

MEASURING THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF CULTURE

HANDBOOK



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Publisher



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-

MESOC PARTNERS

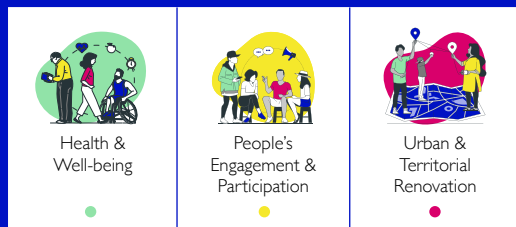


01. UNIVERSITAT DE VALENCIA, eConcult (eCo)
02. KEA EUROPEAN AFFAIRS (KEA)
03. POLITECNICO DI MILANO, Department of Architecture and Urban Studies (DASStU)
04. UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA, Department of Economics (UB)
05. RELAIS CULTURE EUROPE ASSOCIATION (RCE)
06. GRAD RIJEKA, City Office (CoR)
07. DIMOS ATHINAION EPICHEIRISI MICHANOGRAFISIS, EU Projects Sector (DAEM)
08. ASOCIATIA CENTRUL CULTURAL CLUJJEAN (CCC)
09. WORLD CRUNCH (WoC)
10. SVEUCILISTE U RIJECI, Department of Informatics (UoR)



LIST OF CASE STUDIES

Impact Areas



PROJECT	STRATEGY	IMPACT AREA	TARGET GROUP	SECTOR	PAGE
1. Inner Space	Art therapy, research and action on culture & well-being	● ● ●	General Public	Multi-sector	39
2. Athens Digital Escape Route	Gamification	● ● ○	General Public	Audio-visual and Multimedia, Heritage	41
3. Receta Cultura	Art Therapy	● ○ ○	Patients in Health Centres, General Public	Visual Arts	43
4. Kaikukortti Card (Culture for All Service)	Cultural democratisation strategy	● ● ○	General public, Disadvantaged Communities	Multi-sector	47
5. La Gata Perduda	Community co-creation of opera, acting and interpretation	○ ● ●	Disadvantaged Communities	Performing Arts	50
6. SKCNS Upad Theatre Festival	Co-management of performing arts festival	○ ● ○	Young People	Performing Arts	51
7. Apropa Cultura	Cultural democratisation; Connecting social and cultural worlds	● ● ○	Disadvantaged Communities, Migrants and Refugees, Patients in Health Centres	Multi-sector	54
8. L'exposition participative	Co-curation of an exhibition	○ ● ○	Young People	Visual Arts	55
9. Fabbrica del Vapore	Project incubator, artist residencies and public programming	○ ● ●	Emerging Artists, General Public	Multi-sector	60
10. Le temps des cerises	Multi-sector innovation centre for community interaction	○ ● ●	General Public, Children and Families	Multi-sector	63
11. Grouard Valley Integrated Urban Regeneration Project	Co-planning with neighbourhood residents	● ● ●	Disadvantaged Communities	Architecture	65
12. En Palabras	Empowerment through writing labs and personal memory	● ● ○	Migrants and Refugees	Books and Press	90
13. Medicinema	Cinema therapy	● ○ ●	Patients in Health Centres, Children and Families	Audio-visual and Multimedia	92
14. Le Réacteur	Accompaniment of emerging artists	○ ● ○	Emerging Artists, General Public, Children and Families	Performing Arts	93
15. Xamfrà	Artistic education	● ● ●	General Public, Disadvantaged Communities, Migrants and Refugees, Children and Families	Performing Arts	99
16. Children's House	Programming & activities for children & families	○ ● ●	Children and Families	Multi-sector	100
17. Caravansaray Selinunte San Siro	Community co-creation	○ ● ●	Emerging Artists, Disadvantaged Communities	Performing Arts	101
18. Museus per a la salut	Museum visits and volunteering	● ● ○	Patients in Health Centres	Visual Arts, Heritage	103
19. My Space Nucle Bugojno	Co-planning of urban regeneration process	○ ● ●	General Public	Architecture	104

LEGEND OF ICONS

Icons included in the case studies

Impact Areas



Health and Well-being



People's Engagement and Participation



Urban and Territorial Renovation

Target groups



Migrants and refugees



Disadvantaged communities



Emerging artists



Children and families



Young people



Patients in health centres

Sectors



Audio-visual And multimedia



Arts and Crafts



Libraries



Archives



Architecture



Books and press



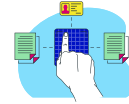
Advertising



Visual arts



Heritage



Multi-sector



Performing arts



CHAPTER I
Introducing the
MESOC Handbook

Culture impacts health & well-being, people's engagement & participation, and urban & territorial renovation.

What is MESOC?

MESOC (Measuring the Social Dimension of Culture) is a European project that focused on the measurement of the societal value and impacts of cultural policies and practices. Implemented between 2020 and 2023 with funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 programme (EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, 2014-2020), MESOC has proposed, tested and validated an innovative and original approach for measuring the value and impacts of culture on society.

MESOC was carried out by a consortium involving **10 partners from 7 European countries**. Coordinated by Universitat de Valencia, eConcult (eCo, Spain), partners included KEA European Affairs (KEA, Belgium); Politecnico di Mi-

lano, Department of Architecture and Urban Studies (DASU, Italy); Universitat de Barcelona, Department of Economics (UB, Spain); Association Relais Culture Europe (RCE, France); Grad Rijeka, City Office (CoR, Croatia); Dimos Athinaion Epicheirisi Michanografisis, EU Projects Sector (DAEM, Greece); Associatia Central Cultural Clujean (CCC, Romania); Worldcrunch (WoC, France); and Sveuciliste u Rijeci, Department of Informatics (UoR, Croatia). The project also involved collaboration with 8 associated cities: Barcelona, Jerez de la Frontera and Valencia from Spain; Ghent from Belgium; Issy-les-Moulineaux from France; Lublin from Poland; Milan from Italy; and Turku from Finland. Many additional organisations and individuals have been consulted throughout the development of the project, including members of MESOC's External Advisory

Board, stakeholders involved in the 11 city pilots and others through direct participation in online surveys, workshops and meetings.

MESOC was funded in the context of a Horizon2020 call entitled 'The societal value of culture and the impact of cultural policies in Europe', which was launched in 2018. Two other projects were selected under the same call, which may also be of interest to users of this Handbook. They are INVENT – European Inventory of Societal Values of Culture as Basis for Inclusive Cultural Policies (<https://inventculture.eu/>) and UNCHARTED – Understanding, Capturing and Fostering the Societal Value of Culture (<https://uncharted-culture.eu/>).

For additional information about MESOC, you can visit <https://mesoc-project.eu/>.

What Was the Rationale of MESOC?

MESOC responded to the need to recognise how much culture matters to European societies, going beyond its economic impact, which often prevails in public discourses. It highlighted the fact that culture also matters in terms of health and well-being, people's engagement and participation, and urban and territorial renovation.

These three themes, which make up the MESOC vision (**Figure 1**), draw on some of the priorities established by the European Commission in its [New European Agenda for Culture](#) (2018). They also, quite often, inspire artists; cultural professionals; local, regional and national authorities; private companies; non-profit organisations (NGOs, foundations, etc.); researchers; and citizens when considering the societal value of culture.

Figure 1:
The MESOC
Vision



The MESOC vision highlights how the impacts of culture on health and well-being, people's engagement and participation, and urban and territorial renovation, operating at the individual, community and societal levels, influence and reinforce one another. It also stresses that these are complex relationships that sometimes cannot be measured directly, but rather require the prior identification of some enabling conditions and factors that may contribute to impact, as well as of so-called 'transmission variables' that more easily lend themselves to measurement through indicators.

MESOC acknowledged that cultural policies and activities cover a wide range of areas, disciplines or 'domains' – e.g., cultural heritage (museums, archaeological sites, intangible heritage, etc.), libraries, performing arts (theatre, dance, circus, etc.), architecture and more. In addition, as explained by EUROSTAT's [ESSnet-Culture Methodological Framework for Culture Statistics](#) (2012), cultural activities serve different functions (cultural creation; production or publishing; dissemination or trade; preservation; education; and management or regulation). Therefore, the examination of

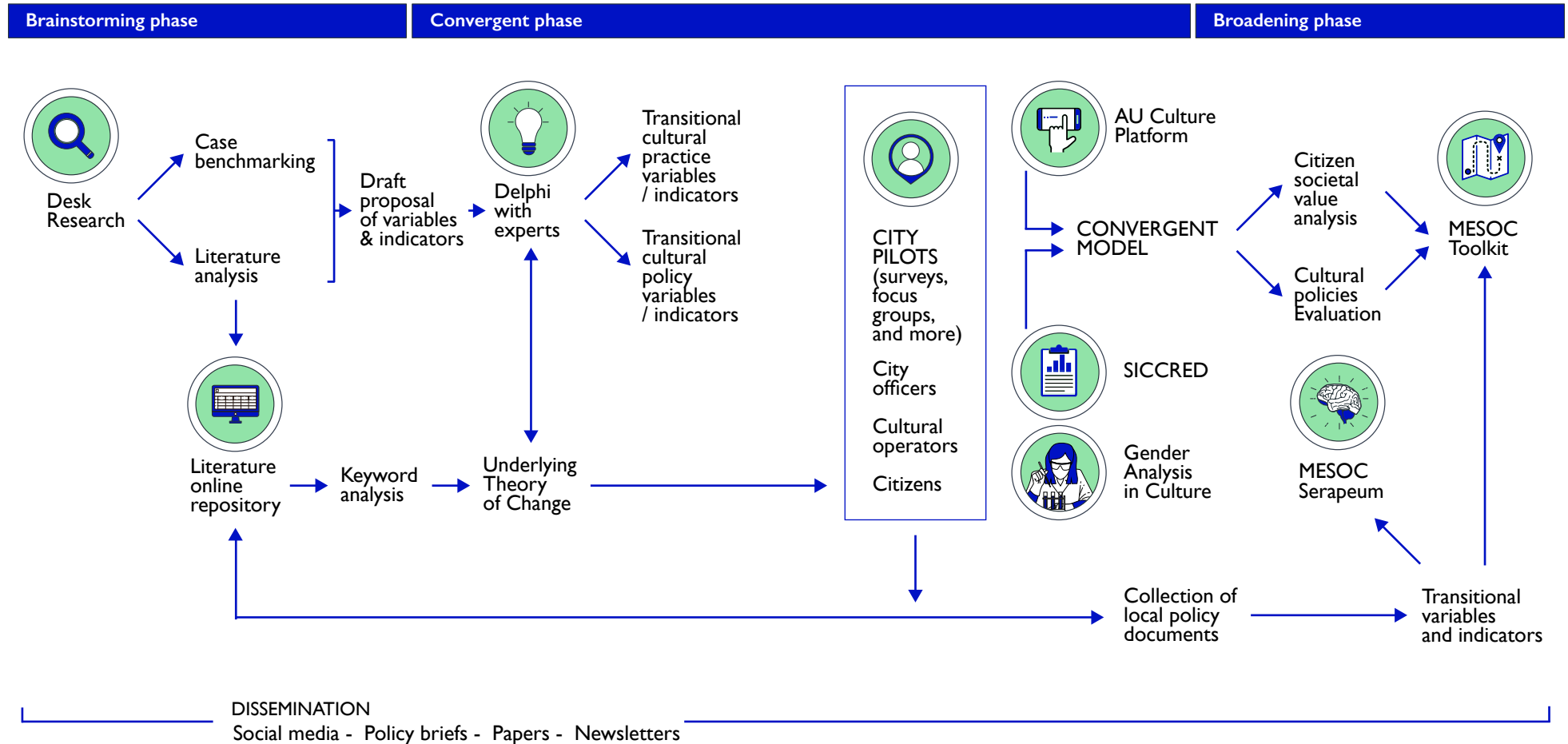
impact must recognise that different cultural activities may be able to contribute differently to societal values because of both the cultural domains covered and the internal and external enablers that inform these activities. In addition to the aforementioned ESSnet-Culture framework, the definition of cultural domains used by MESOC draws on the [UNESCO Framework of Cultural Statistics](#) (2009).

Indeed, since MESOC's key themes have been explored extensively in theory and practice in the past, the project was able to draw on a wide range of contributions from academics, policymakers, practitioners and citizens, building on existing knowledge through an extensive identification and analysis of existing literature. On this basis, it developed new, innovative methodologies for measurement and evaluation, which have been validated in 11 City Pilots.

The MESOC Journey and its Main Results

The MESOC research and innovation journey was structured around several complementary pathways, as **Figure 2** below shows.

Figure 2:
The MESOC Research
and Innovation Journey



An initial phase of **desk research** led to the creation of an online directory of relevant documents (about 1,000) dealing with the societal impacts of culture. After this initial step, two concurrent research directions were followed in parallel: one 'bottom up' (through keyword-based and semantic analyses of cultural impacts based on the contents of gathered documents, using Natural Language Processing techniques developed by the University of Rijeka) and the other 'top down' (leveraging the expert knowledge of the project partners and its External Advisory Board). Both approaches were then validated by a **Delphi consultation exercise**.

This exercise, coordinated by the University of Barcelona, involved several experts in the field of the social impact of culture from around the world. Throughout three stages of consultation and debate, including online surveys and online and offline workshops, the exercise helped explore, validate and reach consensus on the enabling conditions, transition variables and proxies that may be observed and measure the transformative results of cultural policies and practices.

As a result of the exercise, a list of **methodological guidelines** (which are presented in detail in Chapter 3 of this Handbook) were created for public sector officials, cultural operators and professionals willing to set up the most favourable conditions for cultural activities to achieve societal impacts. An interactive version of the guidelines is available online at <https://www.mesoc-project.eu/resources/methodological-guidelines/interactive>.

The initial collection of documents describing the societal impacts of culture was complemented by the production of case studies, coordinated by the Politecnico di Milano, in the context of the **City Pilots**. These were implemented in Athens, Barcelona, Cluj-Napoca, Ghent, Issy-les-Moulineaux, Jerez de la Frontera, Lublin, Milan, Rijeka, Turku and Valencia. In collaboration with local cultural stakeholders, the societal impact areas addressed by the project were examined and discussed, and the model and approach proposed by MESOC was validated. For additional information, please visit <https://mesoc-project.eu/city-pilots>.

The insights gained within the City Pilots were broadened in scope by additional inputs and pieces of evidence gathered by the University of Valencia, including through the use of the **AU Culture platform**, a web and mobile application utilised to collect first-hand information on the impacts of cultural events on consumers (e.g., visitors to exhibitions, attendees of plays in theatres, etc.) **directly at the point of experience**.

The platform was tested successfully in multiple cities and by a number of cultural institutions (both within and outside of Spain) and can be reused by any third party interested in assessing the impact of cultural events and initiatives beyond the mere figures of attendance. Other achievements include an AI-based model using official statistics to measure the effect of a given increase in the employment of individuals in the cultural and creative sectors based on several socioeconomic variables, at the regional level (**SICCREd**), and an extended literature search and gap analysis of national cultural statistics at the EU level, from the perspective of gender equality. This evidence has

materialised a set of recommendations for key statistical and policy research institutions, such as UNESCO, OECD, JRC and Eurostat.

The MESOC consortium unified the results collected in these parallel research pathways under the umbrella of the **Convergent Model**, which presents an explanation (or 'theory of change') of how cultural activities, projects and programmes may generate transformations at the individual, community and societal levels, in terms of health and well-being, people's engagement and participation, and urban and territorial renovation. The Convergent Model can be applied at the macro (i.e., regional), meso (i.e., city, policy, programme, sector), or micro (i.e., individuals, institutions, cultural centres, projects, activities) levels. The Model is explained further in Chapter 3 of this Handbook.

The 'bottom-up' research direction described above is now supported by the so-called **MESOC Toolkit**, which consists of a georeferenced visualisation tool and a semantic search engine that helps map and analyse the societal impacts of cul-

tural policies and practices described in academic papers and grey (policy) literature texts, as well as by the **MESOC Serapeum**, which was not originally foreseen in the project's work plan, and is a collection of Artificial Intelligence tools offered to researchers and policy analysts interested in exploring the societal impacts of culture using the 'transition-focused' impact assessment approach proposed by the project.

Exploring the societal value of culture and proposing intelligent ways to measure it.

What is the Legacy of MESOC?

In addition to this Handbook, MESOC has delivered a range of free, open access resources that should prove very useful to all those interested in further exploring the societal value of culture and finding intelligent ways to measure it.

The **MESOC Toolkit** is a geo-referenced visualisation tool which, drawing on existing studies on the social value of culture, presents data on how different cultural domains intersect with the three areas of impact covered by MESOC, for specific locations as well as at the European level. The Toolkit allows for the semantic search of existing studies, recommends documents based on the terms entered, and identifies those transitional variables that explain social impact in particular regions and documents. It also invites users to submit their own documents for analysis, whether in English or in other languages. You can access the MESOC Toolkit at <https://toolkit.mesoc-project.eu/>.

The **MESOC Serapeum** is a collection of Artificial Intelligence tools offered to researchers and policy analysts interested in exploring the societal impacts of culture. Among the features currently included in the Serapeum are semantic search, document review, clustering and

topic analysis, transition variable search and view, societal impact analysis, and thesaurus and taxonomy. It is available at <https://www.mesoc-project.eu/resources/serapeum>.

The **MESOC Online Repository** is one of the project's main contributions to knowledge in the field. MESOC has identified and analysed about 1,000 documents that address the social impact of cultural policies, programmes and activities throughout Europe. This helps provide a 'state of the art' summary of existing literature and documentation covering the connections between culture and health and well-being, people's engagement and participation, and urban and territorial renovation, as well as those sources that cover broader social impacts. The tool provides a summary of each text identified and information on how to access it. Evidence shows that since 2011 there has been an increase in the production of scientific publications in these areas. This is particularly visible regarding the connection between

culture and health and well-being, which accounts for 44% of all references identified, followed by people's engagement and participation (29%). Regarding the cultural domains covered, the performing arts come up most often (24%), followed by heritage (14%) and the visual arts (13%). The repository is available at <http://repository.mesoc-project.eu/>.

A **Guide on Gender Integration in Cultural Statistics**, which, after a specific and comprehensive analysis to identify gender gaps in existing statistics in the cultural and creative sectors, provides recommendations to better capture women's roles in the cultural and creative sectors. For further information, see <https://www.mesoc-project.eu/resources/gender-and-cultural-and-creative-sector-guide-gender-integration-cultural-statistics>.

