

CULTURAL

POLICY

PATHWAYS

CP P

CULTURAL

NEEDS

BETWEEN

REALITIES

AND

INTERPRETATIONS

Cultural Policy Pathways: cultural needs between realities and interpretations

Edited by Giuliana Ciano
in collaboration with Cristina Carlini and Eleonora De Caroli, *Liv•in•g*

Foreword: Meaning of shared, transformative cultural policy – the role of cultural operators

Milena Dragićević Šešić, *University of Arts in Belgrade*

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Foreword

Meaning of shared, transformative cultural policy – the role of cultural operators

Milena Dragičević Šešić
University of Arts in Belgrade

Innovative ideas and concepts often come from the civil society inspired research or practices. In this case, the book is a result of a wide research done during the pandemic, exploring different trajectories of organisations and individuals who sought to address and mitigate its impact through their actions. The pandemic was a sort of experimental situation, without a possibility to have a control ‘group’ in parallel. Not to make research in such a situation would have been a missed opportunity, as this extreme situation of cultural isolation, on one side, and solidarity among cultural professionals, on the other, might never happen again on the global scale. Research component of international cultural projects, as for example endorsed by aims and schemes of Creative Europe’s calls, are stimulating cultural professionals to introduce research in their daily practices. That enables them not only to develop research skills in order to gather new knowledge and insights about socio-political context, cultural practices, and state-of-the-art of cultural policies, but even more to develop their analytical and critical thinking, and other capacities that would allow them to implement bottom-up cultural policies, policies ‘produced’ in a dialogue of different actors across the borders of Europe and beyond. During these processes of research, policy conceptualisation, and advocacy, dialogues between different stakeholders were established, aiming that final outcome might result in shared policies (Dragičević Šešić, 2006)⁰¹ – policies that would engage the needs and interest of all sectors and all parts of societies.

01 Dragičević Šešić, M. (2006). *Shared policies: future of cultural development*. In B. Cvjetičanin (ed.) *Dynamics of communication: new ways and new actors* (pp.103–111). Culturelink.

The book is inviting readers - whether cultural professionals or just concerned citizens - for a walk through both institutional and non-institutional cultural landscapes, with all their challenges, dilemmas and contradictions. The readings will be impacted, as much as were the authors’ writings, by the ‘positionalities’ of each reader, that are shaping and influencing their understanding of the cultural realm, its new policy dynamics, different agencies of cultural change. As this handbook offers innovative discussions critically exploring some aspects of different national and European cultural policies during the last five years, but also, including through networks debates numerous voices of Global South, it enables its readers to bring their own reflections in a creative dialogue. Thus, it becomes a specific opera aperta (Eco, 1962)⁰², opening prospects for future contributions to cultural policy reflections and practices. In this way, critical reflections on geopolitics of cultural policy practices and its strategies that are re-examining tensions and contradictions between the Global North and Global South might be further differently discussed, considering readers’ values, experiences, and intentions.

This complex exploration and analysis was designed during the pandemic, in epoch of raising populism, ecological crisis, digitisation of public realm, thus, inevitably, conversations focused on much wider scope of problems that cultural sector was facing in the new millennium. More and more mobile, cultural operators are asked and expected to work across borders, on

02 Eco, U. (1962). *Opera Aperta*. Bompiani.

projects that are more and more costly, spectacular, economically justified (transformed under the huge impact of market and consumerism), fulfilling a whole spectrum of demands of other public policies, often not even mentioning arts, unless as an instrument of social (temporary) change. Thus, research reveals different cultural needs in times of fear and humiliation (Moïsi, 2010)⁰³, social injustice, global warming crisis, competitiveness demands even in cultural sphere together with expectations for cultural democracy and cultural decentralisation, numerous contradictory policies that overwhelm sociocultural realm. Even in the rich Global North, cultural operators face challenges like project-driven work that limits time for artistic research, short-term projects that overshadow community development, and resource scarcity that shifts focus from art to fundraising. Intersectoral collaborations, while promising, often lack sufficient time and resources, becoming missed opportunities for deeper cultural change.

That is the reason why cultural operators have to integrate a research component in their work, enabling them to come up with arguments for better redefinition of cultural policy. By building capacity as researchers and bottom-up policymakers, they can engage in dialogue with policymakers to co-create shared policies. This approach allows them to address the purpose of artistic work in a global digital world, advocate for fair labor conditions for cultural workers, and challenge the project-driven model that limits the cultural sector, promoting policies of care and solidarity that transcend sectors and borders. All of that can be seen when discussing controversies of mobility today. Before the pandemic, mobility - sometimes even called ‘mobility of imagination’ (Dragan Klaic, 2006)⁰⁴ - was a new

03 Moïsi, D. (2010). *The geopolitics of emotion: How cultures of fear, humiliation, and hope are reshaping the world*. Anchor.

04 Klaic, D. (2006). *Mobility of Imagination. A companion guide to international cultural cooperation*. Central European University Press.

mantra of cultural professionals and policy-makers. Project approach and ‘new’ methods of cultural work through collaborative practices that demanded joint elaboration and conceptualization of ideas seemed liberating. No one remarking that they were caught in logic of growth and capitalist logic of quantitative development (development of practices, audiences, activities, not to speak about the increase of carbon footprint).

Thus, cultural policy tasks included creation of new mobility formats. It looked like that cultural operators finally got what they lobbied for through decades and that a practice of mobility will help cultural operators to escape institutional (repetitive) logic of routine, sending them to more inspiration diversified tasks. However, today, they see that there is the same ‘mobility injustice’ that is shaping all other relations in a global cultural sphere (huge discrepancy in funding mobility in-between Global North and Global South that is increasing already existing gap, difficulties in obtaining visas and the right to travel, lack of travel infrastructure in the Global South, etc.). Besides that, cultural operators are trapped in a vicious circle of elaborating so-called innovative approaches and practices at all price, not having time to reflect and research, and even less to develop and change plans during project implementation, to improvise and experiment, as funding structures demand careful long-term planning of complex teams and even of project outcomes and results. At the same time, climate changes have imposed elaborations of a green-agenda within cultural work and cultural organisations, taking the concept of sustainability beyond economic, political and environmental demands, going as far as mental health and well-being concerns (especially when lockdown during pandemic had shown how fragile were all the social structures and services, from the public health, education, social care – to arts and culture). It shows that cultural sector has taken on itself numerous roles and tasks of other sectors, further instrumentalizing arts and culture,

based on high sense of duty and responsibility in order to contribute to further creation of public value and realising activities of public interest, even without proper institutional, financial or technological resources.

Shared, transformative cultural policies, initiated through bottom-up innovative cultural practices, should help constructing the new ‘lenses’ for observing and experiencing arts and culture. This Gramscian standpoint shapes intentions, values and capacities of book authors to offer challenging ideas and reflections. Most of them women, they offer different sensitivities in cultural policy research – showing how “interpretation of reality is often mediated by emotions, feelings, and affections...”. It might seem irrelevant, given the well-known feminization of the cultural sector, including the field of cultural policy research. Yet, many indicators reveal that men still dominate number of prizes, honoris causa doctorates, expert invitations and journal articles. As shown in a representative issue of International Journal of Cultural Policy in 2010, 41 cultural policy scholars were invited to offer their testimony about their ‘teachers’ – out of 30 men 27 pointed men as a teacher, and 9 out of 11 women identified men as a source of academic inspiration; only one woman selected a woman, and another one selected a book written by female and male authors.

There are no solutions in cultural policies seen as ‘one-size-fits-all’ as voices from Global South are testifying in this book. It is important to underline, when we speak about ‘decolonising cultural policies’, while at the same time certain vocabulary and way of operating is globally imposed. Creative industries development, as the main focus of cultural policies today throughout the globe, is a proof of new way of re-colonising cultural policies. It took ten years to South Asian countries to get approval to consider the craft its part, as they could not imagine to omit the most vital part of their creative

economy from the key public cultural policies that put creative industries in the centre. Fair international relations start with conceptualisation of issues and readiness for joint programme and projects designs. However, even with digital technologies (that do not guarantee quality on the Global South), but also with timing of online meetings to fit Europe/US time zones, is not stimulative for Southeast Asians to join. Ignoring that is showing lacks of policies of solidarity, empathy and care in a public cultural realm. That’s why these initiatives of independent cultural sector are so important and needed. Silence that unfortunately dominates cultural sector of the Global North around the most depressing contemporary issues related to wars in the Middle East with the complete destruction of Gaza, its people, its infrastructure, its cultural memory, is a bit less complete when it comes to war in Ukraine (as there is funding to bring Ukrainian artists and cultural operators to the Global North’s cultural events), but happenings in Mali, Niger, South Sudan, etc., whether military, political or cultural, are ignored unless some group of activists do not feel responsible to act and to bring, for example video works of Gaza artists, to their event happening somewhere in Europe, but it is impossible to bring an artist as well.

To conclude with one more voice of Global South provided by the book: “We need to act and not react!”. It is exactly context-specific action that is needed to be freely developed and not omitted from funding if it doesn’t fit funding criteria designed long in advance. This book is calling upon new research prior to every programme and project developed, and integration of research dimension into every action that wants to contribute to sustainable, productive but also solidary and fair international cultural relations. Collaborative cultural actions should also contribute to the diminishment of gaps that still exist and are even deeper between Global North and Global South. Subaltern

knowledge in cultural practices (Dragičević Šešić & Cordonnier, 2024)⁰⁵ might be one of the answers to how to change cultural policy. Integrating existing knowledge, vernacular approaches and methods, giving voices to marginal groups and communities is an important task of cultural operators of today. When we all become cultural policy-makers, both on local and global level, arts and cultural sector will release its capacity to help transform societies for the better.

05 Dragičević Šešić, M. & Cordonnier, S. (Eds.) (2024). *Subaltern knowledge in cultural practices: Fostering fairness, cooperation and care*. University of Arts in Belgrade; Clio.

Introduction

Between reality(ies) and democratic imaginations

Giuliana Ciano
Liv•in•g

Cultural Policy Pathways emerges as a collection of critical analyses and recommendations designed to navigate the so-called “new normal”—a term that has nearly vanished from our contemporary discourse but profoundly shaped our perception of change in recent years. Looking back at the period between 2020 and 2023 (extending into the early months of 2024), we revisited these transformative years through the lens of our observatory i.e., that of a social enterprise actively engaged in the cultural cooperation field. From this standing point, we have selected studies, events, and emerging trends, enriched by the insights of experienced authors in the cultural sector, to share reflections that we believe hold significance in shaping cultural policy.

Our journey began during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2021), a moment that demanded deep, urgent reflections on the future of the cultural sector. With the invaluable support of Fondazione Cariplo, we undertook a study to explore how cultural policies in specific geographical contexts were responding to a crisis that was as sudden as it was global. Our aim was to identify practices and approaches capable of inspiring Fondazione Cariplo and other funding bodies in such a complex transition where ready-made solutions seemed elusive. While conducting our analysis, primarily online at the beginning, it became evident that the post-pandemic period was more of an extended transition than a swift recovery. Beyond addressing the health crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare deep-seated inequalities and imbalances, as denounced by several international observers, European reports, scholars, artists, and thinkers.

Unsurprisingly, critical discussions within the fields of cultural cooperation and advocacy gained traction around unresolved issues such as the tension between the Global South and North, and climate change—addressed not merely as an environmental emergency but as a multidimensional crisis demanding integrated cultural, social, political, and economic strategies. These debates also encompassed cultural mobility, reinterpreted through the lens of social justice; the pressing need to ensure fair working conditions for cultural professionals; and the challenge of moving beyond temporary, project-based funding models, often characterized by short-term and inconsistent financial support.

These reflections, alongside concrete actions, studies, and pilot programs underscored the urgency of shifting the focus back to fundamental rights and fostering a renewed consideration of human relationships and care in cultural policy and cultural production (and far beyond). Across various European and international arenas, the need for a ‘human-centred approach’ gained prominence. This perspective placed mental health at the heart of public discourse, not only in response to the devastating effects of the pandemic but also as a critique of a production system increasingly deemed unsustainable.

Between reality(ies), perception and interpretation

To introduce the concept of this handbook, I suggest starting with a letter

dated February 19, 1927⁰⁶, written by Antonio Gramsci, where he shares an anecdote that, although apparently tangential to the central topic, could provide us with some first insights. Here, Gramsci recounts that while in prison, he encountered what he would describe as an ‘ultra-individualist anarchist’, who introduced him to a fellow political prisoner. The man, eyeing Gramsci, exclaimed: “It can’t be, because Antonio Gramsci must be a ‘giant’ (...)”. Gramsci recounted how the man, disillusioned, retreated to his corner, grappling with shattered illusions. Later, during the routine roll call, a brigadier skeptically questioned Gramsci’s identity, unconvinced that this ordinary-looking prisoner could be the famous parliamentarian. The brigadier, echoing the sentiments of the earlier prisoner, expressed disappointment upon realising that indeed, this unassuming inmate was the renowned deputy. Once again, the brigadier conveyed his disbelief upon learning that the prisoner he always imagined as a “cyclopean” man was, in fact, the famous Antonio Gramsci.

In this letter, Gramsci offers essential insights that we can apply into our understanding of the function of cultural policy today. Firstly, the Gramsci episode provides a compelling example of the tension between reality and its perception where the latter is often shaped by our cultural lenses, as evidenced by the way the prisoner and the brigadier envisioned Gramsci as a ‘giant’ or a ‘cyclopean figure.’ Gramsci’s physical appearance, that of a small and frail man, did not match with the fascist regime’s idealised concept of a hero characterised by the prevalent notion of masculinity (a well-trained and assertive man) during that time. These notions, fuelled by political and cultural ideologies expressed through norms, regulations, and aesthetic standards, profoundly shaped reality at that time and even

06 Gramsci, A., (2014). *1929-1932. Quaderni dal Carcere* edited by Valentino Gerratana. Edizione Critica dell'Istituto Gramsci. Torino: Einaudi Editore.

influenced outward appearances (or physiognomies), aligning them with patterns of power.

Secondly, delving deeper into this interplay between realities and perception, we can argue that our interpretation of reality is often mediated by emotions, feelings, and affections. These, in turn, are influenced by our ‘positionalities’, which encompass social backgrounds, access to the public realm, and the intensity of inequalities faced due to factors such as gender, skin colour, or economic status and the possibilities to access the public domain. Consequently, we can comprehend the disillusionment experienced by the prisoner or the brigadier, who were projecting onto Gramsci their hopes and desires for redemption.

Thirdly, in expanding on the Gramsci episode, culture emerges as the realm where the interplay between realities, perception, and then interpretation is actively exercised. As numerous observers have highlighted, culture serves as the bedrock of our societies (Gielen, 2015)⁰⁷, shaping our collective imaginaries, broadening the concept of ‘us’, or even radicalising notions of ‘them’. It provides legitimacy to both the ‘us’ and the ‘them’ to coexist in an ‘agonistic’ democratic environment (Mouffe, 2018)⁰⁸, where the exercise of democratic dissent plays a crucial role in shaping collective narratives. In essence, culture wields the power to either foster pluralistic aesthetics, celebrating a diverse ecosystem of experiences and voices, or monocultural ones, which reinforce a prevailing, dominant hegemonic aesthetic. It is within this tension between realities, perceptions, and interpretations that the role of cultural policies takes shape. If Gramsci’s insights teach us how narratives can influence perception and vice versa, cultural policies become

07 Gielen, P. ed. (2015). *No Culture No Europe. Antennae Series: Arts in Society*. Amsterdam: Valiz.

08 Mouffe, C., (2018). *Per un populismo di sinistra*. Tempi nuovi, Laterza.

pivotal tools for engaging with this dynamic. They interpret the world and contribute to crafting the narratives through which we represent that very world. These policies form the domain of institutions, governments, and strategies implemented to support and regulate art, culture, and heritage. Here, the focus is on funding, accessibility, and addressing critical challenges such as social cohesion and the digital, environmental, and democratic transitions. Through laws, programs, and regulations, cultural policies contribute to shaping the present and future narratives of our societies—whether pluralistic or monocultural. By fostering the production of signs and symbols, such as artifacts, statues, music, and performances, the cultural policy realm can collaborate to the creation systematic spaces of critique that can empower civil society to challenge prevailing hegemonies.

Neoliberalism and democratic imagination

As we explore the central theme of this handbook, we must acknowledge the pivotal role of neoliberalism in shaping contemporary interpretations of culture and, consequently, in influencing the related policies and how they shape our understanding of realities. As David Harvey (2016)⁰⁹ suggests, neoliberalism is not merely an economic doctrine; it has evolved into a fully-fledged mindset, a political ideology rooted in the efficacy of the free market, the reduction of state intervention, and the exaltation of individual freedoms. Since the 1970s, this neoliberal mindset has gradually permeated the public sphere, influencing policies and norms at local, national, or transnational levels and across various fields (e.g., economy, culture, etc.). This is visible for example in the shift from Fordism (characterised by the assembly line and top-down control) to post-Fordism, marked by a decentralised system

09 Harvey, D. (2016). “*Neoliberalism Is a Political Project*”. Interview by Bjarke Skaerlund Rosarger. Jacobin. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/07/david-harvey-neoliberalism-capitalism-labor-crisis-resistance/> (Latest access June 2022).

focused on targets, missions, objectives, and results (Fisher, 2009)¹⁰. This shift has not only altered organisational mechanisms but has also impacted emotional aspects, demanding workers to display a form of affection and emotional commitment that has become a benchmark for assessing their professional effectiveness and quality.

