Communicating the needs of a sector in times of crisis: European cultural networks, advocacy and forward-looking cultural policies

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ABSTRACT

European cultural networks have been key actors in the European cultural sphere, but their advocacy potential has not been substantially documented. The Covid-19 crisis presented a unique moment for cultural networks to voice the needs of a sector, underline its value and contribute actively in forward looking cultural policies. In times where trust arises as a way to look forward, cultural networks provide the plat through a transnational perspective. The article examines the work of the European cultural networks from the early days of the pandemic until today through the advocacy lenses. Rather than providing an analysis of the main issues raised, the aim of the paper is to capture a moment in time that given its fluidity is in a constant evolution and make a contribution to understanding European cultural networks as transnational advocacy actors and rightful participants in the shaping of forward-looking cultural policies.

Keywords:

Cultural networks

Covid-19

transnational advocacy networks

cultural value

cultural policies

Europe

Introduction

In a book written 10 years ago under the title 2014: how to survive the next world crisis, the author claims that current challenges imposed by globalisation, lead us "towards an ideal of ever-closer cooperation" (Boyle, 2011: 151). Also exactly 10 years ago, Bonet and Donato (2011) had written about the then financial crisis and its impact on the cultural and creative sectors, underlying that beyond its structural economic component, the crisis would probably affect also the political and social systems as well. However, as they underlined "deep crises offer a great opportunity for improvement when people and institutions are fully conscious of their potential for change", while suggesting that "trans-sector and international cooperation could lead to a new development of the sector" (idem: 10).

Today, ten years later, these statements cannot be proved but true. This unexpected situation imposed by the Covid-19 health crisis brought to the surface the vulnerability of the sector and resulted into a number of short and medium-term policy solutions in the forms of grants, funds and subsidies, despite being questioned about their effectiveness on the long-term (Comunian and England, 2020). A report by CAE and Mafaso (2021) for the European Parliament mentions that the loss of the cultural and creative sectors will be felt over several years and will only be evident from 2021 and beyond. In this setting, in Europe cultural networks played a crucial role and information brokers. The new scenario demanded a deeper understanding of the situation, on a European level, for a crisis that was common to everyone. It developed thus into an opportunity to unpack the advocacy and convocation claim and capacity of European networks, and to position them as rightful stakeholders in framing cultural policies.

Cultural networks, have been evolving into decisive actors in international cultural cooperation. Being an "infrastructure that has supported the cultural sector in international cultural cooperation in the last three decades" (IFACCA, 2016: 5), and even longer, cultural networks offer the possibility for long-term cooperation, share a number of common goals and also provide opportunities for physical interaction and contact among their members, contributing to the creation of international communities of practice.

Literature about cultural networks focuses on mapping them, analyzing their role, work, structure and models of function (IFACCA, 2016) and governance (Steinkamp, 2003). Especially in the European arena, cultural networks, with their "non-hierarchical, dynamic, unpredictable, somehow anarchic and democratic nature", are consider to have contributed to an exceptional space of bottom-up European cultural cooperation (De Vlieg, 2016). Imperiale and Vecco (2019) looked into the determinants of effectiveness of European cultural networks supported by the Creative Europe programmme, while Brkic (2019) underlined their role of 'in-between-space' that nurtures the dialogue between different players in the field challenging the future of cultural networking in relation to the social, political and technological changes that are happening after 2010's. European cultural networks have been realising and assuming their role understanding its unique value, but their strong advocacy potential that has not been substantially documented. This is the case in general of cultural networks, as Delfino notes, "cultural networks are often identified as relevant political actors in the region's cultural sector yet, despite consensus on their social significance, there is a great lack of systematized information regarding their experience". (2012: 2). This article tries to address this gap by examining the reactions of European cultural networks from the early days of the pandemic until today through the advocacy lenses. Rather than providing an analysis of the main issues raised, the aim of the paper is to capture a moment in time that given its fluidity is in a constant evolution. The paper does not discuss the effectiveness of advocacy actions neither-as they are still in ongoing negotiations. It does however make a contribution to understanding European cultural networks as transnational advocacy actors and rightful participants in the shaping of forward-looking cultural policies.