The **AU Culture Platform** is a web and mobile application that allows for the evaluation (from a wider perspective) of the impacts

generated on individuals after participation in a cultural event. The AU Culture Platform is available for mobile phones and other digital tools and can be accessed via www.aucultur.eu.

SICCRED is an Artificial Intelligence-supported tool that allows for the measurement of the impact of variations in the number of cultural and creative workers in a given European region based on each of the 11 dimensions of well-being covered by the OECD *Better Life Index* (<https://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/>). SICCRED can be accessed free of charge at <https://www.mesoc-project.eu/resources/SICCRED>.

A **range of publications** (conference papers, academic articles, reports, abstracts, videos, etc.) presenting the intermediate and final results of research activities conducted in the context of MESOC. The Special Issue of *City, Territory and Architecture* in SpringerOpen, on the theme of 'Cities in transition:

exploring the role of urban cultural policies', represents one of the main outputs of MESOC in terms of scientific dissemination of the project's results. The Special Issue can be consulted in open access at <https://www.springeropen.com/collections/CITITRANS>.

Online and offline workshops, meetings and conference presentations, which enabled MESOC partners and other key stakeholders working on the societal impact of culture to explore and discuss the themes addressed by the project and to make progress on its results. Additional information on the organised events can be found at <https://www.mesoc-project.eu/events>.

An **interactive version of the methodological guidelines** to leverage the internal and external factors of a cultural institution or project/programme/event that can facilitate the generation of societal impacts. In addition to a com-

prehensive, detailed list of enabling factors, the guidelines also include a set of subfactors, transition variables and examples of proxy indicators, validated by the Delphi consultation carried out during the project's lifetime. The interactive version of the guidelines is available online at <https://www.mesoc-project.eu/resources/methodological-guidelines/interactive>.

For additional information about the activities conducted in the context of MESOC and their results, visit <https://mesoc-project.eu/resources>.

A handbook for those who design, implement, research and assess cultural projects, policies and programmes with social impact.

Who is This Handbook For?

Understanding the societal value of cultural activities and being able to


measure and explain it is particularly relevant for those engaged in designing and implementing cultural projects on the ground, as well as for decision-makers and public and private managers who provide funding and establish priorities, and for researchers engaged in research and evaluation. As a result, this Handbook is particularly targeted at:

Artists and cultural professionals involved in designing and implementing cultural projects that contribute to health and well-being, citizen engagement and urban or territorial renovation, who will be able to better articulate the value of their activities and revise them accordingly.

Policymakers and public managers who design and implement strategies, policies or programmes on the social impact of culture at the local, regional, national or European levels and need suitable tools for planning and measurement.

Managers of private funding programmes, who work

to connect culture with social impact and need adequate measurement tools.


 **Researchers, trainers and students** in cultural management and cultural policy, who will have a new set of resources available to assess, understand and explore the intersections between culture and other areas of societal value.


The Handbook has been structured as a set of resources, texts and elements for reflection. We invite readers to identify and use the elements that are most relevant to their areas of interest.

The Convergent Model provides an explanation of how, under certain conditions, cultural experiences can enable specific social impacts.


What Can You Find in this Handbook?

Following this introduction (Chapter 1), the Handbook contains three major chapters:

 **Chapter 2: ‘Understanding the Social Impact of Culture’** provides an accessible summary of the main themes addressed by MESOC and points to additional references and illustrative examples. It allows practitioners, decision-makers, managers and researchers to become familiar with the ways in which cultural projects and policies contribute to health and well-being, people’s engagement and participation, and urban and territorial renovation. Drawing on previous literature and the contributions made by MESOC, it also includes case studies and additional references, enabling readers to further explore the issues addressed.

 **Chapter 3: ‘How We Can Assess the Social Impact of Culture’** presents the main

contributions made by MESOC, namely the ‘Convergent Model’ for measuring the societal value of culture. The chapter includes, first, an overview of standard approaches to the measurement of the societal impact of culture and, second, a description of the Convergent Model, highlighting its added value when compared to previous models, as well as in relation to MESOC’s three highest priority themes. The Convergent Model provides a certain ‘theory of change’ – that is, an explanation of how, under certain conditions, cultural experiences can enable the occurrence of specific social impacts. The chapter introduces the set of internal and external enablers that can facilitate impact, as identified by MESOC. It also includes illustrative case studies, toolboxes with relevant tools and further reading on the topics at hand.

 **Chapter 4: ‘Recommendations for Improving the Social Impact of Culture’** provides a set of final recom-

mendations for policymakers and cultural project managers, describing how best to apply the findings of MESOC, the tools presented in this Handbook and its accompanying tools in their own contexts and practices.

Chapters 2 and 3 include several **case studies** drawn both from MESOC’s activities and from other sources. While they should not be seen as ‘best practices’ per se, they are illustrative of the societal value and impacts of cultural activities. They also aim to present a diverse spectrum of approaches and contexts, addressing different art forms and cultural disciplines in a range of cities and countries that have been implemented through diverse approaches. Given the overarching goal of summarising complex stories, in each case study only a few salient elements have been highlighted, particularly those that contribute to illustrating the Handbook’s arguments. Each case study contains links to where further information may be accessed for a more comprehensive understanding of each case.

In Chapters 2 and 3, you will also find a set of questions for consideration or additional tools to explore, which aim to enable readers to consider how their own cultural policies, programmes and projects can better integrate social impact.

Furthermore, throughout the Handbook, several boxes present additional references drawn from MESOC's repository of literature, which can allow readers to further explore the issues raised.

How to Use this Handbook



This Handbook aims to provide accessible information, based on the findings of MESOC, for researchers, decision-makers, funders, trainers, project managers, students and other agents interested in understanding, enabling and assessing the social impact of culture. Despite the complexity of the issues addressed, an effort has been made to present the information in clear and easily understood language.

Readers need not use the Handbook at full length, but rather may access the content that is particularly relevant to their individual contexts at any given time. In order to facilitate accessibility and usage, a set of graphic elements serve to distinguish the contents, including case studies, recommended activities, additional resources, etc. Several icons have also been used to facilitate the understanding of key terms and concepts in the case studies.

MESOC RESPONDED TO THE NEED TO RECOGNISE HOW MUCH CULTURE MATTERS TO EUROPEAN SOCIETIES, GOING BEYOND ITS ECONOMIC IMPACT, WHICH OFTEN PREVAILS IN PUBLIC DISCOURSES.

IT HIGHLIGHTED THE FACT THAT CULTURE ALSO MATTERS IN TERMS OF HEALTH AND WELL-BEING, PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION, AND URBAN AND TERRITORIAL RENOVATION.



CHAPTER 2

Understanding the Social Impact of Culture

*Photography: "The Other Map" -
UPAD Festival © Silvija Dogan*

The value of cultural activities increasingly lies in the social interactions they activate and generate.

Why Do We Focus on the Social Impact of Culture?

Cultural activities do not occur in a vacuum. They emerge in specific social contexts and have effects in the environments where they unfold. These effects or impacts may be manifold, operating at individual, collective and broader societal levels, affecting those directly involved (such as artists, cultural professionals, participants, partners, funders, etc.) as well as those who may later interact with their results (e.g., audiences at an event or visitors of an exhibition) or those who are indirectly in contact with their areas of impact (e.g., neighbours in an area where a particular cultural event has been held). We can also classify these effects and impacts in a range of thematic areas, including symbolic, economic, territorial and social impacts, among others.

In recent decades, increasing attention has been paid to the impacts of cultural activities due to several factors, including the following:

- ➊ The technological revolution (digitisation and the Internet) has very significantly reduced the cost of the tools necessary to take part in the creation, production, distribution and access of cultural goods and services – that is, today it is much easier for anyone to create and disseminate a video or song from their home than in the past. In this context, **the value of cultural activities increasingly lies in the social interactions that they activate and generate**, and in the changes in meaning and experiences that they provoke.

- ➋ Today's economic system, with symbolic production as a central component, has been termed by some 'cultural capitalism' or 'cognitive capitalism' – in this context, **art, culture and creativity are seen as critical aspects in development processes**. As a result, many local, regional and national governments, as well as regional and international organisations (e.g., the European Commission, UNESCO, or the OECD), have placed greater emphasis on the relevance of art and culture in territorial development.

- ➌ New mechanisms of social interaction are emerging, which rely particularly on the exchange of symbolic contents and **generate a range of impacts at the individual, collective and broader territorial**

levels. At the individual level, participation in cultural activities may contribute to satisfying the human needs for expression and communication (that is, participants are able to express themselves, engage in social interaction and feel recognised), as well as increasing well-being and self-esteem. Furthermore, there may be positive collective impacts, including a sense of belonging and the perception of oneself in relation to others, with positive effects in terms of social cohesion and empathy. In this respect, an indistinguishable relationship is established between creative processes, cultural dynamics and the territories in which they take place.

At the European level, the European Commission's [New European Agenda for Culture \(2018\)](#) and its accompanying

document have introduced the concept of **'cultural crossovers'**, which serve to assess the impacts of culture in different fields, such as health and well-being. The Agenda highlighted the 'social dimension' of culture, which concerns 'harnessing the power of culture and cultural diversity for social cohesion and well-being'. This is one of the documents that provided a background for the MESOC project.

Different Ways of Understanding Impact

Much attention has been paid over the years to how focusing on the impacts of culture may divert attention from the specific goals of cultural policies and practices. That is, placing emphasis on how cultural activities can generate positive economic or social results may lead to seeing cultural participation as a 'resource' or 'tool' to achieve other public policy objectives in an instrumental way. Some authors have referred to 'policy attachment' as the strategy that allows a public policy sector with relatively low weight in public budgets (such as culture) to obtain resources that allow it to

achieve its objectives. However, other approaches emphasise the contribution of culture to the generation of 'public value', a more holistic, interconnected term which highlights the specific value of culture while also placing it in connection with other spheres. This approach is closer to the understanding adopted by MESOC.

At the same time, and before moving on to examining the impacts of culture in specific areas, it is important to consider a few assumptions and issues which may contextualise our understanding of impact:

... **Impact is an evanescent concept** – because it is, to a certain extent, subjective and dependent upon who defines impact, for which purpose, and in relation to whom (an individual or a group). In research, policy and practice, impact is also frequently used as a synonym for the 'result', 'effect', or 'outcome' of a certain intervention (i.e., a project, policy or activity).

... **Impact assessment is always related to an intervention.** It tries to respond to the fundamental question of whether, and to what extent, an intervention has 'worked well' in relation to the change(s) it aimed to introduce in a certain context and in relation to a certain 'AS-IS' situation (the baseline) to be modified in a certain 'TO-BE' direction (the objective), usually for the benefit of a certain target group or beneficiary (an individual or group).

... **Impact is referred to as a synonym of change,** where the change is induced or triggered by that intervention, comparing the 'AS-IS' with the 'TO-BE' situation – or, in other terms, the 'ex-ante' and the 'ex-post' situations.

... **Addressing the impact of an intervention as a synonym of 'induced or triggered change' is wrong.** Contextual factors also matter for change and are at least as important as the intervention itself. It is difficult to argue that only

the intervention has provoked a change, because changes will always occur, even without an intervention. Changes can go in the same or the opposite direction due to a plethora of concurrent elements, which an intervention cannot easily or fully control for. Often, the scale of an intervention is too limited to explain major change. Time is needed, usually beyond the scheduled end of a certain intervention, for its results to start being impactful.

... **Impact is hard, or virtually impossible, to measure.** The well-known 'linear intervention flow', which moves from 'objectives' to 'actions', then from 'actions' to 'outputs', then from 'outputs' to 'outcomes', and finally from 'outcomes' to 'impacts', makes sense when we look at the dimension of time and the underlying logic of the intervention, but does not necessarily help to measure induced or triggered change. This is because the connection between 'outcomes' and 'impacts' is far from being direct and linear. Change depends on many fac-

tors, some or most of which are totally disconnected from the intervention itself. The influence of these factors often remains impossible to disentangle – not to mention measure, according to a certain criterion or a set of criteria and metrics.

Taking this into account, MESOC focused primarily on **‘transition impact’**, an approach first developed by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in the 1990s which focuses

on the measurable effects of an intervention on contextual factors which may then generate broader impacts. These connections may be presented through a **‘theory of change’**.

In the next few sections, we will examine some of the connections that can be established between cultural activities and the main areas of social impact addressed by MESOC, namely: health and well-being; people’s engagement, participation and social cohesion; and urban and territorial innovation.

Further reading on the impacts of culture and ways to reflect on impact



- Matarasso, F. (1997). *Use or Ornament? The social impact of participation in the arts*. Comedia. Available at <https://arest-lesart.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/1997-use-or-ornament.pdf>
A classic text on the social impacts of culture, including impacts in terms of personal development, social cohesion, community empowerment and self-determination, local image and identity, and health and well-being, among others.

- Holden, J. (2004). *Capturing Cultural Value: How culture has become a tool of government policy*. Demos. Available at <https://www.a-n.co.uk/research/capturing-cultural-value-how-culture-has-become-a-tool-of-government-policy-3/>
A response to the perceived focus of arguments for culture on instrumental impacts, which aims to develop a language through which the value of culture can be conveyed. This involves, among others, recognising the affective elements of cultural experience and exploring its broad public value.
- Carnwath, J.D. and Brown, A.S. (2014). *Understanding the Value and Impacts of Cultural Experiences: A Literature Review*. Arts Council England. Available at https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Understanding_the_Value_and_Impacts_of_Cultural_Experiences.pdf
This report presents a summary and analysis of a set of major contributions to the examination of the impact of culture, aiming to clarify key concepts and to structure the areas covered. It provides an excellent entry point to key references in this field, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon context.
- European Commission (2018). *A New European Agenda for culture*. COM (2018) 267 final. Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2018:267:FIN>
Building on and updating the European Commission’s first European Agenda for Culture in a globalising world, the New European Agenda provides a framework for the EU’s work in the field of culture, emphasising its connections with the EU’s social, economic and external policies.

- Barata, F.T., Molinari, F., Marsh, J., and Moreira Cabeça, S. (2017). *Creative Innovation and Related Living Lab Experiences: A Mediterranean Model*. UNESCO Chair in Intangible Heritage and Traditional Know-How–University of Evora. Available at https://www.mesoc-project.eu/sites/default/files/2020-06/creative-innovation-and-related-living-lab-experiences_a-mediterranean-model.pdf
Developed in the context of the EU-funded CreativeMED project, which focused on territorial innovation and ‘smart specialisation strategies’, this publication examined the connections between territorial creativity and innovation, particularly in a Mediterranean context. It also addressed the complexity of measuring territorial impacts and, as such, inspired some of MESOC’s work.



The Impacts of Culture on Health and Well-being

Product (GDP) or income as a measure of their citizens’ happiness, health and well-being.

General context

The relationship between culture, health and well-being has experienced a growing interest in recent decades. Some of this interest can be traced back to many governments’ **disillusionment with the traditional use of the Gross Domestic**

This has led them to introduce some new indices of progress and well-being to guide their policymaking. In this context, cultural practices have started to be considered important elements in the determination of the well-being and health of a nation, as well as of individual citizens. **Case Study I** (page 39), *Inner Space*, is an excellent example of this relationship.

Case Study I

INNER SPACE

Cluj, Romania

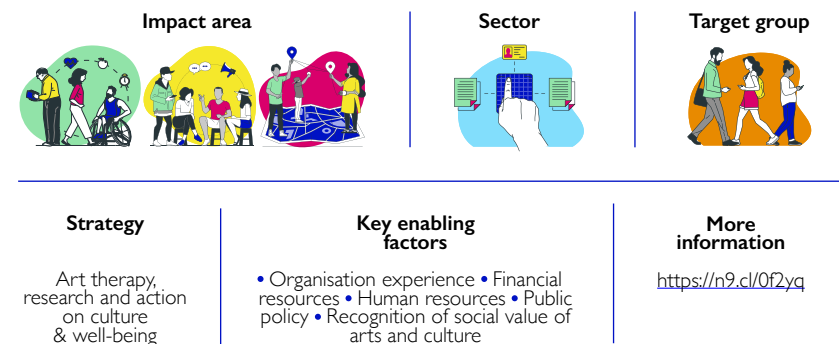
Institution: Cluj Cultural Centre

Public policy-influenced bid to improve the well-being of urban residents through art and cultural participation and create similar scalable actions.

Inner Space capitalises on the Cluj-Napoca bid for the European Capital of Culture title and public policy measures aimed at fostering the well-being of city residents through art and cultural participation. The interdisciplinary, multi-stakeholder project strives to make Cluj an exceptional case by including psychological well-being among its strategic factors for sustainable development, as well as making the city a strategic centre for art and well-being.

The Cluj Cultural Centre’s extensive organisational experience in cultural projects with social impact, combined with its financial and human resources, have facilitated its efforts in working to-

ward such an ambitious objective. The organisation employs a three-pronged approach for improving cultural participation and citizen well-being, combining varied research projects with artistic programmes and a programme for capacity building and advocacy. The project’s main aim is to transfer the lessons of these pilot activities to influence local policies or create actions and frameworks that are replicable on a wider scale.



These approaches build on the extensive available evidence that **cultural participation may have strong and significant effects on several health conditions**, including self-reported psychological well-being, mortality due to cancer, or life expectancy. In particular, cultural participation has been found to be the second predictor of psychological well-being after (the presence/absence of) major diseases, and in this respect has a significantly stronger impact than variables such as income, place of residence, age, gender, or occupation. Moreover, these studies show that this relationship is even stronger in social contexts where cultural consumption is high. In a 2017 Eurobarometer Survey, 71% of the people surveyed agreed that living close to places related to Europe's cultural heritage can improve quality of life.

More recently, lockdowns and social distancing measures in the context of the **Covid-19 pandemic have highlighted the importance of the arts and culture for people's mental and physical health and well-being**. Recognition of the positive effects of cul-

tural participation— both active and passive— on people's quality of life, health and well-being is based on a vast and growing body of research and experimentation developed mainly in the last two decades. It offers a new opportunity to capitalise on the role of culture in the prevention and treatment of mental and physical diseases throughout the lifespan and in the development of healthy living. More broadly, Covid-19 has renewed attention to the centrality of health and well-being in our societies, including both physical and mental health. **Case Study 2** (page 41), *Athens Digital Escape Route*, provides an innovative example of this relationship during the pandemic.

This attention is also aligned with **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 in the UN Agenda 2030**, which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all people at all ages. In this context, a range of organisations including the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the European Commission have established initiatives that provide a systematic link between culture, health and well-being in their policies for the coming decades.