It’s here that the concept of happiness (Bauman, 2016)¹¹ comes into play undergoing another crucial shift: the transition from the declaration of universal human rights to the pursuit of individual happiness. Bauman highlights that this shift underlies social fragmentation in advanced capitalist societies. Pursuing individual happiness necessitates confronting fear, which is exacerbated by right-wing populism, which identifies public enemies as sources of societal unhappiness, thereby polarising the political, cultural, and economic landscapes. Consequently, the organisational and emotional implications of neoliberalism, as briefly highlighted above, have contributed to the gradual fragmentation of the welfare state, the segmentation of the workforce, and what has been termed a post-political condition, characterised by the financialization of politics (Haiven, 2017)¹², where technical experts are entrusted with political matters, thereby intensifying the profound rupture between civil and political society.

From this perspective, neoliberalism has infiltrated the personal sphere, shaping needs, mobilising desires, and influencing individual preferences (Mouffe, 2018). As a result, neoliberalism has become a dominant paradigm for

10 Fisher, M. (2009). *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester, UK: Zero Books.

11 Bauman, Z. (2016). Interview by Peter Haffner, “*Zygmunt Bauman: LOVE. FEAR. And the NETWORK.*” In 032c. URL: <https://032c.com/magazine/zygmunt-bauman-love-fear-and-the-network> (Latest access August 2022).

12 Haiven, M. (2017). “*The Uses of Financial Literacy: Financialization, the Radical Imagination, and the Unpayable Debts of Settler-Colonialism*”. *Cultural Politics* 13 (3) 348–369. <http://doi.org/10.1215/17432197-4211350>.

democratic development advocating for the pursuit of individual happiness, however limiting our capacity to envision cultural, social, or political alternatives. Over the years, we have witnessed a crisis of imagination stemming from being trapped in the in-between space occupied by the multiplication of realities, their emotional perceptions, and hence their interpretations, which led to a gradual loss of the general framework in which we operate. It is within this context that the pandemic has emerged. We have become acutely aware that our world comprises a myriad of realities that often struggle to communicate with each other due to cultural, economic, social, or political barriers. Despite the global spread of cultural participation, participatory democracy, and commons-based experiments from 2012 to 2020, neo-nationalisms and (right-wing) populism, coupled with the rise of illiberal neoliberalism, have significantly intensified the crisis of representative democracies we were already witnessing in pre-COVID times.

Cultural policy: a window into its time

The European Democracy Action Plan (EDAP 2020) highlighted that today’s most pressing challenges are democratic in nature, encompassing issues such as political polarisation and crises involving refugees, migrants, and persecution in war conflicts. Building on this, the 2023 ‘Culture and Democracy: The Evidence’ report by the European Commission argued that these democratic challenges may find a path if understood as cultural challenges. Both reports agree that the global urgencies we are facing require a cultural understanding, in addition to the political and economic dimensions. This is vital for grasping the implications in complex social interactions, the success and failure of community-building, and the complexity of the signs and symbols we produce.

Cultural policy, being a window into its own time, needs to intervene by

tackling social temperatures and finding new ways to support and nurture the cultural sector while navigating the complex role it plays in significant and profound transformations and political ruptures. To some extent, whether directly or indirectly, as cultural professionals, artists, and policymakers, we need to be aware that policies must grapple with contextual events, emotions intertwined with cultural and political experiences and consider the political function they exercise in regulating and shaping our common living.

To get to the central point of this handbook, our aim is to leverage the role of culture and provide an enriched critical lens for interpretation rather than merely on the perception of reality/ies. Accordingly, we reflect upon the function of cultural policymaking as a shared cultural policy endeavour (Dragičević Šešić, 2006)¹³, viewing it as an expression of pluralistic efforts and a lively political realm. After all, cultural policy serves as a lens for entering realities, challenging their perceptions, and interpreting these realities by reformulating power relations, questioning privileges, and foregrounding norms and priorities to address political asymmetries and identify coordinates for potential spaces of democratic imaginations.

Map of contents

With reference to its structure, this handbook is organised into three distinct parts: in Part One - *Mappig Realities*, we present a visual summary of an empirical map developed from interviews, focus groups, and reports conducted during the pandemic. This summary distils emerging approaches, new policy strategies, and innovative programs within cultural foundations, alongside initiatives like the Creative Europe programme.

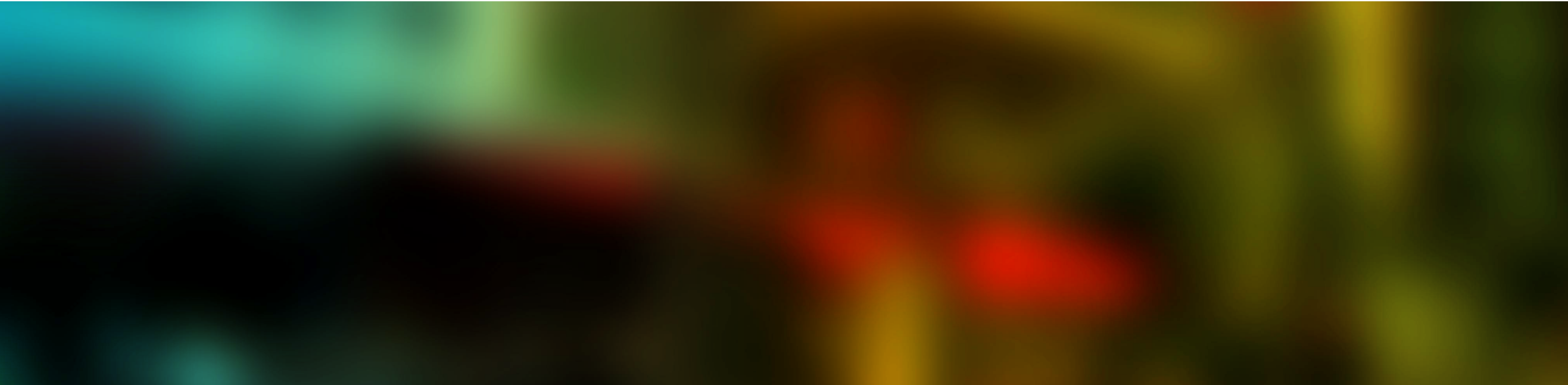
13 Dragičević Šešić, M. (2006). *Shared policies: future of cultural development*. In B. Cvjetičanin (ed.) *Dynamics of communication: new ways and new actors* (pp.103–111). Culturelink.

Part Two - *Framing Realities*, delves into the perspectives of critical thinkers whom we invited to share their insights on the transition to a post-pandemic world, considering the contexts in which they were active. Contributions include insights from many authors: Dea Vidović (former Kultura Nova Foundation, Croatia) emphasises the role of cultural institutions in fostering pluralistic societies and fair conditions in the cultural sector; Marie Le Sourd (On The Move, Belgium/France) critically explores cross-border mobility in light of the tension Global North and South, emphasising a multifaceted approach influenced by political, social, environmental, and ethical issues; Fanny Bouquerel (Roberto Cimetta Fund, France) analyses the concept of bottom-up policies and advocates for long-term perspectives; Lorna Duguid (Creative Scotland, Scotland) points out Creative Scotland’s commitment

to diversifying support, reducing environmental impact and responding to local contexts, Mey El Borni (Al Badil - L’Alternative Culturelle, Tunisia) share her experiences in democratising and decentralising culture in Tunisia; Sara Paoella (Scomodo, Italy) emphasises the importance of intergenerational dialogue in addressing current challenges and creating a resilient future for the cultural sector.

Following the practical insights gathered, Part Three - *Interpreting Realities*, intends to share some of the trajectories that emerged during our journey. To achieve this, we enriched our understanding of the context by conducting two focus groups considering two different landscapes in the context of cultural cooperation.

This section concludes with a series of guidelines and recommendations that we hope may provide useful insights for envisioning cultural policies capable of contributing to the creation of pluralistic narratives. Such narratives are urgently needed today, in a global context dramatically marked by deep political asymmetries, inequality, genocides, and abuses within emerging geopolitical arrangements. In this landscape, official narratives in some cases are failing to reflect the perceptions and emotional experiences of civil society, risking an irreparable political and social rupture.



PART ONE

MAPPING REALITIES

CULTURAL POLICY PATHWAYS

CULTURAL NEEDS BETWEEN REALITIES AND INTERPRETATIONS

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PART ONE

MAPPING REALITIES

A collection
of events

Cristina Carlini, Eleonora De Caroli
Liv•in•g

In this section, we offer a visual pathway of the period 2020–2023, with an extended outlook into 2024. The timeline aims to provide an overview of a tumultuous period marked by a growing divide between reality, perception, and the narratives emerging within the cultural and creative sectors. Throughout this time, professionals in the field have continuously navigated these three dimensions, shaping our understanding of needs, future challenges, and global issues that are now undeniably urgent. The pandemic crisis, in particular, amplified pre-existing dynamics, which not only evolved into new forms but also but also became common features of the sector as a whole.

Based on this, we identified a trajectory connecting key events, terms, and reports that fueled international discussions on cultural policy, presenting an overview of a complex process whose full implications are still unfolding. To offer a clearer and more immediate representation, we have selected pivotal moments that have shaped the cultural ecosystem, along with the sector’s responses—ranging from tangible cultural cooperation initiatives to actions by public and private institutions, and pilot programs explored further in the second part of this volume.

The following infographic is grounded in four key premises, highlighted with renewed clarity and urgency in the so-called "new normal": (a) the increasing challenges in cooperation, aggravated by pandemic restrictions limiting physical interaction; (b) a crisis of trust between citizens and institutions, deepened by uncertainties and disparities in access to resources and opportunities; (c) tensions between the Global North and South, laid bare

by economic, technological, and infrastructural inequalities; and (d) the precarious working conditions of cultural professionals, highlighting the pressing need for greater recognition and support for the sector.

In addition, we felt it essential to intertwine these premises with transversal themes that have defined and accompanied the transformations of the analyzed period: (a) digital transition, offering innovation while also exposing disparities; (b) the growing emphasis on environmental sustainability, now firmly at the center of institutional agendas and cultural projects; (c) solidarity and mutual support, expressed through networks of cultural cooperation and advocacy activities at the European and international levels; and (d) the hybridization of artistic practices, which have explored new formats blending digital tools, local actions, and innovative forms of community engagement.

This timeline is not a definitive or closed record, but rather a tool that brings together various developments within our context. The impact of these developments reverberated throughout the sector, prompting a collective commitment to crafting timely and relevant narratives. The synthesis invites an examination of ongoing changes from diverse perspectives, including those of cultural professional, policymakers, and artists. By reflecting on the motivations behind the questions that continue to inspire those navigating the space between the local and global, this section — viewed in its entirety —invites further inquiry and reflection, which have shaped our research and informed the contributions of our partners and colleagues.

Historical Facts

Italy enters lockdown

World stops. Most
activities are held online,
mobility is blocked

The George Floyd case, along with the #BLM
protests and the ongoing #MeToo movement,
emerges prominently in discussions across
media outlets, social media, and political
platforms

EU launch the Next
Generation EU Plan

Green New Deal becomes central in the
relaunch programme
commission.europa.eu

February 2020

Spring 2020

Summer / Autumn 2020

increased
difficulties in
cooperation
processes

radicalization
of the crisis of
trust between
citizens and
institutions

tension between
Global North
and Global
South

fragile working
conditions of
cultural workers

The online dimension gradually evolved
into a public realm: on one hand, it
facilitated geographical accessibility; on
the other, it highlighted significant
disparities in access to technological
infrastructures between rural areas and
urban contexts; south and north global
areas

Environmental
sustainability, IDEA, and
the need to reframe
international cooperation
have increasingly gained
public attention

IETM holds online the
Rewiring the network
process
ietm.org

Projects such as 'SHIFT' and
'Europe Beyond Access' continue
their work even in pandemic
times raising attention on topics
such as sexual harassment, green
transition and accessibility
shift-culture.eu

Policy and political negotiations play a
significant role in shaping recovery plans.
Meanwhile, funders are experimenting
with new funding programs to adapt to
the uncertainties of the pandemic

Launch of Perform Europe
programme: green and
inclusion as turning points
to change the system of
international touring
performeurope.eu

Networks and professionals start encountering online
through new/emerging tools

Public and private
institutions start planning
emergency funds

The difficulty of setting
parameters for the
distribution of funds
reflects the reality of a
sector with a wide variety
of contracts

Aerowaves is the first
platform/network to move
online a full meeting
aerowaves.org/festival

Streaming of events and
performances is becoming
increasingly common. At
the same time, there is a
growing trend of artistic
experimentation in the
digital realm, including
digital residencies, online
performances, and similar
initiatives

First Call about Mental Health
[culture.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-05/
eac-s18-2020-call-guidelines-revised-30042021.
pdf](https://culture.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-05/eac-s18-2020-call-guidelines-revised-30042021.pdf)

Culture of Solidarity Fund
culturalfoundation.eu

Cultural System Events



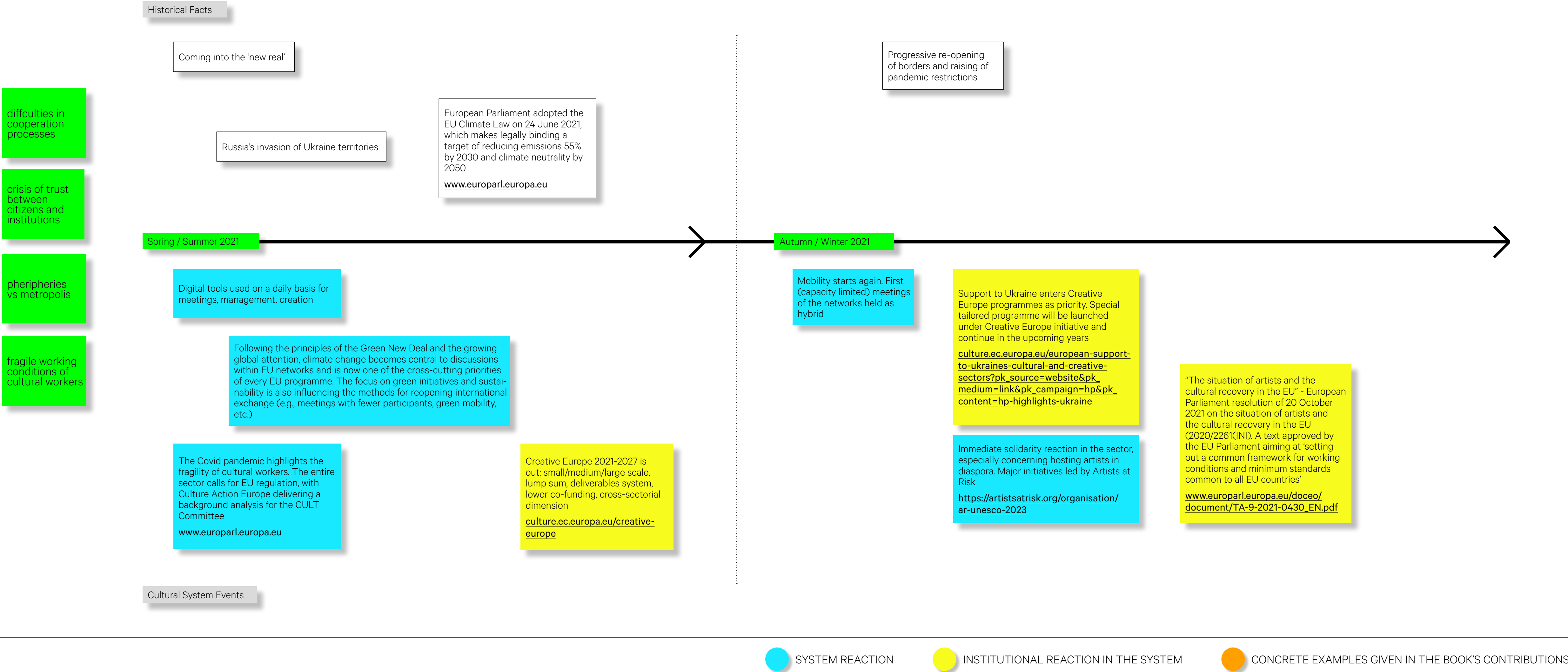
SYSTEM REACTION



INSTITUTIONAL REACTION IN THE SYSTEM



CONCRETE EXAMPLES GIVEN IN THE BOOK'S CONTRIBUTIONS



Historical Facts

difficulties in
cooperation
processes

crisis of trust
between
citizens and
institutions

peripheries
vs metropolis

fragile working
conditions of
cultural workers

Spring 2022

First call for support to the Ukrainian Cultural and Creative Sectors (CREA-CULT-2022-COOP-UA)

Basic Income for the Arts
www.gov.ie/en/publication/29337-basic-income-for-the-arts-pilot-scheme-guidelines-for-applicants

"Manifesto for cultural and artistic mobility in the Mediterranean and worldwide"
promoted by the Roberto Cimetta Fund

Cultural System Events

Summer 2022

Events changing: less participants, more one-to-one occasions, hybrid formats, green and inclusion topics, connection with local community

Meetings and events fully back live

Energetical crisis due to war

Following EU priorities and funding, projects on climate change and climate action are spreading across Europe. The networks start addressing the topic of climate justice, following the work on SHIFT eco-label and the need to reframe the international activities. Climate justice is positioned as a major focus for the network events currently being prepared for 2024. Publications on the topic in collaboration with experts (e.g. IETM and Creative Carbon Scotland)
www.ietm.org/en/resources/articles/how-can-arts-and-culture-work-on-climate-justice

Autumn / Winter 2022

Well being, mental health and care move at the center of attention as post pandemic new trends

