

Culture Action Europe Reflection on Structural and Financial Barriers to Access to Culture

Cultural participation is the ultimate expression of access to culture. It is a human right enshrined in Article 27 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and as such creates an obligation for its protection and promotion. The presence of multiple and varied cultural opportunities for citizens corresponds with a healthy society, encouraging social engagement and inclusion, bolstering solidarity and mutual understanding and facilitating the development of the creative skills required to thrive in a fast-changing world.

Around two-thirds of Europeans are demonstrably interested and participate in cultural activities. Although a significant figure, it also highlights the need to break down barriers and ensure that access to culture is maximised, particularly for those who are disengaged. Hence, it is important to recognise the variety of barriers that prevent diverse people from participating in culture.

The main reason cited for not participating in cultural activities is lack of interest linked to educational attainment, given education's core effect in cultural participation. Other reasons include lack of time, financial means, information and choice. Eurobarometer surveys show an imbalance in access to culture across Europe. Consequently, new policy approaches should be developed on the basis of mounting evidence pointing to critical gaps limiting participation.

In light of this, CAE calls on the European institutions to:

1. Uphold cultural participation as a human right and promote access through a strategic understanding of audience development. Enable the breaking down of barriers to culture, opening up cultural participation to all, regardless of age, gender, income, education, ethnicity or disability as a basis for engaged citizenship, social inclusion and democratic health;
2. Promote European values and facilitate the mobility of European artists and cultural professionals to promote cultural exchange, recognising the capacity of culture to breach social divides, foster mutual understanding and develop European solidarity and community through people's exposure to other European cultures;
3. Build synergies between culture and education, promoting the inclusion of active cultural development in the curriculum and recognising the potential of lifelong learning as a source of transformational change in people's lives;

4. Open up cultural opportunities to those living in regional areas and rural communities by promoting decentralisation in policy development that readdresses European imbalances of access to culture;
5. Facilitate access to cultural activities for those with financial constraints through appropriate funding of relevant cultural initiatives;
6. Create an enabling environment for the CCS in order to provide the necessary conditions for innovation and creativity as well as employment in the sector, in the understanding that this has been proven to enhance cultural participation in society more broadly;
7. Recognise the potential of digital culture to overcome geographical barriers to participation, with support for training in digital skills to encourage active creativity in the digital sphere, especially in underrepresented languages.