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Artivism in Kenya:

Bridging the Gap Between People and Policy Makers

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ABSTRACT

The thesis provides an in-depth dive into the phenomena of artivism (combination of art and activism) in the context of Kenya for its utilization as a means of communication and social capital in addressing existing inequalities. The respective main research question narrates the study of how is artivism an opportunity for social justice, accompanied by three sub-questions to contextualize it. A conceptual framework is developed to position artivism in reaction to the existence of shrinking global space, exhaustion with democracy, and social injustice. Artivism is studied as a case study and knowledge is constructed through existing research, altogether with the key interviewees and during a focus group discussion. Ethnographic approaches of participatory and non-participatory observations were also the main source of information due to data collection taking place in Kenya. The principal analysis and findings suggest that artivism is understood and exemplified as a means to access and advocate for social justice as well as to communicate and self-educate within communities. It is used for political engagement and to bridge the gap between people and policymakers, however, structural challenges such as inadequate funding halt artivism's broader use, thus propositions on enabling environment are presented.

Keywords: Artivism, Kenya, activism, ethnography, social capital, inclusive development, international development, democratic gap, shrinking civic space, social justice, funding

“It’s the little things citizens do. That’s what will make the difference.” Wangari Maathai, former Kenyan MP, Assistant Minister for Environment, environment activist and the first African woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AU – African Union

CBOs – Community-Based Organizations

CCI – Cultural and Creative Industries

CSOs – Civil Society Organizations

FGD – Focus Group Discussion

FoE – Freedom of Expression

FoI – Freedom of Information

GBV – Gender-Based Violence

HRs – Human Rights

MCA – Members of County Assembly

MPs – Members of Parliament

NPOs – Non-profit Organizations

INGOs – International Non-Governmental Organizations

NGOs – Non-Governmental Organizations

SoMe – Social Media

SSA – Sub-Saharan Africa

UN – United Nations

UNDP – United Nations Development Program

YLOs – Youth-led Organizations

WB – World Bank

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INTRODUCTION (OF THE PROBLEM)

Can art mobilize people to seek social justice? Throughout history and particularly in recent times, creatives emerged as key contributors, challenging hegemonic narratives across social, economic, and political realms (Hivos, 2022). Intending to empower, facilitate, and instigate social change, artistic activism or so-called artivism illuminates an innovative path to democratic and social participation in policymaking (Kebaya, 2022). However, despite its fundamental use, for instance in countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) like Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Ghana, Kenya to address systematic challenges (Ruiz-Cabrera, 2020; Thiel, 2017), impediments persist, hindering artivism's potential as potent mean to tackle societal issues and advocate for transition. How can artivism effectively engage authorities and citizens, bridging the widening gap between them and refocusing attention to urgent socio-economic and political inequalities in Kenya?

Despite Kenya's gross domestic product (GDP) surpassing $100 billion, increasing tenfold since the beginning of the 2000s and making it the largest economy East Africa (International Solidarity Foundation, n.d.; USAID, 2023), social justice remains elusive for many. Kenya hailed as the Silicon Savannah of Africa boasts region's leading technology hub (Muchiri, 2024), yet the economic growth is far from inclusive (USAID, 2023) and uniformed across country (Pöltner, 2023). Approximately 28 % of population still lives in extreme poverty below the international poverty line (as of 2022) (Zikhali, 2023) exacerbated by persistent corruption and unequal wealth distribution (International Solidarity Foundation, n.d.)

Over the past decades, East African civil society sought independence through an active fight against dysfunctional, autocratic governments and privileged political elites achieving significant advancements in social justice and individual liberties (Mutua, 2009). However, the global evidence on shrinking civic space, and increased government restrictions on freedom of expression (FoE) both globally (e.g. Myanmar, Cambodia) but especially regionally (e.g. Kenya, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Uganda) (CIVICUS Monitor, 2023) endanger the previous progress. Global Findings 2023 report by CIVICUS Monitor (2023) revealed that Kenya is a country with "obstructed" civic space. Thus, concerns around increasingly restrictive legislation, the safety of activists, arbitrary imprisonments, and protest disruptions (Ibid) remain at the center of civil society organizations' (CSOs) engagement with the government (ARTICLE19, 2021)

Although Kenya's 2010 Constitution is labeled as progressive (Kabutu, 2020) according to ARTICLE19 (2021), ensuring various freedoms, including freedom of expression (FoE, Article 32) and access to information (FoI, Article 35) (Constitution of Kenya, 2010), measures to protect press freedom and human right defenders (HRDs) are at considerable risk. Systematic challenges persist, threatening open and healthy civic space problematizing the pro-democratic struggle (Nyadera et al. 2020; Kebaya, 2022) and extending to digital space (ARTICLE19, 2021). Artivism emerges as a strategy to navigate this shrinking civic space trend (Hivos, 2022) urging the Kenyan government to commit to their responsibility to legally guarantee socially just society (Mutua, 2009). In Kenya, artivism encompasses collaboration between art and activism envisioning mainstreaming of relevant HRs issues in pursuit of social justice through engaging the general public, civil society, and policymakers to awaken their socio-economic and political consciousness (PAWA254, 2024). Coined by photojournalist and activist, Boniface Mwangi in 2011 who founded the organization PAWA254 in protest to increasing shrinking space for CSOs and the need to find alternative and innovative ways how to revitalize civil advocacy for social change (Mwangi, 2016).

Worldwide surveys indicate dissatisfaction with the present-day application of democracy transcending the African continent (International IDEA, 2022). According to International IDEA (2022) to reinvigorate democracy in a meaningful form, institutions must regain trust between people and governments which is dwindling. "Democratic fatigue syndrome" as explained by Malotana (2024) is characterized by decreasing election turn out, failure of citizen-led governments at the expense of increase in military coups on the continent of Africa (e.g. Mali, Guinea, Senegal, Burkina Faso) and autocratization (Mensah, 2023) threatens democratic processes. This gap between citizens, community members, civil society and policymakers may hinder progress in social justice, making it easier for governments to suppress dissenting voices.

Therefore, prioritizing equal access to participation mechanisms and creating inclusive spaces for dialogue should be part of the discussion (International IDEA, 2022). Pan-African movements (e.g. Crtve Development, Fatuma's Voice) situate art at the front run in creating public spaces that challenging dominant consensus and envisioning a better future by pointing out the malfunctioning elements of democracy (Mouffe, 2007). They aim at expressive and politically conscious Africa where art, culture and policy work together while involving community members in the process of social change (Fatuma's Voice, 2024). By curating

events, designing campaigns, conducting training sessions these movements aim for African-owned and led development (Crtve Development, 2023; Fatuma's Voice, 2024).

This thesis explores the possibilities of social justice at the intersection of art, advocacy, education, communication, and political engagement, particularly in urban Kenya - Nairobi, Nakuru. While there is a disconnect of HRs movements clustered in urban areas away from the communities whom they serve which is a serious concern for their legitimacy (Matua, 2008), this research zooms on artivism's pivotal role in bridging a dialogue and engagement between community members, civil society, and policymakers. Through this study, artivism is hypothesized to reduce existing gaps, open up civic space, utilized for social justice as a mean of communication through the lenses of social capital with regards to its opportunities and obstacles.

The paper aspires to contribute with new findings beneficial for several stakeholders, including activists, policymakers, scholars, community members, and development agencies in addition to conceptually expanding the academic and practical understanding of artivism. By shedding light on the efficacy of artivism in communication, messaging, and the provisions of alleviated social justice, this research piece intends to provide valuable insights into the transformative potential of creative expression in championing the social justice agenda. It additionally expands the existing literature on critical approaches to development with an interest of artivism's potential for inclusive and participatory development.

Moreover, artivism aligns with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16[1] (UN, 2024) and Kenya's national development agenda called Kenya Vision 2030, which envisions *"a democratic political system that is issue based, people-centered, result-oriented and accountable to the public"* (Kenya Vision 2030, n. d.) achieved through innovative approaches like artivism.

[1] *"Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels"* (UN, 2024)

1.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This thesis delves into the methodology of art as a means of communication and advocacy for social justice relevant to local communities in Kenya. Its objective is to investigate the opportunities which artivism can leverage for Kenyan society in promoting social justice which I define to be inclusive development that leaves no one behind. Amid the thesis exploring artivism in a specific context of Kenya, evidence on the transferability of this practice across African countries, the universality of findings relevant to similar context is to be presented to corroborate existing and stimulate future research as suggested by Silverman (2017). Notably, Mutua (2008) pleads for HRs NGOs in East Africa to collaborate with academia to reimagine social justice through the prism of the Africa's rich cultural heritage and values.

To guide the research process, one main research question (RQ) and three sub RQs were developed, each integral to understanding the role of artivism in advancing social justice:

1. What are the possibilities of artivism for promoting social justice in Kenya?

    a. How is art used to construct local spaces of political engagement between people and policymakers in selected urban areas?

    b. What are the structural challenges hindering the broader application of artivism in development practice?

    c. What constitutes an enabling context for artivism and its funding?

The adjustment of these allowed for flexibility in response to the data collected (Hammet, 2014). The RQs are grounded and contextualized within the existing research as elaborated in the Literature Review Chapter and Conceptual Framework.

I intend to answer the RQs by examining the utilization of artivism in institutional, organizational and artistic practice through data collection and observations in Kenya. By engaging with practitioners of artivism and analyzing their specific socio-political realities, I aim to demonstrate artivism's potential in addressing social justice issues. The findings will be presented through synthesis, analysis, current discussion based on literature review and engagement with empirical data contributing to the **Conceptual Framework** (see p. 12) on

links between shrinking civic space, democratic fatigue, social injustices and artivism as a reaction to the aforementioned.

1.2 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis is divided first into a Background chapter, where the context of democratic gap, civic space and freedoms, artivism in Kenya are described. Thereafter, literature review is conducted to introduce the importance of art throughout history, reasons for cultural turn in development and artivism in the existing academic terms, followed by conceptual framework that delves into the relevant concepts (social capital, social justice) for study of artivism. Consequently, methodological choices behind the selected approaches are outlined. Finally, the results of the data collection are engaged and discussed in connection to RQs, and broader development issues supported by existing literature and summarized with implications and future study suggestions in a Conclusion Chapter.

2 BACKGROUND

While Kenya ranks 3rd among the top five African giant and fastest growing economies alongside Nigeria, South Africa, Ethiopia, and Angola going into 2023 according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) cited in AfricaNews (2023), the distribution of its benefits remains unequal in analysis of available data (Afrobarometer, 2022). Structural issues, considerable inequalities, and high cost of living (AfricaNews, 2024) still decimate a large portion of Kenya's nearly 56 million population (Worldometer, n.d.) with projections indicating a population increase to more than double by the year 2100 (Population Pyramid, 2023). Despite economic growth, the most recent Afrobarometer survey from 2022 reveals that over 75.2% of the urban population believes the country is headed in the wrong direction (Afrobarometer, 2022).

Among the key concerns considered by Kenyans to pose serious challenges for country's development include government corruption, lack of employment opportunities, poverty, crime, inadequate healthcare and access to clean drinking water as highlighted by the Pew Research Center (Wike et al. 2016) (see **Figure 1**). Income inequality also made it on the list with majority believing that it's gotten worse over the past five years. Finally, 42% believe not many citizens participate in politics (Ibid). This dissatisfaction underscores the need to

explore whether artivism may enhance political participation, grapple democratic dissatisfaction and tackle HRs identified in the survey.

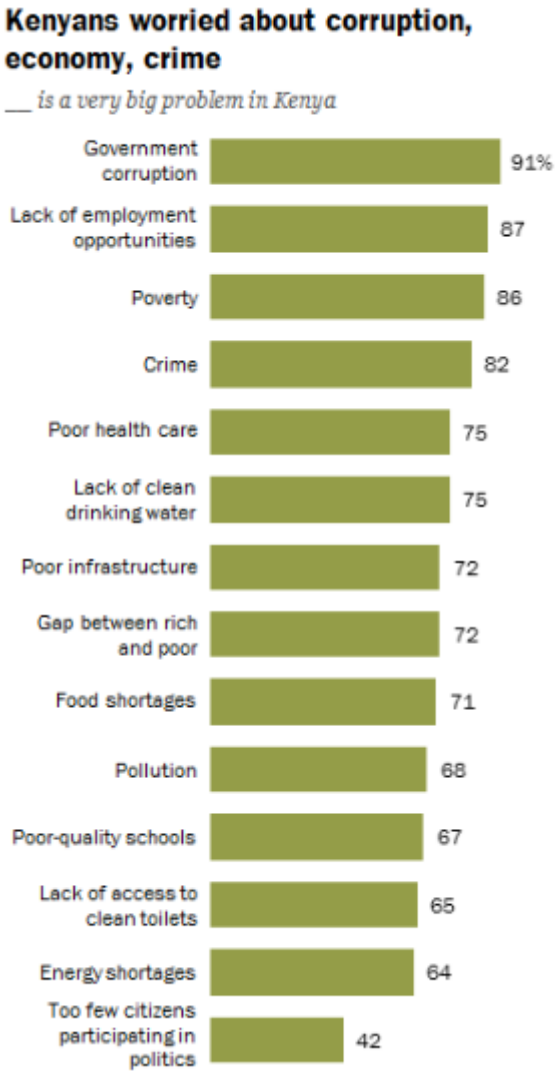


Figure 1: Results of survey by Pew Research Center: Top Concerns within Kenya (Wike et al, 2016)

2.1 DEMOCRACY IN KENYA

The latest Round 9 of Afrobarometer (2022) survey provides and insight into public perception of democratic and advocacy mechanisms in Kenya. Approximately 43-45% respondents believe that Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of County Assembly (MCA) never listen to ordinary people, while 38-39% responded "Only sometimes" indicating the public's sense of being heard and represented (see **Table 1**). However, around 31% are certain that local authorities are "somewhat likely" to help when requested assistance (see **Table 2**) and over 52% confide that if citizens were to mobilize, they are "somewhat" and "very likely" to get their concerns of importance to community across with elected MCA (see **Table 3**).

