

## **Challenges in creative industry exports between Northern Ostrobothnia area and Russia**

Heiskanen (2021) conducted his Bachelor's Degree thesis on "Challenges in creative industry cultural exports between Northern Ostrobothnia and Russia". The thesis intended to describe and highlight the experienced challenges of creative industry actors operating in Northern Ostrobothnia on exports to Russia and other related challenges. The thesis was commissioned by the CULTA project. CULTA-project aims are to strengthen and promote the internationalization of professionals in the creative field and to create conditions for the internationalization of the creative field.

In the thesis, Heiskanen used thematic interviews to gather information from creative professionals working in Northern Ostrobothnia. The interview covered a variety of themes related to the challenges faced by creative professionals. He started his thesis by drawing up a thesis plan and putting together a theory base. With the theory, the themes of the interviews also became clearer.

The following themes were selected for the interviews: "challenges related to Russian culture and business environment" and the second main theme was "strategic and operational challenges". Both main themes include three sub-themes regarding export-related challenges. The subthemes were language and communication, perception of time, networks, funding and support, partners and contacts, and negotiations.

In total, Heiskanen interviewed five creative professionals with previous experience in exporting to Russia. Each interviewee had a different background in cultural exports, but everyone had prior experience of exporting to Russia. Some of the interviewees described the export activity as a systematic, long-term and targeted activity, and some described the export as being mainly small-scale exports made on an experimental basis.

The Corona pandemic had a major impact on the conduct of the interviews, but eventually Heiskanen found suitable interviewees and arranged the interviews during the fall of 2020 and the spring of 2021. A total of five interviews were conducted. Data collected from interviews were analyzed by data-driven content analysis.

The interviews revealed that creative professionals face several challenges in exporting to Russia. The challenges that have emerged in the thesis are in connection with the availability of support services and the availability, and suitability of funding for creative industry, business proficiency, negotiations, language and communication, operational challenges, finding suitable partners, and lack of long-term planning within the counterparts in the creative industry.

Also, problems related to problems caused by the COVID-Pandemic were mentioned within the interviewees. The interviewees revealed that, among other things, also networking and finding suitable contacts in Russia have created challenges among creative professionals.

The interviews also raised a challenge that has not been as clear in previous research as it was in my thesis. Many interviewees shared their experiences, which involve a different perception of time by Finns and Russians. Many interviewees said that this divergent perception of time had posed challenges at different stages of co-operation and export projects. That was particularly noticeable when co-operation focused on a small and remote area. In these remote areas, the timing and implementation of co-operation will differ greatly from the project plan originally made.

Overall, the challenges experienced varied greatly depending on the background and experience of the interviewee. In summary, however, the internationalization of the creative industries poses several challenges related to commercial activities. Commercial expertise related to exports was also limited among the interviewees, which brings challenges to cultural export activities.

To invest in the internationalization and export of the creative professionals in the future, it is good to take into account the challenges and shortcomings that have emerged in the thesis and to try to correct the elements that are perceived as challenging. The thesis can be utilized both among creative professionals planning to export and the findings of the thesis can also be utilized in the further research of the Culta project and as training material for the project. The thesis is also suitable as a good information package for creative professionals in Northern Ostrobothnia.

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