Discussion paper

10th WORLD SUMMIT ON ARTS & CULTURE
SEOUL 2025

Charting the future of arts and culture

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Arts Council of Korea (ARKO) is a national organisation for the arts and culture established in 1973. ARKO shifted into a consensus decision-making structure consisting of Board members in 2005.

ARKO aims to stand as a strong groundwork to support diverse disciplines. ARKO's main scope of activities comprises of contributing to various funding opportunities for artists and arts institutions; advocating for the arts in society; and fostering arts professionals. ARKO strives to ensure everyone's access to arts and culture through cultural vouchers and community projects.

ARKO continues to expand partnerships worldwide with individuals, private and public sectors. ARKO currently runs outstanding arts platforms in Korea and abroad such as ARKO•Daehakro Arts Theater, ARKO Art Center, ARKO Arts Archive, ARKO HRD Center, and the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

ARTS COUNCIL KOREA

IFACCA
International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies

Charting the future of arts and culture

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Welcome

In 1973, when the Republic of Korea's Gross National Income (GNI) per capita was just USD 413, the Arts Council Korea (ARKO) emerged with a clear vision and mission: to create new arts and culture. As we reflect on the journey from then to now, one question stands out: how did South Korea emerge as the world's eighth-largest cultural content market, produce a Nobel Laureate in Literature and cultivate *Hallyu*—the Korean Wave of global popularity for its music, television dramas, films, fashion, beauty, food and more? For a small nation like South Korea, predicting and adapting to political upheavals and rapid economic globalisation was a formidable challenge—one that significantly shaped its trajectory. Moreover, technological advancements introduced profound innovations and disruptions which left an indelible mark on the country, shaping it into the powerhouse it is today.

In response, South Korea was compelled to accelerate its development, driving rapid economic and social transformation. As part of this evolution, its cultural policies adapted in parallel leading to the expansion of large-scale cultural facilities and the implementation of initiatives that integrated cultural experiences into daily life and enhanced the overall quality of life for citizens.

At the same time, the wave of democratisation ushered in freedom of expression, which served as a catalyst for creative activities. The government actively fostered the cultural industries, and policies were expanded to protect artists' rights and establish a comprehensive creative safety net for them. Previously closed to foreign popular cultures, South Korea opened its doors to global influences. Amid these transformational efforts, Korean artists began to perform on the global stage and the cultures enjoyed by the Korean people was no longer confined to those from within national borders. As cultural exchanges flourished, South Korea's artistic influence grew and reached audiences around the world. Today, it is no longer unusual for the global community to recognise South Korea's cultural and artistic achievements. The small seed sown in 1972 has not only flourished domestically but also spread globally. What does the next 50 years hold for ARKO as we look ahead? How can we continue to nurture and expand this cultural legacy on a global scale?

In 2023, ARKO celebrated its 50th anniversary by reflecting on both its accomplishments and challenges. Guided by the belief that the most effective solutions emerge from the field, we have actively engaged with artists to ensure that their voices shape our initiatives. As part

of this commitment, we have restructured our programmes to ensure greater artistic autonomy and have converted our facilities into open, accessible spaces for the public. Furthermore, we launched events to promote arts patronage, raising awareness among citizens and corporations about the importance of supporting the arts. Through these efforts, we aim to create an environment where the arts can flourish sustainably, thus ensuring that cultural engagement remains integral to society.

[As] ARKO celebrate[s] its 50th anniversary ...[and] guided by the belief that the most effective solutions emerge from the field, we have actively engaged with artists to ensure that their voices shape our initiatives.

Meanwhile, having undergone rapid and compressed growth, South Korea now faces increasingly complex societal challenges—ranging from political and economic divisions to social tensions, generational divides and gender issues. Beyond these internal challenges, the climate crisis has become an unavoidable reality and the full impact of AI-driven digital transformation

remains uncertain. As global challenges intensify —demanding collective human responses that transcend national borders— ARKO seeks to redefine the role of arts and culture in shaping a shared future that extends beyond the Korean context. In an increasingly complex and challenging world, the role of arts and culture becomes ever more crucial. Arts enable us to recognise each other's uniqueness, bridge differences and ultimately find common ground despite all that sets us apart. However, this is only possible through open and inclusive dialogue that transcends geographical boundaries.

Recognising this, we envision global dialogue as a driving force in shaping the future and the arts as a vital medium for meaningful communication. At this critical moment, South Korea—a nation that has navigated transformation amidst turbulence— proudly extends an invitation to our global colleagues to join us in Seoul this May for the 10th World Summit on Arts and Culture.

At the 9th World Summit in Stockholm, Sweden in 2023, we found a strong collective resonance with the concept of polycrisis — a term that underscores the urgent need for broader and more frequent dialogue about the role that the arts must play in today's world, particularly in addressing the complex and interconnected challenges we face.

I believe that it is both natural and an honour that South Korea—a nation that has navigated constant, unprecedented change— has been chosen as the gathering place for

cultural experts from around the world to engage in dialogue. Korea's experience of intense, fast-paced and multidimensional progress not only offers inspiration, but also serves as a catalyst empowering us to envision a more interconnected future and creatively reimagine the rightful role of culture in shaping that future.

The nine essays presented in this Discussion Paper offer diverse perspectives and thought-provoking insights into the future of arts and culture. I hope they serve all of us as a catalyst for reflection and shared vision, guiding the international community toward greater empathy, respect and collaboration as we navigate the challenges ahead. I extend my sincere gratitude to the authors whose work lays the foundation for our discussions and to our co-host, IFACCA, for their invaluable role in shaping the spectrum of conversations that will unfold at the Summit in May.

In conclusion, I would like to revisit a pivotal moment in our history. In 2005, ARKO underwent a major structural transformation when it transferred decision-making authority over cultural policy from the government to the arts sector by introducing a consensus-based decision-making model. At that moment, we issued the following declaration—one that remains just as relevant today. Only today, I would like to replace the term 'Arts Council Korea' in this declaration with the words 'our dialogue', as I firmly believe that art is the lever with the power to change the world—a belief I trust we all share.

We believe in the truth that art changes the world and lives. That truth is the thread of our lives and the force of our world. Our dialogue will be that thread and force, and thus, art will become the lever that changes this world.

Byoung Gug Choung
Chair, Arts Council Korea

Introduction

Urgent action to future proof

We face unprecedented turmoil as worldwide peace deteriorates and our contexts become more fragile due to climate catastrophe and social divides. These were the concluding thoughts from the 9th World Summit on Arts and Culture in Stockholm, Sweden in 2023, where we reflected upon how, in such an environment, we might collectively ensure that the dynamism of culture is recognised, protected and enhanced for our future. We also acknowledged that culture is a core dimension of our humanity, and that the cultural and creative sectors (CCS) are the foundation for the arts, creativity and cultural expressions that help bring this dimension of humanity to life.

When we gather for the 10th World Summit on Arts and Culture in Seoul in May 2025, it will mark two years since we parted in Stockholm. Following our conversations on multiple crises, we must now move to urgent action as culture risks being instrumentalised, siloed, undervalued and reduced to a commodity. Over the last 24 months, technological advancements seem to be leading debates – especially in relation to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Generative AI (GenAI) – as humanity tries to keep up and make some sense of complex global geopolitics, cost of living challenges, increasingly extreme weather patterns and climate crises, and polarised environments that minimise and/or deny dialogue and exchange. This context is increasingly complex for cultural policymakers around the world; for governments responding to competing demands and volatile electoral cycles; for people who seek to engage actively in public cultural life and feel safe; and for the sustainability of our future and our planet.

Culture is a core dimension of our humanity, and ... the cultural and creative sectors (CCS) are the foundation for the arts, creativity and cultural expressions that help bring this dimension of humanity to life.

As for global governance for culture, it has not been easy. The seeming consensus among United Nations Member States for a standalone goal for culture in the post-2030 sustainable development agenda – promoted in the 2022 MONDIACULT

Declaration for Culture – appeared to herald a new promise for the future, as it would give culture a place in global agendas that would permeate national and regional contexts and address some of our challenges. However, for the moment, it is not included in the adopted *Pact for the Future* (September 2024), compelling all stakeholders in the international cultural policy community to also come together for this cause.

Against this backdrop, the 10th World Summit in Seoul is an opportunity to come together to chart the future for arts and culture. The Republic of Korea has been a beacon for advancing arts and culture – recognising as it does the role of innovation while also safeguarding rich cultural tradition and heritage – so it is very fitting that the Summit will be co-hosted by Arts Council Korea (ARKO), as it celebrates its 52nd anniversary.

The Summit programme considers the interplay of different elements that will need to work together to help us prepare for the future. Technological advances are here to stay and will continue to develop each day, but what information, narratives and knowledge systems are being imported into machine learning? Who – or what – generates content through GenAI? Whose language, cultural codes, and cosmovision guide and inform these advancements and new tools? And how and where we can find consensus and respectful debate to help us develop ideas, innovate and reimagine, if we are divided and operate in echo chambers in this complex landscape. In this vein,

we will also tackle questions such as: has cultural policy inadvertently contributed to building these divides? Working in this ecology, do we create some of the barriers we are so desperate to break? Do we now mirror analogue world issues in the digital world? And what is our role as an international community?

This Discussion Paper sets out to provoke critical reflection on these ideas and issues that affect culture and the CCS, ranging from the exciting and daunting aspects of technology and AI, and their anthropophagic nature; to how we gather, exchange ideas, and participate; and the types of agency we need to ensure a future with diverse narratives and worldviews. The Discussion Paper is also informed by the recommendations made by IFACCA in our 2024 report *Culture as a public good: navigating its role in policy debates.* This includes the need to recognise culture in both its symbolic and its sectoral forms; to avoid the commodification of culture; to develop cultural capabilities for resilience and adaptivity; to address systemic inequalities and embrace diversity as a key lever; to provide an enabling environment for agency and self-determination in cultural narratives; and to ensure policy work is practical, actionable, understandable and inclusive.

We have invited 10 thought leaders from around the world to share their perspectives on these issues and consider actions that governments and people could and should take, including: Ms Paula Carr and Mr Haiko Te Kurapa (Aotearoa

New Zealand); Mr Lars Ebert (Belgium); Ms Sarah Abdu Bushra (Ethiopia); Prof Dr Nishant Shah (India); Ms Marcela Flores Méndez (Mexico); Mr Mauricio Delfin (Peru); Ms Marichu G. Tellano (the Philippines); Dr Zune Lee (Republic of Korea), Dr Jazmín Alejandra Beirak Ulanosky (Spain). These authors bring diverse perspectives and lived experiences from across the arts and cultural ecology, working in public institutions, academia, or civil society organisations, and as Indigenous and cultural leaders, artists and cultural workers. They also speak to a range of contextual realities – both cultural and geographic – that will be vital as we chart this future collectively. We are grateful for their meaningful collaboration and the knowledge they have shared with us. The nine essays that follow are notable as standalone pieces, yet collectively they demonstrate shared local and global concerns that will spark thought and discussion when we come together in Seoul in May 2025.

Current challenges in cultural policy making: are we going in circles?

Beyond the context of cultural policy, in politics culture is often seen as expendable, a commodity, secondary, even as a luxury. In her essay, Beirak argues that this lack of recognition of culture's social relevance leads to difficulties in legitimising public policies; and expresses concern that cultural policies seem to primarily benefit privileged groups, excluding broader societal participation especially social majorities. Are our policy actions then reinforcing the very issues we seek to redress?

Beirak further suggests that existing frameworks have failed to address inequalities in cultural access and participation and have unintentionally reinforced systemic divides. In operating and authorising environments that are increasingly complex and volatile – where even established successful measures are vulnerable – cultural policymakers compete to be heard amongst multiple crises and portfolios. It seems we need a policymaking reboot to reimagine cultural priorities, processes, and actors. So, have existing frameworks lost contemporary currency? Have demographics changed and has public opinion shifted? Have we become more aware of previously unheard voices, or have we become complacent?

In their coauthored essay, Carr and Te Kurapa highlight achievements in Māori arts and cultural policy, particularly the significant progress in revitalising te reo Māori (language) and celebrating Matariki (Māori New Year) as acts of cultural resistance. However, they also point to recent actions that undermine this progress, which is foundational to Aotearoa New Zealand identity. To this point, in his essay Ebert argues that in such times of polarisation, culture itself has become a contested space, and that it is critical for culture to function as a participatory space for dialogue and reconciliation. How can we champion culture as a driver for positive change? How can we design more inclusive, porous and responsive policies that heal rather than exacerbate current rifts? Can we break the circuit, or will we continue in circles?

Human-centric futures should embrace technology but not be defined by it

Flores Méndez frames in her essay our technological realities by reminding us that the initial promise of the Internet 2.0 as a platform for horizontality, democracy, and solidarity has been taken over by practices of opacity, surveillance, and data extraction. She emphasises that the commodification of human connection has undermined collaboration and the free flow of information and knowledge. Which leads to the question: have we become instruments of the very tools whose existence is meant to support and enhance human-centred activities? Inspired by Ivan Illich's concept of conviviality, Flores Méndez affirms that technology should serve human autonomy and social justice, and that focus should shift from endless consumption-driven innovation to balanced, community-oriented relationships between individuals, tools, and society. This approach would certainly address systems issues of inequality and bring a level of collective and shared responsibility to permeate across all aspects of life, with culture playing a key role in that collective imagination. Flores Méndez concludes that technology must move beyond exploitation and demise-driven systems (such as drones and environmental destruction) to support care, cooperation and sustainable life practices.

In his essay, Shah too speaks of the disruptive – yet transformative – potential of technologies like GenAI in cultural narratives and practices. He reminds us that technologies are part of our routine and 'modes of doing' as invisible and convenient tools; yet it is when they disrupt, break down, or interfere that we notice them. This is the case for GenAI, which Shah argues is breaking existing technologies and forcing us to change our habits. These disruptions affect social norms and lead to either excitement or anxiety, and an overload of information impossible for humans to process and comprehend. He suggests that with technological advancement and the mainstreaming of machine-driven information continuing to develop at speed, it remains unclear how, where and by whom information is fed. In this context, where do we find the balance, and can we harmonise human thought and machine-generated information?

In his essay, Lee speaks to the South Korean context and opportunities in multidisciplinary research and creation, particularly in relation to rapid technological evolution in the country and its implications for nature-human-machine coevolution. He emphasises the growing importance of collaborative approaches that value contributions from both humans, machines and nature, and possible hybrid knowledge created by human-machine collaboration. He highlights the need to restore human-human relationships, and human-non-human relationships, which are core to the foundations of traditional Korean society through Zen Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. This aligns with Flores Méndez's call to advocate for narratives that align technology with human values and collective action, rather than domination and alienation: while technology can disrupt oppressive

systems, it must be aligned with human and ecological wellbeing. Equally, Shah calls for us to leverage technology to foster global cooperation and cross-cultural knowledge exchange, and advocates for creating new stories and narratives that uphold human values, collective action and imagination. The philosophy of technology must factor in the diversity of narratives and knowledge systems to assert human values and the diversity of cultures, expressions, perspectives and vision that will sustain our future.