Q34A. How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what ordinary people have to say: Members of Parliament?

	Urban	Rural	Men	Women	Total
Never	45.1	41.2	37.5	47.6	42.5
Only sometimes	39.9	38.9	44.6	33.9	39.3
Often	10.5	12.7	12.8	11.1	11.9
Always	4.3	6.4	5.0	6.3	5.7
Don't know	0.3	0.8	0.1	1.1	0.6

Q34B. How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what ordinary people have to say: Members of County Assembly or MCA?

	Urban	Rural	Men	Women	Total
Never	43.4	41.2	38.1	45.9	42.0
Only sometimes	38.9	35.9	39.6	34.3	36.9
Often	13.5	14.5	15.9	12.5	14.2
Always	3.9	7.7	6.4	6.3	6.4
Refused		0.1		0.1	0.1
Don't know	0.4	0.6	0.1	1.0	0.5

Table 1. Questions 34A and 34B on public's perception of being listened to by MEP and MCA (Afrobarometer, 2022)

Q36A. How likely is it that you could get someone to take action: If you went to a local leader or a local government office to request assistance for a development project in your community, like an improved water supply or community clean-up activity?

	Urban	Rural	Men	Women	Total
Not at all likely	37.1	39.9	38.1	39.9	39.0
Not very likely	24.1	21.0	22.1	21.9	22.0
Somewhat likely	31.0	27.2	30.2	26.8	28.5
Very likely	6.3	9.7	8.7	8.4	8.5
Refused		0.2	0.1	0.2	0.1
Don't know/Haven't heard	1.5	2.0	0.8	2.9	1.8

Table 2. Question 36A on the likelihood of ordinary citizens to receive an action from a local leader, government office when requestin)g assistance (Afrobarometer, 2022)

Q11A. In your opinion, how likely is it that you could get together with others and make your elected Member of County Assembly or MCA listen to your concerns about a matter of importance to the community?

	Urban	Rural	Men	Women	Total
Not at all likely	27.7	21.8	23.0	24.7	23.8
Not very likely	18.1	13.6	16.0	14.2	15.1
Somewhat likely	28.6	30.4	30.0	29.6	29.8
Very likely	24.1	33.2	30.3	29.8	30.0
Don't know	1.5	1.1	0.6	1.8	1.2

Table 3 Question 11A on the likelihood of ordinary citizens' mobilization having an effect (Afrobarometer, 2022)

Arguably, the effectiveness of collective action in yielding results is essential when considering artivism and community-policymakers communication. Amidst the dissatisfaction among ordinary Kenyans, I am therefore particularly interested to understand the possibilities and limitations of artivism as a response to traditional advocacy processes.

2.2 CIVIC SPACE AND FREEDOMS

The centrality of a self-organized, state-independent civic space for the consolidation of democracy is emphasized by Mutua (2009). It involves nuances, contentiousness in relationship with the government, defining of mandate and identity of HRs and major cultural, political and normative differences (Ibid). As defined in UN Guidance Note on Protection and Promotion of Civic Space (2020), it is required that the environment in which civil society actors operate are free from acts of intimidations, harassments, and reprisals whether online or offline. According to ARTICLE19 (2021), interference with civic space curtails a healthy, open, and free environment that would enable people, groups or civic actors to monitor civic liberties vis-à-vis state actions fostering freedom of expression (FoE), association (FoA), assembly and participation (OHCHR, 2020). In return, more resilient societies, more sustainable peace and better development outcomes are possible as illustrated in **Figure 2** (OHCHR, 2020).

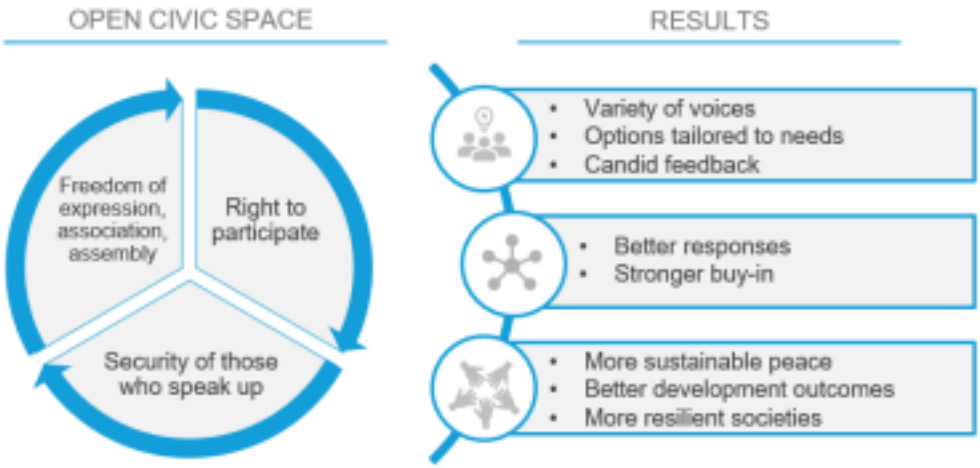


Figure 2. Open civic space explained (OHCHR, 2020)

The existence of specific legislation issued to target and harass civil society members (journalists, NGOs, and non-profit organizations) is a living example of the hindrances in achieving an open civic space. In Kenya, this include, the Media Council Act (MCA) and the

Kenya Information and Communications (Amendment) Act (KICA) both from 2013, excessively restrictive with legal space to impose criminal penalties for journalists, media outlets and human right defenders (HRDs) who expose corruption and challenge people in power (ARTICLE19, 2021). Several independent (I)NGOs, and monitoring bodies such as Hivos (2022), ARTICLE19 (2021) recommended amendments to the national legislation to ensure alignment with the international and regional standards of FoE not to further undermine free speech and media freedom.

FoE is an important prescribed element for the functionality of artivism understood as the exercise of the right to disclose (dis)agreement, dissent with those in power, share and receive impart information through any media regardless of frontiers, and express opinion in peaceful protests without fear or lawful interference as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by United Nations (UN). For this thesis, FoE is bounded by creative expression via art (photography, musical/theatrical performance, painting, graffiti, poetry, music lyrics, etc.) and written communication is considered if conducted on the walls (murals). Social media (SoMe) posts (Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok, Youtube) have also value due to the political activity of Kenyan population and activists demonstrated on the internet (Nyabola, 2018). Personal actions (political protests, civic disobedience) also partially fit in the category of artivism, as some artivists engage in mural paintings on illegal premises with the aim to send a critical message[2].

[2] Not in all instances

2.3 ARTIVISM IN KENYA

Art in Kenya is omnipresent in the streets, communities, and public spaces (e.g. lavatories), on walls, fences, public buildings, matatus[3], tuk-tuks and in the daily lives of Kenyan people (Kebaya, 2022). The public spaces in the city of Nairobi have seen revitalization through community-led design and participatory approaches (UN-Habitat, 2013; UN-Habitat, 2022). In particular, the value of street art in forming social protest in Kenya is an eye-catching, mass-reaching, conversation starting channel of communication (Kebaya, 2022).

The identity of the community-based (CBOs), non-profit organizations (NPOs) engaged in artivism in Kenya is predetermined by their values to utilize bold, socially activating art to drive citizen-led action, empowerment, and positive change (PAWA254, 2024). The most prevalent means of artivistic protests in Nairobi and Nakuru are frequently visible to one's eye in the form of graffiti, murals or street theatre performances (Kebaya, 2022). Other forms of artivism include poetry slam evenings, music concerts. Nakuru is a city with a recording number of criminals gangs and organized crime, thus, much of the youth population is exposed to the dangers of an illegal activity from a young age, especially in the informal settlement of Kivumbini (Defenders Coalition, 2024). Therefore, bright residents and organizations in Nakuru mobilized to capitalize on the unique artistic talents among the youth to present an alternative path for their professional and leisure development (Ibid).

[3] Public transport (buses) widely used in urban areas of Kenya. They are painted with famous artists on the outside and play music on board inside.

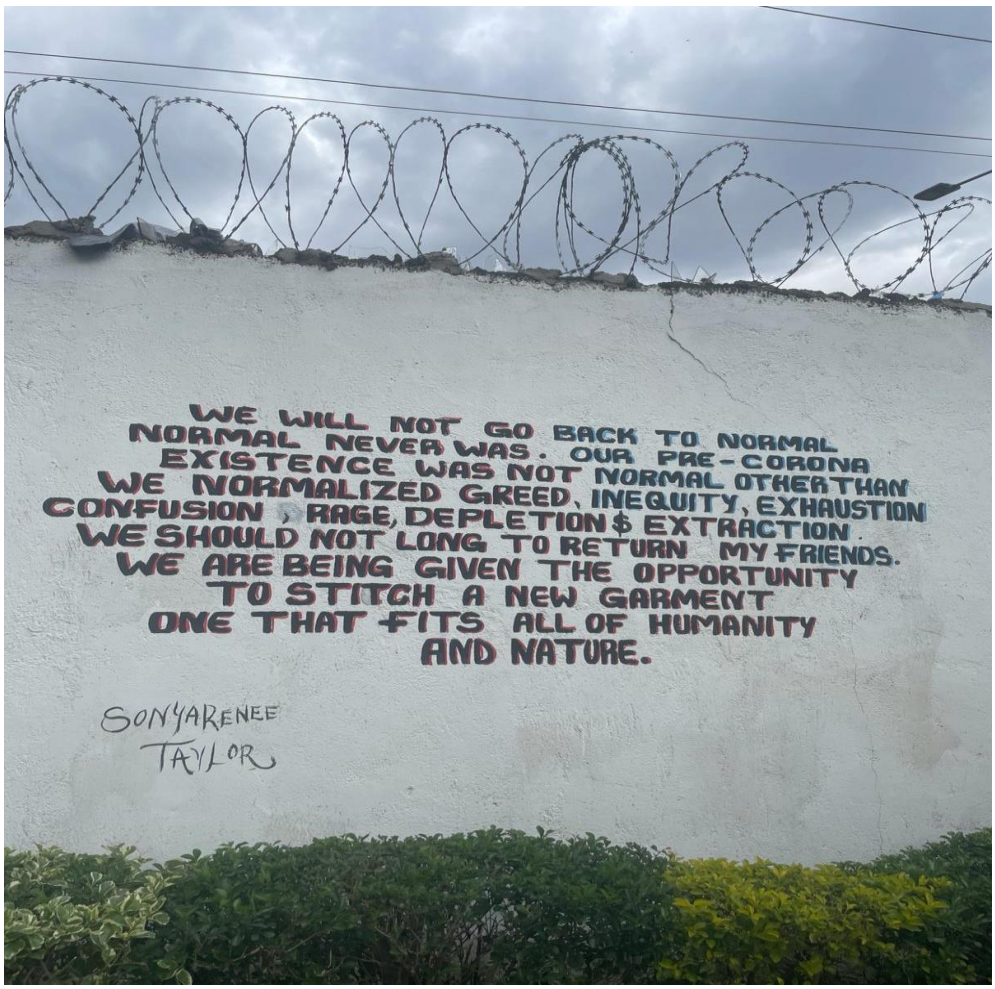


Image 1. Spoken word on a wall stimulating thinking on what our past, present and future (is) should be, Author: Sonyarenee Taylor (Photo: Barbora Kolečková, 2024, Nakuru)

Artivists and CBOs in Kenya use their platforms to address issues of democracy, governance, corruption, extra-judicial killings, political greed (Kebaya, 2022) gender rights, and social and economic justice (PAWA254, 2024). Less attention (however increasing) is generally on climate justice, water and sanitation and environmental conversation in imagining healthy nature, air and environment for all (Imagine Tomorrow, 2024). During the COVID-19 pandemic, murals contained an easily understandable messaging to raise awareness to wear masks, thus prevent the spread of the disease in heavily human-congested areas of informal settlements in the villages of Kibera (Jones, 2020).

Notable campaigns "Occupy Parliament Movement (OPM)" or MaVulture.com attributed to Boniface Mwangi's efforts to shed light on the mass corruption among Kenyan high-ranking politicians and bad governance. Within the campaigns' imperative, they

articulated the broader social, political, and economic concerns within the society (Kebaya, 2022).

Image 2. Mavulture campaign credited to Boniface Mwangi and an organization PAWA254 drawing an attention to issues of bad governance, corruption and abuse of power perpetrated by Kenyan politicians named on the wall (Photo: Andre Epstein, Central Business District, Nairobi)

Similarly, outspoken poet Willie Oeba known for his focus on art to bring about social justice and protecting human rights shared a piece called “Dear Mr. President” (2017) that sparked a nationwide conversation on governance, social justice, and extra-judicial killing, defending democracy in Kenya (Defenders Coalition, 2024). *“Dear Mr President, do you know most of the people who elected you aren't proud of their choices.”* (Willie Oeba, Dear Mr. President, 2017). His extraordinary and unconventional way of communication is attributed to bringing police and youth from Nakuru together to bridge the existing mistrust and education on HRs (Defenders Coalition, 2024).

In the next paragraph, I delve deeper into the specific existing challenges faced by artivism and artivists to detail the context in which artivism operates. One such challenge is the concentration of HRs NGOs mostly in urban areas, drawn by their proximity to governmental institutions where they may advocate for social justice through democratic processes (Mutua,

2008). However, urban areas also display the vast inequities present with 23 % of the urban population living under the international poverty line (UN-Habitat, 2022). For instance, Kibera, Mathare, Dandora, Nairobi's largest informal settlements, vibrant art coexists with an ongoing struggle perpetuated by inadequate governmental management leading to issues such as overcrowding, poor road infrastructure (UN-Habitat, 2013), air quality (UN-Habitat, 2022), urban poverty, sanitation issues (Tacoli et al., 2015), corruption, crime, police brutality, extrajudicial arrests and killings, gender-based violence (GBV), or poor housing susceptible to extreme weather conditions like floodings (Mwanza, 2018; Bethuel, 2023; Wairimu et al., 2023; Rukanga, 2024).

