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From tolerance and tokenism to radical inclusion: decolonial and intersectional approach to diversity in arts organisations and cultural policy

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Improving diversity and the position of minority and marginalised groups structurally in European arts and culture has remained challenging despite continuing efforts. Structural inequalities and barriers to participation are still prevalent. To address structural discrimination, the epistemology onto which policies, practices, and institutions have been built, must be examined. The purpose of this article is to critically examine how discriminating hegemonic power structures, derived from colonial and europatriarchal understandings of difference as hierarchical, are reproduced through cultural policy texts even if their aim is the contrary. I critically analyse the discourses of diversity in the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture's 2023 action plan measures and their implications to promotion of diversity in Finnish National Arts Institutions. Situated within decolonial and intersectional frameworks, the central argument is that cultural policy should move beyond symbolic inclusion to radical inclusion, to enable change and dismantling of structural discrimination.

KEYWORDS

cultural policy, decoloniality, diversity, hierarchical difference, intersectionality

Introduction

"To ask what diversity does, we need to follow diversity around, which is to say, we need to follow the documents that give diversity a physical and institutional form." (Ahmed, 2012, p. 12).

Diversity in the arts, culture and cultural heritage sectors has been examined from various viewpoints over recent decades, consistently affirming its perceived importance. However, the question how to genuinely diversify and decolonise an organisation and overcome historical structural inequalities, has not yet been fully resolved (Ahmed, 2012; MacDonald, 2022; Kaasila-Pakanen, 2021; Kaasila-Pakanen, 2015; Yingling, 2020). Diversity and diversifying are also contested and criticised concepts, especially by BIPOC feminist scholars (see e.g., Ahmed, 2012) as these discourses on diversity are also prone to instrumentalisation and tokenism in art institutions, by arts organisations curating only certain differences which are easily accepted. The purpose of this article is to critically analyse how hegemonic power structures in the arts have been historically construed, and how they are reproduced through cultural policy texts, even if their aim is the contrary. Both the political and social discourse on diversity, minorities and marginalised groups has harshened and polarised during recent years (Besco, 2024) and the rise of the white nationalist movement has increased overt racism in the United States and in Europe significantly (Kaplan and Inguanzo, 2024). Thus, it is elemental to support the initiatives

aimed at improving the position of the groups who are being discriminated against and ensure the potentialities of transformation towards equity. This examination offers one systematic approach to reveal and understand how the historically constructed europatriarchal (Salami, 2020) understanding of *hierarchical difference* permeates our systems, institutions, thinking of diversity and cultural policymaking. To examine this empirically, I am analysing the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture's action plan measures to promote diversity in Finnish National Arts Institutions (Lummepuro, 2023). To further illustrate how systemic discrimination is perpetuated and how it might be dismantled, I conceptualise based on both the theoretical and empirical analysis the causal and conceptual links between systems of inequality and strategies for transformative change to enable radical inclusion.

Since the 1400s onwards, European colonialism has fundamentally affected the ways in which we create meanings, understand the world and relate to the global humanity (see e.g., Seppä, 2024). In this article, the decoloniality framework is positioned as a counterforce to the colonial and hegemonic power structures that underpin the foundations of European national art institutions. Furthermore, a decolonial approach refers to concrete actions. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang state, "Decolonization is not a metaphor" (Tuck and Yang, 2012, p. 1), but a necessary material and paradigm shift, and especially necessary in national arts institutions, which construct, reproduce, and project the cultural image and identity of the nation. According to Bosch (2025); p. 2, to decolonise does not mean to diversify an existing field, but to materially disrupt the epistemic and institutional infrastructures which maintain hegemonic structures. Therefore, the framing of my research centres around how to address the epistemological violence deriving from colonialism and its material repercussions, because as I see it, it is essential to consider the ongoing influence of the colonialist episteme in order to understand how we conceptualise difference and diversity. As Greedharri, Ahonen and Tienari (2021) state: "Taking colonialism seriously as a context of diversity management is not only about acknowledging culturally different ways of knowing, but also about recognizing and undoing the authority of the West to determine what diversity around the world is and how we know it, that is, by what means we produce diversity knowledge." (p. 13). Addressing discrimination at the structural level is central to the notion of radical inclusion (e.g., Schostak, 2019), a transformative approach that not only seeks to include marginalised groups but also demands the reimagining and restructuring of systems to ensure equity and to dismantle discriminatory barriers. The difference between inclusion and *radical* inclusion is the notion that inclusion does not interfere with the structures of inequality, while radical inclusion addresses the necessity of the transformation of the structure itself (Pineda, 2024, p. 48).

The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture's action plan to promote diversity in the field of arts and culture (Lummepuro, 2023) examined in this article is a public cultural policy document which offers measures for various organisations, institutions and agencies under the Ministry's administrative branch¹. I concentrate specifically on the measures for the three Finnish national arts

institutions: the Finnish National Gallery, The Finnish National Theatre and the Finnish National Opera and Ballet. This demarcation is chosen, because these institutions have a profound effect on what the largest art audiences in Finland see and experience. Moreover, the institutions have a vast responsibility on how they portrait, construct, represent, and curate the national image and identity as the official national institutions. These three art institutions have roots in organisations established at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, prior to Finland's independence, to support the creation of a Finnish national and cultural identity. Later they became officially recognised as national institutions. In recent years, national art and cultural institutions have been criticised for perpetuating white, heteronormative, ableist, and cis-gendered stereotypical conceptions of Finnish identities (see e.g., Lehmuskallio, 2022).