Discussions on the green transition within the context of networks and projects spark reflections on criteria, parameters, climate justice, and local specificities. The experimentation conducted within the framework of EU projects, online discussions during webinars hosted by networks, and the experience of SHIFT highlight the urgency of avoiding top-down regulations, which appear increasingly likely from the EU and national governments

Parenting and mobility first debate within OnTheMove
on-the-move.org/sites/default/files/library/2023-09/OTM_cultural-mobility-flows-parenting.pdf

Next Generation EU is being implemented in every country in line with EU priorities, linking local cultural funding closely to the themes of the digital shift and green transition

European forum Where to Land (Le Maillon, Strasbourg, Oct. '22)
cultureactioneurope.org/knowledge/where-to-land-embedding-european-performing-arts-in-the-new-climate-regime-report/

Halaqat: Lessons for the Future: Physical Mobility & Relationship between Europe and the Arab World
www.bozar.be/en/watch-read-listen/halaqat-lessons-future

Launch of SHIFT eco label for cultural networks launch
shift-culture.eu/achieve-environmental-sustainability-in-your-work/shift-eco-guidelines-for-networks/

CAE study with Commission: The CultureForHealth Report
www.cultureforhealth.eu/app/uploads/2023/02/Final_C4H_FullReport_small.pdf



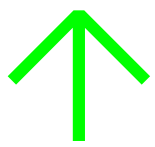
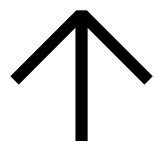
SYSTEM REACTION

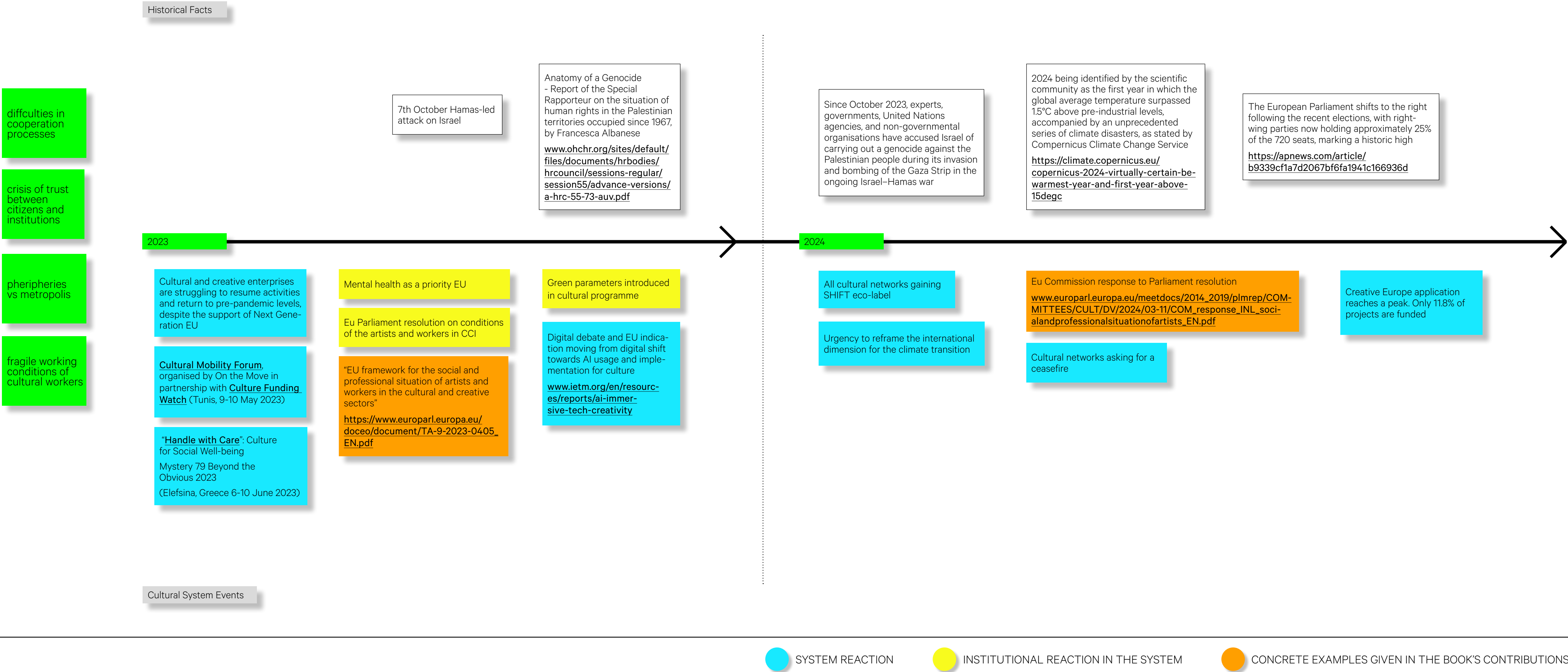


INSTITUTIONAL REACTION IN THE SYSTEM



CONCRETE EXAMPLES GIVEN IN THE BOOK'S CONTRIBUTIONS





PART TWO

FRAMING REALITIES

CULTURAL POLICY PATHWAYS

CULTURAL NEEDS BETWEEN REALITIES AND INTERPRETATIONS

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PART TWO FRAMING REALITIES

In the past few decades, neoliberalism has risen globally as an economic doctrine characterised by various defining features, including financial deregulation and a committed dedication to free markets. Advocating for privatisation and competition, highly valuing individualism, and encompassing multiple other principles and aspects, this ideology, accompanied by reduced state involvement in social welfare, has resulted in pervasive inequality. Moreover, the relentless pursuit of economic growth has led to the extensive exploitation of the Earth, culminating in the climate crisis, the defining challenge of the 21st century. Neoliberalism is responsible for numerous conflicts worldwide, global instability, the plight of refugees, and the migration crisis witnessed in recent decades.

Neoliberalism's impact extends beyond the economy, permeating society and reshaping the cultural landscape. Within the cultural realm, the manifestations of neoliberal ideology have become evident through diverse manifestations. They include a preoccupation with outcome-oriented endeavours driven by economic gains, the staging of lavish events with adverse environmental consequences, the increased prominence of costly art objects, the adoption of project-based financing models, financial instability, and numerous other effects. These dynamics contribute to the fragmentation of cultural workers, the prevalence of precarious working conditions, inequalities in accessing cultural opportunities and resources, and cultural participation, among other issues.

Although neoliberalism has faced criticism for many years, the COVID-19 pandemic was pivotal, intensifying disparities among nations and exacerbating social injustices. The pandemic exposed the fragility of the existing economic model, prompting an unprecedented search for alternatives, radical solutions, and utopian visions. Efforts

to establish a new economic system are fuelled by the vision of a fairer approach that ensures equal opportunities for individuals irrespective of their gender, age, disability, nationality, colour, race, religion, sexual orientation, social status, language, political opinion, income, territory, or any other grounds. Pursuing fair treatment, mutual respect, and meaningful inclusion is essential across economic, social, environmental, and cultural domains. In the cultural and creative sector, achieving this vision necessitates substantial transformations in cultural policy, encompassing all aspects, with economic and social transitions of paramount and priority importance.

Transformative Cultural Policy

Dea Vidović
former Kultura Nova Foundation

By embracing a transformative cultural policy, we can challenge the existing paradigms, redefine power structures, and strive for a more equitable cultural landscape. This short contribution examines the imperatives and potential pathways for change, envisioning a cultural policy that fosters inclusivity, sustainability, and justice. Through comprehensive economic and social transitions within cultural policy, we can journey towards a fairer cultural ecosystem that empowers all individuals to participate in arts and culture, flourishing cultural diversity, artistic expression, and cultural life. This concise article, firstly, delves into the analysis of the system, exploring the background of the problems and a range of measures and mechanisms designed to tackle the identified issues. Secondly, the article furnishes real-world instances of successfully implementing these measures. These examples are drawn from

the context of **Kultura Nova Foundation**—a public institution committed to empowering civil society initiatives within Croatia's contemporary arts and culture sphere—where I have been the director since 2012. Moreover, the article incorporates relevant cases beyond this context to provide a comprehensive perspective on potential approaches.

Economic Transition

Economic arguments have long emphasised the positive contributions of the arts to the economy, including job creation, economic growth, and income generation for local communities. However, there is a tendency to reduce cultural activities, such as concerts, performances, and exhibitions, to mere commodities measured solely by their market prices. Since the 1980s, instrumentalist arguments have gained prominence, highlighting the material benefits of arts and cultural investments in various sectors, from the economy to society and tourism.

While public support for culture exists in many countries worldwide, the amount and nature of such support vary significantly between states, regions, and cities. Public funding plays a crucial role in alleviating the financial burden on citizens, enabling access to cultural content and goods. Politicians justifying and granting public subsidies for the arts often emphasise the income generated through artistic projects. Furthermore, citizens willingly and sometimes eagerly pay for arts experiences and personal ownership of art and cultural products, with prices for renowned works reaching substantial amounts, ranging from hundreds to millions of euros.

However, despite this economic recognition, the arts and cultural sector remains one of the most precarious: numerous European studies and policy documents have underscored the prevalence of insecurity and non-standard work within it. Over the past two decades, there has been a growing sense of precarity in the cultural sector, particularly for self-employed artists and cultural professionals, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. Uncertainty has become an inherent and potentially stressful aspect of their lives, often serving as their sole survival option. Despite typically earning low incomes, artists and cultural professionals choose their creative paths over more financially rewarding careers, prioritising artistic values over economic rationality. Therefore, advocating for fair compensation within the cultural sector is essential for recognizing the work and contributions of artists and cultural professionals. Efforts for change in the arts sector are rising, offering principles, tools, methodologies, guides, and practices for reshaping the status quo. Examples include initiatives like the “Basic Income for the Arts” (BIA)¹⁴, an Irish three-year pilot program launched in 2022 that provides a weekly payment of €325 to artists and creative professionals to reinforce their endeavours and processes. Funding organisations and bodies, including

¹⁴ for more comprehensive details, visit <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/29337-basic-income-for-the-arts-pilot-scheme-guidelines-for-applicants/#> (August 23, 2023).

The urgent need for transformative cultural policy frameworks, regardless of whether it is implemented only in the economic and social domain or cover a broader range of areas, necessitates proactive and forward-thinking actions at national and international levels. However, to facilitate the success of these transformations guided by the idea of justice and fair approaches, several essential principles should guide the formulation of such policies.

Creative New Zealand and Arts Councils in England, Ireland, Wales, Sweden, Norway, Creative Scotland, Ministry of Arts, Culture, Civil Service, and Sport of the Republic of Austria, etc., are actively working on frameworks for fair compensation. In 2023, the Kultura Nova Foundation also significantly changed the previous structure of various grant schemes by adopting a unified grant for organizational development, covering all operational costs of grantees, including salaries and fees for artists and cultural professionals.

Understanding cultural work as labour that warrants fair compensation necessitates transformative cultural policy. Such policies should ensure suitable and decent working conditions for all artists, self-employed individuals, and cultural workers in the cultural sector. This requires the implementation of policy mechanisms such as universal basic income, a commitment to fair remuneration, flexible and fair funding and grant schemes, and various public actions that prioritise care as a guiding principle. By transcending the narrow focus on global economic growth that has permeated the arts and culture, we can effectively tackle the challenges of financial domination and impact in this field. These transformative measures aim to foster a more sustainable, inclusive, and supportive environment for cultural practitioners, challenging the general precariousness and promoting the intrinsic value of arts and culture in society. Nevertheless, while implementing these measures, it is crucial to avoid

succumbing to the pitfalls of neoliberalism. This means that while guaranteeing adequate working and living conditions for all artists, we must avoid perpetuating a system that merely extends control over determining who belongs to the art community and who gains entry to essential resources.

Social Transition

The social dimensions of arts and culture are intricately intertwined with the global circulation of cultural expressions. At its core, the social value of culture emphasises the significance of providing artists and cultural workers with equitable access to cultural infrastructure and resources, enabling their creative development. Simultaneously, it recognizes the necessity of affording citizens equal opportunities to engage with diverse and enriching cultural content, fostering inclusivity and social cohesion. Addressing the shortcomings in these domains presents complex and challenging issues for future cultural policy, particularly concerning accessibility, inequality, and exclusivity, impacting artists, cultural professionals, and the broader public alike.

The contemporary world grapples with persistent problems of unequal access to the art market, limited opportunities for exchange and collaboration, and unequal participation of diverse cultural actors -artists and cultural professionals- in international projects, exhibitions, biennials, festivals, residencies, museums, galleries, theatres, concert halls, clubs, other cultural institutions, initiatives, activities, and events. On the other hand, while the principles of democracy and human rights are often invoked in cultural policy rhetoric, the practical implementation falls short of representing a diverse spectrum of voices. Consequently, there is a growing recognition of the elitist nature of cultural practices and the exclusion of many citizens due to various physical, psychological, economic, and social barriers.

In such a context, social justice becomes indispensable in establishing a more progressive cultural policy model, necessitating comprehensive and transformative changes that ensure equal access for all in the cultural and creative sector. This entails addressing various aspects of the culture and creative sector, such as providing accessible information about grant schemes, facilitating international exchange and cooperation programs, managing multiple artists and cultural professionals regardless of their background (race, ethnicity, nationality, colour, religion, gender, sex or any other), and organising inclusive events. One approach to democratising access and representation is to implement a quota system that guarantees a minimum percentage or number of opportunities for minority

groups, artists, and cultural professionals from rural areas, underrepresented countries, or marginalised artistic disciplines and cultural fields. The Kultura Nova Foundation has addressed these issues by creating specific grant programs tailored to different organisational contexts. One program targets newly established organisations, while another exclusively targets those that haven’t received previous grants for organisational development. To enhance inclusivity, the Foundation has long applied the criterion of positive geographic diversity, assigning points based on location and favouring less developed areas for a more equitable distribution of resources. Kultura Nova also tested a unique selection process that ensured a geographically balanced distribution of funds, providing grants to each city that applied. Another strategy could involve adopting principles that foster diversity in terms of race, age, socio-economic status, and professional experience, encompassing both emerging and experienced cultural actors. Creating targeted calls and programs to support and engage specific groups of artists, cultural professionals, and institutions based on their backgrounds can foster inclusivity and representation.

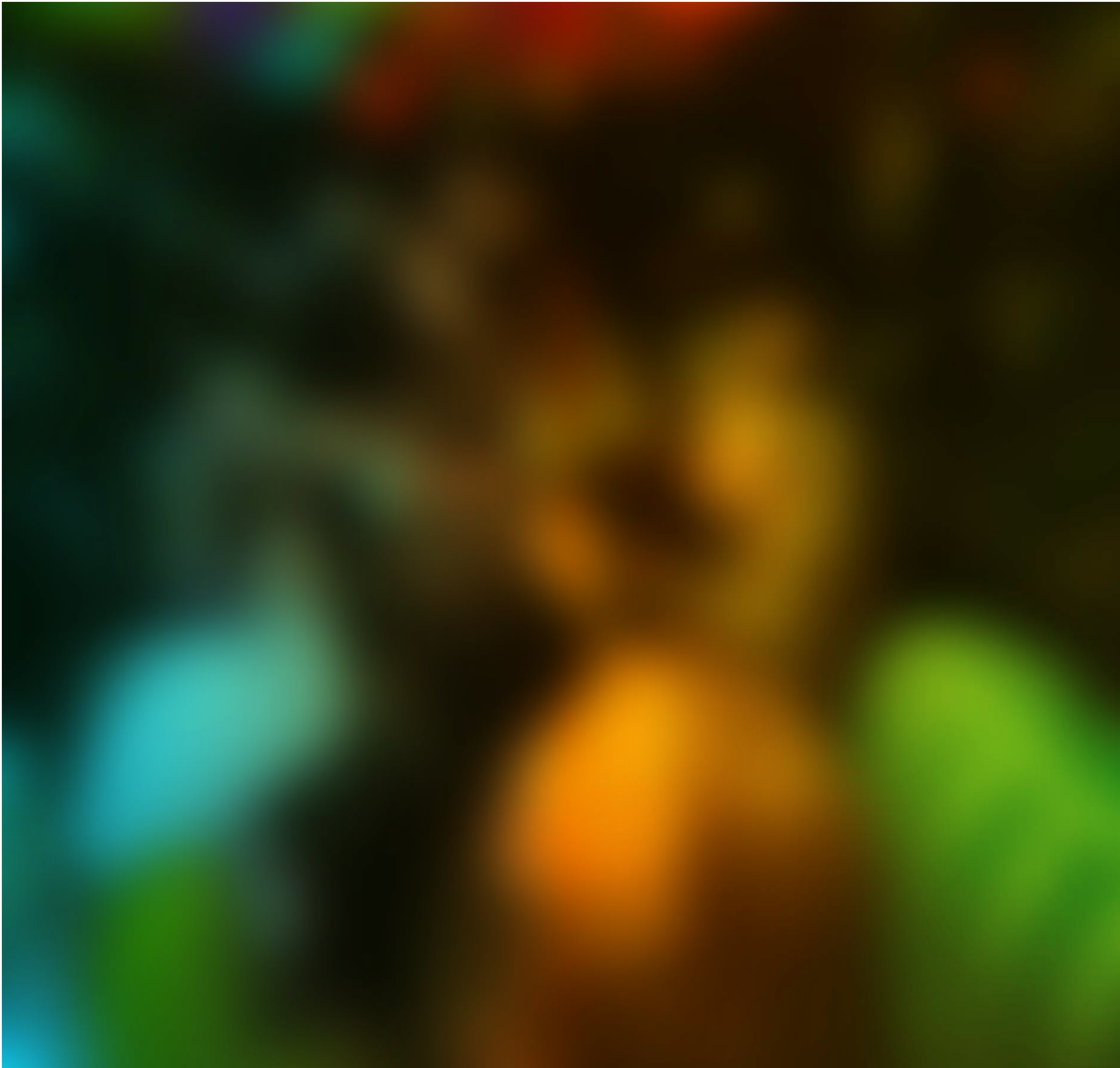
Simultaneously, there is an urgent need to transform cultural institutions into citizen-centred organisations that actively encourage and facilitate individuals’ participation, engagement, and contribution to arts and culture. Cultural institutions can also democratise culture by enabling citizens to participate in the decision-making process in which they foster a sense of ownership and shared responsibility. This shift entails reimagining the role of cultural institutions as inclusive spaces that empower and involve the community, ensuring that their voices are heard and their experiences are valued. Embracing such an inclusive approach, cultural institutions can not only enhance accessibility but also ultimately enrich the cultural landscape and contribute to intercultural dialogue and social cohesion. By prioritising social justice in its principles with these multifaceted measures, the cultural policy can pave the way for a more equitable and accessible cultural framework where all individuals can freely participate, contribute, and benefit from arts and culture.

