

Research Strategy of the Department of Music, Art, and Culture Studies

Autumn 2023

1. Research Environment

The Department of Music, Art, and Culture Studies (MACS) brings together nine disciplines – literature, writing, museology, music education, music therapy, musicology, contemporary culture studies, art history, and art education – into a multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary entity. MACS is an integral part of the faculty and university, aligning its research strategy with their guidelines and research development plans.

The department's researchers and research projects collaborate with the university's key profile and focus areas (e.g., MultiLeTe, MultiLEAP, DigiLearn, CIBR, PACTS2, KeHO, EduFutura, WISDOM, SOSUS, JYU.Well). The department actively participates in the university's new strategic initiatives. Currently, we are actively engaged, for instance, in the School of Wellbeing coordinated by HYTK, contributing to cultural well-being research, and in the Social sustainability for children and families (SOSUS) profiling area with our music science research. The department houses the Contemporary Culture Research Center, founded in 1983, which is a pioneer in interdisciplinary humanistic research and social and political analysis in Finland.

External research funding is a crucial part of the department's research activities. The level of external funding was approximately 30% of the department's budget in 2020–2022. The department's research activities are strongly networked nationally and internationally. The research is internationally recognized as of very high quality, and the research personnel of the department play significant roles in international networks within their respective fields.

From a physical environment perspective, the studio and laboratory spaces in the Musica building (e.g., recording studio, motion capture laboratory, music therapy clinic, game research infrastructure) form a unique entity that plays a central role in supporting the world-class music science and game research unit. The laboratories are developed as part of the university's overall research infrastructure. The upcoming renovation of the Musica building poses a risk, and measures need to be taken to ensure the continuity of research and well-equipped temporary facilities. The game research unit has infrastructure related to esports research, which will be placed in a forthcoming research laboratory. The department also possesses a collection of materials for church art research, forming a unique entity for the study of Finnish church art and architecture.

External partners outside the university are part of the research environment as well. Building the well-being hub with the involvement of various local actors, as well as the development of the Music Campus, offers important research topics and opportunities for collaboration, especially concerning the impact of art and culture on well-being. Collaborations with businesses are conducted in relation to research on gaming cultures and distance education in music (e.g., Jyväskylä Digi & Game Center). In recent years, the department's researchers have collaborated with various ministries and organizations, both nationally and internationally.

2. Research Content and Nature

The research undertaken within the department is inherently multidisciplinary in nature. Psychological, sociological, societal, historical, art-theoretical, experimental, and technological approaches contribute to a multidisciplinary critical understanding of music, art, and culture as part of individuals' experiences and societal phenomena. Research themes encompass aspects such as the transformative power of art and culture, as well as the embodiment, emotional resonance, mediality, and multimodality of music, art, and cultural products. Methodological development and the utilization of technology are integral components of the research profile. Overall, the department stands as an international leader in basic and applied research at the intersection of music, the arts, and human phenomena.

The department's research has identified five areas of strength (see Figure 1): Mind, Body, and Emotions; Games and Digitalization; Heritage, Environments, and Time; Belonging, Crises, and Societal Change; Well-being and Art Therapies. In recent years, these areas of research strength have received significant external research funding. The department hosts two Academy of Finland-funded flagship research units: the Centre of Excellence in Music, Mind, Body, and Brain (2022–2029) and the Centre of Excellence in Game Culture Studies (2018–2025). MACS's research strengths have benefited from the Academy of Finland's profiling funding awarded to the University of Jyväskylä, which has also funded a number of research projects within the department, including "Affective Practices in the Digital Era: Producing, Experiencing, and Managing Hate Speech" (2021–2025); "EU Cultural Diplomacy and Dynamics of Dialogue Between Cultural Heritage" (2020–2023); "Own Music" (2018–2021); "Internal Mechanisms of Integrative, Improvisation-Based Music Therapy in the Treatment of Depression" (2016–2020); "The Rhythm of Life: Modelling Musical Tempo Across the Lifespan" (2023–2027). The department's research has also received substantial funding from the European Union, including three ERC projects: "Ontological Reconstruction of Gaming Disorder" (2022–2027); "Music as Youth Empowerment: Creating Connection to Self and Others" (2022–2027); "Legitimation of European Cultural Heritage and the Dynamics of Identity Politics in the EU" (2015–2020), as well as projects funded through the Horizon program: "Reviving, Boosting, Optimising and Transforming European Film Competitiveness" (2023–2026); "Establishing a Laboratory of Cultural Heritage in Central Romania" (2023–2025); "Dialogue and Argumentation for Cultural Literacy Learning in Schools" (2018–2021). Project funding has also been received from domestic administrative funders, such as the Government of Finland (Government research and analysis activities), Business Finland ("Creating Novel Technologies of Scalable and Empowering Learning," 2020–2022), and the Occupational Safety and Health Fund ("Problem Gambling in the Workplace," 2021–2023). The department's research strengths are supported by significant project funding from domestic foundations, including the Kone Foundation ("Aesthetic Practices in the Shaping of Self and World," 2022–2025; "Worlds Attached to Game Music," 2020–2022; "Art, Ecology, and Diverse Human-Nature Relationships—Towards a Common Future," 2020–2022).