While the action plan on promoting diversity focuses on cultural diversity based on immigration and the inclusion of ethnic and cultural minorities, it is elemental to understand that intersecting elements of diversities such as socio-economic status, ability, sexuality, religion, and gender must be simultaneously addressed to challenge normativities and to enable the development of diversity. Because of this, I have adapted an intersectional framework to illuminate the intersecting elements which construct identities and affect the positioning on the hierarchical scale of societal power and privilege. To scrutinise the power positionings in the writing of cultural policies for diversity, I employ in the following a four-phase critical discourse analysis tool to the policy measures developed by Cummings, de Haan, and Seferiadis (2020). By examining which power paradigms and discourses seem to impact the language and forming of cultural policies on diversity, this study also aims to assess their potential effectiveness when implemented. To support this assessment, the monitoring reports by the institutions after the first year of the action plan implementation are examined. The reports, while not publicly available, were provided by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (MinEdC) for this research with institutional permission.

In line with the feminist research tradition of problematising researcher positionality, my analysis is shaped by my own positionality and my relationship to the theoretical frameworks employed. As a white scholar researching issues relating to minority and marginalised groups, I am particularly minded of the historical tendency in cultural policy and arts management to marginalise diverse individuals as *Others* due to hierarchical understanding of difference. To address this, I work through and within a queer-specific lens which resists the reproduction and reinforcement of white, cisgender, and patriarchal normativities (Grácio et al., 2020, p. 202). While subjectivity is both inherent and necessary in qualitative research, openly articulating researcher's positionality enhances both transparency and reliability. I acknowledge that different frameworks can produce divergent interpretations of the same data; nevertheless, robust argumentation and detailed methodological description are at the same time meant to underpin the credibility of my analysis.

The research questions guiding the article are as follows:

- How does an epistemology rooted in colonialism influence the understanding of difference and diversity within the arts and cultural sector?

¹ <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-263-932-5>

- Which discursive frameworks inform the promotion of diversity in Finnish national arts institutions through cultural policy measures and to what extent do these measures enable the dismantling of hegemonic power structures and enforce structural change?

Materials and methods

Structural inequalities in the Finnish policy context

Finland is generally known as a country of strong equality and a well-functioning, equitable Nordic welfare state. The Finnish Non-Discrimination Act states (Finlex, 2014) that employers are obliged to evaluate how equity is actualised in the workplace and develop working conditions and practices, which are also in use in recruitment and in the decision-making concerning employees. Furthermore, Finland was one of the first countries to grant voting rights for women in 1906. However, this image of equality is complicated and contradicted by research indicating that Finland is also one of the European Union's most racist countries (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018) and the most violent country for women in the EU (FRA, EIGE and Eurostat, 2024). Moreover, Finland has its part in the colonial project (see e.g., Merivirta et al., 2021) and Finland's ongoing colonial practices against the indigenous Sámi peoples have not been reconciled nor rectified (Kuokkanen, 2020), which both the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2022), United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2022) and a special rapporteur Salvioli (2024) have commented on from different approaches. Additionally, studies and reports from the arts and cultural sectors reveal persistent discrimination. Finnish Actors Union's Survey (2022) exposed racism and discrimination in the acting field, while the Opening-report by the Centre for Cultural Policy Research Cupore (Lahtinen et al., 2020) highlighted employment barriers for cultural workers with foreign backgrounds. Teosto - Finnish Music Copyright Society (2024) survey results indicated that in the music field, over 60% of the professionals belonging to ethnic minorities have experienced discrimination. These findings are alarming and demand attention in policymaking and when evaluating the success of current Finnish cultural policies and diversity initiatives.

In research predating the publication of the action plan for promoting diversity in Finnish arts and culture, researcher Saukkonen (2021) extensively examined how specifically cultural diversity has been addressed in Finnish cultural policy. Saukkonen outlines a development which addresses the increased levels of immigration since the 1990s and results in the first policy guidelines concerning immigration in MinEdC being published in 2003. These guidelines emphasised the importance of cultural services for integration, support for minority cultures and artists, and the need for immigrant artists' inclusion in Finnish arts institutions. In 2009, a new national cultural policy strategy reiterated a positive outlook on multiculturalism, where diversity was seen as an asset. Concrete measures included for example, new state grants for multiculturalism and founding of Culture for All Service to ensure equal participation in cultural expressions.

Saukkonen highlights that, although the general policy framework indicated a commitment to multiculturalism, there were discrepancies at the level of implementation. Saukkonen notes that, even when there was willingness to embrace diversity, concrete actions were often limited and supplementary in nature, and reliant on additional funding. Saukkonen's research anticipated the need for more specific proposals for measures, which were then presented in the action plan in 2023 (Saukkonen, 2021).

A major obstacle to researching diversity in Finnish arts and culture is the absence of official statistics on ethnicity and race, which are not collected. Efforts to address this issue are underway (see e.g., Lahtinen and Karttunen, 2023), but the lack of data remains a significant barrier and leads to invisibilisation of minority and marginalised groups and discrimination (see e.g., Mondon, 2023).

Arts and cultural organisations in Finland operate primarily with support from public funding and private foundations, which is essential as a small country and language area with limited audiences. As a result, organisations are subject to various policy frameworks set by national and municipal authorities, as well as private foundations. Kangas and Vestheim (2011); p. 273, point out that publicly funded arts and cultural institutions are inherently dependent on and entangled with the political system. This is particularly important to recognise for the leadership of arts organisations at a time of heightened tensions and cuts to public funding, brought about by the current right-wing government and the over-all rise of the far right in Finland, to enhance capacity for change despite of the political effects and address institutional inertia. Equally important is the question of who authors policy documents, as the text inevitably reflects the episteme and the positionality of the writer, regardless of how neutral they might consider themselves to be. Van Hulst and colleagues (2024); p. 78, note that discourse theory and analysis have highlighted, how discursive practices and mechanisms are produced and reproduced within institutional systems and structures. Without the inclusion of multiple, diverse voices and epistemologies in policymaking—including decolonial and intersectional perspectives—policies risk failing to serve and benefit diverse individuals they are intended to support. As Freeman and Maybin (2011); p. 163, underscore: "Policy documents, through their writers and editors, may state truths or they may suppress, elide or embellish them. The process of writing a statement or briefing, for example, is often a matter of sorting - selecting and ordering - the many truths it might contain. It matters very much, therefore, just who is allowed or tasked to write what and by whom - and this testifies again, above all, to the real or assumed power of the document itself."

