

SPRING 2021

Arts and culture in Europe: relaunching economies, galvanizing values

EVENT REPORT



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Saving and rebuilding Europe's arts and culture for the 21st century

One year into the COVID-19 pandemic and creatives across Europe face a bleak future. Most cinemas, theatres, music halls and art galleries have been shuttered for months. No one knows when the curtain will rise again for musicians and performers or when audiences can safely regather. For the nine million Europeans employed in the cultural and creative industry, endless national lockdowns bring financial pain and mental anxiety.

The European Young Leaders (EYL) Working Group on Arts and Culture was established to share and brainstorm ideas for collaborating on pan-European projects related to arts and culture, drawing on the wide range of artists, musicians, writers and cultural practitioners in the EYL network.

The Working Group on Arts and Culture met online for the first time on 24 February 2021 and welcomed European Commission officials and members of the EYL network. Against the background of a devastating pandemic, their focus was on identifying practical actions to financially preserve Europe's creative sectors while boosting EU-wide cultural exchanges.

"Art and culture bring us together in Europe, but many citizens are turning their backs on them or simply lack access to them", opened **Nathalie Furrer**, Friends of Europe's Director of Programmes and Operations. She noted there can be no recovery or future in Europe without art and culture. So how do we ensure both feature more prominently in our lives and economy?

Mitigating COVID-19's impact

"We've got a very diverse group with us today, including musicians, fashion designers, writers, visual artists and filmmakers", said **Mary Fitzgerald**, a Euro-Mediterranean specialist and EYL alumna who moderated the debate. She added that the idea of the EYL Working Group was to find ways to collaborate across Europe on the arts and culture, including the proposal of new ideas and concrete projects.

Those goals are essential now, as the EU-27's cultural and creative economy has lost almost a third of its revenues due to COVID-19. The worst effects are felt in the performing arts and music, where turnover is down 90% and 76% respectively compared to 2019, followed by visual arts with losses of between 20% and 40%. The pandemic crisis and the drop in investment in the arts and culture sector are expected to have a negative impact for years to come.

“Arts and culture as “powerful tools to consolidate a sense of European identity”

Themis Christophidou, European Commission Director-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (EAC)

In the event's scene-setting speech, **Themis Christophidou**, European Commission Director-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (EAC), expressed delight that this EYL Working Group considers the arts and culture as "powerful tools to consolidate a sense of European identity".

Christophidou said she shared the group's concern about the pandemic's profound and terrible effects: "Artists lacking socio-economic advantages and access to opportunities will be the most greatly affected." Hence the European Commission's efforts last year to give some relief to the cultural and creative sectors, although of course much must also come from the member states.

Stepping up EU-wide support

EU support has come in the form of faster funding for the creative sector and reprogramming of the **Music Moves Europe** initiative, plus the introduction of online exchange platforms for member states and stakeholders. For instance, the **Creatives Unite** shared space now boasts 26,000 users. The Commission also launched social media campaigns promoting creativity and encouraging local tourism in the summer of 2020.

Looking ahead, Christophidou said the Commission plans to bolster the cultural and creative sector and safeguard pluralism, with a focus on cultural policy and increased funding. The Creative Europe programme will have a dedicated budget of €2.4bn over the next seven years (see Annex A). "A remarkable increase compared to the previous programme, demonstrating a strong political will to support the cultural sector and Europe's cultural and linguistic diversity," she added.

The **Erasmus+** programme is also being harnessed to help culture. According to Christophidou, "in mid-pandemic last year, we redirected €100mn of Erasmus funds to projects forging links between education, youth and creativity. It's as much about boosting European identity as increasing young people's chance on the job market."

Creative Europe is now entering its second-generation and will soon be adopted for 2021-2027, noted **Barbara Gessler**, Head of Unit for Creative Europe at the European Commission Directorate General for Education, Youth Sport and Culture (EAC). She highlighted the programme's main objectives of promoting and safeguarding cultural and linguistic diversity in Europe, while safeguarding the cultural sector's competitiveness in a global environment. This is especially important in a world where global digital channels such as Netflix level out culture and may out-compete the distribution of Europe's many great national and regional film productions.

