C/2024/7446

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Council conclusions on improving and fostering access to culture

(C/2024/7446)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

ACKNOWLEDGING

1. That access to culture is a fundamental human right pursuant to Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that everyone has the right freely to participate in cultural life; that the rights related to cultural heritage are inherent in the right to participate in cultural life; and that children have the right to participate fully in cultural and artistic life pursuant to Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;

2. The UN Pact for the Future ([1]), which reaffirms that cultural rights are human rights, and which recognises the role of culture in fostering social cohesion and enabling sustainable development;

3. The need to ensure equal access and participation for all in culture in accordance with Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union and Articles 21 and 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union;

4. The UNESCO MONDIACULT Declaration of 2022, which emphasises the importance of supporting inclusive access to culture and participation in cultural life; the Porto Santo Charter of 2021 ([2]), which advocates for the removal of barriers to cultural access, promoting inclusivity and diversity in cultural participation; the Cáceres Declaration ([3]) of 2023, which states that culture should be considered an essential and global public good and placed at the highest policy level;

5. The right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life, in accordance with Article 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the European Commission's Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030, the special role of the European Disability Card and the Access City Award in facilitating the access of persons with disabilities to benefits and services in the area of culture;

6. The invitation to the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, as set out in the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026 ([4]), to consider proposing an EU strategic framework for culture that will reflect the guiding principles set out in Annex I of the Work Plan and will aim to strategically mainstream the cultural policy perspective and the assets of culture into all relevant EU policies, programmes and initiatives.

7. The growing recognition of the importance of cultural participation for personal health, well-being, territorial and societal cohesion, as well as in strengthening democracy, as emphasised in the priority area of the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023–2026 entitled '*Culture for the people: enhancing cultural participation and the role of culture in society*' and demonstrated by the results of the European Commission's report 'Culture and democracy, the evidence' and the EU-funded project CultureForHealth ([5]);

8. The efforts ([6]) of the European Union and its Member States in recent decades to facilitate access and participation in cultural activities and raise awareness in this regard;

([1]) The UN Pact for the Future was adopted at the United Nations Summit of the Future (New York, 22-23 September 2024).
([2]) The Porto Santo Charter was adopted at the Conference held on 27-28 April 2021 under th**e** Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union.
([3]) Cáceres Declaration by the EU Ministers for Culture on 25-26 September 2023 under the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union.
([4]) Council Resolution 2022/C 466/01.
([5]) https://www.cultureforhealth.eu/.
([6]) These efforts include the EU Access City Award, the European Heritage Label, the Day of European Authors, the Culture Moves Europe initiative, the European Capitals of Culture initiative, EU Cultural Prizes and, more generally, projects funded under the Creative Europe programme and the Horizon Europe programme.

9. The fact that the European Accessibility Act sets accessibility requirements that are relevant to the area of culture; the Directive on the accessibility of public sector bodies' websites and mobile applications; the Directive and the Regulation implementing the Marrakesh Treaty on print access for visually impaired persons; the amendment of the Value Added Tax (VAT) Directive, which allows the same VAT rate to be applied to the supply of e-publications and printed publications, including those loaned by libraries;

10. The recommendation ([7]) of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted in 2022, which emphasises the essential role of public cultural institutions in reaching out to the general public, including young people, and in enhancing cultural participation and cultural activities, regardless of levels of income and education. The recommendation also highlights the need to recognise culture's contribution to a democratic society and the importance of culture, cultural heritage and landscape to the three dimensions of sustainable development goals in terms of the economic, social and environmental development of societies, as well as their essential role in the creative economy and the attractiveness of territories.

RECOGNISING:

11. The intrinsic value of culture as a basis for creativity and self-expression, to support mental health and well-being, and to enhance quality of life. Culture also contributes to local and regional development, innovation, productive entrepreneurship and economic progress by helping people acquire key competences, supporting knowledge-sharing, building self-confidence and empowerment to (re)enter the labour market and equipping people for lifelong learning.

12. The importance of a holistic approach to culture and cultural participation, which aims to incorporate into these concepts the aspect of civic participation. This is key to achieving social objectives such as strengthening social cohesion and democracy;

13. That access to culture can be hindered by various obstacles, including physical and personal financial limitations; psychological obstacles; sensory, cognitive and cultural barriers; all forms of stereotypes and discriminations including gender; technological obstacles; the lack of accessibility in built and virtual environments, information, communication, products and services; as well as the lack of time and interest;

14. That access to culture is strongly related to levels of education, financial opportunities, inclusion, accessibility, geographical circumstances and health conditions, and that attention is needed to overcome these obstacles and reduce social inequalities;

15. The importance of cultural activities based on the needs and interests of regional and local communities;

16. That through the development of inclusive and accessible technologies – while applying the Design for All approach – the acquisition of digital skills and media literacy and the digitisation of cultural heritage play a crucial role in the protection and preservation of – as well as in providing barrier-free, innovative, fast and affordable access to – cultural values, and at the same time encourage people to be creative and innovative (e.g. through social media).