In developing and shaping cultural policies for the future, we must consider the dual nature of culture: it is simultaneously a symbolic dimension of society and a practical sector, and these two dimensions cannot be separated.

The dual aspect of our contemporary ecology: diverse living cultures and dynamic CCS

In developing and shaping cultural policies for the future, we must consider the dual nature of culture: it is simultaneously a symbolic dimension of society and a practical sector, and these two dimensions cannot be separated. As such, we must

promote the sustainability of the CCS; and support culture as a public, common and social good that is intrinsic to humanity and a measure of our shared values, rather than being solely measurable by the market, statistics or digital behaviours. If we continue to rely only upon quantitative mechanisms to justify and value culture – especially in economic terms – we place it in a deficit model and do the disservice of disconnecting it from its social value.[1]

Moreover, as the cost of living continues to increase and exacerbate socio-economic divides, how do we ensure that policymaking is addressing such systemic issues of policy-invisibility on culture and the CCS and supporting transformative practices? As described in our report A crisis of sustainable? *Examining working conditions for independent arts and cultural workers,*[2] at the root of this crisis of sustainability is the continued invisibility of cultural work as labour, and of cultural workers as rightful members of a society's labour force (IFACCA, 2022, p.9). Today we are seeing continued closing down of cultural institutions, companies and arts organisations, especially in the small to medium sectors of the CCS; such entities and collectives that for many are the career-path starting point as malleable spaces to test ideas, to be open to experimentation, creative risk-taking and cross-cultural exchange, and as Bushra states to construct alternative modes. On the role of culture in society, community and civil society led spaces are integral to provide voice and agency; and to embrace the dynamism and

diversity required for a sustainable future. Aligned to this interplay, in his essay, Delfin poses: what must we do to ensure cultural policy is grounded on cultural rights with civic participation as a key element of that framework?

Tellano speaks in her essay to the important interplay between contemporary creativity and rich cultural heritage, and how we must open diverse spaces for learning and exchange for all living cultures to thrive. She reflects on the need to bridge contemporary creativity with traditional knowledge, ensuring fairness and sustainability, especially in relation to the protection of Intellectual Property (IP) rights and Indigenous rights, and the commercialisation and misappropriation of cultural community and artistic content. This is a longstanding area of concern, but it is one that is increasingly exacerbated by GenAI and the challenges it presents to rightsholders. Moreover, Tellano argues for educational spaces in which cultural knowledge can be transmitted across generations and collaborative frameworks can be built among industry, governments, communities, and educational institutions for intergenerational exchange and learning.

In her essay, Bushra also speaks to the need for multiple spaces for reflection and exchange. She argues that local knowledge and embodied practices facilitate gathering and construct a symbolic space in which we can interrogate our relationships, extend kinship towards all human beings and nature, and appear and act in solidarity. She refers to how the radical imagination

of artists, cultural workers, scientists and thinkers can help imagine new worlds through their investment in polycentric thinking spaces and their ability to visualise justice. The interplay of cultural life and culture as profession directly informs this, and Bushra affirms a transformative practice, which can construct alternative modes of coexistence.

While in relation to technology, Lee affirms that culture, knowledge, technology are all intertwined and asks: What opportunities exist in multidisciplinary research, creation and education focused on the co-evolution of nature, human and machines that leveraging data science, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), and Augmented Reality (AR) techniques?

Bridging divides through humanity, agency and participation

Participation will be vital as we chart the future of arts and culture, as Delfin asserts: 'participation is diversity.' However, the role of geopolitics, multiple crises and social media in such polarising times have made participatory dialogue far more complex and tense, and this includes within the cultural sector. As Ebert affirms, in these polarised times we need participatory spaces for dialogue and reconciliation, rather than spaces that merely transmit fixed values. This is key to policy making. In the cultural policy space, UNESCO defines participatory cultural governance as a process that involves the active engagement of various stakeholders, including civil society, in the decision-making and policymaking processes related to culture.[3]

In his essay, Delfin indicates that some dialogue mechanisms in cultural policymaking do exist, but structural barriers remain, including in relation to political will, resource and capacity constraints, power imbalances, and declining trust in public institutions. This also speaks to polarisation across all spheres of life and work, as Delfin asks: where are we collectively failing? Our ability to debate and engage in thought-provoking discussions that may challenge our familiar knowledge base and values seems to be decreasing substantially. The role of digital platforms seems only to exacerbate this tension of power dynamics and create further walls. There is an urgent need to redistribute power and resources, and each author highlights this need to come together, rehumanise our world order, and reclaim our agency and narratives.

In his essay, Shah calls for action to create new stories and narratives that uphold human values, collective action and imagination; and affirms that this approach is essential to counterbalance the dominance of machine logics and ensure AI's influence aligns with human-centric goals in areas like life, labour, language and love. Similarly, Bushra demands diverse spaces for collective gatherings, as we need sources and spaces for diverse knowledge production, which is an act central to worldmaking. For Lee, human knowledge is not something acquired independently, but rather a hybrid knowledge reshaped through the interactions among nature, humans and objects. For Delfin, participation is an operation of power

redistribution, with civic participation being a concrete exercise of this. For Ebert, the notion of participatory systems in culture is tied to democratic engagement, where individuals are not only granted access to cultural resources but are empowered to shape cultural agendas and contribute creatively. Meanwhile, Beirak calls for the empowerment of citizens to lead their cultural lives as central to activating culture's transformative potential; and Tellano reflects on how future generations can be empowered to carry forward the torch of cultural heritage, weaving narratives that honour the past while embracing the possibilities of the future. In addition, Carr and Te Kurapa affirm that we must decolonise Indigenous knowledge, arts and culture and reflect self-determination on all our knowledge systems. And Flores Méndez asserts that art and culture are vital mediums for resistance, enabling collective reimagination of technologies that align with humanity's and nature's wellbeing rather than perpetuating domination.

What must change and what is our call to action?

These nine essays exemplify many of the roadblocks that the arts and cultural ecology faces now and into the future. To futureproof our sector and ensure effective policymaking, we must also acknowledge the role we each play as stakeholders, and identify opportunities for us to act collectively to positively shape this future. Our authors present us with rich inspiration in this venture, and as we head into the 10th World Summit there are several insights that we might keep in mind.

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- We should not be complacent about GenAI but be vigilant about the dangers of relying on machine learning and tools that create truths outside of human ethics and values; and we can look to the collective action and imagination that are core to culture, the arts and creative expression to help us uphold human values.

- We can draw on cultural rights to develop inclusive frameworks that address inequality, transform institutions, and enable communities to drive cultural projects; and we should question our cultural policies to consider whether they reinforce systemic divides and polarisation.

- We should stay alert to the challenges of participatory systems; and we should engender trust, interrogate whether our actions succeed or fail, and ask how we can improve.

- We should acknowledge that polarised public debate can inhibit self-governance, authenticity, and storytelling; and we should remember that self-determination is critical for all peoples.

- We need participatory spaces for education; knowledge gathering, transmission, and exchange; intergenerational engagement; and bridging ideological divides.

- We need systems that allow for cooperation between governments, private sector and individuals to ensure diverse arts and culture and to cultivate an independent, self-sustainable non-profit art sector.

- We should seek local perspectives where hegemonic norms are irrelevant or disempowering for peoples and communities; and remember that difference is a strength that culture embraces.

- We should support care, cooperation and sustainable life practices; and use our knowledge systems to resist, remake the world, and embed a system of diverse values in the digital space.

In closing

For IFACCA, culture is key to help us reimagine possible futures and it must be front and centre in public policy for sustainability. Aspects of our operating environment have already been determined: AI will play an increasing role in our lives and polarised public debate seems here to stay. But we have an opportunity and responsibility to reclaim our voice and our ecology, as an international arts and cultural community.

In collaboration with our co-hosts of the Summit, Arts Council Korea, we hope this Discussion Paper will spark conversations on the future we want and need, before and during the Summit. We recognise that the issues and concerns raised here will continue to evolve and we know that we cannot

resolve them all. However, we believe there is value in acknowledging them and working together to consider cohesive, inclusive and sustainable approaches.

We have a unique opportunity as we gather in the Republic of Korea, a country rich in cultural heritage and dynamic contemporary arts, with a deep understanding of the importance of culture, long term cultural policy and leadership in digital technology. We trust the Summit will provide a stimulating setting in which to tackle complex issues, collectively debate, and cocreate a roadmap that can future proof and inform policy for culture, at the local, national and global levels.

Magdalena Moreno Mujica
Executive Director, IFACCA

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[1] IFACCA Culture as a Public Good report (p.13)

[2] https://ifacca.org/media/filer_public/5e/6f/5e6fe804-eb05-4fed-9658-4da2834dcafe/a_crisis_of_sustainable_careers_-_september_2022_-_eng.pdf

[3] https://www.unesco.org/creativity/en/programmes/participatory-policy-monitoring-making

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*This essay is written in the author's personal capacity and the views expressed are their own.

To guarantee rights, redistribute power, build futures

Those of us who work in culture agree on its key role for social and democratic transformation. Culture has the potential to build more just and equitable societies, strengthen community bonds, foster diversity and activate critical intelligence. Furthermore, it allows us to face major challenges such as climate change or sustainability. Ultimately, those who work in culture share the conviction that it plays a crucial role in our future and can contribute decisively to a better life and world.

However, outside cultural contexts, culture is perceived as something dispensable, secondary, and even a luxury. In politics, culture has rarely been a priority: low assumptions, immediate cuts in times of crisis and lack of recognition of its role as a generator of wellbeing. An example is the absence of a specific objective in the 2030 Agenda. Perhaps even more worrying is the

separation between society and culture. Whether that is because it is perceived as an exclusive domain for specialists, or as a mere consumer product, the reality is that many assume that culture only concerns those who are professionally engaged in it.

This lack of social relevance underlies the main problems that culture faces: the difficulty in legitimising public policies and resources, and the sustainability of the cultural fabric itself. Furthermore, it limits our ability to realise culture's transformative capacity, of which we are convinced. If the social majority remains excluded, it will be difficult to advance the equitable and fair society that culture could make possible.

Therefore, to chart a future for arts and culture, perhaps the most important challenge we faced today is to recover the connection between culture and social

interests. To establish — or to re-establish, if it was ever more solid — the link between culture, citizenship and social majorities. This requires a firm commitment to place equality and democracy at the centre of cultural policies. It implies making public policy a tool for the redistribution of cultural resources and opportunities, so that all peoples and collectives have the possibility to fully develop their cultural life.

Culture and inequality: rethinking public policies

Cultural policies based on the idea of access have made progress in assuming public responsibility for culture, however they have shown significant limitations in guaranteeing the right to culture for the social majority. In 2015, the Warwick Commission warned that publicly funded culture barely reached 15 percent of the population, represented by those at the highest socioeconomic level and with the least ethnic diversity (2015, p.23). Recently, in *Culture is Bad for You* (2023) Orian Brook, Dave O'Brien and Mark Taylor analysed how class, gender and ethnicity determine people's access to cultural participation and employment in the field of culture. Their conclusions are revealing: there is more inequality in culture than in other fields. Cultural occupations are overrepresented by people from a professional or management background, while those from working classes – even if they have the same qualifications – have fewer opportunities (p.67).

Furthermore, cultural disconnection is widespread: those who participate in cultural activities tend to already work in arts-related professions (p.96).

Currently, resources are generally distributed to population groups that already have access to culture. Those policies that paved the way have not only failed to reduce inequality but have aggravated it, making it logical that the population may feel a certain distance from what has been understood as culture.

Therefore, questions arise: what can public policy do to reverse this reality? And how can we envisage cultural policies that allow us to really advance towards a cultural democracy? One possible answer is found in the framework of cultural rights.

Cultural rights as a paradigm for public action

Cultural rights have a long history within the United Nations, dating back to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966). Their history has been especially enriched by the development of cultural rights in the Latin American context, and by crucial milestones such as General Observation No. 21 (2009). Likewise, the 2022 MONDIACULT *Declaration for Culture* made a commitment to foster an enabling environment to respect and guarantee these rights.

In Spain, there has been recent progress in this area. The *Navarra Jurisdictional Law on Cultural Rights* (2019) – updated to include issues related to artificial intelligence – and the *Law on the Public Culture System of the Canary Islands* (2023) stand out in this matter. In addition, Catalonia and the Basque Country are working on similar initiatives. Also worth noting is the *Barcelona Cultural Rights Plan* (2021) and the recent creation of the Directorate General of Cultural Rights in the Ministry of Culture of Spain, that for the first time integrates this approach into its structure.

What contributions does the cultural rights framework make to public policy? And how can it contribute to restoring the relationship between society and culture? These questions open the door to think about a transformation of cultural policies through three key aspects: rethinking culture from a broader notion, reordering political priorities and redefining the role of institutions.

The cultural rights framework allows us to understand culture not as something reserved for specialists or artists, rather we can conceive it as something ordinary: common, shared and every day, following Raymond Williams (2008, p.38). Practicing cultural rights implies not only having access to goods and services, but also the possibility of developing one's own creative capacities, managing cultural assets, using one's own language, recognising community practices or participating in decisions about cultural policies.

This allows the entire population to engage in the cultural sphere, recognising that all people have the capacity to produce culture and make it an integral part of their daily lives. Likewise, thinking from the perspective of cultural rights allows us to move towards a public policy oriented towards citizens. Traditionally, cultural policies have been aimed at the professional sector – without improving their working conditions – reinforcing, as I pointed out at the beginning, the perception that culture is the exclusive concern of those who work in the sector. However, if we understand culture as a right, like education or health, the objective of a public policy must be to guarantee it to the whole population.

This requires us to overcome a model that reduces culture to an economic resource and prioritises production and programming over mediation or participation. In this context, the role of institutions also needs to change. They should not be understood only as providers of culture, but, as Alfons Martinell and Beatriz Barreiro propose, as facilitators of the cultural experience (2020, p.5).

Culture is not made by institutions, it is made by society, communities and people. Therefore, cultural policies must, as Marilena Chaui points out, 'create the conditions so that the cultural projects of society can be carried out' and guarantee that all people can be protagonists and fully develop their cultural life (2013, p.92).