Colonial and europatriarchal understanding of difference and diversity as hierarchical

To understand the impact of cultural policies on arts management practices related to diversity, it is firstly necessary to examine, how hegemonic systems produce and reproduce outsiders, the Others. This requires a critical analysis and deconstruction of the centuries-long development of hierarchical understandings of difference and its entanglement with systemic inequality. Such inquiry is essential to improving the position of marginalised groups in the Finnish arts sector and for moving from "Eurocentric universalism towards epistemic pluriversality" (Lettau and Canyürek, 2024, p. 217). This epistemic shift must

also be reflected in the formulation of cultural policy. By examining the enduring discriminatory structures within hegemonic European arts institutions, including Finnish national arts institutions, we can see how this logic operates in practice. Adams (2007); p. 4, describes hierarchical difference as follows:

“Hierarchical difference is a subset of a broad category of differences characterised by significant power disparities between at least two parties. It comprises those differences within a society or state that are tied to cultural, historical, ethnic, religious and/or other socio-economic variables. For a hierarchical difference to be identified, these differences must have been in existence for several generations resulting in marked educational, economic, and health disparities along fairly rigid, clear lines of demarcation between those with power and those without.”

Indeed, hierarchical difference endures and is reproduced when structures of coloniality and white supremacy remain unexamined and intact (see e.g., Hsu, 2015). Historically construed europatriarchal (Salami, 2020) worldview (the contemporary result of coloniality), positions white Europeans as superior, framing our systems of belief, capitalism and thinking of economic value, and exploitative and extractive relationship to nature as the default and proven superior through the global domination by colonisation. Similarly, the heteronormative, able, cis-gendered, white European perspective is automatically positioned as the neutral, producing again the Other.

The concept of difference is often approached through either essentialist or constructionist approach (Hearn and Louvrier, 2015). The essentialist approach refers to that differences are a person's inner characteristics. The constructionist approach diverts from that and sees that “Differences are not seen as internal to the individual but as constructed in interaction with others and the wider social environment. Difference is produced, rather than existing by itself.” (Hearn and Louvrier, 2015, p. 169). To understand the supremacy etched into the European identity, the colonial history of oppression and its pseudoscientific notions on race must be considered and race seen as a classificatory social system of power. As Canyürek (2022) states, “Stigmatising difference through culture and creating a clear-cut dichotomy between European and non-European ensures the otherness of racialised groups and people. The negative representation of “the other” is maintained in contemporary European immigrant societies, although “the other” is found in various racialised communities.” (p. 65).

These structures of oppression are not only sustained consciously but also reproduced subconsciously. Canyürek (2022); p. 63, emphasises that the critical factor in understanding the process of othering is how differentiation translates to racism through classification. Therefore, counter-narratives of difference and critical engagement with these structures are essential and explicitly needed. The concept of *absent Others* (e.g., Sparkes, 1997), which I use to illuminate the position of marginalised groups, describes a double marginalisation. The individuals are not only labelled different (Other), but they are also excluded (absent) from the spaces where decisions are made. These exclusions stem from normative power structures rooted in dominant epistemologies. Yet, the perspectives of the absent

Others should be present in policy and decision-making, to be counted as fully empowered members of society.

In the early 2000s, liberal multiculturalism was introduced in Finland as the society diversified after the Soviet Union collapsed and Finland became a part of the EU, and the societal shift with the newly emerged cultural differences needed to be addressed (Lappalainen, 2006). Lappalainen notes that liberal multiculturalism was based on the concept of *tolerance* and further explains that tolerance could be “understood as a nationalist practice of inclusion, which reserves the power to position the ‘other’ as an object within a space that one considers one’s own” (Hage, 2000, in Lappalainen, 2006, p. 100). As such, the concept of tolerance is problematic, as it perpetuates unequal power positions by suggesting those in a dominant position retain the authority to either permit or deny the Other participation within a society they continue to control. Drerup (2021); p. 108, confirms this by noting that “toleration itself seems to create and perpetuate precisely those political conflicts that it is meant to contain”. The discourse of tolerance is closely entangled with the concept of difference-blind universalism (see De Man et al., 2024), which refers to attempts to establish universal standards by downplaying differences between individuals or groups. While policies and practices may seem neutral, in reality, they often create conditions that can exclude groups who are not adequately represented in the decision-making processes, perpetuating difference-blind universalism. I argue that the discourse of tolerance in the context of diversity development frequently employs such terms as “opening doors,” “offering platforms” or “giving voice.” These expressions imply structures owned by the majority who still retain the authority to permit the Others access to spaces and platforms.

Another problematic concept deriving from hierarchical understanding of difference is tokenism. Tokenism emerges as a negative result when diversity is being promoted by the hegemonic majority without critical understanding of tokenistic actions. Kanter (1977); p. 208, foundationally defined tokenism as a proportional representation where the marginalised are “often treated as representatives of their category, as symbols rather than individuals”. Tokenistic measures to increase diversity can also include elevating an individual above their own group thus creating exploitative and separative underpinnings. Furthermore, Childress, Nayyar and Gibson (2023); p. 35, note, that creatives from marginalised groups consider themselves to be placed in competition against each other in ways that members of the hegemonic group are not. They go on to argue that recognising the elevation of an individual above their group as a form of tokenism is one precondition of understanding tokenism at a structural level (Childress et al., 2023, p. 35).