Case Study 2

ATHENS DIGITAL ESCAPE ROUTE

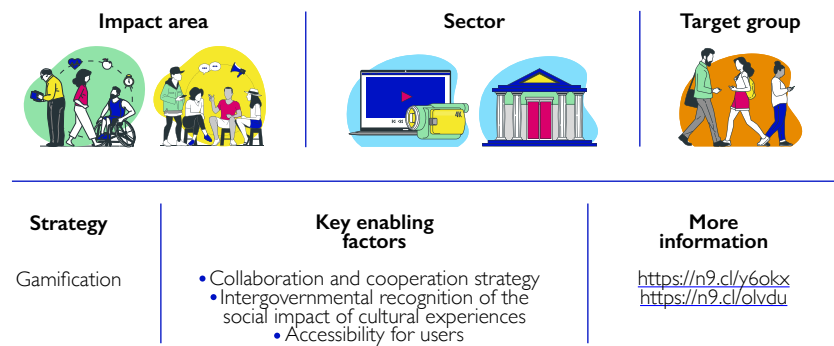
Athens, Greece

Institutions: Municipality of Athens, Athens Culture Network, So7

Digital treasure hunt encouraging cultural participation through gaming during the pandemic that highlights the successful collaboration of governmental and non-governmental actors.

The Athens Digital Escape Route, a digital treasure hunt and the first game of its kind to explore Athens and its culture online, was created during the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic to provide free, interactive cultural programming for local residents during the first lockdown. The game was initially planned as an in-person treasure hunt as part of the Municipality of Athens' Culture Network's pilot program 'Culture in the Neighbourhoods', though the onset of the pandemic led to the game being reconfigured as a digital escape room where residents could connect with local cultural events and expand their knowledge of the city and its neighbourhoods,

culture, architecture and other key landmarks. The close collaboration of the Municipality of Athens' Culture Network and the civic non-profit company So7 made it possible for over 3,500 players to interact with one another and discover their local cultural heritage from their homes over the course of five days, through an engaging and gamified digital experience. This case clearly reflects the benefits of cooperation between governmental and non-governmental entities, as well as the improvement in citizen well-being that can result when governmental and non-profit actors recognise the social impact of cultural experiences.



How cultural activities relate to health and well-being

Health and well-being are linked to multiple complex factors, including lifestyle and social and economic circumstances. Cultural participation is one of the elements that can contribute to better health, although connections will always be conditioned by, and in turn influence, other environmental aspects, including social and community networks, living and working conditions, education, housing, etc.

Therefore, it is always necessary to acknowledge the **complex connections that exist between the arts and culture, health and well-being**. The scoping review conducted by Daisy Fancourt and Saoirse Finn on behalf of the WHO in 2019 identified over 900 publications in this field and suggested a three-level logic model linking the arts with health. Here, some components of arts activities (e.g., aesthetic engagement, or social interaction) may trigger particular psychological, physiological, social or behavioural responses, which

are themselves causally linked with health outcomes— i.e., improvements in terms of health prevention, promotion, management or treatment. Several factors, such as the specific characteristics of participants or the quality and length of the engagement, may also be determining. The Receta Cultura project (see **Case Study 3**, page 43) offers an interesting example of these findings in action.

The notion of **‘cultural welfare’** also serves to recognise the effectiveness of sustained participation in specific cultural, artistic and creative activities as a factor of subjective well-being, life satisfaction and health, active ageing, empowerment for people with disabilities or disadvantaged groups, as well as a factor in combating health-related inequalities and fostering social cohesion.

Cultural participation is one of the elements that can contribute to better health.

Case Study 3

RECETA CULTURA

Valencia, Spain

Institution: Las Naves (Valencia City Council)

Policy-based collaboration between public authorities and health and cultural institutions to improve well-being through prescribing physical activity, social connections and cultural experiences.

A pilot project based on local public policy, the *Receta Cultura* project aimed to improve the emotional well-being and quality of life of people who are lonely and/or affected by sedentary lifestyles. This project benefited greatly from the collaboration and co-production capacity of public authorities and several cultural, community and health centres. Doctors prescribed participants guided tours of six museums and other cultural spaces in Valencia in combination with walking tours that departed from local health centres. In addition to capitalising on the recognised social and health benefits of cultural experiences and community participation, the project began to

shift the medical paradigm of prescribing medication toward the prescription of physical activity, social connections and cultural activities in order to promote healthier lifestyles and improve individuals' overall quality of life. These visits not only stimulated physical activity, but also allowed participants to interact with the group, express themselves without feeling judged and gain the satisfaction of sharing new experiences.

Impact area



Sector



Target group



Strategy

Art Therapy

Key enabling factors

- Collaboration and co-production capacity
- Public policy
- Scientific and social recognition of health and the value of arts and culture

More information

<https://n9.cl/kwe3>

In the MESOC project, City Pilots explored the connections between culture, health and well-being. During the policy dialogues conducted within this framework, the main keywords used to refer to **the role of cultural experience in relation to health and well-being** were as follows:

- ♥ reactivating personal memory;
- ♥ evoking positive emotions;
- ♥ reducing loneliness;
- ♥ improving healthcare services;
- ♥ complementing pharmacological therapies;
- ♥ enhancing psychomotor skills;
- ♥ generating new sensations;
- ♥ strengthening personal identity and enhancing self-confidence; and
- ♥ enhancing participation and inclusion.

Reported impacts included stress reduction, better psychological well-being, better emotional management, and the sensory rehabilitation of hospitalised patients, people with disabilities and other specific target groups and their carers, as well as cultural participation's contribution to overcoming patients' early frus-

trations through perseverance. It was also seen to encourage interpersonal relationships and increase the cognitive abilities of people with dementia, improving their quality of life (see **Case Study 18**, page 103) *Museus per a la salut*).

Policy dialogues also served to identify **some difficulties** among policymakers and other local stakeholders in understanding the concept of 'well-being' and what factors may lead to it. Furthermore, they showed that the connections existing between culture, health and well-being are not easily understood, even if there is an increasing number of projects exploring them, as some of the case studies presented in this Handbook illustrate well. These initiatives often remain isolated, as many countries are missing structured policy approaches connecting culture, health and well-being. This may partly be due to the fact that many policies focus on short-term results, whereas the connection of culture, health and well-being may primarily bring mid- to long-term benefits. Further dissemination of existing knowledge on the impacts

of culture in this area is also necessary. The existence of collaborations between stakeholders in culture and health is an important factor in fur-

ther exploring connections in these areas, a reality illustrated well by **Case Study 4** (page 47), *Kaikukortti Card (Culture for All Service)*.

Further reading on the impacts of culture on health and well-being



- Grossi, E., Tavano Blessi, G., Sacco, P. L., and Buscema, M. (2012). The Interaction Between Culture, Health and Psychological Well-Being: Data Mining from the Italian Culture and Well-Being Project. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 13(1), 129–148. Available at <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10902-011-9254-x>
Drawing on a sample of 1,500 Italian citizens, this study aimed to understand the impact of health status and cultural participation on psychological well-being. It identified cultural access as the second most important determinant of psychological well-being, immediately after the absence or presence of diseases, outperforming factors such as job, age, income, civil status, education, place of living and other important factors.
- Fancourt, D. and Finn, S. (2019). *Health Evidence Network synthesis report 67. What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review*. WHO Europe. Available at <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/329834/9789289054553-eng.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. Results from over 3,000 studies identified a major role for the arts in the prevention of ill health, the promotion of health and the management and treatment of illness throughout the lifespan.

- Ascolani, F., Cacovean, C., Passaretti, A., Portaluri, T., Sacco, P. L., Uboldi, S. and Zbranca, R. (2020). *Art consumption and well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic*. Cluj Cultural Center. Available at <https://art-wellbeing.eu/research-covid-19-pandemic/>
This research explores engagement in cultural activities with reference to well-being and health during the Covid-19 pandemic in Europe. It aims to bring a new perspective on how the arts influence well-being during a period of crisis.
- Zbranca, R., Dâmaso, M., Blaga, O., Kiss, K., Dascşl, M. D., Yakobson, D., & Pop, O. (2022). *CultureForHealth Report. Culture's contribution to health and well-being. A report on evidence and policy recommendations for Europe*. CultureForHealth. Culture Action Europe. Available at https://www.cultureforhealth.eu/app/uploads/2023/02/Final_C4H_FullReport_small.pdf
This report, produced in the context of an EU preparatory action on culture and well-being, aims to synthesise existing evidence on the effects of arts and cultural activities on health and well-being. It presents existing knowledge on the connections between culture and health, and subjective and community well-being, as well as presenting and analysing these connections in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. It also discusses the implication of the findings in terms of policies in this area.

Case Study 4

KAIKUKORTTI CARD: CULTURE FOR ALL SERVICE

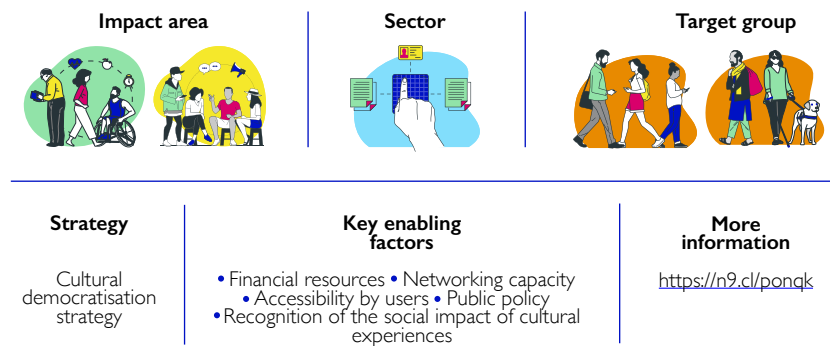
Finland

Institution: Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland

Policy initiative recognising the right to cultural participation and improving cultural democratisation through free admission to cultural events for under-resourced citizens.

The *Kaikukortti* Card is a key element of the 'Culture for All' service financed by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, which recognises the distinct impact of cultural attendance and participation on citizens' health and well-being and aims to foster practical solutions for encouraging more active participation in arts and cultural activities. The Ministry has utilised its networking capacities to partner with various organisations from the social, health and cultural sectors to develop the card, an accreditation that gives its owner access to admissions tickets to cultural events and seats in some adult education courses free of charge.

Based upon the belief that 'culture belongs to everybody, regardless of their financial situation' the *Kaikukortti* Card is available to anyone over 16 years old who is a current client of the social welfare or healthcare centres that form part of its network, or who otherwise cannot afford tickets to cultural events due to financial constraints. In this way, the initiative improves the democratisation of culture and social inclusion. Furthermore, it promotes and supports greater structural cooperation between the participating organisations, creating a new and more inclusive network spanning the social, health and cultural sectors.



Some ideas for reflection



- Which impacts of cultural activities related to health and well-being can you identify in your own experience, either as a direct participant or as an observer?
- Can you think of any factors that would contribute to making these impacts better recognised?
- Are there any factors that could contribute to making these impacts more systematic? This could include, for instance, stronger collaboration between organisations in culture and health, better evaluation frameworks, more funding, etc.

The Impacts of Culture on People's Engagement and Participation



General context

People's active participation in cultural activities and other cultural experiences is a precondition for achieving several other social impacts, including contributing to health and well-being and to urban and territorial renovation, particularly in their more intan-

gible dimensions (e.g., collaborative skills, social cohesion and self-esteem). In addition, broadening opportunities for individual and collective cultural participation is well-aligned with both the **acknowledgement of the right to take part in cultural life as a human right** and the understanding that fostering relationships and the engagement of communities is intrinsic to the idea of culture – that is, **culture requires participation to exist and to evolve**. [Case Study 5](#) (page 50),

La Gata Perduda, provides a clear example of this fact and illustrates the strong potential for both cultural activities and neighbourhood residents to benefit from participatory, co-design processes.

Recent years have witnessed an increase in attention paid to cultural participation, in what some have termed a **'participatory turn' in cultural policy** – with examples ranging from crowdfunding campaigns to large-scale cultural events, through socially engaged art and audience development strategies. While this 'participatory turn' may be connected to making cultural life more democratic and inclusive, some **obstacles remain**. First, the fact remains that, despite the prevailing discourses in cultural policy, very often cultural participation remains concentrated in only a few social and economic groups, according to existing surveys. Second, participation is frequently used in very different ways, ranging from mere consultation to active engagement; though it often intends to make public debates and cultural life more democratic, it instead serves

primarily to legitimise decisions adopted by those who launched the participatory process.

At the heart of these considerations is the need to have a critical perspective on the meaning of 'participation'. As suggested by US policy analyst Sherry R. Arnstein in 1969, [levels of citizen participation can be placed on a 'ladder'](#), ranging from manipulation (where participation amounts to a tokenistic public relations gesture made by public institutions), to citizen control (where citizens are actively engaged in planning, policy making and programme management). A range of levels exist in between, including information, consultation, partnership and delegation. As a result, it is necessary to consider the qualitative dimensions of participation, including how participation takes place, who is engaged, and what the expected and achieved results may be. [Case Study 6](#) (page 51), *SKCNS Upad Theatre Festival*, is an excellent example of citizen control through the co-planning of a theatre festival by and for youth.

Case Study 5

LA GATA PERDUDA

Barcelona, Spain

Institutions: Gran Teatre del Liceu opera theatre, TRACTION project

Co-creation of an opera with residents of an under-resourced neighbourhood, made possible by strong public policy support and community commitment to collaboration.

La Gata Perduda ('The Lost Cat') was an innovative artistic project that worked with residents of Barcelona's under-resourced Raval neighbourhood to produce a community-created opera inspired by the life experiences of neighbourhood residents, who represent more than 40 nationalities in just 1.1 km² of urban space. Developed over more than three years, the opera involved the inputs and active creative work of residents in every possible area, including the text, music, costumes, visual branding, stage floor and other aspects of production, while local amateur choirs and music students performed alongside professional opera singers from the Liceu. The extensive involvement of a total

of 1,000 local residents (between participating individuals and organisations) in planning, creating and presenting the opera was made possible by the strong cooperation and collaboration of the 72 entities and organisations involved. Though collaborations of this stature are by no means common, the Raval neighbourhood boasts the greatest density of associative collectivism in the EU. The unique combination of coordination by a cultural powerhouse, EU funding and a thriving associative network at the local level allowed not only for an original artistic production, but also a novel approach to social inclusion.



Strategy

Community co-creation of opera, acting and interpretation

Key enabling factors

- Collaboration and co-production capacity
- Connectivity of urban space
- Multicultural interaction
- Public policy
- Financial resources

More information

<https://n9.cl/elujs>
<https://n9.cl/359wi>

Case Study 6

SKCNS UPAD THEATRE FESTIVAL

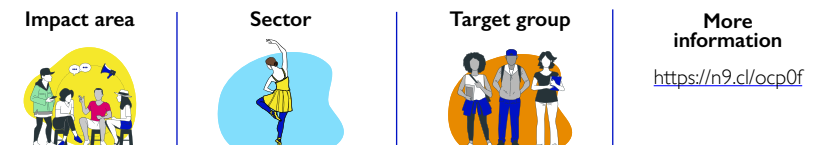
Novi Sad, Serbia

Institution: Student Culture Centre of Novi Sad (SKCNS)

Theatre festival co-managed by youth with strong community ties and the capacities for collaboration and co-production with varied entities.

The Upad Theatre Festival, launched by the Student Culture Centre of Novi Sad (SKCNS) in 2019 under its participation in the EU-funded 'Be SpectACTive!' project, operates under the premise that the performing arts should be widely promoted and popularised amongst young people. This has led SKCNS to create a festival in which young audiences not only have chosen all the performances on the bill, but also have been involved in all aspects of the festival's organisation, under the mentoring and supervision of a community manager. The confluence of a clear recognition of the social value of arts and culture and a strong territorial dynamism with a his-

tory of cultural activism and connection to the social fabric and urban space have all enabled the beginnings of the Upad Theatre Festival. SKCNS' capacity for collaboration and co-production, combined with its connection to the community and target audiences, have also contributed to its ongoing success.



Strategy

Co-management of performing arts festival

Key enabling factors

- Collaboration and co-production capacity
- Connection to community and target audiences
- Recognition of social impact of culture
- Cultural activism
- Connection to social fabric and urban space


Beyond the attention paid to participation as a precondition for cultural experiences and for achieving other forms of social impact, **access to and participation in cultural activities can also contribute to strengthening civic skills** and paving the way for more continued engagement and participation in cultural, social and political life – that is, they can also have an impact on more structural forms of participation. It is particularly this structural, systemic effect of participation on more continued civic engagement that MESOC was interested in exploring.


How cultural activities relate to people's engagement and participation


Evidence collected over the course of the MESOC project illustrates the range of ways in which participation in cultural activities can contribute to stronger citizen engagement and participation, both in the cultural realm and in other areas of life.

City Pilots implemented throughout the project explored the connections


between culture and people's participation and engagement. Some of the findings from participating cities point to the following impacts:


 Cultural projects can facilitate **meeting and participation spaces**, allowing community members to interact; encouraging values such as tolerance, respect and mutual recognition; and generating feelings of belonging in the community and the city (see **Case Study 10**, *Le temps des cerises*, page 63).

 Participation in cultural projects can **strengthen the organisational skills of participants**, at both the individual and the group levels, as well as fostering community cooperation and, in so doing, contribute to civic engagement and social cohesion.

 Involvement in cultural projects, particularly for under-resourced or under-represented groups, can provide them with **enhanced visibility, recognition and social capital** by enabling collaboration with cultural venues and other stakehold-








ers and paving the way for subsequent networking opportunities. It can also contribute to recognising minority cultural expressions that have frequently been separated from the mainstream cultural scene, thus enabling a stronger position of minority groups in public spaces (see **Case Study 12**, *En Palabras*, page 90).

 Cultural projects can provide a **space for visualising and discussing issues of public interest**, including those that would rarely enter the public agenda otherwise.

 Designing inclusive, participatory cultural projects can also be a step towards **generating more continued engagement in cultural activities**, e.g., by generating new habits of accessing cultural venues (libraries, community centres, etc.) and other forms of cultural participation. The *Apropa Cultura* initiative (**Case Study 7**, page 54), provides clear and compelling evidence of this finding.

During the policy dialogues conducted in this framework, the main keywords used to refer **to the role**

of cultural experience in relation to participation and engagement were as follows:

-  enabling social participation;
-  expanding social networks;
-  enhancing community services;
-  increasing a sense of belonging;
-  enabling self-empowerment;
-  bringing people together; and
-  enabling the emancipation of vulnerable groups.