Conclusion

The urgent need for transformative cultural policy frameworks, regardless of whether it is implemented only in the economic and social domain or cover a broader range of areas, necessitates proactive and forward-thinking actions at national and international levels. However, to facilitate the success of these transformations guided by the idea of justice and fair approaches, several essential principles should guide the formulation of such policies. Primarily, recognizing that arts and culture have historically been spaces of power and hierarchies, often

synonymous with Western civilization, the reformulation process must embrace decolonization and restitution without perpetuating domination. To avoid the pitfalls of working in isolation, it is crucial to actively engage and collaborate with partners from all sectors and fields. This requires reaching out, building trust, and fostering inclusive partnerships that enable collective actions. Cultural policy should move away from short-term, one-off, and project-based investments to strive for long-term commitments and establish a flexible and equitable support system. Transformation can occur by democratising culture, opening up the decision-making process, and sharing power and control with all stakeholders.

Articulation of cultural policy frameworks that reflect and address the need for systemic change includes addressing issues of representation, diversity, and inclusivity and fostering a genuine dialogue and understanding between different cultural perspectives, contexts, and needs. This approach will enable arts and culture to become spaces of fair and equal exchange and cooperation, moving beyond the dominating tendencies of globalisation and traditional hierarchies centred on the Western cultural circle. By embracing these guiding principles and committing to their implementation, cultural policy can be pivotal in shaping a more just, inclusive, and globally connected cultural landscape.



When asked to write about cultural mobility, the request is often framed using the lens of the ‘challenges and obstacles’ faced by artists and culture professionals. This way of thinking, even if an appropriate one, has been reinforced by the pandemic and by the urgency of acting on climate change across sectors – a necessity which has at last been widely politically recognised after years of being highlighted by many artists, culture professionals, organisations, and networks.

Given this deeper connection between environmental sustainability and artistic mobility, there is a need however to propose another lens or perspective to address cultural mobility in a more constructive, and more importantly a less exclusionary, way. This perspective shift should understand that mobility is much more than an aggregation of administrative and funding issues, or of different impacts on the artists and culture professionals who benefit from it. It should recognise as well that mobility is about more than the act of travel itself or the means of transportation used – something that is often forgotten within recent discussions on how to ‘green’ our practices. In short, it should understand mobility as something multifaceted and fluid, always crossed by the political, social, environmental and ethical issues and contexts that affect artists and culture professionals as well as funders and policymakers.

This shift in perspective seems even more important given the growing fear that climate change will be used as an ‘excuse’ to continue to exclude artists who are already shut out because of their context, geographical region, or political situation. This fear was voiced in one of the recommendations of ‘Halaqat: Lessons for the Future’, the final publication of a two-year project exploring contemporary issues through the relation between Europe and the Arab world, where the group stressed the importance of physical mobility: “While participants recognise the

devastating effects of air travels on the environment, they are concerned that their carbon footprint will be used as an excuse to put more hindrances on their already challenged international mobility”. This point was also emphasised by the more European, but still diverse, group of participants gathered for a discussion on mobility at the ‘Where to land’ Forum at Le Maillon in Strasbourg in October 2022. Asked to consider a sustainable future for mobility, they underlined the need to act despite and beyond existing frameworks that reproduce inequality, and, in doing so, to embrace mobility justice: “Are we not using the same flawed methods as in the past (for instance, not representing

our sector’s diversity in terms of countries, ethnicity, (dis)ability, etc.) when the overall goal of the event is to reinvent our common future(s)?”.

In order to contribute some thoughts on these issues, we can unfold some initial key learnings from the recent and very stimulating Cultural Mobility Forum, organised in Tunis by On the Move in partnership with Culture Funding Watch on 9-10 May 2023 on the topic of artistic mobility and environmental sustainability. As stated in its introduction, the Forum, was an “attempt to (re)contextualise the conversation on cross-border artistic mobility and environmental sustainability, unfolding the interdependencies between privileged (Western) Europe and other territories, investigating local practical sustainable solutions (e.g. on time, resources, well-being, local networks management) and listening to a variety of voices from the Global South”. For

On the Move, it was very important to situate this Forum in a ‘Global South’ context, with a majority of speakers coming from the African continent or the SAWANA region, as a way to reinterrogate these issues but also with the hope of laying down pathways towards possible solutions. The Forum itself was also accompanied by our annual Yearbook, which focused on the same topic of environmental sustainability, and included a data analysis by John Ellingsworth alongside articles from two of our Forum speakers, Selim ben Safia, a dance artist and festival director

“No one-size-fits-all solution”

Marie Le Sourd
On the Move

Edited by John Ellingsworth
On the Move

from Tunisia, and Ukhona Ntsali Mlandu, a curator and artistic director from South Africa.

Two months after the Forum, curated by Yohann Floch, director of operations at On the Move and Leila Ben-Gacem, a social entrepreneur from Tunisia, and following the publication of the connected Yearbook, here is a brief selection of the key learnings. While they may confirm some assumptions, they also bring a new nuance and richness to our vision of what a fairer, more diverse, and more responsible cultural mobility could be.

Recognizing inequalities and related interdependencies

The very subject of climate change is the one that perhaps triggers the most tension, frustration and misunderstanding with regards to cultural mobility in an international context. In the Cultural Mobility Yearbook, Ukhona Ntsali Mlandu underlines the risk that the conversation around the climate emergency could reinforce “the inequities of a neoliberal, capitalistic, patriarchal world order that is built on domination, extractive practices and injustice”. Leila Ben-Gacem, rapporteur for the Forum, also summarised this situation very sharply: “These are the historical injustices that seem to be the most sustainable today. They manifest themselves in different ways, every day, and today we are still curing the symptoms and not really the disease”. The list of injustices seems even to be increasing, as emotionally attested to by Cyrine Gannoun, director of El Hamra in Tunis and host of the second day of the Forum: “We begin to be invisible in international festivals (...) and the digital is dangerous for us”.

The ongoing disease Leila points to is related to power and the uneven distribution of resources. As Ukhona Ntsali Mlandu says: “Power can be both constructive and subjugating (...) considering the relationship with power, when people speak to the power of the arts and the role that it has played, which of these powers are they referring to? Are they referring to a subjugating and dominant type of power or are they beginning to lean into the possibilities of a power that is more constructive, collaborative? And if so, how do we back that up with the resources that enable the people to whom we are handing over this power to use it in ways that are constructive?”.

Going beyond a ‘trend’ and a new box to tick

On the topic of how resources are distributed, and considering that Western European funding is still prevalent in Africa, many speakers and members of the audience highlighted the risk of having a new ‘box’ to tick with regards to climate change, imposed on their sector without any consideration of its context or the multiple layers of

(...) considering the relationship with power, when people speak to the power of the arts and the role that it has played, which of these powers are they referring to? Are they referring to a subjugating and dominant type of power or are they beginning to lean into the possibilities of a power that is more constructive, collaborative? And if so, how do we back that up with the resources that enable the people to whom we are handing over this power to use it in ways that are constructive?

priorities already in place. As Mike van Graan, playwright and coordinator of the **STAND Foundation** in South Africa, argues: “To concentrate on climate change as the primary element of sustainability is for me an extension of a privilege (...) It does allude that all factors [political, economic, security-related, etc] are in place, that they are taken for granted, so that we can now concentrate on climate change”.

This idea of sustainability as a ‘trend without resources’ can be seen in the calls listed and documented by On the Move on its website, as analysed in its Yearbook: “It is a topic [environmental sustainability] that has been growing rapidly. In 2020, there were 25 calls that focused on environment and sustainability (3.9 % of listed calls). In 2021, there were 47 (7.3 % of calls), and in 2022 this number rose to 65 (10.7 % of calls). However, this activity was not distributed evenly. (...) Regionally, calls themed around the environment and sustainability came mainly from Europe. In 2022, 93.2 % of environment and sustainability themed calls with organisers tied to specific countries had at least one organiser based in Europe”. In this context, and without deeper systemic change, most of the responsibility in terms of time, money and energy still falls on individual artists and culture professionals, without accounting for the multifaceted ways they already deal with sustainability in their work.

Naming process and documenting stories

On this point, Ghita Khaldi, project manager and founder of **Afrikayna and Africa Art Lines** in Morocco, brought up the topic of definitions: “We have the tradition to do all this organically without putting the name of green on it, the way we gather around music, dance (...) the way we build our traditional wood instruments. (...) But in the context of mobility, the priority is put somewhere else”. When the conversation moved to greening practices, including recycling and reuse of materials, some speakers also felt uncomfortable or even annoyed sharing practices that feel ‘new’ in wealthier contexts but which are the norm in places where resources are scarce and community-based. As Ukhona Ntsali Mlandu put it: “I can’t stand here and tell you how most artists from Africa use materials. (...) It is not a performance that I am willing to do on behalf of and towards anything”.

However, beyond the question of the naming of work processes, there is a crucial need to share narratives and stories about positive change in Africa related to climate issues. When researching the subject for the Yearbook and the Forum, it was striking how documentation was scarce or not visible, which may suggest that this question is handled too often from the perspective of artists from Europe. François Bouda, from **Africa No Filter** in Burkina Faso, highlighted this: “most of the stories about climate change in Africa perpetrate all the negative narratives about climate change and do not do enough to amplify all the solutions, the great initiatives”. François introduced, among others, the example of Diébédo Francis Kéré, a community-minded architect who recently won the Pritzker Architecture Prize, and whose work highlights the importance of having people and local communities take ownership of processes in a way that connects them directly to solutions. This collective approach was also highlighted by Sarah Abdu Bushra, curator of Contemporary Nights in Ethiopia. She described how, in a context where precarity is permanent, there is a need to invent frameworks that go beyond conventional ‘infrastructure’ (which can be fragile or non-existent), for instance by approaching conversation and dialogue as an art form in itself, or by shifting the focus of care to concentrate on artists before art objects.

Going beyond fixed, one-sided definitions... and related agendas

This point applies first to the very concept of mobility and the motivations behind it. For many artists and culture professionals, to go international, to develop one’s practices internationally, is vital. Selim Ben Safia emphasised this in his article for the Yearbook and also at the Forum in Tunis: “For Tunisian artists, the international dimension is vital. In order to nourish their artistic works, in order to share with other artists, in order to discover new forms

of creation, the need to travel or to host is essential. To ‘go local’ you need an infrastructure that allows it. If there is none then you have to invent it by being very agile”.

Areej Abou Harb, programme director for **Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafy**, points out that it is also important for funders “not to impose these [green] agendas; not because we don’t believe in them but because we think cultural practitioners should have their say on how they describe a green world. (...) We need to work on our own tools and not only translate terminologies”. This approach is also a way to challenge the global dynamic of power, and to “make it ours, in our region”.

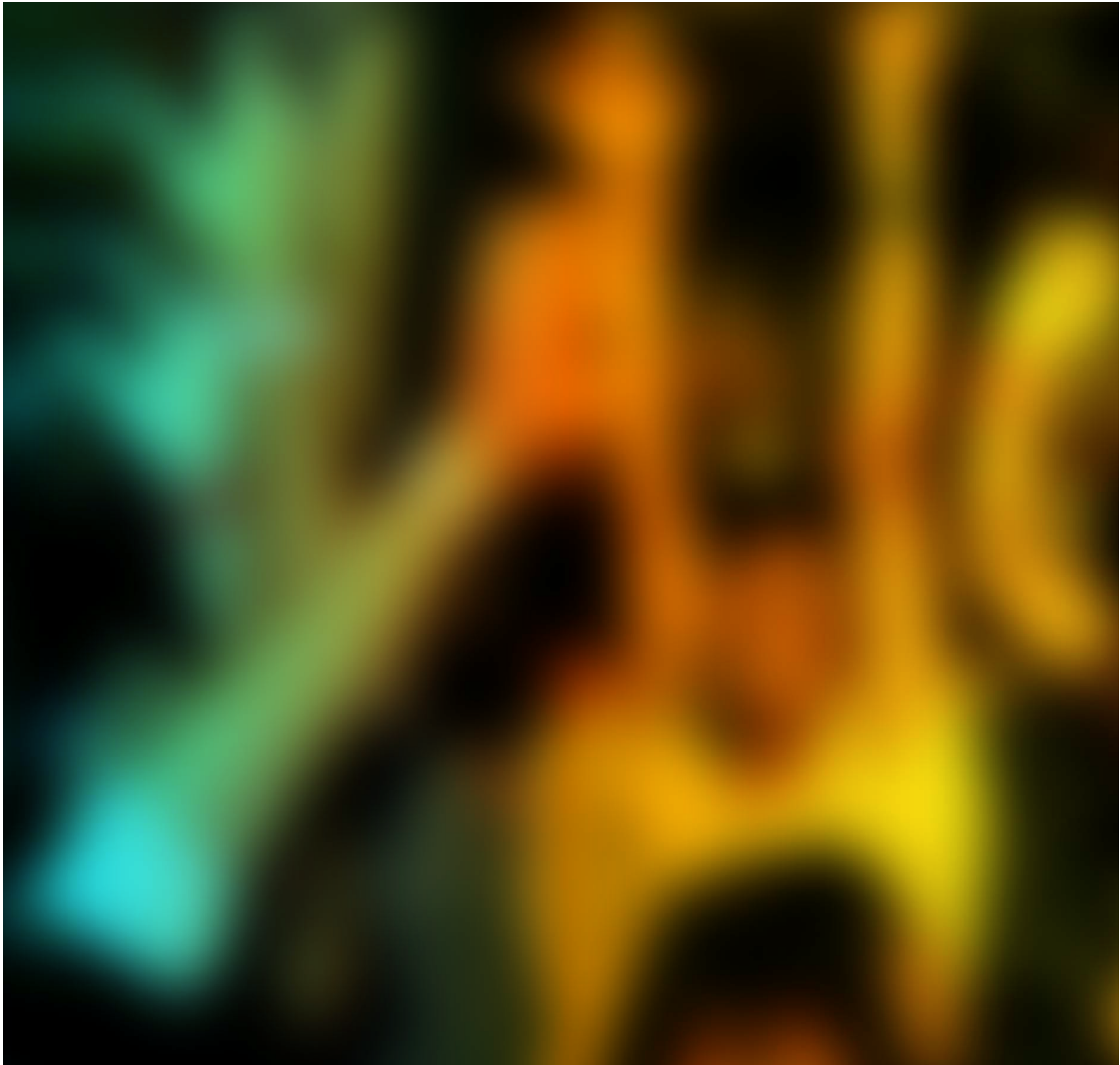
No one-size-fits-all solution, and the need to collaborate and work together

Many insights on collaboration were provided during the Forum, particularly in panels including perspectives from funding organisations given by Karim Sultan (**Kamel Lazaar Foundation**) and Areej Abou Harb (Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafy). One of the key ideas stressed was the importance of understanding the concept of sustainability in a broader sense, in relation to a context that can also be affected by war and political and economic crisis, and in doing so to not “limit the applicant (...) but to work with them to imagine a more sustainable ecosystem where these individuals and organisations can actually grow”. Karim Sultan emphasised that in the projects of Kamel Lazaar Foundation they found it important to work not on the basis of set agendas, but rather through a more experimental, ad hoc approach that could meet the concerns of the moment. Our rapporteur, Leila Ben-Gacem, summarised this approach as an experimental one that allows solutions to be created “as a journey for long-term relationships to be created”.

“The need to act and not react” (Ukhona Ntsali Mlandu)

Throughout the Forum, in tandem with the Yearbook, a first framework of interconnected actions can be designed based on the different interventions of the panellists and audience:

1. Act for more mobility and a new vocabulary attached to it: “for me the radical solution is actually to increase mobility and be in each other’s presence, to move more, to meet each other but also to change the language of mobility (...) to talk about hosts, guests and hospitality and the humanities and the values that come with it” (Sarah Abdu Bushra). One example of this form of revisited mobility, shared by Selim Ben Safia, is the project **Archipel**, organised between Tunisia, Québec and the City of Nantes.



- 2. Act for more context-specific approaches in collaboration stakeholders, artists and cultural professionals; call them ‘partners’ and not ‘grantees’ when doing projects together (Areej Abou Harb); avoid the capital city syndrome in projects (Karim Sultan); and work on our own forms of solutions to raise funds (Ghita Khaldi and François Bouda).
- 3. Act to make our actions visible based on our own matrices of evaluation that value what we do instinctively. In doing so, avoid the exclusion embedded in ready-made funding and de-contextualised evaluation formats (Ukhona Ntsali Mlandu).
- 4. Read, research, document and share, as a way to address the scale of climate change as a global problem, as well as our level of responsibility within it, and thereby interrogate cultural policies and influence funding strategies (François Bouda, Mike van Graan).
- 5. Act to be around the negotiating table and stay visible throughout the process of decision-making via networks and collective organisations (Mike van Graan); consider building our own institutions, to look at what institutions would look like if we built them, if we designed them (Sarah Abdu Bushra).