"When COVID-19 hit, there was a trend for EU member states to return to more national and regional navel-gazing because they wanted to support their suffering cultural sectors, as opposed to cross-border and transnational sectors," said Gessler. However, she is confident that the new and higher budget for the Creative Europe programme – although still relatively small given the scale of the pandemic challenge – underlines a determination to continue building capacity across borders. "It shows solidarity in Europe, through partnership between state-funded institutions and private bodies."

New European Bauhaus

One European Commission initiative above all gathered much attention; launched in January, the New European Bauhaus aims to link science, architecture and environment to arts and culture. But is it necessary to look back in order to look forward?

Christophidou asserted that: “This initiative is a driving force to bring the European Green Deal to life by making the comfort and attractiveness of sustainable living tangible. But it needs the voices, input and ideas of the cultural and creative sectors.” She called for networks like this EYL Working Group to explore what New European Bauhaus can bring, where it should focus its attention and how the role of culture in Europe can be further augmented.

“The New European Bauhaus is about designing a society and how we want to live together. It will help the participatory process, a highly relevant theme for the cultural sector

Barbara Gessler, Head of Unit for Creative Europe at the European Commission Directorate General for Education, Youth Sport and Culture (EAC)

Gessler fully agreed with her Commission colleague, before adding: “The New European Bauhaus is about designing a society and how we want to live together. It will help the participatory process, a highly relevant theme for the cultural sector.”

Nobody left behind

Much of the debate centred on diversity and inclusion. These are a core part of the work of public speaker, mentor, diversity and inclusion consultant, **Kamilla Sultanova**, based in Finland: “Artists can see deep issues of racism, exclusion and delivering on solving societal challenges.” She believes this EYL Working Group should highlight the value and evidence of artists working collaboratively with one another and institutions. One positive way to help artists and especially under-represented artist groups is to build a digital presence, as she has done on LinkedIn for a theatre group in Helsinki: “It’s about translating artistic competences into a business environment and getting more gigs.”

“Artists can see deep issues of racism, exclusion and delivering on solving societal challenges

Kamilla Sultanova, Public Speaker, Diversity and Inclusion Expert, ConnectUz, Finland

“Diversity is a very important topic in classical music”, said **Alexandra Dariescu**, a UK-based award-winning concert pianist, producer of ‘The Nutcracker and I’ and creative entrepreneur. She remarked that only 5.3% of scheduled concerts worldwide include works by women composers and very few have women conductors or soloists. Headline artists at classical concerts and festivals – the composers, conductors or soloists who are visible to the public – also tend to be mainly male and white. For Dariescu, that’s because promoters take a narrow-minded view on what will sell at the box office.

“ We need a more gender-balanced approach to address the inequalities in our cultural organisations and in our society. Change must start at the funding level, with public money being used more consistently to close the inequality gap instead of simply widening it

Alexandra Dariescu, Award-winning concert pianist, producer of “The Nutcracker and I” and creative entrepreneur, Classical music, United Kingdom

“We need a more gender-balanced approach to address the inequalities in our cultural organisations and in our society. Change must start at the funding level, with public money being used more consistently to close the inequality gap instead of simply widening it,” she concluded. **Dariescu** closed the State of Europe 2020 - the festival of politics and ideas - with a powerful musical journey to bring more women and minorities into the classical music world. She played pieces by Lili Boulanger, the first woman composer to win the Prix de Rome, and Florence Price, noted as the first African-American woman to be recognised as a symphonic composer, among others. Watch her performance [here](#).

Inclusiveness has been widely discussed in the European Commission, added Gessler. “We understand it can play an important role for social cohesion, for instance with art helping to build communities. So, our next-generation Creative Europe programme insists that projects must be as inclusive as possible – including for gender equality and non-discrimination.” She added that this new focus neatly matches one of the cross-cutting priorities of this Commission.

Gessler said the Commission will highlight the importance of culture in the overall framework of EU funding: “Our Creative Europe projects will show that culture and creativity are not just nice add-ons, but are an investment in societal development.”

