

Finnish Centre of ITI/Committee/Regional Council Report of Activities July 2022-April 2024

Finnish Centre of ITI

The mission of TINFO

Theatre Info Finland TINFO, the Finnish ITI Centre, serves some 200 theatres and performing art collectives in Finland. Before the COVID-19 pandemic theatre, dance and circus had around four million spectators annually – in a country of 5,6 million people. Though Finns are known around the world as introverted and short-spoken, astonishingly, some 500 amateur theatres around the country perform for an additional one million spectators each summer. Theatre is continuously ranked as one of the favourite art forms among the Finns, along with film and museum visits.

TINFO is an expert organization in theatre, live arts, drama, and other genres within the Finnish performing arts sector. We're an NGO, funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, and one of our main tasks is to promote Finnish contemporary performance internationally. In order to do so we organise showcases, bring artists together, and offer mentoring and advice for artists interested in international mobility. We cooperate with national and international theatres, festivals, and organizations within the performing arts sector, and regularly publish newsletters in Finnish and English.

We also collect extensive statistics on the Finnish performing arts sector on repertoires, salaries, and spectators. Our annual statistics book includes around a hundred graphs each year. Statistics on the performing arts have been collected in Finland since 1944, enabling timelines for comparative study that now span 80 years.

TINFO, an integral part of the Finnish performing arts ecosystem, celebrates its 30-year anniversary as an organization in 2024 and has 14 member organizations, from universities to festivals, unions, and theatres. We're connected and we work to connect artists and collectives in Finland and abroad with each other.

A Summary of the Period from July 2022 to April 2024

As the COVID-19 restrictions lifted in Finland from February 2022 onwards, TINFO was ready to restart its export programs not only towards the Baltic countries and Eastern and Central Europe, but also towards Russia. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine upended all collaborations with TINFO's long-time contacts in Russia. Project resources were instead allocated to safety residencies for Russian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian artists in collaboration with the Artists at Risk network until the end of 2022. TINFO has also offered advice and mentoring to performing artists seeking refuge in Finland since then.

During 2022 TINFO finalized two other international projects that had been running throughout the pandemic, and in which some a great number of Finnish and foreign artists took part. Our aim with the projects had been to create a new sustainable production culture within theatre and live arts, where international guest venues, festivals, residencies, and agencies are involved in the production planning from the very beginning.

The year also saw the start of our three-year World on Stage project, which has introduced world drama for the Finnish theatre field in the hopes of diversifying the repertoires of Finnish theatres. Representing a small language group, TINFO remains committed to working with professional translators of plays, be it on works to or from the Finnish language.

During the period in question TINFO has organized showcases alone and in collaboration with other partners, facilitated and enabled meetings between Finnish artists and international curators, organized networking opportunities in Finland and abroad, worked to develop the professionalism of translators, awarded grants for the translation of Finnish plays into foreign languages and prizes to Finnish artists and collectives. We have collected statistics from performing arts organizations and stored data on theatre productions in our database with 40 000 production entries from the late 19th century for future generations. We have published newsletters and launched a new international publication series, and we have done our utmost to respond to every inquiry regarding theatre, drama, and live arts that we receive from media outlets, from our ministries, or from a random person seeking a sword for their wedding.

Activities, highlights

LUO: Become a Part of the European Production Systems (2020-2022)

The LUO project focused on developing international mobility within the performing arts sector and was funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Through collaborations with European performing arts ecosystems the lifespans of works are increased, and they reach new audiences. The goal of the project was to tie venues, festivals, and agents in Europe to four Finnish performing arts companies selected through an open call: Turunen Company, Reality Research Centre, Other Spaces, and The Stayawakes musical by playwright Laura Ruohonen.

MOTI: A Mobility and Mentorship Program (2020-2022)

Funded by The Finnish Culture Foundation, the goal of the project was to support five independent arts collectives to find and establish new collaborative partners in Europe, as well as to receive mentoring on how to develop their collective into an international operator. TINFO worked with the collectives to clarify their vision in terms of their artistic goals and gave advice on their methods and strategies of communication.