WELCOMES:

17. The support for cultural participation, learning and mobility through various actions in Creative Europe, Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programmes;

18. The European Heritage Hub initiative, which aims to strengthen citizen participation in cultural heritage;

19. The fact that Eurostat has recently updated its cultural statistics on cultural participation;

20. Without pre-empting the post-2030 discussions, the international #culture2030goal campaign, which aims to integrate a specific culture goal into the Sustainable Development Goals in the post-2030 Agenda;

([7]) Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the role of culture, cultural heritage and landscape in helping to address global challenges https://search.coe.int/cm?i=0900001680a67952.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES, AT THE APPROPRIATE LEVELS, TO:

21. Safeguard and promote free, equal access to culture at all levels and without unjustified interference or obstruction – while respecting cultural diversity, multilingualism and intellectual property rights, for instance through exchange and mobility programmes, initiatives – to increase media literacy and reinforcing the links between culture, innovation and sustainability;

22. Continue providing opportunities for participation in cultural activities, also by digital means, that expand the reach of new audiences, including young people and, in a broad sense, persons facing barriers to access culture, thus creating inclusion and a sense of belonging in society;

23. Maintain the dialogue with cultural and creative sectors (CCS) on the importance of audience development and outreach, well considered and appropriate opening hours for cultural institutions and the dates of cultural events that take into account the needs of audiences;

24. Consider incorporating cultural activities and cultural heritage in the delivery and implementation of other policy agendas, for example in the fields of regional and local development, innovation, urban regeneration, community integration, health, well-being and social care, amongst other approaches by harnessing the potential of culture in relation to mental health, and promoting, for instance, cultural prescribing projects;

25. Consider collaborating with other sectors in order to integrate aspects of cultural participation into their political decision-making, strategy-making and funding schemes outside of cultural policy, and consider further developing measures that focus on the meaningful and equal participation of all persons facing barriers to access culture;

26. Consider taking appropriate measures in the cultural field to eliminate inequalities in the accessibility of culture, cultural sites and monuments with special regard to persons with disabilities and special needs, for instance through cultural mediators;

27. Consider supporting cultural institutions providing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, including artists, and consider promoting their visibility to reduce the gap in the employment of persons with and without disabilities;

28. Promote the social integration of all persons facing barriers in terms of accessing culture by considering to develop policy frameworks and short- and long-term strategies and to create the necessary conditions via measures and incentives that remove administrative, financial, linguistic, socio-economic and other barriers to participation;

29. Consider, where relevant, the development of informed and well-planned access strategies to cultural heritage sites and monuments, including management solutions that balance improved accessibility for all visitors with respect for the unique character, integrity and authenticity of the cultural heritage of the place.

30. Consider supporting and stimulating local cultural grassroots organisations in places that are remote, small and/or at risk of depopulation with a view to promoting bottom-up and inclusive cultural programmes, local cultural initiatives and cooperative structures;

31. Consider ways to raise awareness of the challenges faced by individuals encountering barriers to access culture;

32. Consider supporting, where appropriate, formal, informal and non-formal education that promotes engagement with culture. The aim is to nourish cultural interest and talents, arise young people's curiosity for culture and enhance their entrepreneurial skills so as to stimulate the development of creative skills needed to envision a better future for society;

33. Facilitate and encourage the development of sustainable partnerships between schools, artists and cultural organisations while ensuring that these activities are inclusive and accessible to all school children, students and young people with fewer opportunities, particularly those with disabilities; and support lifelong learning and access to formal and informal artistic education and cultural practices;

34. Consider creating innovative and easily accessible formats tailored to young people in order to promote their participation in cultural life;

35. Where relevant, consider reviewing their cultural policies and funding arrangements to encourage support for a diverse range of inclusive and participatory cultural organisations, including grassroots communities, with due regard to artistic freedom;

36. Strive to mitigate the financial barriers to participation and to working in the cultural field by promoting incentives to ensure that culture is accessible as well as create working conditions that respond to the specific needs of cultural professionals and artists ([8]);

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, WHILE RESPECTING THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY, IN THEIR RESPECTIVE AREAS OF COMPETENCE AND AT THE APPROPRIATE LEVELS, TO:

37. Consider the development of cultural rights plans as a tool to outline the actions planned in the field of cultural rights, integrating an analysis of the current situations, the identification of specific objectives to be achieved, and concrete measures for its implementation.

38. Continue promoting the establishment of long-term cross-sectoral collaborations and partnerships between actors in the CCS and, for instance, educational, social, health and justice institutions as well as civil society organisations at local, regional, national and international levels;

39. Continue promoting the further development of CCS organisations' and professionals' digital capabilities while promoting self-expression and digital well-being and preventing the digital divide.