In short, the framework of cultural rights involves understanding culture as a matter set in our daily lives that belongs to everyone, with cultural policies that facilitate and redistribute resources and opportunities to develop this shared dimension equitably.

This rights-based approach opens the possibility to reestablish a new relationship between culture and social majorities, restoring its capacity to transform, connect and fully integrate it into common life.

In that sense, the Ministry of Culture of Spain is promoting the development of a Cultural Rights Plan, a roadmap aimed at translating all these principles into concrete actions. The Plan addresses 13 thematic axes covering different dimensions: from local development, community action, education and cultural mediation, to gender equality, ethnic-racial and linguistic diversity, disability and intergenerational dimensions. It also addresses current challenges such as sustainability and the 2030 Agenda, digital rights and the fight against inequality, together with more technical matters such as evaluation and good practices in cultural policies. For its design, an ambitious participatory process has been launched that includes contributions from experts in cultural rights, sectoral agents and citizens themselves, whose involvement is key. In addition, other ministerial departments and Autonomous Communities have been consulted to guarantee territorial implementation and the transversal link between culture and other areas. The

process will culminate in May 2025 with the public presentation of the final text, which will also be presented at the international forum MONDIACULT 2025. This meeting will focus its discussion on cultural rights, along with other topics that are equally crucial for culture today, such as artificial intelligence, culture to/for peace, and the fundamental goal of its inclusion in the post-2030 sustainable development agenda.

If the cultural rights framework teaches us anything, it is that citizens must be the protagonists of their cultural life and the central axis of cultural policies.

Redistributing power to build new horizons

If the cultural rights framework teaches us anything, it is that citizens must be the protagonists of their cultural life and the central axis of cultural policies. This is the way to restore culture to its meaningful role, to legitimise it as a field of public policy, to guarantee the sustainability of the sector and to activate its transformative potential.

This means implementing profound changes in the distribution of power and resources. Can citizens be protagonists without having any power? Institutions

must go beyond the paradigm of participation and move towards a genuine ceding of their power and resources to citizens. Without the capacity to define cultural practices, manage projects and make decisions in the area of cultural policies, cultural rights cannot be fully exercised. Precisely, this deficit explains why, despite decades of debate, cultural democracy strategies remain marginal.

This redistribution of power is essential for culture to proliferate and display its greatest potential, both in terms of its own complete development – in terms of creativity, language, cultural heritage and community, and participation – and in terms of the ability to question what we inherit, what is established, and to expand (and be open to) new horizons. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o points out, 'culture is like flowers, not because of its beauty, but because it carries the seeds of new plants' (2017, p.112). These new plants are the multiple meanings and worlds that we are capable of building collectively. The cultural policies of the future must keep this movement of creation and questioning open. Redistributing power and resources is, ultimately, what allows societies to imagine and build new possible worlds. That may be the best future that culture and the arts can offer us.

Prof Dr Nishant Shah

Hong Kong SAR, China/India/ Netherlands

Prof Dr Nishant Shah is a feminist, humanist, technologist, working on questions of emerging technologies, social organisation, and narrative change practices of collective action and hope. He is a Professor and Director of Global Communications, and Founder of the Digital Narratives Studio at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He has previously founded the Centre for Internet & Society (India) and has been the vice-president of ArtEZ University of the Arts in The Netherlands. He is Faculty Associate at the Berkman Klein Centre for Internet & Society, Harvard University (USA) and Visiting Professor at the Radboud Institute of Culture and History, Radboud University, The Netherlands.

Prof Dr Shah works closely as a knowledge partner with civil society organisations in areas of emerging technologies, political mobilisation, and arts and cultural production. His recent books include *Really Fake* (2020, University of Minnesota Press) and Overload, *Creep, Excess: An Internet from India* (2022/23, Institute of Network Cultures/Leftword Books).

Narrative struggles with Generative AI: of human intentions and machine logics

We seem to speak or hear others speak about Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) all the time. Most of these conversations are tinged with either excitement or anxiety about GenAI, which must be understood as an emergent technology. There are two critical provocations from the history of technology that might help contextualise why.

Bruno Latour, the French philosopher who developed Actor Network Theory, provocatively offered that technologies make themselves visible when they do not work. When technologies become routine, we stop paying attention to them. They are easy modes of doing things, presenting themselves as neutral, and tools of convenience. However, when technologies get disrupted, when they are interrupted, when they break down, they start becoming visible. We notice them, because they are no longer doing the things that we are used to.

Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, a Korean-American Software Studies scholar, gives us the proposition of 'habitual new media' (2021) and argues that technologies make themselves visible when they become habits. Habits are pre-thought and instinctive, things that we do and repeat without reflection. When technologies update and shift, we suddenly realise that our habits will also need to change, which leads to either excitement or anxiety.

With GenAI, we are witnessing an emergent technology that is breaking existing technologies so that they do not work as expected, or they change the ways in which we do things, and thus, they it is forcing us to change our habits.

Anxiety or excitement about GenAI needs to be contextualised through the idea of information overload. GenAI is built through Large Language Models and Large Action Models – very plainly speaking,

an enormous amount of constantly generating and updating data which is being processed by specific algorithms that intentionally parse the data to make decisions that inform actions. Thus, we are looking at an amount of data that is not humanly comprehensible, acted upon and processed at a speed that defies human temporality. This produces a condition of information overload. While information overload itself is not a new thing (Lockhorst & van de Poel, 2012; Shah, Rajadhyaksha & Hasan, 2021), we are living for the first time as though is a desirable state of being. Being informationally overloaded means that we no longer have the capacity to trust our own judgement because we cannot possibly access, verify, and process all the information that we are subjected to (Leslie, 2020). AI systems, then, become systems that tell us stories, and in telling those stories, they continually judge what is a truth, and what is a lie.

However, there is one simple problem – the truths and lies within AI systems are not human, they are machine truths and lies (Aroyo and Welty, 2015). In an AI system, truth is verified by the logic that organises that system. In computer science, one of the first principles we are taught is GIGO – Garbage In, Garbage Out. That is, if the answer to a computational task (the output) is erroneous, the error is not the fault of the machine, but rather it is the fault of the programmer who designed the prompts for the machine (the input). As such, if a computational programme executes its task according to the applied logic it will be verified and 'true' in machine terms, even if the information it provides is false in human terms. These machine logics of information verification are shaped by computational networks and information processing systems (Seaver, 2019), and work through three fundamental shifts in the background.

Information separation and algorithmic meaning making

The first shift is separation: because AI technologies are digital computation technologies, they work with the logic of separation rather than continuity (Barabasi, 2002). This means that every time an AI system generates an answer, it computes information afresh. Sometimes, this is difficult to understand because we are constantly told that AI systems profile us, target us, customise information for us, and remember us through our actions and transactions. Because of the deep seated surveillance that is embedded in these AI systems, it would appear to us that these systems have a long memory of who we are, and what we have already done. However, memory is not the same as remembering.

Digital systems like AI remember us, but they do not have a memory of us (Juhasz, Langlois, & Shah, 2020). Each time they interact with us, we are a separated, discrete, and individual node, with which transactions are being conducted. When we ask a question of ChatGPT or even make a simple Google search query, the results that they produce might be customised but they are not historicised.

While Google might remember what your older search results were (Nobel, 2012) and what links you clicked, it does not know what information you found valuable or the intention behind your asking that question (Ridgway, 2023).

Similarly, when you ask ChatGPT for an answer, it presumes to know the reason why you have asked a question, but it cannot know for sure. Thus, AI systems are systems of separation. They remove the context of information from the user and make it into an algorithmic process. This allows for these AI systems to generate truths and falsehoods that have nothing to do with the informational paradigm of the individual user. When GenAI gives you an answer or makes a decision, it is no longer responding to your desire or intention. Instead, it is following the logic of the normal and guesses how to perform, based on an assumption that every user would ask the question for the same reason. This condition of separation is what creates echo chambers, because you and I – if we are alike – are going to be shown the same information and the rest will be hidden from us.

Individuation and networked information

The second shift worth noting is individuation, or how AI networks individuate us from each other (Peeters & Borra, 2022). Individuation happens when AI systems insert themselves into our relationships invisibly, so that we increasingly speak to the technologies, even when we are speaking with each other.

We are being trained to think that our separation from others is so intense that we can only trust AI systems to have intimate conversations and make decisions in our everyday lives. It is also perhaps necessary to underscore that the more these AI systems promise to connect us – the more we give them our data, our thoughts, our ideas, and empower them to assist us – the more we lose actual connections with other people. This is why, in our digital interactions, our best friend is not a person but the algorithms on the platforms that we use to communicate.

Predictive systems

The last shift in terms of machine logics is the emergence of predictive technologies (Yuan et al, 2016; Chun 2021), which is not explicitly foregrounded in our stories of AI. Artificial Intelligence systems do not make meaning, they predict it by constantly producing correlations and causality between all the information they process. They put different components together and offer the most plausible sets of meanings (Castelvecchi, 2016). Thus, AI does not represent reality but merely prescribes one that is plausible to its design. Predictive technologies do not rely on proof or verification, but on plausibility and probability. GenAI systems create entirely new meanings, which are called AI hallucinations, which have no mooring in what we understand as the real or external evidence.

When we start thinking through these three shifts – separation, individuation and prediction – and what GenAI enables, we recognise that the responses GenAI provides represent what it thinks is the most probable response based on our individual profile and personalised so that it is not shared by others. Consequently, when dealing with GenAI we cannot make a distinction between truth and lies, because the information in a GenAI system has fidelity only to the logical universe and design of that system (Ganesh, 2020). Something might be untrue in human terms, but true by machine logics, as argued [1] in '[i]f it fools you, it is not fake' (Juhasz et al, 2020).

We must be careful about the stories that we receive from GenAI systems. However, we also need to be careful about the stories we tell about them. If we insist on perceiving them as human operatives that use human languages and logics to make sense of meaning, we fight a losing battle. Rather, it is important when we tell these stories to identify how these systems separate intention from information, individuate meaning and collapse common grounds for understanding, and predict based on what is plausible according to those who control the logic of these systems.

We must be careful about the stories that we receive from GenAI systems … we also need to be careful about the stories we tell about them. If we insist on perceiving them as human operatives that use human languages and logics to make sense of meaning, we fight a losing battle.

Recently, a set of very influential experts and world leaders wrote an open letter asking for a slowdown in the development of GenAI (Future of Life 2023). On the one hand, they accept that life without AI has long passed: it is here to stay and we do not have the option to opt out or shut down. However, we do have an option to build new kinds of stories

and new ways of telling them. Stories that reinforce human values and ideas instead of machine logics. Stories that champion collective action rather than individuation and customisation. Stories that make space for human imagination and fiction rather than just depending on verifications and probability. And this is the narrative struggle in which we will have to invest, as GenAI shapes the domains of life, labour, language, and love.

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[1] By the author

Dr Zune Lee

Republic of Korea

Dr Zune Lee is a multifaceted artist, researcher, educator and designer who blends various disciplines to innovate and impact art, design, education and technology. He explores topics like technology-enhanced multi-sensory art, socio-critical art and arts in games, contributing extensively to Korea's multidisciplinary art ecosystem and media art preservation.

Since 2001, Dr Lee has pioneered the concept of nature-human-machine communication, starting with Trialogue at Art Center Nabi in Seoul. His visionary works on human-non-human co-evolution and social critique through art have earned him invitations to international biennials and exhibitions, including the Seoul International Media Art Biennale and TransLife in Beijing.

As an educator, Dr Lee has developed and taught courses in physical computing, interaction design and new media art at major Korean institutions. He founded the Digital Design Department at Daegu Catholic University and currently serves as an associate professor at Korea University's School of Art and Design, fostering interdisciplinary innovation in arts education.

The ACTscape of South Korea: The DifFusion of Art, Culture, and Technology (ACT)

Over the past century South Korea's active embrace of Western democracy and technological capitalism has driven its remarkable high-speed development, transforming it into an advanced nation. Through costly lessons learned and deep self-reflection, the country has rediscovered itself (namely, its traditional culture) by engaging with others (namely, Western culture). In the 21st century, Korea is experiencing a resurgence of traditional Korean thoughts that had been briefly forgotten. These include concepts such as *Harmony with Nature* (自然親和),[2] *Oneness of Object and Self* (物我一體),[3] *Non-Duality of Self and Other* (自他不二),[4] *Movement within Stillness* (靜中動),[5] and *Investigation of Things to Know the Truth* (格物致知).[6] Parallels to traditional Korean thought can be found in late 20th-century Western philosophy (including Philosophies of The Other)[7] and 21st-century currents like Actor-Network Theory[8] and New Materialism.[9]

We, South Koreans, have realised that humanity is shifting from anthropocentric thinking and behaviour to a cosmocentric one. This is a shift from the dominance and subjugation of nature, humans and artefacts to harmonious equality and communal relationships. The cautious inference here is the 21st century's significant shift toward East Asian philosophies – namely Zen Buddhism,[10] Taoist philosophy[11] and Confucianism,[12] the philosophical foundations of traditional Korean society – provides the basis for restoring human-non-human and human-human relationships and genuine communication.

In this context, the questions we are asking here are:

What opportunities exist in multidisciplinary research, creation and education focused on the co-evolution of nature, human and machines,

leveraging data science, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), and Augmented Reality (AR) techniques?

To what extent has AI and AR been integrated into the ecosystem of the cultural and creatives sectors (CCS)?

Oneness of Object and Self (物我一體)

South Korea has been creating different fusions (i.e., difFusion) of art, culture and technology (ACT). The country has embraced a rapidly changing information and technology environment, integrating these advancements into its art and culture scene and creating various opportunities for region-centred multidisciplinary research, creation and education, while also critically examining the ambivalence of technology.

Since the late 1990s, Korean art and culture have recognised the importance of the co-evolution of nature, humans and machines. This co-evolution signifies that human knowledge is not something acquired independently, but rather a hybrid knowledge reshaped through the interactions among nature, humans and objects. Concepts such as the *Non-Duality of Self and Others and Oneness of World and Self*, rooted in East Asian Zen Buddhism and Taoist philosophy, embody a knowledge that seeks complementary harmony without distinguishing between nature, humans and artefacts. In this regard, hybrid knowledge reflects the principle of *Investigation of Things to Know the*

Truth. Traditionally grounded in these philosophies, Korea now recognises its accumulation of hybrid knowledge through the interplay of human and non-human, exemplified by projects like artist Hojun Song's Open Source Satellite Initiative-1, the Jeju Creative Arts Education Lab and the media art preservation research project at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Gwacheon.

... Korean art and culture have recognised the importance of the co-evolution of nature, humans and machines [which] signifies that human knowledge is not something acquired independently, but rather a hybrid knowledge reshaped through the interactions among nature, humans and objects.