Case Study 8 (page 55), *L'Exposition Participative*, is an excellent example of how all these benefits may come together when projects are focused on engaging citizens –in this case, youth in situations of social and professional exclusion– in participatory processes.

Participation in cultural activities can contribute to stronger citizen engagement and participation, both in the cultural realm and in other areas of life.

Case Study 7

APROPA CULTURA

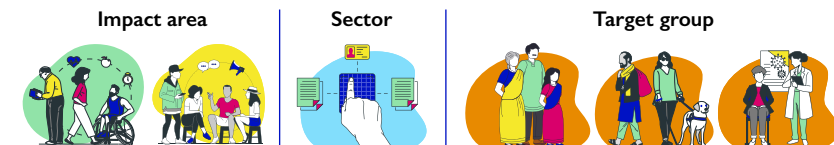
Barcelona, Spain

Institution: Consorci de l'Auditori i L'Orquestra

Cultural democratisation programme helping under-represented groups access cultural activities and encouraging synergies between cultural and social entities' teams.

An innovative programme for fostering and diversifying access to cultural venues for disadvantaged individuals and groups, *Apropa Cultura* has worked since 2006 to put cultural experiences within reach of those who have traditionally had difficulty accessing them, including individuals with intellectual or physical disabilities, people with substance use disorders or mental health conditions, women, older people and migrants. The programme maintains a platform for registering and connecting cultural organisations that agree to offer reduced or symbolic entry fees for under-represented residents with the social or health centres that coordinate these

cultural outings in accordance with participants' needs and interests and evaluate their experiences afterward. Due to its extensive networking capacity, *Apropa Cultura* boasts the participation of more than 190 public and private cultural venues and nearly 1,500 social and health centres in 53 cities in Catalonia, and has also been expanded outside Catalonia. This widespread reach is made possible by the existence of both strong networks of cultural and social actors and public policies in the cultural sector that aim to improve inclusion and equality for under-represented citizens through the democratisation of cultural experiences.



Strategy

Cultural democratisation, Connecting social and cultural worlds

Key enabling factors

- Networking capacity
- Public policy alliances
- Previous experience of the organisation in cultural projects with social impact
- Accessibility for users

More information

<https://n9.cl/3nhci>

Case Study 8

L'EXPOSITION PARTICIPATIVE

Lens, France

Institution: Louvre-Lens Museum

Participatory project allowing 'at-risk' youth to curate an exhibition in a world-class art museum, leveraging the organisation's social responsibility and resources for sociocultural benefit.

To commemorate its 10th anniversary, the Louvre-Lens Museum prepared *L'exposition participative* project, which allowed a group of young adults (aged 16-25 years) in situations of social and professional exclusion to participate in the co-curation of an exhibition in the museum, which receives 530,000 annual visitors and is France's second-busiest regional museum. For 19 months, the young apprentice curators were accompanied by scientific curators as they imagined, designed and ran an exhibition on the place of art in the intimate and the home. Nearly 100 young people were involved in the project, with a rich diversity of backgrounds, interests and exchanges present.

The fact that the museum entrusted a group of young people to coordinate and produce an entire exhibition has made this a pioneering project in the museum world. The Louvre-Lens' recognition of the social impact of cultural experiences and its commitment to social responsibility were important enabling factors for formulating this project, and its commitment to leveraging its organisational experience and human and material resources directly informed the wealth of possibilities available to the young curators.



Strategy

Co-curation of an exhibition

Key enabling factors

- Organisational expertise
- Human and material resources
- Recognition of the social impact of cultural experiences
- Commitment to social responsibility
- Co-participation processes

More information

<https://n9.cl/ojm8a>
<https://n9.cl/xoj1n>

Further reading on the impacts of culture on people's engagement and participation



- Matarasso, F. (2019). *A Restless Art: How participation won, and why it matters*. Lisbon and London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Available at <https://gulbenkian.pt/en/publications/a-restless-art/>
Comprising interviews with artists and observations made through visits to participatory art projects across Europe and other regions, this book explores the meaning of participatory art, including its role in strengthening democracy and its contributions to civic and social values. It also analyses participatory art's evolution throughout the years and the diverse forms it has adopted and continues to adopt.
- Jancovich, L. (2017). The participation myth. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 23(1), 107-121. Available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10286632.2015.1027698>
This article examines the barriers to increasing participation in the arts, critically reviewing to what extent policy rhetoric around participation has had effective results. It argues that, often, policy implementation is influenced by a narrow range of voices, rather than providing a space for others to take part.
- Bonet, L. and Négrier, E. (2018). The Participatory Turn in Cultural Policy: Paradigms, Models, Contexts. *Poetics*, 66(1): 64-73. Available at <http://diposit.ub.edu/dspace/bitstream/2445/191034/1/677444.pdf>

Inspired by the assessment of BeSpectACTive!, a European action research project focusing on citizen participation in the performing arts, this article examines the different paradigms behind the many cultural initiatives and policies that claim to be based on participation, and what they imply.

- Bonet, L. and Négrier, E. (eds.). (2018) *Breaking the Fourth Wall: Proactive Audiences in the Performing Arts*. Kunnskapsverket. Available at https://www.bespectactive.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Breaking-the-Fourth-Wall_publication.compressed.pdf
Bringing together contributions made at an international conference in the context of the EU-funded BeSpectACTive! Project on participation in the performing arts, this publication examines the different goals and approaches to participation in cultural life (e.g., audience empowerment, democratisation, prosumerism, etc.), combining theoretical perspectives and specific examples from different countries.
- Gross, J.D. and Wilson, N.C. (2019). *Creating the Environment: The Cultural Eco-Systems of Creative People and Places*. Creative People and Places. Available at https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/113962091/Gross_Wilson_2019_Creating_the_Environment_FINAL_WEB.pdf
Resulting from research conducted in the context of Arts Council England's Creative People and Places programme, this report focuses on the conditions that may contribute to the emergence of local cultural ecosystems concerned with cultural democracy and the expansion of cultural capabilities. It addresses issues such as how cultural programmes can contribute to community development and capacity building, enabling participants' voice and increasing arts engagement.

Some ideas for reflection



- Which impacts of cultural activities on people's engagement and participation can you identify in your own experience, either as a direct participant or as an observer?
- Are there any policies or programmes that you would consider very good practices in this area? What is distinctive about them?
- Are you aware of any other initiatives emphasising a participatory approach but which have not had very substantial or continued results? What may have been the problem?
- Do you have any recommendations as to how to make participation and engagement more sustained?



The Impacts of Culture on Urban and Territorial Renovation

General context

In recent decades, the need to reshape economic models in former industrial cities; the increasing competition between cities and territories to attract investments, events and tourism; and the acknowledge-

ment of urban and regional development as a complex combination of multiple dimensions (ranging from the individual to the societal) have increased the importance of explorations of urban regeneration, territorial renovation and city branding. Strategies in this area require a cross-cutting approach that spans all policy areas and recognises both the specific contributions that can be made by education, economic policy, urban planning or social inclusion,

and the need to adopt an all-encompassing perspective that recognises the synergies and addresses the tensions between them.

Culture is not an exception in this respect. Indeed, **since the 1980s, the connections between culture and urban and territorial renovation have been clearly acknowledged.** The establishment of the European Capital of Culture programme in 1985 was an early example of how European institutions embraced the nexus between culture and urban development, and cities such as Glasgow (European Capital of Culture 1990), Lille (2004), Liverpool (2008), or Essen for the Ruhr (2010), have illustrated the potential contribution of culture to urban renovation. While these examples are particularly representative of how post-industrial, non-capital cities may transform their infrastructures, cultural life, economic models and images through an increased focus on culture, many examples of similar developments can be found at other levels as well.

Approaches in this area have frequently emphasised the potential

contribution of culture to economic development, with concepts such as the 'creative city' becoming ever more popular. Cities have also increasingly looked at cultural planning and programming as strategies to enable economic development and integrate it with spatial and social regeneration projects (see **Case Study 9**, *Fabbrica del Vapore*, page 60, for a relevant example). The ongoing exploration of the economic impacts of the Cultural and Creative Industries at the local and regional levels and in many territorial development strategies and programmes is testament to this approach.

Beyond their economic dimension, cultural policies & practices can contribute to developing & sustaining human capital, one of the backbones of urban & territorial renovation.

Case Study 9

FABBRICA DEL VAPORE

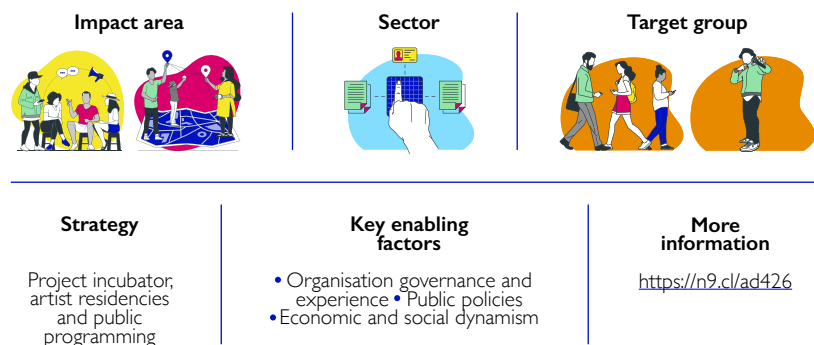
Milan, Italy

Institution: Municipality of Milan

Cultural production centre created under urban regeneration policy, fostering entrepreneurship and creativity through citizen activism.

Instituted in response to a policy measure for regenerating abandoned urban industrial areas through cultural and artistic activities, *Fabbrica del Vapore* is a creative hub and cultural production centre located in a former electromechanical factory in a semi-central area of Milan since 2001. It currently uses more than 14,000 square metres for cultural activities, divided evenly between spaces for creative residencies and public exhibitions. This reflects the centre's chief goals: encouraging youth creativity, participation and development; acting as an incubator for cultural projects; providing spaces for artistic and community connections; and presenting creative content to the public.

Capitalising on the public administration's experience in social projects and its governance model specifically, the centre provides cultural programming for the wider public, as well as spaces for young artists and professionals in a variety of disciplines to complete their training in entrepreneurship and begin their professional activities with the support of a like-minded community. Although the Municipality of Milan has played a key role in establishing and overseeing *Fabbrica del Vapore* since its inception, participating citizens have taken possession of the space through collective proposals for the destination's use and greater social impact.



Progressively, **a more complex understanding of the relationship between cultural initiatives and urban and territorial regeneration has emerged**, which, beyond the economic dimension, acknowledges the role of culture in terms of innovation, self-awareness, self-esteem and social cohesion, people's empowerment, intercultural dialogue, etc. Thus, this intangible dimension, which serves to highlight how cultural policies and practices can contribute to developing and sustaining human capital, is one of the backbones of urban and territorial renovation. Approaches in this area include many regional innovation and social development strategies which have integrated cultural activities and actors, such as the multi-sector innovation centre established in **Case Study 10**, *Le temps des cerises*, (page 63). European institutions have also explored this concept through initiatives such as Culture for Cities and Regions, Cultural Heritage in Action, and many other territorial cooperation projects.

The emergence of integrated strategies connecting culture with broad-

er territorial renovation also signals the increasing attention paid to governance approaches. In this context, governance involves considering how cultural aspects are integrated throughout all areas of local and territorial policymaking, how governmental bodies in charge of culture take into account broader considerations of territorial development, how different levels of government (e.g., local, regional, national, EU) collaborate in pursuing consistent strategies, and what degree of collaboration exists between public, private and civil society stakeholders when connecting culture and territorial development. Initiatives such as the Agenda 21 for culture and the Culture 21 Actions toolkit, both promoted by the global alliance of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) provide a framework for fostering integrated governance that connects culture with local sustainable development.

How cultural activities relate to urban and territorial renovation

Evidence collected over the course of MESOC illustrates the range of

ways cultural aspects can be connected to urban and territorial renovation. It also highlights the complex relations existing in this field. The main arguments resulting from the analysis of MESOC's findings are presented below:

Frequently, the creation or renovation of cultural facilities may contribute to the **improvement of specific urban neighbourhoods or areas**. This is often applied in disinvested or peripheral urban areas and may sometimes be connected to the establishment of 'iconic' urban landmarks.

In a less tangible way, cultural policies and projects can contribute to reinforcing a sense of community and identity, **strengthening the intangible dimension of regeneration**. This is closely connected to the impacts of culture in terms of citizen participation and engagement, which we examined in the previous section, because it is unlikely that urban and territorial renovation will succeed unless it clearly

involves citizen participation. Understanding this also means that cultural facilities and programmes should increasingly be designed as *enabling* spaces, facilitating dialogue, participation and co-creation processes involving their neighbours.

The relationship between culture and urban and territorial renovation is complex, and thus it has **frequently been difficult to develop models** that capture all their varied impacts or easily explain them in different locations.

Part of this complexity lies also in the fact that the connection of cultural practices with urban and territorial renovation often includes **some less desirable impacts**, including the gentrification of urban areas surrounding large cultural facilities, the potential contribution to increasing social and urban inequalities, or the difficulties in predicting the social and cultural impacts of large-scale cultural events.

Case Study 10

LE TEMPS DES CERISES

Issy-les-Moulineaux, France

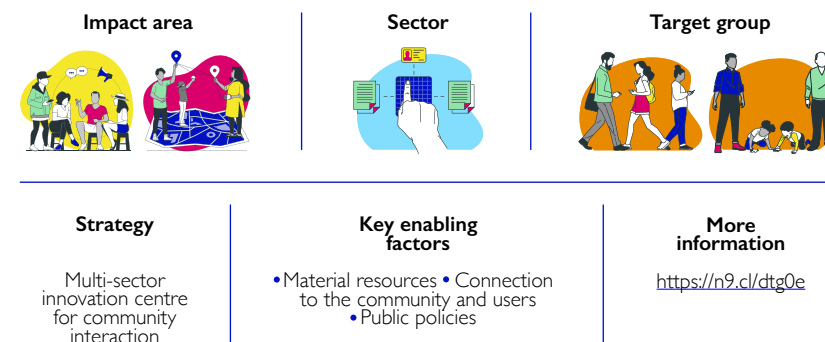
Institution: CLAVIM

Cultural innovation centre established under national policy framework to provide spaces for meeting, interaction and inspiration for citizens of all ages.









Le Temps des Cerises is a multi-sector cultural innovation centre located in an historic building that hosts a variety of cultural, scientific and knowledge-based activities. Inaugurated in 2014, the establishment's location was chosen purposefully to fulfil the principles of the French Ministry of Culture's 'Culture next-door' policy and to join the network of the Micro-Folies project, which promotes the novel cultural use of existing physical infrastructures or integrates new programmes in cultural venues that strive to work closely with their local neighbourhoods.

Under the Micro-Folies programme, *Le Temps des Cerises* installed a Digital Mu-

seum and later a FabLab, a space for virtual reality creation and exploration, a library for books and toys, and a conviviality space for neighbourhood residents to meet. Boasting several cultural resources, the complex is not only a centre for arts, technology, and digital fabrication, but also a community meeting place dedicated to heritage, community building and cultural democracy. Through the combination of available material resources and a connection to a local community of more than 30,000 annual users, the space aims to make culture accessible by creating versatile, hybrid spaces where citizens feel empowered to meet, participate and interact.



MESOC's City Pilots explored the connections between culture and urban and territorial development. During the policy dialogues conducted within this framework, the main keywords used to refer to **the role of cultural experience in relation to urban and territorial renovation** were as follows:

-  enhancing the effectiveness (of urban regeneration);
-  increasing the ambition of the impact (of urban regeneration/renovation processes);
-  changing lifestyles, values and personal stories;
-  enhancing the value attributed to heritage;
-  fostering new perspectives on urban material and immaterial values;
-  reactivating underused urban spaces;
-  creating areas of coexistence; and
-  allowing for the interpretation of urban changes.

Several of these items show that the connection between culture and urban and territorial renovation goes

beyond an understanding of the cultural sector in narrow terms – that is, it does not exclusively affect activities related to the arts, cultural practices and heritage, but rather connects them with their broader urban and territorial ecosystems. As a result, the observation of impacts should consider aspects like social relations, educational processes, urban planning, economic development, etc., a fact that is clearly illustrated in **Case Study II, Grorud Valley Integrated Urban Regeneration Project**, (page 65).

Cultural facilities and programmes should increasingly be designed as enabling spaces, facilitating dialogue, participation and co-creation processes involving their neighbours.

Case Study II

GRORUD VALLEY INTEGRATED URBAN REGENERATION PROJECT

Furuset, Norway

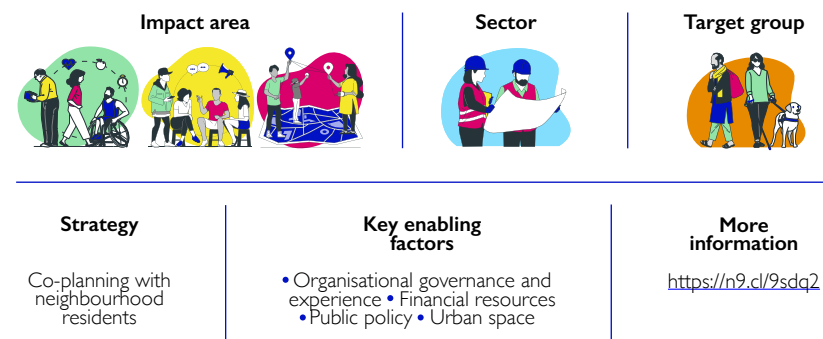
Institution: Norwegian national government

Policy-driven urban regeneration of an under-resourced neighbourhood through participatory design processes to improve well-being and socioeconomic growth.

The Grorud Valley Integrated Regeneration Project is an urban regeneration plan run by the Norwegian government that combines the policy-driven regeneration of physical and social spaces with varied methods of local participation in an effort to reduce social exclusion in the multicultural neighbourhood of Furuset, outside Oslo.

In 2007, the Norwegian government launched an action plan to foster the physical and social regeneration of Furuset and improve quality of life by offering free kindergartens, improving public spaces, building 2,000 new housing units, etc. However, the truly innovative part of this plan rests in

its participatory approach: residents participate actively in the urban planning process in a comprehensive and ongoing manner, and the plan has particularly targeted under-represented groups such as children and older adults. The central goal has been to give voice to the diverse experiences and cultural backgrounds of residents while also improving their quality of life and well-being through better access to the services and public spaces they need. This participatory process has contributed greatly to the neighbourhood's development and the well-being of its residents, and the project is considered a benchmark in Norway and internationally.



