

Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis

Studia ad Bibliothecarum Scientiam Pertinentia 21 (2023)

ISSN 2081-1861

DOI 10.24917/20811861.21.23

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Biodiversity and Cultural Policy as Instruments of Change

Introduction

In the following study, I will present the core theoretical framework that underpins my dissertation and research efforts.

It is important to note that I approach the field of literature and the book industry from multiple perspectives: firstly, as an academic researcher, and secondly, as an active participant. I engage in artistic pursuits, particularly poetry; contribute to organising literary festivals; and play a role in the Association of Writers, the Czech professional organisational body. This multifaceted involvement carries both advantages and risks. It allows me to gain insights from various viewpoints within the book industry (artist, producer, manager, etc.); it facilitates building trust with the book professionals I interview, and systematically mapping the book market. However, it also presents a potential challenge to maintaining academic impartiality. To mitigate this, I make extensive use of international comparisons to assess the local situation. Furthermore, I rely on statistical data and research findings to support my work, ensuring a balanced and evidence-based approach to my research.

Biodiversity

My academic work draws on several theories and approaches within the cultural industries related to books and printing. Given my primary focus on the Czech context, I concentrate on printed books. In the Czech Republic, printed books remain the predominant text medium for sale¹, with audiobooks enjoying a larger market share and e-books² having the smallest presence. Therefore, my perspective revolves around book distribution, encompassing its individual stakeholders and their interconnections. My particular interest lies in independent literature (explained further below) and its functioning within the framework of market mechanisms.

The foundational theoretical background of my research is the concept of *biodiversity*. This concept, which originated in the early 1990s in the Spanish-speaking countries³, has gradually evolved, and is now actively promoted not only in its area

1 Report of the Czech Association of Booksellers and Publishers, p. 12.

2 Ibid, p. 24.

3 Hawthorne, p. 12.

of origin but also in France, where it forms an integral part of cultural policy. The ideas and theories encompassed by this concept are not entirely new; the principles of bibliodiversity have historical precedents. For example, the British publishing house Hogarth Press, established by Virginia and Leonard Woolf, embodied many of these principles with its experimental texts, support for emerging authors, cost-effective practices, and non-profit orientation. Indeed, some of the principles associated with bibliodiversity, such as advocacy for fair remuneration, were articulated by Woolf herself in her essay *A Room of One's Own*.

The International Alliance of Independent Publishers, plays a pivotal role in advancing and promoting bibliodiversity. In 2015, Australian author and publisher Susan Hawthorne further refined the concept, transforming it into a comprehensive framework of thought, which she expounded in her book *Bibliodiversity: A Manifesto for Independent Publishing*. At its core, the concept revolves around the notion that the book market, or the publishing industry as a whole, is not a homogenous entity but rather an ecosystem comprising diverse and distinct members or stakeholders, each with its own strengths, weaknesses, interests, and needs. According to Hawthorne's definition:

Bibliodiversity is a complex, self-sustaining system of storytelling, writing, publishing, and other kinds of production of oral and written literature. The writers and producers are comparable to the inhabitants of an ecosystem. Bibliodiversity contributes to a thriving life of culture and a healthy eco-social system⁴.

Hawthorne, along with the Alliance, identifies independent publishers (further defined below) as the primary advocates and representatives of bibliodiversity. She introduces the concept of *dynamic equilibrium*, borrowed from ecology, to describe the necessity of such a balance for the book industry to operate in a diverse and balanced manner. In opposition stands *monoculture*, which manifests in literature as a plethora of uniform branches of bookstore chains offering the same selection regardless of the local community and its residents. Monoculture does not serve biodiversity, nor does it contribute to human culture. It lacks room for diversity or consideration of local community needs, and excludes entire population groups. Hawthorne, an Australian, illustrates this issue through the example of the disappearance of entire language groups among Australia's indigenous population.