These forms of action had already been spotted in one form or another by the people who shared them as ideas. Pursued in tandem with other efforts, or individually, they may help usher in more nuanced, contextualised frameworks for supporting cultural mobility – frameworks that recognise that in a world already impacted by climate change, adaptation as a ‘we’ is crucial to advancing mobility justice.

As Yamam Al-Zubaidi, quoting Douglas Adams in ‘The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy’, said at the end of the Cultural Mobility Forum in May 2022: “This planet has – or rather had – a problem, which was this: most of the people living on it were unhappy for pretty much all of the time. Many solutions were suggested for this problem, but most of these were largely concerned with the movement of small green pieces of paper, which was odd because on the whole it wasn’t the small green pieces of paper that were unhappy. (...) so doing something completely irrelevant is not helpful! Let’s sit down and see what the real problem is, don’t move papers”.

Over the last years, the cultural and artistic sector has been navigating turbulent waters. From a Mediterranean perspective, embracing both Europe and the Southern and Eastern shore of the sea, the context appears to be deteriorating steadily. The COVID pandemic has had radical and long reaching consequences. First, the cultural scene was impacted by the massive cancellation of initiatives and closure of spaces, resulting in the loss of a significant portion, or in some cases the entirety, of artists' and cultural operators' economic revenues. Moreover, and despite the lifting of the ban on access to public spaces, audiences are reluctant to come back. For the professionals who managed to survive, restricted access to mobility is another challenge: borders that were closed during the pandemic have not reopened fully, thereby jeopardising their international careers, which are key to their professional survival.

Beyond the pandemic, a series of socio-political trends have further darkened the horizon: at the economic level, financial crises and inflation have been spreading across the region and beyond, sometimes with dramatic consequences; politically, rising far-right parties have been building-up power in Europe, while in North Africa and the Middle East, the social movements demanding more freedom and justice have been silenced. The peaceful protests in Lebanon or the Hirak in Algeria, which had sparked a glimmer of hope, are now over, and Tunisia is staggering back into an authoritarian regime. The war in Ukraine forced the focus of international aid to be redirected to meet the emergency situation due to the conflict in this country. More generally, one can safely claim that funds are shrinking. Ultimately, the war in Gaza with its disastrous human toll has brought another tragic blow to the region, impacting perniciously any professional perspectives artists and cultural operators in the region might have, or even compromising their very security.

As a result, a significant number of artists and cultural professionals are left in the lurch, having renounced to pursue their career in the sector. Many others have moved away, emigrating to Europe, Canada, or the Gulf countries, for a temporary stay or with a longer perspective in mind.

Even though it is almost impossible to assess the number of those who have quit their job or left their country, it is estimated that thousands of professionals were smart enough to fill in successful leave requests. At the scale of the Mediterranean region, the impact on human resources is palpable as shortages of producers and managers

have been noted. Also, the overall deterioration in the context has been sapping the confidence of those who are trying to develop their own activity: the perception of a lost battle makes it harder to continue fighting.

Supporting the cultural scene: a diversity of intermediaries and methodologies

A multiplicity of players have been addressing these challenges. Beyond national ministries of culture or local authorities, a number of non-profit organisations such as associations, foundations, cultural networks or funding bodies that raise or redistribute funds have been elaborating strategies and implementing tools to support the sector. This phenomenon is particularly prominent in the Southern and Eastern shores of the Mediterranean: although the contexts are very different from one country to the next, there is general mistrust between

the cultural scene in a country and its government. Discouraged by their failed effort to influence cultural policies, most independent cultural entities are desisting from trying to establish contacts and advocating for their sector with their respective authorities, as they had done formerly. In the current context, non-profit private actors, either based in the region, such as [El Mawred Al Thaqafi](#) and the [Arab Fund for Arts and Culture \(AFAC\)](#), or with antennas located in southern Mediterranean countries, as the [Ford Foundation](#), [Open Society](#) or [Drosos Foundation](#)

“We are all cultural policy makers”

Fanny Bouquerel
Roberto Cimetta Fund

to name just a few, have been taking the lead in the definition of frameworks and priorities and in the allocation of funds to the independent cultural field. In some way, these entities can be defined as intermediaries who shape a cultural action and compensate the lack of national cultural policies to support the cultural scene. As one of these private actors highlighted in a recent professional meeting, “We are all cultural policy makers”. This situation could be considered an example of a bottom-up approach to cultural policy making. This diversity of players, referred to as funders for the sake of clarity, constitutes a complex configuration of entities whose profiles, economic and political powers, agendas and interests, as well as modus operandi may differ substantially. However, they share what they consider their responsibility to bring appropriate solutions to the needs of the sector. They continually review their strategies and methodologies and endeavour to adopt an irreproachable work ethic, a sine qua non condition for building long-lasting trust with the sector.

These efforts include involving professionals and beneficiaries in funders’ activities to define their priorities, design tools for funding, assess project proposals, etc. Their repertory of action includes consultations (one-on-one, focus groups), working groups, or pools of experts involving peers etc. These participatory processes require a serious commitment on the part of the funders in order to ensure the engagement and ownership of stakeholders and beneficiaries and promote transparency in decision making processes. For instance, the drafting of the ‘Manifesto for cultural and artistic mobility in the Mediterranean and worldwide’ promoted by the **Roberto Cimetta Fund**, aiming at highlighting the values of mobility and the necessity to support it, has involved the participation of about 30 artists and cultural operators from the region in a series of online and on-site meetings over three months. It has also resulted in a roadmap of the Fund, and contributed to define the selection criteria used to allocate travel grants. However, the participatory approach has its limitations, and funders understand that if, on the one hand, it contributes to design relevant roadmaps or offer well-targeted grants, on the other hand it may not, by itself, resolve issues related to unequal power dynamics, the involvement of remote/isolated artists etc. In addition, implementing participatory formats is time-consuming and requires capacities and human resources, which are costly for all parties concerned. Finally, the way participatory processes are designed, implemented, and interpreted reflects the values of the funders. Funders are aware that maintaining a critical distance from the results these processes can bring about and accepting the various cultural references that can arise is of use to show their maturity and their openness to the diversity of the cultural scene.

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On another note, the lifting of restrictions after COVID made it possible to meet again physically and formally, and most importantly, it allowed informal contacts among peers to resume, thereby encouraging exchanges and learning, and influencing new practices. In June 2023, the network **Culture Action Europe (CAE)** organised its annual conference entitled ‘**Handle with Care**’ in Eleusis, Greece, current European Capital of Culture. For this occasion, Greek professionals were invited to introduce their projects related to ‘care’. The CAE network presented the EU-funded pilot project on Culture and Health and a high-level representative of the European Commission promoted a recent communication on mental health which, for the first time in a flagship initiative addressing a health issue, included culture. One month later, an informal group of about thirty entities funding arts and culture in the Arab region gathered in Lebanon to share their priorities and practices, addressing participatory methodologies, funding schemes and other concerns, with the aim to better coordinate their work to support the sector. Born about ten years ago, this group offers a safe space for exchanges and has contributed to develop a culture of cooperation which is instrumental for building joint initiatives to respond to emergencies in the region, in particular in Lebanon. Although these gatherings do not claim to design cultural policies, their respective agendas reflect their interest in advocating and coordinating the participants’ work, and the multidimensional flow of information and influences

they promote contribute to fuel the cultural political debate.

Connecting, caring, ‘accompagner’

Despite their differences, the intermediaries described above have been working on issues that already existed but have become particularly relevant over the last two-three years.

First, the lockdown has revealed the necessity to connect and exchange at all levels among artists and culture operators. Although cross border mobility is still a non-negotiable requirement for artists and culture professionals to develop their career, costs and increasing constraints linked to moving abroad, as well as renewed artists’ interest to be more anchored at the local level, have set ‘local mobility’ higher on the agenda. Indeed, some artists may lack the resources to even travel within their own country’s borders, while others who have chosen to remain in their country have expressed their wish to be more rooted in their community. In that sense, new articulations between local and international mobilities are being promoted to connect artists and societies with a multiplicity of contexts, and funders have started to provide support accordingly. Following this perspective, the role and place of diasporas are being reconsidered as intermediaries and potentially powerful allies who could help maintaining and building new ties across communities and territories. Connecting is also deeply entangled with providing access, and thus mitigating the inequalities of access to funding, mobility, the market, or simply work. This issue is all the more acute as the professional community is shrinking: connecting with artists and cultural operators who have less opportunities, such as those living on islands, in rural areas and outside cities is an ethical and professional priority to ensure inclusiveness and diversity in arts and culture.

Second, ‘caring’ is another concept that has gained consensus in the cultural professional world – it is no coincidence that it was the topic of the CAE conference mentioned above. Borrowed from the medical and social world, it underlines the necessity to pay great attention to the players in a sector who have suffered during the pandemic. It echoes issues of solidarity and the necessity to strengthen ties within the community to ensure its survival on the long term, against the competitive dimension that characterises the arts market.

Finally, even though the term ‘accompagner’ is not popular for those who do not speak French, there is a growing concern in finding ways to support artists “side by side”, on the long term, providing tools and safe spaces to talk, learn, and work outside of any project-based logic or production constraints. In fact, offering such spaces that

cater for artists and cultural operators, where they can interact on a regular basis, may prove invaluable and help them solve a short-term problem, but more importantly support them in shaping their career path on the long term.

In the end, connecting, caring and ‘accompagner’ all refer to ways of supporting the sector beyond funding, particularly on a short-term basis. This is not to say that financial resources are not necessary to lead one’s activity. However, the lessons learnt from the pandemic, in addition to the numerous dramatic crises that have hit the region, show that human support may be as important to artists and professionals to develop their work on the long term.

The way a diverse group of private entities have been working to support the cultural sector in the Mediterranean, particularly on its Southern and Eastern shores, offers interesting pathways to rethink shaping and implementing cultural policies. However, this configuration still shows obvious limits: the missing public actors, or their relative withdrawal, hamper the review of obsolete cultural policies in the region that would contribute to build enabling contexts from a political, legal, and social perspective. In that sense, the failure of artists and culture professionals’ long mobilisation in Tunisia to promote the definition of a status of artists that would fit their needs and the reality of their work has left culture and artists communities with a bitter aftertaste.

Creative Scotland, inclusive of Screen Scotland, is the national body which supports the arts, screen, and creative industries across all parts of Scotland. We are a Non-Departmental Public Body, sponsored by Scottish Government and Scottish Ministers and we receive our funding from both the Scottish Government and the National Lottery. We support the arts, screen and creative industries as a development organisation, a funder, an advocate, and as a public body that seeks to influence others to increase opportunity and maximise the impact our resources can offer. We work in partnership with Government, Local Authorities, and the wider public, private, and voluntary sectors to deliver this support. Like many other funder/arts organisations, we distribute money against a set of criteria for revenue funding for organisations as well as project awards for both organisations and individuals. In 2021, building on work we had previously begun, given that the issues of Equality, Climate Change and Sustainability and Fair work had been impacting on the culture sector for some years previously but now heavily influenced by the extraordinary experiences of the arts and culture sectors (and wider society) throughout the pandemic, Creative Scotland established a refreshed Strategic Framework to guide our work.

What we want to see: (a) people and organisations working in art and creativity are supported to make work of quality and ambition that enriches life in Scotland for everyone; (b) more people from all parts of society access, participate in and value a range of artistic and creative activities; (c) art and creativity are recognised by people at home and abroad as a central part of our nation. Our commitment is therefore to increase the diversity of who receives and benefits from our support, ensuring all our support contributes to fair pay, conditions, and employment opportunities, significantly reduce the environmental impact of our work and those we support, respond to local contexts, and build on our existing support for international collaboration and artistic exchange.

Pandemic Impact and emerging measures

As stated above, the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the arts sector in Scotland, as it did globally. Many arts organisations, venues, and individual artists faced severe financial challenges due to the closures of theatres, galleries, and performance spaces during lockdowns. The loss of ticket sales, event cancellations, and reduced funding opportunities resulted in financial strain for all parts of the sector. These events also highlighted the precarity of both institutions in Scotland who had little fat spare to carry them over this period, and also the large numbers of freelance staff whose work formed the backbone of arts and culture production.

A UK wide Creative Industries Federation survey from April 2020 found that 45% of all respondents would run out of reserves within the next 12 weeks and 62% of all respondents faced considerable or very considerable cash flow issues. 62% of freelancers/self-employed and 42% of all organisations estimated that their monthly income/turnover has decreased by 100% since the outbreak. The pandemic had a significant impact on the mental health and well-being of artists, cultural workers, and communities. The loss of social interaction, isolation, and uncertainty about the future contributed to increased stress and anxiety. It highlighted the importance of community engagement and access to the arts. In the face of such rapid and unprecedented change

and turmoil, the Scottish Government (through Creative Scotland), in partnership with other public bodies such as unions and sector representative bodies, acted quickly throughout 2020 and 2021 to implement various support measures and funding programs to mitigate the impact and help the sector recover.

Creative Scotland established several emergency funding programmes to provide financial support to individuals

“The Culture Collective programme”

Lorna Duguid,
Creative Scotland

and organisations affected by the pandemic. Our first response was to ensure that current organisations and projects were reassured that awards involving outcomes that were unable to be delivered would not be withdrawn and the priority for Creative Scotland was to ensure that awards were spent in honouring staff costs and fees, despite non-delivery of activity.

For funds for individuals’ hardship, a light touch digital process was developed quickly and limited evidence beyond proof of a creative practice was required. It was notable that many applicants, when asked to apply to a trusting environment, did not apply for the full amount offered but for a tailored request according to need. In addition, new funds were developed from existing budgets that were more focused on sustaining creative practice than delivery of activity. Support for venues was also developed to bridge the financial gap until opening plans and income projections became clearer and could provide grants of up to £250,000. In addition to preventing job losses and insolvencies, these funds also had an imperative to support commissioning of freelance artists and related professionals.

These funds aimed to help mitigate the immediate impact on artists, freelancers, and creative businesses, 82% of whom reported that this emergency funding saved jobs in their organisations. This light touch approach, with flexible outcomes not fixed to strict project delivery, was invaluable and the evidence is that funds reached a wider and more diverse group of artists who would not normally be Creative Scotland’s usual funding cohort, often from more marginalised groups or art forms. 73% of individual artists had not held an existing funding relationship with Creative Scotland and 28% learned about the funding opportunity through social media.

The Culture Collective programme

While the above emergency measures acted to mitigate in some ways the destruction of the culture sector in Scotland, the use of the emergency funds through the development of a programme of work known as the **Culture Collective** gives the strongest indicator of ways forward for cultural policy. The aim of the Culture Collective programme is to support organisations employing freelance artists to work in communities across Scotland. Building on previous Creative Scotland programmes and informed by a working group chaired by the National Partnership for Culture in response to the Report of the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery (June 2020), the programme focuses on community engaged creative activity, supporting participatory approaches and projects where creative practitioners and

While the above emergency measures acted to mitigate in some ways the destruction of the culture sector in Scotland, the use of the emergency funds through the development of a programme of work known as the Culture Collective gives the strongest indicator of ways forward for cultural policy. The aim of the Culture Collective programme is to support organisations employing freelance artists to work in communities across Scotland.

communities work collaboratively. Operating under the extraordinary stresses and requirements of the Pandemic, the Culture Collective Network has pioneered progressive artist-led and community-informed approaches and partnerships. The Culture Collective Network is viewed with great potential for opening up new routes, models and processes for engaging communities. The programme aimed to empower communities to work with creative professionals and organisations to create positive change.

Culture Collective is a network of 26 participatory arts projects, shaped by local communities alongside artists and creative organisations. The Programme is relatively unique in that it has allowed those funded to design and deliver activities that respond to the particular priorities of the places they are from. There were purposefully few pre-set outcomes for the funded projects beyond ensuring that 50% of the funding was spent on employing creative practitioners. Instead, each of the Culture Collective projects has been free to explore and respond to the values and priorities of the communities they are based in, and to work towards their partnership’s own aspirations and objectives. The result has been a rich and varied range of activities that are delivering impacts that matter to the people and places involved. It is important to note that each of the 26 Culture Collective projects represents a programme of its own, cascading the awarded funds across their own networks of partners and employed creative practitioners. As a result, the

reach of this Programme extends widely across the country as well as deeply into the heart of the communities engaged, and they include projects as diverse as:

Art27 Scotland an artist-led, community-driven organisation whose work focuses on Arts for Dignity, Justice and Peace. Taking their mission from Article 27 of the Declaration of Human Rights, which states that everyone has the right to participate in the culture of their community and to enjoy the arts. One key area of exploration is around Cultural Rights – what they mean in arts practice, and how they are upheld, protected and progressed.

The Creative Islands Network provides opportunities for creative practitioners in Lewis, Harris, Orkney, Shetland and North Uist to devise and deliver activities and workshops with people in their local communities, with a focus on working with older people and those living with dementia; people experiencing poor mental health; young people who may have missed out on educational and social experiences as a result of COVID-19; and people who may be particularly isolated due to living alone or living in our outmost and rural communities and islands.

CULTIVATE is a regional leadership programme which engages communities with climate justice through creativity and peer-education, that will create and produce locally relevant work across the Tay region. Led by Creative Dundee, this pilot project brings together creative practitioners and local communities to mutually explore and share new ways of embedding creativity at the core of grassroots collective action for climate justice.