Further reading on the impacts of culture on urban and territorial renovation



- UNESCO (2016). *Culture Urban Future: Global Report on Culture for Sustainable Urban Development*. UNESCO. Available at <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/publication/culture-urban-future>
Published in the context of the 3rd UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III, 2016), where the New Urban Agenda was adopted, and in the footsteps of the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, this report aims to summarise and illustrate evidence on the connections between culture and the different dimensions of urban development, with contributions and examples from around the world.
- Cultures for Cities and Regions (2017). *Future creative cities. Why culture is a smart investment in cities*. KEA. Available at <https://keanet.eu/wp-content/uploads/Future-creative-cities-01122017-KEA.pdf>
Culture for Cities and Regions was an EU-funded project led by Eurocities and KEA, in partnership with the European Regions Research and Innovation Network (ERRIN). The project produced a catalogue of 70 case studies on culture and urban and regional development, and enabled capacity-building and peer-learning. This document summarises some of the knowledge generated by the project, including the issue of the Cultural and Creative Industries as a driver of urban regeneration, as well as the use of culture as a vehicle for social inclusion, social innovation and intercultural dialogue.

- BOP Consulting and Korean Research Institute on Human Settlement (2020). *Creative and Cultural Industries in Urban Revitalization: A practice-based handbook*. Inter-American Development Bank. Available at <https://publications.iadb.org/en/creative-and-cultural-industries-in-urban-revitalization-a-practice-based-handbook>
Based on a set of in-depth international case studies, expert interviews and a broad literature review, this Handbook analyses what makes for success in urban revitalisation projects involving the Cultural and Creative Industries.
- Papamanousakis, Y. (c. 2020). *Urban regeneration knowledge base. A thematic review of projects and resources*. Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities. Available at <https://www.urban-transcripts.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/CCSC-Urban-Regeneration-Knowledge-Base-copy.pdf>
Produced in the context of the EU-funded Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities project, this short report is based on a review of 55 projects and 45 resources on culture and urban regeneration in Europe. It introduces a contextual and theoretical background for a range of themes that underpin such initiatives, including public space, community building, industrial heritage and participation.

**Some ideas
for reflection**



- Are you familiar with any programmes that have connected cultural activities and processes with urban and territorial renovation? If so, what positive impacts have been observed?
- What challenges or difficulties have existed? What may have been the problem?
- Can you think of any factors that could contribute to strengthening these approaches?

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES DO NOT OCCUR IN A VACUUM. THEY EMERGE IN SPECIFIC SOCIAL CONTEXTS AND HAVE EFFECTS IN THE ENVIRONMENTS WHERE THEY UNFOLD.

THESE EFFECTS OR IMPACTS MAY BE MANIFOLD, OPERATING AT INDIVIDUAL, COLLECTIVE AND BROADER SOCIETAL LEVELS.



CHAPTER 3


How We Can Assess the
Social Impact of Culture

Photography: Un Matí d'Orquestra © Apropa Cultura


A wide array of methodologies have been adopted when exploring social transformations and their impact on culture and the arts.


Different Approaches for the Assessment of Social Impact


Assessing social impact is a complex task, due to the reasons explained in the previous chapter and the difficulty of finding shared metrics to measure social performance. In fact, scholars have developed several methodologies to try to capture social transformation, depending on the context and the purpose of the assessment. Below, we provide a short, non-exhaustive list of some of the approaches that have been adopted:

 **Social Return on Investment** is a methodology that seeks to quantify the social value created by a project or intervention. It involves calculating the ratio of social value created to the resources invested in the project, and can help organisations make more informed de-

isions about where to allocate their resources.

 **Participatory Impact Assessment** involves engaging stakeholders in the assessment process to ensure that their perspectives and experiences are incorporated into the analysis. This can include community members, beneficiaries and other relevant parties, and can help to identify unintended consequences or unanticipated impacts of a project.

 **Randomised Controlled Trials** are a methodology often used in the field of development economics, where researchers randomly assign participants to either a treatment or control group and then measure the difference in outcomes between the two groups. This approach can help to establish causal relationships between interventions and social impact.


 **Impact Frameworks** provide a structured approach to assessing social impact, and can be tailored to specific sectors or types of interventions. They typically involve defining a set of indicators or metrics that are relevant to the project or organisation and then collecting data to track progress against these indicators over time.

Theory of Change is a methodology that helps organisations to clarify their goals and the pathways they will follow to achieve them. It involves mapping out the causal relationships between inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes, and can help organisations to identify the key drivers of social impact.

Each of the above methodologies presents different applications, advantages and disadvantages in their use. The

MESOC project started from a **theory of change approach**, which will be discussed in more depth in the next section of this chapter.

The development of social impact assessment studies in the specific field of the arts and culture also shows that a wide array of methodologies have been adopted when exploring social transformations. Qualitative approaches seem to be the most common methodology in this area, although quantitative analyses are becoming more widespread, especially when considering the impacts related to health and well-being. Through an extensive literature review on social impact assessment studies in the field of culture, Azevedo (2016) identified six main methodological approaches:

 **Qualitative approach**, including several data collection methods such as interviews,

open-ended questionnaires, observations, discussion groups, visits to the places of intervention, analyses of previous relevant documents, workshops, video and audio recordings, diaries and written statement processes, and photos and artistic expression techniques.

Correlation studies, based on questionnaires, that describe the short-term relationships between engagement with an art form and the outcomes of interest.

Multidisciplinary approach, which combines quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

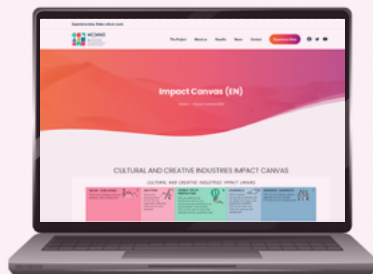
Longitudinal approach, which emerges as a method that tracks the effects of cultural engagement during a period of time, according to a specific dimension of health or education.

Literature reviews, which are meta-analysis methods.

Experiments, exploring the potential of the artistic medium in social change.

Toolbox

ME-MIND Cultural and Creative Industries Impact Canvas



This tool, conceived by the EU-funded Creative Europe project ME-MIND, is designed to suit cultural and creative organisations that are interested not only in creating value and generating impact, but also in developing new ways of working with the support of data. The instrument is an adaptation of the Business Canvas Model and is intended to help organisations think strategically about their activities, with a focus on the generation and measurement of social impact.

<https://n9.cl/z6i8o>

Further reading on approaches for the assessment of social impact



- McCarthy, K.F., Ondaatje, E.H., Zakara, L., Brooks, A. (2004). *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate about the Benefits of the Arts*. RAND Corporation. *A landmark study which offers a framework for understanding the value of the arts, stressing the importance of assessing intrinsic and hard-to-measure benefits and their contributions to public welfare.*
- Reeves, M. (2009). *Measuring the economic and social impact of the arts: a review*. Social Value UK. Available at https://is.muni.cz/el/1456/jaro2009/PVEKMAA/um/Impacts_of_art_Michelle_Reeves.pdf *A review of the different methodologies in arts impact research, with a special focus on social and economic impacts. One of the main contributions of this paper is the assessment of quality and the appropriateness of existing research design and methods, as well as advancing the debate around the implications for future research and policy development.*
- Cicerchia, A. (2015). Why we should measure, what we should measure. *Economia della Cultura*, 1/2015, pp. 11-22, doi: 10.1446/80344 *This article explores the main concepts related to impact assessment in the field of culture, analyses the actors in play (who measures impact, and for whom) and explains the purposes of measurement.*

- Azevedo, M. (2016). *The evaluation of the social impacts of culture*. Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne. Available at <https://theses.hal.science/tel-01804118v2/document>
In this PhD thesis, the author explores the strategic role of the cultural sector in development, beyond its economic impacts. Through an extensive literature review and case analyses, Azevedo researches social impact assessment studies in the field of culture and the arts to propose a new theoretical framework and empirical approaches to interpreting the mechanisms through which culture builds community-level social impacts.

The Theory of Change Approach

As previously stated, the MESOC project started from a **theory of change approach**. A theory of change allows us to describe and visualise how a particular intervention or programme is expected to bring about a desired change in a given context. It is a tool for the planning, implementation and evaluation of social programmes, policies and initiatives.

The theory of change consists of a series of interconnected causal assumptions that explain the linkages

between programme inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact. It identifies the underlying logic of the programme, the intended beneficiaries and the pathways to achieving the desired change.

A typical theory of change includes the following components of the Logic Model:

1. **Inputs:** Resources, activities and processes needed to implement the programme.
2. **Activities:** Actions taken to achieve the programme's objectives.

3. **Outputs:** Tangible products or services produced by the programme.
4. **Outcomes:** The changes that occur as a result of the programme's activities.
5. **Impact:** The ultimate change the programme is designed to achieve.

To develop a theory of change, the stakeholders involved in the programme or policy design process engage in a participatory, iterative process of defining the programme's purpose, goals, objectives and activities. They identify the underlying assumptions, test them against evidence and experience, and refine the theory accordingly.

To better understand how a theory of change works, an example of the concept's step-by-step application is provided by the Center for Theory of Change at the following link: <https://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/how-does-theory-of-change-work/example/>.

A theory of change helps programme and project designers and evaluators to:

1. Clarify the programme/project's objectives and underlying assumptions.
2. Identify key stakeholders and their roles and interests.
3. Develop a comprehensive, coherent and evidence-based programme/project design.
4. Monitor programme/project implementation and measure progress towards achieving the desired change.
5. Evaluate the programme/project's effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

The theory of change allows us to describe and visualise how a particular intervention or programme is expected to bring about a desired change in a given context.

Overall, a theory of change is a powerful tool for programme planning and evaluation that enables stakeholders to better understand the logic, impact and value of their social programmes and initiatives. At the same time, it presents some weaknesses – for instance, it is challenging to identify indicators to assess impacts, and it also runs the risk of reducing social change to a linear process.

In order to overcome the challenges related to direct impact assessment (e.g., improved self-esteem, increased sense of belonging within the community, enhanced use of public space, etc.), it is important to take into account the conditions that may affect the desired transformation. These are called **‘enabling factors’**. The qualities of the enabling factors are what allow us to explain if social transformation is more likely to occur in a given context. These are called **‘transition variables’** or **‘transition signals’** since they are signals or symptoms that anticipate change.

To explain this concept, we can use a metaphor extrapolated from the medical sphere. Let’s imagine that our desired impact is to improve a med-

ical condition– for instance, diabetes. A way to assess the improvement of diabetes could be to monitor blood glucose levels over time, but if we want to enhance the person’s overall quality of life we have to work on the patient’s lifestyle, thus favouring ‘enabling conditions’ such as regular physical activity, a healthy diet, quality sleep, medicines, etc. Of course, there are also ‘contextual factors’ that are harder to change and that should be taken into consideration (in our case, these could be represented by a genetic predisposition to diabetes), but intervening holistically to improve the enabling factors may prevent pathological conditions and lead to an improved management of the disease.

To overcome the challenges related to direct impact assessment, it is important to take into account the conditions that may affect the desired transformation, the ‘enabling factors’.

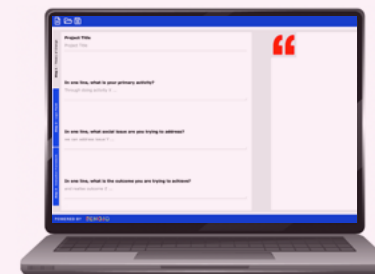
Toolbox

Social Impact Toolbox (University of Technology Sydney)

This tool has been developed by the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and aims to help plan a social impact evaluation system using three standardised frameworks. First, a Theory of Change underpins the intervention evaluation, with a clear and concise articulation of the programme and its intended outcomes. Second, the Logic Model is used to map a flow of the impact, where activities lead to outputs, which lead to social

outcomes, which, in turn, lead to long-term social impact. Finally, an Evaluation Framework captures the specific metrics needed to measure each outcome, as well as identifying the corresponding measurement tools. The tool’s interactive interface allows users to customise each element of the evaluation framework in order to adapt it to their specific contexts and realities.

<https://n9.cl/gaj7y>



Further reading on the Theory of Change approach



- Center for Theory of Change: <https://www.theoryof-change.org/>
The Center for Theory of Change is a key reference in the development of the Theory of Change approach. On their webpage, they provide a comprehensive explanation of this approach and a number of useful resources to apply this methodology in real-life contexts.
- Quality Matters (2022). *Outcome Measurement Guidebook for Local Authority Arts Services & Arts Organisations*. The Arts Council of Ireland. Available at https://author.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/wwwartscouncilie/Content/Arts_in_Ireland/Strategic_Development/FINAL_2022_AC_Measurement_Guidebook.pdf
This handbook provides a framework grounded in the Theory of Change to develop a shared approach to measuring the impact of public investment in the arts at the local level.

The MESOC Convergent Model

The MESOC Convergent Model describes the trajectories of societal

transformation ignited and induced by cultural policies and practices. We call this model convergent because it is the result of the mediation of various methodological views after an intense

discussion and debate that involved all members of the MESOC consortium.

The Convergent Model aims to provide an interpretative framework that is analytical enough to explain complex processes of societal transformation and simple enough to propose comparable, coherent and operational indicators of transition.

The model is centred around the so-called ‘cultural experience’ (see **Figure 3**). This can be defined as the generation, emission or reception of information flows that have symbolic content, usually expressed through artistic language, with the explicit and more or less deliberate intention of creating some kind of ‘resonance’ with people in cognitive, emotional or aesthetic dimensions.

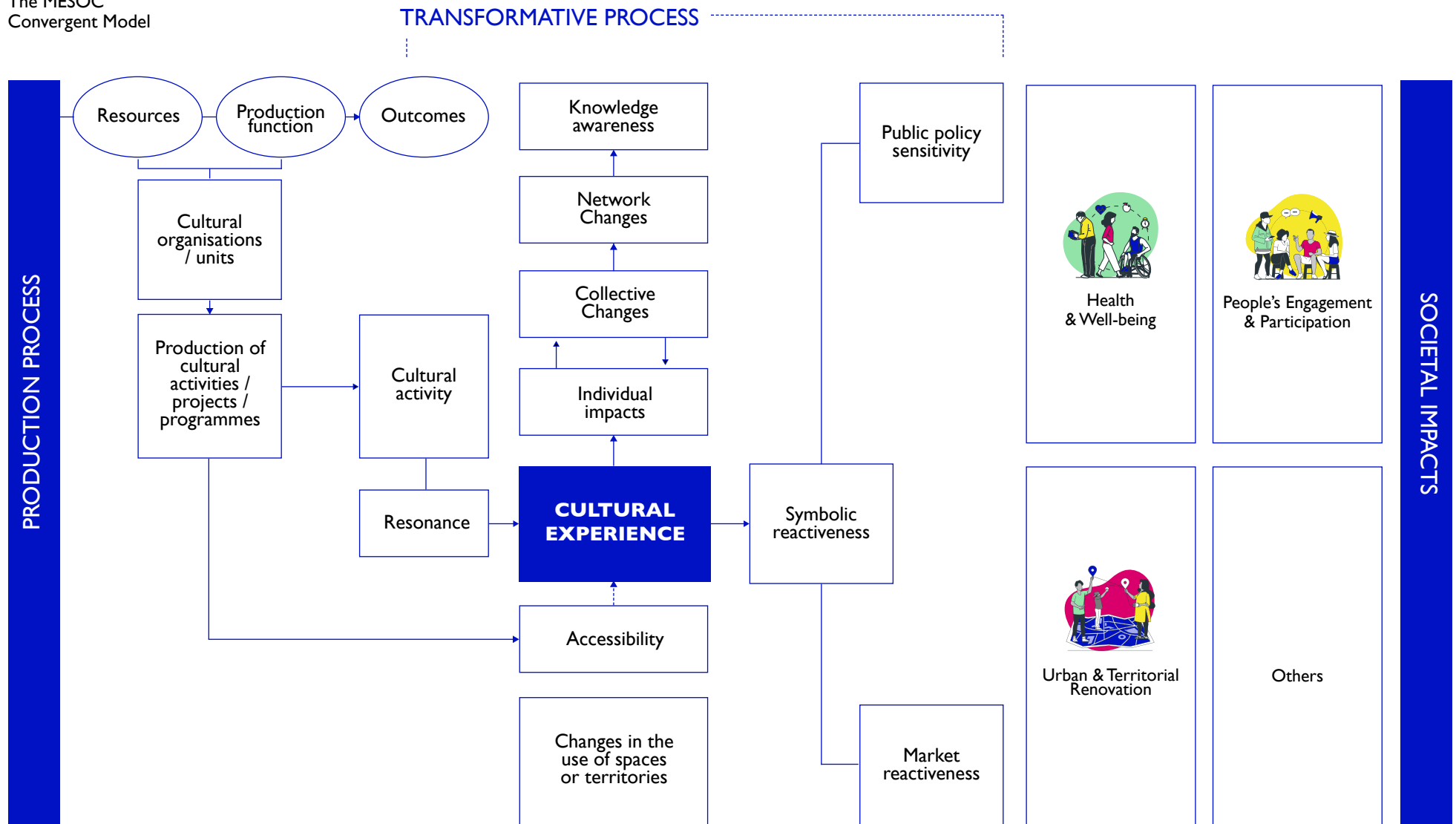
The Convergent Model defines change in a comprehensive way and provides instrumental tools to design, propose and even test and validate new and improved perspectives and methodologies for capturing the wider societal value of culture. This includes– but also goes beyond– its economic impact.

Background

After an extensive review of the existing literature and varied studies conducted in the field of the social impact of culture, MESOC detected the following key elements regarding the capacity of creativity, the arts and culture to:

- ➡ Affect people, with experiences and values, cognitively, aesthetically and/or spiritually;
- ➡ Transform our individual, social, civic, economic or political dimensions;
- ➡ Influence our sense of identity and belonging;
- ➡ Build social capital;
- ➡ Nourish the knowledge that gives us autonomy and critical thinking;
- ➡ Reinforce our ability to look critically at the external environment;
- ➡ Shape our sensitivity and capacity to derive value from aesthetic enjoyment; and
- ➡ Amplify expressive and communicative skills.

Figure 3:
The MESOC
Convergent Model



That is, the arts and culture have the capacity to satisfy our cultural rights to be, participate and communicate; to promote individual and social development; to extend our degrees of freedom; and to reinforce our dignity. This is the initial context and the basis for the elaboration of the Convergent Model.

