

# Connecting the Dots: Fair Arts Practice in Contexts

by Phoo Myat Thwe, Kai Brennert & Tanlume Enyatseng



**IETM Report**

Connecting the Dots: Fair Arts Practice in Contexts

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# Introduction

## The Evolving Concept of Fair Practice in the Arts Sector

“Fair practice” is an increasingly recognised and widely discussed concept across the global arts sector. It is viewed as a fundamental aspiration, a core organisational value or a challenge to strive for. The discourse around fairness encompasses everything from equity in remuneration and contracts to transparency in decision-making and inclusive governance. This growing recognition has led to a variety of responses from different cultural ecosystems. Numerous sectors and disciplines have independently developed comprehensive charters, codes of conduct, and guidelines to codify fair-practice principles. Simultaneously, governments and institutions have introduced various measures, pilot programmes, and policy experiments — with notable examples such as the Fairness Codex in Austria, Paying the Artist Policy of the Arts Council Ireland, and Artists Welfare Programme in Korea — to address systemic inequities and promote better treatment of cultural workers.

Despite cross-border efforts towards fairer practices, the vast differences in legal frameworks, economic conditions, funding models, and cultural norms across contexts suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach would not work in different countries and realities. This recognition of complexity was the driving force behind this research. Our goal was to investigate the lived reality of fair practice in different cultural landscapes. We examine **how members of the arts community interact with one another** within various independent structures. This research focuses on the internal dynamics and mutual relationships found in artist collectives, independent arts organisations, grassroots arts spaces, and festivals. **It is a dedicated study of intra-community ethics, rather than an examination of the treatment cultural workers receive from funders and government policymakers.**

The core inquiry guiding our investigation was multifaceted:

*What are the specific ‘fair’ practices cultural actors are applying on a day-to-day basis?*

*How do they successfully establish, operationalise, and sustain these mechanisms in their local contexts?*

*What specific organisational, economic, or social challenges did they overcome to implement their model of fairness?*

*And finally, what tangible or intangible results and impacts are they currently observing from these practices within their communities?*

By answering these questions, we aim to provide a more nuanced and practice-based understanding of fairness in the global arts ecology. This research deep-dives into a selection of particularly fascinating, innovative and context-specific practices that promote fair relationships in the cultural sector and directly benefit artists and cultural workers. The contextual realities you will discover within these pages offer a compelling mosaic of how the arts, artists, and cultural workers are valued across different global contexts.

In an attempt to infuse artistic intelligence into our research process, we initiated an artist-in-residence programme. The artist-in-residence, Tanlume Enyatseng, conducted independent research and collected reflections grounded in his lived experiences in Botswana and the wider Southern African region. The residency aimed to provide a platform for artists with experience in research-based practice to reflect upon their immediate communities and fair practices from a personal, lived-experience perspective, contrary to the “outside-in” perspective that the broader research might portray. Through this parallel methodology of research and artistic inquiry, we want to ensure inclusion of diverse perspectives within this work. The convergence of findings from two separate inquiries - through interviews with participants from selected case studies for broad research, and artists’ self-reflection notes and interviews with colleagues from the artist’s community - resulted in a collective reflection at the end of the report, titled “In Conversation: What works, what doesn’t, tensions, and challenges.” The outcome, we hope, is aligned with the central theme of the artist-in-residence, Tanlume Enyatseng’s work—the Kgotla, a traditional public forum in Botswana for community decision-making, where “everyone’s words can be beautiful.”

This report serves as a conscious learning exercise, building upon and complementing the previous IETM research dedicated to this topic. Our ambition is that this initiative will foster greater exchange, deeper understanding, and enhanced cooperation across continents, providing a vital foundation as IETM looks ahead to its 2026 Fair Arts School.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all our research participants. Their willingness to share their valuable practices, honest reflections, and precious time has been instrumental in creating this document. We are particularly pleased to note that many welcomed this dedicated space for reflection that is often difficult to afford amidst the demanding, day-to-day operations of the cultural sector.

# Methodology

This research was conceptualised as a collection of case studies of fair practices in the arts, augmented with analysis and reflection. In order to increase cross-disciplinary and global learning, we deliberately did not limit ourselves to performing arts, and included practices across other artistic disciplines.

## Research Questions

In collaboration with IETM, the following research questions were devised:

*What is considered “fair” in different regions and organisational cultures?*

*What are some innovative and context-specific fair practices in the arts?*

*What are the enablers and obstacles of implementing fair practices in the arts?*

*How are fair practices introduced, maintained, and translated across contexts?*

*Who defines what is “fair” — and how is fairness framed, negotiated, or challenged?*

*How do non-human agents (such as land, nature, and climate) fit into ideas of fairness?*

## Survey

To source a wide variety of innovative and impactful practices, we initially launched an online survey for IETM members and the wider public. The 35 responses, which gave us a good overview of fair practices in the arts in Europe, prompted us to activate our own artistic networks around the world to identify more relevant cases. We also mapped insights from the survey results and additional desk research into a ‘network of fair practices’, allowing us to see what kind of ‘fairness elements’ often occur in conjunction with one another.

## Case Studies

The five selected case studies include three collectives, one festival, and one arts institution/residency/venue from Cambodia, Chile, Indonesia, Malaysia, and South Korea. We conducted one in-depth interview with each of the organisations, before summarising how we have understood the mechanisms and contexts of their fair practices in writing and diagrams.

These notes and graphics were shared with the organisations for comments, clarifications, and nuances. Some interviewees shared additional material with us that helped us to understand their history and values better.

The focus of the conversations was not just on the actual practices but also on how they came about, what challenges were encountered in realising their implementation, what compromises were made, and what impact they generated. We also needed to understand in what societal context they emerged and what the artists and cultural workers understood as fair.

We prioritised fluidity and participatory agency in our case study interviews. The conversations moved away from a strict adherence to the pre-set question framework. We embraced spontaneity and allowed the discussion to evolve based on the participants’ concerns and priorities.

We actively created space for the participants to question the interview questions themselves—to challenge our assumptions and terminology. This allowed them to redirect the conversations to areas they believed were most significant, meaningful, and reflective of their actual practice. The goal was to understand their reality, not to fit their reality into our pre-defined conceptual boxes.

## Artist-in-Residence

In an experiment of infusing more artistic intelligence into research and arts managerial practice, we launched a closed call for an artist in residence to join our project. The paid residency invited creative and critical engagement alongside an empirical research project to investigate, question, and creatively respond to how fairness manifests in the structures, relationships, and ethics of artistic and cultural work. The residency encouraged a self-directed inquiry that could take any artistic form. Six strong proposals from various disciplines and continents were received. The selected artist-in-residence is Tanlume Enyatseng—journalist, cultural producer and curator from Botswana.

We approached the artist residency from the perspective that an artist who is embedded in an arts scene and actively defining and exploring what fairness means within their own practice and ecology would provide a valuable methodological complement to external researchers examining these practices. We saw this as an approach with mutual benefits: the artist gains the opportunity to reflect on fairness within their community and to produce a resource that others in the same community can learn from, while we, as researchers, benefit from an artist’s perspective in interpreting our data.

Our weekly conversations with Tanlume centred on exchanging ideas about methodologies, sharing emerging thoughts, collectively selecting initiatives for case studies, and discussing interview approaches, as we became increasingly aware of the sensitivity of the fairness topic throughout the process.

In his own residency, the *kgotla* emerged as a concept in Tanlume Enyatseng's work, where "everyone's words are beautiful." A *kgotla* is a traditional, public community forum in Botswana (and parts of Southern Africa) serving as a social, administrative, and judicial centre, functioning as a town hall where chiefs, elders, and citizens meet to discuss public matters, make community decisions, resolve disputes, and implement policies through open, consensus-based debate, embodying participatory democracy. The consensus-based process involves an open debate where all members are free to speak, voice concerns, and propose solutions without interruption. Decisions are made through a collective agreement, emphasising consensus over a simple majority vote. This is supported by two-way communication, ensuring officials both inform the community and receive feedback from them. In Tanlume's Zine, the *kgotla* emerges as a curatorial and methodological approach: a way of gathering, listening, and learning together that centres collective sense-making as cultural work.

Following this method, Tanlume did a self-reflected exercise on fairness regarding his own collective, Banana Club - a non-profit cultural organisation working at the intersection of contemporary art, culture, and social justice. On top of this reflection, he conducted interviews with the artist collectives and art projects from Southern African regions. The participants included

- **TBP Artist Collective, Botswana**  
"The Botswana Pavillion" Artist Collective - a collective platform for international visibility and exchange.
- **LAPA Project and Residency Space, South Africa**  
LAPA is a communal, experimental public project with a co-working office, reading room and residency.
- **ULAYO, Mozambique**  
A festival built for visibility.

## Virtual Meet-up

Many interviewees valued the opportunity to reflect on their own practices. When learning about the research, they also expressed a desire to connect with the other research participants and learn from one another. We offered to host a virtual meet-up for all research participants to facilitate connection and collective learning. As researchers, we want to ensure we create value for our participants as well through networking or exchanging fair practices across borders.

## Fair Practices in Research

Striving for fair practices in research, we reflected upon our methods and how to treat each other more fairly. As research can often be extractive, we invited our case study participants from the very beginning to let us know if we can support them with anything through this research, for example, by creating written assets that can be reproduced in grant-writing or communication. Participants have requested to use our case-studies write-up and diagrams of their practices in presentations about their work.

For the same reason, we deliberately build in feedback loops for research participants to stay in control of the narrative. We sent participants our reflection notes and finished drafts continuously during the writing period. Facilitating a space for all research participants to connect and share was another opportunity we wanted to enable once we realised the demand. As of January 2026, we planned an online *kgotla* for participants to meet, network and share their practices. Since commissioned research and artistic practice have different mechanisms, we also made a conscious choice in our contract with the artist-in-residence to ensure that he retains all intellectual property rights to his work.



Photo credit: Ruangrupa, Tebet Barat, 2003

# Key Reflections and Future Forward Questions

## Reflections

The following are our key reflections combined from the broad research and artistic research from the residency.

### 1. Rethinking “Fair Practice” through the lens of “Everyday Resilience”

Our initial understanding of fairness was a set of defined rules or principles that individuals are expected to follow. Therefore, our research questions were also centred around probing how these rules were introduced and whether they are working in each context. However, during the research interviews, this perspective proved to be too narrow and prescriptive. Several participants voiced a profound discomfort or difficulty in using the singular term, “Fair practice” or “Fairness,” to encompass the totality and nuance of their complex daily practices. This struggle was rooted in:

- Association with formal systems: For some, “fairness” is irrevocably linked to formal justice or court systems, connoting a sense of legal judgment, adjudication, and absolute right or wrong. Therefore, discussing their practice through a “fair practice” lens is at times difficult to articulate, as they imagine their grassroots practices as something fluid and changing, as opposed to settled systems.

- The Burden of Measurement imposed from the outside: “Fairness” was seen by some as a rigid ruler or measuring stick imposed from the outside. They felt that the word and the questions the researchers posed placed a burden on them to constantly measure whether their existing, organically developed practices were “fair” according to an external standard. This forced categorisation could not encompass the complex, relational, and adaptive nature of their actions.

Many research participants did not initially perceive or articulate their own practices as being “fair.” The case studies were selected by the authors who then approached the implementers with an invitation to explore their practices through a fair practice lens. The research process itself, therefore, became a reflective space. By engaging in dialogue, participants were allowed to step back and recognise their practices.

On the other hand, as researchers, we came to a crucial understanding that, in the lived experiences of our participants, fairness does not come forward as morals or ethics to abide by, but as daily negotiations that adapt to their realities. Fairness is a concept that is changing, fluid and adaptable every day, which contributes to their resilience, practical survival, and sustainability of their practice.



Photo credit: Version 2020 performance, at Theater Commons Tokyo, 2018, photo by Masahiro Hasunuma

## 2. Fairness as a Continuous, Operational Challenge

Maintaining “Fairness” is an ongoing operational challenge. In grassroots art spaces, where resources are scarce, and consensus is key, or in collective practices, where power dynamics are constantly negotiated, fairness is not a status to be achieved but a demanding process to continuously strive for, requiring constant reflection, adaptation, and everyday negotiations. What feels fair in one moment, scale, or context may become insufficient or irrelevant as conditions change. The future of fair practice, therefore, depends less on fixed models and more on the capacity of organisations and practitioners to remain responsive, self-critical, and accountable to their communities.

Sustainability of the practice stood out as the primary challenge for most case studies, whether in financial, human resources, management, or governance structure. To ensure the wider and longer adaptation of the practice, building trust is essential. This trust must be cultivated over time across multiple levels: with funders to secure financial resources, between the individuals within the collective or the staff of participating organisations, and among the team members who are directly initiating the practice.

## 3. As fair practices gain visibility and legitimacy, there is a risk that they are reduced to checklists, policies, or symbolic gestures, detached from the relational work that sustains them.

