

Toward the reconstruction of cultural policy in Japan: Updating the roles and responsibilities of intermediary support organizations after COVID-19

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I. Research Question and Aims



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Research Question

After the rise in awareness of the precarity of cultural freelancers during the COVID-19 pandemic, what measures are necessary to address the challenges of restructuring cultural support in Japan moving forward?

Research Aims

- To identify common issues and needed structural change in cultural policy during and after the COVID-19 pandemic
- To report lessons learned from the experiences and collective actions of artists and cultural practitioners
- To investigate the precarity of cultural freelancers based on testimony from the field in order to make policy recommendations.

II. Cultural Policy in Japan during the Pandemic

A. Turning points in non-interventionist cultural policy:
Literature review and international comparative analysis

Cultural policy in Japan is largely characterised by a “liberalist” approach that prioritises autonomy of the art sector and minimalist state intervention.

— Kawashima (2012), quoted in Lee, Chau & Terui (2021), p. 150

The emergency aid distributed by the government during the pandemic, and discussion thereof, can be regarded as constituting a series of turning points in Japanese cultural policy leading to potential institutional rearrangements.

— Lee, Chau & Terui (2001), p. 153

Turning point 1: Support funds target individuals for the first time in the history of the Agency for Cultural Affairs (ACA)

- Central government: three supplementary budgets from 2020 to 2021
- ACA: 18 support projects in 2020
- A total of 500 billion JPY (3.1 billion EUR) in emergency support funds for the arts was provided by the ACA and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) from 2020 to 2021. (cf. ACA 2023 budget: 107.7 billion JPY)

Sources: Oshita 2020; Arts and Cultural Forum 2021; Yamato 2021; Asakura 2022; Takahashi 2021; Geidankyo 2023

	UK Public Funding	Japan Public Funding	Japan Private Funding	Japan Advocacy Groups
2020 March	3/20 UK Gov "Job Retention Scheme" (3/23 First UK-wide lockdown)	3/10 Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare "Emergency Small Loan for Individuals"	Government request to refrain from mega events (2/26-5/26)	
	3/26 UK Gov "Support for Self-employment" 3/27 Creative Scotland "Bridging Bursary Fund"		3/25 Save Our Space (Live music venue)	
	First state of emergency (4/7-5/25)			
April	4/1 Welsh Gov "Arts Resilience Fund" 4/9 ACE "Emergency Response Fund" 4/27 ACNI "Artists Emergency Programme"		4/13 Mini-Theater AID 4/28 Inamori Foundation 4/28 Mirai Performing Arts Fund	4/4 SAVE the CINEMA (Film)
	May	5/1 METI "Sustainability Subsidy" 5/7 Kyoto City 5/15 Tokyo Metropolitan Gov	5/1 K-Three "Arts United Fund" 5/1 Mitsui Sumitomo Financial Group 5/14 Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group	5/1 Theatrical Emergency Support Project 5/14 Japan Performing Arts Solidarity Network
(5/25 Cancellation of state of emergency)		5/21 #WeNeedCulture		
5/27 METI "J-LODlive" #1			5/? Art for all (visual art)	
June		6/1 Japan Foundation 6/17 Toshiki Ogasawara Memorial Foundation 6/25 Sony Music Foundation		
July	7/5 DCMS "Culture Recovery Fund" #1	7/10 ACA "Support Project for Continuous Activities for Arts and Culture"		
August			8/6 Association for Corporate Support of the Arts "GB Fund"	
2021	Second state of emergency (Tokyo 1/8-3/21; Osaka 1/14-3/7)			
	Third state of emergency (4/25-6/20)			
	4/26 ACA "Arts for the future!" #1		7/1 The Saison Foundation 9/1 Japan Arts Council	8