The paper is developed in five main parts, besides this introduction that offers an overview of the research objectives and the framework. The second section provides the theoretical background of the paper reviewing existing literature on international cultural cooperation and networks and especially on European cultural networks and their advocacy role. The third section describes the research methodology and the data reviewed, as well at the limitations of the approach adopted. The fourth section provides an analysis of the research findings, while the next section discusses main trends in the field and potential future research avenues. Finally, the last section includes the conclusions.

International cultural cooperation, European cultural networks and the value of culture

International cooperation in the network society

Today, even more than before, working and cooperating internationally oscillates between choice and need and often is even dictated by social and political developments. Undeniably, globalisation has played an important role in this, since it has radically changed the relations between time and space within the network society (Castells, 2010). Globalisation has indeed become an system that involves "interactions of a new order and intensity" (Appadurai, 1996: 27), due mainly to the wide technological expansion in transportation and information, which has enabled a new era of 'neighborliness' even with people living far away from us.

International cultural cooperation forms a complex system of governance, which involves actors on the international, national, regional, and local levels as well as non-governmental civil society actors and independent artists and cultural operators and may occur at bilateral or multilateral levels. The conceptual stretching of culture to encompass values, beliefs, norms together with the intensified ways of communicating and interacting enforced by globalisation, have given the possibility to various actors to engage in international cultural cooperation. This liminal space of international cultural cooperation has implied "a state of movement and the continuous updating of social relations and structures, with reference to their social construction and thus their changeability" (Zobl and Huber, 2016: 7). In such a framework, artists and cultural operators are expected to use "grasp the opportunity to be at the forefront as mediators of global realities" (DeVereaux and Vartiainen, 2007: 118) and collaborating internationally has become an everyday reality for almost everyone working in arts and culture.

The intensification, however, of international cultural cooperation practices should not be merely considered as if imposed primarily by globalisation. Undeniably globalisation has offered a multiple number of opportunities to connect, however, international cultural cooperation has been widely connected with human nature since ever and when it has not been imposed by economic, or social related reasons, it was merely the result of the human "will to connection"(Simmel, 2001). Networks have arisen in this context as an ideal form of organisation to respond to the conditions created by the network society: the acceleration of information and communication technologies, the intense mobility of people, goods and services transcending time and space constraints. As Castells argues that networks have evolved in the "morphology" of our societies (Castells 2010: 500). Thanks to their flexible and dynamic form of governance, transnational networks have evolved into key advocacy players, as they are independent from state or other influence and supervision, allowing a 'power-shift' from state to non-state actors (Matthews 1997). Their flexible and dynamic nature, their open structures and innovative and adaptive capacities, make them work "as long as they share the same communication codes (for example, values or performance goals)" (Castells 2010: 501).

Cultural networks as transnational advocacy platforms

"Networks are communicative structures. To influence discourse, procedures, and policy, activists may engage and become part of larger policy communities that group actors working on an issue from a variety of institutional and value perspectives. Translational advocacy networks must also be understood as political spaces, in which differently situated actors negotiate- formally or informally- the social, cultural, and political meaning of their joint enterprise" (Keck and Sikkink, 1998: 3)

Brun et al (2008: 82) describe networks of cultural cooperation as part of civil society that act in the public sphere. Van Paaschen adds that international cultural networks are also social change networks that "undertake actions that have a (potential) impact in society by bringing people into an action-oriented framework" (2011: 160). As Keck and Sikkink (1998: 3) mention, "a transnational advocacy network includes those actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services". They underline that at the core of the relationship is information exchange, and what makes this information eve more valid and valuable is that it is the result of international interactions. Mobilize information strategically enters at the center of translational advocacy networks activities, in order to "persuade, pressure, and gain leverage over much more powerful organisations and governments" (idem: 4). As van Paaschen (2011: 160) notes, international cultural networks "undertake actions that have a (potential) impact in society by bringing people into an action-oriented framework. These actions could be directed to governments, the private sector or to the public at large".