40. Maintain regular dialogue with cultural organisations – including organisations representing persons with disabilities, civil society and the general public – on equal access to culture, focusing especially on digitalisation and respecting cultural and linguistic diversity as well as adapting existing services and developing new services to various forms of disabilities and impairments;

41. Encourage research aimed at disaggregated data-driven and evidence-based assessment of the cultural needs and habits of persons facing barriers in accessing culture; provide further training for cultural professionals working in related fields;

42. Consider further examining the factors hindering access to culture, focusing on rural and remote areas and/or those at risk of depopulation, social and economic problems, disabilities, health conditions, deprivation of liberty, gender, age and educational background. This may include examining different levels and domains of access, structural as well as physical, language and psychological barriers;

43. Consider, in collaboration with Eurostat's Member States Expert Group on Cultural Statistics, to improve the current measurement of cultural participation. The aim is to provide more frequent and better-targeted statistics on culture, and to analyse the relationship between culture and health, social and financial issues, with particular regard to socio-economic inequalities;

44. Take further measures to promote the cultural heritage of the Member States and make it available on Europeana through national aggregators; continue developing the common European data space for cultural heritage to enable the sharing of heritage data across national borders and thus facilitate broader access to and reuse of European heritage;

45. Consider including cultural participation and the enhancement of cultural infrastructures as a goal in future updated editions of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans.

INVITES THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO:

46. Encourage the networking of professionals who organise cultural events and activities for persons facing barriers to access culture. In this respect, particular attention needs to be devoted to the population of suburban, post-industrial, rural and peripheral areas, outermost regions and those areas at risk of depopulation or social exclusion;

47. Take advantage of existing opportunities to collect, organise and showcase in a searchable way Member States' good practices on facilitating access to culture for persons facing barriers;

([8]) EU framework for the social and professional situation of artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors – https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0405_EN.html.

48. Continue prioritising cultural participation and facilitate access to culture in its current and future work, for instance through the ongoing Creative Europe programme (2021–2027);

49. Examine the possibility of including cultural aspects in the monitoring action carried out in Member States by the AccessibleEU ([9]), with a special attention to the accessibility of culture;

50. Encourage research into the social diversity of the CCS in the EU and its influence on cultural participation;

51. Explore the possibility of a Eurobarometer survey assessing the attitudes and opinions of people in the European Union regarding involvement in cultural activities and access to culture – with a special focus on formal and informal cultural actions, as well as on non-users – and the potential role of culture in enhancing people's quality of life.

52. Explore whether discounted access to cultural institutions and cultural content in the European Union could be linked to the European Student Card.

([9]) https://accessible-eu-centre.ec.europa.eu/index_en#:~:text=About%20AccessibleEU,-AccessibleEU%20is%20one&text=It%20is%20a%20resource%20Centre,on%20equal%20basis%20with%20others.

ANNEX

DEFINITIONS:

For the purposes of these conclusions, the following definitions apply:

— *'Access to culture'* is the ability of all individuals, regardless of their background, abilities or circumstances, to participate fully in cultural activities and experiences.

— *'Cultural participation'* includes a variety of active and passive cultural activities, such as going to the cinema and library, attending live performances, visiting cultural sites (historical monuments, museums, art galleries or archaeological sites) or practising artistic activities and creating content.

— The *'Access City Award' (ACA)* was created by the European Commission in 2011 to reward cities that have prioritised accessibility for persons with disabilities. The contest awards a monetary prize to the cities that are addressing accessibility from a holistic approach . The main areas of the award are: (1) the built environment and public spaces; (2) transport and related infrastructure; (3) information and communication, including new technologies; and (4) public facilities and services.

— *'Creative economy'* (also known as the *'orange economy'*) is an evolving concept based on the contribution and potential of creative assets to contribute to economic growth and development. It embraces economic, cultural and social aspects interacting with technology, intellectual property and tourism objectives.

— *'Cultural prescribing'* or *'Culture-based social prescription'* refers to the practice where healthcare professionals recommend cultural activities, such as museum visits, theatre, dance classes or community art projects to improve patients' mental and physical health. This approach aims to reduce stress, strengthen social connections and enhance overall well-being.

— *'Design for All'* approach is a design philosophy that aims to create products, services and environments that are accessible and usable by as many people as possible.

— *'Cultural mediators'* are professionals who facilitate access for a greater number of people to cultural works and productions in an informal and individualised manner. This includes removing possible barriers and adapting mediation to persons with disabilities and other special needs. Cultural mediation is the process of helping people fully comprehend the arts through involvement and participation.

— *'Cultural rights plan'* is a framework designed to implement actions in the realm of cultural rights. It outlines initiatives to be undertaken, incorporates an assessment of the current situation, identifies specific objectives to be achieved, and details specific measures needed to ensure the fulfilment of those objectives.

— *'Aggregators'* work with cultural heritage institutions to make their data accessible through Europeana and other digital platforms in the Member States to share their data via the data space for cultural heritage (https://pro.europeana.eu/page/aggregators).

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