First results toward a possible shared policy system

For the projects themselves, the Culture Collective provides a network, opportunities to share resources, learning and experiences. For the sector as a whole, the Culture Collective shines a light on the crucial importance of participatory arts projects for artists, for communities and for the future. The evaluation from this programme gives a blueprint for ways in which future funding programmes can create and embed the changes required to tackle the immediate perils facing society through climate change, inequality, and barriers to opportunity. What is evident is that the projects are reaching deep into localities, engaging many communities, including some of the most vulnerable groups and those especially impacted by the pandemic.

Key elements that the projects identified as enabling factors in their success were:

- o Training and Support for practitioners
- o Artists’ professional knowledge and skills being properly valued

- o Collaborations
- o Partner Buy In
- o Funding model allowing for extended time, patience, and flexibility
- o Connections into communities enabling local visibility and community buy in
- o Having access to the right spaces and facilities
- o Freedom and flexibility for the project without pressure of set outcomes
- o Flexibility to adapt or change where needed, and for experimenting and exploring new approaches
- o A funding environment fostering openness and honesty with scope to learn by trial and error
- o Feeling trusted to deliver, and able to be open about the project with collaborators and funders
- o A supportive cultural policy.

The value of the work taking place is multifaceted: for the cultural sector; for the communities they are working with; for local authorities seeking models of person-centred service provision and rapid, targeted responses to local need; and for policymakers seeking to fulfil Covid Recovery objectives by means of this Programme.

With such positive impacts evident in this policy initiative, the challenge remains when faced with shrinking public funding and competing priorities for governments in how to continue to build on these insights and create a new ‘shared system’ owned and empowered by the true owners of culture- those who make it collectively as audiences, communities, and creators. This is the true purpose of policy change, and the evidence suggests its time needs to come.

In Tunisia, artists and cultural professionals had to face new challenges and significant changes that required rapid and creative adaptation. In this testimony, we explore these aspects in the context of the post-COVID era as well as the current needs of civil society in Tunisia and around the world. This contribution is more of a testimonial and feedback from experience coming from a dancer, artist, cultural actor, and generally someone who has been active in the sector for more than 13 years. More specifically, for the past 5 years, I have been a member of a budding association, **Al Badil - L'alternative culturelle**, which strives for the democratisation and decentralisation of culture in Tunisia by providing alternative opportunities and solutions to artists and to actors of the cultural sector. The experience acquired as an artist before entering the back office nourished my understanding of the conditions on the ground. The situation of both young and established artists has always been precarious. They have no status, which makes it difficult for them to choose the path of being an artist, and even more difficult for them to interact with the world. Unfortunately for Tunisians of my generation, the pandemic wasn't the first crisis we experienced. In 2011, during the revolution, we had already gone through confinement, restrictions and strict curfews for indeterminate periods. We were cast into darkness, instability and, above all, insecurity. It was an unprecedented experience in which the whole country was thrown into with no visibility and no real resources. The difference between 2011 and 2020 is this global 'solidarity'. The enforced protocols, restrictions, and new way of life was the same everywhere. In a way, this was reassuring, because it was a difficult but common situation.

As time went on, as cultural players and artists, we understood that we were facing new challenges; the cultural sector was the first to grind to a halt, and the last to get back on its feet. The health crisis led to the cancellation of numerous cultural and artistic events, which had a direct impact on the livelihoods of artists and cultural professionals

in Tunisia. The shutting down of theatres, concert halls and museums also led to increased economic insecurity, as many artists found themselves without stable sources of income. The pandemic revealed the situation of artists in the country to the general public. In addition, travel restrictions and social distancing measures led to the cancellation of many shows, festivals and tours. Artists in the performing arts sector, actors, musicians, choreographers and dancers often depend on performances for their income. Cancellation of these events has resulted in significant financial loss. Most artists depend on one-off contracts and fees for their livelihoods, and limited travel and

restrictions on gatherings made it difficult to fulfil these commitments. Many were forced to leave the capital and return to their hometowns, as they were no longer able to cover their expenses. These restrictions made the creative process virtually impossible, as face-to-face collaboration with other artists is often essential in the creative process, and social distancing measures hampered this collaboration. The loss of connection with audiences, peers and collaborators fostered feelings of loneliness, frustration and anxiety.

Al Badil and the digital transition

For instance, in the case of the 2020 edition of the **Hors Litts festival**, the performances had to be cancelled two days before the opening. The project led by Al Badil takes the form of a touring festival in five towns across Tunisia, where artists are invited to create and perform in atypical settings, directly in people's homes and in public spaces. Importantly, the organisation of the events is managed by young adults from regions with little means, who are trained and supported by the association in their début as cultural managers. The cancellation of Hors Litts was a big blow, several of these youths were constrained to return to their family homes, sometimes in remote and difficult parts of the country. At Al Badil, we initiated a support network on social media, holding online meetings to maintain dialogue, trying to reduce feelings of exclusion and isolation. These

Words from a cultural actor

Mey El Borni,
Al Badil - L'alternative culturelle

support groups were also a channel to signal those who were in dire need of financial assistance, to maintain the link and create feelings of solidarity between the youngsters themselves.

The COVID-19 crisis accelerated the digital transition in the field. Faced with this challenge, many artists in the live art sector have had to turn to new forms of creation and dissemination. Online performances, streaming broadcasts, audiovisual recordings and virtual collaborations became ways of continuing to share their work with the public. New art forms have emerged, as have collaborations between different disciplines such as technology, science and health. These partnerships have enabled us to rethink artistic practices and create unique experiences for the public; novel initiatives have emerged to highlight and accommodate these new creations. However, adapting to these new forms requires technical skills and a reinvention of traditional artistic practices. Unfortunately, the entire country was not on equal footing in this regard. Some parts of Tunisia had neither the same resources nor the same access to digital technology. Despite these difficulties, artists used this time to develop new skills, experiment with alternative art forms and reimagine their practices.

Digital technology has made it possible to erase borders between countries, and to facilitate exchange and sharing. This has enabled some of us to start new collaborations with foreign structures or artists, which have lasted even after and beyond the crisis. Artists were encouraged to collaborate and establish creative partnerships to find innovative solutions. We explored alternatives such as open-air performances, small-committee shows and performances adapted to the constraints of social distancing. We rethought the audience experience and tried to find innovative ways of creating interaction and emotion that transcended restrictions. Right before the pandemic, we had launched IJA!, an opportunity for artists and professional of the cultural sector to gather and engage in debates and discussions on the challenges faced in the artistic and cultural world in Tunisia. In the face of the sanitary crisis, the initiative evolved. **IJA! Nahkiw** emerged as monthly round tables which were broadcasted on live streaming, where professionals in the cultural and artistic sector working ‘in the shadows’ or in back office roles which receive less recognition could find a platform for expression. Similarly, we developed **IJA! Chouf** for artists to propose an online immersive experience in their creative universe, expose and share their work in the Al Badil coworking space and retransmit it to the world through live streaming.

Artists have also responded to the crisis by becoming more involved in the community and using their work as a

Today, artists, cultural operators and civil society need several elements to sustain and develop the cultural sector, and this starts with the need for adequate financial support to pursue their artistic and cultural activities. This can be achieved through grants, public and private funding, residency and exchange programs, and scholarships. Stable funding that is accessible to all is crucial to enable them to create and promote their work. At the same time, they need collaboration and networking opportunities to establish partnerships, share knowledge and develop joint projects.

means of raising awareness. They created high-impact art projects to address issues such as health, social inclusion, inequality and resilience. We used art as a powerful tool to encourage reflection, dialogue and social transformation. Cultural players and performing artists had to be flexible, creative and adaptable to respond to the changes imposed by the health crisis. We explored new artistic avenues, using technology to connect with audiences and make art even more accessible.

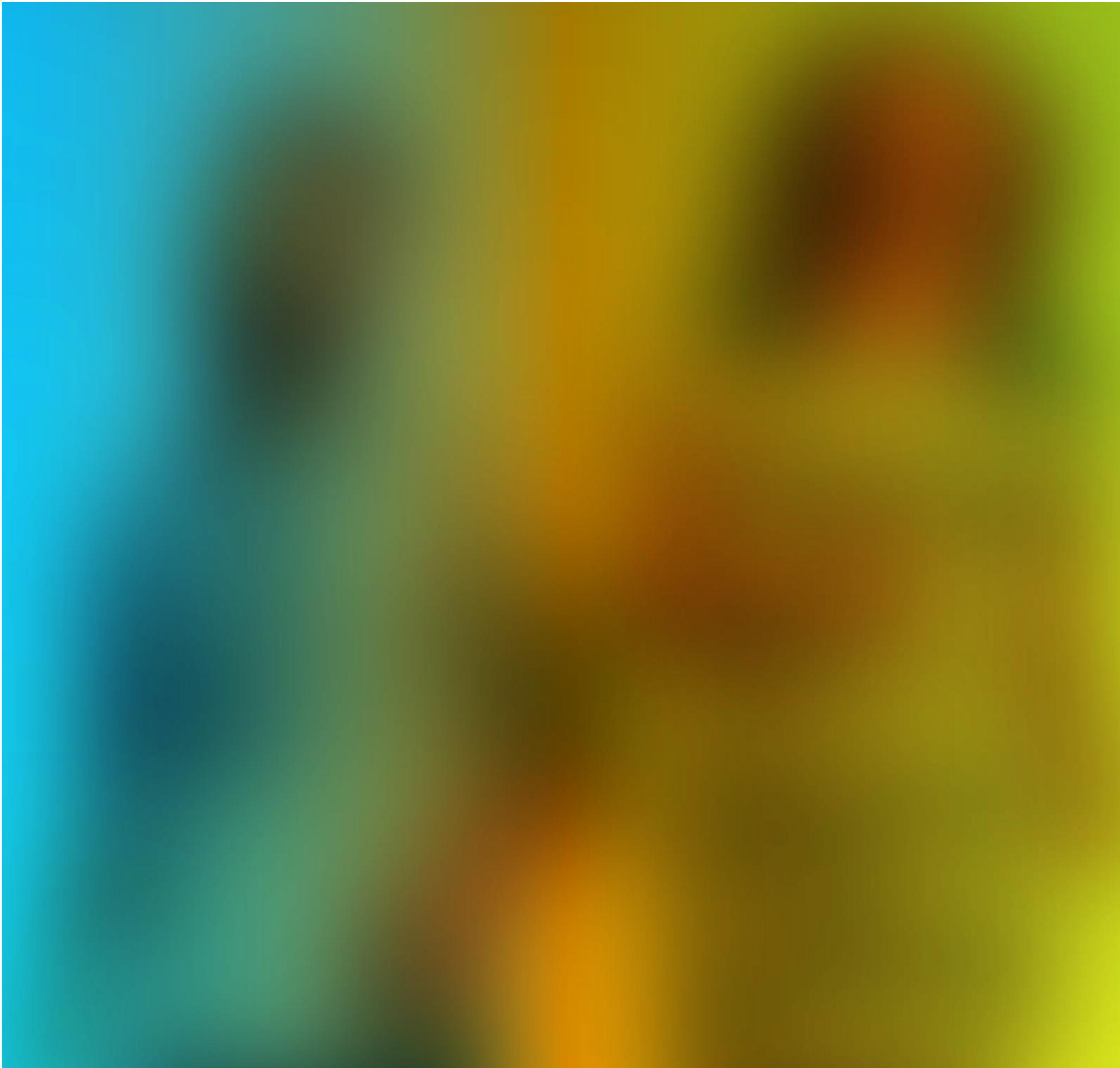
Think tank, needs and trainings

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, it was important to identify what was happening in the cultural sector. At Al Badil, we launched a think tank, the Laboratoire des alternatifs culturels et créatifs (Lac²), notably with an inquiry into the needs and practices of operators and professionals in the cultural and creative industries in Tunisia. Based on interviews with people from different generations and sectors, researchers analysed the data and produced findings. Among the burning issues for artists and cultural actors were the absence of a status for artists, their insecurity and lack of a social safety net, the difficulties encountered by Tunisians to travel abroad, the inaccessibility of the artistic professional card, and the struggle to protect author’s rights. The idea is to eventually present the Ministry of Culture with this body of research in the hopes of instigating change.

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In conclusion, the health crisis has raised new questions for artists, cultural operators and civil society. Nonetheless, it has also revealed the resilience and adaptability of these sector players. To cope with significant changes, it is crucial to meet their essential needs. Artists and cultural operators need financial support, access to resources and infrastructure, training and professional development, channels for promotion and dissemination, collaboration and networking, recognition and valorization, as well as support for diversity and inclusion. By providing them with these elements, we can support their creativity, their contributions to global society and their artistic development. On the other hand, civil society also plays an essential role in supporting and enhancing the cultural sector. Open dialogue and active participation on their part can help promote art and culture as drivers of social change and community cohesion, because culture is a real economic lever. By working together, we can overcome today’s challenges and build a resilient, inclusive and dynamic cultural sector. Artistic creativity and culture play an essential role in our society, enabling us to express ourselves, connect and inspire each other. It is therefore essential to recognize and support these players, to help them thrive even in the most difficult of circumstances. By investing in the cultural sector, we are investing in our own enrichment and development together as a society.



In 2020, we all had to start rethinking the social models we had become accustomed to in the last century. Questioning our idea of the world was not easy, but our adaptability allowed us to overcome such a challenge. We managed to prepare ourselves and we have faced the consequences of the quarantine, starting with the issue of protecting employment during a state of emergency. Yet, the workers in the cultural sector were conspicuously absent from this public debate, despite being the first to experience the consequences of complete closure and among the last to resume work. However, the lack of protections in the cultural field is not a novelty: the Coronavirus Emergency has only made more evident the issues that workers in this sector were already facing. The main problem is that even today it is difficult to recognize cultural activity as top-notch work: being a writer, dancer, film-maker, poet, painter and whatever other cultural job crosses your mind, is mainly still considered more of a hobby, even for highly skilled professionals. For example, during the press conference while presenting the decree of May 13th 2020, the now ex Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, referred to “all the artists who make us laugh and captivate us”. A statement such as this one leaves no doubt about how challenging it still is to pronounce the apparently unknown definition ‘cultural workers’. This particular mindset perpetuates an old idiomatic expression: the ancient Latin poet Horace wrote *Carmina non dant panem*, meaning that writing poems doesn’t provide for your bread. Unfortunately, throughout the course of history, Horace has been proven to be right: nowadays in Italy we still have a similar idiomatic expression that goes “con la cultura non si mangia”, which can be translated into “culture doesn’t put food on the table”. Even though culture doesn’t provide sustenance, it certainly gives us a reason to live.

In the solitude of quarantine days, everything that allowed us to pass the time and disconnect from smart-working was a cultural product. From a book to a film, the void left by monotonous days was filled by the work of an artist. This led to a heightened awareness of the evaluation of entertainment products, for which the demand grew as the

quarantine persisted. The challenge, then, was to understand how to maintain the consumption of cultural products, now devoid of their primary essence: the relationship with the audience. The dimension of collectivity proves essential in this sense, especially within the relational dynamic between the audience and artistic product, which is the beating heart of the cultural sector and the bridge that was severed with the onset of the emergency. The discussion carried out during the pandemic years revolved around the possibility of reintroducing the artistic product to the public, seeking to establish and imagine new paths that could become meeting points between the artist and the audience

while respecting social distancing measures at the time and now, with the return of normality, drawing from the experience gained. Undoubtedly, the major adaptation required to artists and cultural professionals was the effort to embrace the digital environment. Traditionally perceived as separate from forms of entertainment that involve physical presence and human warmth, the virtual realm has often been dismissed by the majority of the cultural world.

The pandemic has allowed, at least in part, the bridging of this seemingly irreparable gap: theatre performances and virtual exhibitions have become the new norm, opening alternative opportunities to reach a global audience. Furthermore, the pandemic has emphasized the importance of intergenerational dialogue. Artists and cultural professionals from different generations have had to find innovative ways to collaborate and share knowledge, leveraging digital platforms and creating bridges between diverse experiences and perspectives. The experience of intergenerational dialogue has proven crucial

in addressing current challenges and creating a resilient future for the cultural sector. Intergenerational dialogue facilitates the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and perspectives between different age groups within the cultural sector. By bringing together seasoned professionals and emerging talents, it enables a dynamic transfer of ideas, approaches, and skills, which contributes to the overall resilience of the industry. For instance, established cultural institutions have collaborated with young artists and creatives to infuse fresh perspectives into traditional

Great expectations: how cultural workers will overcome a pandemic

Sara Paoella
Scomodo

art forms, resulting in captivating and relevant exhibitions and performances.

As younger generations offered their expertise in emerging technologies and digital media, older generations provided invaluable institutional knowledge and guidance. Museums and galleries, for example, engaged in collaborative initiatives with tech-savvy individuals to develop immersive online exhibitions, virtual tours, and interactive platforms, enabling broader access to cultural experiences. Through mentorship programs, incubators, and collaborative projects, experienced professionals have provided guidance and resources to younger individuals, fostering the next generation of cultural entrepreneurs and innovators. In this regard, the internet has played a leading role, along with the development of new web platforms, fostering fruitful exchanges among different communities, providing possible remote consumption alternatives, and facilitating collective reflection on the future of culture. As a result, many initiatives have emerged over time, through lengthy phases of discussion, proposing ideas for the future of cultural life that seek to preserve the indispensable relationship between the audience and the artistic product while embracing the digital realm, no longer seen as a mere appendage but as an extension of the original work.