Littoz-Monnet (2013) explains that European Institutions initially neglected the role of networks in the process of European integration and that it was only in the late 90s that their potential was acknowledged and the conditions were put into place to enhance their role. She explains that this delay was especially due to the subsidiarity clause that leaves EU without substantial competence in the field of culture. She recognizes that it was at that time that the new 'policy method' which allowed spaces of collaboration and exchange at the civil society level was put in place allowing a number of consultations, as today the Voices of Culture. Littoz-Monnet goes on claiming that cultural networks were even "used" when more recently Europe as a political project was challenged by public opinion. One of the conditions that was introduced later was the inclusion of a cultural networks strand in the Creative Europe programme which allowed structural and project based funding to a number of existing cultural networks, but also the creation of new ones. Nevertheless, as Davies (2016: 54-55) notes, "it can be argued, are not really being afforded the opportunity through the European funding process to play to their real strengths, and the danger is that by attempting to re-present themselves to fit a tight European agenda that the picture of their purpose and potential that emerges is distorted, formulaic and, ultimately, rather sterile (Davies, 2016: 54-55)".

Cultural networks and the value of culture

A statement signed by a number of European cultural networks in March 2016 (Culture networks, 2016) under the title The value of international cultural networks emphasises the importance, relevance and strength of cultural networks to empower people through the arts and cultural heritage:

"As networks we build trust and nurture relationships across national borders that support people to overcome local as well as global difficulties and to exchange their ideas, knowledge and expertise. Our 'raison d'être' is to inspire, to be inclusive, to test new ideas and to pilot new projects, to help the culture sector to take risks and meet new challenges."

Cultural networks feel the pressure to prove their value. And this is a communicative action, and one with a strong advocacy aspect. The debate around the value of the arts and culture has been at the forefront of policy discussions due to the on-going need for evidence-based policy-making and practice. Within this concept, looking for the value of the arts and culture is seen as a way of investigating what works, with the purpose of basing future policy and practice decisions on the results of such investigation.

In order for evidence- based policies to be formulated and for their impacts to be measured and evaluated, reliable information is needed. More and more stakeholders and policy-makers are in a need of specific cultural benchmarks, both objective (often regarded as numerical) and conceptual (often regarded as qualitative), to design programmes and interventions. Although there is some questioning around how evidence-based research is actually taken into consideration in the design of public policies and programmes in general (Cairney, 2016) and especially in the field of cultural policy (IETM, 2016; Belfiore, 2016)[1], literature reviews and evidence-based research have been widely commissioned by public bodies to research institutes and consultancies. In the same time cultural observation, cultural statistics and the development of cultural indicator frameworks have been at the heart of the debates around cultural policies. In a constantly changing world, however, producing timely and responsive knowledge and evidence that can successfully be applied in public or organisational decisions responding to real world situations still remains a challenge. This becomes even more complicated when it comes to the arts and culture sector since, as "arts occupy a particularly fragile position in public policy, account of the fact that the claims made for them, especially relating to their transformative power, are extremely hard to substantiate (Belfiore and Bennett, 2008: 3). This difficulty in articulating the obvious should be considered as the main reason why debates around the impacts of the arts and culture and the development of methodologies for their measurement and evaluation have played a prominent role in the cultural policy discourse over the past decades (Belfiore and Bennett, 2010).

Although diverse in nature, cultural networks share some common features, such as strong interpersonal ties, non-hierarchical relationships, openness towards development and change, innovation of structures and activities (Pehn, 1999). Through their transnational aspect they "bring new ideas, norms, and discourses into policy debates, and sere as sources of information and testimony" (Keck and Sikkink, 1998: 3). Through their inherently social capacity they connect individuals

[1] This 'missing link' has also been the main point of Pascal Gielen's key-note speech during the IETM Satellite meeting (IETM, 2016) where he made the statement that "there is no evidence for evidence-based research and we need to study culture as a sense-making process".

through shared understanding (Light and Cunningham, 2020) and in moments of extreme stresses- such as the one imposed by Covid-19- they have an amplifier potential which gives voice to the less heard.

Methodology and limitations

For the purpose of this article, I use a meta-analysis methodology based on a review of secondary material gathered through desk research. From the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, On-the-move, the cultural mobility network with the support of Circostrada, started compiling a list of all resources, policy developments and policy documents that were available internationally in an effort to share knowledge, help to navigate information on the condition of art culture and cultural mobility under the unforeseen crisis and serve as a basis of inspiration for the wider community. In their mapping, there is a section specifically including Statements by organizations, networks and foundations. The first part of this list included documents issued by the European Commission, the European Parliament, the EU Ministers of Culture, and UNESCO, which are not in the scope of our study. The second part includes documents and statements issued by some of the most known European cultural networks. The material gathered primarily served the purpose to identify the networks that had some kind of advocacy performance during the Covid-19 pandemic.