Figure 1. Research Strengths of the Department of Music, Art, and Culture Studies (MACS).

In the ongoing development of the research profile, attention is given both to emerging initiatives within the department's disciplines and the priorities of the university, faculty, and funding organizations. Multidisciplinary research in music, the arts, and culture connects the department's disciplines and specializations, and by leveraging this multidisciplinary nature, the department supports cross-disciplinary, creative, and innovative research. Different arts and cultures are at the core of research, but due to the interdisciplinary nature of the research, department researchers collaborate closely not only within the University of Jyväskylä but also with social scientists, psychologists, educationalists, historians, ethnologists, cultural policy researchers, linguists, sports scientists, and information technology researchers, among others.

3. Objectives for Research Development

The clarity of MACS' research profile is maintained by emphasizing areas of strength, excellence in research, and significant externally funded projects. The research profile also takes into account the goal of establishing a strong and mutual interaction with the strategic priorities and profiling of the university and faculty. The development of the profile also values new initiatives and dialogues between the scientific disciplines within the department. The department's Research Board updates the research strategy in collaboration with the staff every few years. Individual researchers' work is emphasized to link with the overall research profile through goal discussions, work plans, and recruitments. The visibility of the research profile and communication related to research activities are reinforced through the utilization of university communication services and ensuring that research projects are presented on the department's website, with researchers actively updating their Converis data and researcher profiles.

MACS' considerable success in securing external research funding will be ensured in the future as well. Maintaining the current level of funding requires identifying new funding channels and dynamic measures, such as seeking new research partnerships. Researchers are encouraged to participate in training, apply for funding for project preparation, manage their time in work plans, and collaborate in team efforts to support this effort. Success in securing project funding is seen as dependent on the ability to strike a balance between initiatives emerging from researchers and strategic profiling, as well as agility in responding to the demands of society and funders. The department's management team annually monitors the realization of external research funding as part of the department's budget.

In terms of publishing, researchers are encouraged to publish at the JuFo 2 and JuFo 3 levels. Publishing aims for open access, internationalization of publications, co-authorship, and publication in prestigious journals within the field. Publishing in domestic languages is also considered important. Staff members are encouraged to seek research period funding and leverage the periodic nature of teaching.

Maintaining the internationality of research is actively pursued. Collaboration with esteemed international research units and partners is continued and encouraged through researcher visits and travel funding. The international attractiveness of the unit is strengthened, especially by developing internationally significant research centers in areas of strength to provide attractive working conditions for both recruited and visiting researchers. Visiting researchers are recruited through programs such as Marie Curie and Fulbright. Practices learned from successful online meetings and webinars during the COVID-19 pandemic are leveraged in international collaboration and student involvement.

The systematic development of research-related infrastructure and laboratories is continued, especially to meet the needs of top-tier research in music science and game culture, in collaboration with the broader development of infrastructure at the University of Jyväskylä. Establishing a permanent laboratory assistant position is a key goal in the development of laboratories.

The involvement of doctoral students and post-doc researchers in the activities of the department's research groups and teaching is encouraged. The goal is to maintain department-level practices for doctoral education and mentoring and to support researcher interaction through activities such as the department's research day. In all activities, efforts are made to find solutions that support equal opportunities for salaried employees and researchers on grants to participate in the department's activities.

The department aims to disseminate research results to society. Department researchers are engaged in various national and international expert and trust roles. Participation in expert working groups, statements, media appearances, and interviews are seen as an important part of researchers' roles. The department strives for flexible interaction and collaboration with research centers, institutes, and foundations affiliated with the department.

The department's Research Committee monitors research activities at the grassroots level across different scientific disciplines and brings its observations to the discussions at committee meetings. The views of the department's researchers on research activities are heard in various staff/researcher meetings and development days, with their input being utilized in the continuous development of research activities.