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The Prague convention 2024:

How to advocate for participatory amateur arts activity

‘Amateur arts can bring together what boundaries divide’

The purpose of this document is to summarise the crucial role, benefits and impacts of amateur arts activity for individuals and for society.

You can use this document to influence relevant stakeholders (e.g. funders, partners, specific art networks) or policy makers (e.g. politicians) in your countries, in order to maintain and develop and support the amateur arts as an integral part of the arts and crafts ecosystem, and of society.

We are suggesting some practical ways in which you can achieve change where needed.

This document can also be used like a checklist, to make sure we are using all the arguments we could be using to advocate for our amateur arts activity.

It is free for anyone to use. Please reference Amateo's Prague convention 2024 where possible. And please don't forget to mention that this publication is supported by Culture Moves Europe, a project funded by the European Union and the Goethe-Institute.

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DEFINITIONS

An amateur artist is someone engaged in creative and artistic activities across various disciplines, such as music, theatre, visual arts (including 3D art and ceramics), dance, photography, film/video, poetry, and writing.

- The defining characteristic of amateur/voluntary art is the **active participation of individuals in the creative process**; they create artworks, craft objects, or perform their art themselves
- **It is not about passive consumption**, such as viewing others' works or listening to performances, but about actively contributing to and shaping the creative process
- Amateur art can range from individual efforts to collaborative group projects, but here we are focusing on **activity creating and sharing the art with others**, without the intention of professional ambitions or commercial goals
- There is a **difference between continuous regular amateur arts activity and project activity** - this paper talks about both types:
 - Activity that is continuous, sustained over a long time, e.g. weekly throughout the year, every year; with groups often existing for decades, and participants staying for years
 - Time-limited projects can get people started into amateur participatory activity; open up opportunities to people who have not had them before; keep people involved for the development opportunities (e.g. festivals, new music, travel abroad etc.)
- **Funding models:**
 - Permanent funding models:
 - all amateur arts activities get an annual contribution, depending on size, e.g. in Fryslân (Netherlands)
 - amateur arts activity is funded by the local authority/town (e.g. Italian wind bands), and in return for money and for a space to rehearse, they perform at civic functions, and during the tourist season, and organise music lessons
 - in the UK, most groups ask for an annual contribution from their participants
 - some groups earn money, e.g. playing or singing and earning a fee, or charging money for their concerts/theatre shows/exhibitions, selling art/recordings etc.
 - the state pays for a development agency (e.g. Croatia) which runs projects, festivals etc., but the groups themselves are funded by local towns, cities
 - the state gives one agency money (e.g. Slovakia, Germany BMCO) and they distribute it to their members who apply for the funding once or every year
 - big national companies (e.g. energy/communication in the Czech Republic) have their own funds for 'partnerships', e.g. environmental partnership

- Permanent funding is often unrestricted - that is, can contribute to core costs of the organisation; it is rare to find, even for professional organisations.
- Project funding is generally conditional/restricted for a specific time-limited activity and purpose, e.g. Amateurmusik Fonds in Germany and can be available from state funds, development agencies, trusts and foundations, businesses, other institutions
- Practising ***amateur arts is as important for individuals and society as practising amateur sports***, but amateur arts are less well supported with money and resources (e.g. sport fields)
- ***Why do people take up amateur arts?***
 - Under-18s; parents decide or are role models; something the young person encounters in educational settings
 - Adults (age 19+); fun, social, personal development including time for themselves; third party/'other' reasons - e.g. fundraising for charity, doing something for their community, personal health and wellbeing, connecting with/preserving their traditions and identity

IN WHAT WAY AMATEUR ARTS ARE IMPORTANT FOR INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY

- Amateur arts are the main way to transmit **intangible cultural heritage** from one generation to another. Intangible cultural heritage has a need to have groups of people undertaking an activity, practising an art or craft, and actively teaching new people
 - Helping to maintain their own heritage and traditions is a major motivation for participants in amateur arts
 - Preserving living heritage connects local communities to the wider world, e.g. through listing on their country's or UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list
- Amateur arts are ***specifically important for children and young people*** in these ways:
 - Improve children's cognitive and social development and other academic achievements
 - It is mainly about enabling **all** young people to take part in amateur arts for the rest of their lives (not just about developing future professionals)
 - Children and young people **also** get the benefits that adults do from taking part in amateur arts, **see the five first bullet points under 'adults'**
- Amateur arts are **important for adults** for all their lives to...
 - Develop their own creativity, taking part in an art or crafts form
 - Make and maintain social connections; reducing loneliness
 - Develop soft skills, e.g. team work, collaborating, communicating, negotiating a common space or goal, innovative thinking and problem-solving skills
 - Build resilience, prevent mental ill-health, give people a sense of purpose
 - Improve mental health and well-being, e.g. stress reduction
 - Prevent certain physical or medical conditions, e.g. reduce risk of dementia
 - Improve physical health and well-being, e.g. dance for Parkinson's; singing for COPD and long Covid; music for dementia sufferers