Rationale

The Convergent Model should be read at several levels:

- At the **micro level**, it serves to analyse the outcomes of different intervention programmes in relation to the available resources and their specific contexts. At the same time, it highlights the enabling factors (both endogenous and exogenous) that maximise the impacts of cultural projects and programmes.
- At the **meso level**, it places us in the complex environment of cities, identifying the contextual variables ('transition signals') that react to cultural policies or programmes.

- And finally, at the **macro level**, it points to the causal relationships between employment in the cultural and creative sectors and various socio-economic variables.

The Micro Level

Once a cultural experience has been generated because: a) some individual or organisation has been able to bring about the production of a cultural project; b) this project has made possible the exposure of some person or groups of people to flows of information with symbolic content, usually in artistic language; c) these information flows have meaning and significance for the people who generated or received them, engendering resonance; then the transformative process is initiated, which can in turn generate impacts, if applicable.

The trajectories of impact (which may or may not occur) can have diverse characteristics, depending on the form of cultural production and its function(s), the type of cultural experience and the socio-demographic characteristics of the people who live

the experience. For instance, participation in a youth orchestra hosted in a conflict-laden, suburban area has been demonstrated to have clear impacts on the educational results and socio-professional integration of the beneficiaries. Certainly, not all the participants will experience the same level of change, but they will be more likely to undergo transformation compared to non-users.

The impact itself may be direct and linear— for example, visiting a museum exhibition may reduce a person's stress levels and directly affect that person's health at that moment, or it may produce an emotional epiphany that transforms an immigrant's sense of belonging to the host community. Impact can also be indirect and non-linear, or it may activate long causal chains whose effects on urban regeneration (for example) will materialise at later points in time.

Enabling factors

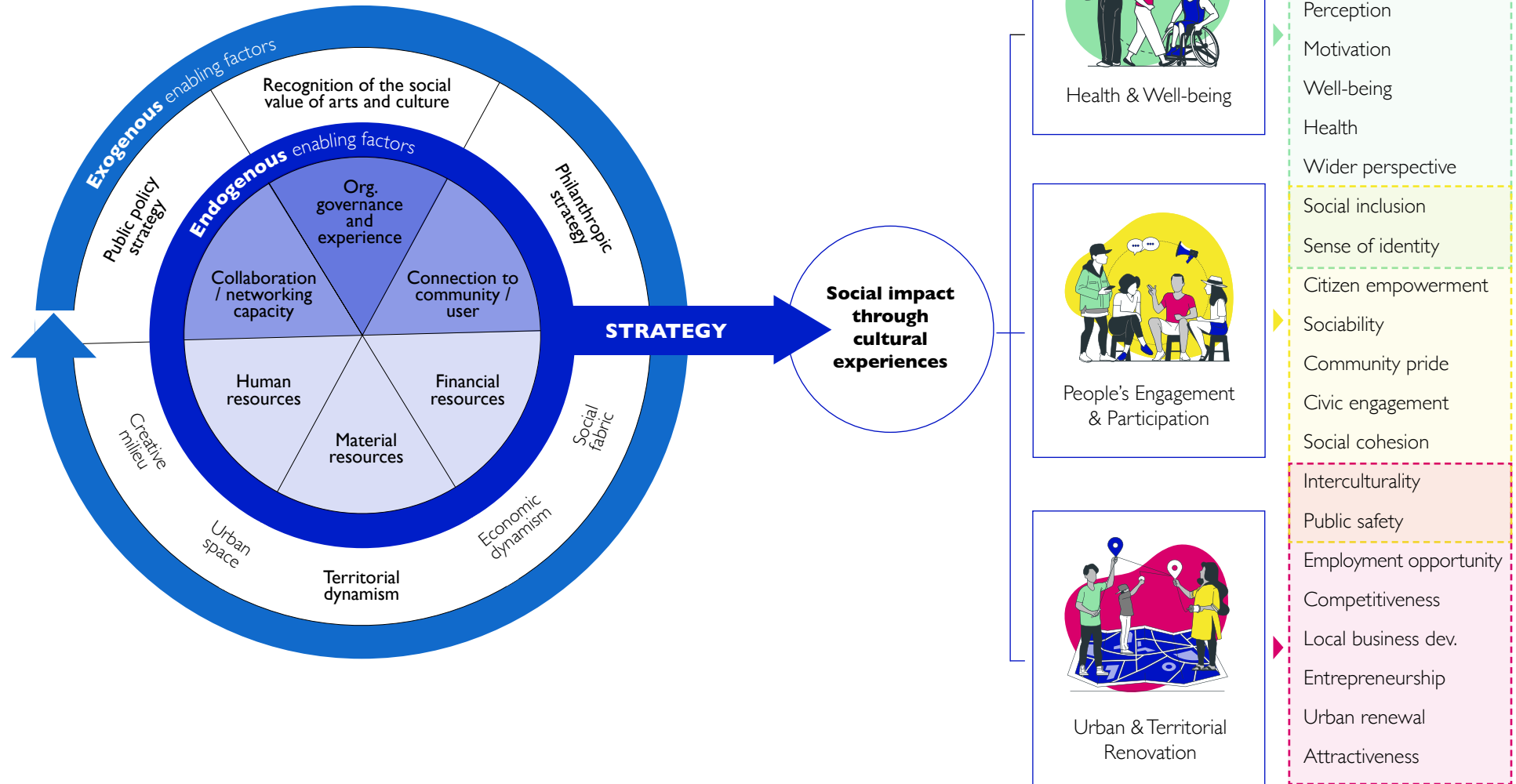
The analysis of a large number of cultural projects designed to produce social outcomes and impacts allows us to extrapolate a set of **enabling**

factors. These enablers have been tested through a participatory consultation with international academic experts, policymakers and cultural operators. From this analysis, we can distinguish between factors endogenous to the organisation responsible for the projects, and other contextual or exogenous factors that interact with the former.

In the inner circle of **Figure 4**, we propose the main **endogenous enabling factors**, such as the organisation's governance model and institutional experience and, linked to these, the availability and quality of its human, financial and material resources. In parallel, the networking, collaboration and co-production capacities developed by the organisation and its ability to connect with the community and the users of its projects are also key.

Outside the circle of **Figure 4**, we highlight the main **exogenous enabling factors**. For most cultural projects and organisations, the existence of an explicit public policy or philanthropic funding strategy may be crucial to support the development

Figure 4:
Enabling Factors
of the Social
Impact of Culture



of cultural projects with social impact. The existence of these projects and supporting policies are usually interconnected with other key factors such as the level of recognition of the social value of the arts and culture in a given community and the territorial dynamisms of these communities. Subfactors like a rich creative milieu connected to a dynamic social fabric, urban space or economic dynamism are crucial as well.

Each of these factors can be subdivided into several sub-factors, and these are, in turn, divided into the consequent set of transition variables (see **Figure 5**). Thus, when we refer to the organisation's governance and experience, we take into account its previous experience in cultural projects with social impact, its governance model and organisational values. Similarly, the level of staff trained and/or with expertise in social impact projects, the ability to attract and retain a committed and motivated team, or the sensitivity and commitment of the team toward social impact help to understand the potential of a cultural organisation's

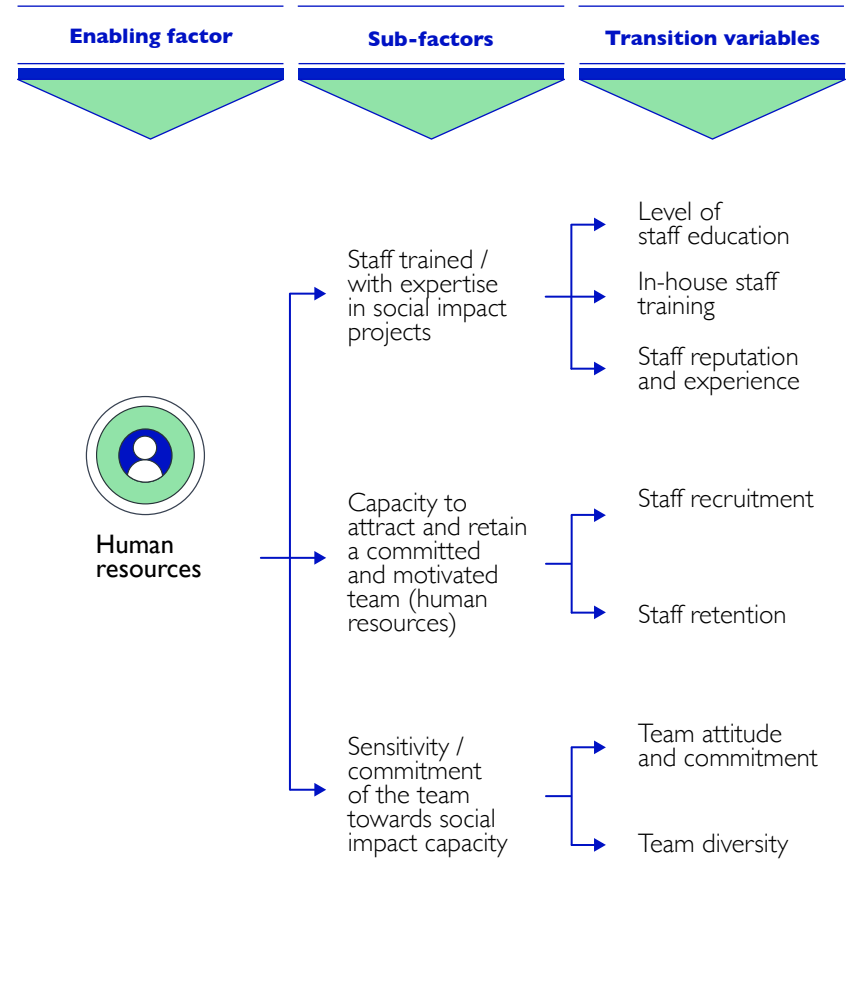
human resources to achieve social impact. The full list of enabling factors, sub-factors and transition variables is explained in detail in the MESOC project's Methodological Guidelines document, available at <https://www.mesoc-project.eu/resources/methodological-guidelines>.

Examples of transition variables

Regarding **internal enabling factors**, if we consider human resources, for instance, one of the transition signals that could be indicative of empowerment and inclusion is the diversity of the staff composition (see **Case Study 12, En Palabras**, page 90). Working in a multicultural team produces different effects, such as:

- 👤 Increasing the sense of identification and belonging for participants of diverse origins and backgrounds.
- 👤 Providing richer insights and perspectives to both the project and the organisation.
- 👤 Inspiring and empowering beneficiaries through the example given by the staff members.

Figure 5:
Example of Human Resources as an Enabling Factor, and Related Subset of Subfactors and Transition Variables



Case Study 12

EN PALABRAS

Barcelona, Spain




Institution: Connectats Cooperative

Empowering and fostering the social inclusion of migrants and refugees through creative writing and social memory.

En Palabras ('In Words') is a collective literary project for refugees and migrants from Latin America resident in Barcelona that explores the construction of personal and cultural memory, particularly in the context of the violence and human rights violations that forced these individuals to abandon their native lands, and their subsequent difficulties related to migration and settlement.

The project is as much about personal empowerment as it is about creative writing, as it provides participants with a safe space for developing their unique life stories in a variety of literary forms. Writing labs give participants the chance to connect with one another and construct their personal and collective nar-

ratives, as well as giving voice to individuals who have often been silenced and whose struggles are often "invisible" in the European context. The vibrant territorial dynamism of Barcelona—with its background of multicultural exchange and cultural activism—have made this project possible, while the organising cooperative's experience in social inclusion and its governance structure based on the values of social inclusion and accountability have developed and sustained it. As a result, the project allows members of a particularly vulnerable community to become agents of change who are active in both their own healing and the education of the local community on issues of migration.

<p>Impact area</p> 	<p>Sector</p> 	<p>Target group</p> 
<p>Strategy</p> <p>Empowerment through writing labs and personal memory</p>	<p>Key enabling factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation governance and experience • Multicultural interaction • Cultural activism 	<p>More information</p> <p>https://n9.cl/f71jp6</p>

If we wish to examine the multiplier effect of enabling conditions such as material resources and the connection to the community, **Case Study 13** (page 92), *Medicinema Italia*, is an excellent example based in Milan.

Furthermore, the synergistic effects of the *Apropa Cultura* programme in Catalonia (**Case Study 7**, page 54) where cultural professionals are invited to visit social entities and vice versa, goes above and beyond the fact of granting accessibility to cultural experiences to under-resourced and under-represented groups.

Regarding **external enabling factors**, if we consider, for instance, existing public policy strategies, one of the transition signals that may lead to social transformation is represented by a high level of interdepartmental collaboration, since an interdisciplinary approach is required in order to achieve social change.

A highly illustrative example of the scientific recognition of the social value of culture is provided by the case study of *Receta Cultura* in Valencia (see **Case Study 3**, page 43)

where specific cultural activities are prescribed to patients.

If we are interested in exploring the elements of territorial dynamism, a dense and varied creative milieu in the field of contemporary music builds the base for the *Le Réacteur* project in Issy-les-Molineaux (see **Case Study 14**, page 93) which became an international reference in terms of providing meeting spaces for both amateurs and professionals.

Building indicators

On a micro scale, we can evaluate the temporal evolution of the effects obtained by a project or intervention in relation to the resources and inputs available. However, comparing the outcomes obtained and the long-term social impact of different projects without taking into account the context and exogenous factors of each project can be ineffective. Rather than working with homogeneous result indicators, it is recommended to adapt the set of transition variables and related proxies for building indicators to each specific case.

Case Study 13

MEDICINEMA

Milan, Italy

Institution: Medicinema Italia

NGO employing cinema for relief therapy, increasing the physical and psychological well-being of patients and humanising the hospital space for patients and neighbourhood residents.

Founded in 2013 and inspired by its UK twin association, *Medicinema Italia* is a non-profit organisation that utilises cinema to improve the emotional well-being and rehabilitation of patients in hospital. Organising free film screenings carefully selected for therapeutic purposes, it seeks to support patients and their families through the difficulties of disease and rhythms of life in hospital, thus humanising the relationship between hospitalisation and healing and welcoming neighbourhood citizens by changing their perceptions of the hospital space. This work is complemented by research into the benefits of cinema therapy, which has been shown to improve quality of life and play

a significant role in reducing healing times, pain perception, stress and anxiety, particularly for young people. Scientific recognition of the social impact of cultural experiences has been an important enabling factor for this work, as well as *Medicinema's* organisational culture and values of social accountability and inclusion. Furthermore, *Medicinema's* strong capacity for co-production with public and private entities in the health and audiovisual sectors, as well as its connections to patients and neighbourhood residents and the material resources it employs to maintain a cinema within the hospital, have also contributed greatly to its success.

Case Study 14

LE RÉACTEUR

Issy-les-Moulineaux, France

Institution: CLAVIM

Performance venue and musical education centre that leverages its material resources to accompany emerging artists and educate musicians of all ages.

Since 1995, this hub for contemporary music has dedicated itself to offering courses and programmes in a multitude of genres, as well as hosting young talent concerts and over 20 professional concerts yearly. Perhaps the most innovative aspect of *Le Réacteur* is its strong support for emerging musicians, as it offers them access to its varied material resources, including a recording studio, rehearsal spaces, several performing spaces, workshops and music classes to develop their skills and capacities. In this way, *Le Réacteur* provides targeted support for musical groups who wish to start professional activities. It also provides a dynamic learning environment

for musicians of all ages, offering classes for both children and adults and support in music production. By leveraging its material resources to create sustained connections with its target audiences (the general public and emerging artists), the project takes advantage of the strong local recognition of the social value of arts and culture. This contributes to broadening opportunities for emerging and established artists and the education of musicians of all ages, as well as establishing itself as a well-known venue for public programming and professional music events.



Strategy

Cinema therapy

Key enabling factors

- Organisational culture and values
- Capacity for networking and collaboration
- Connection with community of users
- Scientific recognition of the social impact of cultural experiences
- Material resources

More information

<https://n9.cl/e49bf>



Strategy

Accompaniment of emerging artists

Key enabling factors

- Material resources
- Connection to users
- Recognition of social value of arts and culture
- Creative milieu

More information

<https://n9.cl/4drpt>

On the MESOC project website you will find more than 260 suggested proxies to build indicators that you can use for the sake of designing cultural projects and refining the criteria of support policies. The full list is available in the MESOC Methodological Guidelines document: <https://www.mesoc-project.eu/resources/methodological-guidelines>.

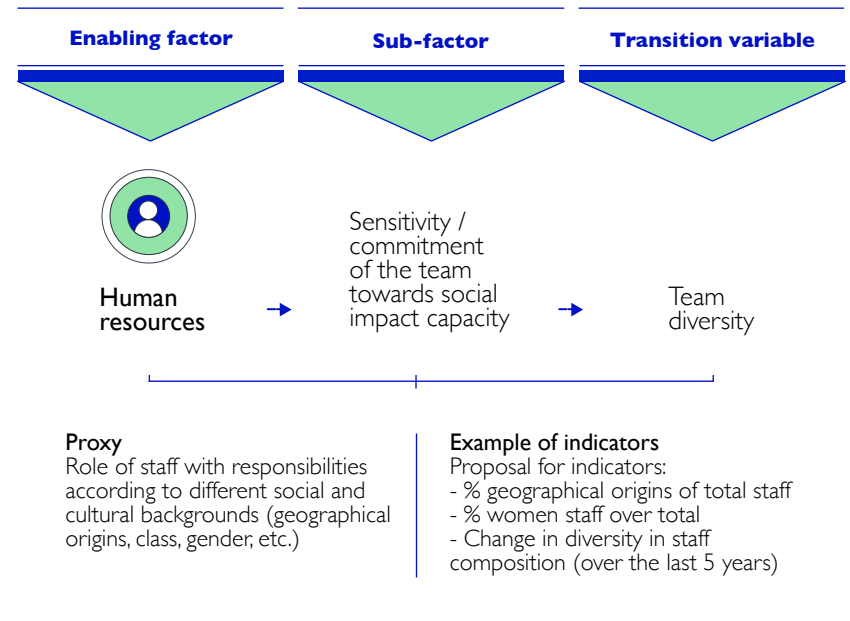
The proposed proxies should be used as an inspiration to set the basis for building ad hoc indicators. It is advised that this process should be shared with the team members of the organisation and should take into account qualitative elements for contextualisation. A good indicator should be measurable, valid, robust, reliable, clear, comparable and relevant, and the effort to collect the data should be proportional to its value.