Within this context, I deem it worth exploring the role of artivists as agents for change within specific communities which are often exposed to numerous obstacles. These challenges include the compromise of personal safety due to the political sensitivity of their commentary, increasing the risk of (illegal) arrest, prosecution, or worst-case extrajudicial killing. Financially sustaining their work is often cut short by the inability to cover basic expenses. Additionally, issues of stigmatization of art deeply rooted in Kenyan culture (Maina, 2023), lack of employment opportunities (Business Daily, 2023), scarce funding, or restricted access to justice and economic equality contribute to obstacles for artivists to maintain their job.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

In examining the precise influence of art within culture on democracy, civic space, and social justice in the realm of international development, I draw upon the insights of selected academics whose knowledge assists me in illustrating its current understanding. Proposed by Clammer (2014b), discussions persist regarding the nature and role of art for society throughout historical epochs with theories often simplified into a division of art as a) a sophisticated form of entertainment, b) a fundamental and generative mechanism for religion, sport, social protests, social movements grounded in social theories. Indeed, the latter perspective holds particular relevance for the study of artivism. Art historian Bell (2007), cited in Clammer (2012, p. 4) describes the imagination and human creativity within global cultures and art as the "mirror of society".

For the setting of the study, Radcliffe (2006) and Clammer (2014a) take the reader through the emergence of new visions of development emphasizing the significance of culture and creative expression of arts in fostering a holistic social transformation. This fresh perspective, incorporating the knowledge systems of communities and moving away from top-down Western approaches (Estradé, 2023) prompts a discussion on achieving sustainable and desirable results in HRs, widespread social justice, and expanding creative opportunities, rather than focusing solely on economic growth (Clammer, 2014). Radcliffe (2006) suggests that factors such as disillusionment with previous development paradigms, unfolding of concepts like social capital, and governance, postcolonial challenges to ethnic and gender discrimination, and efforts for conflict prevention among different cultural or ethnic groups have collectively contributed to the rising prominence of the cultural turn in development agenda.

Why is the landscape of international development increasingly acknowledging culture as a critically powerful vehicle promoting cohesion, growth, transformation, and development (African Union, 2021) transcending to policy dimension (Radcliffe, 2006)? Major development agencies like the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the World Bank (WB) incorporated social capital, participation, and governance as important emerging elements characterizing the link between culture and development (Radcliffe, 2006). Additionally, Clammer (2012) argues that amid global crises, human-centered models of development offer an alternative to the perceived failures of economic and outcome-oriented policies which in

part contributed to the existing problems. For instance, in recognition of the pivotal role played by cultural and creative industries (CCIs) in achieving inclusive sustainable development, the African Union (AU) announced the year 2021 as "The AU Year of the Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building Africa We Want" (African Union, 2021).

However, as Clammer (2014) points out, the relationship between creative arts and development remains a neglected topic, overlooking its significant contribution to humanizing social change. Duxbury et al. (2017) further note that the SDGs immensely overlook the importance of culture and its role in catalyzing sustainable development. Without recognizing the role of culture, particularly its core element of creative arts, it is impossible to grasp how art has shaped societal understandings, and normative values and their evolution in terms of HRs and social justice.

Art and development are intertwined in ways that may surprise us, as demonstrated by Clammer (2014) who reveals how art serves as a means to an end. Its value, especially for poverty alleviation, social transformation, and encouraging self-empowerment, is underscored (Ibid). Rodriguez-Labajos (2022) elaborates on how artivism proposes a transformative and innovative approach to development, encouraging clearer communication lines between governments, citizens, and civil society by educating audiences through performative expression and enabling reflection on socio-political issues.

Ruiz-Cabrera (2020) echoes the sentiment that music is not merely entertainment but also a political instrument to combat global injustices caused by governments. As Brian Holmes puts it: "Art can offer a chance for society to collectively reflect on the imaginary figures it depends upon for its very consistency, its self-understanding" (Holmes, 2004, p. 549). It contains a central role for individuals of different backgrounds, beliefs, and ideas regardless of time and space (Dutton, 2006) to communicate without barriers. The approach helps bring theory and practice together by deconstructing and contextualizing problematic habits and challenging dilemmas (ActionAid, 2021).

All the interchangeable terms to "artivism", namely "artistic activism" (Groys, 2014), "community art" (Cohen-Cruz, 202), "creative expression" (Hivos, n.d.), "cultural activism (Buser et al., 2013)", "cultural resistance" (Duncombe, 2002), "activist art" (Duncombe &Lambert, 2018) or "performative democracy" (Weibel, 2015) have been fundamental for

social movements and organizations in the fight against political injustices since the mid-1990s, as outlined by Kebaya (2022). Proponents of artivism, such as Steve Duncombe and Steve Lambert (2018) further develop the concept in their chapter on "Artistic Activism" highlighting its emotional impact and its ability to stimulate action and a positive effect.

The widespread use of the term "artivism" among practitioners from CSOs, NGOs, CBOs, youth, women-led, grassroots, and international organizations (IOs) speaks volumes to its importance. Numerous resources supporting artivism have been established to provide insights on best practices in programming and gathering potential allies. For illustration, Financial Management and Sustainability Toolkit by Hivos (n.d.), Arftful Activism: A Toolkit for Creative Activism by ActionAid (2021), Artivism Fellowship, Academy and Artivism Manual by ForumCiv (2022)[4] have been published to achieve local, national, global relevance for creatives and the community needs.

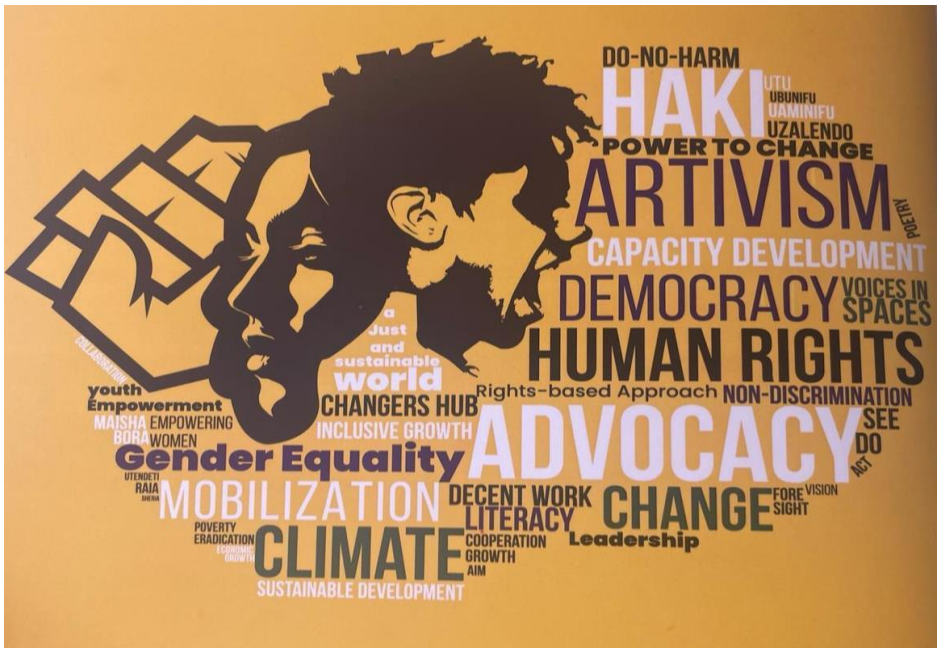


Image 3.Visual illustration on artivism and related concepts part of an internal report for an international CSO (Internal Report on Artivistic Academy, ForumCiv, 2022)

Kebaya (2022) discusses how artivism as an unconventional and non-traditional practice, provides space for diversity, versatility, and change by leveraging publicly accessible spaces. The emphasis on a free, untouched accessible street environment demonstrates defiance against the limitations imposed on ordinary people's lives. On this note, D. Soyini Madison's argument

[4] Unpublished internal document

(2008) suggests that the environment of a performance or an act influences the unfolding of the encounter and its outcome. To truly understand social justice, we must focus on art and the powerful key institutions that are agents of such development, including donors, governmental and NGOs, and CBOs (Radcliffe, 2006).

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

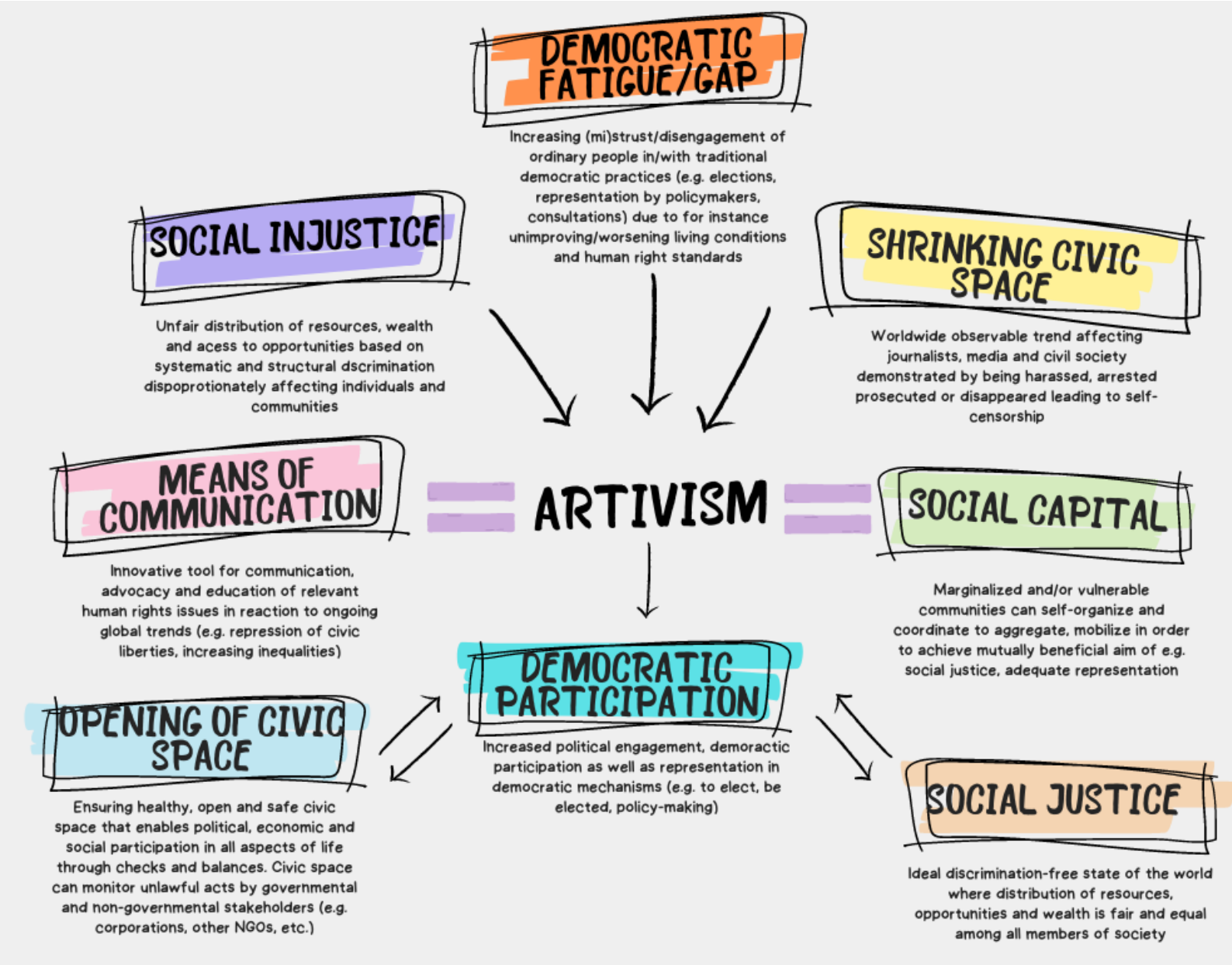
4.1. *ARTIVISM*

Artistic activism or artivism embodies a fusion of civic engagement in socio-political issues and advocacy for vulnerable groups' well-being through art, as articulated by Aldred (2012) and Malzacher (2015). It represents sustainable transformation driven by cognitive processes triggering relational and behavioral change (Rodriguez-Labajos, 2022). The interplay between art and politics is intrinsic as there is no art without politics and no politics without art (Mouffe, 2007). Artivism catalyzes political change when combined with activism and in reverse, artivism needs to be constituted of art for political and emotional effects to take place (Duncombe & Lambert, 2018).

According to ActionAid's report (2021), the method of artivism unlocks new visions of the future and ways of working, activates reflection to include a diversity of cultural traditions and expressions of justice, presents new ways of communication and engagement of the audience, and reevaluates objectives and thinking of the activists and NGO work as well as the world we live in. While participatory approaches such as participatory arts promote participation, and activism as explored by Newman & Caroll (2019), they also align with the logic of *"Change is possible, and it comes from the power in people"* (ActionAid Kenya, 2024) applied across this thesis. However, the scholars Newman & Caroll (2019) are skeptical regarding the straightforwardness of the possibility of the change, despite acknowledging the benefits participatory arts reap.