Artist Hojun Song's controversial science fantasy, *OSSI-1*

Hojun Song, who majored in electrical engineering, is a highly provocative and delightful Korean multidisciplinary artist who does not follow conventional artistic grammar. His representative work is the *Open Source Satellite Initiative-1 (OSSI-1)*, which showcases the design, implementation and launch of a small [13] DIY cube satellite, also known as Space Romance. Completed in 2013, his satellite had minimal functionalities.[14] According to the artist, this project represents the first time an individual has launched a satellite as an artwork. Song wanted to democratise the ability to create and launch satellites, which nations and large corporations monopolise. He publicly shared his satellite's development design materials and source code on GitHub[15]

Unfortunately, after the satellite was sent into space, communication ultimately failed, and it became untraceable. The satellite likely orbited the Earth in silence for a while before disappearing into the cosmos as dust. From a purely technical perspective, Song's endeavour appears to be a failure. Consequently, his work generated significant controversy: some interpreted it as a meaningless happening, while others viewed it as a heroic tale.

Regardless of the project's original intent or its ultimate success or failure, the author perceives this endeavour as a Korean Don Quixote's attempt to communicate with the vast universe through honed technical skills.

The very act of launching an artefact created by an individual into the sky to directly speak to the cosmos demonstrates a new mode of interaction between nature, humanity and machines. In the Anthropocene era, Song's act symbolises an uncanny artistic quest for the unity of the world and the self, while also exploring sustainable living for humanity.

Jeju Creative Arts Education Lab's *The Wind Transforms into {Data}*

Contemporary South Korea faces many new challenges, such as rapidly declining population, an ageing society, generational gaps, regional disparities, ecological issues and transition to a multicultural society. Despite this, the public education system, which is centred around university entrance exams,[16] perpetuates a trend of undervaluing arts and cultural education. To address these challenges, the Korea Culture and Arts Education Service (ArtE), a public institution, launched the Creative Art Education Lab (CAEL) in 2019 to focus on solving regional problems through multidisciplinary arts education reflecting local characteristics and centred around young local talents. Among these is The Wind Transforms into {Data} from the Jeju Creative Arts Education Lab (J-ART). In this 2019 project, local participants explore the relationship between the human senses and non-human elements (through nature and data). Observing the wind in Jeju, participants (or rather, citizen data scientists) recorded, analysed and interpreted their sensations as data. Here, data was seen as an active entity shaped

by interactions among humans, nature and technology rather than mere information.

National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art's Media Artwork Preservation Project for Nam June Paik's *The More, The Better*

Digital convergence technologies such as AI, IoT, AR and data science are increasingly involved in preserving media art in Korea and showcasing new possibilities for collaborations between humans and non-humans. A recent example is the study by the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA) on the development of monitoring systems for the monumental video artwork, *The More, The Better (TMTB)* by Nam June Paik, the pioneering Korean-American artist widely regarded as the father of video art.[17]

Installed at the MMCA in 1988, *TMTB* is an enormous video art installation comprising 1,003 Cathode Ray Tube (CRT) monitors arranged in a cylindrical structure approximately 18 metres high and 10 metres in diameter, whose primary damage stems from heat generation and the resultant monitor failures. The MMCA has relied on manual inspections for temperature, humidity and malfunctions, but this approach is costly, inefficient and inadequate for accurate condition monitoring. To address this, a modular monitoring system integrating AR, data science and IoT has been developed, offering real-time data measurement, visualisation, and problem reporting for *TMTB*'s preservation. By accumulating and analysing big data, this study is expected to contribute to the preservation of other media artworks in future.

Movement within Stillness, Movement within Movement, Stillness within Movement (靜中動, 動中動, 動中靜) during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The close integration of AR with daily life in South Korea is deeply related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The convenience of AR technology and its contactless nature led to a nationwide spread of AR literacy. Koreans cleverly overcame the difficulties of non-contact living using their smartphones: AR linked to objects, barcodes and QR codes became evocative symbols of contactless life, rather than mere technical signs.

AR and Extended Reality (XR) technologies created new cultural possibilities during the pandemic as well, as they became prominent in K-pop music concerts and art exhibitions. This phenomenon is a 21st-century manifestation of the East Asian philosophies of *Movement within Stillness* (靜中動), *Movement within Movement* (動中動),[18] and *Stillness within Movement* (動中靜).[19]

Amid the pandemic, people were in a state of retreat and stillness due to the lack of in-person interactions. Despite this stillness, some Korean artists provided dynamic artistic experiences with XR that allowed audiences to participate remotely in performances – a manifestation of *Movement within Stillness*. Yet other

artists used QR codes and AR technology artistically to foster dynamic interactions between artworks and audiences, presenting a new museum experience in the contactless era (*Stillness within Movement, Movement within Movement*). K-pop global superstars BTS and Korean new media artist YeSeung Lee provide excellent examples that illustrate this.

In October 2020, during the pandemic, K-pop global superstars BTS presented BTS MAP OF THE SOUL ON: E, an online live-streaming performance utilising XR technology to establish a multi-view streaming system. Audiences could connect online through their smart devices and select from six real-time screens to enjoy the performance. Here, XR was utilised to create a diverse and dynamic virtual space for BTS's music performance, allowing the audience to experience a spectacular show. This performance demonstrated how XR could form new artistic relationships with people in the contactless era. BTS provided dynamic artistic experiences to audiences when face-to-face activities were halted (*Movement within Stillness*), allowing pandemic-weary audiences to enthusiastically immerse themselves in their dynamics (Movement within Movement).

Korean new media artist YeSeung Lee artistically elevates AR technology by transforming QR codes (which she sees as artistic signs that carry meanings beyond mere technical symbols) into components of an image and links them to larger-scale images, completing them as AR motion graphics. When audiences recognise these with their smartphone AR applications, they experience vibrant animations that pop up. By turning static QR codes into dynamic images on the audience's smartphones, Lee differently diffuses the East Asian spirit of *Movement within Stillness*. In 2021, she collaborated with BTS to create the billboard artwork, *Bun Bun Jong Jong* for a large building façade in Seoul by integrating transformed QR codes with lyrics from BTS' Permission to Dance to create a new AR artwork that cheered passersby during the pandemic.

Over the past two decades, South Korea has developed a robust CCS ecosystem through government and private sector cooperation... It is time for the country to reflect on and cultivate its independent, self-sustainable non-profit art sector.

Imperatives and Opportunities

Over the past two decades, South Korea has developed a robust CCS ecosystem through government and private sector cooperation, with public institutions under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism – such as the Arts Council Korea (ARKO), Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA) and Korea Arts & Culture Education Service (ArtE) – having had considerable impact. Further, in the past five years, institutions under the Ministry have intensively focused on creation and appreciation based on art *and* technology (such as AI art and metaverse art), with significant budgets for cultural digitalisation. But this has also led to uniformity, hindering the diversity of art and culture. Further, the non-profit arts sector currently heavily relies on government support. It is time for the country to reflect on and cultivate its independent, self-sustainable non-profit art sector. This trend is likely not unique to South Korea. How can we effectively address this imbalance? Should the central government support the non-profit arts sector while the private sector promotes the commercial art sector? Moreover, to what extent should local characteristics be reflected in this dynamic?

[2] The concept of *Harmony with Nature* reflects the idea of living in alignment with the natural world, recognising humanity as an integral part of the broader cosmic order, and striving for balance and coexistence with nature rather than domination over it.

[3] The concept of *Oneness of Object and Self* expresses the unity between an individual (the self) and the external world (the object). This principle emphasises a harmonious relationship where the boundaries between subjectivity and objectivity dissolve, leading to a deeper, more intrinsic connection with nature, the cosmos or a creative process.

[4] The concept of *Non-Duality of Self and Other* refers to the philosophical and spiritual understanding that the boundary between oneself and others is ultimately illusory, emphasising interconnectedness and the dissolution of oppositional thinking.

[5] The concept of *Movement within Stillness* reflects the dynamic interplay between stillness and motion, emphasising harmony, balance and the interconnectedness of opposites.

[6] The concept of *Investigation of Things to Know the Truth* emphasises the pursuit of knowledge and moral self-cultivation through understanding the principles underlying all things in the world.

[7] In Western philosophy, Philosophies of The Other explore the relationship between the self and the Other, focusing on themes of identity, ethics and the recognition of difference. Thinkers like Emmanuel Levinas emphasise the ethical responsibility to the Other, while postcolonial theorists like Edward Said critique how power structures marginalise and define the Other.

[8] Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is a sociological framework developed by Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law that examines how human and non-human entities (actors) interact to form networks. It emphasises that objects, technologies and ideas are as significant as humans in shaping social dynamics and outcomes.

[9] New Materialism is a contemporary philosophical movement that rethinks the role of matter, emphasising its active agency and interconnectedness with human and non-human forces. It challenges traditional dualisms like mind/body and nature/culture, focusing on how material and social processes shape each other in dynamic ways.

[10] Zen Buddhism integrates wisdom, compassion, and everyday life, encompassing self, others, and nature. Zen's "not one, not two" approach transcends both dualistic and non-dualistic perspectives. By freely moving between these two, Zen practitioners achieve a third, independent perspective beyond either extreme.

[11] Taoist philosophy advocates a philosophy of pursuing a free life in accordance with the natural order. It values wu wei (無爲), action through inaction, or living spontaneously in accordance with the flow of nature, rejecting artificial interference.

[12] Confucianism is a philosophical and ethical system emphasising moral integrity, social harmony, respect for hierarchy and the cultivation of virtues such as benevolence, righteousness and filial piety.

[13] Measuring 10 cm × 10 cm and weighing 1 kilogram.

[14] A beacon and data communications transceiver, an LED array to emit Morse code messages to ground observers and a Cosmic Microwave Background radiation detector for future artistic performances.

[15] https://github.com/ossicode

[16] Refers to the intense focus and prioritisation of preparing students for the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT), known as *Suneung* in South Korea. This exam plays a critical role in determining admission to prestigious universities, which in turn significantly influences career opportunities and social status. The curriculum is heavily geared toward subjects tested on the CSAT, such as mathematics, sciences, Korean language, English and social studies. Students often attend after-school cram schools (*hagwons*) to supplement their preparation.

[17] The author also participated in this research, examining the state of *TMTB* and contributing to establishing a foundational monitoring system for large media art installations.

[18] The concept of *Movement within Movement* refers to the concept that even in dynamic or active states, there are deeper layers of motion that exist in harmony with the primary movement. This idea often complements the philosophical principles of balance, interconnection and transformation.

[19] The concept of *Stillness within Movement* reflects the idea that even within dynamic activity or motion, there exists a calm, centred stillness. This principle is deeply tied to notions of harmony, balance and the interconnectedness of opposites.

Sarah Abdu Bushra

Ethiopia

Sarah Abdu Bushra is a curator of visual and performing arts programmes. Her research interest lies in sensing the lived experiences of artists in East African locality and documenting their underlying ties towards building alliances that emerge as rooted arts ecosystems. She works to sharpen the East African gaze centering its archives as well as post-contemporary practices of art making, contributing to the plurality in exhibition making and curatorial practices.

Ms Bushra is a co-founder of Contemporary Nights, a curatorial collective facilitating research based and process-driven collaborative praxis. She directs an artists' residency programme called GOJO, a place for experimenting with habits of collectivity and collaboration. She is currently working on a long-form research project, titled *Grazing Hyacinth and Lilies or How to Feed on Majesty to Become Eloquent*. The project aims to think alongside artists from the Global South whose work deals with implicating social and political welfare within ecological study and preservation.

Photo credit: Yasmin Abdu Bushra

Towards worldmaking

In 2016, the Senegalese economist, philosopher and musician Felawine Sarr published Afrotopia, a significant and visionary work that reimagined Africa's future. In his introduction, Sarr identifies *development* as a concept that – alongside *economic emergence, growth* and *struggles* against poverty – prioritises the Western dream. He suggests that we must untangle ourselves from this siege so we can once again grant a place for other possibilities.

Heeding Sarr's suggestion, some curators[20] have sought to theorise cultural production alongside food production, as a means to sustain and future-proof methodologies that promote transnational, self-organised collaborations in the arts and cultural sector. They have presented the work of collectives and scientists who quietly but consistently address the harmful effects of foreign-funded institutions which – driven by short-term goals of increased productivity and market access – often irreversibly damage natural resources, fragment local alliances, and erase Indigenous knowledge. Homegrown Vision is one example, as an independent think tank based in Ethiopia comprising local agricultural experts who advocate for a self-reliant agricultural ecosystem and insist that true development must originate within the country. In their work, decoloniality appears in a lifeform, free from metaphorical abstractions. Engaging with decolonisation as a recurring question – a continuous line of inquiry – is a material practice that makes meaning and compels us to reflect and act upon the world in order to change it. As cultural workers, how can we resuscitate decolonisation to be a living force that guides and disciplines our practices, as we navigate through a fragile and uncertain world?

'The African Scramble' takeover issue of the UK-based magazine *Sandwich* magazine in 2021 exemplified this practice. Guest edited by Ethiopian writer and producer Ruth Gebreyesus and Nigerian chef and writer Tundey Wey, the issue interrogates global food politics through a 'conceptual sandwich' that represents the layers of production, consumption and value chains and the 'scramble' for Africa's resources,[21] to illustrate how present-day global food systems replicate colonial dynamics. "I am concerned with nurturing myself and my beloveds. I hope everyone is, reflected Ruth about the perfect sandwich in the editorial to this special issue." The editors' worldview deliberately collapsed the polemic and material with the poetic and metaphorical to a key question: how can we explore political and aesthetic ruptures in systems of consumption and cultivation to map and make visible the immediate and intimate ties between humans and nature, and reconsider that relationship?

A matter of agency and spaces for gathering

In the article *But Hearts Did Not Go Dry!*, Ethiopian scholar Netsanet Gebremichael maps local strategies of caregiving that emerged during the infamous 1977[22] famine in Ethiopia, which is remembered globally and locally through largescale aid projects mobilised in the Global North, including the iconic song 'We are the World.' This important text documents seldom-recognised gestures in the cultural history of Global South solidarity and presents three oral histories from the community,

which demonstrate infrastructures of care in extraordinary abundance. What is neglected and barely archived is how local communities supported each other in that desperate time of need. In excavating these stories Gebremichael reiterates that help, aid, and care can come from within, and articulates a tectonic shift, a slow undoing of the dichotomy imprinted on Ethiopia's national imaginary: the Global North as giver, Ethiopia as receiver.

The difference between development project and practice is reflected in proximity to natural systems, and the methodologies of meaningful cultural work and development should align with natural systems.