- Amateur arts are **vital for society**, offering benefits beyond individual creativity and expression
 - They foster **social inclusion and cohesion** by bringing people together, creating connections and relationships, encouraging collaboration across diverse backgrounds (e.g.; people from different socio-economic, cultural or ethnic backgrounds, of different abilities or neurodiversities, genders, generations, LGBTQ+, heterosexual people)
 - The amateur arts can be a **powerful medium to connect or reconnect (voluntarily or forcefully) displaced people with their heritage**
 - Amateur arts contribute to a **sense of pride and belonging within communities**, enhancing the livability of neighbourhoods (including preventing rural depopulation), strengthening residents' emotional ties to their environment, thus playing a **key role in regeneration and place-making**
 - Participating in amateur arts gives everyone **tools to develop creative solutions and visions for the future**
 - Amateur arts can help to ensure that **all cultures and traditions are respected equally in society, and also to foster an understanding and partnerships/ collaborations between different traditions or backgrounds**
 - Cultural vitality not only improves quality of life for residents, it attracts businesses and investment; thriving, creative communities are desirable places to live, work, and grow. Thus, amateur arts are a **powerful force for building stronger, more connected, and more prosperous societies**
 - They **empower participants to have a voice**, and be in charge of their own activity; this often leads to participants' greater involvement as citizens in the life of their communities and national/international democratic processes
- Amateur arts play a significant **economic role**
 - While primarily driven by passion and creativity, amateur artists **generally engage professionals**, such as teachers, mentors or technicians, to enhance their skills or support their artistic endeavours
 - They also **generate economic activity** through the use of venues and spaces for rehearsals, exhibitions and performances, through the purchase of materials, tools and equipment needed for their art
 - **Amateur arts foster a vibrant cultural ecosystem**, attracting audiences and stimulating local economies through events, festivals and workshops
 - **Participants in amateur arts** develop skills which make them **more valuable to employers and the economy, and** also enable them to **achieve higher employment status than non-participants**
- Participatory art contributes to **social change**
 - Participatory art transcends aesthetic expression, fostering openness, dialogue, and collaboration to **address local and global challenges** like climate change, international conflict and inequality, on an interpersonal level
 - Participatory arts can **provide a safe and neutral space for dialogue** between different people
 - By uniting people through shared experiences and promoting hope, resilience, and collective action, it becomes a **powerful catalyst for social and ecological transformation**

PICK AND CHOOSE FROM THIS MENU OF POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Champion better recognition and safeguarding by policy makers, media and general public of amateur arts and their **role in maintaining and transmitting intangible cultural heritage**
- Improve **access for young people to arts participation**
 - Better/more arts education in schools
 - Ensure arts education included in the curriculum
 - Improve connection between arts education in school time/class room; and extracurricular activity outside the school time/class room
 - Include arts education in teacher training for all teachers
 - for primary school teachers to lead arts delivery (e.g. singing, drawing)
 - for secondary school teachers of any specialism as enriching background to support a creative approach to their subject
 - Promote the importance of arts education to school leadership teams
 - Advocate for and facilitate out of school/classroom opportunities for youth arts groups (e.g. spaces, leaders)
 - Provide opportunities for youth arts groups to come together, e.g. festivals or competitions, as something to aspire to, to compare themselves to others, to be inspired by and learn from others
 - Advocate to parents about arts participation (include them as much as/ if possible)
 - Use social media platforms where young people are for marketing and community building, making use of influencers that young people respect
 - Connect them to professional artists that matter to them
 - Advocate for greater use and connection between arts activities and the curriculum
 - Advocate for equal value and recognition of all leisure-time activities and for greater connection and communication between them - e.g. sports and arts
 - Give young people the opportunity to also work across generations (benefits to all)
- To ensure **adults are involved in participatory arts activity**:
 - Improve education (at higher education level/ university/ post-graduate) for professionals to interact with amateur arts and adult amateur arts/crafts participants
 - Professionals are an essential part of amateur arts activity, e.g. as teachers, leaders (e.g. conductors), and so their payment needs to be part of planning and sustaining amateur arts activity, to ensure sustainable fair practice
 - Bridge the gap between ending formal arts education at age 18 and entering amateur arts participation
 - Share information with school leavers about benefits of arts participation for life
 - Signpost where to find such opportunities to be active participants
 - Amateur arts groups need to actively communicate and welcome new participants, inviting new people in