The research points to the importance of redefining success. Many collectives and organisations continue to operate within value systems shaped by growth, visibility, and productivity, even when these metrics conflict with care and sustainability. As practices age, there is a tension between evolving commitments and procedures that capture them. The challenge moving forward is how to retain the spirit of care, slowness, and dialogue as practices scale, formalise, or enter institutional frameworks.

A fairer future may require different measures of success - ones that account for longevity, well-being, and the quality of relationships rather than output alone.

## 4. There’s a need to think more expansively about who takes part in shaping the future of fair practice.

Youth, emerging practitioners, queer and marginalised artists, and those working outside major urban centres often carry the consequences of unfair systems most acutely, yet have the least influence over how those systems evolve. Ensuring that future frameworks are shaped with, rather than for, these communities remains an ongoing ethical task.



Photo credit: Projek Angkat Rumah, participatory house carrying project in central KL, 2010, photo by Tan Siong King

# Future Forward Questions

## Questions from Broad Research

From the case study deep-dives, several questions emerge across varying contexts.

- How do we create economic structures that actually fit care-centred, fluid consensus-based work practices that are constantly negotiated and only done in agreement between individuals, rather than forcing them into frameworks that demand legibility, hierarchy, and measurable outputs?
- In grassroots initiatives, how do we build fair infrastructures that outlast the individuals who initiated them to ensure longevity? How do we pass on the legacy?
- Can fair practices travel across contexts, or are they fundamentally place-bound? What is actually transferable—principles, attitudes, specific mechanisms—and what must be reinvented each time?
- How do we negotiate hidden expectations, unclear accountability, and the quiet dominance and ambiguity in collective decision-making?

## Questions from Artistic Research

Across the case studies, several recurring questions surfaced — often implicitly, sometimes explicitly — reflecting shared uncertainties about the future:

- How do we sustain fair practices when funding cycles remain short-term and unstable?
- How do we remain accountable to our communities while engaging with international partners and funders?
- How do we ensure that fairness does not rely on the efforts or goodwill of a few individuals?
- How do we document and transmit fair practices to future practitioners without fixing them into rigid templates?
- How do we create room for disagreement and failure without undermining trust?

These questions do not point toward a single solution. Instead, they invite continued reflection, experimentation, and dialogue. In this sense, a fairer future is not something to be designed in advance, but something to be practised, questioned, and re-negotiated together.



Photo credit: ItSelf TerJadi performance, Five Arts Centre studio KL, 2023, photo by Kubhaer T. Jethwani

# People

## edgeandstory

edgeandstory is a creative studio for data-driven insight into arts, culture, heritage, and the creative industries in the context of sustainable development. edgeandstory designs evaluations, conducts research, crafts strategy, and facilitates cultural policy processes that expand learning and impact. edgeandstory wants to challenge the status quo and spark imagination for better futures with culture at its core.

[edgeandstory.com](http://edgeandstory.com)

## Phoo Myat Thwe

As a curiosity-driven researcher, Phoo Myat helps cultural and creative organisations make sense of their impact through data-driven insights and evidence-based strategy. Her background ranges from arts management, curating, writing and research to hands-on experience with XR technologies. Originally from Myanmar and now based in Bangkok, Thailand, Phoo Myat is passionate about brainstorming creative solutions and human-centred design approaches to data sense-making.

## Tanlume Enyatseng

Tanlume Enyatseng is a journalist, cultural producer, and curator whose work bridges art, community, and cultural strategy. As the founder of Banana Emoji Studio and the curatorial platform Banana Club, he is committed to expanding how contemporary art is accessed and experienced, working across unconventional spaces, digital culture, and community-centred methodologies. In 2025, he hosted the first Banana Club Economic Inclusion Forum, a convening that introduced the concept of the Pink Pula as a framework for exploring queer economic inclusion within Botswana's cultural and creative industries. His work continues to champion alternative forms of cultural expression and meaningful cross-border exchange.

## Kai Brennert

Kai Brennert is the Founder and Director of *edgeandstory*, a creative studio for data-driven insight into arts, culture, heritage, and the creative industries in the context of sustainable development. You might find him documenting violations of artistic freedom in Southeast Asia with ArtsEquator, evaluating the membership experience of the contemporary circus and outdoor arts network Circostrada, exploring the relationship between culture and sustainable development for the British Council, or co-designing a new work plan for culture and arts for ASEAN. Kai is from Germany, lives in Cambodia, and writes the cultural policy newsletter *curious patterns*.

**edgeandstory** impact for  
culture and  
development

## Illustration

Thoughtform (report)  
Tebogo Cranwell (zine)

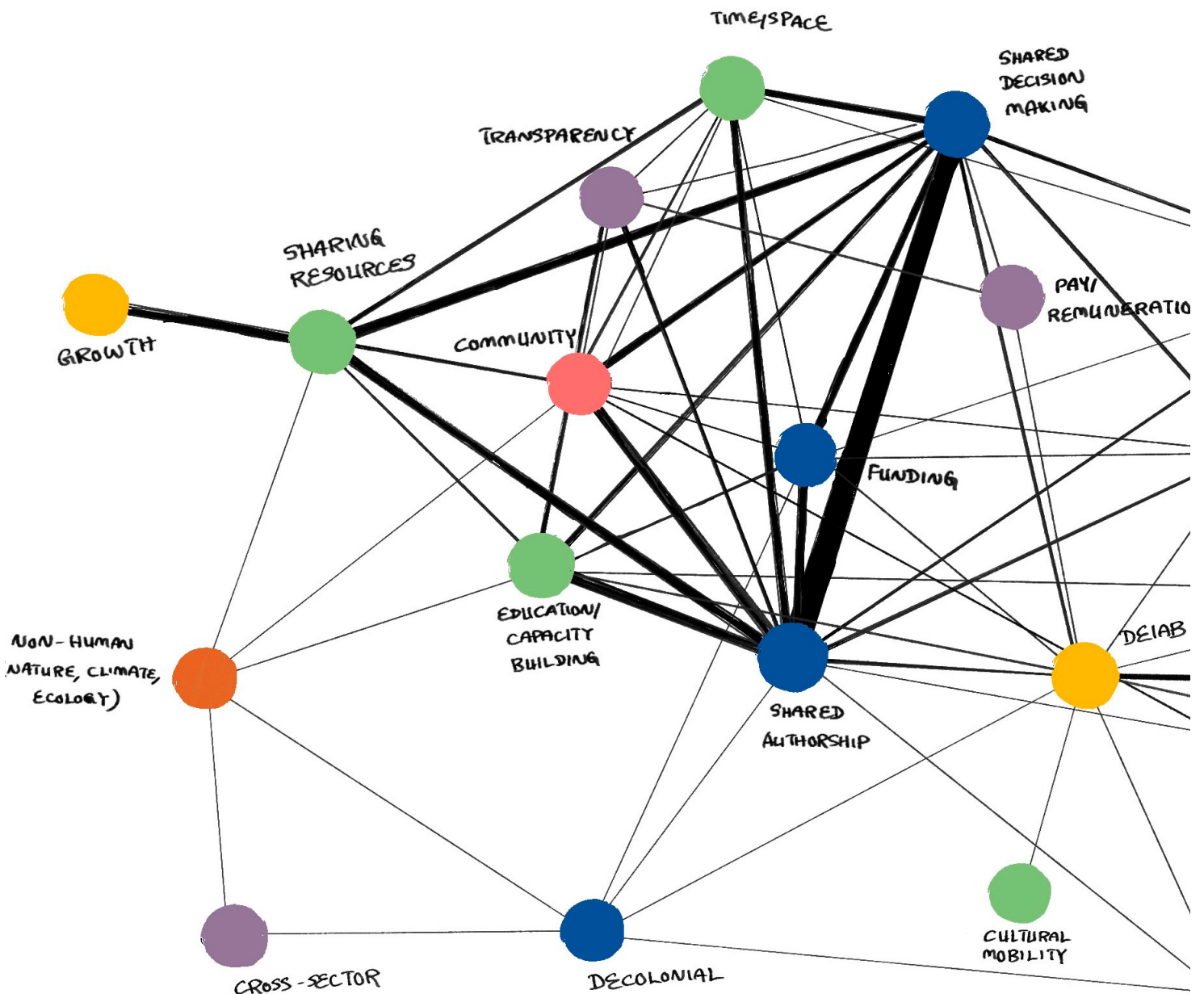
## Interviewees

Gyohee Baek (Seoul Fringe Festival)  
Mark Teh (Five Arts Centre)  
Hui Ting Hoe (Five Arts Centre)  
Sebastián de la Cuesta Gormaz (Espacio Checoeslovaquia)  
Farid Rakun (GUDSKUL)  
Sopha Neak (tiSamjort)  
Sreymao Sao (tiSamjort)  
Tola Say (tiSamjort)  
Choulay Mech (tiSamjort)  
Sereyrath Mech (tiSamjort)

## Chapter 1

# CONSTELLATION OF PRACTICES

## Emerging Themes in Fair Practices



## Where the Data Comes From

This constellation emerged from two complementary research methods. First, we conducted a survey distributed through IETM's network, inviting arts practitioners, organisations, and collectives worldwide to share their experiences of practising fairness in their contexts. The survey asked respondents to describe what fairness means in their work, what strategies they employ, and what has been working for them.

In a second step, we undertook desk research, examining existing documentation, publications, toolkits, and publicly available materials from organisations already engaged in fair practice initiatives. This allowed us to identify established models, policy frameworks, and organisational approaches. Together, the practices include both the lived, grassroots experiences of practitioners and the institutional, structural approaches.

This section aims to give broader information on types of existing practices before we deep-dive into the case studies we have selected. As this was not intended as an exhaustive mapping exercise of fair practices across the globe, our data is not extensive. However, we hope to offer insights into the work artists and cultural workers have been doing for a fairer arts and cultural scene. This data is based on an analysis of 46 practices across the globe, encompassing nine distinct themes across interpersonal dynamics, organisational policies, and institutional frameworks.

## Macro and Micro Practices

Fair practices can operate at different scales:

### Macro Practices

These are systemic, structural interventions that affect entire organisations, sectors, or ecosystems. They require institutional commitment, policy development, and long-term implementation. Macro practices reshape the conditions within which many people work.

An example from our mapping research:

- [The Korea Artists Welfare Foundation](#) provides a support infrastructure ranging from activity support and living stabilisation, to pension programmes and legal advice.

### Micro Practices

These are relational, interpersonal interventions that happen in the day-to-day interactions between individuals and smaller organised groups (collectives, independent art spaces). Micro practices change how people experience working together. An example:

- [GUDSKUL](#) (Indonesia) practices an assembly model for unanimous decision-making, being an ecosystem where every resource (money, programmes, equipment) is pooled and shared with decisions made collectively across a diverse ecosystem of artists, curators, and practitioners. The key to a successful assembly, according to GUDSKUL, is to understand people's dynamics.

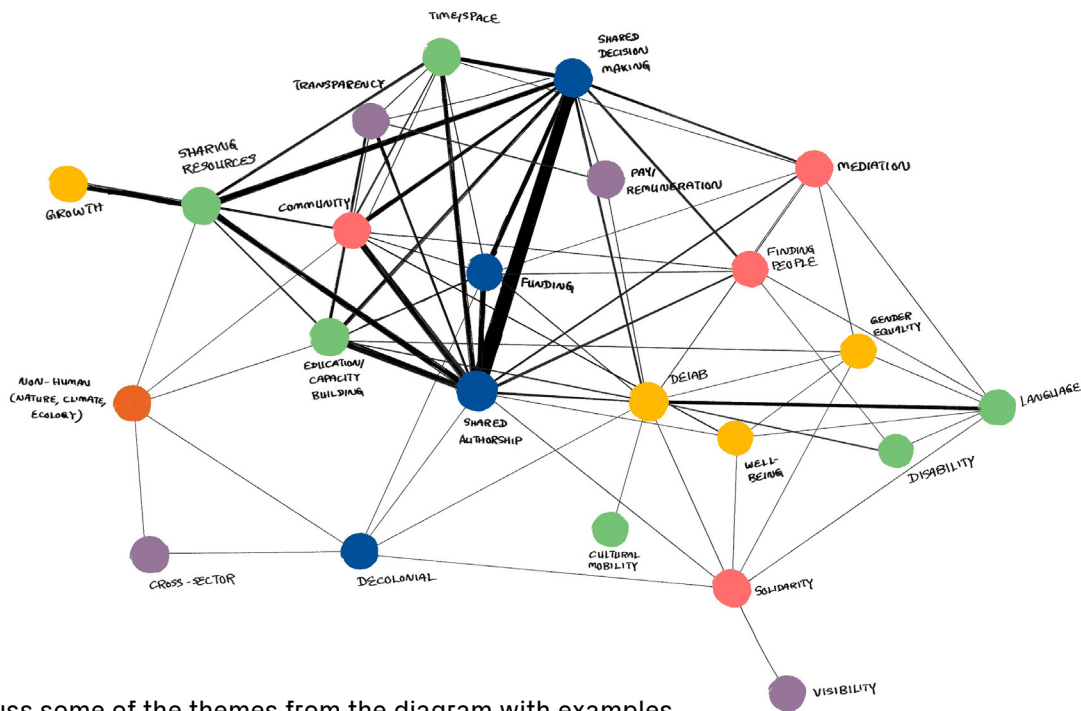
## How Practices are Categorised

Seeing how practices can be diverse from the structural level to the interpersonal level, we clustered them into four main categories, each representing a different level at which fairness is practiced:

- **Interpersonal Dynamics / Collective Practices**  
This category focuses on grassroots, collective-led, and community-centric approaches, often operating outside of large institutional frameworks. These are the practices that emerge when artists and practitioners organise themselves—creating their own systems, protocols, and ways of working together. Examples include peer-led programming, collaborative decision-making processes, and resource-sharing collectives.
- **Organisational Practices**  
Here we find structural approaches developed by organisations to share resources, knowledge, and infrastructure.
- **Policies**  
This category focuses on fair practice policies adopted by cultural institutions and relevant government sectors.
- **Non-Human Fairness**  
A distinct category emerged around practices that recognise nature, climate, and ecology as stakeholders deserving fairness and care. These practices expand our understanding of fairness beyond human relationships and include the living world.