TAKO: The Finnish-Russian Cooperation Program (2020-2022)

The TAKO project enabled cross-border production cooperation between Finnish and Russian theatre makers and performing arts collectives and supported guest performances to the respective countries. The project was turned into a safety residency program for artists in February 2022 in collaboration with the Artists at Risk network, and with the support of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The World on Stage (2021-2024)

The World on Stage project and its Advisory Board has introduced 75 plays from all around the world to Finnish theatres and theatre collectives during the last three years. The Finnish Cultural Foundation and the Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland have supported theatres that wish to have foreign plays translated and produced, in order to make Finnish theatre repertoires more diverse. During the 2022-2024 period TINFO organized several seminars and events in connection with the project. In addition, TINFO organized a play reading festival with the Nordic Culture Point and the Theatre Academy in May 2024 during which particularly questions of representation were raised.

The first productions based on plays translated and produced with the help of project support have been staged from the spring of 2023 onwards. In September 2024, the Finnish National Theatre will produce a play originally written in Arabic – Basim Kahar's play *Oranges* – for the first time in its history.

TYKÖ: Baltic and Nordic Cooperation (2023-2025)

The TYKÖ project strives to help performing arts collectives interested in the Baltic and Nordic regions to find collaborative partners in the form of venues, festivals, or agents. For example, in the fall of 2023 TINFO aided The Secret Feminist Society of Helsinki to find a partner in Lithuania for their concept work *Encounters*. A local version (in Lithuanian) of the work was produced at the Sirenos festival in October 2023.

Showcases

TINFO regularly invites performing arts experts to Finland for showcases and festivals and organizes showcases on its own and in collaboration with partners within the performing arts field.

TINFO organized the Performing HEL showcase on theatre, dance, and circus together with Circus & Dance Info Finland from August 31 to September 3, 2023. The showcase welcomed some 100 curators from around the world to Helsinki for shows, demos, and pitches. The opening seminar delved into questions of digitalization in the performing arts. The showcase organized a digitalization program for arts professionals in the year leading up to the showcase.

The Future is Present programs of 2022 and 2023 were organized with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to coincide with the international Tampere Theatre Festival. TINFO invited foreign artistic directors, curators, dramaturgs, and translators to the festival and organized informal artist meetings – as well as popular sauna nights for its guests.

In June 2023 TINFO aided the Baltic Takeover organizers from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to literally take over venues in Helsinki.

Networking opportunities

TINFO regularly organizes study and networking trips abroad for Finnish performing art professionals.

TINFO organized, for example, a networking trip to the Vilnius International Theatre Festival Sirenos in September 2022 for ten Finnish performing arts professionals. The initial networking meeting led to further meetings later that spring, and eventually to a production by The Secret Feminist Society of Helsinki at the festival the following year.

A networking trip to Latvia was organized for delegations from two artistic umbrella organizations to meet with the leadership of the Homo Novus festival, the Festivāls Sansusī, Cēsu Mazais Teātris and Ģertrūdes ielas teātris in December 2022.

And in collaboration with two playwrights' association, TINFO organized a joint trip to the Swedish ITI centre's Scenkonstbiennalen festival in early June 2023. The participants took part in the festival program, and in addition TINFO organized breakfast meetings with influential Swedish artists and directors for its guests.

We have also supported the travel of individual artists to international festivals, seminars, and other events by ourselves, or in collaboration with other funding bodies.

Publications

Performance and Solidarity – a collection of essays and articles on Finnish performing arts and artists committed to working on global issues – was published in print and online in the summer of 2023.

The annual statistics books are published in August every year in print and online.

Grants and workshops for translators

As an organization striving to promote Finnish theatre and drama, TINFO works closely with translators of drama. We've annually handed out around 22 000 euros in grants to translators of Finnish plays, and we've worked to develop the skills of translators of plays specifically by offering workshops. In 2022 and 2023 a total of 25 works were translated to a total of nine languages with the help of the grant.

In November 2022, we organized three online meetings for translators on best practices, and a 1-week workshop on drama translation in early November 2023.

World Theatre Day celebrations

In addition to challenging theatres to read the World Theatre Day message before their performances, TINFO annually challenges theatres to also produce a recording of the World Theatre Day message, and to share it on social media. This challenge is accepted by numerous theatres every year.

Prizes

TINFO has handed out four prizes during the 2022-2024 period:

The Thalia Prize, or the Performance of the Year prize, is awarded to a production that has raised discussion, attracted new audiences, been internationally renowned, or received acclaim on other grounds, and thus shed light on the importance of theatre. The Thalia Prize of 2024 went to the Lappeenranta City Theatre's production *Viimeinen Atlantis* (Last Atlantis).