How culture and food are produced is deeply connected: as farmers let land lie fallow between crops, cultural workers can allow time for thoughtful collaboration, instead of rushing for immediate results. Collectivity and communal thinking are the nucleus of meaningful cultural work, yet the language used to describe these processes often feels abstract. For example, when we speak about working in 'slow time' in the cultural and creative sector. When we begin to integrate social and political welfare into ecological studies, the modalities of doing cultural work will change to make it more sustainable and inclusive. Understanding culture as part of nature can help resolve the persistent cognitive dissonance that often dislocates humans from nature. The seamless and sustainable integration of art and agriculture can be found in

the example of Sakiya, an academy for producing experimental knowledge located in a unique nature reserve on the outskirts of Ramallah, Palestine. Through its programming models, we witness the intersection of cultural and food production, which leads us to reimagine the role of the cultural worker (including farmers) as stewards of nature, not presiding over it within an anthropocentric worldview. As Sakiya states, '[t]he history of art is also a history of agriculture marking humanity's complex relationship with the environment.'

Gathering spaces and placemaking are equally critical. In his exhibition *Wulo*, Ethiopian artist Berhanu Ashagrie engages in a practice of placemaking, with works that consider the topography of land and body as a meeting point where we can imagine, then perform radical collectivity. *Wulo* – an Amharic word suggesting *stay* or to *stay* – refers to the Ethiopian tradition of accompanying a family in grief after the loss of lost loved ones. Ashagrie highlights the precarity of grief as an affective agent for collectivisation and explores how grief can unite and mobilise communities. Here local knowledge and embodied practices facilitate gathering and construct a symbolic space in which we can interrogate our relationships, extend kinship towards all human beings and nature, and appear and act in solidarity.

In this exhibition that extensively looks at the practice of mourning, the physical body elides a visual representation. As an audience, we read this symbolic evasion as tendency in Ashagrie's works to multiply the meaning of body, expanding the body from its visceral boundaries to encompass the larger social body—a site of both vulnerability and agency. The artist strategically likens the familiar corporeal vulnerabilities to the precarity of spaces that nurture a critical coming together, and in so doing asserts the need to work to preserve them. Using a pedagogic vocabulary of folding, Ashagrie articulates a language of preservation. How to preserve a mourning cloth for the next mourning ritual? How to preserve a space for collective gathering? And how to preserve it under duress?

Re-centring knowledge production

Just as we need diverse spaces for collective gatherings, we need sources and spaces for diverse knowledge production, an act central to worldmaking. In the introduction to Ursula K. Le Guin's essay *The carrier bag theory of fiction*, American scholar Donna J. Haraway says that '[i]t matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with: it matters what concepts we think to think other concepts with. It matters wherehow ouroboros[23] swallows its tail, again. That's how worlding gets on with itself in dragon time'.

Here Haraway calls for close reading of the framework within which we conduct our work. Situated practice calls for a rootedness in the materiality and context of the places of our work, combining a broad perspective and detailed engagement with the locale.

Just as we need diverse spaces for collective gatherings, we need sources and spaces for diverse knowledge production, an act central to worldmaking.

Situatedness helps us find alternatives to Euro-modern knowledge production,[24] instead of accepting its hegemony as a norm. We see this in the work of British curator and researcher Hassan Vawda, who discusses the challenges of negotiating with the 'perceived liberal dominant cultures' of art spaces in order to introduce frameworks for integrating religious beliefs and communities of faith into contemporary art practices, in his essay *Artistic Mizan* (2024). Instead of a framework adopted from art history or Western academia, Vawda – in an act of radical imagination – introduces the concept of *mizan* an Arabic term meaning *balance* or *scale*, rooted in traditional Islamic sciences and taught to him by his forebears. The concept emphasises equilibrium in all aspects of life and Vawda applies this principle to contemporary art practices, proposing a balance comprising one-third tradition, one-third questioning, and one-third experimentation.

First introduced by Argentine feminist philosopher Maria Lugones, the concept of *horizontal deep coalition* is cited by Argentine semiotician Walter Migonolo in his conversation with postcolonial studies scholar Madina Tlostanova as key to Global South collaboration. Horizontal deep coalition advocates for egalitarian alliances across diverse marginalised groups, built on mutual respect, empathy and shared commitment to dismantling intersecting systems of oppression. Despite the proliferation of alternative worldviews, Migonolo asks why the dominant Euro-modern knowledge production continues to persist and finds the answer in the lack of collaboration among the many compartmentalised and disparate resistances. Collaboration among practitioners in the Global South – who are building their own institutions with lexicon, praxis and other methodologies – is imperative to critically challenge dominant framework of knowledge. This collaboration calls for a poetics of relations that considers difference as a fertile ground from which meaningful relationships form. As Martinican poet and philosopher Edward Glissant has rightly said, "[t]here are no relationships without differences.' Co-existing with difference is a means of expanding the space we are working from. The constellation of references cited in this text are presented as tools to engage in worldmaking. We do not always have to accept institutions' ways of working: it is our work to challenge them. As the American philosopher Nelson Goodman

explores in *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978), humans build multiple worlds out of our experiences, language, art, cultural foundations, and our imaginations. This process of worldmaking – a central human activity according to Goodman – is a transformative practice. Worldmaking is a continual performative exercise, a flux which rejects a unidimensional worldview. We can lean on the expansiveness of world as a metaphor and way to articulate the radical imagination of artists, cultural workers, scientists and thinkers – their investment in polycentric thinking spaces and their courage to imagine and visualise justice – and use that language to propose and construct alternative modes of coexistence. To do so, we must constantly ask ourselves: how can we renew our habits of assembly? How can we do a better job with regard to the theory and practice of getting together, of being together? How can we reclaim our agency for worldmaking?

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[20] Myself included.

[21] Scramble for Africa is a term describing the colonisation and exploitation of the continent by European powers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, where raw materials and labour from the continent were extracted, processed and consumed elsewhere, leaving little benefit for local communities.

[22] 1977 in the Ethiopian calendar corresponds to the years 1984–1985 in the Gregorian calendar. Ethiopians reference their own calendar when marking historical events. Ethiopia uses the Ethiopian calendar, which is based on the ancient Coptic calendar. It is approximately 7–8 years behind the Gregorian calendar, depending on the time of year.

[23] Ouroboros, derived from the Greek words *oura* (tail) and *boros* (eating), is an ancient symbol depicting a serpent or dragon eating its own tail, representing the cyclical nature of life, self-reflexivity, unity, and the eternal cycle of destruction and renewal.

[24] Euro-modern knowledge production refers to the systems, frameworks and practices of creating and sharing knowledge that emerged in Europe during the modern era (roughly the 17th to 20th centuries). These practices have significantly shaped global ways of understanding and organising knowledge, often emphasising scientific methods, rationality and universalism.

Mauricio Delfin

USA/Peru

Mauricio Delfin is an international expert in cultural governance, civil society and civic technologies. With a background in social science, arts management and the design of information systems for socially engaged cultural projects, he explores how civic engagement intersects with open cultural governance.

A cultural worker and advocate for progressive cultural policies, Mr Delfin co-founded Realidad Visual, a Peruvian media arts organisation and the Peruvian National Summit of Culture. He has served as Technical Secretary of the Peruvian Alliance of Cultural Organisations (Alianza Peruana de Organizaciones Culturales - APOC), working to foster inclusive and transparent cultural ecosystems. As director of Asociación Civil Solar, Mr Delfin advances open government practices in Latin America's arts and cultural sectors. A member of the EU/UNESCO Expert Facility for the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, he also serves as the Artistic Activism Research CoLab coordinator and co-directs the Culture and Arts Policy Institute in New York, leading its Open Data for Culture Program. Mr Delfin holds degrees from McGill and New York University.

Participation is a spectrum

Participation in policymaking is not a singular phenomenon. It exists along a spectrum: a range of possible interpretations (IAP, 2006; Chilvers et al., 2015; Reed, 2018). American policy analyst and social planner Sherry Arnstein described this almost 50 years ago when she used the metaphor of a ladder of citizen participation to illustrate the varying degrees of civic involvement in policymaking and the power relations between authorities and citizens (1969). Arnstein's model illustrates the levels of public involvement in decision-making, dividing it into eight rungs across three categories: non-participation, tokenism, and citizen power. At the bottom, *manipulation* and *therapy* represent non-participation, while the middle rungs—*informing*, *consultation*, and *placation*—signify tokenistic engagement. At the top, *partnership*, *delegated power*, and *citizen control* represent increasing degrees of real power and influence for citizens in decision-making processes. This model can also be applied to participatory governance in cultural policymaking and can help us assess the current state of practice and the challenges we face in the cultural and creative sector (CCS).

While many countries report the existence of participatory dialogue mechanisms in cultural policymaking, civil society organisations are rarely involved in decision-making, policy monitoring and evaluation, which suggests a need for more inclusive and transparent processes (UNESCO, 2022, p.117). Structural barriers – including lack of political will, resource constraints, capacity limitations, power imbalances, centralisation, and corruption – prevent participants from engaging more substantively in cultural

policymaking. Even where participatory governance exists and factors like gender, location, or age of participants are tracked, often they are only recorded as totals, offering no insight into the actual quality of participation. As a result, the potential for shared ownership, innovation, and meaningful outcomes in policymaking for culture remains untapped. Realising this potential is essential because it results in policies that genuinely reflect the diverse needs of people and their communities, something that is particularly important considering the protracted effect of COVID-19 on the arts and cultural sectors, which are still recovering from severe social and economic losses, the rise of illiberal democracies (Dupin-Meynard and Négrier, 2022), and the configuration of increasingly polarised societies.

While the characteristics of each step on the ladder – or the participation spectrum, as the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) calls it (2024) – may be open to debate, evidence highlights significant challenges in advancing participatory practices in cultural policymaking, locally and nationally (UNESCO, 2022). Traditional participatory methods, primarily focused on deliberation and debate, tend to be transactional and non-relational, often superficial and extractive (Gaudry, 2011). They gather input without offering meaningful mechanisms for involvement during policy implementation or evaluation phases.

They fail to foster long-term collaboration, prioritise accountability, and build trust. This results in less sustainable cultural policies with low stakeholder investment in their outcomes.

Participation as illusion

The limitations of participatory strategies in cultural policymaking do not result from uncontrollable factors. They are a symptom of the current state of democratic governance in societies where democracy has been reduced to a technical process that resists addressing and correcting power imbalances (Brown, 2015). For example, Peru's *National Cultural Policy Towards 2030*, or *Política Nacional de Cultura al 2030 (PNC)*, adopted in 2020, was developed through a consultation process that engaged around 500 cultural workers, but reached only 9 out of 24 regions of the country, and did not include official mechanisms for oversight during implementation (MINCUL, 2020). For comparison, during the same time, the civic-led Peruvian Alliance of Cultural Organisations developed a 12-chapter *Shared Advocacy Agenda* through a process that included over 600 cultural workers and reached 14 regions, using a networked strategy of 25 bottom-up local forums (APOC, 2019). The limited geographic reach of the *PNC*'s participatory strategy, coupled with the absence of official mechanisms for citizens' involvement in implementing and evaluating the policy, may explain the disengagement of the Peruvian cultural sector from this policy.

The *PNC* did not lead to ongoing collaboration between the government and civil society, and the possibility of contesting the *PNC* was then affected by COVID-19 and various national political crises (Valdizán, 2024b).

In another region and at the local level, *Create NYC* (2017), New York City's first-ever comprehensive cultural plan which reportedly engaged 20,000 people in its design, has been described by established cultural advocates as an unsuccessful effort to address deep-rooted issues of equity, affordability, and systemic bias in the local arts and culture ecosystem (PCP, 2017; Hyperallergic, 2017; Small, 2017; Bahr, 2020). Others have questioned the plan's ability to address economic inequality effectively (Chow, 2017). In New York, local cultural workers organised to generate a *People's Cultural Plan* (2017), offering a different vision of what arts and cultural policies should concentrate on, placing greater emphasis on revealing the structures of inequity, and thus configuring a critique of the city's engagement strategy. Since that effort, the city's Department of Cultural Affairs has kept its participation limited to scheduled City Council Hearings, where citizens can express their concerns through their testimony without any guarantee of follow-through.

Although relating to different contexts, the *PNC* and *Create NYC* had participatory strategies to collect ideas and information and demonstrate that many people were engaged with the process. Participation that is limited to consultation often results in a

simulation of democracy. Some governments use this strategy to validate policy processes that may lack social legitimacy because they fail to foster the necessary consensus among societal actors to support and maintain a new policy direction (Wallner, 2008; Weible, 2023). Civil society plays a critical role in exposing tokenistic participation and advocating for higher standards of civic engagement (Talò & Mannarini, 2015).

When participation overcomes barriers it brings more diverse voices, knowledge, and interests into decision-making.

When participation overcomes barriers it brings more diverse voices, knowledge, and interests into decision-making. Rather than counting participants, we should value the quality and variety of their contributions and the relationships they build (Reed, 2008). This depth and inclusivity strengthen democratic practices by better reflecting society. People are more willing to engage when their perspectives influence outcomes (Stringer et al., 2006).

Cultural organisations and networks differ in how they hold discussions and make decisions. Some rely on leaders who consult a group of representatives, while others take more time to involve all community voices before reaching an agreement. Trust is

culturally specific and is generated differently by organisations and groups (Delfin, 2012). Similarly, the stakes of participation vary widely among communities. For some groups, participation is merely a convention or part of a democratic procedure. For others, it is a bottom-up vector that should challenge power relationships – such as settler colonialism, structural racism, and white supremacy – all factors that limit cultural diversity (Lescano, 2024). From this perspective, civic participation is a concrete exercise of power redistribution.

Participation is a right and diverse

Disengagement from policymaking at both national and local levels – due to declining trust in public institutions, deliberate restrictions on participation, or a lack of effective participation mechanisms – limits people's ability to shape public policies and influence their implementation (Donoso, 2016; Wampler & Touchton, 2017; González y Mballa, 2017). Reduced civic engagement diminishes cultural diversity, as fewer voices and knowledge systems inform the democratic process (Lechelt & Cunningham, 2020; Belfiore, 2020). As a result, policies fail to address the cultural diversity of the arts and cultural sector. For example, the Peruvian government promotes its National Advisory Commission on Culture as a 'mechanism to promote civic participation' (MINCUL, 2020). Yet, for decades, the Commission favored members living in the capital city, and it still does not require the inclusion of Indigenous representatives. Only last year did the State mandate involvement from all 24 regions (MINCUL, 2023).