As of July 2021, 44 entries appear on this mapping. The entries were reviewed and classified in order to define the final corpus of the research study. Out of these 44 entries, two did not have a European scope as the first was issued by the USA National Performance Network and another was a statement by Caribbean leaders urging to diversity creative economy post-Covid. Another two were reproductions of a statement of various European networks by other European projects/ organisations and were not considered as well, while two entries were repeated. Another one was a statement issued by a regional network located in SouthEast Europe and two entries were statements issued from funding institutions (HIVOS, DOEN and Prince Claus) that we do not consider in the mapping of cultural networks responses. It should be noted that the last update on this list of resources by on-the-move was made on July 5th, nevertheless it is not by any means considered to be exhaustive.

The final corpus indicated 13 European networks[2]. These networks serve as examples to understand the advocacy capacity of European cultural networks, but they are in no way exhaustive of all the efforts undertaken by cultural networks during the pandemic. In addition to reviewing the documents that appeared on the on-the-move site, for the purpose of this article, the websites and often the social media posts of these 13 organisations were reviewed covering the period from March 2020 until July 2021 to identify the further following two elements:

- further texts or statements that had not been included in the on-the-move mapping;
- mapping and/ or data collection activities by those organisations in regards to impacts of Covid-19 on their membership and sector;

Going through the social media posts and websites was also useful in order to define the specific moment during the defined period that a certain statement was published or activation took place, as it was not obvious from the on-the-move mapping. As mentioned, although this mapping is not claimed to be exhaustive, the material reviewed provide a first insight into how European cultural networks orientated their advocacy actions during this period. In the next section I describe and briefly discuss on the main findings of this research.

This study is limited in scope and in depth, however it provides an entry point into understanding better the evolving advocacy role of cultural networks in Europe. It also does not discuss the main points raised by cultural networks, but looks into the how cultural networks formulated and put in place their advocacy actions amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. In a previous article (Imperiale et al., 2020), we attempted a preliminary discussion on the main reactions and points of view of the main stakeholders in the field of arts and culture in Europe. The cultural networks were identified as amplifiers of the concerns and claims of the cultural sector and its professionals. The information reviewed for that article included the first wave of reactions until early summer 2020. The aim of that paper was to contribute to the overall understanding of the challenges that the cultural and creative industries were facing across the different subsectors following the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis and map the main

[2] There networks included: Culture Action Europe (CAE), ENCATC- the European network of cultural policy and education, PEARLE*, IETM- the Informal Theater Meeting, the Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO), the European Festivals Association (EFA), EUNIC- the European Institutes of Culture network, the European Music Council, Europa Cantat, Live Europe, Impala and the Creative Hubs Network.

concerns and emerging challenges brought to the surface. Also in Steinkamp & Magkou (unpublished document, under review) we have approached networks through their collaborative power in the context of the 2005 UNIESCO Convention which places them as civil society actors particularly suitable to function as catalysts of action and change. In that text, the focus was on exemplifying how cultural networks can fill Article 11 of the 2005 UNESCO Convention with life and to prove that the Convention can only be impactful through a multi-stakeholder-approach including civil society, governments and other players, especially during times that require immediate and coordinated action, as it is the case for the Covid-19 pandemic.

Findings

Data collection for evidence-based advocacy and knowledge circulation

In a globalised world, having "access to reliable data that can be compared across borders in order to determine the status of the cultural sector, its weaknesses and its strengths" has become of primary importance (Usero & Del Brío, 2011: 197). One could say that with Covid-19 even more.

In the past decades, cultural observatories, as data-producing bodies that can serve as support to public, private and third sector cultural policies (Ortega, 2010: 54). Cultural observation, "the action of producing and capitalising information and analysis on a scale of the territory under study, and making it available to the decision-makers and local stakeholders on the cultural offer" (Martin, 2011: 80), has attributed to the cultural observatories an important role in evidence provision around the value of arts and culture and have allowed policy makers at different levels to demonstrate the effectiveness of policies or to better understand a situation before intervening through policy. In the same time, the UNESCO 2009 framework for cultural statistics (UNESCO, 2009) has tried to feed in this direction.