## Themes That Emerged

Across these categories, we identified several interconnected themes. These themes reflect the diverse strategies organisations and practitioners are employing to advance fairness in the arts. The following diagram visualises the themes that emerged.



Below we discuss some of the themes from the diagram with examples.

### DEIAB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility, Belonging)

This theme encompasses comprehensive approaches to creating inclusive arts spaces.

### Gender Equality

Addressing gender-based disparities in the arts. Example:

Otros Ojos (Mexico) provides gender consultancy to entertainment professionals, reviewing scripts and running workshops to ensure nuanced portrayals—understanding gender broadly through an intersectional lens.

### Accessibility

This theme encompasses strategies for removing barriers that prevent people from participating in arts and culture, whether those barriers are linguistic, physical, financial, geographical, or educational.

1. **Language:** Efforts to ensure linguistic diversity and inclusion.

2. **Disability Considerations:** Practices that proactively include disabled practitioners. Example:

Creating job descriptions/ ad language not only in written formats but in video or audio, allowing people with different abilities to apply, and listing job postings on a range of sites intended for disabled individuals.

3. **Time/Space:** Creating physical and temporal conditions for participation. Examples:

tiSamjort (Cambodia) provides free out-of-town artist accommodation and help in networking with the local art scene.

Collectives like tiSamjort (Cambodia) and GUDSKUL (Indonesia) negotiate time contributions based on individual career needs and financial risks.

Members can contribute less time if they need to prioritise personal, income-generating projects. There are no fixed rules; those in a better financial position are happy to contribute more, ensuring inclusivity and reducing pressure on all members.

4. **Education/Capacity Building:** Investing in skill development, particularly for underrepresented groups.

5. **Sharing Resources:** Pooling and redistributing resources collectively. Examples:

GUDSKUL (Indonesia) operates an ecosystem where financial resources, programs, equipment, and space are shared according to need.

Shared Leadership in Dance (Germany) shares knowledge, working spaces and responsibility with the aim of sustainable artistic production

**6. Cultural Mobility:** Addressing barriers to international movement and exchange. Example:

To enable cultural institutions in Germany to find new partners in non-European countries and implement long-term artistic projects, the German Federal Cultural Foundation launched the programme WAYS – Towards Fair and Sustainable International Partnerships. WAYS helps cultural institutions and independent groups in Germany to establish long-term artistic collaborations with non-European partners, especially from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, Oceania, and Central-, South- and Southeast Asia and to carry out joint projects over a period of years. A central focus of collaboration concerns fairness and sustainability, the terms of which the partners will jointly define, in addition to equitably developing their artistic projects.

**7. Finding People:** Reaching beyond existing networks to diversify participation. Examples:

Afri-Art Connect created Resilience in Bloom as a direct response to the invisibility of migrant, underrepresented, and racialised creatives. Strategies included: 1) peer-led programming, allowing migrant artists to shape content based on their needs, 2) open call processes that prioritised accessibility over prestige or status, and 3) ensuring fair remuneration and non-extractive collaboration, especially for undocumented creatives.

**8. Solidarity:** Actions that build collective support and mutual aid within the arts community. Examples:

The Freelance Dance Ensemble Berlin (Germany) is a loose collective of artists and practitioners in the field of contemporary dance/performance that has developed a website to honour their colleagues, highlighting the complexity of their work, and fight against the looming budgetary disaster threatening them and their peers. The website records and archives individual practices, how they have contributed to the art scene and what could happen to these practices if financial support were discontinued.

Decentralised Autonomous Organisations (DAOs) in the Arts: artists and activists are experimenting with DAOs—blockchain-based organisational structures—to pool resources, share decision-making power, and build solidarity networks beyond traditional funding systems. While not a solution to structural precarity, these experiments offer practitioners spaces to prototype more mutualist approaches to cultural governance: placing community before profit, prioritising long-term sustainability, and giving practitioners greater agency over cultural decision-making processes.

**9. Mediation:** Practices involving intermediary roles and processes. Examples:

Reso - Swiss Dance Network created publications such as, “Glossary: Diffusion Terms,” for clear communications with standardized terminology in negotiations between funding bodies, companies, production managers, partner venues and programmers during production, “Coproduction Meeting Protocol,” a discussion guide for companies and institutions in the run-up to a planned co-production, and “Personal Rider,” a self-reflection tool and a tool for exchange with work-partners on working conditions developed by performing arts managers for all those working in the performing arts. The objective is to negotiate with respect for the wishes, skills, limits and resources of the joint working relationship. These tools aim to provide a safer, aware and fairer working environment for creatives, acting as intermediaries in discussions and negotiations.

## Decentralising Power

This theme addresses how decision-making authority, resources, and creative ownership are distributed within artist relationships, organisations and collaborations. It challenges traditional hierarchical structures in favour of more collective, equitable approaches.

**1. Financial resources:** Initiatives that redistribute financial resources and challenge existing funding structures. Example:

GUDSKUL (Indonesia) pools resources from multiple collectives into a shared ecosystem distributed according to collective need.

**2. Shared Decision Making:** Practices that involve all stakeholders in governance and programming choices. Examples:

The Seoul Fringe Festival (Korea) is exploring an autonomous agreement process where 100 artist teams collectively decide on venues and schedules through dialogue rather than through top-down allocation.

Five Arts Centre (Malaysia) employs participatory democracy in negotiating programming decisions.

**3. Shared Authorship:** Approaches that recognise collective creative contributions and intellectual ownership. Examples:

In a series of experimental research workshops, Togathering: Worldbuilding invites participants to collectively re-imagine and articulate what their ideal future world would look, smell, taste, sound, and feel like. In doing so, the artists and participants critically examine and reflect upon processes of negotiation and decision-making (within the self, with ‘the other’, and within a group)

Silent University – initiated by Ahmet Ögüt, is a knowledge exchange platform led by asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants, who are prevented from sharing their knowledge formally due to legal or structural barriers. This practice engages with fairness as redistribution of epistemic power, where participants act not as “beneficiaries” but as teachers, thinkers, and facilitators.

4. **Decolonial practices:** Efforts to dismantle colonial legacies in arts funding, aesthetics, and institutional structures. Examples:

The Seed Biblioteek (South Africa) addresses colonial intrusion on indigenous seed-keeping practices as a framework for equity.

No More! White Money (Germany) exposes neo-colonial structures in contemporary arts funding and invites audiences to imagine new rules for resource distribution.

## Non-Human

1. **Nature, Climate, Ecology:** Extending fairness beyond human relationships. Examples:

Sounds Right is a music initiative recognising the value of nature, while EarthPercent invites artists to donate a percentage of their income to address climate and nature crises. ‘Nature’ can be tagged as a ‘collaborator’ or ‘co-artist’ so that the royalties collected can be used for climate change mitigation.

Seed Biblioteek (South Africa) centres relationships between humans and seeds as non-human actors. They build community, nurture cultural practices, and expand imagination. The practice centres on seeds as a way to speak through political, social, cultural, spiritual, ecological, and cosmological values of the community.

## Pay / Remuneration

Ensuring artists and cultural workers receive fair compensation for their labour. Example:

W.A.G.E. (North America) provides a wages calculator (WAGENCY) for determining fair compensation.

## Cross-Sector

Collaborations that bridge the arts with other fields, advocating for fairness outside the arts and the broader contexts. Examples:

An AI of Our Own (AAOO) is a project dedicated to creating adaptive AI systems for portraying Global South-based knowledge effectively. It focuses on centring diverse knowledge systems and bridging the digital divide between the Global North and South, as current mainstream AI models, trained primarily on Global North data, fail to accurately represent Global South traditions, cosmologies, and epistemologies.

Seed Biblioteek (South Africa) works across cultural practices and food sovereignty.

## Visibility

Making underrepresented voices and practices visible. Example:

Freelance Dance Ensemble Berlin (Germany) emerged as artists united to advocate against budget cuts threatening their livelihoods.

## Connecting the Themes

The above-mentioned themes rarely exist in isolation. Most initiatives address multiple dimensions simultaneously—GUDSKUL, for instance, combines shared decision-making and resource sharing. The Seoul Fringe Festival’s autonomous agreement process advances both decentralised power and collective care. The Seed Biblioteek connects decolonial practice with ecological concerns. The majority of practices incorporate two or more themes simultaneously. This suggests that fairness is a multi-dimensional challenge requiring integrated solutions.

## Implications

These findings indicate that effective fair practice interventions are rarely single-issue. The most impactful approaches combine power redistribution with resource accessibility and community engagement. For policymakers and arts organisations, this suggests that funding frameworks and support structures should accommodate multi-thematic approaches.

Fairness requires systemic change across multiple fronts: who holds power, who has access, how people are compensated, how decisions are made transparent, and how care is embedded in working relationships. The practices documented here offer diverse contextual strategies for pursuing that change, while acknowledging the ongoing challenges of sustainability and the need for continued adaptation to local contexts.

## Chapter 2

# CONTEXTUALISATION

Fascinating, innovative,  
context-specific practices



Photo credit: GUDSKUL

# South Korea

## Seoul Fringe Festival

### Fascinating, innovative, context-specific practices

Seoul Fringe Festival differs fundamentally from other international fringes in that it doesn't operate as a market. Started in 1998, as an 'Independent art festival' for the needs of independent artists, producers, and audiences, Seoul Fringe Festival is run as a 100% open-access festival, relying on resource-sharing among stakeholders: artists create the work, the festival team handles operations and marketing, collaborators cover outsourced functions, and audiences provide support/funding. The festival champions freedom of speech, diversity, and respect.

Unlike other international fringe festivals, the Seoul Fringe secures performance space in bulk for artists to share, which saves artists money on venue rental but limits available venues. Bringing one's own venue is an unpopular option. Given Korea's market size and geographical/linguistic barriers, artists often use the Seoul Fringe to experiment with new work, much like a start-up.

For the last three years, the festival has replaced its traditional, month-long process where professional producers decided on venues and timetables. Instead, it is experimenting with a structure where all stakeholders are invited to collaboratively dialogue and decide on the artists' venue and schedule. The Seoul Fringe Festival has tried different methods of fair models for venue allocation. In 2024, a lottery system was introduced for space allocation as part of the transition toward a more participatory decision-making approach.

In 2025, a peer scheduling model was implemented, including the following steps:

1. **Orientation Session:** Anyone who is interested in taking part in the Seoul Fringe Festival can come and chat with the festival team. The team explains the values of the festival and the major changes of that year's edition. With this session, artists can decide whether participating in this festival would benefit them.
2. **Artists Open Call:** Anyone can register at the Seoul Fringe Festival. All they need to do is fill in a simple form about the artists and their planned artwork, and pay for the registration fee. Once the registration process is complete, all registered artists are invited to have an interview with the festival team.
3. **Pre-Meeting Individual Briefings:** Anyone who registered and paid the participation fees can be a part of the festival. Every artist receives a one-on-one interview before the collective scheduling meeting to ensure they understand the process, expectations, and ground rules for negotiation.