- Promote enhanced mental health and well-being to potential participants, making participation particularly attractive for adults balancing work, family, personal challenges
 - Promote health and well-being benefits to policy makers in charge of health care, using research
 - Give adults extra reasons to become involved, e.g. charity fundraising or doing something for their community or keeping their traditions and heritage alive
 - Give adults a reason to get started, e.g. 'honey projects', projects with a limited time involvement, simple goals, leading potentially to longer involvement
 - Make sure that arts groups reflect the full range of diversity in your country - new people will join something if they can identify with the people already doing the activity
 - Provide opportunities for adult amateur arts groups to come together, e.g. festivals, competitions, exhibitions, showcases (e.g. amateur film festival) - something to aspire to, to compare themselves with others, to be inspired by and learn from others
 - Ensure participatory arts activities are open and adapted to all adults, whatever their age (e.g. older adults voice changes and singing; 'silver ballet', etc.)
- **Use research, data, evidence** to talk to policy makers about participatory amateur arts activity
 - Ask for support for ***better and more research and data*** on this activity
 - See list appended at the end of the document as a starting point
 - **Promote art as a communication tool for policymakers.** Art can make abstract policy goals more tangible and engaging. This helps in conveying urgent messages and encourages broader participation in finding solutions. E.g. policy consultations or decisions could be accompanied by art projects in which citizens participate and learn
 - **Talk to other stakeholders about the mutual benefits of participatory arts activity**, e.g. healthcare professionals, businesses, urban planners, and others, to turn them into partners (from stakeholders to shareholders!)
 - **Create opportunities for amateur arts participants/groups to undertake activity alongside professional groups**, to mutually inspire and connect the arts and crafts ecosystem (e.g. joint music performances; Rhythms Is It! - project involving young people dancing, professional orchestra, professional choreographer)
 - Advocate for the **importance of amateur arts networks - they can support, connect and champion this activity better than individuals/groups on their own**. Examples of networks: Bundesmusikverein Chor und Orchester, Consulta Periferie Milano, Kunstwerk

APPENDIX; RESEARCH AND DATA

Please send contributions, ideally weblinks, to comms@amateo.org

- [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#)
- Guidance notes on how to create an inventory of intangible cultural heritage in your country <https://ich.unesco.org/en/guidance-note-on-inventorying-00966>
- Report from the All Party Parliamentary Group (United Kingdom) on Arts and Health which defines the subject and lists the benefits
https://www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/Publications/Creative_Health_Inquiry_Report_2017_-_Second_Edition.pdf
- This report synthesises the global evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being, with a specific focus on the WHO European Region.
<https://www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/sites/default/files/9789289054553-eng.pdf>
- over 250 research papers and reports from the Social Behavioural Research Group at University College London - <https://sbbresearch.org/research-papers-lib/>
- 2008 report on the amateur arts in England –
<https://culturehive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Our-Creative-Talent.pdf>
- Report on Everyday Creativity for everyone
<https://www.docdroid.net/9HEVtmk/everyday-creativity-pdf>
- The Ecology of Culture
<https://publicartonline.org.uk/downloads/news/AHRC%20Ecology%20of%20Culture.pdf>
- Making Music, Making Communities <https://www.makingmusic.org.uk/sites/making-music.org.uk/files/Documents/Resources/Making%20Music%2C%20Making%20Communities%20-%20overview%20report%20PUB%20Feb%202018.pdf>
- A review of the social impacts of culture and sport https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/416279/A_review_of_the_Social_Impacts_of_Culture_and_Sport.pdf
- The ultimate guide to the reason for engaging with music: Susan Hallam, Evangelos Himonides, The Power of Music
<https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/ob,0292>
- Culture Wellbeing and Health Alliance collects lots of evidence in one place:
<https://www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/resources/research-and-evaluation>
- Making Music's collection of evidence on the impact of music:
<https://www.makingmusic.org.uk/resource/evidence-bank>

Relevant documents:
[Link to Drive Folder](#)

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The European Network for Active Participation in Cultural Activities
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