	METI J-LODlive (#1-2)	ACA Continuation fund (#1-3)	ACA Arts for the future! (#1-2)
Application period	2020/5/27 – 2021/3/31 (#1) 2021/4 (#2)	2020/7/10–7/31 (#1) 8/8–8/28 (#2) 9/12–9/30 (#3)	2021/4/26–5/31 (#1) 2021/9/6–9/17 (#2)
Application by freelancers	not accepted	accepted	not accepted
Applicant's own expense	required	required	not required * fixed cost included
Number selected	23,500 (#1); 18,400 (#2)	Around 80,000 (individual: 71,224; group: 5,828; both: 649)	2,713 (#1); 4,311 (#2)
Amount provided	¥87.8 billion (€546 million) (#1) * Largest public fund during COVID- 19	Around ¥42.3 billion	
Problems	Video creation and distribution required Amount reduced if income exceeds total expenses	Over 12,000 cases either rejected or withdrawn due to the complexity of requirements	Commissioned projects not eligible Duplicate applications not allowed

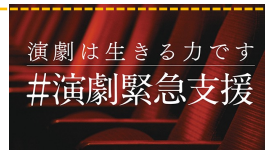
Turning point 2: Solidarity and collective action of artists

Three
lobby groups
(in 2020)



#WeNeedCulture
(Live music venue,
Cinema, Theatrical
play)

- Submission of four letters of recommendation for government emergency aid
- Submission of one open letter of enquiry to MPs



#SaveOurSpace

SAVE the CINEMA



**Japan Performing Arts
Solidarity Network**
(Performing arts)

- Submission of three letters of recommendation for government emergency aid
- Application support



art for all
(Visual arts)

- Submission of letter of recommendation for government emergency aid and worker's accident insurance
- Remuneration guidelines for the art sector

Resulted in the extension of support funding plus the covering of cancellation fees and fixed costs for freelancers

Turning point 3: Progress in database construction

Five large-scale surveys on labour and contracts in the arts sector have been conducted.

	ACA2020	Forum2021	GEIDANKYO 2022	ACE2022	Forum2023
Survey title	Questionnaire for people involved in cultural and artistic activities	Questionnaire on the 'Continuation Fund' and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic	Questionnaire on recommendations for revitalisation of the performing arts	Questionnaire on contractual relations in cultural and artistic activities	Questionnaire on the use of government measures to deal with the impact of COVID-19 and provide a safety net for artists
Survey conducted by	ACA	Japan Arts Council & Arts and Culture Forum	GEIDANKYO	ACA	Japan Arts Council & Arts and Culture Forum
Survey method	Online	Online	Online	Online	Online
Number of valid responses	17,196	18,370	1,355	2,633	20,273
Survey period	2020/9/30–10/13	2021/4/21–5/6	2021/10/20–11/1	2021/12/17–12/27	2023/7/7–7/31
Respondents under age 40	67%	46%	24%	59%	32%