The TINFO Prize is awarded to people within the theatre field who have, through their work, promoted a wider understanding of theatre. The TINFO Prize of 2023 was awarded to the *Talo horjahti* ('The house shook') working group, that compiled texts by Ukrainian playwrights and illustrators at the start of the war into a performance text for charitable readings that were held throughout the country.

Two travel grants to Germany were awarded to the recently graduated theatre directors Juho Liira (2022) and Minna Lund (2023) through the Ralf Långbacka fund.

Summer Theatre Day

To celebrate the beloved Finnish summer theatre tradition, TINFO annually proclaims the first Friday of July as the Summer Theatre Day. The day is celebrated in conjunction with summer theatre productions all over the country.

Communication

TINFO has published a weekly Finnish-language newsletter every Thursday that has become an important source of information for theatres as well as practitioners. The newsletter includes weekly interviews, information on upcoming events, festivals, open calls, job postings and grant schemes and other opportunities. In addition, TINFO has published an English-language newsletter, TINFO e-News three times a year, with information on Finnish artists, festivals, and upcoming events.

Cultural Policy

Although TINFO's main role is to be a provider of trustworthy statistics and information on the field, TINFO at times takes positions in questions on cultural policy in Finland by providing statements, opinions, and the like for the ministry of education and culture, as well as other governmental agencies.

Organisation

Staff: Linnea STARA (director), Piia VOLMARI (statistics), Hyde HYTTI (international and transcultural affairs), Mikko KARVINEN (research & administration), Sari HAVUKAINEN (communications manager), Jenni YLIENTALO (communications officer).

Board: Meena KAUNISTO (chairperson), Liisa BLAD, Iira HALTTUNEN, Karoliina HUOVILA, Elina KUUSIKKO, Sanni MARTISKAINEN, Kaisa PAAVOLAINEN, Riko SAATSI, Jussi SORJANEN, Tiina SYRJÄ.

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Report submitted by Linnea Stara, director of Theatre Info Finland TINFO.

Photographs (8)



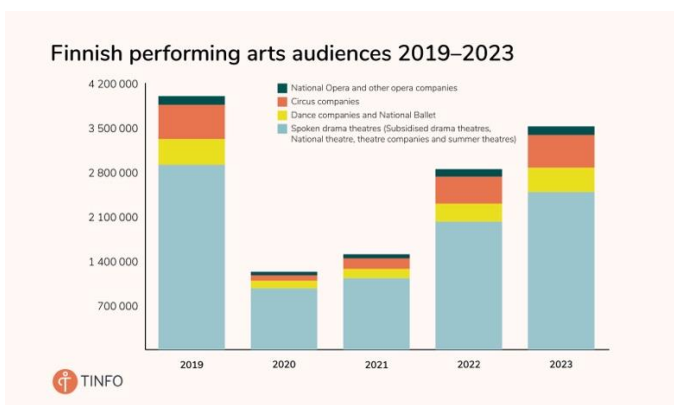
WÜST Or The Marquise of O... - Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill! by German playwright Enis Maci, staged by KokoTeatteri in the spring of 2023, was the first play produced with the help of the World on Stage grant. Photo: Heidi Bergström



TINFO with Finnish playwrights at Scenkonstbiennalen, organized by the Swedish ITI centre in June 2023. In the photo from left Ulrika Bengts, Fabian Silen, Carl Johan Karlson (Artistic Director of Unga Dramaten in Stockholm, guest of TINFO), Elin Westerlund, Petri Karra, Hanna Ryti, Asta Honkamaa, Christoffer Mellgren, Tomas Jansson, Johanna Sorjonen, Marie Kajava, Salla Viikka and Leena Kärkkäinen. Photo: TINFO



A drama reading festival organized by TINFO in collaboration with Nordic Culture Point and the Theatre Academy in May 2024. Photo: Inga-Stina Heikkinen



Spectator numbers for the performing arts (theatre, dance, and circus) in Finland 2019-2023.



The guest editors of the Performance and Solidarity (2023) publication, Maria Säkö and Heidi Backström. Photo: TINFO



The Secret Feminist Society of Helsinki during a joint planning session with the Sirenos festival in Lithuania in 2023. Photo: TINFO



The Performing HEL showcase in 2023. Photo: Performing HEL



The staff of TINFO during a recreational day in May 2023. Photo: TINFO