It is important to remember that civic participation is not merely a variable that can increase the efficacy of a policy, but it is primarily a human and cultural right (Campagna, 2017). While it involves artists and cultural organisations in policymaking, it concerns all people and communities and their ability to access spaces where the cultural policy priorities that will affect them are determined (Beirak, 2022). A cultural rights framework can be robust but runs the risk of remaining a discourse rather than an operation of power redistribution. Notably, the *PNC* in Peru determined the public problem it responds to as the 'limited exercise of the population's cultural rights.' However, the policy glossed over civic engagement in cultural policymaking and focused only on participation in cultural life (*PNC*, 2022). In the years that followed the *PNC*'s approval, the Peruvian government engaged in numerous infringements on cultural rights (Valdizán, 2024) – such as attacks on artistic freedom, targeted cuts, closure and dissolution of cultural art institutions and public agencies, manipulation of state-owned media, among many others – which begs the question of how a government that violates human rights can uphold cultural ones (Lescano, 2024).

Participation, transparency and accountability operate in tandem

Moving up the spectrum of participation requires strengthening participation's relationship with transparency and accountability. These principles work in tandem, feeding into each other. Participation

is more likely when people trust institutions. Transparency, especially the proactive kind, increases trust. Increasing transparency is key in Latin America, where trust in public institutions has been notably low. Data indicates that between 2009 and 2018, trust levels declined significantly, with only about 20 percent of the population in the region expressing confidence in their governments by 2018 (UNDP, 2023).

Similarly, more comprehensive participatory processes require greater accountability, which calls for those in power – in this case, public institutions – to be answerable to stakeholders. Accountability also exists on a spectrum. Once in power and implementing policy, governments must respond to criticism, meet demands, and accept responsibility for failures, incompetence, or dishonesty (Sharma, 2008). Because accountability depends on redistributing power, it is often overlooked in cultural governance. Ongoing research on accountability suggests that more detailed, sector-wide studies can clarify the issue and guide future action (Pérez-Durán, 2024).

Questions for the future

A set of key questions for reflection emerge:

What concrete and sustainable public policy mechanisms at the local and national level can help move civic participation up the spectrum, going beyond consultation? And what role can we all play from our spheres of influence?

How are we measuring the impact of a cultural policy? And what must we do to ensure it is grounded on cultural rights with civic participation as a key element of that framework?

Do we have the right leadership style and values in civil society, and state actors to ensure participation is transparent and accountable? Where are we collectively failing?

Paula Carr*

Aotearoa New Zealand

Paula Carr is from Ngāti Ruanui, Ngāruahine, Te Atiawa, Ngā Rauru tribes of Taranaki, Aotearoa New Zealand, where she was raised on her family farm and ancestral lands. She has a diverse career spanning central government, corporate, Māori Development, Treaty of Waitangi Settlements, Arts and Sports and she has held various governance roles at tribal levels.

Ms Carr is Senior Manager, Māori Strategy and Partnerships at Creative New Zealand – Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa overseeing the organisations national strategy for Māori arts. She also chairs the Council of Pacific Arts and Culture working group, implementing a major review to strengthen the 50+ year-old Festival of Pacific Arts & Culture (FestPAC), the world's largest gathering of Indigenous artists in the Pacific.

Haniko Te Kurapa*

Aotearoa New Zealand

Tūhoe Moumou Kai, moumou Taonga, moumou Tangata ki te pō.

The proverb reflects my identity as a member of the Tūhoe tribe, renowned for their generosity, gifting of treasures, and dedication to the survival of its people. Raised in Te Urewera in the Bay of Plenty, New Zealand, Mr Te Kurapa is a fluent speaker of the Māori language and deeply rooted in Tūhoe Mātauranga (heritage). With over forty years of arts experience, he offers a Māori worldview on knowledge systems, encompassing relationships with the environment, ancestry, land, and the cosmos.

Mr Te Kurapa works as Senior Manager, Te Kaupapa o Toi Aotearoa at Creative New Zealand – Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa.

*This essay is written in the authors' personal capacity and the views expressed are their own.

Advancing Indigenous rights, knowledge and leadership: a Māori perspective

It is essential to acknowledge and centre the voices of Indigenous peoples for solutions, as the world grapples with the biggest challenges of our time.

> I te tīmatatanga ko te kore ko ngā pō, ka wehe a Ranginui rāua ko Papatūānuku, ka puta ki te whaiao ki te ao mārama, hui e taiki e!

This proverb in te reo Māori, the language and one of the cornerstones of Māori culture and identity, speaks to the Māori creation story. This is a story that begins with *Te Kore* (the void of unlimited potential), progressing to *Te Pō* (darkness and night), and culminating in the separation of Ranginui (Sky Father) and Papatūānuku (Mother Earth) by their child Tānemahuta (God of the Forest), who adorned the sky with the sun, moon and stars to bring light to the world. Tānemahuta also

retrieves three baskets of knowledge that form the basis of Māori worldview: *te kete-tuatea, te kete-tuauri* and *te kete-aronui* (ancestral knowledge and rituals; knowledge of good and evil, teaching and learning; and knowledge of the natural world and the arts). This worldview emphasises the connection between people and nature and focuses on interconnections between tikanga and *mātauranga* (customary values and knowledge). It informs how Māori – as *Tangatawhenua*, the first peoples of Aotearoa[25] in Te Moana nui a Kiwa (the Pacific Ocean) - see the world.

Māori rights under Te Tiriti o Waitangi [26]/ Treaty of Waitangi

Before the arrival of *Pākehā* [27] in Aotearoa, Māori were thriving as kaitiaki (guardians) of the lands, with a flourishing language, culture, and incredible agency. They traversed across the largest oceans through traditional

navigation for trade. They embedded their knowledge, passed from generation to generation, in story, *haka*[28], song, weaving, carving, chants, *taonga*[29], and art.

After the arrival of Pākehā, Māori sovereignty was asserted through He *Whakaputanga*[30] signed in 1835 by northern Māori chiefs and recognised by the British Crown. Te Tiriti o Waitangi between Māori chiefs and the Crown followed in 1840. Under Te Tiriti, Māori retain sovereignty and the protection of their lands, resources and other treasured aspects of their identity, including language.

The Waitangi Tribunal, a commission established to investigate breaches of the treaty, has found that the Crown has made repeated breaches over the years, particularly in relation to land dispossession and Māori governance. The ongoing process of treaty settlements involves reparations from the Crown to iwi (tribes) for historical breaches of Te Tiriti. This includes an apology, and cultural and financial redress. Arguably, these settlements reflect a fraction of the true value of the loss by Māori. As Indigenous rights lawyer the late Moana Jackson argued back in 2005, addressing Māori needs stems from the breach of their rights under Te Tiriti o Waitangi rather than framing Māori rights as special privileges.

Māori – as *Tangatawhenua* have long faced cultural erasure and dispossession. Today, Māori feature at the bottom of virtually every socioeconomic indicator in the country. Their life expectancy is lower. They own only 5 percent of land in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The New Zealand government is proceeding with a fast-track consenting process for decision-making of infrastructure and economic development projects in the country, with different levels of engagement with Māori as *Tangatawhenua* on rights and interests. In December 2024, activity was underway to review policies addressing Māori inequities and reinterpret Te Tiriti o Waitangi through the introduction of a proposed Treaty Principles Bill (which has since been voted down and will not proceed).[31] There is a Regulatory Standards Bill being pursued and attempts to repeal Te Tiriti o Waitangi clauses from 28 pieces of legislation.

In other areas, funding has been withdrawn from programmes for the advancement of te reo Māori and withdrawal of place names in te reo. These developments are best understood in the context of the revitalisation of te reo Māori as one of the most significant acts of cultural resistance in Aotearoa, marked by milestones such as the *Māori Language Petition* (1972), the Māori Language Act (1987) and the *Māori Language Revitalisation Strategy* (2019-2023) holding public sector chief executives across the country accountable for delivering the strategy and reporting on outcomes. When in 1999, Dame Hinewehi Mohi sang *E Ihowā Atua*, the national anthem[32] of New Zealand solely in te reo Māori at the Rugby World Cup, it caused quite the fuss back in Aotearoa New Zealand, but today is celebrated as a bold and pivotal moment in the history of the country's bicultural[33] journey. Further, through initiatives like Kōhanga Reo total-immersion language nests for preschoolers, Kura Kaupapa Māori immersion schools, and the establishment of

Māori television and radio stations, alongside growing integration of Māori cultural expressions in public spaces, te reo has been transforming into a vibrant, living language with a goal of enabling one million speakers by 2040. Te Matatini Festival, an extravaganza of the best of the best in Māori performing arts deserves mention as being profoundly significant for Māori and the country, as it brings all the traditional arts together in one place. The Pākehā system had come to be changed by the land just as the Māori system was.

The reduction of funding for Matariki, the Māori New Year, has also raised concerns, especially since the Te Kāhui o Matariki Public Holiday Act 2022 established it as the first official Indigenous public holiday in the country, resulting from efforts led by campaigner and Māori astronomer Professor Rangi Matamua of the Tūhoe tribe. By making Matariki a public holiday, the New Zealand government recognised the value of *mātauranga*,[34] particularly in relation to the cosmos, time and the natural world.

November 2024 saw an expression of mana *motuhake* and rangatiratanga (self-determination and chieftainship) in the country's Parliament when Māori Party Member of Parliament Hana-Rāwhiti Maipihi-Clarke delivered an unprecedented chant and haka during voting for the Treaty Principles Bill'[35]. That following week saw Hīkoi mō Te Tiriti, the largest ever protest march with Māori and non-Māori protestors, opposing the proposed Treaty Principles Bill and demanding that the government honour Te Tiriti and its commitments to Māori rights.

Looking forward, a critical issue is the 2019 roadmap set out by the Government-commissioned *He Puapua Report* to implement the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP), which New Zealand adopted in 2010. One of the report's recommendations is that by 2040, the bicentenary of Te Tiriti, the country should adopt a model of governance that reflects Māori self-determination, including significant devolution of powers to Māori. The report sparked intense debate when it became public in 2021, with opponents claiming it represented a radical shift toward separatism, while supporters viewed it as a necessary recognition of Māori rights under Te Tiriti.

Decolonising knowledge, arts and culture

For Māori, decolonisation requires a fundamental shift in how knowledge is viewed, represented and shared. This means valuing oral traditions, whakapapa (genealogy), spiritual beliefs and ancestral knowledge as legitimate forms of knowledge and expression. It emphasises collective values (we/us) which are central to Māori view of the world. The difference between Māori as Indigenous people and Western constructs is our multi-dimensional view of the world – the collective (we/us) vs individualism (I/me).

Importantly, it also means creating spaces where Māori can tell their own stories in their own ways, which would authentically express their culture without being forced to conform to external standards. Since 2019, Creative New Zealand, the national arts development agency, has been amongst others leading the way in implementing Te Tiriti o Waitangi through its Māori cultural

capability programme, Te Kaupapa o Toi Aotearoa, and using the *Waka Hourua*[36] model to foster partnership and Māori leadership in the arts – with much more work to do. The decolonisation of arts and culture is not a one-time event but a continuous process of unlearning, relearning and creating space for Indigenous voices.

It is critical for governments to meet Indigenous peoples' half-way to co-design authorising environments that are inclusive of Indigenous frameworks, perspectives, policies and action plans.

To achieve this, it is critical for governments to meet Indigenous peoples' half-way to co-design authorising environments that are inclusive of Indigenous frameworks, perspectives, policies and action plans. Change also requires that central and local governments, along with their creative agencies, universities, galleries, museums and other public institutions, become spaces where Indigenous knowledge is prioritised and protected. In Aotearoa New Zealand, this includes creating platforms where Māori artists can showcase their work without the need

to explain or justify their cultural practices.[37] Sometimes this means giving over the money and getting out of the way.

Achieving Māori self-determination is more than just about preserving the past: it is about envisioning a future where Māori and other Indigenous cultures can thrive on their own terms. To find a renewed sense of self and of community in a post-colonial world, we need to first understand how far we have come. Only then may we better assess who will we be in a generation's time. It is time to call on our country and its institutions to reflect:

> Given the power of the arts and culture to lead change, has your institution or community explored the historical context of injustice and the role that creative arts have played in shaping or responding to such injustice?

> How can we ensure that institutional operations embrace biculturalism and/or multiculturalism, and more importantly, how does spending contribute to fostering biculturalism on a national level so we can rediscover our shared identity?

In the words of our late Te Arikinui Kiingi Tuheitia Potatau Te Wherowhero Te Tua Whitu[38] on the message of kotahitanga or unity: "Just be Māori all day every day. We are here. We are strong". We share this as a message of hope so that it may resonate with peoples all around the world.

[25] Aotearoa (Land of the long white cloud) is the Māori-language name given for New Zealand.

[26] Treaty of Waitangi

[27] Non-Māori people of European descent

[28] Traditionally, haka was a customary way to welcome visiting tribes, but it also served to invigorate warriors as they headed into battle. Usually performed in a group, it involves chanting and actions, such as stamping, hand movements, and facial gestures. Today, haka is used as a sign of respect and is performed on important occasions

[29] artefacts

[30] The Declaration of Independence of the United Tribes of New Zealand

[31] With the final outcome pending Justice Committee review and public consultation (as of December 2024)

[32] God Defend New Zealand | Aotearoa is the national anthem of Aotearoa New Zealand which is sung in Māori first E Ihowa Atua then in English.

[33] Biculturalism refers to the recognition, coexistence and promotion of two distinct cultural groups within a society, often with an emphasis on equity and mutual respect. In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, biculturalism usually pertains to the relationship between Māori (as tangata whenua, the Indigenous people) and Pākehā (non-Māori, particularly of European descent).

[34] Māori knowledge and ways of knowing

[35] https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/534187/video-te-pati-maori-mp-hana-rawhiti-maipi-clarke-reacts-to-haka-heard-around-the-world

[36] Waka Hourua refers to a double-hulled canoe in Māori culture, traditionally used for long-distance ocean voyaging. It symbolises partnership, balance, and collaboration, as the two hulls must work together in harmony to navigate successfully.

[37] A further complication arises from conventions such as CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) which can unintentionally restrict cultural practices by regulating the use of traditional artifacts, affecting Indigenous rights and interest, such as taonga (sacred items) or materials made from endangered species. At the 13th Festival of Pacific Arts & Culture (FestPAC) in 2024, Māori artists, through the Permits Declined campaign, advocated for such concerns. Plans are underway to address issues and opportunities at the 28th Standing Committee meeting of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLC) in Geneva and the 2025 Conference of Parties on CITES.