B. Post-pandemic: Remaining issues



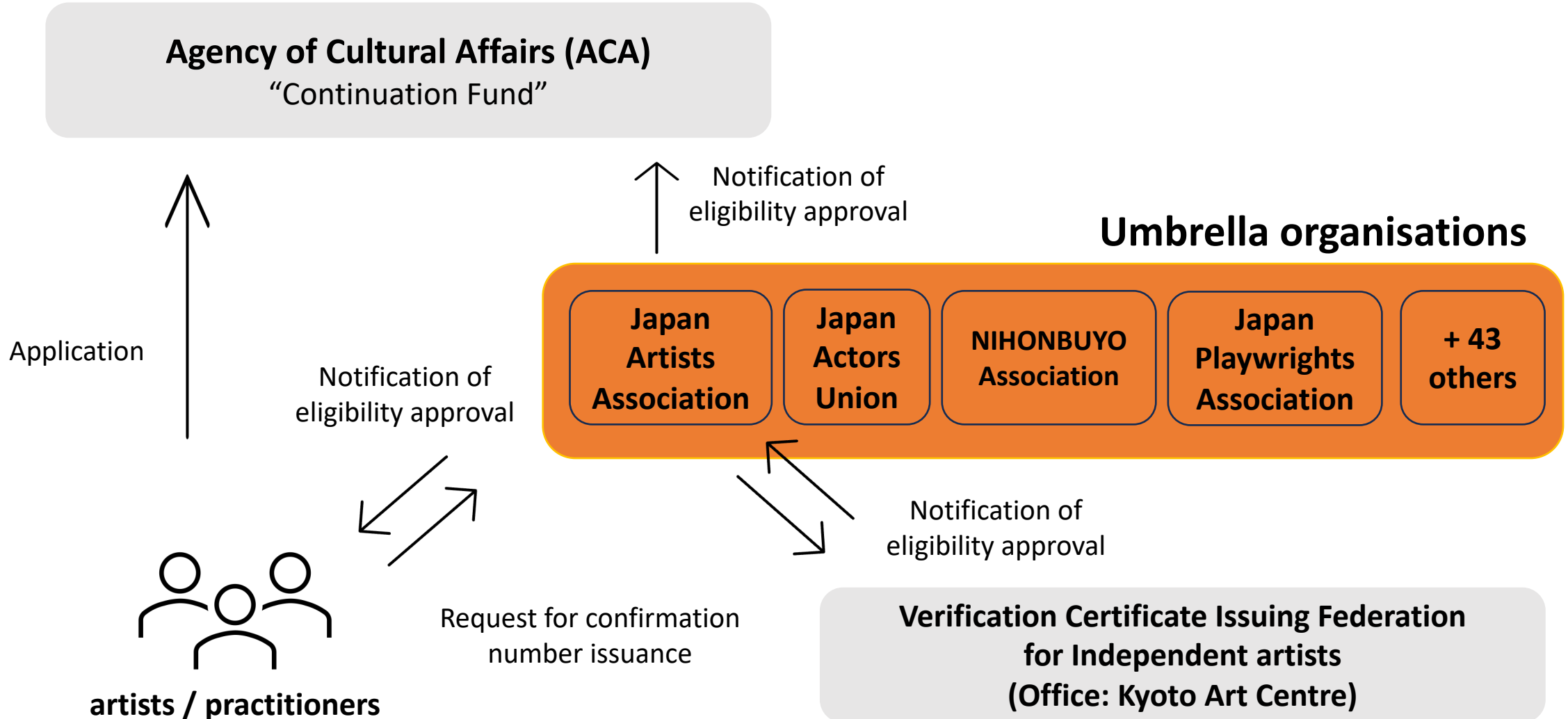
1. Umbrella organisations

Genre-specific professional associations / Trade unions
(membership required)

History of umbrella organisations in Japan's arts sector

- 1963 Japan Actors Union (previously "Japan Broadcast Entertainers Association")
- 1965 GEIDANKYO (Japan Council of Performers Rights & Performing Arts Organizations)
- 1973–2009 Entertainers' Pension Mutual Aid Scheme
- 1974 GEIDANKYO survey on activities and livelihood of performing arts performers and staff
- 1980 UNESCO "Recommendation concerning the status of artists"
- 1983 Musicians Union of Japan
- 1986–2001 Survey of 4,000 Japanese artists
- 1992 ILO "Tripartite Meeting on Conditions of Employment and Work of Performers"

Eligibility criteria: “Advance confirmation approval system” (2020)



Belonging to an umbrella organization: generation gap, genre-specific issues

In Japan, membership in an umbrella organization or trade association is not a prerequisite for artistic activity, but more of an added element for those with experience. Membership in trade associations under the Geidankyo requires a recommendation, and in most cases a person must have a certain amount of work experience to join. The proportion of artists who do not belong to an association organization is increasing, especially among younger people.

— Takahashi (2021)

This [complex eligibility criteria and paperwork] is the downside of a hastily designed system in which a large national organisation examines and subsidises individuals—a system that has never been tackled before. This makes clear the fact that in Japan there are no intermediary organisations between the national and local governments, or between these administrative bodies and individuals, in culture and the arts.