“Europe can’t fill all the funding gaps that exist at other levels, we just don’t have enough money,” admitted Gessler. “Our added value in the Commission and especially Creative Europe is bringing people together from other countries to talk about issues, solutions and expertise.” She noted that this also applies to gender equality, through a Commission experts working group in the cultural and creative sector, plus help for women to engage and “make their voices heard in the creative sector”.

Lastly, Gessler discussed the **Keychange** project, a global network and movement working towards gender equality in the music industry: “By working with promoters, mostly in rock and pop, it aims to get women artists topping the bill and increasing their earnings!” As gender equality is a new focus in the Creative Europe programme, the Commission has also built indicators to measure progress there.

Solving the access and funding conundrums

For some European creatives, access to funding is a real problem. “It’s fine to talk about state-level support for struggling artists and top-down funding, but that misses the bigger picture – the cultural and creative habitat,” said **Una Mullally**, a Dublin-based writer and presenter of the United Ireland podcast. Her speciality is culture in urban areas, and she notes that many creative people gravitate to European cities like Berlin, Barcelona and Lisbon. Unfortunately, many artists there today find themselves faced with a high cost of living and soaring rents due to gentrification.

“It’s fine to talk about state-level support for struggling artists and top-down funding, but that misses the bigger picture – the cultural and creative habitat

Una Mullally, Writer, United Ireland podcast, Ireland

“How do we ensure that edgy and avant-garde artists emerging outside the mainstream get the conditions they need to thrive?” wondered Mullally. She called for a new systems approach to urban areas in Europe, possibly including lower rents and other artist-specific initiatives. “If the cost of living inflates, we must inflate arts funding.”

Could a universal basic income for artists be the answer? **Malcolm Byrne**, Senator of the Seanad Éireann (Irish Senate), said that Ireland is looking at this option. It might emulate a similar French funding scheme to help artists in periods between their concerts or events, with the view of encouraging creativity.

Dariescu, who has seen over 100 of her piano concerts cancelled over the last year, noted that not one venue offered her any compensation fee. She would like to see a European-level initiative for a creative basic income for artists because most EU governments are currently supporting organisations rather than the artists themselves.

She also highlighted the problem of online copyright blockages. When classical musicians like her try to post performances on social media, platforms like YouTube or Facebook typically remove them, even though the composers are often long dead.

Self-help career solutions are well worth exploring, said **Eduardo Portal Martín**, a conductor in England. “The performing arts are in deep trouble now, due to cancelled concerts and reduced income. Audiences are also disconnecting, and one in five music students are ready to abandon their chosen career.” Having lost lots of concerts in his field of work, Portal created a new online platform, Passion for Conducting Academy, which brings him a new income stream and already has over 2,000 conductors worldwide as members.

Byrne also praised arts and culture for helping society get through the pandemic. “We’ve learned their value and we must articulate that. The cultural sector can help us rebuild our economies by pushing a big positive message. So, we must find ways for the state to enhance and support artists’ role.”

Concerns about access to money were also voiced by **Yuriy Vulkovsky**, Country Manager at Reach for Change in Bulgaria. “I’ve evaluated Creative Europe for six years and conclude that many projects who see the programme as a way to fund their basic operations – especially projects in Eastern Europe – never receive funding.” He believes they are excluded from funding because they are judged to be too small, lack operational capacity or fall between the cracks simply because the programme targets ‘European added value’.

Vulkovsky agreed that inclusion needs boosting in arts and culture, but he also believes that having access to culture is more important in some parts of Europe. “It’s shocking to me that some young people have never been to the theatre,” he added.

“ We need to assess how to work more closely with schools and teachers, in order to reach young people and increase access to culture

Anne-Solène Rolland, Head of Museums at the French Ministry of Culture

France has seen improvements in arts and culture education over the last decade, as evidenced by growing numbers of people visiting some cultural institutions. This was the view of **Anne-Solène Rolland**, Head of Museums at the French Ministry of Culture, but she reckoned this education could still be better. “We need to assess how to work more closely with schools and teachers, in order to reach young people and increase access to culture.”

