artists envision systemic change: Participants imagine futures characterized by collaborative practices, financial stability, slower phased work, long-term partnerships, supportive structures and environments where working as an artist is sustainable and not a struggle for survival.

Theoretical insight: The combination of artistic and production responsibilities can be understood and discussed as a structural feature of contemporary artistic labor. Discussing the topic this way focuses on systemic conditions, framing discussions of artistic work around the need to support meaningful structural change.

5.3 Managerial implications

The findings of this study have several implications for how artistic work is discussed and supported.

First, the results indicate a clear need for increased structural support. Artists are often required to work on extensive responsibilities due to a lack of resources, which affects both workload and the ability to focus on artistic work. Providing access for example to administrative support and longer-term collaboration structures could reduce this burden.

Second, funding systems should better recognize the full scope of artistic work and all tasks and processes it entails. Preparatory tasks are essential for making artistic work possible, yet they are often insufficiently compensated.

Third, the findings highlight the importance of recognition of artistic work as work and a career. Lack of recognition contributes to mental and physical insecurity, unpaid labour, and challenges in professional wellbeing. Strengthening recognition at institutional and societal levels would support sustainability at work and therefore overall wellbeing.

Fourth, collaboration and shared responsibility emerge as important factors. Working with for example producers or within supportive structures makes artists work manageable and sustainable. However, access to such collaboration is often limited by limited resources. Artists could be part of ideating how these kinds of collaborations could emerge and be built.

Overall, the study suggests that improving artists' working conditions requires not only supporting individuals, but further addressing the broader structural conditions that shape artistic work. Within the scope, resources and timeframe of this thesis, the aim has been to identify and articulate these needs rather than to provide concrete solutions. Further research and practical development are needed to explore how such changes could be implemented in these different contexts.

5.4 Suggestions for further research

This study provides insight into how artists experience their work, including the interplay between artistic creation and production-related responsibilities. In addition to highlighting these experiences, the findings point to several important directions for future research, particularly regarding how structural conditions, recognition, and support systems shape artists' work and wellbeing.

First, future research could expand the scope of this study by including a larger and more diverse group of artists working in art and production across different artistic fields in Finland. This would make it possible to examine whether the experiences identified here are shared more broadly and how they may vary between disciplines, career stages, or working contexts.

Second, further research could continue to explore artists' lived experiences of art and production work and artists' work overall, as a way of developing a more grounded understanding of artistic work. This research could be made part of development work for integrating artistic labor into broader conceptions of work in Finland and to inform for example social security structures to better include and support artists.

Third, the findings of this study call for a more critical examination of how skills are discussed in relation to artistic work. Artists' skills are an important part of their practice and should continue to be studied to improve working conditions and support artists' work. However, the discussion in this thesis suggests that emphasizing individual skill development too much may overlook the broader structural conditions that shape these demands. Future research could bring light even more toward the structural factors that make such demands of skills necessary in the first place and examine how these expectations are produced and maintained, and what their implications are for sustainability and wellbeing of artists.

Finally, this study highlights the importance of distinguishing between sustainable and unsustainable working conditions. The tension is not only between artistic and production work but in having support or lacking it. Where support exists, production work can meaningfully contribute to artistic processes, yet where it is absent, production can become a burden. Future studies could examine these differences more systematically, providing insight into how sustainable models of artistic work can be developed and supported over time.

By exploring these areas, future research can deepen the understanding of both the structural and lived realities of artists and their work, while providing insights that support improvements in working conditions and wellbeing in the arts. As Houni and Ansio (2023) point out, it is misleading to describe an artist's weak socio-economic position as a simple "career choice," and such a limited view should be questioned from the start (p. 234). By challenging and reframing these perspectives, we can begin to imagine and build better conditions for artists working in Finland.

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