We can most easily illustrate how to build good indicators by starting with the previous example of the enabling factors related to human resources. Imagine that you are responsible for a cultural project and you want to improve your options for generating favourable results in a multicultural

environment. One of the transition variables could be related to the diversity of the team's composition. How can we measure this element? The research carried out within the MESOC project suggests a list of possible data points that can be used as a starting point for building indicators. These data points are called 'proxies'. In this case, and as we may see in **Figure 6**, we can collect data related to the different social and cultural backgrounds of the team members (for instance, geographical origins, class, gender, etc.) to build indicators that are adapted to the reality of our project. Perhaps for our project diversity is best represented by the diverse geographic origins of the staff, so we would analyse this data and not, for instance, other variables (e.g., their socio-economic backgrounds).

Similarly, let's pretend to be a policymaker who needs to prioritise the cultural projects that a given policy must support. Even in this case, it is important to build indicators that allow us to obtain better results for the political strategy, as these can also help to modify the strategy itself. Thus, a policymaker may decide

Figure 6:
Example of Proxies and Proposal for Indicators in the Case of the Human Resources Enabling Condition



that it is preferable to give support to cultural projects led by multicultural teams, since these would help build a better relationship with neighbourhood residents and increase their representation in the political sphere. The same may occur when working with LGBTI+ collectives or other target groups.

When selecting the proxies that are best adapted to your needs, it is important to consider the following elements:

- Availability of data.** Check if the data you require is easily available and if the collection process is feasible with the

means and resources available to you.

Relevance. When designing indicators adapted to each particular reality, it is advisable to select the data that is considered relevant to the project, prioritising the key information to be captured and using a dose of realism.

Territorial context. Context matters, and it is not the same to work on the periphery or in the city centre, in urban or rural areas, in a creative district, etc. If the focus of a strategy is to work with older adults or with young people in situations of social and professional exclusion, it is important to think about creating alliances with social, health and educational entities or neighbourhood associations in order to improve your chances of obtaining better results.

The Meso Level

Meso analysis refers to the level of broad policies or programmes, cultural sectors or urban contexts. In

order to identify, analyse and propose indicators that can provide us with measurable evidence (and therefore control) of the transformation trajectories, the researchers of the MESOC project tested various methodologies that ultimately allowed them to gain a comprehensive view of the key variables to identify for monitoring those processes of change. These key variables are described in more detail below, while a summary of meso level enabling factors (including several examples) is available afterward in **Figure 7**.

1. Network changes

The first dimension to analyse is the transformation of the networks of relationships between the agents that have participated in or made possible the materialisation of a cultural act, as well as the transformations in networks of people who have participated in the cultural experience. Related changes can be measured in different ways, which also depend on the context and initial conditions of the cultural experience. A case that exemplifies this dimension is the *Kaikukortti Card: Culture for All Service* (see

Case Study 4, page 47) where the strong networking capacities of the public administration have led to the creation of a nation-wide partnership with various organisations from the social, health and cultural sectors. Similarly, but from a bottom-up perspective, the socio-educational project *Xamfrà* provides a great example of how engaging in networks at different territorial levels contributes to multiplying the social effects of its activity (see **Case Study 15**, page 99)

2. Market reactivity

The individuals exposed to cultural experiences change their preferences, their demands and their willingness to pay for certain goods or services that may have social effects. As an institution, the market is capable of detecting opportunities through anticipating and sensing unsatisfied demands, generating new products or services, or detecting the needs of professionals. When movements are activated in the market that widen the availability of cultural experiences related to a certain societal impact, we may deduce that the market reaction corroborates that a transforma-

tive effect is taking place in some of the societal dimensions considered. Therefore, the reactivity of the market is always a very effective and obvious indicator of transition. A good example of transition signals related to the enabling condition of resources and infrastructure is represented by the existence of co-financing schemes, as illustrated in the case of *La Gata Perduda* (see **Case Study 5**, page 50) or the availability of material resources and adequate infrastructures, such as in the case of *Le temps des cerises* (see **Case Study 10**, page 63).

3. Public policy sensitivity

Exposure to cultural experiences, which are rich in meaning and may reinforce the critical and autonomous visions of participants, can also generate changes in political awareness and in the vision of the responsibilities of public policies to deliver a given social benefit or public good. Therefore, public policies, either reactively or proactively, can improve the conditions for a certain public value derived from cultural experiences to be delivered. The possible

options for public action lie in the range of the recognition of rights focused on a certain social impact of culture; the direct provision of such a public value through programmes or projects focused on a certain social impact of culture; the orientation of resources for public, private or third sector agents to generate activities or projects that facilitate the achievement of such a social impact; or the establishment of regulatory resources that facilitate activities pursuing a certain social value. Excellent examples of the benefits of combining public policy sensitivity with citizen activism are provided by the cases of *Fabbrica del Vapore* (see **Case Study 9**, page 60) and *Children's House* (see **Case Study 16**, page 100)

4. Symbolic reactivity

The generation of new meanings and values or the critical thinking activated by the exposure to cultural experiences can have other broader implications that go beyond actions in the political field or in the sphere of the market. Cultural experiences have a lot to do with attitudes and behaviours. In fact, cultural ex-

periences are often produced in a specific group context that informs the attitudes, values and behaviours of the individuals that compose the group. For example, the creation and appreciation of cultural products requires behaviours and preferences correlated with those of (and acquired from) other members of the group. Art and music are not primarily enjoyed in private, but rather in public, and they often cannot even be appreciated without understanding their cultural references. Changes in narratives and discourses are often experienced by people taking part in participatory art projects, like in the case of *Caravansaray Selinunte San Siro* (see **Case Study 17**, page 101) where co-creation processes led to a renewed vision of the neighbourhood. Similarly, co-curation and co-managing strategies - represented respectively by the cases of *L'exposition participative* (see **Case Study 8**, page 55) and *SKCNS Upad Theatre Festival* (see **Case Study 6**, page 51) - brought about feelings of empowerment experienced by the groups of young people involved.

Case Study 15

XAMFRÀ

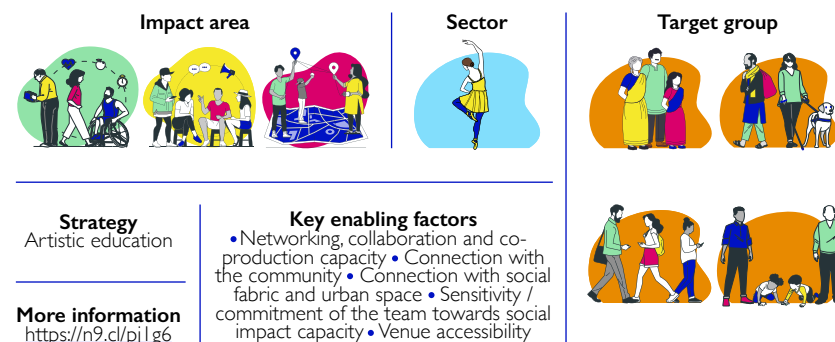
Barcelona, Spain

Institutions: L'ARC Music Foundation, Ciutat Vella District (Barcelona City Council)

Socio-educational music school serving an under-resourced neighbourhood through dedicated programming and activities co-produced through varied networks of related actors.

Xamfrà is a socio-educational centre and music school dedicated to guaranteeing the universal right of access to cultural and artistic practices for all citizens, from infants to older adults. From its inception in 2004, the centre has been active in an under-resourced neighbourhood of Barcelona (El Raval), where it has made use of the urban space and connectivity of the local social fabric to focus on fostering equality and equity, recognising diversity, promoting diverse participation and positive interactions between citizens, and encouraging a feeling of belonging through its artistic and educational activities. Since 2014, the centre has dedicated itself to the promotion

of social inclusion through music, dance, and the performing arts, specifically by offering educational opportunities to citizens who, historically, have had access to fewer opportunities, including migrants. *Xamfrà* is highly active in programming, implementing and publicising varied artistic activities, workshops and socio-educational projects for community development, including those held at the centre and others carried out by their diverse local partners. The organisation's engagement in a variety of networks of sociocultural and educational actors at the neighbourhood, district and city levels, as well as its connection to the local community, have contributed greatly to its success.



Case Study 16

CHILDREN'S HOUSE




Rijeka, Croatia

Institution: City of Rijeka

Synergistic cultural programming specifically created for and with children and their families, in collaboration with diverse cultural institutions.

The reconstruction of Rijeka's historic Brick House building into the new Children's House (completed in 2021) was a key part of the City of Rijeka's plan for the revitalisation of the Benčić Brick and T-Building Complex for cultural and educational activities. Thanks to its strong connection to the community, the city recognised the potential of creating the first ever Children's House in Croatia—a space for children and their families to participate in cultural, artistic and scientific activities—and then identified the historic building as its ideal location. By strategically utilising its material and financial resources, the city has made possible a wide variety of events and learn-

ing opportunities for children aged 0-12, such as participating in the production of animated films, music, video reporting segments and video games; design production and 3-D printing; participating in "sensory theatre" in a small amphitheatre on the house's roof; puppet-making; and theatre and film activities designed specifically for children with developmental disabilities. The city's capacity for collaboration and co-production has also ensured that all activities are jointly designed and implemented by four Rijeka cultural institutions with the goal that children not just access culture, but rather participate in the whole process.

<p>Impact area</p> 	<p>Sector</p> 	<p>Target group</p> 
<p>Strategy</p> <p>Programming & activities for children & families</p>	<p>Key enabling factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material and financial resources • Connection and openness to the community • Collaboration and co-production capacity • Public policies 	<p>More information</p> <p>https://n9.cl/r8inv</p>

Case Study 17

CARAVANSARAY SELINUNTE SAN SIRO




Milan, Italy

Institution: Outis-Centro Nazionale di Drammaturgia Contemporanea

Urban participatory dramaturgy as a co-creation strategy with playwrights and residents, leading to improved physical infrastructure and social cohesion.

Carried out from 2019-2020 under a local policy framework supporting urban regeneration through cultural development, the *Caravansaray Selinunte* project explicitly connected artists and playwrights with the social realities of San Siro. This neighbourhood is home to several public housing complexes and has long dealt with issues of social exclusion, ethnic integration, intergenerational exchange and the maintenance of housing and public spaces. The programme's methodological approach of 'urban participatory dramaturgy' encouraged local residents to share their life experiences and co-create a new theatrical production. Playwrights also engaged in participant observation, allowing

them to learn about and later highlight details of residents' lives that are often unaccounted for or underestimated, both in policy design and in the public eye. By leveraging its connections to the local community and organisational values of participation, empowerment, diversity and social inclusion, the NGO leading the project helped contribute to the improvement of physical infrastructures in the neighbourhood. It also led to a greater understanding of the cultural norms, living conditions and experiences of residents, thereby improving the identification of local needs, stories and values and setting the stage for better-adapted public policies.

<p>Impact area</p> 	<p>Sector</p> 	<p>Target group</p> 
<p>Strategy</p> <p>Community co-creation</p>	<p>Key enabling factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisational values • Community participation • Public policies • Social fabric • Urban space 	<p>More information</p> <p>https://n9.cl/z82kx https://n9.cl/xyixs</p>

5. Knowledge awareness

Access to information or knowledge constitutes a key input for activating a process of change. At all levels, agents who incorporate valuable knowledge, motivations and their own goals can drive transformative processes at different scales. The first has to do with the generation of knowledge and the diffusion of a certain 'state of opinion' regarding the relationships between cultural experience and social impact. This is correlated with aspects such as: scientific recognition of the societal impact of cultural experiences, media coverage of the phenomenon, the existence of grassroots movements for the inclusion of a societal dimension in cultural policies, the existence of international recommendations pushing for the inclusion of a social dimension in cultural policies, or educational and training programmes' recognition of new professional competencies related to societal impact. A clear example of the scientific recognition of the social impact of cultural experiences is provided in the case of *Museus per a la salut* (see **Case Study 18**, page 103) while educational and training

programmes' recognition of new professional competencies related to societal impact is exemplified by the capacity building programme of *Inner Space* (see **Case Study 1**, page 39)

6. Changes in the uses of space

Finally, we can also refer to those transformations that have spatial implications and may point to the fact that processes of change are indeed taking place, which link or relate cultural experiences to social impacts. In this case, we talk about changes in the way spaces are used by citizens to improve or facilitate societal impacts, or the appearance of private spaces that offer goods and services related to the societal impact pursued, as well as public equipment and infrastructures or non-profit institutions that also provide goods and services linked to societal impact. For instance, the *My Space Nucle Bugojno* project (see **Case Study 19**, page 104) and the *Gorud Valley Integrated Urban Regeneration Project* (see **Case Study 11**, page 65) both provide key examples of how participatory urban planning processes may affect the perception and use of public spaces.

Case Study 18

MUSEUS PER A LA SALUT: RECORDS DE FESTA

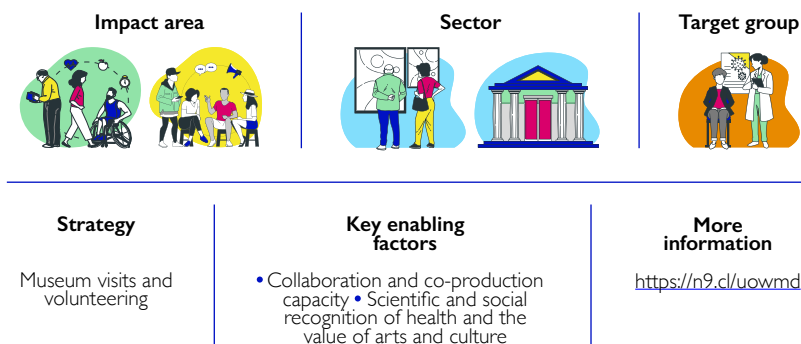
Valencia, Spain

Institutions: Museu Faller de Valencia, Las Naves (Valencia City Council), Association of Relatives of Alzheimer's Patients in Valencia, University of Valencia, Craftsmen's Guild of Fallas Artists

Collaborative effort to organise museum visits and artist talks for individuals with Alzheimer's, improving well-being through recovering memories of collective experiences.

Museus per a la salut: records de festa capitalised on the recognition of the social and health benefits of cultural experiences and a strong collaboration between local authorities, private cultural and health institutions and academia. Implemented in 2019-2020, it provided interactive tours of the Museu Faller de Valencia's collection for older people in the early stages of Alzheimer's, with the goal of increasing well-being and cultural connections for both visitors and the artists presenting their works. The tours sought to dynamize Valencian popular culture while also generating greater well-being. In addition to favour-

ing access to culture for individuals with Alzheimer's, tours contributed to visitors' physical health by stimulating their long-term memory through reminiscence therapy, using the cultural resources of the Fallas festivals. Significant positive impact has been observed in the emotional well-being of participants, as well as furthering social inclusion, reducing loneliness, stimulating cognitive function and consolidating a sense of shared identity. This initiative has already been replicated successfully in New Zealand and several organisations around the world have expressed an interest in reproducing the model.



Case Study 19

MY SPACE NUGLE BUGOJNO

Bugojno, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Institutions: Youth Association of Bugojno, Youth Centres of Bugojno, Public Company for Residential Utilities and Local Roads, Municipality of Bugojno

Participatory urban planning and placemaking tools promoted by the public administration to harness territorial dynamism through citizen involvement.

Active from 2019-2021, the My Space Nugle Bugojno project was a cooperative, participatory planning process for the use of a residential area in the Nugle neighbourhood of Bugojno. Capitalising on the governance model and capacities for collaboration and networking of varied actors from the local public administration, the project asked citizens to participate in the design and construction of a public recreation area. The coordinating team actively involved residents in this co-planning process from its earliest stages, using workshops, meetings and further open dialogue to gather the widest possible set of perspectives and needs. After analysing the contributions from residents and

team members, the organisers consulted with experts in the fields of architecture and urban planning before creating a detailed project proposal that was presented to and subsequently accepted by the city of Bugojno.

This extensive use of participatory planning and placemaking tools not only gave citizens a say in the use of their neighbourhood land, but also privileged their voices from the outset, thus augmenting the feeling of collective ownership of the plan and the recreation space that was eventually created. This project exemplifies the possibilities of harnessing territorial dynamism for improving social well-being and citizen participation.

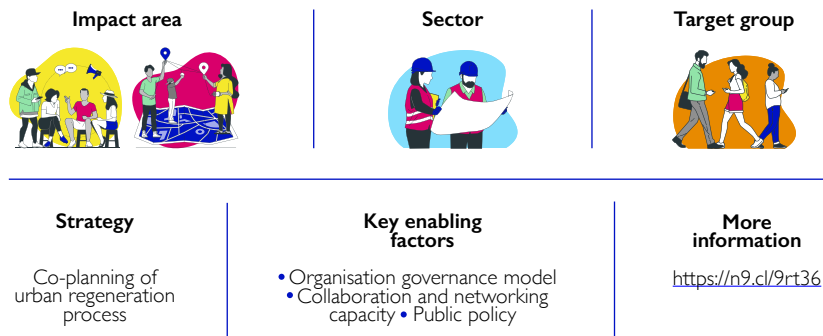


Figure 7.

Meso Level Enabling Factors, With Examples

Meso Level Dimension	Type of Enabling Factor	Example
Network changes	Network and Partnerships	Involvement of co-beneficiaries in the design and implementation of cultural actions, Forms of collaboration
Market reactivity	Resources and Infrastructures	Co-financing and sponsorship agreements
Public policy sensitivity	Norms and Regulations	Allocation of public resources to the cultural sector
Symbolic reactivity	Narratives and Discourses	Affecting the jargon of sectoral policies
Knowledge awareness	Knowledge, skills and abilities	Public support to educational programmes targeting cultural operators
Changes in the use of space	Cross-cutting	

The Macro Level

Finally, macro level analysis explores relationships between cultural and creative activities with macro indica-

tors of their societal impacts. At the macro level, and within the theory of change, MESOC developed models using some innovative techniques for data modelling that were originally

developed in the fields of Artificial Intelligence and machine learning. Using these techniques, we can connect causally, and at a regional level, the dimensions of the cultural and creative sectors – measured by the volume of workers in the cultural and creative sectors – with the welfare variables proposed by the OECD in its Better Life Index.

Although the approach extends to a more general conception of well-being than that found in the meso and micro levels, the set of 11 variables selected contains the dimensions that formed the key focus of the MESOC project, such as a sense of community and political engagement, life satisfaction or the impact on access to housing. The work presented is, in fact, one of the first applications of such advanced methods to the study of the regional impacts of culture and creativity, also providing quantitative evidence in support of their causal inferences. The development of each of the 11 models that relate the dimensions of the cultural and creative sectors to each of the targets for well-being implies the detection of their differing transition variables, which allow us to interpret why the

effects and impacts are greater in some regions, while in others the effects are smaller or even negative.

