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**The international conference *Artists and Culture after COVID* has concluded research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the cultural sector, identifying ongoing challenges and announcing changes to operations.**

**The conference *Artists and Culture after COVID* (held April 10th 2024 in Prague, Czech Republic) presented outcomes of the Arts and Theatre Institute (ATI) and Arts and Culture Norway’s bilateral project *Post-COVID Adaptation Models in Culture*. This event focused primarily on the status of arts and cultural workers, platforming artists seeking to reform their working conditions alongside contributions from Czech and wider European experts.**

The project *Post-COVID Adaptation Models in Culture* attempted to map the impact of COVID-19 on the cultural sector in terms of changes that have occurred in cultural operations. Representatives of the project team, including ATI director Pavla Petrová, presented conclusions specifically concerning changes to the business models of cultural organizations, and patterns in evaluating public support. Published and discussed alongside this research were insights from a concurrent study on the working conditions of musicians and performing artists, as well as findings from career surveys of artists working in the Czech Republic.

Outcomes of the projects presented underscored and elaborated on themes highlighted in the opening statement of Kristin Danielsen, CEO of Arts and Culture Norway and chair of the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA). In “Dawn of a New Cultural Era,” Danielsen drew attention to the fragility, unpredictability, and danger of the ongoing multifaceted crisis in the arts. Among the greatest challenges warranting attention, Danielsen identified *“increased societal polarization, rising social inequality, an aging population, imbalance in urban/rural migration, rapid technological advancements, climate change, declining trust in the government, lack of common goals or collective solutions, and increasingly unstable geopolitical situations.”* In response to these challenges, Arts and Culture Norway have adopted a new strategy aiming to promote innovation, diversity and sustainability while striving to increase political recognition of the cultural sector. In order to achieve these aims, Danielsen continued, cultural policy and cultural donors need to *“reassess investment models to ensure diversity and sustainability, gather data and evidence to present strong arguments for culture in public policy, and strengthen the position of artists and cultural workers while safeguarding their artistic freedoms.”*

Joost Heinsius, independent expert and member of the European Commission Open Method of Coordination (OMC) working group on the status and working conditions of artists and cultural and creative professionals, discussed the current status of the artist in the context of the June 2023 report *Position and Working Conditions of Artists and Cultural Workers.* This report extensively describes the situations in EU member states, providing a series of recommendations towards social security, fair remuneration, lifelong learning and artistic freedom.

Based on the efforts of the OMC working group, online platform *Creative Unite* was launched to catalog specific research examples, including an overview of available financial support and legal advice on intellectual property rights. In his presentation, Joost delved into the issue of collective bargaining for self-employed individuals, recommending that the cultural community *“unite through associations and unions, preferably on a national scale, focus on income and employment surveys of artists, and publish minimum wage rates for various sectors.”*

Zuzana Zahradníčková, director of the Department of Arts, Libraries and Creative Industries at the Czech Ministry of Culture, provided an update to participants on a legislative proposal concerning the artist’s status in the Czech Republic. The proposal to create a register which artists can volunteer to enter upon meeting certain criteria—an amendment to Act No. 203/2006 Coll.—is currently under review by the government. As well as this, the drafted law includes mention of possibilities to expand and optimize conditions for existing creative and study scholarships offered by the Ministry of Culture.

Spirited discussion of this amendment, for which Deputy Minister of Culture Ondřej Chrást was in attendance, demonstrated that this amendment should be viewed as the first step in addressing a litany of measures. These issues do not strictly fall within the remit of the Ministry of Culture, but require consensus from other ministries and relevant authorities. The topic which attracted the greatest attention was collective bargaining, a prerequisite for setting minimum wages, for example, or addressing concurrent working conditions for artists.

In the final panel discussion, artists expressed their own views on the status of the artist, unequivocally endorsing the main conclusions of the project’s “career mapping” section. According to Jana Návratová, *“the artistic community feels a lack of respect, interest, and care from the state; it feels overlooked and excluded from public discourse. Society undervalues the relevance of art for social cohesion, inclusion, protection, and dissemination or values, as well as its economic contribution.”* Artists present at the conference articulated the need to increase the social prestige of their professions as the main reason for accepting the artist’s status, citing the oft-encountered misunderstanding and depreciation of their work. In the words of visual artist Richard Loskot, *“our society needs to categorize everything, and artistic professions are primarily unclassifiable when in contact with authorities. The artist’s status can help artists avoid having to define themselves and wander as lost souls, and help aspiring artists not have to submit to being random sparks that soon fade away.”*

 

[Recording of the conference in Czech and English languages](https://www.idu.cz/cs/aktualne/kalendar-akci/6601-stred-zajmu-umelci-a-kultura-po-covidu)

[More on Project Post Covid Adaptation Models in Culture](https://www.idu.cz/cs/o-nas/veda-a-vyzkum/vedeckovyzkumne-projekty/3159-post-covid-adaptation-models-in-culture)

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