One of these is LGBTQ+ Dialogues, a project that began with a simple question: what might we learn about our own experiences through deep conversations with those younger or older than us about what it means to be a part of the LGBTQ+ community in the past, present, and future? This project connects two populations – LGBTQ+ youth and LGBTQ+ elders – who rarely have the chance to interact. A partnership between The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Center on Addison at Center on Halsted, and the University of Illinois at Chicago, brings together different cohorts of LGBTQ+ college students and older adults (60+) for year-long series of bi-weekly themed dialogues, creative work, and shared dinners. Documentation has been particularly challenging during the COVID-19 pandemic: the project has relied primarily on Zoom recordings and email conversations, thus allowing older generations to use new software and to become closer to the digital world. They have collected photographs, video clips, and other materials in their digital archive.

The editorial staff of **Scomodo** – a monthly magazine written by under30 and focused on current affairs and culture – has been influenced by recent events, creating an additional content to complement its longstanding analytical work: that’s how the section of the Lettura Aumentata (literally ‘improved reading’) was born.

Our main aim was to provide a unique reading experience capable of demonstrating how digital expansions can

As younger generations offered their expertise in emerging technologies and digital media, older generations provided invaluable institutional knowledge and guidance. Museums and galleries, for example, engaged in collaborative initiatives with tech-savvy individuals to develop immersive online exhibitions, virtual tours, and interactive platforms, enabling broader access to cultural experiences

complement the information provided in an article. In this way, a written text is intertwined with digital media: we suggest a Spotify playlist for a better reading experience. This innovative mode of consumption was specifically designed to enhance in-depth analysis, comprehension, and user engagement: the reader is supposed to read the magazine, while following various instructions that will later lead them into interacting with videos, podcast, graphics and statistics on our website. The creation of projects that hybridise the analogue and digital realms will remain a cornerstone of the new cultural vanguard.

However, in the coming years, the priority should primarily concern our ability to reassess the impact that cultural products have on our lives and, consequently, that culture has on every aspect of society. Once we understand how culture shapes individuals and citizens, it will become a priority to address the multiple shortcomings derived from inconsistent policies supporting the sector, which have become evident during this emergency. It is time, once and for all, to consider these figures as top-notch workers and provide them with the rights they deserve: establishing income and training support, recognizing professional status for cultural experts, and allocating the space, funds, and support that culture requires, especially when we often claim how fundamental it is for our history, yet how often we forget to take care of it.

PART THREE

INTERPRETING

REALITIES

CULTURAL POLICY PATHWAYS

CULTURAL NEEDS BETWEEN REALITIES AND INTERPRETATIONS

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PART THREE INTERPRETING REALITIES

Cultural policy trajectories

Giuliana Ciancio, Cristina Carlini
Eleonora De Caroli, Carlotta Garlanda
Giulio Stumpo,
Liv•in•g

Brief results from the focus groups in 2023

In Spring and Summer 2023, two focus groups were organised, bringing together representatives from philanthropic foundations, cultural organisations, and institutions. These sessions aimed to address key questions including difficulties and opportunities of internationalisation, the challenges posed by implementing programs amidst the COVID crisis, strategies for overcoming these challenges, and the necessary adaptations to the evolving cultural landscape. The first gathering took place in person in Italy, hosted by the Fondazione Cariplo in Milan. Attendees included cultural professionals from various organisations and institutions based in the Lombardy Region, representing a diverse array of artistic languages, organisational structures, and scales. The second group met online, comprising members of Philea - the Philanthropy Europe Association - which encompasses founders and private institutions across Europe. While recognizing that these discussions provided only a snapshot of the broader cultural landscape, our primary objective was to gather first insights for enriching our critical understanding. We aimed to uncover practical initiatives that could serve as the building blocks for initial policy recommendations in a cultural sector characterised by fragmentation, diversity, and unwavering passion. Below are among the topics that emerged from these dialogues.

In both groups, discussions highlighted a common sentiment: even before the pandemic, there existed pressing challenges within political discourse that necessitated exploration of new approaches. This was evident in the shift regarding their understanding of ‘making art’ as not just an isolated act, but rather as a multifaceted endeavour intertwined with broader issues

including the imperative of green transition, ensuring fair labour conditions for artists and cultural workers, and adopting a comprehensive approach to capacity-building that involves funders, cultural professionals, and institutions. They both agreed upon the fact that, despite its disastrous impact, the pandemic crisis served as a catalyst for critically examining emerging cultural and political dynamics and reassessing priorities in the development of cultural programs.

Among funders, this entailed a call to “be generative and transcend conventional approaches”, sparking reflections on how to evaluate the social and economic impact of cultural endeavours, and the need of more significant changes within the funding systems. Accordingly, participants stressed the need to simplify paperwork, eliminate unnecessary tasks, and ensure that the workload in the cultural sector is manageable, actions that in some cases were already in their agendas. For the Italian group, bureaucratic barriers often hindered collaboration, exacerbating competition within the fragmented cultural landscape and limiting international cultural strategies. Despite increased attention to international cultural cooperation, the group pointed out the difficulty they see from their observatories to establish robust connections between local and global initiatives, together with the need to be equipped to navigate change and pursue effective long-term endeavours. In response to these obstacles, participants advocated for the implementation of comprehensive capacity-building programs more focused in support to the creation of strategic partnerships, and enhanced networking opportunities urgent for strengthening the cultural sector considering shifting social and economic dynamics.

By elaborating on the meaning of partnership within the funders’ group, a significant challenge arose in navigating the intricate dynamics of public-private collaboration when engaging with new shared and transformative cultural policies. Participants stressed the necessity of strengthening collaborations across various levels, emphasising the importance of not only horizontal collaboration among similar organisations or institutions but also dynamic partnerships between funders, artists, professionals, public institutions, and communities. Even the funders group acknowledged the recurring issue of competition within the cultural sector also due to the non-cooperative system in funding support (nationally and at EU level). Accordingly, following the experimentations conducted by some of them, there was a call to reflect on the hidden functional mechanisms within the sector itself and to elaborate urgent policies capable of integrating various stakeholders in a cooperative perspective. There was a call for a more collaborative and supportive environment (in terms of sharing knowledge and economic resources) within the cultural sector. To some extent, the need for cooperative efforts was seen as an essential pathway toward systemic change, requiring multi-layered synergies, streamlined decision-making, and the creation of instruments for challenging the status quo. Both groups affirmed that partnerships and cooperation are crucial starting points for changing current practices in favour of sustainable, long-term perspectives and the space of cultural cooperation was identified as a key area for reflection in new programs and actions. They agreed that cooperation needs to be understood beyond mere partnership, as it could serve as a channel for addressing global challenges and, hence, cooperation could turn into strategic alliances and an opportunity for positive territorial outcomes with international reverberations.

In essence, both focus groups shared a deep commitment to strengthening democratic practices, recognizing the crucial link between cultural participation, civil engagement and a thriving democracy. Expressions like

“Citizen participation in policymaking is essential for effective change” echoed throughout both discussion sessions, reflecting a shared conviction and a newfound challenge in light of the current landscape. For both groups enhancing democratic and participatory strategies means to embrace a holistic approach to cultural policy development, i.e., a comprehensive set of actions capable of promoting pluralistic policies and social justice, while also integrating strategies that address economic concerns, environmental sustainability, caregiving, and human capital development. Furthermore, there was a collective call for rapid adaptability in reimagining cultural programs, funds, and resource allocations. This adaptability was viewed as a form of “resistance”—a concept emphasised in the dialogue—as a means of supporting artists, cultural professionals and the entire cultural ecosystem in navigating drastically transformed contexts and characterised by dramatic geo-political dynamics.

Insights gained and recommendations

According to the results collected within the focus groups and of the contributions in Part 2 of this handbook, below we will present a set of reflections and recommendations that have emerged throughout our journey. While some of these insights may seem familiar, having been widely discussed in meetings, reports, and studies over the past four years, we have found essential to consolidate them here together. We have organised these insights into three conceptual groups, recognizing them as potential avenues for understanding reality or realities beyond mere perception for delving into the cultural, organisational, and social dynamics that underpin their interpretation.

A - Shared cultural policy processes

In exploring collaborative cultural policy processes, a unanimous sentiment among the stakeholders emphasised the pressing need for heightened awareness, advocating for the creation of new spaces of negotiation and deliberation. These spaces should not only accommodate empirical evidence but also allow for moments of dialogue, dissent, and even constructive conflict, as Chantal Mouffe suggests. Along our journey, a critical imperative that has come to the forefront is the need to simplify bureaucratic processes and streamline decision-making within the cultural sector. To address these issues and encourage empirical cultural policy initiatives, we propose the following strategies:

A1 - Develop pilot projects with flexible evaluation parameters

Develop pilot programs with flexible evaluation parameters to test new policy initiatives and lay the groundwork for future measures beyond the constraints of the existing regulatory framework. This approach empowers cultural organisations to define their own priorities in response to funding

opportunities, aligning these with their development goals rather than strictly adhering to predefined criteria. It provides an opportunity to address pressing issues and realise their potential. For funders, this strategy offers a valuable opportunity to gain an updated map of the sector’s needs and feelings which could inform new cultural programs at local, national, or international levels. By implementing it on a small scale, this approach could pave the way for a more responsive cultural policy framework, particularly suited to current transitions—whether democratic, digital, or environmental—that demand bold, pluralistic responses. Furthermore, it opens possibilities for experimentation with environmental sustainability and equitable digital development, enabling cultural organisations and funders to collaboratively establish new mindsets and objectives.

A2 - Stimulate self-assessment tools

Encourage the use of self-assessment tools within cultural organisations to promote continuous improvement and responsiveness to evolving cultural needs. This approach involves adopting customised qualitative and quantitative parameters to measure performance across areas such as work quality, economic and wage sustainability, creative capacity, and engagement with audiences and stakeholders. Ideally, organisations would propose their own evaluation criteria during the funding application stage, ensuring alignment with their specific goals. This self-assessment process could be monitored in collaboration with institutional, artistic, and productive entities. Additionally, peer-to-peer evaluations among similar projects could be encouraged as a final step, enabling the cultural actors to share insights, compare challenges and successes, and draw inspiration from each other’s operational solutions.

A3 - Promote exchanges among institutions and foundations

Strengthen the role of funders in advancing shared, transformative cultural

policies by establishing multidisciplinary platforms or observatories to document and continuously monitor empirical policy experiments, as previously outlined. These observatories should bring together sector experts, cultural organisations, members of the artistic community, and informal cultural networks to record socio-cultural impacts and generate operational blueprints for developing and implementing culturally informed policies that reflect social, political, and economic contexts including global north and global south issues. This approach not only facilitates knowledge transfer and the exchange of best practices among institutions, foundations, and the philanthropic sector but also ensures that the outcomes of policy experiments are disseminated and integrated at local, national, and international levels.

A4 - Inclusive policy development

Engage a broad spectrum of stakeholders - citizens, artists, institutions, and informal communities - in the cultural policy process. This approach helps ensuring that cultural policies genuinely reflect community needs, aspirations and sentiments, fostering long-term perspectives and implementation of related programmes. Inspired by the commons movement in various local contexts across the globe and participatory governance experiments across Europe, we propose establishing ‘Citizen Councils’ - dynamic think tanks composed of various citizens and community representatives. These councils would play an active role in identifying cultural priorities, monitoring policy impact in their territories, monitoring the social temperatures in given contexts and contributing to decision-making processes. Moving beyond basic feedback sessions, this model promotes experimental, hands-on participation with a medium-term perspective, allowing for more responsive cultural policies to the real needs of communities and enriched by direct contributions from those involved.

B - Beyond project fragmentation

Throughout our discussions, the constraints of the project-based funding model have posed significant challenges for organisations, artists, and stakeholders. A holistic approach, frequently mentioned by our various interlocutors, needs to be informed by the complex nature of cultural aggregates (NGOs, institutions, informal communities) and the challenges they face. The project-based approach, increasingly time-consuming for cultural operators and artists, also significantly impacts on decent work conditions within the cultural sector. Contributors to our discussions have highlighted the urgent need to move beyond the prevailing project-centric mindset, which tends to neglect broader considerations related to employment standards and the well-being of those involved in cultural initiatives. To tackle these challenges and promote the development of strategies that transcend a project-centric mindset, here are a set of suggestions:

B1 - Core funding for cultural organisations and long-term planning

Provide core funding for cultural organisations to alleviate the pressure of unhealthy “innovative” project production. This approach allows organisations to focus on their overall mission and objectives rather than being solely project-driven. Core funding can cover operational costs, salaries, digital updates, workplace inclusivity and accessibility, and adapting spaces and cultural centers to meet environmental sustainability standards, as recommended by Creative Scotland, Kultura Nova, and others. Such support requires a commitment to long-term planning rather than episodic, crisis-driven funding responses, like those seen in the post-pandemic period. This could remind the pattern of the Basic Income for the Arts (BIA) and it has the potential to enable cultural initiatives to have stability, encourages strategic planning and fosters the growth of the cultural ecosystem.

B2 - Experiment with ‘Carte Blanche’ logic

Explore variations of the ‘Carte Blanche’ model to back artistic research. This entails developing strategies inspired by programs like the French Ministry of Culture’s Carte Blanche, the Aerowaves platform, or selected EU cooperation projects. The objective is to customise support for artistic research, providing grants for artists without production constraints. Within this framework, the emphasis is on granting the freedom to employ experimental methods and tools in artistic work that can also address contemporary social challenges.

B3 - Cooperation as a tool for sector development

Promote networking and cooperation among cultural institutions, organisations and bottom-up initiatives. Encouraging partnerships that can allow the sharing of resources and expertise, reducing the competition for isolated, project-based efforts. In addition, it can favour the individuation of ad hoc ‘cultural infrastructures’ (rehearsals spaces, recording studios, radio repeaters, shared digital platforms, and so on) moving beyond the Bauman individual happiness as mentioned in the introduction and hence promoting a rationalisation of the economic resources across communities of exchange.

B4 - Multi-phase funding calls

Implement multi-phase funding models that include various stages such as capacity building, networking, and in-depth exploration, allowing for a more comprehensive and flexible approach to supporting cultural initiatives in their live and online developments. This approach, already implemented by foundations and cultural institutions across Italy and Europe, can be effective when: (a) acknowledges and compensates with core funding strategies aiming at recognizing the cultural work in the preparation of these efforts generally not paid or significantly underpaid; (b) incorporates comprehensive monitoring process of these initiatives on cultural organisations and professionals

through each stage; (c) a holistic strategy aligns organisational changes with broader cultural impacts allowing for a sustainable approach to both live and online developments.

C - The challenges of pluralistic democracies

Throughout our journey, a resounding theme has been the call for systematic change, closely tied to the current threats facing pluralist democracy - a space where diverse voices, dissent, and shared growth contribute to the public good and to the building of a shared public domain. It is therefore urgent for the cultural sector to strengthen its awareness as both a creative space that produces symbols and meanings, and as a laboratory for fostering pluralist narratives. This means treating today’s challenges as genuine missions, not merely as funding criteria. Achieving systemic change requires robust cooperation and collaboration across local, national, and international levels, fostering diverse participation and trust-based relationships. It also involves sustainable economic strategies and a commitment to diversity at every level: from organisational scale and institution type to gender and geography. The following proposed approaches aim to address these core themes:

C1 - Fair conditions is the driver for public recognition

The value of culture will never be fully recognized until working conditions ensure adequate protections and fair compensation, addressing inequalities rooted in position, gender, and privileges. Providing fair conditions, acknowledging cultural skills and competencies, and advocating for equitable treatment are essential for art and creativity to gain relevance in society and contribute meaningfully to public discourse. It is therefore crucial that public and private institutions act for guaranteeing sustainable working conditions, both in human and financial terms; to monitor aspects like salaries, work conditions, and well-being; and to compare national contexts, aligning with recent advancements in cultural labor at European and international levels and adapting them accordingly.

C2 - Diverse representation

Ensure diverse representation in decision-making bodies, cultural institutions and on stage. Funding panels, advisory boards, and leadership positions should include voices from local communities and multiple generations, as well as individuals who bring diverse gender, cultural, political, social, and geographical perspectives. This approach not only enriches decision-making but also promotes fair pluralistic narratives within cultural productions.

C3 - Building capacities and changes through relations and intergenerational dialogue

Recognizing the crucial role of a ‘human-centred approach’ and the key function of social interactions in navigating the current landscape, innovative proposals have to incorporate training formats, structured peer exchanges, and capacity-building strategies to empower artists, cultural professionals and funders towards pivotal transitions such as environmental, technological, and social changes. In this peer-to-peer interaction, intergenerational dialogue must be re-designed to break barriers and competition schemes, enlightening the vital role of legacy while embracing fresh perspectives.

C4 - Cultural mobility and international solidarity

Cultural mobility is a right. Supporting, protecting, and systematically funding ongoing mobility experiences and collaborations among cultural entities of various sizes and geographical locations broadens knowledge and helps participants move beyond self-referential cultural approaches. This can be realised by developing residency programs for artists and professionals from diverse parts of the world, with particular attention to those from conflict zones or marginalised areas. These programs should encourage interaction and mutual learning, creating spaces where cultural diversity can meet and engage in dialogue valorising the inner characteristics of the cultural Global South landscapes. To this end, we propose to support cultural players with

public and private funding to cover fee, travel and accommodation costs, enabling artists to work in “uncomfortable” or high-risk areas and vice versa. Such support would not only enrich individual experiences but also help build networks of international solidarity.

C5 - Address sensitive topics

Encourage cultural institutions to host events and workshops that address sensitive topics such as war, migration, and social injustices, creating a safe space for open dialogue and expression. To support this, training programs can be developed to help professionals facilitate conflict management and foster intercultural and intergenerational dialogues. Shared narratives can promote greater empathy and understanding among diverse communities internationally.

C6 - A just transition

In today’s context, it is essential to address environmental sustainability with a holistic, integrated, and intersectional approach, positioning a just transition as a foundational pillar of cultural policies.