[38] The Kiingitangi (King Movement) is the unifying korowai of Māori, korowai here referring to a non-physical, metaphorical cloak that the Kiingitanga movement provides for all of Māoridom – a spiritual protection that upholds and cares for the united mana of all Māori.. Established in 1858, it served to unite all tribes under the leadership of Pōtatau Te Wherowhero. Its primary goals were to cease the sale of land to Pākehā, stop inter-tribal warfare and provide a springboard for the preservation of Māori culture in the face of Pākehā colonisation. As it has done for the past 160 years, the role of Kiingitanga will still be the unifying thread of all tribes, under the current and eighth monarch, Kuini Nga Wai Hono i te Po.

Marichu G. Tellano

Philippines

Ms Marichu Tellano currently serves as the Deputy Executive Director of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), Philippines. She also serves as the Head of the Research, Planning, Policy Office at NCCA. She is a member of the Philippine Creative Industries Development Council and Board member of the Bataan High School for the Arts, Philippines.

At the NCCA, Ms Tellano plays a key role in the formulation of policies and programmes for the preservation, development and promotion of the country's artistic and cultural heritage as well as the creative industries. In particular, she is at the helm of initiatives for cultural education, Filipino cultural values programme, adoption of the Philippine Cultural Statistics Framework, institutionalisation of cultural mapping and the creation of local culture and arts councils. Through festivals, exhibitions, research, conferences and other educational initiatives, she works to highlight the diverse cultural heritage of the Philippines. She holds a degree in Chemical Engineering and Masters Degree in Educational Administration.

Weaving Futures: Honouring the past, embracing new possibilities

The Philippines, an archipelago of over 7,000 islands in Southeast Asia, is home to more than 110 Indigenous ethnolinguistic groups with Indigenous, Christian and Islamic cultural influences. Collectively referred to as Indigenous Peoples, these groups possess unique languages, cultural traditions, and practices that they aspire to pass down as living cultures from one generation to the next. These diverse cultures enrich the national identity of the Philippines and their preservation is critical in an era defined by rapid change and urbanisation.

In parallel, there is a vibrant contemporary cultural and creative sector in the Philippines. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority's 2024 report, the creative economy contributed 7.3 percent to the national gross domestic product (GDP) and provided employment for 7.2 million professionals in 2023. This sector encompasses a broad spectrum of activities, including traditional customs, arts, crafts, culinary practices, festivals, and celebrations. Remarkably, 35.5 percent of these professionals were engaged in traditional cultural expressions, making this segment the largest in the creative economy. The interplay between contemporary creativity and rich heritage reveals the unique cultural weave of the country, shaped by prehistoric traditions, colonial histories[39] and modern influences.

The Philippines is now at a critical crossroads, where rapid urbanisation and modernisation often generate a palpable tension between preserving the past and embracing the present. This dynamic manifests itself in many ways and heritage – both tangible and intangible – needs safeguarding. As the country's Indigenous

culture and heritage are increasingly celebrated, discussions about the crucial distinction between cultural appreciation and appropriation are growing within the fashion and cultural industries. In August 2020, during the Ginoong South Cotabato fashion show, designer Jearson Demavivas showcased garments featuring the image of Lang Dulay, a National Living Treasure and revered weaver of the T'boli people, an Indigenous group in Mindanao in the southernmost part of the country. This sparked controversy, as T'boli cultural norms prohibit placing her likeness on clothing or T'nalak fabric. Lang Dulay's kin publicly criticised the designs for cultural violation; and others highlighted the designs' breach of both cultural protocols and the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997.

The Philippines is… at a critical crossroads, where rapid urbanisation and modernisation often generate a palpable tension between preserving the past and embracing the present.

This dynamic raises essential questions: How can traditional knowledge be effectively protected and transmitted to future generations? How can cultural exchange be ensured, enriching both contemporary art and living cultures?

Moreover, what educational spaces can facilitate this vibrant learning environment?

Initiatives for intergenerational knowledge transmission

A notable initiative addressing these challenges is the Schools for Living Traditions (SLTs) launched by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) in 1995 as vital community-managed spaces to facilitate the intergenerational transmission of living cultures by imparting skills to young people and instilling them with pride in their cultural heritage. What sets the SLTs apart is their non-formal teaching approach led by cultural masters, often esteemed elders within their communities who have expertise in local traditions. These six-month training programmes are often conducted in community social halls and the homes of cultural masters, with the teaching methodology emphasising experiential learning.

By 2009, approximately 400 Schools for Living Traditions programmes had been successfully conducted across the nation. In the next phase, the NCCA – in collaboration with cultural masters – broadened the roles of these schools to serve as hubs for creative development, capacity building for community leaders and livelihood generation. Presently, SLTs accommodate multiple cultural disciplines, including weaving and performing arts. For example, in Lake Sebu, South Cotabato, the SLT emphasises T'nalak weaving techniques to preserve this intricate art alongside other

cultural practices. Currently, 30 Schools for Living Traditions operate within the Philippines under a new framework and this successful implementation led it to being inscribed in the UNESCO Register of Good Safeguarding Practices in 2021.

The SLT ecosystem exemplifies the convergence of educational innovation, cultural preservation and community engagement. Events like the T'nalak Festival in South Cotabato showcase the T'boli people's weaving heritage, bolstering local tourism and economically benefiting artisans. Noteworthy T'boli master weavers, such as Lang Dulay and Barbara Ofong, have received the Gawad sa Manlilikha ng Bayan (National Living Treasures Award). This convergence extends beyond SLTs too, as educational institutions such as the University of the Philippines College of Fine Arts promote interdisciplinary arts education, where students collaborate with Indigenous practices through community projects.

Despite these achievements, the implementation of Schools for Living Traditions programme is not without challenges. Adapting the offerings of SLTs to contemporary audiences while preserving cultural integrity is a key challenge. The reliance on oral history makes cultural transmission prone to discontinuities, especially if younger generations lose interest or access to these narratives. There are also commercial pressures that may lead to modifications in Indigenous practices to suit external

markets, potentially eroding their cultural essence. Lastly, protecting intellectual property (IP) rights for Indigenous arts and crafts is crucial, as they often face commercialisation or appropriation without appropriate consent, attribution or compensation for the communities involved.

Sustainable commercialisation of Indigenous crafts

Fortunately, there are noteworthy examples of efforts to preserve cultural heritage while adapting traditional crafts for contemporary contexts. The Habing Pilipino programme, a government-supported initiative launched by the Philippine Textile Research Institute, promotes the preservation and innovation of Indigenous textiles like T'nalak by integrating them into modern apparel and home décor.

The role of retail in preserving Indigenous artistry has also been developing in the last decades. The Philippine retail brand Kultura, which sells handwoven textiles inspired by heritage, serves as a good model. It collaborates directly with Indigenous artisans, acknowledges the collective ownership of cultural expressions, and guarantees that any commercial use benefits the originating communities. Kultura also actively promotes the stories and heritage behind artisans, fostering appreciation for Indigenous craftsmanship.

The fashion industry and government agencies continue to initiate measures to protect the IP rights of Indigenous peoples and ensure they receive fair compensation for their crafts. In 2017, the Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines (IPOPHL) and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) issued a Joint Administrative Order requiring intellectual property right applicants to disclose the origin of any Indigenous knowledge or cultural expressions used and to secure appropriate clearances from the NCIP. The government is also promoting the registration of geographical indications for products like Lake Sebu T'nalak to protect Indigenous crafts by recognising their unique origins and ensuring that benefits accrue to the communities. In addition, the industry initiative Philippine Fashion Coalition collaborates with the Center for Intellectual Property Management at De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde to enhance IP protection in the fashion industry by educating members about IP rights and advocating for stronger legislation to safeguard Indigenous designs.

Even as the journey continues to preserve and promote Indigenous cultures in a rapidly changing world, we confront several critical questions: What innovative strategies can deepen the connections between living arts and contemporary creativity? How can future generations be empowered to carry forward the torch of cultural heritage, weaving narratives that honour the past while embracing the possibilities of the future? And finally, how can we establish sustainable collaboration models across government, civil society, and the private sector to reinforce these efforts?

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[39] The colonial history of the Philippines includes over 300 years of Spanish rule (1565–1898) and a shorter period of American colonisation (1898–1946), both of which significantly influenced its culture, governance and society.

Lars Ebert

Belgium

Lars Ebert is Secretary General of Culture Action Europe, the European network of cultural networks, organisations, artists, activists and academics. Culture Action Europe maintains an ongoing dialogue and knowledge-sharing between the European cultural sector and policy makers. It advocates for strong cultural policies and appropriate public support for culture both as a sector in its own right and as a vector contributing to other sectors.

During his previous engagements as Co-director of the cultural centre H401 in Amsterdam and Deputy Director of The European League of Institutes of the Arts, Mr Ebert has developed a specific interest and experience in participatory practices and art-based research that fuel his belief in the transformative role of culture for more sustainable societies. He holds a postgraduate degree in theology. He has taught cultural management and leadership, is a frequent speaker and facilitator, publishes regularly and serves on the board of various organisations in the areas of culture, education and research.

From practice to policy and back: advancing cultural democracy in Europe

Amid the vast and often disorienting transformations facing our societies, arts and culture offer a space for meaning, critical reflection on both past and present, and inspiring visions of the future. Democracies rely on this vision of progress to remain sustainable, as these hopeful images of a better future motivate citizens to exercise their freedoms and engage in democratic life. Through arts and culture, we imagine future possibilities and empower citizens with democratic agency.

However, we witness in Europe that culture itself has become a contested space for competing identities and ideologies – including undemocratic ideologies - as cultural consumption shifts toward personalised, on-demand experiences.

In October 2024 Culture Action Europe (CAE), the major European network of cultural networks, organisations, artists, activists, academics and policymakers, released its first ever State of Culture Report. One of its key observations highlights that while culture is foundational to democracy, it must itself be democratic to fulfil this essential role. The report defines cultural democracy as an approach that promotes active cultural participation and the recognition of diverse cultural practices, aiming for a more inclusive cultural landscape where communities play an active role in shaping cultural expression. Emerging in the 1980s, cultural democracy advocates for a more participatory and pluralistic cultural landscape. It encourages active involvement and the recognition of diverse cultural expressions, fostering a reciprocal relationship between institutions and communities. This model emphasises local knowledge, traditions and diverse voices, encouraging people to co-create

and engage in culture actively rather than just consuming it.

This idea opposes the top-down 'democratisation of culture' model, established in the late 1950s, which aims to make cultural heritage and artistic masterpieces more accessible to the public. However, it does not encourage public participation in shaping or redefining cultural norms; rather, it assumes a monolithic culture to be shared with all people. The shift from traditional top-down models of cultural democratisation to frameworks that prioritise inclusivity and co-creation has been driven by factors such as Europe's growing cultural and demographic diversity. This diversity, alongside rise of digital platforms which have helped bypass traditional gatekeepers, has exposed the limitations of models that exclude local, grassroots or marginalised cultural expressions. Moreover, increasing polarisation in society across Europe – over immigration, social benefits, pandemic responses, gender equality, and the war in Ukraine – and declining trust in public institutions in Europe – with only 47 percent of EU citizens satisfied with the way democracy works in their country according to Eurobarometer – have highlighted the need for culture to function as a participatory space for dialogue and reconciliation, rather than merely transmitting fixed values.

Towards a plurality of voices

Cultural democracy not only encourages a plurality of voices but also extends to who makes decisions, whose voices are amplified, and how culture is defined and supported by institutions, funders, and policymakers. As the State of Culture Report found, the notion of participatory systems in culture is tied to democratic engagement, where individuals are not only granted access to cultural resources but are also empowered to shape cultural agendas and contribute creatively: 'True participation goes beyond merely accepting an invitation… it's about having the power to invite, set the agenda, imagine new possibilities, and shape a setup aligned with your values and aspirations' (p.105).

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The Kaaitheater (KAAI), established in 1977 in Brussels' canal zone – where nearly 40 percent of residents today are foreign nationals – is an example of such cultural democracy in action. Located in a hyper-diverse neighbourhood signified by migration and social tensions, it embarked on a journey to make its governance,

management and programming more democratic and representative of the communities in which it is embedded in and around Brussels.[40] Under the motto How to Be Many? KAAI makes space for a broad spectrum of visitors, artists, stories and perspectives, to better reflect the city's many voices. How to be many on Earth? How to meet in many languages? How to be many in the future? How to love in many ways? How to connect across generations? How to be many in the city? These questions run like a thread through the theatre company's programming and also guide the overall transformation of its governance and management. Co-directors Agnes Quackels and Barbara Van Lindt assumed their roles with a vision to make it a 'many-voiced theatre.' Communities are actively involved in co-creating content, fostering dialogue between cultural leaders, artists and audiences. By challenging traditional hierarchies in cultural production and embracing plurality, the theatre is democratising access to the arts in line with the vision of the Porto Santo Charter, adopted in 2021 at the international conference Culture in Sustainable Development: Designing Paths for the Future, organised by the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union in collaboration with UNESCO.

Challenging the status quo and new tensions

However, implementing cultural democracy brings many challenges: limited access to resources, institutional inertia, cultural gatekeepers defending established norms, or political forces seeking to use culture as a tool to reinforce national identity through narrow perspectives. Even in Europe where culture often benefits from established infrastructure and governmental support, access can remain limited due to a lack of genuine recognition of participation as a shift in power dynamics.

More recently, CAE has flagged that freedom of artistic expression has come under threat across Europe.[41] Consequently, the European Theatre Convention, the largest network of public theatres in Europe, has launched the *Resistance Now: Free Culture* campaign to advocate for the protection of culture in its diversity against increasing attacks and restrictions. This Europe-wide initiative addresses recent violations of artistic freedom and the diminished autonomy of cultural organisations across the continent, calling for action from the European Union. Supported by over 200 prominent cultural organisations from 39 European countries as of December 2024, the campaign highlights various pressing issues. These include new laws undermining the cultural sector (Hungary), budget cuts (France, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands), perceived unjust dismissals of heads of national cultural institutions (Slovakia) and violent disruptions of cultural events (such as the November 2024 disruption of the Sofia premiere of George Bernard Shaw's Arms and the Man, a play, set during the 1885 Serbo-Bulgarian War that has faced accusations of being anti-Bulgarian).

Culture, space for critical reflection
As the *State of Culture* report found, 'Culture is about embodying what it means to be a 'society,' a collective with a voice and power, rather than just a group of individual voters or consumers' (p.126). With the migration crisis and other issues like climate change intensifying populist views and social division in Europe, culture is increasingly viewed as a way to bridge ideological and emotional divides and strengthen democracy. As influential English musician, composer, producer, and visual artist Brian Eno suggests, in a world rapidly advancing yet increasingly fragmented, culture acts as a ´fantastic conversation´ that holds societies together and is essential to our shared future.

