
Culture and Social Inclusion: Engendering empowerment through a cross-sectoral and people-centred policy approach.

Social inclusion is not about stigmatising those who need to be included, it is rather about challenging and changing exclusionary perceptions for the benefit of all. Given its unparalleled value, culture can play a crucial role in augmenting wellbeing by breaking down barriers, increasing the sense of belonging, lessening isolation and strengthening social cohesion. Culture, however, is not the remedy for effective social inclusion on its own nor should it be hyper-instrumentalised in this way. Nonetheless, in partnership with other sectors relevant to social welfare, culture can help deliver a robust people-centred policy approach to address the compound demographic challenges, complexities of poverty, inequality and marginalisation that the EU and its Member States are currently facing.

The report of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) working group of Member States' experts on *Fostering the Contribution of Culture to Social Inclusion*, frames the issue of culture and social inclusion by identifying those key challenges Member States perceive as posing the greatest challenge to social inclusion and looking at public policies that encourage and support cultural institutions in working within partnerships with other sectors (healthcare, social care, prison service, etc.)

The report contains recommendations for policy-makers and cultural institutions and brings to attention numerous good practice examples that may serve to better inform policy making.

Starting from the premise that there are significant challenges for the European Union, its value system and its Member States as regards social inclusion and cohesion, rights, diversity and intercultural dialogue, the OMC group of experts mapped the current European context to identify cross-cutting challenges. This was done through the undertaking of a comparative analysis of key horizontal issues, informed by a questionnaire on policy aspects of culture for social inclusion and available Eurostat data. Overall, the analysis highlighted poverty and inequality, migration and polarisation, ageing and health together with disparities between rural and urban contexts as the key challenges to social inclusion in Member States.

People-centred approaches: culture for, with and by people at risk of exclusion

While also bringing benefits in other areas¹, art and culture play a fundamental role in the fight against social exclusion. Though both passive and active involvement work in positive ways on a personal improvement and social integration level, active involvement shows better results². The involvement of individuals and groups in the arts affects the community by creating public good³. Research shows that, on a community level, the arts contribute to a societal development that reduces social inequalities and increases social capital and social cohesion by developing networks and understanding. The OMC group report recognises the role that art and culture play in fostering constructive meaning-making and in fostering the strengthening of competences to represent the diverse remit of cultural identities within national cosmopolitan societies, to improve the personal but also the general situation of people who have to cope with poverty, homelessness or other disadvantages, including self-exclusion. As evidenced also by the results of the questionnaire, sometimes special focus needs to be placed on different groups. With the overarching aim of strengthening the individual, strategies employed to do so can range from empowerment, to tackling attitudes and prejudices in the surrounding society. In this respect, the OMC group chose to look into a people-centred approach of tackling social exclusion through culture for, with and by the people at risk of exclusion themselves, placing the focus on empowerment and the need to combat prejudice and discrimination..

Guidelines

In the context of its evaluation of a people-centred approach to tackling social exclusion through culture for, with and by the people at risk of exclusion themselves, the OMC group has identified a

¹ Matarasso, Francois (1997). *Use or Ornament? The social impact of participation in the arts*. Online: <https://arestlessart.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/1997-use-or-ornament.pdf>

² Bennoune, Karima/United Nations (2018). *Report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights*.

³ Guetzkow, Joshua (2002). *How the Arts Impact Communities: An introduction to the literature on arts impact studies*. Online: <https://www.princeton.edu/~artspol/workpap/WP20%20-%20Guetzkow.pdf>

series of guidelines for policy-makers (at local, national and EU levels) that can contribute to implementing this approach.

In this respect, policy-makers should:

1. acknowledge the right and ensure the possibility for artistic expression for everyone through identifying the barriers that still prevail;
2. promote long-term financing and place more focus on programmes than on projects.

Actors in the cultural sector should:

1. build continuity and possibilities for the target groups to stay linked with art-projects after they are finished;
2. consider mentoring programmes to help networking among artists and employees in cultural institutions from underrepresented groups

Furthermore, the report also identifies a series of recommendations to policy makers at all levels. Amongst others, these include the need to acknowledge the right and ensure the opportunity for artistic expression for everyone by identifying the barriers that still prevail, enhancing cross-sectoral cooperation across different Ministries; promoting financing on a longer term and it also suggests that the possibility of quotas is to be considered in some cases. This may be a way for awarding committees to promote artists from under-represented groups. The report also makes recommendations to cultural institutions, notably in terms of broadening outreach to political and professional actors beyond the field of culture, including at local and regional levels, mentoring programmes, building continuity and possibilities for continued links between target groups and art projects as well as promoting more stable employment.