The green transition in the cultural sector must be tailored according to its specificities, and especially considering the diversity and richness of the various local contexts that creative organisations can help to nurture and grow. Green criteria cannot be imposed from the top down; instead, targets and strategies should be determined by each organisation, promoting peer-to-peer evaluation and international exchange.

To achieve this, a common understanding of terminology, impacts, and tools is essential. This is an area of intervention for public and private funders, who have to offer capacity-building initiatives, foster national discussions and, for both public institutions and cultural players for animating shared arenas of analysis and elaboration .

Attention to climate justice is an imperative, as vulnerable communities are often the hardest hit by climate change and environmental injustices.

It is well-documented that climate change is deeply interlinked with all forms of social inequality. Investing in research projects that explore the intersections of culture, environment, and social justice is crucial, enabling the promotion of innovative practices that can be adapted and replicated across diverse contexts.

C7 - IDEA

Finally, the connection between sustainability and care underscores the urgency of decision-making processes grounded in the principles of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA). These principles, which form the very foundation of a pluralist democracy, must be at the core of every cultural organisation and institution. Cultural institutions can incorporate IDEA principles into their governance and programming, thereby helping to build a more just, sustainable society that is prepared to tackle the global challenges threatening both our environment and the foundations of democratic coexistence.

Final thoughts

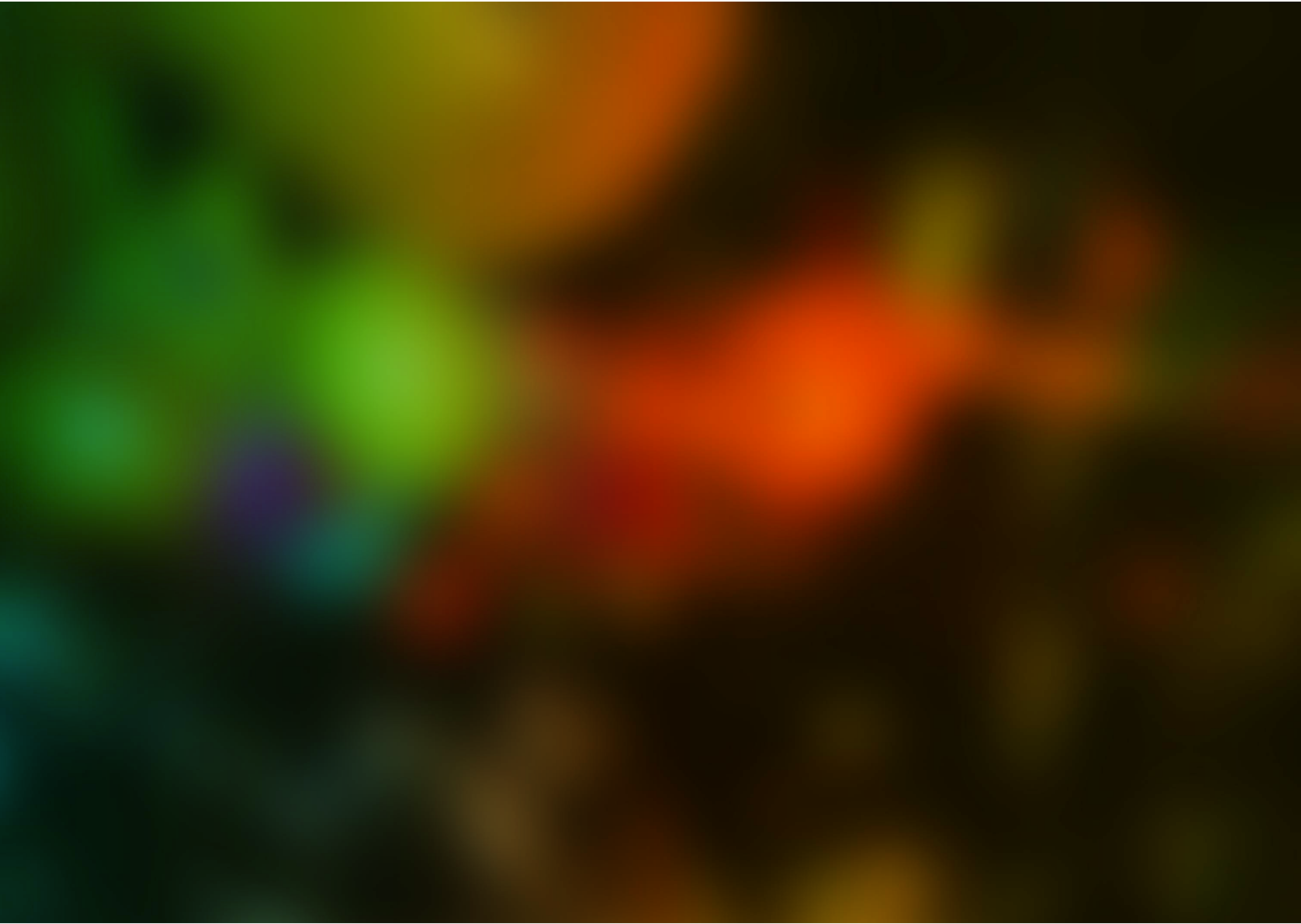
...We need bread but also roses

Cultural Policy Pathways, designed to provide recommendations for the cultural policy realm, does not aim to be an exhaustive analysis of an era that still requires deeper exploration to fully understand its complexities. Instead, inspired by the experiments and strategies developed to navigate the so-called “new normal,” it seeks to outline possible trajectories toward a more sustainable and equitable future. Through the contributions of key cultural players at the forefront of change, this work navigate a historical moment marked by unprecedented conflicts, ignored genocides, persistent inequalities, resurgent nationalisms, and entrenched power asymmetries. These profound disruptions have compelled us to reflect on the role of cultural narratives in supporting genuinely pluralistic democracies.

Today, we face a reality overshadowed by social disillusionment, collective anxieties, and existential disorientation—a kind of societal burnout that challenges our daily interpretations of the world. In response, we must reimagine cultural policies as shared and transformative. As highlighted by the voices in this handbook, transformative policies are both utopian and programmatic. They do not merely react to change; they interpret and shape it. Such policies demand critical spaces for dialogue where dissent can be expressed, new pathways can be explored, and bold cultural initiatives can take root. Like the authors of this handbook, we believe that nurturing small, critical arenas of discourse and practice can serve as a catalyst for change, allowing us to build networks, locally and globally, to decipher evolving social and political temperatures and propose informed practices. However, for policies to be truly transformative, it is crucial to move beyond the rhetoric of resilience and flexibility—concepts often championed as solutions but frequently co-opted by neoliberal logic. This appropriation shifts the burden of change onto individuals while absolving institutions of their responsibilities. Instead, this work underscores the urgency of a

new paradigm, one that embraces collective responsibility and reimagines institutions—across their many forms—as visionary entities capable of crafting and sustaining programs rooted in social justice and human rights.

To conclude, *Cultural Policy Pathways* serves as a call to action, urging the recognition of cultural policymaking as an essential, dynamic political instrument capable of fostering deeply pluralistic change. It advocates for experimental models born from bottom-up experimentation and vibrant collaboration among cultural ecosystem actors—policymakers, artists, and citizens alike. Through *Cultural Policy Pathways* we aspire to present a fresh perspective, which is vital for the ongoing evolution of the cultural sector and policymaking. Ultimately, this vision aspires to build a future where cultural expressions thrive as a cornerstone of pluralistic societies, driven by courage, radical imagination, and an unwavering commitment to equity and justice.



Afterword

Valentina Montalto, Elena Polivtseva
Culture Policy Room

This book comes at a timely moment, two years after the end of a major pandemic that profoundly questioned how we live, work, and travel as a globally interconnected community. We can reasonably build on an experience that feels as though it happened ages ago, but in reality, is still recent, and from which we retain vivid memories. Moreover, the recent European elections offer a crucial opportunity to introduce changes based on the evidence collected over the past few years. There is a need for both self-reflection and sense-making to understand the ‘untold (but widely known) inequalities and injustices’ that the pandemic unveiled. More importantly, we must consider what to carry forward in building a ‘new normal’.

Today, there is a general sense of being at a crossroads - a moment of choice, a ‘now or never’ situation in global policy discourse. “The world is at a crossroads”, declares the homepage of the United Nations’ Pact for the Future. The 2024-2029 programme of Commission President Ursula von der Leyen is similarly driven by a sense of urgency and the pressure to make the right decisions. The title of the introductory section of her political guidelines is Europe’s Choice, highlighting four areas where Europe ‘faces a clear choice’. The recent report on European competitiveness by Mario Draghi, too, dedicates 400 pages to signalling the urgent need for a radical shift in the Union’s economic policy.

So, cultural policy too stands at a crossroads. Debates around cultural policy closely follow broader global trends, leaving us with perplexing questions: Should we double down on promoting culture as an economic industry to ensure it is not excluded from major policies and investment programmes? Should we recognise culture as essential to wellbeing, or should we remain cautious of further instrumentalizing cultural policies - or perhaps strike a balance between the two? Should we envision a future where both AI and human art coexist, hoping that human creativity will endure, or should we accept that creative labour may

be swept away like many other jobs that have disappeared under the pressures of the digital revolution over the past century? Even though cultural policy is inherently sensitive to broader social dynamics, it may appear that insufficient attention is being paid to the dilemmas specific to the cultural sector itself. Could it be that the cultural policy pathways pursued today are not addressing the most critical issues the cultural sector is actually facing? Instrumentalised, misunderstood, and undervalued, culture has lost its way amid numerous pathways imposed from outside forces - political winds, economic shocks, social antagonism, and more.

This book is a bold attempt to seize the opportunity to shape cultural policies that address the actual needs of artists and cultural producers. It ultimately seeks to move beyond eye-catching and oversimplified narratives about the contribution of the cultural sectors to our economy and society. Care, fair conditions, and environmental sustainability are the most prominent fil rouge running through this handbook, guiding the development of future, human-centred cultural policies - an approach that could help address the rising social discontent affecting democratic systems worldwide. The book conveys the sense of the emerging 'new' normal, yet the issues at hand are familiar and long-standing. The challenge today is to go deeper in understanding them and piece together a truly relevant puzzle of a contemporary cultural policy fit for our times. For this, we need to address some key questions. To what extent do we truly understand the negative, large-scale implications of social discontent? Are we prepared to recognise access to culture as a fundamental right, rather than a mere 'nice-to-have', and make it the core around which fairer, more inclusive cultural policies are built? Which cultural stakeholders would we need to engage? Who among them genuinely attends to the needs of cultural professionals and local communities, and who does not? Finally, can cultural policies pioneer new pathways and processes in policy-making at all levels of government - local, regional, and European?

Have we wasted the crisis, as many are wondering these days? Not yet. We have reached the point where it is time to consolidate our own worth and value, and to be clear about the true power of the arts and culture - to unite, to question, to surprise, to heal, and to lead. The cultural sector must continue guiding the essential conversation about who we are as a society, as it has done for centuries. We must not abandon culture at a crossroads where it does not belong. That is why we believe in the power of vigilance, ideas, and an honest, forward-looking approach to cultural policy. Everyone in the sector must equip themselves with knowledge and reclaim their agency. This is why the Culture Policy Room places evidence-based policymaking at the core of its thinking and welcomes initiatives like this book, which embraces the same approach.

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Fanny Bouquerel, PhD, is a freelance adviser, part-time lecturer, and researcher at the European Studies Institute, University Paris 8. She has been working for public entities at the European, national and regional levels as well as for cultural organisations and companies based in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. Since 2020, she has been in charge of the Roberto Cimetta Fund’s development, promoting the mobility of artists and cultural operators in the Mediterranean.

Cristina Carlini is a performing arts project manager and lecturer, specialised in innovation of processes and services for networking and international cooperation. Co-founder of Liv•in•g, she was project manager of IETM Spring Plenary Meeting Bergamo 2015 and member of the network’s Advisory Committee for several years; as project manager and freelance consultant, she managed international projects for Marche Teatro and Emilia Romagna Teatro. She is also engaged in cultural-regeneration and development of cultural projects for Municipalities and other public entities.

Giuliana Ciano, PhD, is a researcher, cultural manager and lecturer with over 20 years of experience in performing arts, cultural cooperation, and cultural policy at European level. She has developed and curated multi-stakeholder cultural projects, including the European project Be SpectACTive (2014–2022), recognized for advancing cultural democracy within the Creative Europe program. Co-founder of Liv•in•g, she is a

member of the Culture Commons Quest Office (University of Antwerp), the board of On The Move, and the Reviewers Board of the ENCATEC Journal of Cultural Management and Policy. She publishes in academic and popular journals on cultural activism, participatory practices, political emotions and cultural policy.

Eleonora De Caroli earned her PhD in Philosophy from Sapienza University of Rome in 2021. From 2014 to 2020, she was the project manager for the Summer School of Italian Language and Culture at Sapienza. Her role involved promoting the dissemination of Italian linguistic and cultural heritage, as well as internationalising teaching in the humanities. In 2017, she began working with Liv•in•g, where she supervises and coordinates the advancement of multiple projects and actively participates in international projects and research.

Lorna Duguid is currently Multi-Artform Manager for Creative Scotland. She is the Creative Scotland programme lead for the Scottish Government’s Festivals Expo fund and for the Platforms for Creative Excellence Fund, which supports Edinburgh’s Festivals. She's part of the team delivering the Creative Scotland Touring Fund for Theatre and Dance. Before Creative Scotland, she worked for over 25 years in a variety of roles and contexts, from building-based companies to national and international touring.

Mey El Borni is a cultural operator in the performing arts sector dedicating her career to fostering artistic expression. From 2018 to 2023, she was the deputy director of the Al Badil Association. In 2022 and 2023, she played a pivotal role as an artistic advisor for the National Festival ‘Carthage Dance Days’. Currently, she serves as a program manager for an organisation dedicated to the Tunisian documentary film industry, contributing significantly to the vibrant cultural landscape of Tunisia.

Carlotta Garlanda is a highly experienced project manager and lecturer in the cultural sector with over 20 years of expertise. She held positions on the boards of Teatro di Roma and the Smart It cooperative and collaborated with various organisations, including the Ministry of Culture, as a project designer and manager for international projects. Currently, she is co-founder of Liv•in•g, and also acting as the general manager for the Italian contemporary dance company mk. Additionally, she works as a freelance consultant specialising in strategic management and project design.

Marie Le Sourd is since 2012 the Secretary General of On the Move, the international cultural mobility information network. Prior to this position, Marie Le Sourd worked in Singapore for the Asia-Europe Foundation (Cultural Department) from 1999 to 2006 and directed the French Cultural Centre in Yogyakarta-Indonesia from 2006 to 2011.

Sara Paolella is 24 years old and is a graduate in Digital Humanities. Enamored with the world around her, she seeks out stories to write about it and to convey its essence. She is the editor-in-chief for the culture section of Scomodo and has contributed to various online publications.

Giulio Stumpo deals with analysis, economic evaluation, planning and management in the field of Culture and Creative Industries, research, consultancy and training on the economy and management of cultural heritage and activities for Italian and international public and private bodies and institutions. He teaches Finance Science at the Guardia di Finanza Inspectors and Superintendents School in L'Aquila. He is a founding partner of Liv•in•g, president of ACTA association of freelancers and partner of Banca Popolare Etica for which he works as a social evaluator.

Dea Vidović is a researcher at the Institute for Development and International Relations in Zagreb, Croatia. Previously, she served as the Director of Kultura Nova Foundation, a public foundation dedicated to civil society organizations in contemporary arts and culture in Croatia. She has been professionally engaged in culture & cultural policy, civil society, and philanthropy for over twenty years and has worked as a manager, researcher, trainer, editor, and journalist. She was Chair of Philea Arts & Culture Thematic Network, Vice-Chair of the ENCATC Board, and Board member of the İzmir Mediterranean Academy.

Liv•in•g is an Italian social enterprise committed to promoting fair growth in cultural cooperation and internationalisation. It serves both established and independent cultural and creative organisations, as well as public and private institutions, nationally and internationally. Liv•in•g is founded by a passionate group of professionals Cristina Carlini, Cristina Cazzola, Giuliana Ciancio, Carlotta Garlanda, Giulio Stumpo with the valuable collaboration of Eleonora De Caroli. Since 2018 it offers creative and strategic planning through international networking and matching, tailor-made training, mentoring, consultancy and research to manage cultural projects of different scales, using "learning by doing" methodologies. Known for its active international engagement, Liv•in•g is a member of several prestigious networks, including Culture Action Europe, IETM International network for contemporary performing arts and On the Move.

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CREDITS

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Edited by **Giuliana Ciano**

in collaboration with **Cristina Carlini** and **Eleonora De Caroli**

Liv.in.g. contributors

Giuliana Ciano, Cristina Carlini, Eleonora De Caroli, Carlotta Garlanda,
Giulio Stumpo

External contributors

Fanny Bouquerel, Roberto Cimetta Fund

Milena Dragičević Šešić, *University of Arts in Belgrade*

Lorna Duguid, *Creative Scotland*

Mey El Borni, *Al Badil* association

Marie Le Sourd, *On the Move*

Valentina Montalto, Elena Polivtseva, *Culture Policy Room*

Sara Paoletta, *Scomodo*

Dea Vidović, former *Kultura Nova* Foundation

Book design

Leonardo Mazzi, *neo-studio.it*

Communication and diffusion

Caterina Giannottu, *Liv•in•g*Elisabetta Mariani, *Liv•in•g*

Sirio Schiano lo Moriello, *Art Cluster Media*

Marco Enrico Giacomelli, *Art Cluster Media*

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