Covid-19 was uncharted waters. That's why it required an intense data collection process to understand better the phenomenon and its effects on the cultural and creative sector. The first observation in regards to the data reviewed is the immediate response of cultural networks to try to understand the effects of the Covid-19 to their membership, assuming a role very close to that of cultural observation. This resulted in a number of surveys and questionnaires distributed already during the first weeks of the lockdown. Some of the data gathered did indeed feed into other outputs, mainly digital publications or statements that captured and highlighted the main findings. Here we discuss a number of them.

The majority of surveys as data collection mechanisms them were sector-specific and initiated by cultural networks. Circostrada, for example, launched a survey during the period March- May 2020 that was filled by 100 street art and circus organisations or artistic companies from 25 countries- mostly based in Europe and Taiwan. The results were shared in June 2020 in an infographics form on a 2 pages document capturing the main findings. Again what is interesting here is the articulation of the goal for collecting and sharing these data: "to better advocate for these sectors and imagine appropriate support measures".

IETM also launched a survey[3] under the title *"Performing arts ecosystem: balances and relations amidst the pandemic".* The main question raised here was *"What new insights and practices should be brought along to the post-pandemic future? What models practiced today can become part of the 'new normal' and help the sector to recognize itself in a more sustainable and fair way"?.* In the survey introduction it was clear that the aim of this survey is to feed into a report on "imagining the best possible way for our sector to emerge from the crisis". The contributions received from 80 members in 23 countries were presented in a report compiled by the Communications and Advocacy officer of the organisation already at the end of March 2020 under the title "Performing arts in times of the pandemic: status quo and the way forward" (IETM, 2020b).

The Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO) was also one of the first organisations to documenting and analyzing the impact of Covid-19 on museums launching survey which gathered 1,000 responses from the end of March to April 2020 from museums in 48 countries, they majority of which in Europe. The survey results were documented in an online publication (NEMO, 2020a) gathering recommendations at three levels (immediate action, mid-term and long-term strategies) on three main areas: economic support for museum operators, investment in digital cultural heritage and making museums fit for crises.

Another example is the European Festival Association. The network, "because festivals have their own specificities" conducted a survey between

the period April- May 2020 to "guide EFA's response to provide an accurate picture to governments and other funders about the needs of festivals" gathering 208 valid answers (EFA, 2020). The results of the survey were published in a document that captured the nature and early dimensions of the damage, mapped a number of alternative solutions and included a future-oriented lessons learnt element.

Fewer surveys were addressed to the sector as a whole. From June to mid November 2020, the European Creative Hubs Network (ECHN) through the MAX-Maker's Mobility Pilot Creative Europe funded project launched a survey to better assess the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on all sectors and build efficient advocacy strategies for the implementation of suited public policies. The survey was addressed mainly to individuals working in the CCIs, artists, producers, photographers, designers, technicians, researchers, translators, communications managers from all 27 members states and UK, Turkey, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ukraine and Moldova, that are the countries represented within ECHN. It is interesting to note, that in order to maximize the reach, the network "assembled a team of ambassadors to support the dissemination of the survey at the local level" in an effort to produce a quantitative research on how the Covid-10 pandemic has affected CCS workers. The analysis of data in this case was undertaken by IDEA Consult and touched upon resilience, consequences, adaptive capacities and an assessment of policy measures for supporting the sector, the results of which were presented in an online publication (ECHN, 2021).

As already mentioned in Imperiale et al. (2020), the complexity of the effects caused by Covid-19 to the overall cultural and creative sector, raised the need of compiling data in a rush, with no coherent research approach. The aim of this paper is not to review the scientific validity of those surveys, but to discuss the knowledge production processes undertaken by key players in the field. To address this challenge, ENCATC the cultural network that brings together cultural policy, education and research, initiated in April 2020 a Think Tank bringing together culture and education institutions, including networks from all over Europe, to better understand the various impacts of Covid-19 through a coordinated effort. The network is still today nurturing the Think Tank through information sharing. In the description of the Think Tank on ENCATC's website, we read that this initiative is addressed to those who "are interested to gather, analyse, and come away with robust findings for evidence-based policy recommendations that would allow the cultural sector to better navigate through the current and future turbulent times[4]". Moreover, some organisations, tried to compile information coming from others in an effort to share collective knowledge. On-the-move created a dedicated page on coronavirus resources, while ENCATC produced a monthly Think Tank newsletter gathering all relevant and updated information from policy organisations and institutions to initiatives of networks and other cultural organisations in relation to the subject matter. The Creatives Unite initiative was also a platform promoted by the European Commission in the framework of the FLIP pilot project and operated by the European Creative Hubs Network and the Goethe-Institut, "in response to the pandemic and the pressing need to gather in one place pertinent initiatives and information related to the Cultural and Creative Industries in the EU in response to the COVID crisis"[5].

