

**TURKISH CULTURAL POLICY REPORT  
A CIVIL PERSPECTIVE**

**CONFERENCE TALKS  
(25-26 MARCH 2011)  
AND  
SUMMARY REPORT**

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# Conditions For Artistic Creativity

## I. OVERVIEW

This chapter discusses problems common to many fields and provides recommendations as to how to solve them. The disciplines covered here are the visual arts, the performing arts and literature.<sup>1</sup> In preparing this chapter, focus group meetings with approximately forty artists were held and personal interviews with professionals working in the field were conducted. Projects were carried out, meetings held, draft legislation drawn up and articles on the topic were written and examined by entrepreneurial groups, civil society organizations, artists and professionals.<sup>2</sup> Taking “the artist” as its point of de-

- <sup>1</sup> Included as part of the visual arts are the plastic arts (painting, sculpture ceramics, photography, graphic arts, which are not user or product focused) and all areas of modern/contemporary art; the performing arts are taken to cover theatre and dance, cinema and music – which, through its performance, focuses solely on the artist. For problems in the music and cinema industry, see the Culture Industries chapter.
- <sup>2</sup> For example, in 1991, the International Association of Plastic Arts (UNESDOC) held meetings entitled “Rights of the Artist”. The subjects discussed at the meetings were the free circulation of art and cultural products, providing artists with health and retirement insurance, issuing them special passports, establishing public-supported artist residencies and workshops, providing art tax exemptions and ensuring central government support to all areas of art on the basis of the same criteria. Another project carried out through the initiatives of the UNESDOC is “Artist Councils”. These Councils, later continuing under the “Independent Art Council”, brought together 76 art and artist institutions and were organized under two headings, “creating autonomy in art” and “freedom to create”, with the aim of coordinating relations between the public, local governments and artist organizations. A protocol was signed between the Independent Art Council and the Ministry of Culture in 1995 to create the National Art Board; however, it was never implemented. Important work is being done in this area by the Contemporary Performing Arts Initiative, which

parture, this chapter aims to identify the main problems affecting the production of art and creativity, and to suggest ways of resolving them. Issues such as art sponsorship and copyright are dealt with in other chapters of this report; in this chapter they are simply referred to as problems.

Artistic production in Turkey surged during the 1960s and 1970s. With the development of information technology, the inclusion of local cultural values in mainstream culture, and the rise of pop culture and global neoliberal cultural policies after 1980, art production and its environment underwent a huge transformation. The private sector assumed a more active role in the field of art: new venues appeared, organizations and initiatives were founded, new media and experimental techniques were explored and a more extensive dialogue with the international art community began. Central government had a limited role to play in many fields of art; from the Ministry to local governments, the national culture policy supported the production of classic or traditional art despite its restricted budget. The post-1980 global cultural transformation was also a factor in the government's incentive system.

## II. ASSESSMENTS AND PROBLEMS

### A. Artists

In Turkey, artists working as civil servants can be employed in art or performance groups, orchestras, universities (as a faculty member in one of the branches of art) and other similar institutions or groups. However, the number of civil servant jobs is insufficient. Sometimes authorization for even the minimum number of positions required to form a group or orchestra cannot be obtained. Being employed as a civil servant enables artists to work until retirement age and receive a regular salary. However, lack of proper employment provision prevents artists – even those who, for example, are too old or unable to work – from retirement. The capacity of these institutions to hire new graduates and young artists is limited, resulting in many professional artists working as “guest artists.” Therefore, artists working for the state have to take on extra work to supplement their income. Another problem is the inequality in pay between foreign and Turkish artists. Hiring foreign artists prevents Turkish artists from developing themselves.

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includes among its members civil society organizations, associations, institutions and formations, and the newly founded Stage, Curtain, Screen and Microphone Actors Guild.

In addition to artists working as civil servants in state institutions, there are those who are independent.<sup>3</sup> The most serious problem confronted by this latter group of artists is lack of recognition. Often denied the title of “artist”, they are thus prevented from accessing the established mechanisms of social security and sponsorship. Outside the generally accepted concept of “artist”, fall all non-classical artists as well as those operating outside state institutions or those who have not been educated in state-approved schools or do not have formal training. Therefore, self-employed artists confront inequality. The economic or social problems they encounter make it impossible for them to keep producing. The government should seek to revise existing regulations that engender inequality in living and production conditions between artists – all artists should be treated and supported equally.

Moreover, measures must be taken to pave the way for new graduates and young artists. It takes a long time in most art disciplines for such artists to establish themselves and to find their niche. Nevertheless, through the creation of new spaces and autonomous organizations<sup>4</sup> supporting new types of production, room is being made for young or newly graduating artists in the world of art.

