

2021 ENCATC Digital Congress

CONCEPT NOTE

Artists in the spotlight! In search of new agendas for education and research in the cultural management and policy field

There is no question the COVID-19 crisis has severely impacted cultural and creative sectors (CCS) throughout the different waves Europe and the world have experienced to date. While different episodes in these recent developments have brought about different consequences – cf. Voldere et al., 2021 for the specific impact of great lockdown and post-lockdown measures on CCS –, the whole crisis has brought (back) to the fore serious challenges for the CCS, some of which are new, but most of which have been only emphasized by the current crisis (Comunian & England, 2020). Among the latter, the debates about the role and status of the artist are all but new – see, for instance, European Parliament, 2019, or UNESCO, 2019 – and yet it surely demands a renewed look in front of the current scenario(s).

Artists are at the core of the CCS – “without artists there is no art, and no arts industry” (Bower, 2020) – and the most important partners to other professionals and stakeholders, in and beyond the CCS. In accordance to UNESCO (1980), “Artist’ is taken to mean any person who creates or gives creative expression to, or recreates works of art, who considers his artistic creation to be an essential part of his life, who contributes in this way to the development of art and culture (...)”. This definition reinforces the placement of the artist at the very core of the CCS.

Artists’ work is unique in its essence, and so are the challenges they face in the so-called “new normal” ahead for the sector. Furthermore, the effects of COVID-19 crisis on the artists have an impact at the institutional and organisational levels too. By way of example, the (post-)lockdown measures forced artists to learn and adapt, mostly to the digital environment. But this entailed a challenge for cultural managers too, who were forced to learn how to mediate between artists and audiences in this new context. Focusing on artists does not mean to exclude other elements and actors of the wider cultural and creative ecosystem, but aims to put the spotlight on its core: the point where the creative process takes place.

Zooming into artists, their needs and strategies seems not only a timely discussion, but also a much needed one, insofar tackling the issue of the situation of artists “would not only help to establish minimum standards and requirements [...] but also address structural fragilities and inequities that were reinforced by the COVID-19 crisis”, which would in turn “support the long-term sustainability of the (...) CSS”, as highlighted in a just released report by the CULT Committee of the EP on “The Situation of Artists and Cultural Workers and the post-COVID Cultural Recovery in the European Union” (Dâmaso, 2021).

In the research commissioned by the European Parliament’s CULT Committee on “Cultural and creative sectors in post-COVID-19 Europe”, it is argued that “[t]he CCS are an integral part of the EU’s way out of the crisis”, and authors add: “if built on more sustainable systems” (De Voldere et al., 2021). Along these lines, it is clear by now that – the same as the world will not necessarily turn into a better place just because of this crisis – CCS playing a key role for recovery is not something that will just happen organically. Real commitment is required at the sector and policy level. Being artists at the core of CCS and a potential conveyor of creative innovation in the form of spillover effects into other sectors, this topic deserves careful attention. Their role might be essential to go beyond rhetoric and wishful thinking, as well as to put culture and creativity at the centre of the transition out of the crisis.

In accordance with the above, aesthetics – as inherent to artists’ work – and a wide concept of sustainability – including the green aspect but also the circular economy and the ethical dimension – are two pillars of the New European Bauhaus (European Union, 2021), and key aspects of our conversation, which will be tackled through different questions and formats.

As a network of cultural management and policy educators and researchers, and acknowledging the work of artists as the core element in the sector, with its 2021 Digital Congress ENCATC aims to provide a space for **reflection on the implications for cultural management and policy education and research of the situation of artists with regard to the current, multi-dimensional crisis, and before the scenario(s) ahead**, considering not only the health crisis, but also other dimensions of the current context, such as climate change, societal changes, etc. A comprehensive view on the issue is proposed, which considers not only the status of the artist in terms of professionalization, standards, etc., but also encourages an examination of the roles assigned to artists in society and the territory in the forthcoming scenarios.

Congress sub-events will cover the different angles described below. This applies also to the Education and Research Session (E&RS), for which proposals shall be welcome that provide evidence or new scientific developments with regard to those same angles. Furthermore, this topic particularly invites reflections from the field, and by artists and creative people themselves.

Questions or tracks

How can artists contribute to the way out of the current, multi-dimensional crisis at a *societal level, beyond the CCS?*

A report published in January 2021 advocates for the “use [of] the CCIs – and the multiplied power of their millions of individual and collective talents – as a major accelerator of social, societal and environmental transitions in Europe” (EY, 2021). This track aims to explore how artists can be agents of cross-sectoral innovation, which might be key in the process of recovery and transition into new scenarios. Therefore, this track suggests looking beyond the CCS and examine the role of artists in recovery for the wider society, as well as the role of cultural managers and policymakers to facilitate these processes, and the implications this may have at an educational level.

What is the role of artists and other cultural professionals in applying *sustainability values* in the CCS?

Linked to the previous track, we dive into the role of cultural professionals, managers and producers in applying in practice the sustainability values (not limited only to climate change issues or SDG topics, but also including other ethical dimensions, as well as regarding circular economy) in the work with artists and with cultural organisations that employ artists at their very centre.

How should *policy* echo the challenges faced by artists in the new scenario(s) and help them tackle them?

The need for a new agenda for cultural policy has been brought to the table since almost the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak (Bonet, 2020). A reflection on what has been done at a policy level to support artists and reframe their working conditions and social security in the current context is proposed in this track, which would also welcome policy recommendations for the shaping of a new agenda for cultural policy.

What role should artists play in the *new agenda for research and education* in cultural management and policy before foreseeable scenarios?

Some pandemic conjunctural works have stressed how education can contribute a more sustainable and democratic post-pandemic future (Council of Europe, 2021). In this track we are interested in learning from experience and reflecting on how a new agenda for research and education in cultural management and policy could look like in the new scenario(s), as well as on what the role of the artist could be in this new agenda.

How is the viewpoint of the artist integrated in the responses for and from the CCS to the current situation?

In the above-mentioned research commissioned by the EP, it is noted that “the crisis has highlighted the very vulnerable position of many non-standard workers in the CCS, such as artists, freelancers or temporary workers” (De Voldere et al., 2021). It is not only important to give a response to this situation that goes beyond to emergency measures, but also to include the viewpoint of the artist in these debates. This track focuses on artists’ needs and demands, acknowledging how the sector as a whole reacts and is impacted by artists’ vulnerable positions.

What future for old and newly developed [digital] formats, organisational and business models?

Artists and the wider CCS have implemented from major adaptation to cope with the current crisis, in terms of formats – at the level of artistic production and delivery, with performing arts and festivals faced with the worst version of the pandemic effect – , but also in terms of organisational and business models. It would be interesting to explore what will remain of the changes introduced, and how this may impact cultural management and policy education programmes.

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