To address societal positionings of power, intersectionality considers factors such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity/race, nationality, class/socio-economic background, neurodiversity, religion, and ability, and recognises that these social categorisations of difference are often interconnected and create overlapping systems and structures of disadvantage and discrimination (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2019; Winker and Degele, 2011; Lykke, 2010). It has been a crucial framework in recent decades in understanding structural questions about power, discrimination, and marginalisation. Intersectionality has roots in the BIPOC feminist activism of the 1970s, when the Combahee River Collective (Boston, U.S.) described the phenomenon as “manifold and simultaneous

oppressions” and called the oppressions *interlocking* (Combahee River Collective, 1977, p. 1). Intersectionality was then coined in 1989 by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw to further describe the oppression of African American women (Crenshaw, 1991). Official entities such as the Finnish Ministry of Justice (2019) have also identified intersectionality as an excellent method for examining the multifaceted relationship between an individual and society. To further address equity in participation in arts and cultural life in the past decades, accessibility has strongly emerged in the discourses and promoting of diversity development. In the context of social justice, access and accessibility refer to the removal of all barriers to participation (Cuyler, 2022a). Often accessibility is looked at from the aspect of physical barriers, while a broader analytical approach to accessibility can be employed, for example, through various linguistic and economic measures and practices to increase the possibilities of participation. Moreover, there has been an increase in awareness of improving accessibility for people with neurodivergences from various approaches. Focusing on all these aspects of access and participation further enables dismantling of barriers caused by the hierarchical understanding of difference and enforces equity and diversity in arts and cultural sectors.

Data and methods: the action plan and critical discourse analysis

“Discourses are the expressions of power, ideology, dominance and resistance in policy, politics and society and at the same time discourses constitute social realities.” (van Hulst et al., 2024, p. 78)

These aforementioned theoretical approaches and lenses enable a critical analysis of the discourses and discursive power dynamics regarding the promotion of diversity in Finnish cultural policy. This study employs qualitative methodology, adopting an interpretive approach to cultural policy analysis and utilising a critical discourse analysis (CDA) tool. Interpretive approaches are central to contemporary critical policy analyses, as they provide tools to interrogate both policy outcomes and the processes by which they are produced (van Hulst et al., 2024). For a policy measure to result in concrete actions and facilitate the achievement of concrete goals, it must be precise. As Cummings et al. (2020) state: “policy documents can be used to present an inspirational vision which convinces stakeholders of the need for action while ultimately also preserving the *status quo*, enshrined in the dominant discourse.” (p. 102). Examining the policy measures for promoting diversity outlined in the action plan requires a critical perspective and an understanding of broader discourses. Cummings et al. (2020); p. 100, further argue, the focus within the critical analysis of a policy text should be on the subdiscourse.

To examine and better understand discourses, I draw on Michel Foucault’s conceptualisation of discourse as a system of knowledge that both reflects and reproduces power. According to Foucault, discourses are never neutral: this perspective supports the critical examination of discourses within cultural policy to further understand how they shape power relations and the allocation of material resources in the arts and culture sectors. As Foucault (1972) states, discourses construct social realities by defining what can be said, thought, and acted upon within a given historical and institutional context. In cultural policy, discourses shape the language used to frame diversity, determining which identities

are acknowledged, which remain marginalised, and which strategies are legitimised. Power, therefore, is not simply repressive but productive, operating through discursive practices that normalise certain truths while excluding others (Foucault, 1980). Foucault’s concept of *dispositif* further illuminates how discourses, institutions, regulations, and practices interconnect to sustain hegemonic structures (see e.g., Peltonen, 2004). Seen in this way, Finnish national arts institutions can be understood as dispositifs that materialise cultural policy discourses, internalising them in organisational operations, recruitment practices, and artistic programming. These dispositifs reproduce hierarchical differences as they often fail to interrogate and dismantle existing europatriarchal power structures and continue to position, often subconsciously, whiteness, heteronormativity, and able-bodiedness as norms, while relegating the Others to the margins or even to complete invisibility.

The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (MinEdC) has made conscious efforts in collaboration with various actors in trying to better the conditions and possibilities of diversity to be enhanced in the fields of art and culture, by reports, action plans, and research. In 2020, the MinEdC appointed a Working Group for Cultural Policy, Immigrants and Cultural Diversity and the task was to increase the visibility of cultural diversity and ensure it is more considered in policy making, with a specific task to consider how art and culture could be used to strengthen social inclusion and participation of people with a foreign background (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021, p. 9). The working group produced a final report (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021) in which they recommended developing of an action plan to promote diversity, resulting in the publication of the action plan “Art, Culture and Diverse Finland” (Lummepuro, 2023). As the process concentrated on diversity issues based more on recent immigration, the national minorities such as the indigenous Sámi and the Roma are not mentioned specifically in the action plan measures, while their invisibility in national art institutions should be urgently addressed.

The measures to promote diversity are organised in the action plan into categories and presented as bulleted lists, with many of them specifically tailored to individual organisations or agencies:

- Measures for MinEdC’s strategy work and funding of culture
- Measures in the Ministry and the agencies under its administrative branch
- Measures for the three Finnish national art institutions
- Measures to promote diversity and integration in cooperation with communities in the cultural sector
- Measures to strengthen the knowledge base on diversity and equality

My approach for the analysis of the policy measures is critical discourse analysis (CDA). Critical discourse analysis is rooted “in theory and analysis of ideologies and power, the sociology of science and the philosophy of language” (van Hulst et al., 2024, p. 77). There are two strengths in CDA when analysing policy documents according to Cummings et al. (2020); p. 100: “First, it allows you to analyse policy documents by revealing their inner biases and claims in systemic, structured way, revealing their hidden pre-occupations and how they reflect different discourses: dominant,

marginal, oppositional or alternative. Second, the methodology is also intrinsically activist because the final stage involves the identification of new discourses, narratives and arguments which can counteract 'social wrongs' in current, dominant discourse.". Indeed, CDA method enables examining what type of power positionalities are being expressed and produced in cultural policies. For this research I have adapted an approach and a tool for CDA developed by Cummings, de Haan and Seferiadis (2020). They maintain (2020, p.100) that CDA is a useful tool also for non-specialists and have developed the method to suit policy documents where one examines specifically subdiscourses, all while also aiming to clarify the methodology by simplifying the language. Their tool is based on the transdisciplinary CDA by Fairclough and Fairclough (2012). The analysis tool is divided into four phases, which I followed in my examination (Cummings et al., 2020, p. 103-104):

1. Identifying a research topic which relates to a social question which can be approached meaningfully through language and text.
2. Finding a suitable text and its analysis, and an analysis on previous research and policies on the topic.
3. Examining how the text was developed in terms of who was participating in making of the policy and what types of connections that power positioning has to the discourses identified and being examined.
4. Identifying possible solutions past the dominant discourse in terms of creating new discourses, narratives and arguments.