— Yamamoto (2020)



2. Issue-based collectives

(membership not required)

Continuity, responsibility and literacy

It is not always clear who takes responsibility in establishing networks, support forms [...] due to the informal structures connected to precarious contracts.

This support was ad hoc across the continent, with various funding models which placed the intermediary organisations themselves in a precarious position with little recognition of their value.

— Dent, Communian & Tanghetti (2023)

The COVID-19 crisis has ironically reaffirmed artists' lack of knowledge about tax payment procedures for freelancers and their lack of information on access to public funding.

III. Precarity of Cultural Freelancers in Japan: Voices from the Field

A. Literature review – about cultural freelancers

The complexity of the challenges facing cultural freelancers necessitates a closer look at the relationship between direct artist support during the pandemic and underlying structural issues.

Using principal component analysis, it was found that the tendencies in labor views among musicians include "artistic supremacy" as a characteristic of the unique nature of artistic labor, as well as "career advancement orientation", which tends to prioritise unilateral demands over equal relationships. These tendencies exhibit a positive correlation with the frequency of troubles, indicating that there is a relationship between the two.

— Nakane (2021)

A survey conducted by the Performing Arts Producers Open Network (ONPAM) revealed that current subsidy programs are not adequately distributing budgets to stakeholders in the arts, highlighting the need for further mechanism development beyond event support, such as infrastructure improvement.

— ON-PAM (2021)

A. Literature review – on support for cultural freelancers

Artists' direct involvement in mutual aid operations is not necessarily sought; this underscores the underlying importance of intermediary support organizations and functions.

Despite the celebratory use of Cultural and Creative Workers as drivers of economic development, the lack of investment in understanding the sector and supporting its needs has been exposed [...] the work of creative intermediaries tries to fill these gaps ...

— Dent, Comunian and Tanghetti (2023)

... the need to recognize and acknowledge the role creative intermediaries play in advocacy, research and care work towards CCWs.

— Arts & Culture Forum / Geidankyo (2023)

- Support for Solidarity is positive at 92.1%.
- A mutual aid mechanism requires “benefit contents that are commensurate with the level of burden” and “support from non-artists such as industry and the public sector, along with financial and operational assistance.” These were the most commonly cited needs, accounting for 50-60%. In contrast, “participation of artists' representatives in management” and “independent management by the artists themselves” were mentioned by fewer than 20%.

B. Methodology: Semi-structured interviews

In total, we conducted 11 interviews among cultural practitioners between 23rd May and 27th September 2023:

- Intermediaries (5)
- Policymakers (2)
- Trade Union (1)
- Researcher in cultural policy (1)
- Consulting Agency (1)
- Cultural Foundation (1)

These semi-structured interviews aimed to explore cultural practitioners' experiences and actions during the COVID-19 period and understand the precarity faced by cultural freelancers. Thematic analysis involved coding interview answers and comments inductively, followed by grouping them into 22 sub-issues aligned with the research aims and literature review. As a result, we identified four overarching issues.

Interview Results

Analysis of the interviews reveals a relatively high volume of references to policy proposal and delivery, as well as to freelancer self-management.


Issues	Sub-issues	Codes
Intermediary functions (45 codes)	Limitations of umbrella organisations Professional associations as agents of change Solidarity	Lack of data and discussion about future development More contribution to sustainable foundation for artists Mutual support for livelihood
Policy participation (22 codes)	Lobbying Participation	Lobbying and advocacy Unified voice needed to move politics
Policy proposal & delivery (74 codes)	Database Delivery Impact of COVID-19 Law Policy making Professional training Public funding design Social security Stakeholder communication Support system Value of art	Creation of all-Japan arts-and-culture database Devolved funding Precarity of artists Revisit the Basic Act on Culture and the Arts Bottom-up voices Professional development/re-skilling Accessible language should be used Need to develop insurance for artists Importance of umbrellas organisations to connect ACA Identification of artists Value of art
Self-management (60 codes)	Art-for-art's-sake mindset Siloed thinking Social & practical skills Underfunded ecology Working conditions Career in the arts	Art in the society Closed circle and society Lack of management literacy Freelancers exploit other freelancers Not sustainable as a profession Support for career building