In deconstructing artivism, key concepts including democratic fatigue, shrinking civic space, and social injustice shed light on how is artivism driven in response to such factors. Therefore, it is hypothesized that artivism is a means of communication and social capital of Kenyan communities mobilizing to realize change envisioned as an improved reflection of the challenges. Change is thanks to artivism represented as an increased democratic participation in political matters which may in return reassure the opening of civic space that can check and

monitor actions by state and non-state actors and lastly pave a path towards social justice (see Conceptual Framework 1). The notions of democratic gap and civic space and their operationalizing are explained above in the section of **Introduction and Background.**



Conceptual Framework 1: Explanation of key concepts and their operationalization (Barbora Kolečková, 2024)

4.2. *SOCIAL (IN)JUSTICE*

The concept of social justice encompasses wide dimensions ranging from political, economic, environmental, and gender that regardless have fairness, inclusivity, solidarity, dignity, and equity for all members of society at its heartbeat. This thesis adopts four principles: HRs, participation, access, and equity mirroring Oxfam's definitions of social justice (n.d.). They include issues such as access to education, healthcare, housing, employment, the right to participate in elections, and other HRs. Social justice recognizes the interconnectedness of the aforementioned and therefore calls for addressing the structural barriers, their roots which continue to cause social disparities and inequalities. Additionally, social justice emphasizes the importance of collective action, community organizing, and grassroots movements in driving systematic change to ensure no one is left behind (Oxfam Australia, n.d.). In terms of attaining social justice, movements call and pressure politicians for different proposals of policy change and initiatives to change their unfair aspects that discriminate or marginalize (Ibid). With that said, artivism centers itself as one of the tools for advancing the social justice agenda.

A report from McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) (2023) provides a nuanced picture of Kenya's development in the past 20 years. Despite Kenya's rapid economic growth, certain areas (counties bordering Somalia, or internal areas like Baringo or Kakamega) are lagging (Pöltner, 2023) and thus citizens from there are still abject to levels of poverty. The WB statistics show how the GPD growth of Kenya does not reflect in changes of the poverty levels in urban sites where stagnation is observed (Zikhali, 2023). Unequal distribution of wealth and resources, spatial disparities (arid areas vs. cities) as well as the fact that Kenya ranks 126th out of 180 countries in terms of the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) according to Transparency International yearly report (2023), and weak rule of law hamper the just improvement through generation of inequality of positive outcomes (Kariuki, 2024) and impacting the most vulnerable (Banoba et al., 2024). Pöltner (2023) stresses that it is essential to highlight the differences to help direct resources and narrow the gaps to create a more equitable future for all.

Mutemi wa Kiama, a Kenyan social justice activist, regularly speaks up[5] about how taxes should be used for the right reasons to assure justice (Kamau, 2021). Instead, he

[5] Insomuch that he faced multiple arrests (Kamau, 2021)

highlights the misallocation of resources (e.g. omitting marginalized communities) and the need for citizen education on constitutional rights to hold the government accountable (ibid). Artivism is proposed as a tool (social capital) to mitigate this gap in education and insufficient capital/resources available (social injustice) and helps achieve desired ends (social justice, democratic participation, opening of civic space) which would be impossible otherwise as debated by Coleman (1988).

4.3. *SOCIAL CAPITAL*

In exploring artivism in Kenya with respect to bridging the gap between people and policymakers, it is essential to examine its relationship with the concept of social capital. A plethora of scholars such as Robert Putnam (1993, 1995, 2000, 2007), Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1985, 1986), James Coleman (1988, 1990, 2000) Nan Lin (1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2008) or Nahapiet, Ostrom (2000) and Goshal (1998) have provided definitions of social capital cited in Claridge (2020). The most cited definition of social capital was put forward by Robert Putnam et al. (1993) where the scholar considered social capital to be *"features of social organizations such as networks, norms, and social trust that can facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit"* (p. 35). Particularly, Putnam et al. (1993) conceptualized social capital as a public good available to anyone who invests in it (Claridge, 2015) emphasizing its role in enhancing participatory potential, mobilization power, and facilitation of communication.

Given this theory, artivism presents itself as a form of social capital among local communities and organizations that self-organize to communicate and advocate relevant HRs with regard to social justice issues to policymakers. Artivism, like social capital, can leverage education among community members to increase understanding, facilitate inter-personal cooperation, alleviate mobilization, and active role in decision-making (Putnam et al., 1993; Putnam, 2014) contributing to social change. Eventually, social capital is elevated from the individual level to a feature of a larger population thanks to its aggregation making it a collective trait (Claridge, 2015). Similarly to social capital, in the case of artivism, artivists are individuals whose craft stimulates conversations and dialogue and mobilizes groups, communities, and society at large.

Claridge (2020) offers a simplistic explanation of social capital as a social setting or factors that mobilize various forms of capital, including informational, financial, or physical assets, memberships in social networks, creativity, or problem-solving abilities. These resources become accessible through the dynamics of social settings or social factors. Since Putnam's conceptualization of social capital did not reflect on power dynamics and structural inequalities within society (Claridge, 2015), it, therefore, matters to the study of artivism for social justice to scrutinize social capital as well. Thus, this thesis explores how marginalized communities use artivism to aggregate and communicate their needs to local or national legislators, who are in positions with more resources and can thus either perpetuate or ease existing inequalities through their actions (Coleman, 1998). The hypothesis relies on the fact

that participatory approaches to decision-making and policy discussion (here exemplified through artivism) help forge positive dynamic relationships between people and their governments, and bridge gaps to address and settle differences through accountable mechanisms (OHCHR, 2020). This significantly reduces the risk of violence, crisis, or fragility (Ibid) in democratic settings.

While social capital has also been associated with criminal activities among criminal groups, gangs, or HRs violators as explored by Papachristos (2006), it illustrates that in certain environments bad outcomes are also inevitable. Claridge (2015) and Bourdieu (1986) additionally argue that social capital might reinforce social divisions, reproduce social inequalities, or exclude marginalized individuals from participation. Therefore, evidence on the role of artivism in fostering inclusion and engagement in socio-political matters is to be presented to hypothesize under which circumstances social capital generates positive outcomes.

The foundational assumptions center artivism as an instrument that akin to social capital might create synergies, and cultivate collaboration and interpersonal cooperation, thereby instigating necessary action (Coleman, 1998). Conceptually, it is worth investigating whether social capital, here artivism, enables the stretching of the benefits (e.g. social justice) even for those who do not directly engage or participate in it as put forward by Coleman (1998). Claridge (2015) underlines that Putnam's theory primarily focused on its application in the context of modern societies such as Italy or the USA with limited attention given to developing countries. Thus, this research work provides space to explore its applicability beyond existing frameworks.

Major global development agencies like the UNDP and WB perceive social capital through different prisms. The WB's perception of social capital is linked to honest government, institutional functionality, and security of market access, whereas the UNDP's view stands on influences by Amartya Sen's thinking on freedoms, capabilities, and entitlements concerned with overcoming global inequalities and empowerment of the poor (Radcliffe, 2006). The latter is a more representative view for the study of artivism and its function to realize social justice. In summary, this research seeks to explore how artivism serves as a conduit for social change, fostering collaboration, and empowerment within marginalized communities, thereby advancing the principles of social justice and democratic participation.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1. *RESEARCH DESIGN*

This qualitative and explorative research situated in Kenya draws upon Bryman (2012), selected by the effectiveness of qualitative research in "understanding the nature of phenomena" (De Walt & De Walt, 2011, p. 129) in my case artivism, as nationally, regionally, and globally utilized practice to elevate concerns of communities and let those voices speak (Lowe & Short, 1990). The study relies on abductive methods, a compromise between inductive and deductive setups. By combining both theory and practice rather than operating in dichotomy, it is best suited to exploratively disentangle complex societal problems, build a new theory through participatory problem-solving, and necessary to study the unconventional tool (Kistruck & Shantz 2022) for civic mobilization called artivism.

By employing abductive reasoning, this process involved refining hypotheses based on evolving evidence which over time required testing and development as described by Timmermans & Tavory (2012). After initial interviews and analysis, clearer observations emerged which furthermore generated ideas and information necessary to develop my conceptual framework as well as a theory in line with grounded theory approach (Hammet, 2014). The data collection made it clearer which data is consistent and corroborates my hypothesis and which needs to be revised or omitted as they do not speak directly into the study (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

The research avoids an excessive reliance on theory but is rather guided by the evidence which presents a unique opportunity for theory construction (Ibid). The grounded theory approach opens doors for never-before-thought ideas and multiple analytical directions with surprising linkages, and comparisons to describe the phenomena of artivism from a new light (Charmaz, 2014). References to predictions and explanations are conducted about the disclosed information (Kistruck & Shantz 2022) to demonstrate the community's reasoning behind utilizing artivism to demand social justice. The goal is also to form an adequate space for the interviewees within the thesis to shape their understanding of the social world (Hammet, 2014). Concepts of reciprocity and iteration following the feminist post-constructivist approach (Ibid, England, 1994) as opposed to the neo-positivist thought school of chasing objectivity (Ibid) are leading drivers of this research.

The epistemology of social capital, social justice, artivism, democratic gap, and shrinking is perceived through the lenses combining political science and anthropology. The aforementioned concepts are framed within the constructionist theory paradigm to negotiate how much reality is a result of a social construct (Alvesson, Sköldberg, 2018; Cohen, 2012; Silverman, 2017). Therefore, in my approach, I am both constructionist and interpretative while keeping this text in dialogue with the audience.

In pursuit of a fit-for-purpose setup, a mixed method approach of case study and ethnography was developed to ensure robust reliable data (Silverman, 2017) in answering my RQs. The case study design is useful for an in-depth and intensive analysis (Bryman, 2012). Within Bryman's (2012) categorization of case studies, the case study of artivism can be classified as an "exemplifying case" since it exemplifies a broader category of activism under which artivism falls and is suitable to provide space to depict broader reality through interacting with RQs (Ibid). The ethnographic approach was based on fieldwork and brought contradictions when compared to knowledge obtained through literature review (Creswell, 2013). Participatory and non-participatory observations with people around the urban sites visited were also used as a source of data (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011).

My fieldwork took place from February to May 2024 in Kenya, in the informal settlements of urban areas of Nairobi and Nakuru supported by firsthand insights from CBOs that operate, or interviewees with personal experience of upbringing in Kibera, Mathare, and Dandora[6]. Nakuru's informal settlements have not been spatially demarcated but are known by authorities and local experts (UN Habitat, 2020) who assisted me during my visit of Lake View, Pangani and Manyani in Nakuru (Ibid). The travel and study were possible thanks to a stipend called the Crafoord Travel Grant offered in collaboration with Lund University (LU).

I engaged in everyday conversation as an interview technique, informally observed leisure activities, collected detailed notes, learned Swahili-specific terms for artivism, actively participated in daily practices of Kibera artivist volunteers, and practiced together with them as suggested by DeWalt & DeWalt (2011). I also took pictures of murals in public areas around the city to demonstrate artivism's omnipresence and meaning in Kenyan society.

[6] Informal settlements in South and Eastlands, Nairobi

Before the research visit to Kenya, I familiarized myself with the socio-political and economic circumstances as well as HRs standards by doing a contextual analysis (semi-formal informed conversations), literature review of newspapers, thematic contemporary scholars' articles with knowledge on the context of Kenya, artivism, SoMe (X, Facebook, Instagram) of active organizations and artists, renown NGO publications active in the field of civic space and Kenya, international, national reports, independent monitoring and statistic agencies papers to guide and complement obtained primary data.

Qualitative primary data is generated through interviews with key informants' interviews (KII), one focus group discussion (FGD), and observations held as semi-structured, collaborative, and interactive following suggestions by Cresswell (2013) and Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) to land on a co-owned thesis. To increase the credibility of the research, a method of triangulation as suggested by Hammet et al. (2014,) was implemented where interviewees of different positions were carefully selected (e.g. policymakers, grassroots and community organizations, community members, artivists, INGOs) (see Appendix 2 for a detailed overview) to land on a holistic perspective and corroborate findings grounded in the conceptual framework. The categorization was done based on the available information from interviews or on their websites. In total 17[7] of interviews were conducted both physically and virtually at convenience of the interviewee.

. Image 4. FDG with members of CBO from Kibera (Anonymous[8], 2024, Kibera, Nairobi)

[7] In 3 instances, the interviews were held with 2 people, in one instance with 3 people, instead of 1, in a more conversational and interactive mode.

[8] For security reasons the author is anonymized

The interview guide (see Appendix 1) was refined after the pilot interview and features open-ended questions designed to elicit rich, detailed answers in response to RQ. The KII's attitudes and claims were treated as relative narratives which in dialogue with me constructed the knowledge and helped interpret and contextualize the phenomena of artivism substantially. Triangulation was also enacted using different secondary sources, e.g. newspapers, statistics, governmental reports, and literature review to corroborate the proposed discussion and emerging themes in the Analysis Chapter (Section 6). The technique of double triangulation helped me foresee emerging disjuncture and counterarguments vis-à-vis applied conceptual framework (Hammet, 2014)

Purposive sampling for semi-structured interviews utilized convenient and snowball technique (Bryman, 2012, Creswell, 2012) leveraging networking and local knowledge to enhance the list of interviewees. Combined with online research, I extended the pool of potential interviewees. Interviewees were purposively sampled based on their extensive experience with artivism both within their personal and professional lives. All informants had relevant experience with projects utilizing artivistic interventions in development practice or artivism as a theory of change (ToC) within their organizations. The category of artivists was defined as individuals comfortable with the label "artivists", or "artists for change". These individuals are creatives and/or HRD/activists who intentionally advocate for HRs or social justice through their art whilst intending to provoke a critical dialogue, about social justice within Kenyan society.

In the process of mapping and snow-balling possible interviewees, a justice-to-intersectional approach was ensured by selecting diverse activists and organizations concerned with myriad dimensions of HRs differing from democracy, governance, corruption, women's rights, children's rights, people with disability (hearing), hygiene and sanitation, extrajudicial killings, GBV, gun violence to environmental issues. Representation across age, gender, political, religious belief, and sexuality was also considered as suggested by Valentine, et al. (2010). The intersectional approach guided me to understand and better represent a variety of identities, acknowledge multiple forms of discrimination, promoting inclusivity and equity in advancing the social justice agenda at the center of the thesis. Despite these efforts, challenges in discussing sexuality due to socio-cultural taboos in some communities combined with legislatively hostile and repressive constraints (CIVICUS Monitor, 2023), may have impacted

the equitable representation of rights for individuals with different SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression and sex characteristics).