Statements, claims and united efforts

Besides publishing the results of surveys and mapping of initiatives, European cultural networks also deployed the most common tool for advocacy: issuing statements. All 13 networks reviewed did, in different moments of the pandemic crisis, issue a sector-specific statement or endorsed a statement put forward by a number of organisations (see also point below). Therefore, there has been a variety of accounts put forward, describing specific needs and underlying the need to have the different stakeholders be heard in the design of future cultural policies and support measures. The underlying principle could be translated as "no cultural policies without cultural organisations and workers". PEARLE*, the European Federation of Music and Live Performance Organisations issued statements in regards to the conditions for the reopening of live performance venues, underlying the existing knowledge among its organization of safe and sustainable practices (PEARLE, 2021a) and also commenting on EU guidelines on the same resumption of activities in the CCIs (PEARLE, 2021b). EUNIC- the network of EU institutes of culture underlined raised the questions of on "how to go forward in the

[3] The survey is still available on https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfRkQKcjOdFiKSnAkalirxD9BwaygG1JrfNhBiCL_YLy9BXcw/viewform?fbclid=IwAR3pbvIOpnNxtxXSZIW-lGz-GqnvrE6fTbDrnDcN5Svhc_HlKvnHu3oQCdI&fbzx=3295052241281183278 (date accessed 25/09/2021)

[4] Taken from ENACTC website https://www.encatc.org/en/news/140-encatc-leading-new-think-tank/ (date accessed 25/09/2021)

longer term", especially in the digital realm and how can "cultural relations continue to bring trust and understanding between the people of Europe and the wider world" (EUNIC, 2021). Europa Cantat underlined the transformational nature of arts, especially in times of crisis (EUROPEAN CORAL ASSOCIATION, 2020), while LiveEurope calls for investing in European cultural diversity and recognizing music venues as vehicles to revive the music ecosystem (LiveEurope, 2020). These examples are used just to underline the variety of messages and standing points that each cultural network brought into the forefront.

Finally, it should be underlined that the Covid-19 pandemic is also giving a unique opportunity for cooperation between networks themselves. Most of the European cultural networks are members of Culture Action Europe (CAE), the sectors' body on advocacy for arts and culture on the European level. Under the coordination of CAE, the COVID-19 outbreak also provided an opportunity for joint work among cultural networks. Already in March 2020, cultural networks addressed a letter to the European Commission on the effect of COVID-19 underlying the challenges imposed by COVID on the implementation of Creative Europe projects and a number of proposals on how to cope with the consequences of COVID-19 on the CCIs.

At the very first weeks of the Covid-19 outbreak, CAE joined forces with another key player on culture in Europe, the European Cultural Foundation and issued a joint paper (CAE & ECF, 2020) in the beginning of May. Solidarity is a key concept in this document, while, as it is underlined, the EU's response to the crisis and evidence of solidarity among Member States will determine Europe's future. For example, under the coordination of CAE, already in March 2020, cultural networks addressed a letter to the European Commission on the effect of COVID-19 underlying the challenges imposed by COVID-19 on the implementation of Creative Europe projects and a number of proposals on how to cope with the consequences of COVID-19 on the cultural and creative industries.

Discussion: Towards a continuous effort of unpacking the needs of the sector

Is it still a question about proving the value?