## **B. Social Rights**

Regardless of whether they work on a temporary basis for private institutions or self-employed, many artists live without insurance; they lack job security and are unable to exercise their social rights. There are practices in many European countries whereby freelance artists are provided with social security guarantees not unlike those which other occupational groups receive. These practices take many forms. In the Netherlands, artists are offered flexible conditions for social security eligibility. In Germany, institutions operating in

**3** According to the International Standard Classification of Occupations, “Writers, Producers of Artwork and Performing Artists” are included as Members of Professional Occupations in Turkey. According to the 2010 data of the Turkish Statistic Institute (TURKSTAT), there was a total of 1,541 Members of Professional Occupations “employed” in the country. However, this data does not provide sufficient information about the artist population living in Turkey. Freelance artists are considered “self employed” and their number is not known.

**4** Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture AKB held the International Gathering of Artist Initiatives in 2009 with the aim of bringing these organizations together. See C. Bakbaşı, İstanbul’un Kültür Ekonomisindeki gelişen sektörlerden biri: Görsel Sanatlar-Sektörel Araştırma Raporu, İstanbul Kültür Mirası ve Kültür Ekonomisi Envanteri 2010 [One of the developing sectors in Istanbul’s Culture Economy: Visual Arts-Sectoral Research Report, Istanbul Cultural Heritage and Culture Economy, December 2010], 14. [http://www.istanbulkulturenvanteri.gov.tr/files/ya-yinlar/ISTANBULDA\\_GORSEL\\_SANATLAR.pdf](http://www.istanbulkulturenvanteri.gov.tr/files/ya-yinlar/ISTANBULDA_GORSEL_SANATLAR.pdf), [accessed on: 15 February 2011].

the fields of art and culture are permitted to pay the insurance premiums of freelance artists and to create special funds for these artists. In Belgium, incentives such as reduced premiums are offered by central government to employers who insure artists. Finally, in Bulgaria and Croatia an artist – self-employed or otherwise – whose earnings from a set period in the year match the annual average wage of an “employed” artist, can benefit from insurance.

### **C. Support to Art**

Central government in Turkey supports mostly classical and traditional forms of art. Although it is true that after the 1980s there was a marked increase in the support of art from the private sector, this provision is still inadequate. More often than not, artists have to rely on their own resources for the production of their work. There is therefore a clear need for a system of funding and grants open to all artists and disciplines indiscriminately according to a pre-defined policy, as well as to autonomous boards which support all social and cultural identities, all disciplines, approaches and institutions within the field of art.

### **D. Interference in Art**

One of the most significant problems affecting the artist and the production of art is state interference in the field of art. Requests for permission for exhibitions are not granted, or exhibitions are banned outright, for reasons such as transmitting a political message which does not conform to national culture, carrying the “vestiges of the former regime”, being immoral, creating “inter-class antagonism”, “deprecating the military”, “containing slang”, “having an unfavourable impact on the security forces”, “being pornographic”, “being insensitive to ethical considerations”, “having a potentially negative impact on the people”, and “undermining the integrity of the nation-state and its history”. Moreover, some artists are prosecuted for the ideas contained in their works. At times, these factors give rise to auto-censorship and, by serving as an example to other artists, have a negative impact on production.

The critical and exclusionist disposition of central government and the prevailing political stance towards art work with ethnic or political content as well as towards contemporary art in general, has had an impact on certain segments of society. It opens the floodgates to the occasional violent reaction to the production of art, claiming, for example, that it undermines “general morale and beliefs” and the “integrity of the nation-state and its history”.

### **E. Art Education**

Art education in Turkey is provided by faculties of art (Fine Art, Art and Design, Art and Social Sciences) in public and private foundation universities and conservatories, and, at high school level, by public high schools of fine arts. Public universities, in particular, have inadequate infrastructure and technical capacity due to budget limitations. With respect to curriculum and teaching methods, the education provided has closely adhered to classical art practice. After the 1990s, however, with the training of the new generation, there has been an evolution towards a curriculum containing modern methods. Nevertheless, this has not been the case for all educational institutions; art education has had a hard time catching up with contemporary approaches.

Fine arts and music education is also offered in primary and secondary schools. But, due to insufficient infrastructure, these classes lack suitable workshops, so they fail to provide adequate instruction even in classical art.

### **F. Memory, Criticism and Publication**

Many difficulties are confronted in preserving artistic memory; moreover, efforts to maintain a record of art production carried out in the present are fragmented. There is no institution or institutionalized location serving as a repository for the memory of the works of contemporary artists. The job of creating memory in the field of art production is generally being undertaken by private institutions and, as far as resources permit, by citizens.