When approaching social justice through intersectional lenses, this thesis also addressed differences in perception of the country and own's wellbeing varying based on age, gender, or different ethnic group. For instance, the younger generation (aged 18 to 34 years old) is much more positive about the economic future of Kenya in comparison to the older generation (Wike et al., 2016). The socio-economic views also differ per ethnic group which also affects the existing political tensions between them (Ibid). Wike et al. (2016) conclude from a Pew Research Center survey (2016) that Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities exhibit higher levels of satisfaction with the Kenyan economy compared to the Luhya and Lua people (Ibid).

Transcription, coding, collection, and analysis of data were conducted meticulously and securely. To interpret data, synthesize, and arrive at the final analysis, I utilized the computer software NVivo provided by LU. Thematic analysis as explained by Braun & Clarke (2006) was employed to analyze the collected knowledge on artivism to comprehensibly respond to the proposed RQ in line with the constructionist approach. By relating thematic analysis to my conceptual framework, I could proceed to categorize knowledge systematically which allowed me to foresee both interesting and critical points for discussion. Both in vitro (direct statements, word for word) and in vivo (constructed from the material) as described in Alvesson & Sköldberg (2018) with reference to Strauss's (1987) categorization types were used during coding balancing direct quotations with interpretive analysis.

Following Charmaz's (2014) recommendation for the grounded theory approach, coding was carried out in two phases – initial and focused coding. The first round (initial coding) involved analyzing key concepts from my conceptual framework, such as social justice, social capital, democratic gap, artivism, and means of communication by examining words, lines, and segments for their analytical utility (Ibid). During the focused coding, I identified reoccurring themes across interviews which formed the basis for my discussion and debate in relation to RQs (Bryman, 2012) and existing literature (Charmaz, 2006). In my final analysis, I was guided by abductive reasoning aimed to interpret a single case from a hypothetic overarching pattern enhancing the understanding of artivism (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018).

The interpretation-focused coding (Adu, 2019) is strengthened with each new observation I was able to obtain (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2018).

Ensuring internal and external validity of the data was crucial in terms of the interpretation where the former was tested vis-à-vis the disclosed statements and pursued motivations of the interviewees. Subjecting their claims to critical scrutiny rather than accepting them as absolute truth assisted me in managing the risks of the adequate depiction of reality in the Kenyan context in the hope of generating socially constructed reflections of reality (Ibid). In line with Guba & Lincoln (1994) referenced by Alvesson & Sköldberg (2018), the focus was on the transferability of findings instead of on the external validity emphasizing the contextual relevance and applicability of the research outcomes.

5.2. *ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS, DECOLONIALITY AND POSITIONALITY*

The research methodology committed to ethical standards and safety precautions prioritizing the safety of the interviewees who were informed of the nature, content, potential risks, benefits, outcomes, and purpose of the study as well as their rights. Following their decision to participate in the study, all this information was provided and confirmed both orally and in writing. (see Appendix 3). Interviewees had the option to withdraw statements, parts, or the entire interview at any stage of the thesis process. Confidentiality and anonymity of interviewees were strictly maintained from data collection, through to data coding, analysis, and text production. Given the potentially sensitive political reflections and opinions shared, special care was taken not to put the co-creators of the research at risk. Personal data was stored in encrypted files with password access restricted to the researcher, in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Recordings were kept secure, stored on an old phone without internet access, and no sim card, or computer, and in safe locations.

In consideration of artivism to serve the Kenyan population to attain social justice as desired, I refrained from remote data collection. Instead, I conducted data collection in the natural environment of the interviewees to authentically represent the interviewee's context, get an accurate understanding of their behavior (Creswell, 2013; DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011) as well as of the performances in consideration of the expressive nature of artivists. By localizing the research and cooperating with CBOs, artivists as well as vulnerable communities in place, the aim was to achieve morally and academically solid and just research under the decolonial framework (Agboka, 2014). Incorporating a decolonial approach in development

studies helps unravel the complex interplay of the historical legacy of colonialism, and political, and socio-cultural factors while it guided me on how to envision more just and equitable interactions, incl. in research (Ibid). To honor the principle of reciprocity (Kimmerer, 2017) and time spent together, interviewees received compensation for transportation costs where applicable. Some interviewees expressed interest in the research results, and I have committed to sharing the final thesis with them. This reciprocal engagement ensures that the research process and outcomes are beneficial and respectful to all parties involved.

When visiting vulnerable communities defined as economically, socially, or politically marginalized groups in specific geographical locations (e.g. informal settlements) to amplify these voices of communities on social justice issues and understand their perspective on artivism as the facilitator of communication to policymakers (Scheynes, 2014), I took considerable caution not to cause harm. It was important not simply to benefit from the knowledge of communities and stakeholders interviewed, but rather to co-create knowledge and allow for interviewees to take an active role in this collaborative research (Cresswell, 2013). To minimize the ethical risks of intruding upon vulnerable communities, when necessary, I was accompanied by a knowledgeable and active member of the Kibera community during sensitive interactions (Silverman, 2017). Avoiding non-inclusive language such as "participants of the study", and "subjects of study" was central to narrowing unequal power relations (Scheynes, 2014; Meadow, 2013). The research design remained flexible to accommodate community needs to ensure the research serves the communities involved (Ibid).

I acknowledge my positionality as a student coming from the Global North with "white privilege" and citizenship might have been reflected throughout the research and specifically during the data collection in a still racialized context. I exercised a level of awareness when these factors affected access to certain places and shaped the interviewee's expectations. It was crucial to set clear expectations as early as the first communication to avoid miscommunication or false promises. My background as a semi-professional dancer and my experience volunteering, working, or interning for CSOs fighting injustices assisted me in acquiring an essential initial understanding of the research context. Regardless of my previous experience, I treated the research with an open mind, free of predisposed judgments and unintended biases that could negatively impact the research (Meadow, 2013). I attempted to mindfully incorporate an appropriate distance from the interviewee's opinions which was critical to

objectively understand the extent to which we share political, social, or economic ensuring these did not influence the research outcomes (Ibid).

LIMITATIONS

I initially relied on gatekeepers and recommendations from my host organization, former employees of Pawa254, and colleagues from Raoul Wallberg Institute (RWI) thanks to whom I compiled a list of possible interviewees engaging in art and social justice. The reliance posed a risk of predetermined results of the thesis with an inaccurate depiction of reality, which I mitigated by conducting interviews with policymakers and independent mapping of other international and national, CBOs, youth-led organizations (YLOs) operating in Kenya to ensure data reliability (Silverman, 2017).

Challenges to setting up transparent interviews with policymakers due to limited accessibility prevented me from obtaining sufficient information from their perspective. The selection of policymakers as an interviewee relied on a criterion that they are familiar/work with the concept of artivism. I addressed this by researching publicly available data on government websites related to artivism and funding in the creative sector. New legislation called The Creative Industry Bill (2024) was introduced after finalizing interviews, thus I could not incorporate its implication and discuss it appropriately within the thesis.

Due to the scope, time, and access constraints, the study does not comprehensively depict the reality of rural artivism, highlighting an important future research avenue. Additionally, the problematic elitist urban NGO work modeled after Northern HRs watchdogs is still very much detached and distant from the real struggle of the countryside (Mutua, 2008). Consequently, the choice of artivism as a community-based method was intended to foster participation and connection to people whom the idea serves (Scheynes, 2014). Differences in internet access in Kenya due to high prices potentially excluded valuable interviewees who could provide immensely important insight because of no possibility to be reached other than physically. Despite attempting to have gender-balanced interviewee representation, the final interviewee list included 14 interviewees who identified as men and 8 who identified as women which may influenced the perception of social justice in the findings.

6. ARTIVISM: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

In the following parts, with the help of opinions shared by interviewees, I engage in dialogue and construct discussion supported by existing literature on the topic of artivism as an opportunity for social justice. Afterward, three subsections, delve into the specific features of artivism – artivism for political engagement, which structural challenges halt artivism's application in broader development practice and what is an enabling environment for artivism with regards to funding.

Opinions widely shared among the interviewees emphasize the vast opportunities artivism provides in recognition of art as a tool for empowerment both for communities and artivists (interviewee no. 5, 7, 13) not to leave skills and potential out (Interviewee no. 11, 13, 15, 16) as well as raising awareness on constitutional rights (Interviewee no. 6, 9, 11, 15). By empowering the community through informing them of their rights, like e.g. rights of the arrested person enshrined in Article 49 (Constitution of Kenya, 2010), Interviewee no. 11 *"can see there is a decrease on illegal arrest by police officers since this information was shared"*. Such intervention helped the community youth understand their rights and not get intimated by police officers (Interviewee no. 11). Interviewees no. 1, 7, 11, and 16 also highlighted their current vision (and also the need) to build training/ art residency centers/institutions which would alleviate their work and its contribution to the community to a greater extent.

Interviewee no. 12 shares how documented individual stories of transformation show instances where kids were not doing well academically before they participated in artivistic programs. Thanks to skill-building and capacitating their artistic talents, parents were pleased to attest to change in their children who became more responsible and took on leadership roles. Similar changes in attitudes are observed elsewhere when CBOs leverage existing knowledge in communities but lack technical know-how (Interviewee no. 13, 14, 17). One example includes the technique of phonography (phone + photography) offered by Interviewee no. 13 allowing the youth to discover their creativity whilst building their technical skills. This is precisely crucial since it is believed that formal education does not offer enough space for the acquisition and development of art-based talents (Interviewee no. 12, 13, 14).

On the question of relevance of art through time Interviewee no. 15 reply: *"Art is timeless"* and Interviewee no. 16 says: "*There is no timeline to art"* meaning art will always play a role, even in the future. Therefore, the popularization of different initiatives for artivists, such as "Truth Is", Artivism Fellowships, Artivism Academies and other self-organized institutions

that seek to raise a conscious artistic generation, provide training and opportunities so that artivists can stand up to protect HRs (Defenders Coalition, 2024), financially sustain themselves (Interviewee no. 15), build their brand and continue to spark conversations are of the essence for long-desired social justice and social change in the country (Interviewee no. 5, 6, 13, 16).

Artivism is also attributed to be a conversation starter, provoking dialogue through highlighting certain issues people are otherwise afraid to talk about (e.g. gun and police violence, extrajudicial killings, GBV) (Interviewee no. 1, 7, 11, 14). Not only awareness within the community is raised (Interviewee no. 6, 15, 14), but this also attracts mainstream media (Interviewee no. 10, 14). Artivism is thus able to scale up the knowledge on issues unknown before to different spaces and get a broader audience and attention, incl. the government (Ibid). *"Even women who've been excluded from processes of governance, they too can be beneficiaries of artivism, just by observation and learning"* (Interviewee no. 2) as artivism according to interviewees no. 15 does not differentiate or discriminate and anyone can take part in it, incl. the government.

6.1. *ARTIVISM FOR POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT (SUB-RQ1)*

Art as a means for mobilization, communication, advocacy, or communication strategy is recognized by all the interviewees as a legitimate and largely utilized tool across urban places of Kenya whose full potential is yet to be realized. There is an overall belief among interviewees that art is a very attractive method and media for its strength in advocacy messaging disseminated at a much faster pace and getting better across (e.g. via factsheets, infographics, curriculums, animations) to masses in comparison to traditional means of lengthy reports (Interviewee no. 6, 10, 17).

Creatives and organizations are aware of artivism's transborder existence in the region e.g. Tanzania, Uganda, or Zimbabwe (Interviewee no. 5, 8) but acknowledge Kenya has comparably much more free civic space. Historically, they mention for example rap as a tool of resistance during Arab Springs across the Middle East (Lebanon, Jordan, Palestinian refugee camps, and North Africa (Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco) (Interviewee no. 3, 13) Yugoslavia, during Pinochet's rule in Chile (Interviewee no. 1, 3, 10) and thus rationalize/reason for its potential also within the country with reference to the importance of art for liberation from economic and systematic discrimination throughout Kenya's history (Interviewee no. 1, 10).

In my analysis of how specifically is artivism adapted and engraved in organizational, professional, or personal use, a variety of approaches is observed. At a closer look, two-level tracks consisting of horizontal and vertical artivism emerged differing particularly in their way of engaging with power and social change as portrayed in Diagram 1.

On one hand, what I call horizontal artivism is the case when artivism is perceived as grassroots organizing, community self-education, and self-empowering tool. In academic terms, this would correspond to Granovetter's (1985) explanation of social capital with over-socialized embeddedness, in which actions are primarily driven due to shared normative assumptions with other individuals. In this way, CBO's leaders saw the need/demand by communities to set up mechanisms that easily allow the acquisition of (technical) skills (e.g. photography, sewing, music recording, painting, dancing) in response to unemployment rates, mental health issues, community issues (e.g. waste pollution, GBV, police violence, etc.) (Interviewee no. 9, 11, 13, 14).

The founded institutions provide spaces for therapy and political conversations through creative expression (Interviewee no. 4, 11, 14), as well as represent a vision to specialize in creative, innovative, *"life and technical, 21st-century skills for creative employability"* as opposed to the skills offered by some traditional "livelihood programs" (Interviewee no. 3, 9). For instance, a project called a Jam[9] shared by interviewee no. 10 utilizes the method of *"captive audience".* Passengers in matatus are captured on public transport until they reach their destination while listening to a music set with messages in between to awaken their political consciousness. This initiative was enacted especially in areas with a high presence of post-electoral violence and helped decrease political tensions respectively in Eastlands, Nairobi. Interviewee no. 5 also supported artivists who organically every morning shares his poetry on the board of matatus.