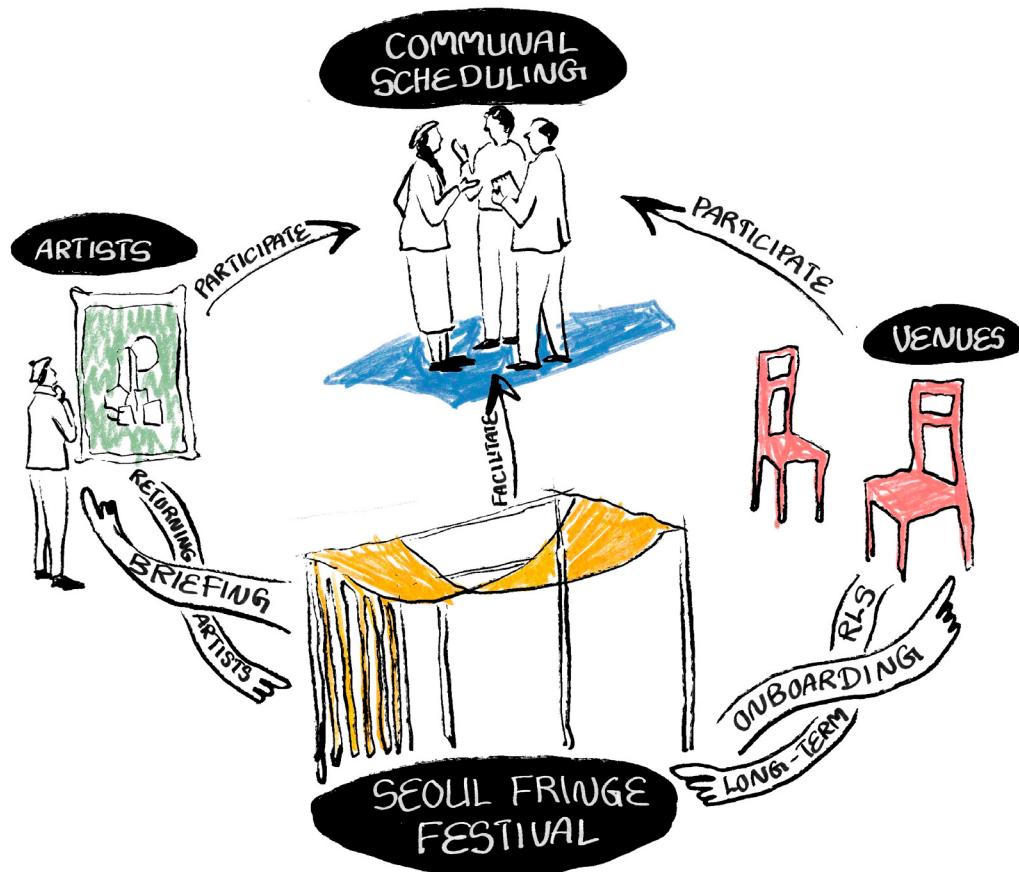
Additionally, this is the time when individual artists and the festival team establish a rapport with each other, as partners who are working together to create this festival.

After the interviews, an assembly was arranged on a day, inviting every artist and venue participating to join and discuss the schedule together. The following describes the step-by-step process of how this assembly is carried out.

- a. **Ground Rules Co-Creation:** Using digital tools like Padlet - an online post-it wall, which allows individuals (and large/small groups) to post their comments, questions, and resources in one place that is easily accessible to everyone - participants establish communication guidelines before negotiations begin, creating a framework for respectful dialogue.
- b. **Peer Scheduling Process:** Artists and venues negotiate space-sharing arrangements directly, rather than having the festival team act as an intermediary. The 2025 iteration brought all stakeholders together in one large meeting where 5-10 groups per venue collectively decided on scheduling. This replaced the previous month-long process where festival staff allocated pre-rented venues to artists.
- c. **Artist-Venue Dialogue Sessions:** All artists and venues meet together for discussions, fostering direct relationships and shared understanding of constraints and possibilities. They often decide how to share common resources (time, equipment, lighting/staging plans, etc.)

Seoul Fringe engages artists and partners involved with the ethos, "Make this festival altogether," prioritising collective ownership and decision-making. It is important to Seoul Fringe that fairness for artists is negotiated through communication rather than systematic/procedural rules, contradictory to how South Korea's art sector operates.

In South Korea, there is a complex funding landscape where artistic practices heavily rely on public support through extensive grant processes. Aspiring to achieve transparency and equal access, the government implemented complicated application procedures with excessive documentation requirements. As a result, instead of achieving equal access and fairness, the system has become meritocratic, lacking democratic flexibility. This rigid framework makes it easy to exclude people who don't fit the predetermined criteria, rather than engaging with what fairness means to different groups.



At this backdrop, Seoul Fringe gives space to the negotiation of attitudes and values over rigid systems in festival planning. The process ensures that participation is inclusive, conversation principles of how to treat each other are pre-decided, and artists are directly communicating their needs and wants with each other without the festival team intervening most of the time. As a result, scheduling was completed faster (discussions done in 90 minutes) than the previous month-long allocation system. It also reduced the intermediary burden on the festival team from constant phone calls and negotiations. Moreover, previous systems created buyer-seller dynamics (established artists expecting to get what they paid for and bringing hierarchical attitudes).

Culturally, South Korea has experienced rapid socio-economic growth, creating a society that is increasingly competitive and risk-avoidant. Deep socio-cultural tensions exist along generational and gender lines, with hierarchical attitudes based on age. These divisions fragment society and reduce tolerance for reciprocity. For example, older artists are expected to be favored in senior-junior (older-younger) relationships. This creates less space for younger emerging artists to voice their concerns or address their needs.

In contrast, the Seoul Fringe model aims to create space for diverse needs. The festival now attracts people who align with diversity values and are open to collaborative approaches. Returning artists began mentoring first-time artists about practical challenges and opportunities in working with Seoul Fringe's model. Finally, some venues<sup>1</sup> now independently invite artists they met during Seoul Fringe, creating ongoing relationships and extending impact beyond festival periods.

Yes, this model also faces challenges. Seoul Fringe has realised that they need to focus on developing the facilitation skills of the staff. During peer scheduling assembly, younger, less experienced staff members struggle to navigate and mediate conflicts among artists. The festival team seeks to implement workshops on non-violent communication techniques to support staff and participants in facilitation and negotiation skills in the future. Moreover, the logistics of sharing space are also a challenge. Korea has fixed performance times (7:30 pm standard, 3:00 pm weekend) across venues, and there are currently not enough staff members for rapid turnarounds. Seoul Fringe is now considering reducing festival size to increase capacity for care within the organisation.

Within the peer-scheduling process itself, there are tensions that still need to be worked through. Artists with larger ensembles, who are used to being favoured due to hierarchical respect culture in Korea, still risk seniors dominating the conversations. Some younger emerging artists are also not used to voicing their needs on top of older artists, which in makes them feel exposed during the process.

1. Rather than simply renting spaces, the festival works only with venues interested in long-term collaboration. Long-term partnerships are valued over transactional exchanges.

# Cambodia tiSamjort

## Conversations as infrastructure

tiSamjort, an all-women-led collective based in Cambodia, originated organically from necessity during the COVID-19 pandemic. The collective had been conducting rural art tours in Cambodia, offering opportunities to people who have limited access to exploring or experimenting with art. They maintained a storage room in Phnom Penh for artworks and supplies. When COVID-19 restrictions prevented movement and closed public spaces, they began to open the space for students in the same neighbourhood to study online, as well as a residency for artists and environmental activist friends. As coffee shops closed, artists from their network would sneak in and out to meet, and the concept of a dedicated space grew naturally from these needs. The collective then recognised that artists in Cambodia faced difficulties moving across cities due to high living costs and travel expenses. What started as a local initiative to facilitate connections evolved into an international residency space: the collective now offers free residencies for local and international artists in Phnom Penh. The collective itself purposely remains small and cosy so they can operate fluidly, with members contributing when they have time and capacity to avoid burning out.

Below describes tiSamjort's practices:

- **Inclusivity Programming:** tiSamjort defines fairness through radical inclusivity toward both the local community and the arts field. They engage the general public, including local women and children, through crowd gatherings, chit-chatting sessions, painting with artists, dialogue facilitation, cultural exchange, food sharing, and communal cooking. They actively facilitate connections between artists-in-residence (both local artists and international artists from Germany, Canada, Myanmar, etc.) and the local community.
- **Rural Outreach:** To address the stark gap between urban and rural access to arts and culture, tiSamjort creates NomadiX Art Tour and brings screenings, performances, and workshops directly to rural areas. This practice stems from their belief that art should not be limited to those who can afford to travel to galleries and that new generations in underserved areas can make a difference.
- **Network-Based Residency:** Their residency program operates through validation via their network. Artists are typically introduced through third parties - friends and other existing connections. For those outside their immediate circle, they do casual chit-chats to understand the artist's background, character, and work.



Conversations are initiated to get to know the individuals first before working with them. This is a way of not judging people before knowing who they are, while letting them understand tiSamjort's values and ensuring that everyone is on the same page. Despite being an all-women-led collective, tiSamjort takes a gender-neutral approach by welcoming people based on shared values, regardless of gender, rejecting the notion that tiSamjort should be a women-only space because it is led by women.

- **Open Studio for Multiple Usages:** The space remains open during residencies, with residents informed upfront that they'll see people coming and going.
- **Sensitivity & Accountability:** In sharing spaces with others, the team understands that some artists might be uncomfortable when activities take place in the space when it is being used as a living space. In prior conversations before the residency, the team tries to understand points of sensitivity to ensure comfort. Moreover, the collective meets with residents every two weeks during their stay. tiSamjort facilitates when they can, but accountability takes centre stage in relationships with guests and artists in residence. The guests are accountable for their actions, and the team ensures that the artist-in-residence follows the basic house rules about cleanliness and co-sharing space with visitors.

The collective also sees areas they can improve in dealing with artists-in-residence. In residencies, people rarely raise problems and always say everything is okay. The collective recognises they should implement reviews, follow-ups, and surveys to better understand residents' actual experiences.

- **Free Accommodation:** Accommodation is available free of charge for artists coming from outside Phnom Penh who wish to work and network in the city. Participation in a residency programme is not required to access this accommodation.

- **Fluid Collective Structure:** tiSamjort is a space 'created out of love'. Members, therefore, do not set any predetermined rules on what a member must contribute or how they show up. They follow the principles, "No rule is the rule," and "work with the flow," to introduce ease and flexibility into their practice. The collective functions without rigid hierarchies. Members contribute when they have time and capacity. They communicate extensively as a group, and if someone cannot fulfil a task, others do not force or blame them. The principle is "Work with the flow; if the flow breaks, sit down and step back." All members accept imperfection and value fluidity.
- **Collaborative Decision-Making:** Every decision made on behalf of tiSamjort requires group consensus. Messages are sent through group chat, and the collective waits for everyone to respond before moving forward.
- **Care-Centred Operations:** Care (as in both well-being and growth of individuals) is integral to tiSamjort's identity—care toward the collective itself, the community, and their larger network. They prioritise conversations with and the involvement of everyone in their ecosystem.

- **Opening networks:** tiSamjort practises fairness through inclusive opportunity-sharing. When opportunities arrive at their doorsteps, they share them beyond their immediate collective and known circles.

Through these practices, tiSamjort has successfully connected international artists with local communities, creating space for cultural exchange and mutual learning. They also help artists living outside of Phnom Penh to gain exposure to a wider network and opportunities without having to worry about living costs.

Bridging communities through work extends beyond artist communities. tiSamjort successfully brought arts programming to children and communities in rural Cambodia, addressing the real gap between city and countryside access to cultural opportunities. By prioritising accessibility and community participation, they've embodied "the spirit of community" and provided cultural access to those who couldn't otherwise afford or access art. Furthermore, as a collective, tiSamjort demonstrated that an arts space can operate with fluidity and minimal structure while still serving both artists and community.





credit: tiSamjort

Yet, every fair practice is not without its challenges. Financial sustainability and future direction of the collective remain open questions that tiSamjort needs to work through. As a small collective without government support and significant income, they can only provide living space to artists, not travel expenses or daily allowances. They contribute in other ways by supporting artists with art-making challenges and facilitating local networking. In terms of space maintenance, members currently share rental and electricity costs according to individual financial capacity, with no set contribution amount. Grant income helps, but when it is unavailable, members pay what they can. The space has grown larger and incurred more expenses, with more equipment to maintain.

Beyond money, maintaining the space requires time. Not having money to pay professional cleaning staff, collective members usually clean spaces themselves before artists arrive. If none of the members have time, a neighbour is hired to do it.

As tiSamjort is not a registered NGO and has no legal entity to accept large funding amounts, the collective questions their future: “How do we sustain ourselves?” They see their community impact and want to do more, but don’t want to become a big organisation and wish to maintain the current small size of the team. They’re considering whether to establish board members or advisors with sector experience, while questioning their own readiness to commit more time and whether they’re “really for that.” The collective acknowledges that saying “no pressure” can paradoxically create pressure as the practice grows.