This concept also promotes sustainability principles within the book industry, focusing on sustainable publishing and book distribution practices. It explains why smaller-scale operations are sustainable and highlights some of the issues related to printing outside the sales region and the associated transportation costs. Bibliodiversity elucidates the mechanisms of book industry oligopolisation and the consequences this has for literature, which is an integral part of society that cannot be left entirely to market forces.

Hawthorne writes from the perspective of an engaged participant – publisher, author, and bookseller. She seeks change by advocating for a shift in mindset, encouraging a more diversified view of the book industry. When we examine her concept differently, we can perceive the book industry not only as an ecosystem with interconnections and relationships but also – in terms of production types and economic

4 Hawthorne, p. 10.

indicators – as a spectrum. At one end, we find extremely commercial publishing houses primarily focused on profit; at the other are independent publishers whose primary goal is to publish a specific (usually non-profitable) type of literature, with profit or sustainable operations ranking second or third in priority⁵. In between, there are hundreds of other entities leaning towards one end or the other. Importantly, all of them have the capacity to change their positions, which is acceptable. However, it is crucial to recognise that there will always be a portion of production at both ends and, most importantly, the spectrum cannot shift entirely to one side. It is a connected system.

In theatrical practice⁶, there is a process described wherein a particular theme initially emerges on the independent theatre scene. Here, it undergoes exploration, testing, and the discovery of a theatrical language to artistically convey the theme. In the initial stages, such activities are often non-profit and supported by grants and scholarships in many countries. Gradually, however, the theme gains wider recognition; larger theatre companies sense an opportunity, and they take over the theme. For a time, it becomes part of the mainstream, only to eventually recede and return to the periphery of the independent scene. This cycle repeats regularly. In the academic sphere, a similar process is divided into a research or testing phase, followed by an application phase. However, in cultural and artistic processes, we must recognise that the initial phase – the practical, experimental work – is indispensable for the application phase; especially in the creative sector, which aims for profitability.

An analogous process can be observed in literature. For a long time, topics such as sexualised violence and the status of women in society did not sell tens of thousands of books. However, in recent years, texts addressing these themes have been published by major publishing houses.

These have included titles such as *Těla* by Klára Vlasáková (one of the brands under the hegemon of the Czech market, Euromedia Group), which is currently expected to receive a reprint; *Houbařka* by Viktoria Hanišová (published by Host, one of the ten largest publishers)⁷; *Poupátka* by Hana Lehečková (Albatros, the largest publishing group in the market⁸); and *Bílá voda* by Kateřina Tučková (again, Host). This theme has also made its way into the mainstream: Radka Třeštíková's new book *Kde jsi, když nejsi* (Albatros) delves into the disintegration of a middle-class couple's relationship from the perspective of a woman who seemingly lacks nothing but becomes a victim of her husband's escalating microaggressions. The issue of sexualised violence is also addressed in the latest book by Alena Mornštajnová, *Les v domě* (Host), which may be this author's most commercially successful work so far. The last three books have often had print runs exceeding 100,000 copies.

In the non-fiction domain, several books have been published in a period of just under a year. Šárka Homfray's *Proč jsme tak naštvané* (published by the independent publisher wo-men) was followed a few months later by *Feministkou snadno a rychle* by Lucie Jarkovská and Kateřina Lišková (Euromedia Group), and most recently,

5 As shown by the research I conducted among independent publishers in 2020.

6 Matarasso, Landry, 1997, p. 48, [on-line:] <https://vltava.rozhlas.cz/nezavisle-divadlo-je-ted-podcenene-pritom-nase-experimenty-se-casto-odrazeji-na-8372366> – 2.10.2023.

7 Report of the Czech Association of Booksellers and Publishers, p. 15.

8 Ibid.

V pasti pohlaví: O politice, péči, sexu, násilí a postavení žen v Česku by Silvia Lauder (Host).

Cultural Policy as an Instrument of Change

Cultural policy, like any other policy, represents a vision and a defined direction for a society to pursue through the support of the state apparatus and the development of culture, consequently enhancing its own identity. This vision is typically embodied in a strategic document, which may or may not have a specified timeframe.