Regarding identifying a research topic suited for the CDA tool, this paper is a part of a research process which examines structural discrimination and promotion of diversity within arts organisations from various approaches and contexts. The timely publishing of the action plan offered a possibility to study diversity within the cultural policy context through text and language. Previous research on the development on diversity in the Finnish cultural policy context was examined. Next, following the tool, who participated in the writing of the policy was noted. The original working group for the MinEdC's final report (2021) document consisted of individuals from diverse backgrounds. The action plan document was written and edited by a senior ministerial adviser in cultural affairs, and interestingly, the measures in the action plan for each national arts institution were written by the national arts institutions themselves according to their diversity projects and aims. These measures indicated both development of general diversity principles and more detailed project, production, and practice descriptions. That the institutions themselves wrote the measures resulted in three very different sets of measures both in number, tone, and details: six (6) measures for the Finnish National Opera (FNOB), nine (9) for the Finnish National Gallery (FNG) and seventeen (17) for the Finnish National Theatre (FNT).

I began the analysis by identifying several themes of diversity development in the policy measures through thematic analysis: recruitment of diversity, increasing skills and competences on diversity, re-thinking language-requirements, anti-racism training, integration and easy-language use, and diversity expert services. The language around the themes in the measures was then taken more into focus, concentrating on the tone, content and power positioning alluded in the writing. The discourses were distinguished informed

by the theoretical framework describing the developments of understanding and addressing diversity, specifically identifying discourses and subdiscourses which resist structural change, and which induce change. Through the interpretive approach, they were identified as the discourse of tolerance and difference-blind universalism, the discourse of tokenism, the discourse of intersectionality, and the discourse of accessibility. The discourses were operationalised through the search of words, concepts, meanings, absences, and their interconnectivities. In the discourse of tokenism these related to e.g., instrumentalising diversity, singling out individual actors, singular success stories, targeted recruitment for positions to improve diversity, and placing the responsibility for addressing identity-based injustice on individuals from diverse backgrounds. In the discourse of tolerance and difference-blind universalism these related to a passive or general tone, passive or symbolic inclusion, absence or concealment of race, erasure of differences in diversity, and unchallenged power hierarchies. In intersectionality these related to power positions and hierarchies, representation, underrepresentation, positionality, identity factors, multiple identities, and society. In accessibility, these related to access within both physical, economic and cognitive aspects, identifying barriers, language accessibility, belonging, and identification. After this, I compared the measures against the reported results of the implementation of the measures. In the monitoring report the institutions answer with yes/no -answers to individual measures and shortly elaborate on the implication or success of the measure on a practical level. In the answers some measures by the FNG and FNT were not elaborated, so the monitoring report was utilised more as a support for the analysis than comprehensive evidence for the success or failure of the measures. It was important to balance the theoretical framework and the analysis process: the existing theory has informed identifying and categorisation of the discourses, while enabling also emergent new insights and interpretation from the data. In the next chapters the empirical findings are presented through discursive examples and developed with the theoretical frame into a visualisation of the relationship between systems and discourses of inequality and the strategies and discourses for transformative change.

Results

Embedded and emerging discourses of diversity: from tolerance and tokenism to intersectionality and accessibility

The analysis of the measures highlights differences in the amount, tone, and critical engagement with various aspects of diversity for each institution. Based on the analysis through the CDA tool, I identified the dominant and normative discourses on diversity being the discourse of tolerance and difference-blind universalism and the discourse of tokenism, all of which reproduce hierarchical difference. According to the CDA tool, the final phase involves identifying new discourses and these emerging discourses were identified as the discourse of intersectionality and the discourse of accessibility. Next, I present and analyse examples of how I identified the discourses and examine their impact to diversity development in the institutions.

How to evolve from the discourse of tolerance to decolonial and anti-racist diversity: the Finnish National Opera and Ballet

Among the three national art institutions, The FNOB has the fewest measures for promoting diversity, with only six (6) measures. Furthermore, these measures are brief and expressed in an impassive tone. Their brevity results in lack of detail, absence of clear implementation steps, and vague goal orientation, making further evaluation difficult. FNOB's measures rely exclusively on terms "cultural diversity" and "diversity." The formulations of the measures are broad and unspecific. Examples include: "the topic of cultural diversity is included in the development work"; FNOB "regularly implement diversity training;" "maintain an open diversity discussion;" FNOB is "utilising networks for diversity work in Finland and the Opera Europa Organisation" (Lummepuro, 2023, p. 43). The lack of specificity reflects the discourse of difference-blind universalism (see e.g., De Man et al., 2024): the differing diversities remain unidentified and hegemonic power structures are maintained by merely including, rather than prioritising diversity in development work, leaving existing structures unquestioned.