“Even before the pandemic, the Commission had identified accessibility difficulties in the Creative Europe programme,” replied Gessler. This may arise when EU member states cannot provide co-funding. Responding to Mullally’s call for funding help for artists in urban areas, Gessler said that the Commission often talks to the Committee of the Regions and city networks. One focus area now is supporting cities’ night-time economies, especially ‘nightclub culture’ – a niche but vital part of Europe’s creative scene.

The nefarious impact of nationalism

Slovenia’s government has recently replaced the directors of some of the nation’s biggest museums, much like Hungary (in 2015) and Poland. “This is shaping the cultural scene through a more nationalist and populist stance,” said **Jasmina Cibic**, a Slovenian artist and filmmaker based in the UK.

“My country is a petri dish of warning for the rest of Europe about the dangers of nationalism. Everyone understands the importance of art and music, but we can see how quickly they lose symbolic capital as well as the dangers of self-censorship.” She also criticised the Slovenian government for taking artists off the register of self-employed workers in culture.

Taking up the liberty theme, Christophidou remarked how, in line with this Working Group, she worried about the impact of Brexit on European democracy and more

specifically, the cultural sector: “Freedom of expression is the cornerstone aspect of democracy. It enables different views to be held and enriches public debate.” In her view, it’s essential to protect and promote a European society that doesn’t tolerate threats, intimidation or censorship.

Cultivating culture as soft power

The moderator highlighted several key conclusions recently drawn up by the EYL Working Group on Arts and Culture. On the plus side, culture is Europe’s soft power, one of its core industries and a core part of European identity, and artists are natural ambassadors for the ‘good word’ about Europe. On the down side, there is a growing discrepancy in cultural funding within diverse EU countries.

Most encouragingly, the group has identified a message of hope. Given the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be very important to preserve and support the arts for all the above reasons. Fitzgerald noted that these conclusions will feed into the group’s policy briefing for the European Commission next autumn.

Other noteworthy ideas that have emerged from and for the EYL Working Group:

- Look at ways to achieve a culture of ‘Europeanness’ and try to forge European identities in the long term.
- Rethink ways of bridging critical artistic production (e.g. research-based projects, museums, archives) and more community-based projects.
- Encourage cross-sectoral collaboration with artists, theatres, poets in all business and education webinars/sessions.
- Help multicultural artists to break into the national art scene in European member states.
- Approach European arthouse cinema and film screenings as a cultural activity, and not just entertainment.
- Encourage artists not to give away their precious work for free online.

The Working Group will meet three times this year and aims to produce a policy briefing in the autumn of 2021 to be brought to the attention of high-level policymakers at European and national levels. Friends of Europe hopes to hand over the recommendations to EYLs Mariya Gabriel, EU Commissioner for Innovation, Culture, Education and Youth, and Clément Beaune, Europe Minister for France, ahead of France assuming the EU rotating presidency in 2021.

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Annex A - [Creative Europe](#)

Creative Europe is the European Commission's only flagship programme specifically dedicated to support the cultural and creative sectors. It is open to cultural and creative organisations **from EU member states as well as non-EU countries** (a more detailed list of non-EU countries eligible for the programme [here](#), together with the guidelines of each specific call for proposals). In order to access funding for Creative Europe, projects must have a European added value and a particular focus on inclusion and gender equality. Please note that funding opportunities for 2021-2027 are not yet available and upcoming calls for proposals will be published on the European Commission's **[Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal \(F&TP\)](#)**.

With a dedicated budget of €2.2bn – a 57% increase in funding compared to the amount foreseen in the 2014-2020 period – the new 2021-2027 programme will provide funding for 2,500 artists and cultural professionals, 2,000 cinemas, 800 films and 4,500 book translations. Through the continued promotion of heritage, cultural and lingual diversity, the aim is to allow for cross-border circulation, cooperation and social inclusion, while seizing the opportunities of the digital age and globalisation. For the first time, the news media sector will be supported throughout several actions bolstering media literacy, pluralism and media freedom.

How can you apply?

Organisations interested in applying for opportunities can find out more in the individual pages for: **[culture sector opportunities](#)**; **[audiovisual sector opportunities](#)**; and **[the cross-sectoral strand](#)**.

More detailed information on the application process and the results of previous calls are available on the website of the **[Education, Audiovisual, and Culture Executive Agency \(EACEA\)](#)**.

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