Covid-19 brought back to the surface the on-going discussion around the value of culture. Jeannotte (2020) even proposes a research framework for public policies in the era of Covid-19 through revising theories of the value of culture. In the past, the transformative power of culture was undeniable and it seemed no one needed proof of it. In the last decades, however, the situation has changed. The arts and culture sector is constantly requested to prove measurable outcomes to demonstrate its wider, sustainable and long-term effects on economy and/ or society and to provide a clear account of value and worth to those who fund and support arts and culture. In the same time, funding agencies, both private and public, have been acquiring a more and more influential role in the processes of measuring performance and value in cultural and arts organisations (Turbide and Laurin, 2009). In reality what has been the result of this situation is that it has added more challenges to what was already a complex environment of financial instability and it has produced additional pressure to cultural practitioners and policy makers to provide proof of the added value that the arts and culture can bring. Moreover, the paradigm shift in regards to recognising culture as a pillar of development has brought a different role to culture, a more institutionalised one, imposing to the sector a higher level of responsibility and an obligation to demonstrate its value (Zurita, 2012: 36).

The question of value of course is not new to cultural networks. It has actually been has been central in their during the last decade, following the financial crisis and the urge to prove to funders and supporters the value of culture. For example, IETM published in Spring 2015, a *General Mapping of Types of Impact Research in the performing arts sector* (2005- 2015) as a first step in IETM's 2014- 2017 plan that had an explicit focus on the measurement of the impacts of the arts. The primary goal of this mapping was "to explore what efforts arts organisations are making in order to contribute to the latest justifications undertaken to counteract budget cuts in the arts and culture sector" (Shishkova, 2015: 4). This focus was also present in a number of activities organised by IETM, such as a Panel discussion in Brussels in February 2015 under the title *The Art of Valuing: between evident and evidence-based* that focused on the analysis of different models for measuring and demonstrating the value of culture and its impacts on societies, as well as the role such measurements play in informing national cultural policies (IETM, 2015), an IETM Satellite meeting in Paris in March 2016 where

[5] Taken from Creeatives Unite website https://creativesunite.eu/ (date accessed 25/09/2021)

arts sector representatives, researchers, policy makers and intermediaries organisations gathered together to develop a collective view on why and how to advocate for the arts in local, national and European policy-making processes (IETM, 2016a) or a session at the IETM Plenary Meeting in Amsterdam in April 2016 that was devoted to the topic *Advocating for the Arts* and aimed to exchange ideas on "how to convince policy-makers- on local, national and European levels- of the essential role culture and the arts play in the development of European societies" (IETM, 2016b). Similarly, ENCATC the European network on cultural management and policy that has been widely concerned with the topic of cultural observation and measurement and has since December 2007 organised its discussions around the Thematic area/ Working Group *Cultural Observatories and Cultural Information and Knowledge* chaired by the Institute of Leisure Studies of the University of Deusto. ENCATC's Advanced Seminar *Rethinking Cultural Evaluation: Going beyond GDP* was held on the 22nd of October 2014 in Paris France following two previous seminars organised in 2013 in Antwerp *(Rethinking Cultural Evaluation: Going Beyond GDP)* and in New York *(Place of culture in sustainable development: going beyond the GDP indicators)* and an outcome of the ENCATC Thematic Area *Monitors of Culture.* In 2015, a new ENCATC Working Group on *Monitoring and Evaluation of International and European transnational cultural projects and European networks* emerged as a response to the need of having a discussion platform to exchange ideas and best practices in the field. Also CAE since 2013 had been publishing a number of reflection papers and studies on how to measure the impact of culture (CAE, 2013) or on methodology and challenges on culture in relation to well-being (CAE, 2016) under a wider project with the title *Measuring the impact of the arts in society.*