The discourse of tolerance and difference-blind universalism emerges in formulations such as "The Finnish National Opera and Ballet takes cultural diversity into consideration in recruitment." (p. 43). This indicates that all cultural diversities can be considered similarly and implies that merely considering cultural diversity is sufficient for diversifying staff. This can lead to a difference-blind universalist approach: although the FNOB has the most diverse staff considering the variety of nationalities represented, this does not necessarily indicate that the institution supports all kinds of cultural diversities in recruitment practices. The artistic staff primarily come from Western European traditions of classical music, opera and ballet, which tend to include people from specific similar societal positionings and backgrounds. Research has shown that opera and classical music systems perpetuate discriminatory structures, particularly towards racialised individuals (see e.g., Cuyler, 2022b). Without critical, active anti-racist approach to diversity development, the diversity of the staff will remain limited. Moreover, the presence of multiple nationalities without conscious anti-racist recruitment strategies can lead to institutional complacency, as diversity is perceived to have already been achieved. The overarching discourse of tolerance is evident in formulations that employ a passive tone. Merely stating that cultural diversity will be considered in recruitment creates the possibility that nothing changes and existing recruiting systems remain intact. The passive tone in the action plan measures is mitigated in the FNOB monitoring report, where the implementation of the measures is communicated in more detail in the practical level, however it would have been beneficial to add the detailed information into the policy document to understand how the generally formulated measures are implemented in practice. The monitoring report mentions for example, employing a questionnaire for staff on diversity to further improve the diversity development, which represents a more active approach.

Encouragingly, elements of the discourse of intersectionality also emerge. One of the more specific measures states that FNOB is "developing policies to promote the diversity of artistic content,

such as the introduction of a representation policy" (p. 43). Introducing the discourse of representation indicates an awareness of the intersecting diversities and need for change in opera and ballet production on a systemic level. However, keeping the representation policy as a separate document further hinders the recognition of best practices among the national art institutions and other organisations. Moreover, when its goals are not specified in the official policy document, monitoring and evaluation become challenging and the policy text may remain as a symbolic idea, like Cummings et al. (2020); p. 102, state that policy documents may frame an inspiring vision yet ultimately reproduce and sustain the status quo upheld by dominant discourse. The representation policy, provided for this article by the FNOB, is a four-page document that includes a glossary of terms, identifying challenges related to representation in opera and ballet, such as exoticisation and racialisation, and addresses changing audience values and expectations regarding representation. The representation policy also acknowledges that FNOB does not merely reflect the society but actively constructs it. FNOB mentioned it has shared the representation policy with some other organisations, however including the measures from the representation policy to the public action plan document would have demonstrated a more prominent and critical approach to promoting diversity and signalled a stronger institutional dedication to the challenges of diversifying the artistic programming and addressing discriminatory practices and discourses in opera and ballet.

Overall, the FNOB measures point to positive goals. However, especially for art sectors such as opera and classical ballet which carry the weight of their perceived elitism and still struggling with issues of basic gender equality and misuse of power in leadership (see e.g., Ramstedt, 2024; Jägerhorn and Vihmanen, 2023), stronger measures are needed to address broader questions of inclusion and representation. What further strengthens the analysis of the reproduction of the discourse of tolerance and difference-blind universalism is how notably anti-racism is absent. The omission is especially significant in the context of recruitment. Considering that FNOB has developed a representation policy to address issues such as exoticisation and cultural appropriation, a broader institutional understanding of the need for these decolonial and intersectional strategies is essential.

From accessibility measures to diversifying the programme and exhibitions: the challenges of the Finnish National Gallery

The FNG is an art museum institution comprising three museums of visual art: The Ateneum, Sinebrychoff Art Museum and Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma. The FNG has nine (9) measures for promoting diversity, most of which focus on different aspects of increasing accessibility. However, what are notably missing, are measures taking into consideration diversity in artistic programming of the museums of the FNG. The three museums which form the FNG focus on different periods of art and operate as separate organisations, which understandably can complicate the creation of common measures. Nevertheless, if promoting diversity were seen as a structural task, the measures considering diversity in artistic programming for all museums could be similar, as they could relate to for example, to curatorial training.

Another factor complicating the diversification of the museums and might be a reason why artistic programming was left out of the measures, is the nature of the museums' collections. These collections, especially in the museums focused on non-contemporary art, were shaped with the same historically constructed europatriarchal understanding of *what art is*: What is artistic value and style, and who can be an artist. Historically, this largely has excluded works by anyone who is not a white man. Consequently, museums face challenges when demands for more diverse programming and artists is raised. To mitigate this, absences and oversights should be explicitly acknowledged and critically analysed in contemporary exhibition making (see e.g., Juvonen, 2021) and taken into consideration in policymaking. Excluding efforts to diversify exhibitions is particularly an oversight, when the FNG informs of the goal to improve the accessibility and approachability of all the museums through a programme "Let's meet at the National Gallery" (p. 43). Research consistently shows that to attract diverse visitors, an artistic programme which takes diversity into consideration is essential and it is not enough to enhance just the accessibility to the museum if the contents do not speak to a diverse audience and do not create a sense of belonging through possibilities for identification with the content of the museum (Lehmuskallio, 2022). The monitoring report does not mention any developments of this measure.

The discourse of intersectionality emerges in utilisation of certain concepts which are strongly associated to intersectionality and through recognition of intersecting elements causing discrimination or barriers. As an example, a measure for The Ateneum mentions *underrepresented* groups (p. 45). Underrepresented refers to various minority and marginalised groups, their power differentials and absences, and it is an encouraging sign that FNG recognises this in the measures. Several measures involve contacting entire age groups of children and youth, suggesting efforts to reach individuals from underrepresented groups. This reinforces an intersectional approach by acknowledging the intersections of for example, representation, participation, socio-economic status, race, ability, and religion (see e.g., Collins, 2019), which can contribute to non-participation in the arts. Furthermore, the concept of safer spaces is mentioned. This concept is a principle and typically a set of suggestions, often associated with the intersectionality discourse as they acknowledge the multifacetedness of identities and their relation to power hierarchies and norms. Safer space guidelines aim to create a respectful, non-harassing, and non-assuming atmosphere where everyone, especially individuals from marginalised groups, can expect to feel relative safety to participate. This reflects progressive awareness within the FNG and sends a message of dedication towards practices actively dismantling barriers to participation, by creating spaces welcoming for everyone.