# Malaysia

## Five Arts Centre

Multiplicity, “highly Specific, then constellated”

Five Arts Centre is a 41-year-old collective founded in 1984 by five artist-educators. It emerged from a politically charged period in the 1970s marked by racial clashes, policy changes, and debates around ‘national culture’ in Malaysia. The collective was formed as a multi-disciplinary response to these tensions, advocating for multiplicity rather than unity—a counter-narrative to Malaysia’s official self-image. The collective has undergone several generational shifts, with waves of new members joining over the decades. For 10-15 years, Five Arts also welcomed other collectives to join them. While undergoing multiple changes, they continue to follow the principal question: “What is the current Malaysian story that needs to be told, that can be told? Why is this necessary?”. Generation shifts have brought in new directions to the collective. Today, Five Arts functions simultaneously as: a studio and office, production house/label, collective of 13 people, a space/network for conceptual and research-driven performance practices, and an institution. It operates with three staff members plus part-time support. Their vision is to “create multiple Malaysias - creatively, critically & with resilience.”

Five Arts Centre sees collective thinking as a form of art-making. As Krishen Jit, one of the founders of Five Arts, stated, their guiding principle is “push and to be pushed by others.” Whether in artistic relationships, critical inquiry into Malaysian society, or thinking, making, and doing as a collective practice, Five Arts believes that artists push each other to be more innovative through artistic experimentation. Through artistic practice, artists can also push political ideas, cultural frames and creative imaginations of the society towards a more diverse Malaysia.

At its inception, the Five Arts Centre’s mission was to promote multicultural representation. In the 1980s, FAC staged English plays written by Hokkien and Tamil writers. In the 1990s/2000s, Janet Pillai, a collective member of Five Arts, created radical children’s theatre, which offered free auditions based on socio-economic indicators, followed by 6 months of collaborative work. In the 2000s, the collective produced plays on racial riots and student protests, sometimes resulting in censorship. However, the questions Five Arts posed have evolved across the eras with its changing members. In a sense, “the battle is won”—the mission of the 80s and 90s around multicultural representation and creating space for multiple Malaysian voices has been achieved. The meaning of “multi” has shifted: the new direction centres on opening access to newer generations, and the collective is about providing access, combating gender and generation gaps, and



Photo credit: Five Arts Centre

innovating artistic structures - giving members the freedom to explore and evolve their artistic roles. For example, over the past 10-15 years, Five Arts introduced the role of creative producer—moving away from producers serving directors toward producers who experiment, update approaches, and start their own projects. This has shifted focus from output-driven work to ecosystem-building in the culture sector.

Despite the direction shifts occurring as the collective gets passed on between generations, Five Arts still follows the principle of “multiplicity”. As Krishen Jit stated, “In plural societies, multiculturalism is in one body.” The ethos is highly individual and specific to each member, and then gets constellated into Five Arts. Five Arts understands and facilitates that the newer generation now has a much looser relationship to the history of the collective, viewing Five Arts more as a resource (reputation, knowledge, space, financial resource) than as a shared artistic mission that originated in the 1980s.

Facilitating “multiness” is not an easy task. Not all members are always happy about every decision, but they accept it as part of the process. Every 4-6 months, the collective holds lengthy meetings where major decisions and tensions are discussed. These can go on for hours, sometimes resolved by “who had the longest stamina.” Staff practice active listening, conflict resolution, and risk management—trying to understand the needs and desires behind emotions and anxieties. This requires care and patience but can be exhausting and lead to staff burnout. To avoid this, people can temporarily step away. Staff also personalise communication styles for each collective member.



Beyond communicating within the collective, Five Arts creates opportunities for the wider network to engage with the centre. They issue open calls to make their space available for free, ensuring emerging artists can access their resources. The partnership goes beyond just space rental. Five Arts ask: What does this artist really need at this point? Space? Name recognition? Mentoring? Artistic feedback? They function as sponsors or project partners, applying for funds together with artists if it is required.

Beyond artistic support, Five Arts positions itself for a wider societal impact. They serve as the secretariat for ReformARTsi, a coalition made up of arts organisations, practitioners, and academics who have come together to advocate specific reforms and policies for the performing arts in Malaysia, and Southeast Asian Artistic Freedom RADAR, a research and documentation resource that documents violations of artistic freedom in Southeast Asia. Five Arts also maintains Archives, and administers the Krishen Jit Fund, supporting art projects.

On top of larger initiatives, Five Arts Centre also brings “multiness” and “fairness” in engaging with communities in Malaysia. Five Arts works with 4-5 university students as interns per year. They deliberately rotate which universities they receive interns from every year as they recognise that universities have vastly different contexts—public versus private, different class compositions, and language environments. This ensures they engage with diverse student populations. Moreover, in artistic productions, they’ve begun artistic work with neurodivergent and physical disability communities.

The multitude of practices has had macro (ecosystemic) and micro (personal) impacts. Five Arts has shaped the cultural ecosystem through advocacy, funding, partnerships, and creating platforms for others. In terms of micro impacts, for certain members of the collective who grew up in a mono-cultural environment, Five Arts created culture shock—exposing them to the “multiness” that has theoretically existed around them, but something they had not experienced in practice. The work environment’s richness and multi-directionality showed that “everything is possible.” Additionally, Five Arts helped staff members reframe their role from “I work for Five Arts” to “I work with Five Arts and the collective”—de-coding hierarchical upbringing and its effects on organisational work.

As a collective running for nearly five decades, Five Arts recognises an important task for the coming years: to revisit and discuss the tensions in their own legacies—both within the collective and with individual artists—with criticality and care. This is a clear challenge for Five Arts, which has resisted sentimentality and nostalgia, to avoid being seen within its old identity (e.g., the mission of 1980s multiculturalism). Having achieved its original mission, Five Arts continues to evolve, addressing new questions about access, inclusion, and what “multiplicity” means for contemporary Malaysia. In practice, multiplicity requires managing conflict across diversity, which demands immense emotional labour from staff, and burnout is an acknowledged risk. Whether in large initiatives or day-to-day operations, the question of fairness became both a conscious and unconscious daily practice involving transparency, respect, and care between collective members and between Five Arts and the wider society.

# Chile Espacio Checoeslovaquia

## Mutual value creation with neighbours through door2door mechanism

Dubbed “Neighbourhood Creative Factory,” Espacio Checoeslovaquia is a performing arts space that also provides design, construction, and consultancy services for scenographic projects and technical implementations for theatres, cultural spaces, and large-scale events. Since its inception, the ‘Creative Factory’ has adopted a door-to-door mechanism to build trust and relationships with the neighbourhood it is located in. The organisation’s core mission is to cultivate a safe, inclusive environment, open to all, where mutual respect is the standard. They view their activities as a blend of social work and artistic practice, leveraging the arts as a potent tool for engagement, initiating dialogue, building trust and community, and establishing a space for expressing diverse views. Their underlying philosophy centres on fostering an authentic (unforced) community where members consistently demonstrate respect for one another.

Espacio Checoeslovaquia’s neighbourhood in Santiago is characterised by its working-class population, a significant number of older residents, and a context of deep political polarisation. There is a gradual decline in community trust, a sentiment which initially extended to the ‘Creative Factory’ itself. The erosion of trust had to be worked through. The members acknowledge a foundational tension in their work: “We don’t trust each other but need each other.” The backdrop of Chile’s broader societal issue, a substantial disparity between the rich and the poor, also impacts the local dynamics.

To create trust with the neighbourhood while constructing the space, the entire team of Espacio Checoeslovaquia went door-to-door to 200+ houses to introduce themselves and explain the whole model of the space. In the beginning, many people didn’t understand the idea, but it was important that neighbours got to know the team and could come directly to them if there were any issues. Now, they all know each other well enough by name. After the initial canvassing, Espacio Checoeslovaquia kept engaging neighbours through ongoing activities. In creating these activities, they consider how neighbours would understand art differently. For many local residents, as it’s the first time they’re encountering theatre, dance, or circus in 50 years of their life, and it is vital that they feel welcome.

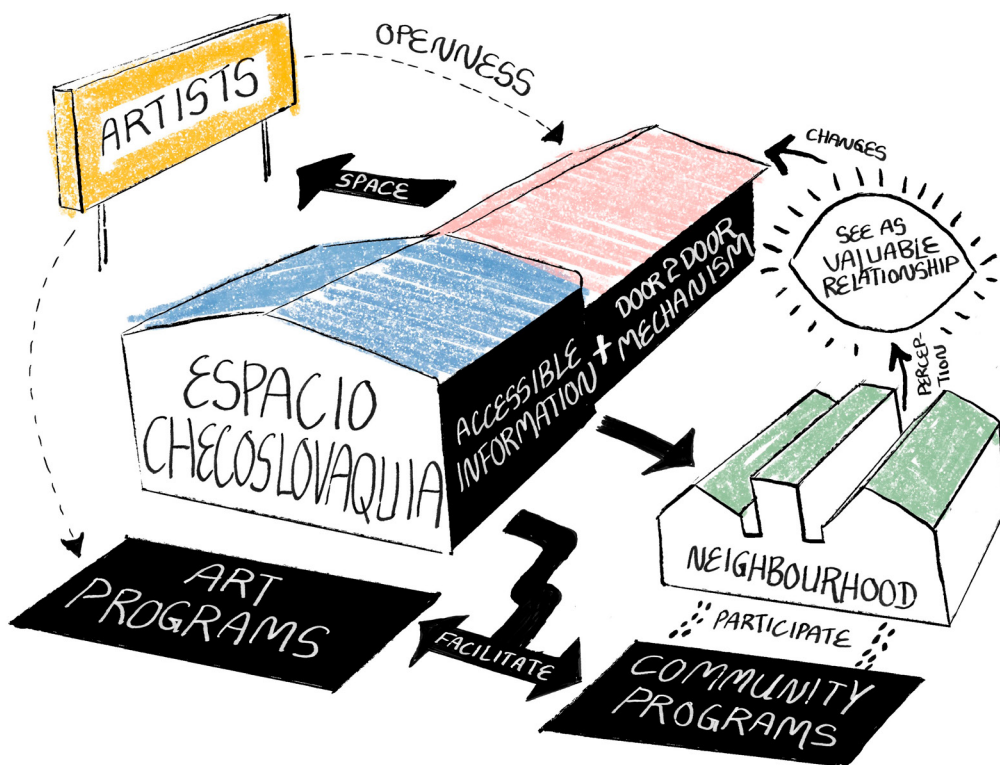


Photo credit: Espacio Checoeslovaquia

Therefore, Espacio Checoeslovaquia offers diverse programmes for the community, including yoga, tai chi, choral work, dynamic play for children, community gardening, etc. Sometimes they host entertainment nights with bingo and music, where multi-generational families come together.

Beyond facilitating programmes for neighbours, Espacio Checoeslovaquia has also established an economic relationship with them. Essentials for artistic productions are sourced from the neighbourhood. If they need set work or costumes, neighbours are their suppliers; if they need transport, a neighbour offers this service; if they need catering for a residency or event, a neighbour’s restaurant supplies it.

At least one person on the team is fully dedicated to working with neighbours. They have one organisational WhatsApp phone to engage with residents. Some neighbours use WhatsApp messages to sign up to activities, others use online forms, and there are also people who prefer engaging offline. Espacio Checoeslovaquia adapts to how different people operate.



Espacio Checoeslovaquia, therefore, tries to adapt to the community and build a relationship with it. People coming back to the space - to work together or to join activities - is the most important indicator for their work. Maintaining good relationships with the neighbours has had a great impact. Neighbours now recognise the status of artists; the community views them as workers rather than slackers (those who don't contribute to the neighbourhood). Slowly, people keep coming to show openings, start having an opinion about activities that the Espacio Checoeslovaquia is doing, and start feeling comfortable in the space. Neighbours might not understand conceptual art, but when they feel a part of the space, they feel a part of the art as well. The positive impact is an increase in community trust and partnerships, helping people see Espacio Checoeslovaquia as an important part of the larger ecosystem.

Fair practices are balancing acts between care for the community and care for the team. This practice sometimes creates tension within the team, as not everyone agrees that programming and curating should be oriented towards the neighbourhood. Despite these occasional challenges in team dynamics, the group has built a strong level of trust with local residents over the past ten years, enabling them to coexist and work in harmony within the neighbourhood.. The director of Espacio Checoeslovaquia aspires to be sensitive to people's dreams and needs, as well as mindful of the skills within his team and within the wider community. Despite these difficulties, a sense of pride and contentment comes from reflecting on the effort invested in building trust in a space where, politically and socio-culturally, it has been challenging to sustain trust and create shared values among artists and community members.



Photo credit: Espacio Checoeslovaquia

# Indonesia

## GUDSKUL

“Lumbung,” pooled resources, trust-building through friendships

GUDSKUL is a contemporary art ecosystem developed from a not-for-profit work model. A large part of the operational support comes from its founding collectives, which in turn is supported by donor institutions, sponsors, and independent funding generated through its business unit. Apart from the outside funds, each collective of the ecosystem contributes at least 10–30 per cent to the lumbung (Indonesian word for “rice-barn,” meaning the collective resource pool): money, equipment or books. GUDSKUL has set up a system of a co-storehouse where every resource is stored and shared in proportion to collective needs. Assets are pooled for easier access and sharing for every member of the collective.