Within horizontal artivism, emphasis is put on collaboration in addressing specific issues, inclusivity, participation, and amplification of marginalized voices (Interviewee no. 3). Interviewees no. 9, and 10 mention the term artivism as *"edutainment"* combining elements of education and entertainment. An interactive technique utilized by interviewees no. 9, 11 called magnet theatre helps provoke discussions while involving both authorities and community

[9] Stands for both "traffic and music jam."

members and thus bridging the gap between both. After the performances, critical dialogues on the topic are facilitated whilst not providing any answers but rather letting the communities figure out their understanding. Prioritization of mutual aid, direct type of democracy, and local ownership are also evident as outlined by Interviewee no. 1: *"We love to let the community come up with their own problems and their own solutions"* and supported by Interviewee no. 4, 6, 14.

On the other hand, vertical artivism focuses on engagement with formal institutions, policy, or influencing decision-making by leveraging artistic intervention to achieve change from the top down. Practically, it is a creative means to communicate and advocate the specific issues communities are facing as a result of dissatisfaction with governmental (in)action. The civic and political engagement of vertical artivism is exemplified in strategic communication, lobbying, and cooperating with both governmental and nongovernmental agencies in addressing systematic injustices (Interviewee no. 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 15). CSOs/CBOs or artivists may utilize traditional media, social media platforms, campaigns, or high-profile events where art (visual vs. spoken) is incorporated to argue for higher accountability and tangible changes in HRs standards or aim at mobilization, peacebuilding, etc. They might include cartoon posters, thought-provoking murals, critical, explicit, vulgar, "radical" spoken word/poetry. As such vertical artivism maintains a critical stance towards existing power structure and invites for structural change (e.g. of patriarchy, neo-colonialism) (Interviewee no. 8, 15). It can be argued that the under-socialized model by Granovetter (1985) is relevant since here action is largely based on the calculation of costs and benefits possibly for the relationship between policymakers and community.

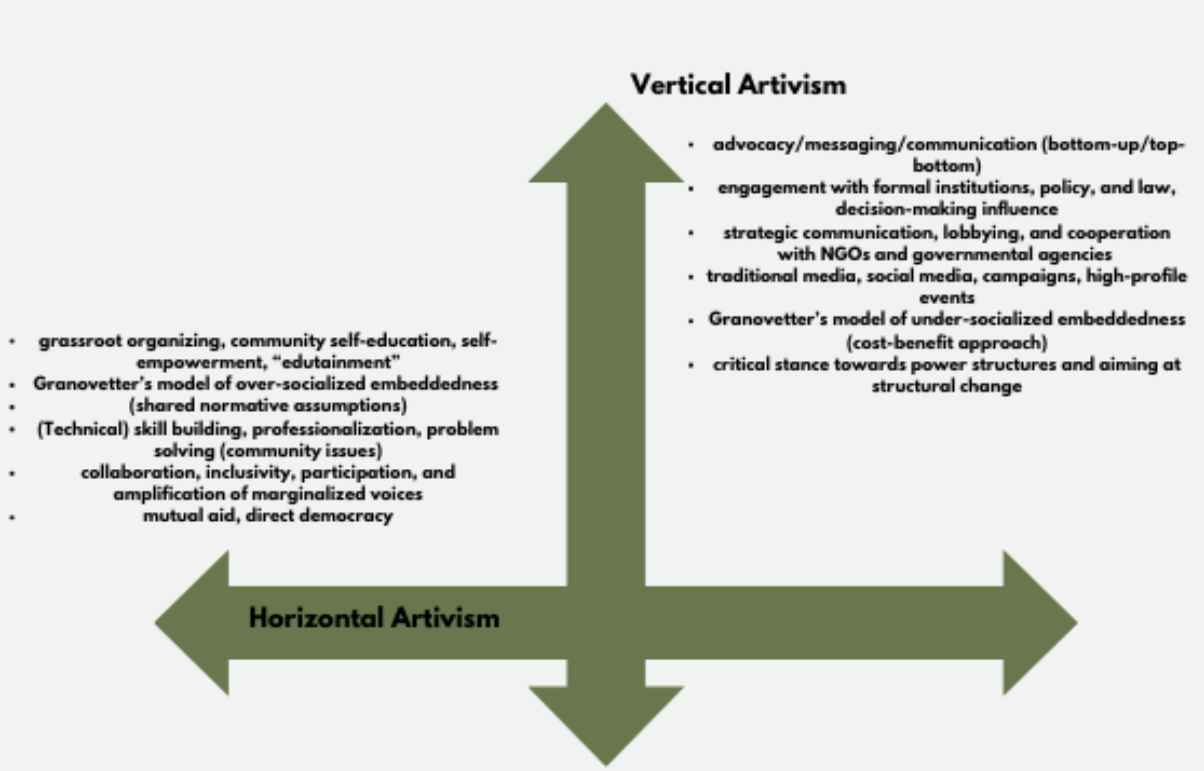


Diagram 1 Analysis of Artivism: Difference between Horizontal & Vertical Artivism (Barbora Kolečková, 2024)

Art as a tool for communication is not limited to a bottom-up approach (civil society, communities, artivists to policymakers, donors) but can be utilized by governmental officials as well for dissemination of newly passed laws, regulations, and guidelines among Kenyan society (top-bottom). Legal language often makes it inaccessible and not understandable to the people who are affected (e.g. communities) by the new legislation. This distance can however be tackled by creative means (e.g. graphics, illustrations) if appropriately put into effect (Interviewee no. 6, 15, 17). Interviewee no. 15 illustrates that they have seen an effort from the Kenyan government and even the World Bank (e.g. Guidelines on Forced Evictions) to incorporate art as a means to communicate in policy dissemination (Interviewee no. 15)

Rather than the horizontal and vertical artivism being separate and independent occurrences, they are complementary in advancing social justice and promoting positive social change via political engagement of people and policymakers if operating in an enabling environment as elaborated in **Section 6.3**. Their relationship is visualized in **Diagram 2.** It can be argued, that horizontal artivism is a preceding phase that might eventually transform into a vertical phase (e.g. through political pressure) (Interviewee no. 3) when a certain gap between policymakers and communities reaches an unbearable level. To be able to say more, a

longitudinal case study would be relevant as a follow-up as it allows for studying phenomena over time (Bryman, 2012). Essentially, both types of artivism create political engagement by thought-provoking, increasing one's awareness, edutaining, and sparking necessary discussions within society (Interviewee no. 1, 5, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17). From my analysis, the more vocal, critical, and frequent artivism is the more it might open an avenue through civic space to work towards social justice under the condition that the government does not become more resistant and does not crack down on those taking action.

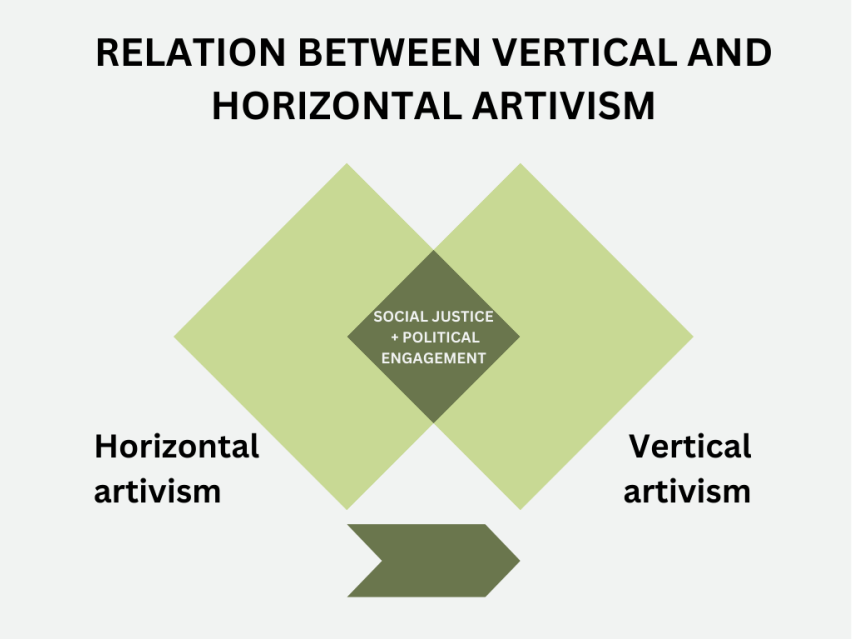


Diagram 2. Relation between vertical and horizontal artivism (Barbora Kolečková, 2024)

I would argue that a vibrant ecosystem of democratic participation is possible with the help of artivism as it breaks down complex topics for all groups of society regardless of their age, literacy, tribe, culture, or language into a simpler visual, spoken, performative arts (Interviewee no. 1, 2, 6, 8, 10, 12) and other forms of media such as podcasts (Interviewee no. 8, 17). Artwork is considered by Interviewees no. 8, 10, and 17 a universal language thanks to which the problems of access (essential for social justice) are resolved, and in exchange, an increased interaction of citizens with policymakers can be potentially observed. As such an enhanced, alternative method of civic mobilization in the form of artivism demonstrates its opportunity to bridge the gap in the contemporary world of exhausted democratic processes.

In pursuit of bridging the gap between policymakers and people, Interviewee no. 2, 4, 6, and 7 believe that change is more likely to happen, the lower the constituency of the

policymaker because *"The higher the higher the position, the higher the disconnect. But the lower, the lower the position, the higher the connection."* (Interviewee no. 2). This is for instance attributed to the fact that, senators and MPs usually do not reside in the areas they are responsible for in comparison to MCA, which automatically creates a closer relationship with one's work (Interviewee no. 2) reconfirming the suggested assumption in **Table 3** (p. 11)

The usage of the word artivism for political engagement has been highlighted by Interviewee no. 16 as potentially damaging due to negative discourses engineered by offended parties (government, politicians) to delegitimize, stigmatize, and discredit civil society actors (Cheeseman, 2022). Preferred terms include artistic activism, art for change, or creative expression (Interviewee no. 8, 16). Creative expression was highlighted as the most inclusive term since art is often associated with tangible results whereas creativity provides space for more abstract results (Interviewee no. 8). Interviewee number no. 16 believes that this ostracization and demonization of those who attempt to unite under the term artivism are often intricated by government and "shared" by traditional media (newspapers) (Interviewee no. 10).

This is further elaborated by acknowledging that artivism may not always be used for good reasons. Interviewee no. 10 warned about the disadvantage of using art as a method of communication as *"it can be used to pass the wrong message if not checked or regulated"* and manipulate the public. For example, music or illustrative art may stir community members in the wrong direction by inviting them to join criminal gangs and inciting violence (Interviewee no. 12) just as it is described as one of the faults of social capital by Papachristos (2006). As a result, the government does not hesitate to bandwagon on the few wrong examples to manipulate the public, delegitimize, and reduce the authenticity of artivism (Interviewee no. 12; Cheeseman, 2022). Many CSOs have even been accused of being "agents of the West" (often unfairly) because of the proportion of funding they receive from countries like Sweden, Germany, the United Kingdom, or the United States to sustain their activities (Cheeseman, 2022). This has served as a pathway for many authoritarian regimes to employ anti-NGO legislation to regulate activities, limit international funding, and influence of international donors extensively to restrain critical voices (Interviewee no. 6, Cheeseman, 2022).

In rare instances, the interviewees (no. 4, 5, 6, 11, 15, 17) attest to being invited to policymaking, strategic dialogues, and consultation processes because of their advocacy work. One illustration was the long-awaited, Creative Economy Bill (2024), where stakeholders

expressed their concerns about other creative domains and art forms to be included in the document (Mohamed, 2024) to ensure that the spearheading of opportunities does not leave anyone behind (Interviewee no. 17). Hence meaningful citizen participation in the decision-making enables diverse representation, minimizes marginalization, allows for community needs to be reflected (with that decreases existing gaps) (Interviewee no. 2), transfers agency and extends ownership, increases transparency and accountability and is more likely to result in a sustainable solution to social justice issues as discussed by mentioned interviewees and put forward by Irvin & Strasboury (2004), Callahan (2007) and others. Interviewee no. 17 brings up community issues through artivism to facilitate communication between duty-bearers and rightsholders. This way, if CBOs, INGOs, and artivists coordinate with governmental initiatives, for instance, Kikao, a dialogue-based youth program facilitating discussions between youth from informal settlements and the government helping to address the root causes and various challenges affecting them, they may together contribute to alleviating the social justice agenda.

6.2. *STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES (SUB-RQ2)*

This chapter highlights the structural barriers and root causes behind inequalities and disparities essential to dismantle before artivism which is dependent on the external environment, systems, and structures it operates in, may pave the path towards social justice. In dialogue with the interviewees, we identified the continuous structural challenges that halt artivism from being applied in a broader development practice which I will now contextualize and discuss further.

Interviewee no. 16 stresses the importance of understanding the systematic roots, oppression, and discrimination through legal means and social constructs. To comprehend why and how did we get there, art offers a *"social mirror"* which becomes a *"spear against the oppressors"*. (Interviewee no. 16). Interviewee no. 8 explained how their exhibition where you walk into an empty room speaks (loud) into the stolen heritage of many African countries currently displayed in European museums as a result of colonization. Projects like this help invoke conversation in society about how to imagine the change in the future.

One of the many other challenges currently present in Kenya is the evident shrinking civic space highlighted as:

"Right now, it seems to be we're going back to the times of suppressing the media, all the critical voices that are being suppressed, and we have seen and read, that people are being attacked, receiving threatening messages." (Interviewee no. 12)

"When we see bloggers, journalists, and activists being arrested, disappearing, and being killed, for me, I do not believe we have freedom of expression". (Interviewee no. 1)

It is not only a phenomenon specific to Kenya as there is vast evidence of artists prosecuted throughout history by authoritarian rulers as discussed by Clammer (2014b) providing the examples of the Nazi regime or during the brutal reign of Stalin in the Soviet Union.

The experiences of organizations and artivists share that there are evident negative attitudes towards activists as they are perceived by the government as people who do what they do to simply *"meet their ends"* rather than *"to meet ends of the public"* (Interviewee no. 17). Consequently, it is common to be subjected to threats, illegal surveillance, harassment, or assault from the government (Interviewee no. 1, 6, 12, 17), which furthermore speaks into the room for improvement laying on the shoulders of the politicians and government of Kenya as well as educating the public on the real purpose behind activism.