The current Czech cultural policy, effective for the years 2021–2025, is, for the first time in history (it is the fourth document of its type), largely focused on the so-called cultural and creative industries (CCIs). It states:

An essential part of the modern creative economy consists of CCIs. We define them as economic activities within the broader cultural and creative sector. Unlike other cultural areas, CCIs are not dependent on public resources; they are financially self-sustaining to more than 50%. CCIs encompass various fields with the potential to generate profit, including audiovisual, music, books and print, advertising, architecture, design, fashion, traditional and artistic crafts, as well as certain areas within the performing arts, visual arts, and cultural heritage. However, this simple list cannot fully capture the diversity of CCI⁹.

This approach has been present and valid in foreign countries for many years. Currently, a new cultural policy is being prepared, which, ideally, will build upon the existing one. However, the challenge lies in the discontinuity and resulting instability caused by this system. Looking at other countries, it becomes evident that the key is to set a certain direction and maintain it for decades. France has had a relatively stable cultural policy since the 1980s. Some Scandinavian countries have even longer periods of continuity – Norway established its basic framework in the 1960s, and Sweden’s cultural policy, with minor adjustments, has been in place since 1974. In essence, these policies emphasise that, to quote from the Swedish document, “culture should be a dynamic, stimulating, and independent force based on freedom of expression. Everyone should have the opportunity to participate in cultural life. Creativity, diversity, and artistic quality should be an integral part of societal development.” The principle of diversity was added in 2009; the text has remained unchanged since then¹⁰.

Priorities may vary; some countries may focus more on the development of cultural infrastructure, others on cultural exports, and some on providing democratic access to culture for all segments of the population. Ideally, it should be a comprehensive concept that evenly covers all aspects of cultural operations, and it should not change every three or four years.

Czech cultural policy, since the 1990s, has primarily focused on the preservation of immovable heritage but has stagnated in supporting contemporary and live arts¹¹. Three decades later, we face precarisation of work in the cultural sector and

9 Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, 2021.

10 Arts Council Sweden, 2009.

11 NEKOLNÝ (In Mattarasso, Laundry), p. 80.

a lack of social security for workers in this field, despite UNESCO recognising in 1980 that cultural workers have specific needs and that their status should be adjusted¹². Across Europe, in the cultural and creative sector, about 30% of individuals work as freelancers (in 2022, the average was 31.8%); in the overall economy, the figure is just over 10% (13.8% in 2022). The Czech Republic surpasses this average, with as many as 37.5% of people in the cultural and creative sector working as freelancers¹³. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was no support for cultural workers, resulting in a significant decline in employment in the sector. Last year saw the number of people employed in cultural work drop by 15,000¹⁴ or 7.3%. Only Bulgaria (with a 7.7% decrease) performed worse¹⁵. In contrast, 19 other countries saw an increase in cultural employment even after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Status of the Artist

A potential solution to the issue of insecure work in this sector is the Status of the Artist, a set of measures promoted by the European Union. The European Commission formed a separate working group to address this matter¹⁶. Several countries, including Spain, Portugal, Ireland, and Austria, have made significant progress in addressing the Status of the Artist, and it remains a topic of discussion in many other places. This issue is highly relevant in the Czech Republic, which, as part of the National Recovery Plan, has committed to adopting the Status of the Artist by the end of 2024. The first version of this legislation was expected to enter the legislative process at the beginning of December 2023¹⁷.

The specific components of the Status of the Artist may vary from one administration to another. However, I will attempt to summarise the fundamental principles and approaches that these different policies aim to incorporate.

Artist vs Cultural Professional

First and foremost, the discussion revolves around who should be eligible to attain the Status of the Artist. There are two main approaches to this: a narrow approach focused solely on artists and a broader one encompassing what are known as artistic-technical workers.