The ecosystem consists of many roles: artists, curators, art writers, managers, researchers, musicians, directors, architects, cooks, designers, street artists and more. This variety makes GUDSKUL an affluent and dynamic ecosystem, open to collaborative projects that are socially, politically, culturally, economically, environmentally and educationally diverse.

After Indonesia’s dictatorship ended in 1998, the collective practice spread rapidly as a part of the post-98 euphoria over freedom of assembly. Previously, gathering more than 5 people could result in arrest. Though the law has not been entirely lifted to this day, its selective application made collective organising possible. Artists had formed collectives before 2000 as a political statement against this repressive law, but the post-2000 period saw an explosion of what were initially called “artist initiatives.”

The current GUDSKUL model is a legacy of the collectives *ruangrupa*, *Serrum* and *Grafis Huru Hara*, Jakarta-based art organisations initiated in the 2000s and 2010s. At the time of these collectives’ inception, in Jakarta, there were virtually no spaces for art workers to engage with public spaces outside of galleries and museums. With only one art school in the city, disciplines that intersect with art, such as design, architecture, urban planning, and social sciences, remained siloed in other educational institutions.

Both *ruangrupa* and GUDSKUL emerged out of this need to intersect art with the larger society. This collective practice, as is often the case for bottom-up innovations in the arts, exists as a sign that something systematic is not working in the nation-state. The interviewee stated that, if the system functioned properly, collectives wouldn’t need to exist.



Photo credit: GUDSKUL

They emerge across sectors—art groups, food cooperatives, workers’ movements, indigenous land movements—to fill gaps left by the state, the market and civil society movements. However, collective practice is not the only answer, and not everyone would agree that it effectively fills in the system gaps.

Taking inspiration from autonomous people movements and squatter movements, GUDSKUL adopted the assembly structure for decision-making. They bring difficult decisions to the assembly—for example, by the end of 2022, facing financial sustainability issues, they held more than 30 meetings before unanimously deciding to stop paying everyone except essential personnel (admin, accounting, security). They don’t fold until reaching a unanimous agreement; if there is disagreement, they continue the conversation. Understanding that the most effective negotiations happen during informal moments, they structure meetings with many breaks. They don’t rush discussions, allowing informal, organic conversations to emerge. They play with formats to see what works best in each situation. When opportunities arise—both external invitations and internal projects—they are thrown into the assembly. Whoever has time, availability, or interest participates. This distributes work and opportunity across the collective rather than concentrating it in a few hands. Friendship is very important for GUDSKUL. It’s how they form kinship over the years, build trust enough to form this resource sharing system and eventually sustain themselves.

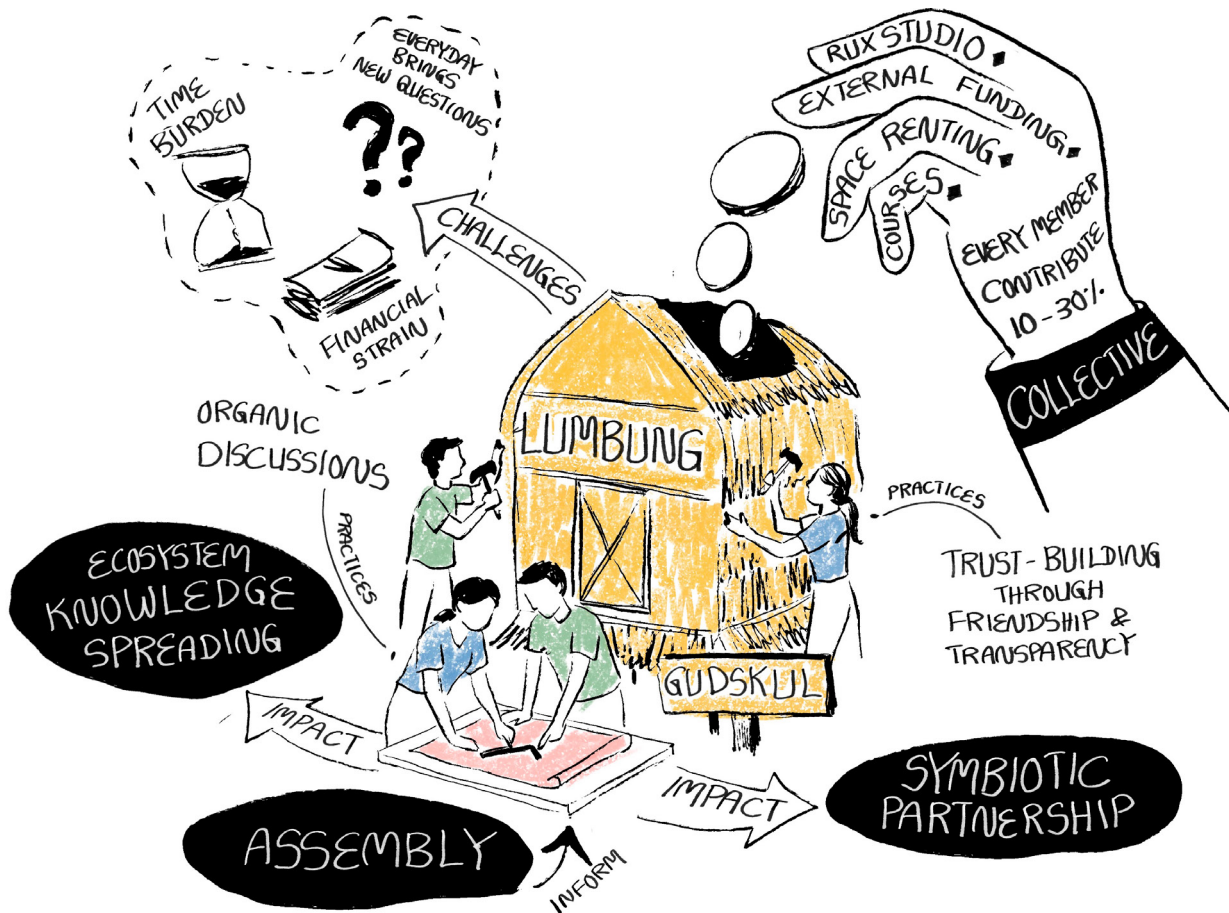
The education system GUDSKUL developed is also a part of their fair practices. Founded to address the fact that Indonesian art schools didn't take collectives seriously or learn from them, GUDSKUL focuses on collective and ecosystem building, teaching beyond arts—how to connect with neighbours, how to form collectives. Lumbang I (documenta 15) was a test to see if the model works and to spread knowledge about collective and ecosystem building. Rather than following western academic frameworks, they use the collective and ecosystem-building lens to understand Indonesian art history. Certain artistic practices may appear, on paper, to be individual in nature, but when viewed through an ecosystem lens, the embedded role of community within the practice becomes visible. This perspective offers artists a different understanding of their own artistic history and future direction, in which art does not exist in isolation but is shaped through ongoing engagement with its community.

Financial sustainability is a core challenge for GUDSKUL and they tackle it through various income streams. RuX (part of Gudskul) functions as a hierarchical company structure for commercial for-profit projects- thus bringing revenue to the collective that complements subsidies. Furthermore, they explain to funders why project-based handouts aren't sustainable, why they need to own property (since rent in Jakarta is expensive), and how their ecosystem model works—where part of funders' support intended for individual collectives would eventually go into the broader Gudskul ecosystem. Sometimes, the resource an institution offers isn't money, but its name-borrowing to lend legibility to GUDSKUL.

However, funding sources remain to be limited, and GUDSKUL is conscious about not competing with newer, growing collectives. By deliberately limiting how many resources they take and not trying to monopolise available funding, they've created space for other initiatives to thrive.

GUDSKUL understands fairness as equity, rather than equality. Individual contributions to the collective are adjusted based on what people earn each month, creating a flexible solidarity economy. They also practice equity of expectations, understanding, for instance, that people with families can invest less time in the collective. Small considerations like non-smoking rules and dedicated spaces for the elderly, children, people with disabilities and mobility issues are also introduced during the assembly to include diverse members and their families.

They found that there are no universal principles on how to be a collective—there is no success recipe. The fairness matrix has evolved through experience and learning from failures. Fairness in their practice is not a single mission statement.



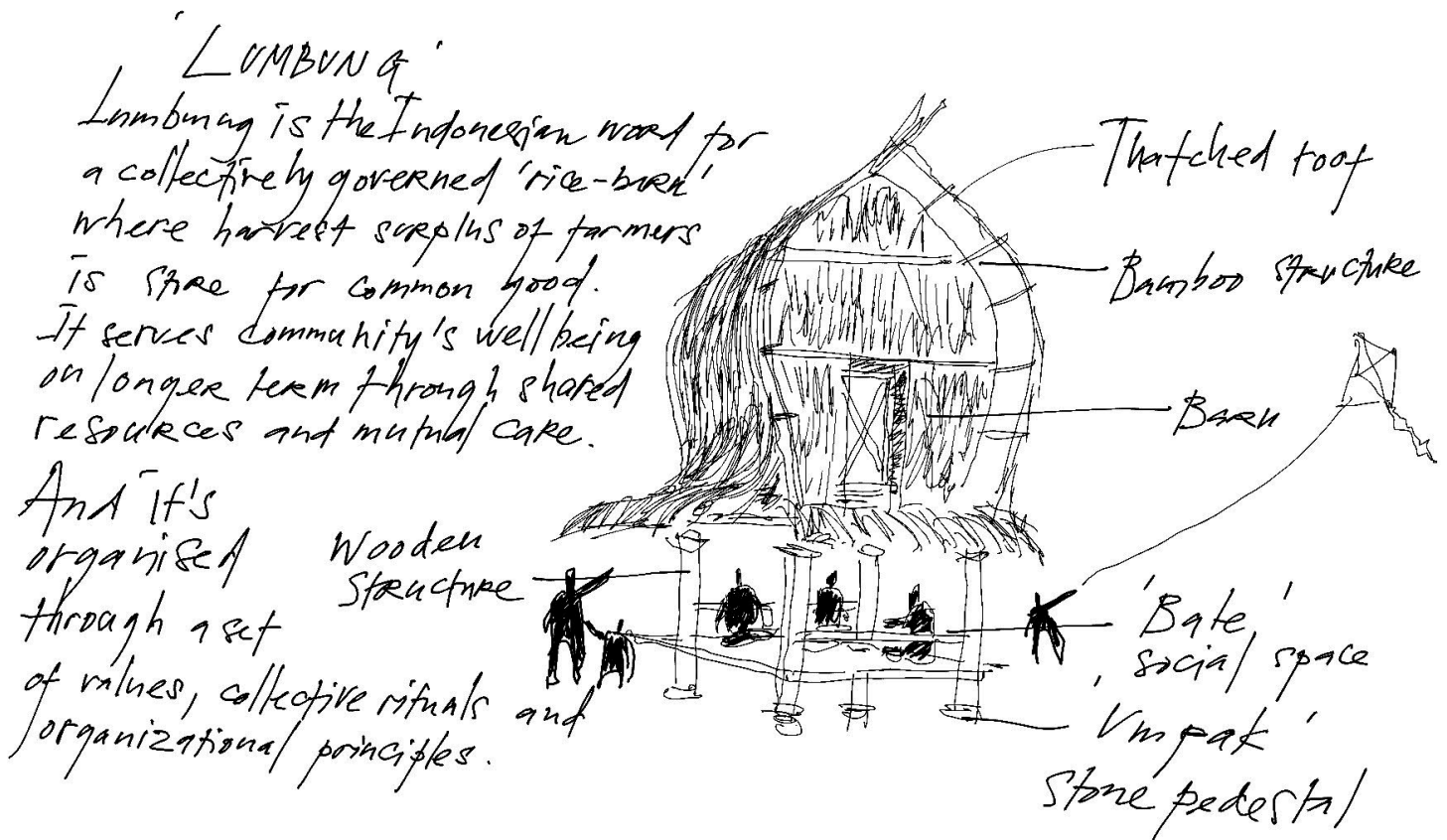


Image credit: GUDSKUL

In terms of impact, the GUDSKUL ecosystem proves that art communities can create co-existence structures when state resources are not available. They have created a system that ensures the long-term survival of existing and future collectives. These are not artistic experiments, but survival and sustainability strategies. Their collective model will travel through the GUDSKUL education model, which teaches collective and ecosystem-building practices. GUDSKUL has also demonstrated that institutional funding practices can be challenged and reshaped by trust building, negotiation, and transparency about ecosystem needs.