This transformative potential of culture as a platform for inclusive and active participation is exemplified in the work of PELE – Associação Social e Cultural, a social and cultural association based in Porto, Portugal. One of its flagship initiatives, Art and Citizenship Laboratory, offers a space for artistic creation and civic participation for young people who have had trouble with the law but are working towards reintegration. By using participatory theatre techniques, such as Brazilian playwright, director and political activist Augusto Boal's transformative Theatre of the Oppressed, PELE empowers individuals to rehearse social change. Participants not only artistically express their realities but also transform their stories into tools for community dialogue. Their work showcases how democratising culture – through co-creation and direct involvement – can make it a powerful space for debate and inclusion.

There is a pulling in opposite directions. Although culture is fundamental to democracy, it must itself be democratic to fulfil this critical role. To oppose the current threat to democracy and unfold the transformative power of culture towards more sustainable societies, we might need to bring this old debate to a new level. For cultural democracy to take root in Europe, and for an inclusive and resilient cultural landscape that contributes meaningfully to the wellbeing of all communities, the need of the hour is an open conversation throughout the cultural ecosystem in Europe and globally that asks critical questions:

> What kinds of capacity-building are needed and for whom?
>
> How should we redesign outdated funding frameworks?
>
> What new ways to share knowledge do we need, including across ideological divides?

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[40] Until 2027, the Kaaitheater at the Square Sainctelette will undergo renovation works. In the meantime, the theatre company is hosted by other theatres and partners in and around Brussels.

[41] https://cultureactioneurope.org/news/call-for-artistic-freedom-and-autonomy-of-the-arts/

Marcela Flores Méndez*

Mexico

Ms Marcela Flores Méndez is the Director of Centre de Cultura Digital, Mexico. Among other projects, Ms Méndez has coordinated the México Creativo Desarrollo Cultural Sostenible (2019-2021) at the Ministry of Culture; the Dirección de Fábrica Digital El Rule (2018) and the Dirección del Laboratorio de Tecnologías el Rule (2019). She also served as Deputy Director of cultural programming at the Centro de Cultura Digital from 2012 to 2016.

Ms Flores Méndez studied acting at El Foro de Teatro Contemporáneo and later studied lighting technology at the Escuela Superior de Artes del Espectáculo del Instituto del Teatro de Barcelona and Universidad Politécnica de Cataluña from 2003 to 2005. In her former role as a designer, she was in charge of the lighting design of the piece Farsa y Artificio by Melanie Smith(2019); the lighting of the exhibition Esperando el relámpago by Ale de la Puente, at the Laboratorio Arte Alameda (2018); the direction of Conejoblanco Galería de Libros (2006-2012); and the programming and curatorship of Nuevos atajos y otros caminos hacia la participación colectiva para el Foro de Ideas en Ambulante (2015), to name a few.

Resist and remake the world

The Internet 2.0 seemed to offer a utopia of horizontality, giving free rein to pretensions of emancipation, democracy and solidarity, as well as the full exercise of freedom of expression, self-publishing, hive intelligence and social mobilisation via social media. In the early 2010s, in Mexico local movements such as #YoSoy132 (#IAm132) were articulated through social media, and aligned with international initiatives such as the so-called Arab Spring in the MENA region, the 15M in Spain, and student movements in Quebec, Canada and Santiago, Chile.

Today we find ourselves in a new context: the horizontality promised by digital technologies has been co-opted by different agents who have made digital into an ecosystem plagued by opacity, extractivism, data mining and a space of monitoring, surveillance, punishment and post-truth. This has happened thanks to restrictive collective practices, the logic of which undermines cooperation and the free flow of knowledge, monetising our affections, our communication, our sociability. What role should technology play in this context?

Critical opposition to this horizon implies radically inclusive worldmaking, linked to social justice and the promotion of diverse and organised communities, to confront the monopolies that inhibit the exchange of information.

Historically, capitalism has projected a dominant, accelerated, mechanistic, productive and automatic technological 'progress' that seeks to increase consumption through the design of 'new' tools. This has caused a crisis of subjectivities and established the means

as an end. As early as the 1970s, the Austrian thinker Ivan Illich, in his essay on conviviality, called counterproductivity the process by which technology turns against its own ends, that is, when the means is transformed into an end. In this same sense, Illich proposes the construction of a convivial society, that seeks to articulate relationships between individuals, their instruments and society, and to imagine other proportional arrangements between means and ends that favour people's autonomy (2006, p.374). In this convivial society, the tool is at the service of the person integrated into the community and not at the disposal of specialists. The balance between the value of autonomy and the principle of instrumentality is restored; it is a question of a society reaching agreements about the limits that should be placed on technology.

Culture and technology: an amalgam of vital relationships

There is no doubt that the Internet, inhabited on a daily basis, has modified social reality. This makes it a priority to offer alternatives for the critical appropriation of technologies and their implementation in the processes that transform social and cultural life. In *Fragment the Future: Essays on Technodiversity* (2020), the Chinese founder of the Philosophy and Technology Research Network Yuk Hui, emphasises the need to rethink the question of technology and interrogate the ontological and epistemological assumptions of modern technologies, from social media to artificial intelligence systems.

Technology first leads us to rethink the binary – usually taken for granted, where culture is opposed to nature – whose antagonism reduces and reproduces a system of domination. On the other hand, culture and technology shape an amalgam of vital relationships. If culture is composed of the ecosystems of techniques, knowledge, practices and processes with which we mediate life, the protection and promotion of culture, therefore, is part of protecting life itself.

By working with technologies, it is possible to lay the foundations for ecosystems that shape society. There is no imperative on how to experience technologies; rather, they must be questioned, dismantled, rearticulated and invented collectively.

Modern contemporary culture has lost its transformative force, that power to change the world. Today freedom is reduced to consumption, based on a planned obsolescence that also stimulates accelerated innovation. In this sense, Illich argues that technology has become a new variety of the sacred: humanity has placed a kind of redemptive power in technological development.

Given this context, for some time it has been urgent to slow down, to turn this kind of development upside down and activate consciousness, criticism and autonomy.

Technological geopolitics: coloniality and resistance

In the so-called Global South, there are examples of differences in epistemic rhythms, which have made a historic effort to preserve different ways of understanding and living in the world. The colonisation process involved a rupture and a clash of beliefs, cultures, languages, and techniques.

In this context, the academic and feminist Paola Ricaurte explains that colonialism remains a matrix of power even after the historical moment we call the colonial era. This matrix is fueled by controlling work, resources, products, sexuality, institutions, forms of violence, intersubjective relations, knowledge and forms of communication. Ricaurte recovers the term *coloniality* proposed by the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano in his book *Essays on the coloniality of power* (2023). He explains how this coloniality materialises through sociotechnical systems as the epistemic and material imposition of a capitalist, Western, modern and patriarchal way of being, thinking, feeling, doing and living (2023, p.17). Coloniality is based on differences of race, sex-gender and class that produce forms of classification and knowledge in the service of sustaining power asymmetries.

In recent years, scientific-technological power nodes have become more evident. For example, Mexico is home to only 1.4 percent of the North American region's Data Centres, which reveals the country's high technological dependence on the so-called Global North (Data Center Map,

2021). This is especially true in the private sector, where corporate technology giants commercialise our digital habits. The unidirectional flow of data from the South to the North is evident, and the gap between knowledge and information has grown.

This asymmetric flow of information becomes a regime of algorithmic truth (Ricaurte, 2022, p.30). With the pandemic, the process of datafication accelerated. Our data is now in the hands of corporations and used to impose worldviews and political systems designed to maintain inequality, dispossession, and the erasure of otherness.

If we want to continue participating in social life, do we consent to be dispossessed because we have no choice? It seems impossible not to. However, in the face of this apparent impossibility, various forms of resistance have emerged in Latin America: techno-resistance, autonomous technological infrastructures, permacultural technologies, cooperativism, cyber-trans-hackfeminisms, tequiologies, among others.

As only one of many examples, there is the Sursiendo[42] organisation, which works in defense of collective digital rights to achieve a more open and collaborative environment. These re-existence practices seek dignified ways of living and caring, and defense strategies for technological autonomy and community organisation. Members open different routes in order to build dignified and technodiverse futures.

Another example worth remembering is the work of Rhizomatica,[43] a civil association dedicated to increasing access to wireless communications and information and communication technologies, mainly for rural and indigenous populations.

The technical wisdom of Indigenous peoples has resisted erasure, implying a fight against oblivion and in favour of visibility. One example is *Healing as Technology,* a book based on interviews with experts from Amazonia conducted by the Colombian artist Bárbara Santos. In the epilogue she states:

> It is a good time to recognise what our history has censored and exterminated. It is a good time to thank ancient cultures for their resistance. It is a good time to stop undervaluing indigenous knowledge and recognise their languages as living words and holistic science. It is time to create technologies based on the autonomy of diverse cultures. It is, perhaps, the last moment to make the right decisions. (Santos, 2019, p.11).

Beyond nostalgia or nationalism, we can modify and rethink technology for life and with life, in opposition to technologies of death and war that reproduce relations of domination such as racism. Technological resistance commits to recover agency and inventive force; to provoke the fusion of bodies and languages; and open ourselves to others, to difference and diversity. As Yuk Hui points out, we need to 'reappropriate

technology that has as its first step the affirmation of the irreducible multiplicity of technicality' (2020, p.78).

For Paola Ricaurte, the future is ancestral and, at the same time, a territory in dispute. We must question technology, leave behind the instruments or tools of consumption and recover the technical force to transform humanity into networks. We must become active, flexible participants; remember the power of exchange and invention; and practice resistance. We must learn to be others.

Adopting technologies beyond the dawn of digitality can offer tools to resist and find ourselves in art, culture or the circulation of knowledge, aiming for cultural cooperation that transcends borders.

Beyond digitality

Adopting technologies beyond the dawn of digitality can offer tools to resist and find ourselves in art, culture or the circulation of knowledge, aiming for cultural cooperation that transcends borders. If, as Illich says, technological tools must mediate the real needs of a society, then it is worth reviewing what our priorities are. Perhaps in this way we will realise that, at this point in history, it is better to

share power rather than to accumulate it, to opt for care instead of exploitation, to recognise ourselves as part of nature before instrumentalising it and, deep down, to understand that what we have called technology is nothing more than a body of knowledge that we recognise in the world and adapt to our purposes.

We live in a time of new genocides that are based on technologies of death: people kill with remote-controlled drones; hunger and disease are used as weapons of war; centres of knowledge are blown up; Earth is — in the most literal sense — exploited. How can we imagine technologies that free us from horror? How can we make the defense of life our primary technological objective? And, at this point, what else can we say about our time with the tools we have?

It would seem that, as Basque cultural researcher María Ptqk recalls in the interview on CCD Radio in November 2023,[44] the very nature of life is to resist.

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[42] https://sursiendo.org/

[43] https://www.rhizomatica.org/

[44] https://soundcloud.com/ccd-radio/maria-ptqk

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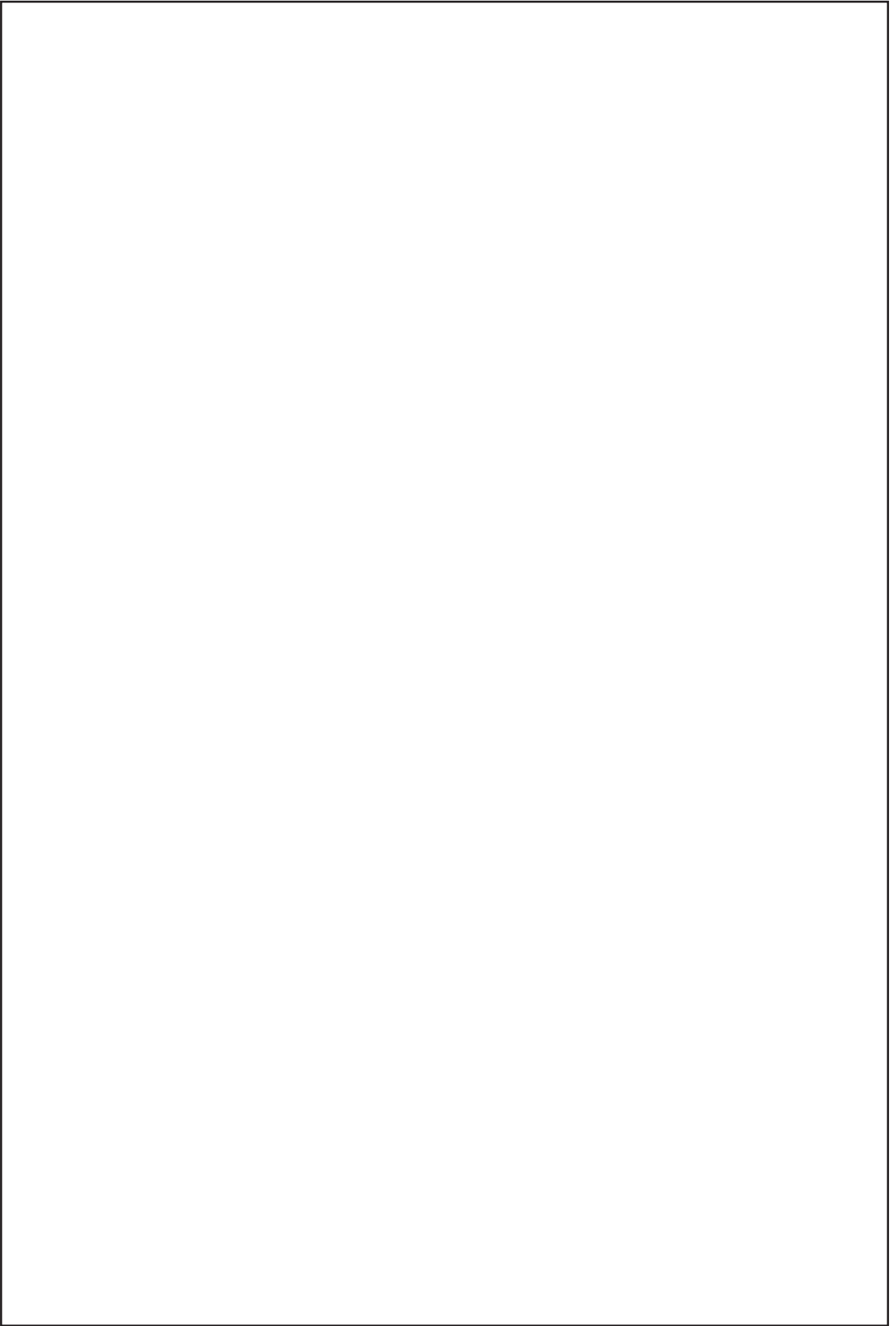
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Notes