To capture primarily the artistic aspect within the system, it is usually sufficient to rely on the generally applicable principles of copyright law and grant artist status to those whose work is associated with copyright, such as directors, writers, visual artists, translators, or choreographers. Performative artists, such as actors and dancers, are also typically included in this category. All these groups typically work in creative cycles, alternating between periods of preparation and rehearsals when

12 UNESCO, 1980.

13 Eurostat, 2023.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 The final report is available here, [on-line:] <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/01fafa79-1a13-11ee-806b-01aa75ed71a1/language-en> – 2.10.2023.

17 Legislative Plan of the Government of the Czech Republic 2023.

their work is insecure: visual artists usually receive no payment for preparing an exhibition, authors' advances seldom make up a significant portion of their income, and theatre rehearsals are unpaid. This can lead to long gaps between these periods, as creative work usually cannot be continuous and occurs in clearly defined time frames. A director cannot immediately start directing again the day after a premiere, a writer cannot immediately start writing again, and so on.

Another question is which people from these professions should be included in this category. The French system, *Régime des salariés intermittents du spectacle*, only includes workers in the fields of theatre, music, television, film, and radio¹⁸. Writers and journalists are not included, and this approach is not unique to France. There are various reasons for this. In the Czech Republic, during the COVID-19 pandemic, literature was not initially perceived as a "live" or performative art form, and was not part of the initial COVID support for artists. It only became eligible for support after strong appeals from the relevant organisations. Other countries may take the same view, even though activities such as author readings abroad or the sale of rights to living authors are significant economic activities within the market.

The second approach views the creative sector in a broader context and recognises the indispensability of those workers who, while not making an artistic contribution to the work, play a significant role in its outcome. In literature, these could be proofreaders or typesetters; in theatre, they might be lighting technicians or sound engineers. Collectively, these people, who operate in a system just as precarious as that of artists, are regarded as artistic-technical workers. Spain and Portugal, for example, have adopted this approach by creating the concept of a *cultural professional*, which offers a wide range of possibilities to achieve this status¹⁹. However, this approach requires a more robust system and includes more individuals, leading to higher costs.

Freelancer vs Employee

Another debated aspect is whether this status should exclusively apply to those who are self-employed or also to those who are employees in artistic professions, such as those under contract. Slovakia, which was preparing its Status of the Artist based on the COVID-19 pandemic, but has currently postponed the legislative preparation²⁰, considered including both groups. In fact, one of the criteria to obtain this status was expected to be employment. Similarly, the French system requires artists to complete a certain number of teaching hours in schools each year; if they meet this requirement, they receive support during periods when they do not have artistic work.

Critics point out that employees in cultural institutions often receive very low salaries that are insufficient for their livelihood. However, they already enjoy some benefits as employees, including social and health insurance coverage, maternity leave, sick leave, and vacation days. Ideally, the Status of the Artist should level

18 CASSE, 2020.

19 O Estatuto dos Profissionais da Cultura, Portugal, [on-line:] <http://www.estatutocultura.pt> – 2.10.2023.

20 Research on book traffic, interview with Zuzana Došeková, official of the Ministry of Culture, June 2023.

the playing field for people working in culture, ensuring that they are not forced to seek employment in other sectors because they cannot support themselves and their families. This prevents the loss of cultural capital and human creative potential. Whether artists and artistic-technical workers who are employees should be included depends primarily on the subsequent measures that result from artist status (see further discussion).

Qualitative vs. Democratic Conditions

Thirdly, there is ongoing discussion about the conditions under which a person should be eligible for a Status of the Artist system. There are numerous possibilities; usually, it is not about a single condition but rather combinations of multiple criteria, with each country defining its own unique “cocktail” of requirements.

In essence, there are two approaches: the qualitative and the democratic/measurable approach.