Two core challenges for GUDSKUL are the financial sustainability of the practice and translating their lumbung model of building collectives to other contexts. It is not always easy to give away one's time and share space, and money can be even more difficult to share. Transparency in financial resources is important for trust building. For GUDSKUL, it took years to build mutual trust and make the current resource-pooling model work. Even in 2025, they feel trust-building remains an ongoing endeavour.

Another challenge is that the collective model doesn't easily translate to other contexts, for example, when they proposed "let's just hang out" at Sonsbeek '16<sup>2</sup>, others asked "how much can I charge per hour to hang out with you?" Similarly, documenta 15's Lumbung I tested whether their model could travel, revealing both the possibilities and limits of context-dependent collective practices. This experiment demonstrated that worldviews around time, value, and collaboration differ fundamentally across contexts.

2. Sonsbeek is an outdoor sculpture exhibition series founded in 1949, that takes place intermittently in Park Sonsbeek in Arnhem, the Netherlands.

## Chapter 3

# CONNECTING THE DOTS

Reflections from Broad Research  
+ Artist Residency



Photo credit: Artlab, Ruangrupa

# THE KGOTLA METHOD: FAIRNESS AS COLLECTIVE PRACTICE

## Fairness, Voice & Process in Southern African Artistic Communities

The Kgotla Method: Fairness as Collective Practice draws on the Botswana institution of the kgotla — a public forum historically used for collective deliberation, dispute resolution, and community decision-making — as a conceptual lens for reflecting on fairness, voice, and process within contemporary artistic communities in Southern Africa.

In this context, the kgotla is not treated as a nostalgic or symbolic reference, but as a living methodology: a space where listening precedes decision-making, where participation does not guarantee equality of voice but does insist on presence, accountability, and relational ethics. Central to the kgotla is the understanding that fairness is not achieved through uniform rules, but through ongoing negotiation shaped by context, responsibility, and care.

Through conversations with arts organisations and cultural practitioners across Botswana, South Africa, and Mozambique, this contribution reflects on how fairness is practised within artistic ecosystems that are often under-resourced, historically marginalised, and required to invent their own internal governance structures. These reflections foreground questions of who can speak, who carries labour, how trust is built over time, and how disagreement is held without collapse.

Positioned within the wider IETM research, The Kgotla Method: Fairness as Collective Practice offers a Southern African perspective on fair practice that privileges process over policy, relationships over metrics, and lived experience over abstract frameworks. It frames the kgotla as a curatorial and methodological approach: a way of gathering, listening, and learning together that resists extractive research models and instead centres collective sense-making as a form of cultural work.

*“This is not a neutral document.*

*I do not write about “fairness” as a trend. I write about it because the arts have a talent for romanticising exploitation when it is dressed up as opportunity.*

*If you are a Black African arts worker building platforms with and for communities that have historically been treated as disposable, you learn quickly that the global cultural economy does not reward care. It rewards legibility. It rewards proximity. It rewards institutions that know how to perform competence in the language of funders, biennales, and policy.”*

[Excerpt from Tanlume Enyatseng’s zine, “The Kgotla Method: Fairness as Collective Practice.”](#)

# In Conversation: What works, what doesn't, tensions, and challenges

Researchers Phoo Myat Thwe, Kai Brennert and artist-in-residence Tanlume Enyatseng reflect on the fair practices of this research.

## What Works

**Tanlume:** One of the practices that has worked well in this research is the decision to prioritise process over speed. Allowing conversations to unfold over time, rather than collapsing them into a single extractive interview, created space for trust, hesitation, and revision. In practice, this meant engaging organisations through a series of conversations rather than one-off exchanges, revisiting questions across different moments, and leaving room for participants to reflect between sessions. This pacing made it possible for participants to speak more honestly about their own practices, including areas of uncertainty or contradiction, rather than feeling pressured to present polished narratives of success.

Another important practice has been the recognition of relational labour as part of the research itself. Time spent clarifying intentions, revisiting language, and holding space for disagreement was treated as integral to the process, rather than as peripheral communication. This differs from more conventional research approaches that prioritise efficiency and extraction, recognising that knowledge is produced through relationships, not only through data collection.

The openness to multiple forms of sense-making has also been productive. Alongside structured case-study research, the process allowed for reflective writing and interpretive framing as part of the analysis itself. Rather than consolidating insights into a single authoritative narrative, the outputs foreground process, plurality, and uncertainty. This approach makes visible how fairness is felt, negotiated, and lived in practice, rather than only describing it as a fixed outcome.

Finally, what has worked is a shared willingness to name context explicitly. Rather than assuming a universal definition of fair practice, the research situates practices within specific cultural, political, and economic conditions, and traces how these conditions shape decision-making. For example, factors such as funding precarity, linguistic positioning, safety concerns for queer practitioners, and limited local infrastructure directly inform how organisations structure participation, distribute labour, and set boundaries around openness and care. Making these links explicit allows fairness to be discussed not as an abstract ideal, but as a series of situated decisions shaped by constraints, histories, and community expectations.

**Phoo Myat:** I think many of the reflections from the artistic research resonate with the findings from our side of case studies. Putting relationships first was necessary in the research since this is the lived reality of our case study participants. For example, one of the case study participants invited us for an introductory meeting to get to know each other before the actual interview began. From a researcher's perspective, where outreach was mostly a heartfelt email, it made me reflect and value face-to-face conversations more. I also realised it is important to give time for trust. In practice, putting relationships first in fair practices really hinges on groups being able to deeply trust and collaborate well. Groups like GUDSKUL (Indonesia) and tiSamjort (Cambodia) are great examples of how existing connections—like friendships or contacts—can kick things off.

But it's not just a superficial thing. Art collectives, such as Espacio Checoeslovaquia (Chile), actually invest the effort to build this trust through consistent, in-person time. That involves not only working with artists with mutual openness and trust, but also taking deliberate steps, like going door-to-door, to build strong, lasting relationships with the neighbourhood in which the art space exists. The main takeaway is that fairness emerges from the everyday, natural interactions that foster trust, where strong personal bonds are the priority before diving into formal projects. This changes our perspective: fair practices shouldn't just be seen as a rigid set of rules. Instead, they actually grow out of those small, daily interactions that keep everything running smoothly. Plus, "fair practices" need to stay flexible and adaptable to different situations.

**Kai:** What struck me was also how much trust and existing relationships enabled us to do this research in the first place. Where there was a friendship or a history of collaboration, agreement to share experiences and reflections was much more freely given, which speaks to the relationality of the arts ecosystem. What I did not expect was how grateful many of our research participants were to be given the space to actively reflect on what fairness means to them, how they treat each other, and what visible or invisible structures or un-structures they have put in place to enable that.

Discovering different manifestations of structural fluidity in particular was something that again showed us that fairness is fundamentally connected to how we manage and care for our inter-personal relationships, especially in that murky

in-between space of daily operations. We observed that it is necessary to ensure that people feel seen and heard. *tiSamjort* (Cambodia) realised this through implementing their “no rule is the rule” principle, which enables every member to voice any idea and opinion at any time for the collective to consider, also requiring robust communication. For the same reason, *GUDSKUL* (Indonesia) incorporated structured breaks in meetings to facilitate informal negotiation and substantive discussion.

On a bigger scale, *Five Arts Centre* (Malaysia), throughout its multiple decades of existence, has maintained concurrent multiple organisational forms; at times as collective, as institution, as production house, as advocate, and more. Many of these different arms and faces of *Five Arts* show how sharing can work even when it comes to organisational mission—not every collective member is engaged in every strand of *Five Arts*’ wide variety of activities. Of course, the sharing and pooling of resources was also a central element to many other research participants. For example, *GUDSKUL*’s *Lumbang* model incorporates flexible contributions based on changing capacities; *Seoul Fringe Festival* (Korea) instituted negotiations among artists regarding the sharing of venues and schedules; while *Espacio Checoeslovaquia* (Chile) implemented a cultural circular economy where local businesses become both vendors, audiences, and participants. To me, seeing and treating resources as shared rather than owned does not just show the commitment to fairness as an inter-personal value but it demonstrates the necessity of the arts sector to actively create alternatives to an economic paradigm that does not value art and its role in society.

## What Doesn’t Work

**Tanlume:** An aspect that has been challenging from a fairness perspective is the density and intensity of communication at certain points in the process. While regular check-ins are important, moments where reflections were requested in quick succession sometimes limited the space needed for deeper consideration. For an arts-based research practice that relies on reflection and synthesis, an insufficient pause can inadvertently privilege speed over thoughtfulness.

Another limitation has been the uncertainty around when reflection becomes a contribution. At times, it was not entirely clear which moments were exploratory and which required formal articulation. This ambiguity can create pressure to respond prematurely, before ideas have had time to mature. From my perspective, fair practice benefits from clearly distinguishing between open-ended thinking spaces and moments of decision or documentation.

There were also moments where the frameworks and terminology of research risked moving ahead of lived experience. While conceptual clarity is important, fairness can be compromised when language becomes too settled too quickly, especially before all voices have fully shaped the framing. In arts-based research, meaning often emerges through iteration rather than early definition.

**Phoo Myat:** I hear you. Different working styles across partners, communication and sense-making styles are definitely important to constantly negotiate. What’s important here perhaps, is open communication and regular check-ins to ensure each side is updated and informed on where the other is at. This connects to a theme emerging from our wider research, which I’ve been thinking of as “Time/Space fair practice.” Time here concerns not just deadlines but duration—the speed of communication, the intervals allowed for thought to mature. Space concerns solitude, the room to work iteratively before bringing material into shared dialogue. Different practices require different configurations of both, and fairness may depend on making these configurations negotiable rather than assumed. Perhaps what’s needed is a more explicit rhythm of checking in: signalling when we are in—ready to continue, to respond, to co-construct—and when we are out—needing time to recuperate, reflect, or let ideas breathe. This doesn’t resolve the tension entirely, but it might make it more workable and more honest.

**Kai:** Your reflections on the research process, *Tanlume*, are testament to the initial idea of inviting you as an artist-in-residence in this research project. You hold up a mirror to our existing research practices which in themselves can carry various elements of ‘unfairness’—not least the biases we carry in ourselves—and share insights and perspectives that would never have emerged with the tools we were deploying. Multiple times have I caught myself making pre-emptive assumptions about the organisations and collectives we interviewed, including deciding for them what I deemed to be a ‘fair’ practice.

A key takeaway for me is the need for more intentional collective sensemaking as a method of data analysis, both within the wider research team and with our research participants. This should allow the necessary space—or Time/Space—to respond to the fluidity of concepts, practices, and perceptions of fairness in the arts.

**Phoo Myat:** Fluidity in fairness is not only necessary in micro (individual-to-individual, grassroots collectives) contexts but also in more established structures. For example, a rigid and bureaucratic approach to fairness can turn out to be unfair. Government rules that are designed to treat everyone exactly the same can sometimes unintentionally exclude people. South Korea’s public grant system serves as an example of this, where an excessive number of forms and overly strict rules make the process difficult to navigate. Systems that strictly focus on individual achievement often become less flexible and exclusive as a result of this rigid approach. The problem is the “One-Size-Fits-All” approach to fair practices. An approach that proves highly effective in one environment may completely fail in another. This is also true for grassroots initiatives. For instance, GUDSKUL’s informal, “let’s just hang out” methodology did not always translate well. Group-based strategies must always be carefully customised and adapted to the specific individuals and the particular context in which they are being applied.

## Key Tensions

**Tanlume:** A central tension across the practices we engaged with is the gap between ethical intention and material capacity. Many collectives articulate strong values around fairness, care, and inclusion, yet operate within conditions of precarity that limit how consistently these values can be enacted. The question of how to sustain fair practices without adequate resources remains unresolved, and in some cases creates difficult trade-offs between care, survival, and visibility.

Another ongoing tension lies in who carries responsibility for fairness. While fairness is often framed as a collective commitment, the labour of maintaining it frequently falls on a small number of individuals, often those already marginalised or positioned as caregivers, mediators, or organisers. This raises unanswered questions about how fairness can be distributed more equitably within organisations, rather than being upheld through personal sacrifice.

There is also a tension between openness and protection. Many of the practices discussed value transparency and participation, yet must also establish boundaries to ensure safety, particularly for queer and marginalised artists. Deciding when openness becomes exposure, and when protection risks exclusion, remains a delicate and context-dependent negotiation.

Finally, the research surfaced a tension between local grounding and global legibility. Collectives are often required to translate their practices into language that is recognisable to funders, partners, or international audiences, sometimes at the expense of their own terms and rhythms. How to remain rooted in local values while engaging broader infrastructures of support is a question that remains open — and one that sits at the heart of debates around fairness in the arts.