Culture at the heart of the recovery mechanisms

Most of the statements reviewed, especially during the first months of the pandemic, highlighted the need of a coordinated effort at various levels to guarantee the sustainability of the cultural and creative sector, that was also highlighter by international institutions (European Parliament, 2020). All point out to the need to invest in long-term strategies and not only ad-hoc rapid response measures that will contribute to the sustainability and resilience of the sector on the long run. As the policy environment evolved at the European level, the primary claim of cultural networks became the inclusion of arts and culture at the heart of the recovery mechanism on the EU and the national level. At the moment that this article is being written, CAE is running the #CulturalDealEU Campaign, using a campaign tag that resonates to the already solidly articulated European Green Deal, jointly with the European Cultural Foundation and Europa Nostra (representing the European Heritage Alliance). The aim of the campaign is to "mainstream culture across all policy fields to fully realize its potential": from the green transition to Europe's geopolitical ambition, and from the digital shift to a value-driven Union" (CAE, 2021a). The central claim of this campaign is to urge members states to devote at least 2% of the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility to culture, based on the backing provided by the open letter co-signed by over 110 European networks and organisations earlier this year (CAE, 2021). Following the evolution of the policy spectrum on the national and European level will actually allow to understand the level of influence of European cultural networks in future-policy making. As Keck and Sikkink (1998: 3) mention that "more than other kids of transnational networks, advocacy networks often reach beyond policy change to advocate and instigate changes in the institutional and principles bases of international interactions. When they succeed, they are an important part of an explanation for changes in world politics". This can be an interesting topic of further research, which would require- besides desk research and meta analysis of secondary data- a more in depth and qualitative approach to understanding different stakeholder's aspirations and actions in a comprehensive way.

The role of technology

What has been presented above confirms van Paaschen's (2011: 161) statement that "communication and the processing and dissemination of information are two of the most vital functions of the network's organization"). During the Covid-19 outbreak and the months after, the role of cultural networks was all about knowledge and communication. Information and communication technologies have been at the core of networks' work, both internally and externally, but as in all domains in life, Covid-19 intensified our dependence from them. The adaptive capacity of cultural organisations to digital transformation has been (Pelissier-Thieriot & Pelissier 2017; Massi, Vecco

& Lin 2020) and will be a subject of ongoing interest in the future. Besides an anxiety to continue to exist in an uncertain context (Saez 2020), technological developments will also require investments from the side of all organisations in technology and on developing digital capacity (Sgourev 2020) in order to enhance their advocacy potential.

The question of legitimacy and trust

In the case of European cultural networks, passing from the individual or the organizational to the collective, is a process of trust. Networks claim to communicate the needs on behalf of a sector. In reality they communicate on behalf of a specific membership, which is in its own capacity limited to a certain extent. Even if a question of representation arises in regards to legitimacy of cultural networks as a socially constructed, they are quite representative and when it comes to European cultural networks, they are present in many European countries giving the possibility to various actors to voice their concerns and aspirations. A recent initiative by CAE under the title Amplify: make the future of Europe yours, confirms that cultural networks are aware of their limitations and seek to ensure a fair an equal representation at policy related for a. Amplify works across 12 European countries that bring underrepresented voices in the cultural sector in the Conference on the Future of Europe and gathers recommendations that will be put forward by CAE to EU decision makers[6].

As Borin (2015: 28) networks differ from other forms of collaboration "because of their focus on trust, reciprocity, mutual gains and common goals". In the case of cultural networks, members confine their trust to their representatives and the network governance and expect that they will take their interests into account. Although trust is supposed to be important in situations of high uncertainty, there is little research on the impact of trust in achieving results in governance networks, not to say about European cultural networks. Klijn et al (2010) attempt to enlighten the importance of trust in networks and underline that trusting another actor means that one is willing to assume an open and vulnerable position. They continue by saying that this is even more important when dealing with unpredictable or risky situations- such as the setting imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. "Trust leads to more information and knowledge exchange, which results in an enhanced problem-solving capacity, new insights, innovative power, and better outcomes" (2010: 198). Trust is a pre-condition for successful advocacy actions and should be nurtured by cultural networks within their membership.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 outbreak calls for a deeper understanding of the changes produced and the need to re-define policies and priorities in the filed of culture. This unexpected disruptive process revealed long-term issues concerning the volatility and sustainability of the cultural and creative sector as a whole (Comunian and England, 2020; Saez, 2020) but also its remarkable resilience, responsive capacity and an outlook that calls for solidarity and joint action. It also confirmed that European cultural networks are rightful participants in the shaping of cultural policies and therefore should be consulted and heard. European cultural networks, as transitional advocacy networks "are most prevalent in issue areas characterized by high value content and information uncertainty, although the value content of an issue is both a prerequisite and a results of network activity" (Keck and Sikkink, 1998: 3).

The data reviewed is not exhaustive but it is quite representative of the wealth of work of European cultural networks and the different sectors their represent undertook during these last months. The evolution of the policy landscape in Europe in relation to the claims of the European cultural networks should be further monitored to validate their role as rightful partners the shaping of forward-looking cultural policies.

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