The FNG further reinforces the emergence of the discourse of intersectionality by addressing economic accessibility, as according to intersectional analysis, questions of marginalisation and discrimination cannot be approached without understanding the combination and intersections of the factors which cause them (see e.g., Winker and Degele, 2011). An intersectional approach requires consideration of socio-economic positionalities, as these relate to the positioning on the societal scale of power and privilege. The FNG also identifies anti-racism training for all staff members as a fundamental strategy for promoting diversity, which further

indicates understanding of the need to dismantle intersecting structures of discrimination on an institutional level.

Tackling language accessibility and whiteness: the Finnish National Theatre

Positively, the discourse of accessibility, specifically language accessibility, emerges strongly in the measures for promoting diversity for the FNT. This is a fundamental approach to increasing the diversity of visitors when dealing with theatre, which is performed primarily in Finnish in the FNT. The institution addresses language accessibility through several measures, including multilingual performances, classroom performances for young people with Finnish as a second language and immigrant backgrounds, and plans to use subtitles for future performances (Lummepuro, 2023, pp. 47-48). According to the report, these concrete actions have been largely implemented successfully, although only one or two plays per year currently have been subtitled.

Reproducing hegemonic power positionings, the discourse of tokenism emerges repeatedly in the FNT measures. Tokenism can be identified in the measure which "looked for and hired Finns born abroad to its "Communities and Inclusion" unit." (Lummepuro, 2023, pp. 47-48). This action can be seen as twofold: on one hand, it shows clear and positive effort to consciously diversify the workforce; on the other hand, this targeted recruitment is pointed to a specific unit for inclusion. This can result in that individuals already othered in Finnish society are put in a position where they are responsible for transforming the institutional structures and practices, often relying on their personal experience to make the theatre more inclusive. Previous research has indicated that individuals belonging to marginalised groups hired for roles such as Chief Diversity Officer must personally fight against the same challenges in the workplace which they are hired to tackle, such as racism (Koffi, 2023). As Baybutt (2023) states: "For initiatives to become more inclusive, recognition needs to be matched by redistribution of access to positions more broadly. Otherwise, hierarchies of power can be reproduced by so-called diversity work through instances of tokenism." (p. 23).

Another example of tokenism is the explicit mention of a writer-in-residence who has a foreign background in a specific measure by their name. Like research indicates, tokenism can operate by singling out or elevating an individual (see e.g., Kanter, 1977; Childress et al., 2023). Again, this can be viewed from two perspectives: it is genuine progress that the FNT has hired a BIPOC writer and a prominent societal figure and staged their successful work on the main stage by a diverse working group including BIPOC performers, albeit led by a white Finnish theatre director. This process marked several important firsts for both the FNT and the Finnish theatre field. The production attracted large audiences, and it was praised in the media leading to positive publicity for the FNT. However, coinciding with this positive publicity highlighting the quality and diversity of the production, all actors permanently hired or belonging to the theatre's ensemble were white. This reveals a stark discrepancy between the positive public image of diversity through the successful production, contrasted to the institutional reality of the non-diverse ensemble. The implementation report mentions as a sign of success of this specific measure that a new production has been commissioned from the same writer. This again can be seen from

two perspectives: an individual is rewarded with a second possibility due to their artistic, financial and media success, which is great, however from another perspective, no structural changes or measures are outlined to ensure that diverse voices or BIPOC representation will be seen on the main stage consistently beyond this single future commission.

The discourse of difference-blind universalism also emerges. The FNT states in the measures that the theatre aims to have an increasingly diverse group of actors (pp. 47–48) however, no specifications on how this goal will be achieved are mentioned. The implementation and monitoring report notes that 0% of the permanent ensemble of actors come from diverse backgrounds, even if there was a recruitment process for new actors to the theatre's ensemble in 2023. Had the measure on recruiting diversity included concrete strategies for implementation, perhaps the outcome of the recruitment process might have indicated a stronger commitment to promoting diversity and addressing the need for structural reform in representation.

Visualising the structures of inequality strategies for change

To further illustrate how systemic issues are perpetuated and how they might be dismantled, I conceptualise in [Figure 1](#) the relationship between systems and discourses of inequality and the strategies and discourses for transformative change, particularly within the context of historically europatriarchal art institutions. In the chart, I illustrate and summarise the causal and conceptual links between historical structures of inequality and contemporary strategies for change, connecting the abstract concepts with actionable strategies. The aim is to provide a tool that integrates theoretical reflection with practical applications for further cultural policymaking and arts management practices.

To summarise my analysis and conceptualisation, colonialism laid the foundation for societies structured around contemporary europatriarchal norms and values, where differences and diversity between groups continue to be constructed and understood hierarchically, resulting in systemic discrimination. These forms of systemic inequality include for example, structural racism, classism, ableism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. These discriminatory structures create barriers to participation and employment, which I found being maintained through practices such as tokenism and difference-blind universalism in national arts institutions. These lead to many minority and marginalised groups being excluded from arts institutions, resulting in their symbolic and material absence in both recruitment, decision-making, and artistic programming, creating absent Others. I further point, that institutional inertia and resistance to change caused by the comfort in privilege help maintain dominant power structures.

To challenge these structures, I outline a series of strategies for change towards radical inclusion. It is essential that new epistemologies, methods of research, and counter-narratives are present in these processes to ensure pluralistic knowledge production and representation. The series of strategies begins with understanding history through the radical deconstruction of colonial knowledge production. The chart proceeds to the analysis of discourses with a focus on identifying and

challenging privileges, stereotypes and prejudices embedded in cultural discourses, policy texts and institutional practices. The next step involves shifting the discourses by adopting decolonial, antiracist, intersectional, and accessibility-oriented strategies. From this, I argue that new discourses and knowledge systems can emerge, grounded in plurality and decoloniality. Ultimately, these processes create possibilities for structural change and radical inclusion through new policy instruments, institutional reform, and discursive shifts.