Qualitative conditions typically involve evaluating the quality and societal contribution of a given artist or cultural worker. This assessment may be carried out by an established committee or, for example, by professional organisations. However, in the cases and countries examined, this approach is rarely implemented or forms only a minor part of the system; the focus is more on meeting objective, measurable criteria. For instance, eligibility for the Status of the Artist may be granted to those who are members of a professional organisation (typical in countries where associations have a union-like status). It may also involve demonstrating sufficient and long-term practice, obtaining specialised education, or obtaining confirmation of work related to artistic activities (teaching at an art school, lecturing, research, etc.). Slovakia, for example, proposed a three-year uninterrupted practice requirement, and applicants had to provide documentation (invoices, contracts, etc.)²¹. In France, they must demonstrate that they have completed 507 hours of work within 10 months²².

Areas of Solution

The most discussed aspects revolve around the subsequent measures aimed at ensuring or equalising the Status of the Artist in the cultural sector, allowing them to carry out their work with dignity and without concerns about their income. These measures typically span several areas, including social and health insurance, the tax system, fair remuneration, and support and grant systems, often in combination.

In the realm of social and health insurance, there are various options available. In the event of income loss, the state may commit to covering the social and health insurance contributions of cultural workers. It may also provide unemployment benefits or supplement missing income to prevent them from having to quit their work (as seen in Germany and France). In case of injury, workers may be entitled to sickness benefits equivalent to what they would receive if they were employed; this is crucial for professions like dancers. In matters of parenthood, they will receive

21 Ibid.

22 CASSE, 2020.

standard maternity benefits. The health and social insurance sector also encompasses the concept of a second career, especially for performative artists, acknowledging that they may not be able to perform internationally forever. In such cases, the state apparatus assists them in transitioning to the next phase of their careers, providing support, educational courses, and more.

Regarding the tax system, the focus is typically on accommodating the specifics of artistic work, characterised by alternating months with low and high income. This also involves determining the appropriate tax treatment for various types of artistic work. For example, in the Czech Republic, books are placed in a less advantageous tax bracket, which may discourage or disadvantage those involved in artistic work such as translation.

Austria has taken a different approach to the Status of the Artist than Spain or Portugal, where the aim is to level the playing field for cultural workers to compete with employed individuals. Austria has opted for what is called fair remuneration: it establishes nationwide categories, setting minimum and dignified remuneration levels for various professions. It calls on and obligates individual federal states to adhere to and enforce these categories even in the non-state sector. Stakeholders from the sector, federal government, and federal states are invited to participate in shaping this system:

As part of transparency, the Federal Government and the Länder have committed to a transparent approach in creating framework conditions for arts and culture in Austria. The process of creating uniform guidelines for fair remuneration in all fields was already initiated in 2019 at a major symposium.

In order to achieve fair remuneration, a detailed survey was carried out on the differences between actual payments and recommended salaries/honoraria in the Austrian arts and culture sector. As a first step, the Federal Government has included fair remuneration among the eligibility criteria in all new calls. Evaluators are encouraged to take fair remuneration into account when assessing applications. A number of fee recommendations have already been developed during the process. Based on the results of the survey on the fair remuneration gap, the working group will develop a *Fair Remuneration Strategy for Arts and Culture*²³.

Taking a step further, Ireland has embarked on an experimental approach, randomly selecting 2,000 artists who will receive an unconditional income of €325 per week for three years. This experiment will be continuously evaluated²⁴.

Lastly, a meaningful system of support and grants is essential for the functional Status of the Artist, which is an integral part of cultural policy. Many countries have Arts Councils, which serve as state service institutions for redistributing funds to support culture. A working example can be seen in Slovakia, where the Fund for Supporting the Arts has been in operation for several years, despite occasional objections from the local cultural community. The Czech Republic still awaits a functional Arts Council, and the redistribution of support primarily takes place within the Ministry of Culture each fiscal year. This approach brings many problems. However, it is worth mentioning that this measure involves not only a change in the system

23 Návratová, Žáková, 2022.

24 Government of Ireland, [on-line:] <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/6d4e1-basic-income-for-the-arts-pilot-scheme-faqs> – 2.10.2023.

but also a change in perspective. The term “subsidised culture” is often viewed with disdain. However, it is crucial to recognise that in culture, we are not talking about subsidising something insignificant. We are talking about an investment – an investment in people, human cultural capital, and the social infrastructure that culture alone can provide.