**Phoo Myat:** Many of the key tensions you have reflected here, from sustainability of practice to burnout, are resonating with our case studies. I want to go deeper into the tension between local grounding and global legibility that you mentioned. This was extensively discussed in our interview with tiSamjort collective from Cambodia. I second your point about how local terms and rhythms negotiated within the contained context are difficult to translate into globally understandable frameworks. The interviewees themselves felt frustrated to answer some of the research questions we had. This was not only about the nature of the practice, but also about the words “Fairness” or “Fair Practice”, which felt as if we were trying to measure the practice with a fairness ruler. What I have reflected on from our research process is that it’s important to make conversations around fairness fluid and adaptable, ensuring they are open-ended and participation-led.

Going back to the issues of sustainability, in our case study with tiSamjort, when it comes to growth and structure, a key internal conflict is the desire to remain a small, intimate group while still aiming for a broad community impact. There's a common aspiration for a structure that offers support without stifling flexibility—a “structure with ‘no structure.’” However, this approach creates practical communication hurdles. For instance, achieving consensus is slow when everyone's input is needed, and in the absence of clear roles, there's a constant need to figure out who is responsible for what. Effective communication also requires tailoring the approach to different members' needs.

Many of the grassroots collectives, such as GUDSKUL and tiSamjort, emerge organically from the needs of the ecosystem they exist in. Once they become an integral part of the ecosystem, there is enormous pressure on self-organised individuals who started the practice to consider how to sustain their model, whether to stay the same or grow bigger and create more impact. Growing bigger, in tiSamjort's context, has infrastructure difficulties, such as not being registered as a non-profit to receive large grants, to not having enough human resources and time to expand the practice. Public funding bodies often fail to recognise that these organisations need stable, year-round teams to function effectively and cannot sustain themselves without sufficient financial resources.

Speaking of human resources, another significant area of difficulty revolves around capacity and time. Many organisations mention that staff are suffering from burnout, often due to the immense emotional labour involved in conflict resolution and facilitation. The daily grind of maintaining optimism while pushing the work forward is a major challenge. On a practical level, organisations find it hard to balance time, money, and space—it's often easier to share physical space than it is to coordinate financial contributions or dedicated time for essential tasks like maintenance. This pressure is compounded by the fact that building trust, both internally and with the wider community, is a very slow process, which can be masked by members avoiding conflict and simply saying “everything is okay.”

**Kai:** But often everything is not OK. Internal fair practices cannot exist in isolation. They inevitably clash with the systems that surround them, not least cultural policy frameworks and arts funding mechanisms. In some cases these practices might be a response to such harmful systems and become everyday resilience, but they are equally a value-based model of holding community—re-action and pro-action at the same time. However, this constant push and pull does take a toll on the people as Phoo Myat has mentioned, which is something we as the wider ecosystem need to be aware of. How much pressure do we put on people and organisations, what silent rules do we expect them to abide by, what logic do we frame our thinking of ‘value creation’ in?

I like the image of the game when talking about how we might engage in systems change. Systems were designed, so they can also be re-designed or even un-designed. Play the game as it serves you but try to slowly and deliberately change the rules. Create some creative friction, use both your artistic practices and your organisational and interpersonal ‘fair’ practices to challenge the very systems that made them necessary or did not recognise them in the first place. GUDSKUL is a good example of how they practice slow trust building and full transparency to give them reputational and relational leverage to negotiate some of the systems' rules with external partners. As a knowledge mediator in the wider cultural ecosystem, at edgeandstory we also try to do our part. Sometimes this means including questions of ‘what/when/how much is enough’ into evaluations of linear cultural development projects, introducing mission-based or portfolio policy approaches, imagining alternative arts management futures, and inviting artistic intelligence into more traditional empirical research projects.

**Phoo Myat:** Kai's framing of “changing the rules while playing the game” feels like a fitting place to land. What this research has shown us, as we have reflected several times across this research, is that fair practice is not a fixed destination but an ongoing negotiation—between intention and capacity, between local rhythms and external demands, between the desire for structure and the need for fluidity. The collectives we engaged with are not models to be replicated but living experiments, each adapting fairness to their own conditions, often at great personal cost.

Perhaps what we carry forward is this: fairness in the arts cannot be measured with a ruler. It lives in the everyday—in how we check in, how we share, how we make space for one another to be “in” or “out.” And while resilience should not be romanticised, especially when it masks burnout and invisible labour, there is something generative in the creative friction these practices produce. They remind us that the systems we inherit are not the only systems possible.

# What's in it for a policymaker?

By Elena Polivtseva

At the end of last year, the European Commission announced in its new strategic framework, *the Culture Compass for Europe*, that it will develop an EU Artists' Charter for fair working conditions for artists and cultural workers. While little information is available so far, the Charter has the potential to bring the arts field onto common ground around what fair practice means and how it can be made a reality through collective commitments. Similar "soft" instruments already exist across Europe, such as the Fair Practice Code in the Netherlands, the Juist is Juist initiative in Belgium, and the Ethics Charter in Luxembourg, among others. Denmark is currently in the process of developing its Fair Practice Culture. Fairness has also entered the global conversation, culminating in the Fair Culture Charter launched by Germany's UNESCO Commission.

While the EU Artists' Charter is still under development, parts of the sector are already raising difficult questions: how will this become a reality when public funding for culture is shrinking? How can a focus on fair practice be sustained in a context of defunding and scarcity? Is there not a clash between two parallel trends — diminishing resources for the arts on the one hand, and a growing insistence on fair relations within the sector on the other?

An immediate response might be that this depends on whether fairness is understood as a checklist to comply with, or as a foundational value. Fairness is like kindness, hospitality, or honesty: if we truly share these values, we aspire to practise them in good times and when circumstances become worse. It is true that in challenging times we may exercise our values differently, but those very times can also strengthen them and underscore their relevance.

In this case: how can we approach fairness through policies, so that it is embedded and promoted as a value, not a set of top-down rules? And how can fairness function not as a universal ruler for measuring behaviour, but as an adaptive value that can endure through both good and bad times? What does fair practice look like when resources and supporting systems are lacking? What does fairness even mean in such contexts?

## Fair practice - progress or a signal of systemic cracks?

To gain insight into these questions, we decided to turn our gaze to contexts where fair practices have emerged and sustained themselves bottom-up - not with the support of the wider systems, but in some cases despite the gaps and fractures in these systems. This research explored five inspiring practices from South Korea, Cambodia, Malaysia, Chile, and Indonesia. Each unfolds within a highly specific context and embodies different dimensions of fairness — including resource pooling and sharing, collective decision-making, radical openness towards neighbourhoods, and more. These practices serve both as responses to gaps and fractures in their environments and as visions of how those gaps might be overcome.

Notably, these initiatives did not emerge from abundance, generous funding, or supportive policy frameworks — in many cases, quite the opposite. Nor were they the result of a politically symbolic push, such as a government-created charter, or even a bottom-up collective process leading to a collective code of practice. Instead, they arose as responses to concrete challenges, as forms of resilience.

These examples show us that fairness, like solidarity, is a vital concept — but also one signaling urgency and hardship. Innovation in how cultural workers organise themselves and support each other often emerges in response to external gaps, frictions, and shortages. The arts are compelled to seek alternative forms of working and collaborating, particularly when dominant systems are unfair, extractive, or overwhelming. When such initiatives succeed, they can feel like fresh air, a source of hope.

Yet, there is a paradox. Because of their often conflictual relationship with existing systems, these initiatives cannot be fully supported or normalised by those systems until the systems themselves change. As a result, the burden is frequently placed on the shoulders of a few initiators, often leading to exhaustion and burnout. This path is ultimately unsustainable.

When we speak of solidarity and fairness, we often appeal to values and, typically indirectly, to goodwill. Fair practice is a *soft infrastructure* of decent working conditions. But for this soft infrastructure to make a difference, we need the hard infrastructure - laws, regulations, and resources. One cannot function without the other. Without shared values and collective commitment, regulation or a programme risks remaining stuck at the level of implementation.



Photo credit: Fragments of Tuah performance, Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre, 2025, photo by Pam Lim

For example, without a commitment to care for one another, increased funding alone is unlikely to result in sustainable working conditions - it will rather be used to reproduce the usual unfair practices. At the same time, commitments to fair practice — charters, codes, and manifestos — cannot succeed on their own if they are not underpinned by improved systems.

Our message is therefore clear: fair practice innovations are essential for consolidating shared values within the field. At the same time, they can also be signals of cracks in the system. Policymakers must support progress on fair practice within the arts community not only by facilitating dialogue and endorsing codes or charters - though this is vitally important, but also by proactively driving structural change in the wider system - so that fair practice becomes an actual practice, not merely rhetoric.

### **Fairness as an ongoing negotiation, not a static set of rules**

The arts sector is driven primarily by self-expression and meaning-making, not by the pursuit of wealth or comfort. Numerous studies demonstrate that artists do not “take the money and run”: when given resources with fewer restrictive conditions, they often work more deeply, more intensively, and achieve stronger results<sup>3</sup>. At the same time, tendencies towards self-exploitation — and the exploitation of others — undeniably exist. Addressing these tendencies requires continuous negotiation and awareness-raising.

What is crucial to realise, is that profound - and collective - shifts in mindsets do not occur under hasty pressure, short-term timelines, or output-driven funding structures. A code of practice alone, as a set of rules, - even if seen as needed exactly in circumstances lacking space and time for dialogue offers little help in such conditions. What fair practice truly requires is mutual understanding and trust.

Trust enables the negotiation of implicit expectations, ambiguous accountability, and subtle power dynamics in collective decision-making. Trust enables listening. Listening enables us to understand each others’ needs. And respecting each other’s needs is, in practice, fairness.

3. Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Ireland 2023, Basic Income for the Arts Initial Impact Assessment (6-month); Wijngaarden, Y., Berkers, P., Kimenai, F., & Everts, R. (2024). Basic income, post-precarious outcome? How creative workers perceive participating in an experiment with basic income. *Cultural Trends*, 1–16; Creatives Rebuild New York, Guaranteed Income for Artists: Preliminary Findings.

This publication demonstrates that fairness is not a final destination. It is a process of negotiation and collective crafting: testing, adjusting, transforming, experimenting, and conversing. Ultimately, it is a deeply relational concept, shaped by who is involved, the context, and the purpose and nature of the project.

The experiments explored in this study show that understandings of time, value, and collaboration differ fundamentally across contexts. When initiating any new project — particularly an international one — organisations must continuously ask themselves how a specific activity or collaboration affects their local relationships and how it fits into their broader ecosystem.

The role of the policymaker, ultimately, is not to define the principles of fairness, but to provide the conditions in which the sector can build trust, relationships, and reciprocity — and collectively decide what fairness means for specific collaborations. This happens through open-ended trajectories, spaces for collective inquiry, and community-building processes — elements that are too often absent from short-term, project-based funding structures focused on outputs, overproduction, and rigid criteria. What we need in order to learn and practise fairness are trust-based funding processes that allow the field to build the foundations for mutual understanding.

## Equity in voices, resources, and responsibility

That said, collectively agreed foundations are still necessary — tools to discuss values, understand one another's needs, and draw boundaries. A collective charter can provide such a foundation: a dialogue-builder and a living — not final — framework for working together in both difficult and better times. It is essential, however, to begin at the right end of the story.

Too often, when speaking about fair relations in the arts — and especially about the fair distribution of resources — we focus on how gains are shared among those who are already part of a project or partnership. Questions of fairness in the arts, however, extend far beyond the distribution of end resources. They also concern how input is shared: whose voices are included, who is invited to participate in decision-making, and who receives visibility and recognition. One resource is indispensable for every partner: artists' right to contribute their voice, values, and perspective to the shared work — artistically, socially, and politically. The right to participate in the arts as an equal is as vital as the right to derive tangible benefits from that participation. Being heard, respected, understood, and included is a core aspiration for artists in their creative work.

Yet there are still too many people and communities who have no access to cultural spaces, artistic education, or artistic careers. Too many voices never reach the point at which fair practice *in* the arts even becomes relevant, because social, economic, historical, and political factors keep them *outside*

the arts altogether. Fair practice for a few who are already inside is not fairness — it is privilege. Any fair practice process must therefore aim not only to improve conditions within the arts, but also to make the field itself more accessible to those who are currently underrepresented.

This is closely linked to other policy areas, including education, equality, migration, social protection, labour, freedom of expression, and more. Any fair practice code or charter must be thoughtfully embedded in this broader context — not to complicate reality, but to understand the root causes of structural problems and to clarify the actual role and agency of art workers within them.

Needless to say, these realities change over time. Just consider the rapid rise of AI, the long-term consequences and revelations of the post-pandemic period, or the growing number of displaced artists in times of wars and conflicts. New challenges continually reshape the conditions in which we work and live, and they can also shift priorities within the fair practice realm, requiring adaptations of the codes and charters we develop. While core values may remain foundational, the *how* and the *why* must remain open to rethinking. Fair practice should therefore be understood as an ongoing negotiation, not a fixed destination. Charters and codes must be treated as living documents — revisited again and again to keep dialogue open and to remain attuned to changing realities.