Another important factor, painfully absent but which has an impact on artists' production, is the institutionalization of criticism. There are very few objective publications devoted to criticism, which could make a contribution to the field. There are many reasons for this, the primary being that in the world of art, artists and critics are inextricably linked. There is a dearth of publications in which critics can voice their opinions and there are no institutions where they can receive training. Critics in the written media generally follow current events; their critiques are subjective and discussion is generally avoided.

Independent publications operating in the field are founded on a long-established history of journal publishing. However, problems such as financing and the monopolization of distribution have rendered them unworkable. The development of blogs and e-journals over the internet is a recent phenomenon. These new channels, which provide both criticism and examples of works, offer broadcasting autonomy. Moreover, the distribution network

over the internet is extensive. Similarly, many artists represent themselves through personal websites and blogs. Thus, the internet provides a common platform and enables the communication between many local and international artists.

### **G. The Dissemination of Production and Organizations**

Art is for the most part an urban phenomenon in Turkey. It is clear that there is a need for the establishment of a nationwide network enabling access and participation in culture and the support and development of artistic production in the country. To this end, through the support of civil society organizations, private persons and, sometimes, local governments, projects in different cities are being carried out and new spaces for art are being established. Their increase is crucial to the dissemination of the production of art of all kinds and from all disciplines. Efforts should extend to the field of education and be encouraged through the measures taken by central and local governments. This will also increase access to and participation in culture.

The large number of art collectives operating in the various spheres of art need to form links with civil society organizations. They should be impartial in their activities and in the support they provide, and should ensure the efficiency of autonomous institutions and the autonomous institutions which will be established, will include all disciplines and all forms of art.

## **III. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **A. Central Administration and Art**

- Central administration should eliminate all legal and administrative obstacles to allow art to be freely created and freely exhibited in the public space. The artist's freedom of expression should be guaranteed by the state.
- All decisions, measures and regulations concerning art and artists should be the product of cooperation and dialogue. The partners in this dialogue should include: central government, civil society organizations, artist organizations, art educators, the private sector engaged in the field of art, and artists.
- Art institutions operating under the auspices of central administration should be given autonomy. The choice of repertoire and staff for the needs of artists and projects should be left to the discretion of the art directors.

- Central administration should open doors to young authors, composers and artists. New works should be admitted to repertoires, to exhibitions and collections. Additional resources for the development of projects should be provided. Such changes will serve as incentives to the production of unique work and encourage creativity.
- Central administration should do all that is needed to achieve modernization in the area of art by renovating the infrastructure of spaces with institutional memory. Priority should be given to museums, library archives and the like. Catalogues of works should be revamped and digitally reproduced.

### **B. Support to the Art and Artist**

- Assistance should be given for the establishment of artist initiatives adopting contemporary and experimental approaches, as well as for the sustainability of existing ones.
- A special support programme for freelance artists should be developed. An “Autonomous Artists Support Fund” could be formed for this purpose with specially dedicated resources. To this end, the continuation of the activities of independent art institutions and initiatives should be facilitated by taking measures, both administrative (e.g., licensing or a new form of organization other than an association or foundation) and economic (e.g., tax exemptions, reductions to social security contributions). The support to be provided must not be limited to a particular institution or activity. Efforts should be made to open the doors to young artists and to enable the production initiatives of artists and others working independently. In this regard, support mechanisms for artists need to be put in place (for example, residencies, studios and workshops). The same goes for staging, rehearsals, recordings, tours and mobility.
- Special support should be provided for the new forms of art and contemporary forms of production that emerged post 1980s which through the aesthetics created and the technologies used, become transdisciplinary in the 2000s. Their growth led them to contribute to the social and cultural creativity by developing new styles of communication with the audience.

### **C. Legal Regulations**

- Legal provision should be made entitling social security to all artists and facilitating all stages of the creative process.

- Obstacles to the protection of copyrights and inadequacies in existing regulations should be eliminated. New ways of expression via the internet should be given support and autonomous work promoted.
- Private individuals and institutions backing art and artists should be encouraged and legal regulations facilitating such support should be put in place.

#### **D. Art Education Policy**

- Primary and high school art classes should be revised by an autonomous board consisting of experts in children and youth education as well as experts in art education. A new curriculum should be developed providing equal opportunity to all students and encouraging participation and creativity.
- It is vital that incentives be made to implement a contemporary curriculum at university level and that alternative educational mechanisms are encouraged. Following developments in art worldwide and becoming innovative, experimental and interdisciplinary should be the crucial criteria of art education.

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