Conclusion

In this study, I have mentioned several theoretical and more practical approaches that I employ in my research. I have provided a closer look at the concept of *bibliodiversity*. This approach, along with the theoretical understanding of the independent literary scene, provides the fundamental material for naming certain phenomena and relationships within the book industry. However, it has certain shortcomings: it is incomplete in many respects, and a significant number of the outlined topics need to be further developed in the coming years. Additionally, the concept needs to be applied or adjusted according to the specific area of focus. The author describes the global, English-language market; although the Czech book market exhibits many similar traits, it is essential also to consider the differences.

Furthermore, I have attempted to anchor my work more practically within the field of cultural policy and its principles and tools. I have briefly introduced one of these tools, which is currently being intensively discussed in the Czech Republic and the European Union; I have also named various ideological perspectives.

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Abstract

The study deals with the issue of book traffic as a cultural and artistic environment and tries to introduce the theoretical framework of the broader research.

It introduces more closely two concepts that can be instruments of a change. Firstly, there is briefly described the concept of biodiversity, which builds on a close analogy with biodiversity in the sense of preserving and protecting an ecosystem with an emphasis on locality and attention to the individual members of that environment. The text introduces selected ideas and approaches of this concept, such as sustainability, actors, etc. The chapter concludes by outlining the mechanism whereby the independent scene acts as an experimental lab from where the mainstream then takes over and appropriates topics. This illustrates the interconnectedness of the whole system.

The second concept or approach is through cultural policies, which can be an effective tool to promote and develop culture. More specifically, the study focuses on one of the currently discussed tools – the status of the artist. It looks at different approaches to addressing the working conditions of artists and cultural professionals.

The aim of the text is to present and show possible approaches to the conception of literature as a cultural and creative sector and its care. The list is not exhaustive, but a selection of different perspectives on the subject.

Keywords: literature, biodiversity, cultural policy, the status of the artists

Biblioróżnorodność i polityka kulturalna jako instrumenty zmian

Streszczenie

Studium poświęcone jest zagadnieniu obrotu książkami jako elementu środowiska kulturowego i artystycznego i stanowi próbę wprowadzenia teoretycznych ram dla szerszych badań. Przedstawiono w nim bliżej dwie koncepcje, które mogą być narzędziami wprowadzania zmian. Po pierwsze, krótko opisano koncepcję biblioróżnorodności, która opiera się na ścisłej analogii do bioróżnorodności w sensie zachowania i ochrony ekosystemu z naciskiem na lokalność i dbałość o poszczególnych członków tego środowiska. Tekst wprowadza wybrane idee i sposoby podejścia do tej koncepcji, takie jak zrównoważony rozwój, aktorzy itp. Rozdział kończy się zarysowaniem modelu, w którym niezależne nurty działają jak laboratorium eksperymentalne, z którego następnie główny nurt przejmuje pewne elementy. Ilustruje to wzajemne powiązania całego systemu.

Drugą koncepcją lub strategią jest polityka kulturalna, która może być skutecznym narzędziem promocji i rozwoju kultury. W szczególności badanie koncentruje się na jednym z obecnie dyskutowanych narzędzi – statusie artysty. Przygląda się różnym podejściom do warunków pracy artystów i osób zawodowo związanych z kulturą.

Celem tekstu jest przedstawienie i pokazanie możliwych podejść do koncepcji literatury jako sektora kultury i kreatywności oraz opieki nad nią. Lista nie jest wyczerpująca, ale ukazuje różne perspektywy postrzegania zagadnienia.

Słowa kluczowe: literatura, biblioróżnorodność, polityka kulturalna, status twórców