C. Findings – Issue 1: Intermediary support functions

- The limitations of current intermediary support organizations such as umbrella organisations (genre-specific professional associations and trade unions) as well as high expectations
- But these intermediary support organizations have the potential to thoroughly understand the challenges specific to each field, conduct surveys to assess current situations, and make forward-looking policy recommendations for those fields.
- Additionally, there were expectations that these organizations, being closest to practitioners, could play a key role in facilitating mutual aid mechanisms. Nonetheless, concerns were raised about the instability of organizational operations due to resource constraints.

It became evident that there is a need for further development of the roles and responsibilities of intermediary support organizations, such as umbrella organisations, to effectively meet post-COVID-19 needs.



C. Findings – Issue 2: Policy participation

One thing that became evident is the importance of actively engaging in lobbying efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic to influence policy decisions and secure support such as grants.

However, several challenges were pointed out:

- The limited presence of cultural and artistic freelancers in policy-making arenas, particularly those in need of support.
- The difficulty in achieving consensus due to the diversity of individual needs.
- The lack of lobbying skills and personnel, as well as the time and financial resource constraints faced by cultural and arts freelancers, are areas that will require further consideration moving forward in order to ensure the sustainability of their activities.

C. Findings – Issue 3: Policy proposals & delivery

- Various policy challenges were identified, revealing a complex, multi-layered structure. These challenges encompassed issues ranging from the awareness levels and vocational training of cultural and artistic freelancers to the execution of actual budgets, the design of support mechanisms, and the repositioning of stakeholders within the framework of the Basic Act on Culture and the Arts.
- Despite these challenges, several positive outcomes were noted, including the government's (especially the ACA's) gaining of a better understanding of how subsidies fit into Japan's cultural and artistic landscape; the potential for administrative use of systematically organized databases to enhance social security frameworks; and the ability to influence policy decisions using empirical data gathered from surveys. Additionally, increased discussion of the value of cultural arts and heightened awareness were observed, prompting considerations on how to support creativity and where to position art within Japanese society.
- While various criticisms were raised regarding funding design, there was also shared recognition that simply continuing events without nurturing the underlying soil is unsustainable. Particularly crucial is the issue of execution. Confusion in execution during the pandemic, caused by directly targeting individuals, underscored the importance and function of intermediary support organizations standing between the Agency for Cultural Affairs and cultural freelancers.

C. Findings – Issue 4: Self-management

- Among the numerous complexities highlighted, a common issue was the lack of basic skills and awareness among freelancers as professionals. Suggestions include the need for freelancers to build social connections and trust, to articulate and explain their work, to overcome aversion to numbers, and to acquire awareness and skills related to social security, taxes, and other fundamental aspects of self-management.
- By addressing these areas, freelancers could actively participate in discussions about support as contributing members of society.
- Conversely, challenges stemming from an artistic-centric mindset were also noted, such as hindrances in discussing safety nets and the overlapping of work and social networks. This leads to closed-off communities and difficulties in asserting rights or engaging in fair negotiations, and highlights structural issues within the business framework.