To avoid the potential dangers associated with activism, art was found to be a loophole (interviewee no. 2) not to put humans at the front line of the fight for social justice that is currently obstructed:

"Going back into our history where our forefathers used art as a mode of communication. For us, art is very symbolic when it comes to activism. But at the same time when it comes to community understanding and in picking conversations, but also art as a center of unpacking conversations and setting the ground for people to have conversations." (Interviewee no. 1).

Despite shining the spotlight on some of the existing injustices and violations, you can still get away with it while people understand your message (Interviewee no. 2).

Since traditional activism in the forms of protests, demonstrations, and petitions is sabotaged, dismantled, and dispersed by police forces, many artivists unite and strengthen into a more vocal, striking expression of their dissatisfaction via media such as spoken word, music (Interviewee no. 1 & 12). The attacks on open civic space and its mechanisms to hold government accountable seem to be counter-productive in the end when interviewee no. 10 in

reference to shrinking civic space confides that: *"The more you block the more organizations become active to regain back their rightful space".* Artivism is indeed perceived to be the means to open up this space thanks to its power in creativity and innovation (Interviewee no. 5, 6, 7, 10 & 12).

The level of success of artivism is also largely determined by existing funding opportunities, and governmental "pragmatism" in support of artivism (Interviewee no. 2, 8, 15). It has been highlighted that artivism is a critical vehicle that does not shade away from exposing governmental shortcomings, changing people's perspectives, and raising their awareness while for this precise reason, it does not receive adequate attention or support from the government (Interviewee no. 2, 7, 10, 12, & 15). To underline this, there is no available information on the budget on the governmental websites of the Ministry of Youth Affairs, Creative Economy, and Sports to showcase the precise amount allocated to the creative industry. The recent Kenyan Creative Economy Policy (2023) acknowledges that *"Kenya encounters a notable deficit in terms of supportive policy and legal framework for the creative economy"* (p. 19).

Interviewees no. 2 & 12 argue that the arguable non-incentivization by the government is quite deliberate and strategic not to be undermined and challenged in its credibility which is what artivism lately achieved. It goes as far as speaking out via art is perceived by the government as a threat to the regime (Interviewee no. 12). However, changes might be on the way with new legislation, The Creative Industries Bill (2024) formulating supportive measures for creatives, e.g. entitlement to *"specified aid, support and incentives from relevant agencies"* (p. 7). The implementation and unfolding of this law for artivism, including the outlined Creatives Industries Development Fund will be interesting to follow. As soon as the government recognizes the importance of art by providing sufficient subsidies, artivism may help tackle e.g. issues of unemployment by creating work opportunities for artists (Interviewee no. 2). In the meantime, it seems evident that artivism's future will have to continue to partially rely on the international (e.g. country embassies, development agencies) and non-governmental donor world's decisions to grant funding (Interviewee no. 10) which is both volatile and vulnerable to external political shocks globally (Alexius & Vähämäki, 2024).

Regardless of HRs assured under the new Constitution from 2010 which all interviewees who spoke on the matter agree to be progressive, implementation and practice

demonstrate a different reality (Interviewee no. 3, 4, 5, 8, & 15) attributed to lack of political will (Interviewee no. 15)

"I think, in the Kenyan constitution, it says that there is the government's responsibility to take care of every child and youth. And there are more than 400,000 homeless youth in Nairobi alone, that are roaming the streets" (Interviewee no. 3).

Furthermore, the issue of the FoI was discussed (Interviewee no. 6, 8, & 15) in relation to what way communities continue to face challenges in how and where to get information. *"Sometimes the lack of information makes people do certain things"* (Interviewee no. 8). Deliberate withholding of information from communities and citizens by government officials further imposes an unnecessary burden on the communities (Interview no. 15, & 17). A specific instance of such cases is outlined:

"You want to get a certain, you know, budget document, which probably would lead you to come up with a program in relation to artivism. But it's difficult to get that budget document […]. Those budget documents are packaged in a way that for citizens, they are very complex". (Interviewee no. 17)

Therefore, the consideration of art as part of a project design proves to help simplify complex legislation and data into more friendly, understandable content (Interviewee no. 17) – it bridges the gap between the duty bearers (policymakers) and right holders (citizens) by helping people to truly comprehend the law's weight and consequences on their daily lives. For illustration, interviewee no. 17 organizes radio stations and podcasts informing on current events and discussing passed legislation available for free.

Especially for individual artists and artists for change, economic and mental health struggles, and lack of resources were regarded as one of the most prominent issues artivists are faced with (Interviewee no. 1, 5, 8, 17, & FGD). Their agency is limited by available financial resources (e.g. offers for gigs/performances) as artivism is often their main source of income (Interviewee no. 10, & FGD). Yet *"wasinii"*[10]is largely stigmatized, dismissed, and condemned by society in Kenya as an occupation that does not generate sufficient profit (Interviewee no. 1, 2, 8, 14, & FGD). *"Artists are the most rich and poor people"* (FGD).

[10] Swahili word for art

Maina (2023) offers an additional explanation and polemizes whether the stigmatization of artivists is purposefully engineered to shut down the most politically critical voices. Interviewees no. 1, & 8 even know fellow artists who were forced to leave their occupations. In recognition of the obstacles artists face, some organizations decided to put their well-being at the center of programming (Interviewee no. 5, & 17). As a mitigation strategy, organizations offer master classes on financial literacy, brand management, psycho-social support (PSS), consulting, and legal services in circumstances where artivists are on the receiving end of an attack (physical, digital, prosecution) or in economically difficult situation (Interviewee no. 5, & 17) to build resilient creatives.

Another structural challenge relates to the problem of insufficient size or even non-existence of physical co-working space. Due to this little cooperation and non-unification among the active creatives and organizations using artivism is observed (Interviewee no. 3, 17). Some interviewees would go as far as to call it a *"competition for resources"* (Interviewee no. 3, & 11) among CBOs and NGOs with similar goals. This causes hardship in achieving results which furthermore prevails over a common goal these activists have - social change (Interviewee no. 17). However, there are also efforts, for example by Interviewee no. 8 who organizes yearly get-togethers for the community of creatives, academics, or just technocrats to foster collaboration, mutual support and leveraging of different experiences to further contribute to the field of artivism.

In light of artivism aiming at social justice, the question of how to measure social change in this context has arisen. Green (2016) would chip into this discussion by pointing out that social norms are at the backbone of change. However, the author argues that it is rarely the government behind the new norms but rather most of the core features of the state (social protection, education, or healthcare) were incubated by activists. The interviewee's opinions (no. 1, 3, & 10) were directed mostly at the impossible task of demonstrating concrete results in the change of behavior of targeted communities in periods of one, two, or five years corresponding to funding cycles. Changes in mindsets are something that according to them takes years, if not decades, and thus might not bring about the desired results (Interviewee no. 16) in contrast to donors' expectations.

"If you're talking about social cohesion, or changing ideas, and lines and structures, peace, inequalities, and stuff like that, your scope needs to be a hell of a lot longer. Because if you manage just a little bit in 50 years, then it's incredibly fast" (Interviewee no. 3).

"I think the donor world needs to understand that change doesn't happen overnight. When I'm undoing injustices that have been normalized for the last 60 years, you know, we are undoing mindsets that have been created for the last 60 years. How do I do that? I hope our partners can always wake up to that fact that one year, two years is never enough" (Interviewee no. 1)

The limited time frame or what Interviewee no. 3 calls *"donors' short-termism"* as well as donor priorities affect the sustainability of the projects as well as the organizations (Interviewee no. 17).

"*It has normalized lies in our space, and it has killed so many good initiatives. Because you set standards that people cannot reach. And when we lie to you, you come back to them and call them frauds* (Interviewee no. 1).

With the current donor setting, some of the CBOs are left to self-sustain themselves for some time which affects their capacities (Interviewee no. 7, 17).

Many of the conversations on the funding are linked to the current discussion around an experience called the Obsessive Disorder Measurement (ODM) coined by Natsios (2010) as a counterproductive condition where organizations become so preoccupied with measurements and formal control that they risk losing touch with other fundamental aspects that matter to their mission. This is further elaborated by Interviewee no. 1: *"People have perfected the art of writing report, writing good project proposals, [...] people become civil society premiers"*. The authors Alexius & Vähämäki (2024) also reason how the strive for legitimacy and effectiveness results in counterproductive work. As such we are witnessing a paradox – since the bureaucrats (donors) are busy with setting up the requirements and measurements on which they over rely on, as well as they are distant from the partners (CBOs) who are responsible for delivering change, it is a never-ending vicious circle due to the officers making the work of CBOs impossible (Ibid). On this note, ForumCiv (2023) recommends that it might be for the best if organizations (under the condition they can) reduce dependency on aid in the long run and build more resilient communities.

It is no secret that artists *"are the most liberal […], free-spirited people"* (Interviewee no. 1) which in the context of the donor-structured (and often rigid) requirements might pose quite a struggle (Interviewee no. 8). Some interviewees (no. 3, & 10) regard structures as something useful and necessary to set up for artivism's full functionality whereas others (Interviewee no. 1, & 14) believe that the free-spiritisms of art is what makes it a unique and impactful way of communication. On this note, Interviewee no. 8 adds that for instance reporting can be done in a multitude of manners and their organization has put an effort into receiving reports in a medium that is comfortable with the passion and language of creatives. Afterward, they translate it to whichever form and language required by the back donor.

effort into receiving reports in medium that is comfortable with the passion and language of creatives. Afterwards they translate it to whichever form and language required by back donor.

Structural challenges	**(Possible) Impacts on Artivism/Artivists**	**Suggested solution/mitigation**
Crackdown on civic space	Illegal harassment, detentions, imprisonments, disappearances of HRs advocates	Roundtable with government on artivism's role in accountability seeking, checks and balances, social justice
Inadequate governmental (financial) support	Limited financial resources for artivism Competitive funding environment among active organizations/artists Overreliance on International Donor Funding Discontinuation of artivistic practice due to economic constraints	Advocacy to relevant governmental bodies (Ministry of Culture) Artistic Academies for mentorship, financial literacy, brand management Mental health/Psycho-social support

Rigid funding criteria (Obsessive measurement disorder (OMD))	Excessive result/activity/project-oriented funding Hardship in demonstrating (social) change in (short) funding project cycles Inaccessibility of funds Sustainability of organizations at stake Limits artivism's spontaneity, free-spiritism, organic nature, and emotional/relational power Capacity-strengthening of organizations put as secondary	Increase in flexible funding (e.g. core funding, rapid response mechanisms, power funding) Program-based and institutional capacity funding Long-term donor perspective Increased trust in partners Intermediaries' advocacy role in shielding CBOs before back donors Reduction of aid dependency + community resilience
Stigmatization of Art	Limited financial resources Excessive reliance on available gigs/performances Lack of support from family members, friends	Artistic Academies for mentorship, financial literacy, brand management Mental health/Psycho-social support

Table 4: Analysis of structural challenges, their impact on artivism and the suggested solutions compiled throughout interviews and literature review (Barbor Kolečková, 2024).

6.3. *ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR ARTIVISM (SUB-RQ3)*

Enabling environment refers to fostering conditions and space where artivism thrives and assists in delivering social justice and positive change in HRs with specific propositions made in reference to funding as the biggest denominator highlighted in discussions with interviewees. *„It is important for them [the donors] to understand that spaces are defined by the support they get, and the capacity that is built of them."* (Interviewee no.1). Green (2016) expands that it is crucial to grasp that those incentives which achieved a change of norms had backing from powerful constituencies (e.g. government, donors) as a prerequisite.

However, contrasting views on the future of artivism with regard to funding are shared. On one side, interviewees share that the current thematic areas towards which donors gravitate including a focus on youth, climate change, health, and gender equality enable artivism to strive thanks to its substantial focus on youth (Interviewee no. 12). The criteria of integrated projects as well as having an "innovative aspect" also works in favor of artivism as it fulfills both (Interviewee no. 6, 10).

On the contrary, others do not share the view that the international donor had been the best ally to the cause of artivism. The unpredictable long-term shifting (ForumCiv, 2023) of donor priorities and over-prioritization of certain areas over others with little freedom for funding recipients on how to respond to community issues (Interviewee no. 15), completely disregards art as a tool to achieve the set-out goals (Interviewee no. 17). With that some organizations are pushed to move away from their originally anticipated reasons: *"whereby you want to work on ABC, but given some structural restraints, you have to work on XYZ altogether"* (Interviewee no. 17). As a result, the accessibility of funds becomes a problem for organizations in the artivism space (Interviewee no. 1, 7, 17). Underfunding or cancellations of projects due to changing donor priorities risk that HRs and crises (e.g. rising inflation, climate change, food insecurity) exacerbate the already existing distress in Kenya (ForumCiv, 2023).

Interviewees (no 1, 10) recommend that an approach of flexible funding is implemented particularly in the artivism space:

"I acknowledge the work people like Ford Foundation, a National Endowment for Democracy do because they strategize with you and we call it a journey, they will not come after one year and ask you, what is your input? But after five years, they will want to know what your progress is. So, meaning they understand, in five years, we can see, have we seen anything different from

what we started, then can we evaluate if we are moving in the right trajectory or not? For me, that is the best form of partnership" (Interviewee no. 1).

Flexible funding as described by Mattingly (2022) includes unmarked finance as well as techniques such as core funding or rapid-response grants especially essential in emergencies and for grassroots activists and human rights defenders (HRDs). In contrast to traditional project-based funding that excludes costs of salaries or other types of expenses, flexible funding focuses on the organization's mission and theories of change and allows the activists to be agile (Ibid). The mechanisms may be also accessed in instances where activists are under an immediate threat to their lives as implemented by for example as Solidarity Fund by Interviewee no. 5. However, the modality operates under the assumption that CSOs are professionalized and registered (Green, 2024). On that note, Interviewee no. 10 adds that a *"certain level of professionalization is necessary for sustainability as long as the DNA and passion of the organization are preserved.".* I see how policies and definitions of power may allow for smooth operations but would warn against over-NGOizing[11] some of the well anchored CBOs.