Best Practice

The report looks at best-practice examples from across Member States across both of these pillars. From broader projects relating to empowerment, such as the Austrian initiative InterACT, which uses

the methods of Forum Theatre, Image Theatre, Legislative Theatre and drama-based research to improve the personal, but also the general situation for people in situations of poverty or unemployment to more specific projects dealing with particular sectors, such as the Romanian MultiArt Festival for prisoners, Dana Cenusă (Free through culture) or the Hijabi Monologen/Hijabi Monologues in the Netherlands, a production of Stage Z by Rajae el Mouhandiz, which premiered in Theater Zuidplein Rotterdam in 2014, where hijab-wearing women shared their stories with the audience. Best-practices from projects relating to combating prejudice and discrimination are also identified, both national programmes, such as the Czech long-term project HateFree Culture which includes not only cooperation with local partners and institutions, but also work with schools, local police forces, etc. in partnership with Czech Television (CT), as well as campaigns run by NGOs such as The Roles We Play: Recognising the Contribution of People in Poverty by NGO ATD Fourth World, which tackles the myths about poverty perpetuated by the media and politicians through the collection of stories and producing exhibitions, plays, movies and a book. In projects that look at facilitated inclusive access to heritage sites through partnership with other sectors, a successful example is the Heritage Malta Student Passport Scheme rolled out by Heritage Malta, the entity responsible for Maltese heritage sites. The passport is given to all students attending primary and secondary schools and is distributed through the school system providing free unlimited access for one student and two accompanying adults to museums and heritage sites. A similar scheme has now been rolled out for people over the age of 60 in partnership with local councils.

The Capital of Culture initiatives can also be instrumental in catalysing inclusive and sustainable initiatives and one pertinent example is from Marseilles ECOC 2013. Hôtel du Nord, offers heritage and hospitality-related services using an innovative model of hospitality, *Fair BnB*, a fairer version of Air BnB. The aim was to create an autonomous and democratic European heritage cooperative based on the principles of the Faro Convention. Hôtel du Nord brings cultural institutions, parks, artists, artisans and local producers together with the active engagement of the local inhabitants. In this way, a more responsible and sustainable form of tourism is achieved.

National strategies

Finland's Percent for Art scheme, used in construction projects, is expanding its model of funding art for art-based well-being services to be a permanent part of social welfare and healthcare structures and the monitoring of well-being. Central in its effort for greater social cohesion is the collaboration of different ministries to fruitfully connect culture with other sectors to make culture and the arts a permanent part of well-being services. The Spanish National Plan of Action for Social Inclusion, created by the Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality, explicitly refers to culture as an element that must be guaranteed to people in vulnerable situations. It also contemplates culture as a tool for social inclusion in vulnerable groups; for example, raising the importance of promoting prisoners' participation in cultural programmes through support of the Third Sector.

The Maltese Government's National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion⁴ (2014-2024) specifically includes culture together with social services, health and environment, income and social benefits, education and employment as the significant dimensions through which to address the challenges of poverty. The strategy targets Malta's population in general and four target populations in particular; children, elderly persons, unemployed people and the working poor. It is supported by an inter-ministerial committee structure to benchmark, monitor and evaluate progress towards poverty reduction and social inclusion. The Ministry for Education and Employment, the Ministry for Health and the Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government, being the key Ministries covering the six dimensions underpinning the vision and strategic direction of the national policy. The cultural sector's contribution here is seen as vital and implemented through the Create 2020 Strategy (2015)⁵. The strategy has implemented numerous policy actions through measures and projects with the aim of promoting inclusion and greater cohesion. These range from wider access initiatives implemented by the heritage Sector, Arts Council Malta funding schemes that specifically support art projects or programmes with vulnerable groups, a creative communities programme, to the opening of a new community-based national museum. The national cultural policy is also currently being updated accordingly.

Conclusion

<https://family.gov.mt/en/Documents/Poverty%20Booklet.pdf>

⁵ https://www.artscouncilmalta.org/files/uploads/misc/English-Create2020_web.pdf

The report significantly brings to the fore that there is an evident need to develop a more clear-cut integrative approach to overall national policies, and highlight the potential of culture for addressing key societal challenges. The overarching goal should be to develop a transversal 'culture for social inclusion' programme that becomes the key reference for all other policy domains. Culture therefore needs to be firmly at the table as an equal partner with the pertinent sectors for a more empowering, people-centered approach to effectively mitigate the challenge of social exclusion.