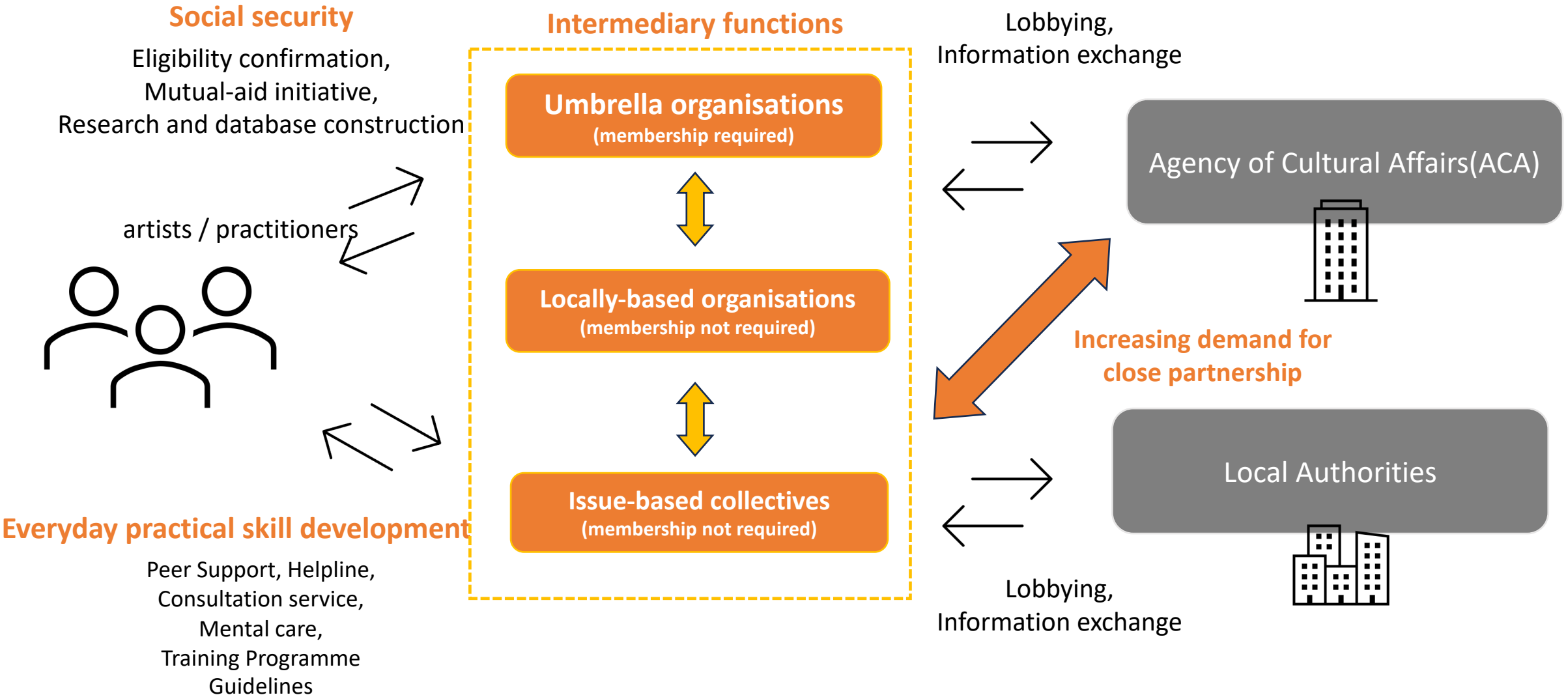
IV. Summary and Conclusion



Summary of findings

- The four overarching issues can be seen as interconnected under the umbrella of Issue 1, intermediary support functions.
- While it is unlikely that the annual budget of the Agency for Cultural Affairs will see a sudden increase in the future, there is potential for intermediaries to influence how the budget is allocated by communicating with the Agency from the perspective of practitioners. This could involve proposing more efficient ways to utilise available resources and discussing strategies for activating various cultural and artistic fields in the future.
- Umbrella organisations, acting as intermediaries that connect cultural freelancers, could be repositioned as partners of the Agency for Cultural Affairs. They could take on roles such as lobbying for freelancers, tightening information exchange with central governments, and arranging social security.
- Issue-based collectives could foster everyday practical skills through peer support and training programmes, potentially in collaboration with specialized educational institutions like music and art colleges.
- Whatever form they take, if there is a reconsideration and expansion of the roles of intermediary support functions, discussions about enhancing resources beyond current levels will likely be necessary.

Toward “Bottom-up policy”



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