Beyond core funding the newly experimented power funding modality by IM Swedish Development Partner which does not require proposals or reports but simply a contract and an audit enables to redistribute power and more responsibility towards the communities.

"Feedback I've given to most of our donors, where you If you want to have grassroots organizations grow to serve, you must kill the question of compliance and capacity and build their capacity and help them achieve the compliance standards. Because if you always go to organizations that have capacity, then grassroots organizations will never grow" (Interviewee no. 1).

Interviewee no. 1, 10 believes that funding into institutional capacities would help the cause of artivism tremendously but is missing. Effectively, if we are to consider CBO's objective of achieving social justice in communities, we must also consider scaling up alternative models of funding that regard the well-being of the partners highly.

[11] Referred to professionalization, bureaucratization and institutionalization of e.g. social movements to adopt organizational forms like NGOs (Lang, 1997)

Instead of hyper-bureaucratizing the donor field (Alexius & Vähämäki, 2024), what is in my opinion effectively needed is a compromise of pragmatic bureaucratism[12] where an increased trust and equalization of power dynamics between the donor and donor-recipient with regards to future perspective is advocated for. Interviewee no. 10 is certain that having the intersection of *"a CSO person who possesses the technical skills and an artivists with an understanding of the space and art skill"* would contribute to resolving some of the contemporary hardships. After all, CBOs work closely with communities, founders, members come from the communities and most importantly are better in touch with the pertaining issues (Interviewee no. 1, 4, 7) and thus well skilled to take local ownership of both the necessary actions and changes if provided with the necessary resources and trust.

7. CONCLUSION

This text aimed to demonstrate the power of artivism within Kenyan society as a specific response to democratic fatigue syndrome, shrinking civic space, and social injustices. By reacting to the RQ exploring the overarching potential of artivism for social justice, specific instances of successes in Kenya are highlighted by interviewees in the artivism space. Therapeutical effects, dealing with past wrongdoings, and injustice, increased awareness about constitutional rights, social and economic empowerment, and sparking necessary societal dialogue were among the propelled achievements credited to art(ivism).

The endless opportunity of art and its use to locally construct political engagement between policymakers and people in selected urban areas of Kenya (SubRQ1) was highlighted in bridging the gap between both. It can be concluded that there is an emergence of vertical artivism, a major form of communication for communities within informal settlements of Kenya as well as in society. It enables education, raising awareness on HRs issues of importance for the communities. The outcome of the analysis also showcases the potential of horizontal artivism for advocacy and communication purposes (bottom-up, top-bottom) useful in amplifying marginalized voices and alleviating participation and representation in democratic processes that assist on the way to social justice. As a result of artivism's advocacy

[12] Defined as the "*use of judgment to identify a sweet spot between the extremes of bureaucracy and pragmatism, where bureaucracy is used rationally when possible, and pragmatically when needed"* (Alexius & Vähämäki, 2024, p. 7).

efforts perpetuation of policy-making and decision-making platforms opens doors for alleviated inclusion and representation of diverse voices.

While artivism continues to transform individual lives, major structural challenges halt its full application in broader development practice (SubRQ2) and will continue to do so unless addressed. Throughout this study, it becomes apparent that strengthened governmental support for the creatives active in activistic spaces aligned with artivistic and ordinary people's demands would tremendously expand social justice. The Kenyan government is accused of not providing adequate funding for the cause of artivism (since artivism continues to criticize it) as well as targeting active stakeholders in the space. Other broader challenges such as stigmatization of art, and rigid funding criteria will also continue to obstruct artivism's potential for social justice unless echoed and appropriately mitigated by respective stakeholders. As part of my analysis, I propose a list of suggested mitigations which will hopefully serve as a good starting point for consideration.

Lastly, the interviewees and I constructed a discussion on enabling environment for artivism (SubRQ3) with regards to funding on the way to achieve social justice. Proposals on flexible (core) funding and beyond (power funding) would help narrate the power imbalance among donors and donor recipients. Centering the work around communities (local ownership) and CBOs who would not be limited by excessive reporting, measurements, and criteria in exchange enables organizations to focus and deliver on their desired goal - social justice.

7.1. *FUTURE RESEARCH*

Further study on the topic of artivism for social justice would help consolidate the presented Further study on the topic of artivism for social justice would help consolidate the presented findings in response to the main research question. I was also able to gather data on the importance of public and digital space for artivism, however, due to space I could not present the results which opens the door for putting together a paper to contextualize even further. One of the other future research avenues is the mentioned longitudinal case study of the use of artivism with a specific focus on overtime developments in relation to the speculation that vertical (educational) artivism is a preceding phase to horizontal (advocacy) artivism. In addition, there can be further elaboration on the role of artivists as agents of change and the prevailing systematic (stigmatization) (and) economic (insufficient and inadequate governmental incentivization) hindrances in doing so with consideration of the new Creative

Industries Bill (2024). Lastly, the dynamic political unfolding of the global donor scene has an interesting potential for research with regard to its effects on artivism and its potential in working towards true social justice.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I – Interview Guide

Type of stakeholder	Theme	Questions
Artist Artivist	Context	Can you briefly introduce yourself, your background, history with artivism (if any)
		What do you view yourself as? (e.g. artivists, human right defender, educator)
		What is the current situation of artistic freedom in the country? How would you describe the context you operate in?
	Artivism	How would you define artivism? (Mention definition of artivism outlined in thesis)
		What are some examples of artivism in your work?
		For what purpose do you use artivism in your work?
		What messages are you trying to translate with your artivism?
		What does artivism symbolize for you?
	Reaction	Who are usually recipients of your artivism?
		At what point does the audience usually recognize the problem statement of your art?

		What is generally the reaction of the audience to your artivism?
		If you ever experienced negative reaction to your artivism, what did it look like?
		Does artivism bear potential risk/danger? If yes and you feel comfortable, could you describe?
		What reaction did artivism spark? Anything related to action/mobilization?
	Utilization	How do you view artivism as means to communicate/do messaging/education/social change?
		What (dis)advantages in using artivism as a tool, do you see?
		What does it take for activism to achieve changes in the interaction with citizens and municipalities?
		Have there been consultations with artists or civil society while drafting local/national policy/regulations? If so, please explain?
	Results/Concluding remarks	What tangible changes that your artivism achieved?
		What do you think artivism is capable of achieving?
		How does an access to public space affect artivism/expression?
		In terms of funding, how does the development/aid sector provide financial opportunities for artivism?

		Do you know of other examples of artivists/grassroot/community organizations?
		Room for last reflection: Is there anything you would like to add?
(I)NGO **CSO** **CBO** **YLO** **NPO**	Context	Can you briefly introduce yourself, your background, your organization, projects on artivism
		What do you view your organization as? (e.g. artivists, human right defender, educator)
		How would you describe the context you operate in in terms of freedom of expression/peaceful assembly/access to information?
	Artivism	What is your organizational definition of artivism? (mention definition as outlined in the thesis)
		Can you provide examples of artivism in your work?
		In your theory of change (ToC) as an organization, what reasons led you to choose artivism as a tool for change?
		What focus/messaging does artivism within your org. provide?
		What kind of difficulties do you face in your work with artivism/cooperation with partners?
		How do you mitigate such challenges?
	Reaction	Who is usually the targeted population of your interventions?

		What is generally reaction of the audience to your activities with regards to artivism?
		If you ever experienced a negative reaction to your projects related to artivism, in what ways did it reflect?
		Does artivism bear potential risk/danger? If yes and you feel comfortable, could you describe?
	Utilization	How do you view artivism as means to communicate/do messaging/education/social change?
		What are the (dis)advantages in using artivism as a tool for advocacy/communication/education/social change?
		What does it take for activism to achieve changes in the interaction with citizens and municipalities?
		Have there been consultations with artists or civil society while drafting policy/regulations? If so, please explain?
	Operationally	How does your artivistic work change when you operate in digital space?
		In terms of funding, how does the development/aid sector provide financial opportunities for artivism?
		What is your view on artivism as an agent of change in consideration of project cycles (one/two year)?
		What indicators (both qualitative and quantitative) on measuring change via artivism proved to be useful?
	Concluding	Can you name any tangible changes that your projects

	Remarks	utilizing artivism as a ToC achieved?
		How does an access to public space affect artivism/expression?
		What do you think artivism can achieve?
		Do you know of other examples of artivists/org./communities in Kenya engaging in artivism?
		Room for last reflection: Is there anything you would like to add?
Policymaker	Context	Can you briefly introduce yourself, your position, (if applicable relevance to artivism)
		How did you learn about artivism?
		What is artivism to you?
		How would you describe your country/local/municipal' legislation/context you are responsible for in terms of FoE and PA?
		What is the current situation of artistic freedom in the country?
	Artivism	What is your relationship/thoughts on artivism?
		In what ways have you encountered artivism within the scope of your job? If not in your personal life?
		Do you consider artivism important? If yes, why? If not,

		why not?
		For what reasons do you see artivism used for human rights advocacy/communication/education?
		Who do you view as an audience of artivism?
	Reaction	As you are part of the audience of artivism, what sort of reaction does it spark? What thoughts?
	Operationally	Are you aware of funding opportunities for artivists?
	Utilization	How do you view artivism as means to communicate/do messaging/education?
		What (dis)advantages in using artivism as a tool, do you see?
		What does it take for activism to achieve changes in the interaction with citizens and municipalities?
		Have there been consultations with artists or civil society while drafting local/national policy/regulations? If so, please explain?
	Concluding Remark	How does an access to public space affect artivism/expression?
		What do you think artivism is capable of achieving?
		Do you know of other examples of policymakers in Kenya interacting with artivism?

Appendix II – Overview of Interviewees (last edited 23.4.2024)

Type of stakeholder	**No. of interviews conducted**	**Interview no.**	**Positions held**	**HRs focus**
Artivists	1 focus group discussion (FGD) with approx. 25 people	FGD	Members of a community-based organization	Family planning, police violence, sexual and reproductive rights, gender-based violence
Youth-led organization (YLO)	2	1 & 15	Project Manager II	Governance, democracy, youth in politics, social accountability, constitutional rights
Policymaker	1	2	Former Member of Country Assembly (MCA) I	Economic and social justice, education, curriculums for artivists
INGOs	4	3	CEO/Founder I	Ethnic & tribal & community violence, Democracy, Governance, Refugees, Women's Rights, Peacebuilding, Access to Public
		4	Senior Manager I	
		5 & 8	Program/Project Manager III	

		6	Advisor on Civic Space I	Spaces, Climate justice, Gender Equality, Civic Rights in Digital Age, FoA, FoE, Social Accountability
CBOs	5	7 & 9 & 11 & 13 & 14	Founder IIIIII	Extrajudicial killings, police & gun violence, people with disabilities (PWDs) (hearing), GBV, family planning, constitutional rights, peacebuilding, sexual and reproductive rights, maternal health, ethnic & tribal & community violence
Independent Consultant	1	11	Former Employee of NPO I	NA
Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs)	2	12 & 17	Project Officer I M&E Officer II Advocacy Officer I	Governance, democracy, youth in politics, social accountability,

			Community Manager I	constitutional rights, PWDs
Artist for Change	1	16	Hip Hop musician/rapper I	Election Violence

Appendix III – Consent Form to Participate in Thesis

Consent to participate in a Thesis at the Faculty of Social Sciences

I agree to participate in ***Artistic Activism in Kenya: Bridging Gap Between People and Policy Makers.***

This is a student project undertaken in the context of a thesis submission for the Master's in International Development and Management (LUMID) at Lund University. Personal information may be collected with the aim to explore the phenomenon of artivism as means of communication for self-advocacy of relevant human rights issues and for social change for local communities in Kenya.

Information on the processing of personal data

The following personal data will be processed:
Name, name of organization, job position/role, years of experience, project implemented, artivistic performances conducted, person's voice, person's psychological, cultural, economic or social identity.

The following sensitive personal data might be processed:
Political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs

Personal data will be processed in the following ways:

*The researcher guarantees the **anonymity** and **confidentiality** of the **participants** She also ensures that any publication, including publication on the Internet, neither directly nor indirectly, will lead to a violation of the agreed confidentiality. Any information obtained as part of this study will not be disclosed without prior permission.*

*Measures will be taken to protect personal data against accidental or unlawful destruction or accidental loss, alteration, disclosure or unauthorized access. Data will be hosted on **secure servers** and housed **in physically secure rooms**. As part of a risk mitigation policy, data backup and disaster recovery procedures will be implemented to protect the*

data collected. The data will be stored as long as the research takes places ***January-max. August.*** *The deletion of the data will take place* ***after the completion*** *of the thesis.*

We do not share your personal data with third parties.

Lund University, Box 117, 221 00 Lund, Sweden, with organisation number 202100-3211 is the controller. You can find Lund University's privacy policy at www.lu.se/integritet

You have the right to receive information about the personal data we process about you. You also have the right to have inaccurate personal data about you corrected. If you have a complaint about our processing of your personal data, you can contact our Data Protection Officer at dataskyddsombud@lu.se. You also have the right to lodge a complaint with the supervisory authority (the Data Protection Authority, IMY) if you believe that we are processing your personal data incorrectly.

I therefore agree to voluntarily participate in *Artistic Activism in Kenya: Bridging Gap Between People and Policy Makers*

Location	Signature
Date	Name clarification

I, Barbora Kolečková, the researcher, hereby declare to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of the interviewee to the full extent as agreed and aforementioned

Barbora Kolečková
LUMID MSc. Student/Researcher