Discussion

Improving diversity and the position of minority and marginalised groups structurally in European arts and culture has remained challenging despite continuing efforts. I suggest that one of the causes for this lies in cultural policies and consequent arts management practices, which derive from colonial and contemporary europatriarchal understanding of difference as hierarchical and have not adequately dismantled historical structures of discrimination. This, in turn, has reproduced discriminatory structures, practices, and discourses such as racism and ableism in arts organisations. This article proposed how to address such a deeply entrenched epistemology of discrimination by critically examining discourses in the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture's 2023 action plan measures and their implications to the promotion of diversity for national arts institutions. I foregrounded the role of discourse in shaping institutional change and argued that examining why discursive frameworks derived from hierarchical understanding of difference persist helps explain why the status quo remains even when positive diversity initiatives, such as the action plan, are formally introduced.

To address the violent discourse against diversity and minority and marginalised groups caused by the heightened global, political and social polarisation and the increase of racism, multiple approaches are needed to ensure social cohesion and equitable development. In the context of arts and culture, identifying and challenging dominant discourses, and identifying and supporting the emergence of new ones, can help overcome institutional inertia in diversity development of arts institutions with histories of nation-building and hegemonic status in their fields. Discourses derived from hierarchical understanding of difference, such as tolerance, difference-blind universalism and tokenism, continue to reinforce discrimination. Discourses of intersectionality and accessibility on the contrary challenge hierarchical conceptions of difference and offer transformative approaches to diversity development and structural change. These discourses acknowledge the intersecting dimensions of marginalisation and their implications on participation and representation. While positive, this discursive shift remains yet underdeveloped and requires further consolidation. In conclusion, my analysis suggests that Finnish cultural policy currently focuses on strategies and actions that *add* diversity into existing systems rather than dismantle the underlying structures that perpetuate hierarchical difference. As a result, policy measures may fall short in creating the comprehensive framework conditions necessary to move beyond symbolic inclusion to radical inclusion: the systemic diversification in staffing,

Structures of Inequality and Strategies for Change

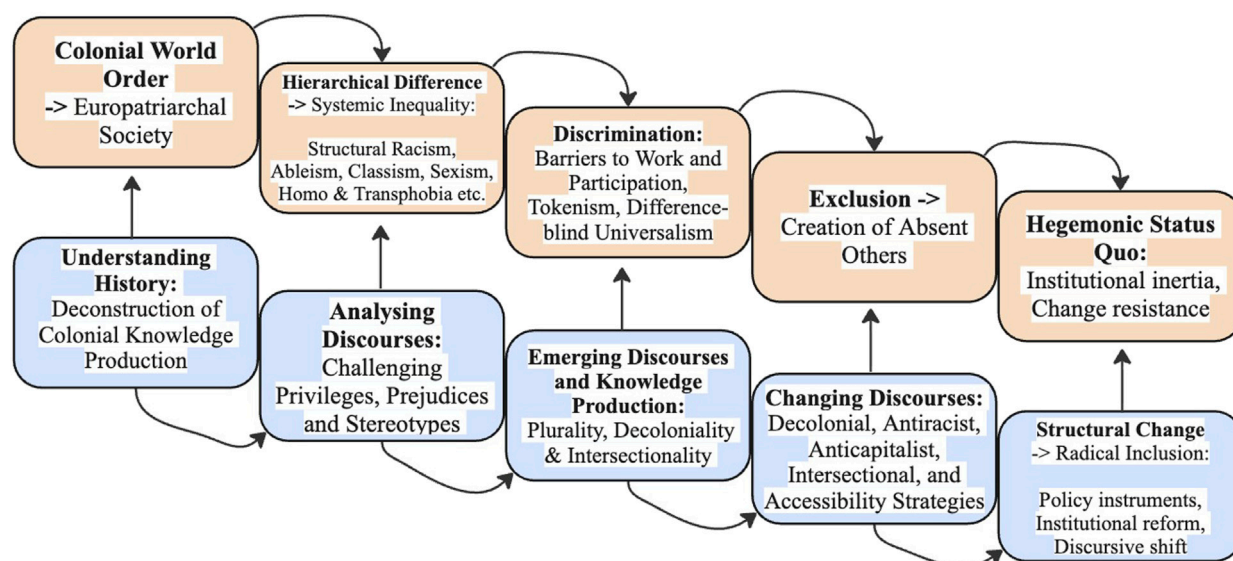


FIGURE 1
Visualisation for structures of inequality and strategies for change.

programming, and audience profiles within national arts institutions.

Further research should explore the critical strategies of resistance to hierarchical difference and new knowledge production methods, including antiracist, anticapitalist, decolonial, post-migrant, and queering approaches. The post-migrant approach illustrates how a discursive change can reframe the conception of differing diversities, as [Altay et al. \(2025\)](#) note, the post-migrant framework reframes migration not as a temporary challenge but as a continuous and formative force of social and societal life. This example of a discursive change challenges static notions of national identity and opens space for more diverse cultural narratives. Future research should address the invisibility of Finnish national minorities such as the indigenous Sámi and the Roma within the national arts institution, and critical diversity management studies would benefit from critical analyses of art institutions' internal equity policies to deepen understanding of how diversity is conceptualised and operationalised.

In conclusion, art managers and policymakers should respond proactively to the global shifts and demographic changes which require a commitment to decolonial, norm-critical, and antiracist approaches, as well as a more equitable distribution of power positions. National arts institutions would benefit from more concrete and systemic policy measures, particularly in the context of current austerity policies and political polarisation under the Finnish right-wing government, which have undermined the national importance of arts and culture. Finally, diverse voices representing epistemic plurality must be present in policymaking, since as [Lorde \(2007\)](#); p. 110, famously stated: "Master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."

Data availability statement

The data analyzed in this study is subject to the following licenses/restrictions: The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article. The monitoring reports analysed in this study were obtained from the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture with institutional permission and are not publicly available. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author. Requests to access these datasets should be directed to LL, lilja.lehmuskallio@uniarts.fi.

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