A full explanation of the macro level and the Convergent Model is contained in the MESOC Methodological Guidelines document, available at <https://www.mesoc-project.eu/resources/methodological-guidelines>

The research results from this area are provided in the SICCRED online tool, presented in the following Toolbox.

MESOC has developed macro level analysis models using innovative data modelling techniques to connect the cultural and creative sectors with the welfare variables proposed in the OECD's Better Life Index.

Toolbox

SICCRED Societal Impact of Culture and Creativity Regional European Dashboard (MESOC)

This online tool, developed within the framework of the MESOC project, allows us to make a diagnosis of the impacts of the cultural and creative sectors in different European regions. In particular, the tool serves to measure the impact of variations in the number of cultural and creative workers in a given European region based on each of the 11 dimensions of well-being covered by the OECD Better Life Index (BLI). For these estima-

tions, an innovative causal machine learning algorithm called Causal Forest is used. This technique has a number of characteristics that make it ideal. Primarily, it combines high levels of fit and accuracy while also allowing for the direct and transparent interpretability of the results, and causal impact can be inferred if the models are correctly specified.

<https://n9.cl/7a42w>



Further reading on the MESOC Convergent Model



One of the main outputs of MESOC in terms of the scientific dissemination of the project's results was the publication of a Special Issue of *City, Territory and Architecture* in SpringerOpen, on the theme of 'Cities in transition: exploring the role of urban cultural policies'. This Special Issue opens up a debate on the role of cultural policies and initiatives in urban transformations, and their potential contributions to urban transition processes.

Here, we provide a brief selection of the articles included in the Special Issue, which can be consulted in full via open access at the following link: <https://www.springeropen.com/collections/CITITRANS>

- Bonet, L., Calvano, G. & Fernández Compañ, P. (2023). Exogenous and endogenous factors affecting the social impact of cultural projects: the case of Barcelona ecosystem. *City, Territory and Architecture*, 10, 9. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40410-023-00196-3>
This article provides a conceptual framework which is useful for understanding the micro level of the MESOC convergent model, introducing the concepts of exogenous and endogenous variables in the case of cultural projects. The analysis of several case studies helps the reader to understand the different enabling factors through real-life examples.

- Concilio, G., Bianchi, I. & Tosoni, I. (2023). Signals of sustainability transition: Sensing enabling factors through cultural initiatives. *City, Territory and Architecture*, 10, 5. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40410-022-00187-w>
Through the use of case studies in six different European cities, the authors present the main families of impact determinants that have been merged into the meso level of the Convergent Model. The article includes a useful classification of case-specific and comprehensive enabling factors.
- Rausell-Köster, P., Ghirardi, S., Sanjuán, J. et al. (2022). Cultural experiences in the framework of 'cultural cities': measuring the socioeconomic impact of culture in urban performance. *City, Territory and Architecture*, 9, 40. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40410-022-00189-8>
Drawing on work conducted in the context of MESOC, this article presents a model for connecting cultural experience with urban performance, with a particular emphasis on the socioeconomic impacts of culture. It presents a proposal for some transitional indicators linking the different tactics used for connecting culture and urban development with the effects observed as a result of doing so.

- Cicerchia, A. (2022). Indicators for local policies of cultural welfare: content, dimensions, and quality criteria. *City, Territory and Architecture*, 9, 32. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40410-022-00179-w>

This article examines the notion of cultural welfare as an integrated approach aimed at promoting individual and community health and well-being through practices connected to the arts and cultural heritage. It also proposes a set of quality criteria for designing cultural welfare indicators on a local scale.

THE MESOC CONVERGENT MODEL DESCRIBES THE TRAJECTORIES OF SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION INDUCED BY CULTURAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES.

IT DEFINES CHANGE COMPREHENSIVELY AND PROVIDES TOOLS TO DESIGN, PROPOSE, TEST AND VALIDATE NEW PERSPECTIVES AND METHODOLOGIES FOR CAPTURING THE WIDER SOCIETAL VALUE OF CULTURE.



CHAPTER 4

Recommendations for Improving the Social Impact of Culture

*Photography: Mòdul Centro Ecológico Cultural
© Fundación Contorno Urbano*


We need to move along and up the 'knowledge value chain' from data (statistics) to information (indicators) to knowledge (benchmarks) to wisdom (policy).


Colin Mercer, 2003¹


This Handbook has presented information, reflections and guidance to allow cultural operators, policymakers, managers of public and private funding programmes and strategies, researchers, trainers and students to better connect cultural activities with social impact. The MESOC project delved deep into the societal impact of cultural experiences. Most of these individual or community experiences were the result of an increased number of cultural projects aiming at social transformation with the support of public policies, and in some cases with additional or alternative philanthropic support. One of the main aims of the MESOC project was to develop new assessment frameworks, approaches, methodologies and improved tools to capture

the wider social value of culture and, ultimately, to suggest ideas to improve the design of cultural policies and projects.


Following the spirit of the MESOC Declaration presented at the end of this chapter, the project shared the following general assumptions regarding the role of culture in relation to social impact:


 Art and culture are increasingly recognised for their capacity to facilitate societal cohesion and citizen engagement, build and improve upon common spaces for living and socially interacting, and ultimately improve people's well-being and health.

 Cultural phenomena and experiences have a strong symbolic weight that varies depending on the value systems of each community and the idiosyncrasies of each experience and cultural activity. Knowing and promoting the enablers that enhance this impact is the responsibility of policymakers and cultural operators.

 We are moving towards a holistic perception of culture, where the social dimension is not just instrumental, but rather is part of culture. This fact forces cultural policies to be reoriented in such a way that they are elaborated in connection or conjunction with other political fields to interact synergistically.


At the same time, there are some methodological assumptions related to the evaluation of the social effects of culture:


 Exposure to cultural experiences has a long-term impact on individuals and communities, making it difficult to identify the impact generated by a specific isolated factor, as it may be mixed with others that may also have influenced the desired impact.

 Most cultural projects and supporting policies seek results that are difficult to quantify, as they are often intangible. The more precise the objective of a project or policy, the easier it will be to assess its effectiveness and measure its efficiency in relation to the resources invested. However, the achievement of the outcomes of a project or policy - much less the fulfilment of its outputs (i.e., the realisation of a course, a show or a guided visit) - does not necessarily imply its long-term desired impact. There are contextual factors that force

¹ Mercer, Colin, From Data to Wisdom: Building the Knowledge Base for Cultural Policy (September 28, 2003). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2153369> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2153369>

us to relativise both the outcomes achieved and the resulting impact.

 Data (and even statistics) are not indicators: they only become such when they are transformed or when value is added. Obviously, without rigorous and verified data and statistics, it is not possible to build credible indicators. In order for the data to generate value, it must be contrasted with other data (temporal or spatial comparisons) and, in particular, with data on other significant variables (demographic data, resources employed, achievement of results, etc.).


 We must learn from other experiences: illustrative cases may inspire changes in perspective for those in charge of other institutions and territories.


Considering the above assumptions, the project suggested a number of recommendations for both policymakers and cultural operators in order to better design projects and policies, outline better tailored strategies and develop systemic frameworks for evaluation.


These recommendations are structured in the following way:

- a) Recommendations for policymakers, connected to design strategies for public policies that aim to stimulate social transformation
- b) Recommendations for cultural operators, connected to design strategies for cultural projects
- c) Recommendations related to improving the framework for evaluating social impacts


a) Recommendations for Policymakers


 Allocate specific budget items to support participatory cultural projects with social impact, as well as providing material resources to amplify their results.


 Plan long-term interventions that go beyond electoral periods to allow time for projects to reach their potential in terms of social impact.

 Favour bottom-up approaches to supporting programmes in order to integrate the local reality


and its context, embrace diverse groups who have transformed into innovation communities and boost their latent value.


 Communicate the positive social impact that culture has with examples of good practices and disseminate the results of scientific empirical studies that support this. It is necessary to go beyond the general assumption of culture's impact on well-being, focusing on specific programmes and strategies that have the greatest impact on the particular area of interest.


 Promote interdepartmental collaboration (between culture, education, social services, health, urban planning, etc.) and, at the same time, partner with innovative institutions, which can assume a greater level of risk than the public sector.


 Raise awareness among different types of policymakers (legislators, heads of other departments, etc.) in order to promote new rules and regulations that

favour substantial, long-term changes in the behaviour of the different stakeholders and professionals (educators, health workers, social workers, etc.).

 Support research and development activities in the context of funded programmes and projects, including through partnerships with universities and research centres, and by encouraging beneficiaries to take part in the process.

 Support the scalability of cultural projects. For instance, enhancing digital culture and not just face-to-face projects to reach new users and participants.

 Promote the monitoring and evaluation of projects and its accountability to strengthen their legitimacy.

 Recognise the new professional competencies emerging in cultural projects that aim to stimulate social transformation (for instance, cultural mediators) through the promotion of spe-

cific professional training frameworks.

Understand cultural organisations as innovation centres that contribute to facilitating innovation spillover between projects, organisations and sectors. Supporting these facilities is a way of helping to innovate society.

Incorporating successful strategies from other contexts, adapted to each local reality, is a great way to favour innovation.

b) Recommendations for Cultural Operators

Get inspiration from other sectors. Cultural proposals are enriched when they intersect with other social practices (sports, education, etc.), since it allows them to learn from their experiences,

successes and mistakes. At the same time, it allows them to attract people who are not regular attendees or 'captive audiences', and thus would not necessarily be interested in the cultural proposal initially.

Facilitate accessibility for potential users. Elements such as physical proximity, a welcoming venue, timetables appropriate to their availability, spaces adapted to different users' needs, etc. are crucial for reducing the distance between cultural organisations and their beneficiaries. You may also think about leveraging friends and acquaintances' participation as a way to break down entry barriers.

Take inspiration from case studies (for example, those suggested in this Handbook), adapting them to the mission of your project or organisation and to the local context where you operate. Incorporating successful strategies from other contexts, adapted to each local reality, is a great way to favour innovation.

Strengthen social impact through cooperation with other social and cultural organisations, since the experience and synergies that can be obtained through this cooperation may generate an important capacity for multiplying impact.

Build a committed team (human resources), thus freeing up more time for training and increasing your contact with other experiences.

Capture new talent in your team, seeking to overcome in-group logics and incorporating professionals who are representative of the social and cultural diversity of your environment.

Legitimate the social impact of culture through demonstrating better social and financial accountability.

Create environments and programmes with inclusion and diversity at their heart and boost models of participatory governance in order to empower grassroots initiatives.

Set up adequate infrastructures, managed by committed teams, that are people-centred.

Promote bottom-up initiatives instead of generalising strategies that are poorly connected to diverse local realities. Projects that are connected to local identities and concerns make more sense to citizens.

Create environments and programmes with inclusion and diversity at their heart and boost models of participatory governance in order to empower grassroots initiatives.

c) Recommendations for the Evaluation of Social Impacts

Focus on the processes (which are not linear) rather than the final product when building an

assessment framework. For instance, the dynamics at play when creating a participatory performance with people with mental illnesses or intellectual disabilities are more interesting than the number of attendees during the show. This requires a change in focus from the evaluation of outputs to the consideration of outcomes, inputs, strategies and contextual elements, as well as their relationships with one another.

Take into account the different entry points of your evaluation system: by processes, by impacts, by sectors, by audiences, etc. Start with what you have and gain inspiration for what you are currently missing.

Acknowledge the multiple areas in which the social impacts of cultural activities may be observed, and consider establishing comprehensive assessment models in this respect, either during the analysis of funding applications and in the subsequent monitoring and evaluation of

funded projects, or in the assessment of your own cultural projects.

Recognise the complexity of measuring impact and consider developing theories of change relevant to your specific areas of action that integrate transition variables and related proxies, such as those proposed by MESOC.

Engage with varied stakeholders who have expertise in different domains (e.g., health, urban renovation, social development, citizen participation, etc.) in the analysis and evaluation of programmes and activities.

Consider the need for evaluation approaches that recognise different timescales, ranging from short-term results to longer-term impacts.

Acknowledge the importance of territorial and sectoral contexts and their enabling (and also limiting) factors, by taking into account their singularities.

Work on a good structuring of the policy, programme or project's objectives from the outset in order to trace in a clearer way the transition trajectories that may lead to intentional social transformations.

Also consider the possible negative externalities when assessing social impact. Although unintentional, interventions may bring about negative effects in the local context. It is fundamental to recognise and include these elements in your evaluation in order to avoid biased discourses.

Appraise if the information needed to carry out the evaluation of policy programmes or cultural projects is available and may be easily processed with the means and resources at your disposal.

Use complementary data collection methodologies (statistics, focus groups, etc.) to obtain a more holistic perspective on the impacts generated.

Adapt the indicators to the point of view of the evaluator, be it your team and the different profiles within it, or policy-makers, expert evaluators, etc.

Change the narrative around impact assessment: when talking about impact evaluation, sharing data and numbers may result in a sterile communication effort. Switching the focus to more emotional narratives may result in a more effective dissemination of the evaluation results.

Consider the need for evaluation approaches that recognise different timescales, ranging from short-term results to longer-term impacts.



DECLARATION

DEEPENING THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT OF ARTS AND CULTURE THROUGH EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES

We, the signatories of this Declaration

- **Being aware of the emerging connections** between art, education, technology, innovation, heritage and scientific culture, and their strategic value for the projection of cities and territories into a future of reinforced rights in a democratic society;
- **Recognising the need for framing** and promoting those connections **within new, human-centred policies** aimed at responding to challenges such as the health crisis, the climate emergency and persistent social inequalities;
- **Welcoming the new wave of diffused legitimisation** of cultural policies after the huge budget cuts initiated after the 2008 global financial crisis, which had prioritised “efficient” public expenditure, including in cultural heritage;
- Keeping well in mind that nowadays, **art and culture are widely recognised for their capacity** to facilitate societal cohesion and citizen engagement, build and improve upon common spaces for living and socially interacting, and ultimately improve people’s well-being and health;

Warmly welcome

The vision of the **latest EU Work Plan for Culture (2023-2026)**, which delineates a holistic perception of culture that is articulated across many policy fields and, more specifically, acknowledges culture’s capacity to define our foundations, shape our daily lives and structure our collective future.

In a world that is not only more globalised but also more fractured, where the green and digital transitions are becoming imperatives and unknown societal risks are likely to appear, we need ambitious cultural policy goals. We concur with that vision and share its ambition to build a **more coherent European cultural policy ecosystem**.

At both the local and global levels, the role of science is accelerating. This is due to the **growing understanding that science is an integral part of culture**, responsible not only for exciting technological advances, but also for the evolution of innovation systems and the development of more open, participatory and transdisciplinary research and knowledge transfer processes.

This is witnessed by the recent introduction of the **New European Bauhaus**, a movement that puts culture, creativity and innovation back at the centre of the debate on sustainable development and social inclusion, which has been reinforced in the aftermath of the pandemic crisis.

Within this framework,

- We contend that until today, European stakeholders and citizens have shared a sort of intuitive perception that **the cultural experiences of people** and the related projects, programmes and policies able to support them, **are an important factor for the social, political and symbolic cohesion of the Community.**
- However, **the advocacy of the relevance of art and culture needs to make further progress** beyond being a mere accumulation of anecdotal evidence and episodes, supported by well-intentioned and attractive narratives but showing too little rigour and replicability to become truly conceptual and operational tools for designing better, fairer and more efficient interventions.
- We believe that a further argument in favour of such progress is the recent **surge of investigations on the design of science for policy tools**, which include new evaluation mechanisms, competencies and more democratic and effective ethical codes, which surely have an impact on academic science, but can also turn out to contribute significantly to tackling societal challenges.

In light of the above,

Our view is that we are at an inflection point where we must grasp this unique and invaluable opportunity to dig deeper into the relationship between culture, the arts and societal transformation.

The challenge of the EU funded MESOC project was **to develop new approaches and improved methodologies and tools for capturing the wider societal value of culture**, which includes, but is not limited to, economic impact. We wanted to support new, effective and inclusive policies and institutional frameworks that offer a convincing vision for citizens to cope with current cultural and societal transformations. However, concepts such as *social cohesion*, personal and collective *well-being*, or *urban renewal* allude to enormously complex societal problems, and it would therefore be illusionary (and, ultimately, disappointing) to convey the idea that art and culture are always a good solution to these challenges.

To achieve that, we need **the articulation of different methodologies**, both quantitative and qualitative, to be more precise and concrete in the direction, dimension and causality of impacts. It is time to propose common and concerted protocols and procedures for new cultural policies to be evidence-based and truly pursue social transformation objectives.

We demand the attention of cultural policy makers so that all operators interacting across the cultural ecosystem acquire certain commitments, including:

- **To explicitly and concretely highlight in cultural projects, programmes and policies the social, economic, cultural or other objectives pursued by the implementation of such projects or programmes.**

- **To allocate in the design of cultural projects, programmes and policies** the necessary resources (5% of the total budget) to develop evaluation and monitoring processes, without compromising on cultural funding.
- We must deepen the collaboration among all agents of the cultural ecosystem **to generate indicators** that are connected not only to specific objectives but also to key enablers, as well as new sources of **data and methodologies to capture all the relevant dimensions of culture.**
- In a field such as culture, which is so heterogeneous and so dependent on the specific territorial context, it is particularly necessary **to converge towards standardised (albeit flexible) evaluation protocols.**
- We must convince and engage the practitioners using **intensive data analysis and, where possible, Artificial Intelligence**, that culture is at the heart of many of the great questions around humanity's societal challenges.
- And we also must push for more official statistical institutions **to be sensitive and responsive to the demands of the cultural ecosystem.**

We believe our demands are central to building a prosperous, cohesive, just, resilient and beautiful Europe. This declaration is a first step towards a cooperative and united response that we will pursue by continuing to promote the implementation and evaluation of cultural projects aimed at societal transformation. It is also a call for contributions from various horizons: cultural workers, researchers and policy-makers to discuss these proposals, to recognise the importance of context in impact assessment and, most importantly, to test and experiment with these ideas in the field.

Paris, 10 March 2023

WE ARE AT AN INFLECTION POINT AND MUST GRASP THIS UNIQUE AND INVALUABLE OPPORTUNITY TO DIG DEEPER INTO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE, THE ARTS AND SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION.

Coordination
of MESOC



Handbook
edition



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Handbook
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