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Cultural Policy
TRACKER

Why Cultural Risk Matters



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editorial

The 12th issue of the ENCATC *Cultural Policy Tracker* takes its title and inspiration from Jorge Cerveira Pinto's thought-provoking contribution, "Why Cultural Risk Matters". This edition explores one of the most pressing questions facing cultural systems today: how can institutions and policymakers balance accountability with experimentation, ensuring that culture remains a living, learning force in society?

In a rapidly changing world—marked by digital transformation, climate urgency, and shifting social contracts—risk is no longer a liability to be managed away, but a resource to be cultivated. Pinto's article invites us to reframe cultural risk as a condition for creativity, resilience, and public trust. By examining how institutions can build psychological safety, learning cultures, and adaptive governance, he reminds us that without risk, culture becomes administration.

The accompanying contributions from Laura Päiviö-Häkämies, Oana Naşui, and Sumaira Malik extend this conversation across diverse contexts. Päiviö-Häkämies connects national and European developments through Finland's new Cultural Policy Report, a case that demonstrates the power of long-term, cross-sectoral planning even in times of austerity. Naşui examines ongoing EU efforts to strengthen the social and economic rights of artists, emphasising fairness and solidarity as foundations of creative risk. Malik brings a Global South perspective, illustrating how local initiatives and creative networks foster resilience and innovation under uncertainty.



editorial

Together, these articles invite readers to look beyond stability and toward the kind of courage and curiosity that define cultural maturity. They speak to ENCATC's conviction that sustainable cultural policy depends not only on sound frameworks, but on the willingness to test, learn, and adapt.

As the international community continues to build on the legacy of MONDIACULT 2025, this issue calls for a new culture of institutional bravery—one that sees risk not as an obstacle, but as the engine of renewal for the arts, heritage, and creative sectors.

Yours sincerely,

GiannaLia Cogliandro Beyens
ENCATC Secretary General



Why Cultural Risk Matters: Beyond Safe Programming¹

Jorge Cerveira Pinto, Senior Advisor in Socioeconomic Policy and Cultural Governance

Introduction — The Paradox of Maturity

Over the past decade, the Gulf has emerged as one of the most ambitious laboratories for cultural transformation anywhere in the world. Museums, festivals, and commissions have multiplied at a pace that few nations could match, supported by unprecedented public investment and a clear conviction that culture belongs at the centre of national development. From Riyadh's Diriyah Gate to Doha's Msheireb Downtown and Abu Dhabi's Saadiyat Cultural District, the infrastructure of creativity has taken physical form, signalling a regional shift from cultural aspiration to cultural presence.

Yet with institutional maturity comes a subtler challenge: the loss of creative risk. The same systems that have professionalised the cultural field - establishing governance structures, accountability mechanisms, and performance frameworks - have also narrowed its margins of experimentation. What once operated as a frontier of imagination is at risk of becoming a bureaucracy of delivery. The metrics that once legitimised investment - visitor numbers, international rankings, compliance indicators - now threaten to stifle innovation by rewarding predictability over exploration.

This paradox is not unique to the Gulf. Cultural sectors worldwide face a similar inflection point: the tension between the desire for relevance and the fear of failure. As cultural organisations become larger, richer, and more visible, they often become less daring. The avant-garde energy that drives renewal gives way to institutional caution; curatorial independence is balanced against reputational risk; and policy frameworks designed to ensure accountability begin to suppress precisely the uncertainty from which artistic and intellectual vitality emerge. In

¹ This paper systematizes the participation of the author in the *International Conference on Cultural Policy Research (ICCPR 2024)*, Warsaw, Poland, August 2024, under the theme *Cultural Policy in Democratic and Nondemocratic Regimes*.

this sense, the challenge of the Gulf is not immaturity but premature maturity - an ecosystem that has grown faster than its capacity to take creative risk.

The argument advanced here builds on the foundations laid in *From Vision to Implementation: Why Cultural Strategies Fail* and *Curators, Not Contractors: Rebuilding the Human Infrastructure of Culture*. Those essays examined the structural and human dimensions of cultural sustainability: how strategies falter at the point of delivery, and how systems built on borrowed expertise risk fragility once the consultants depart. This article extends that analysis to the psychological and organisational domain: the culture of risk itself. It asks how cultural institutions - particularly those in rapidly maturing systems - can preserve the space for experimentation and dissent that sustains creativity, even as they professionalise and institutionalise.

To pose the question of risk is to confront the moral economy of culture. Every decision to commission, curate, or fund is a negotiation between the new and the safe, the visionary and the acceptable. In environments of high visibility and political symbolism, such as those of the Gulf, this negotiation becomes acute. Yet the lesson from cultural systems across the world is consistent: innovation does not flourish in the absence of control, but in the presence of trust. The capacity to take risk - to test ideas, to fail productively, to learn publicly - is not a luxury of maturity but its defining characteristic.

This essay therefore advances a simple but urgent proposition: that the sustainability of cultural development depends not only on institutional competence or financial resources, but on the ability to manage uncertainty as a creative asset. It calls for a re-examination of how cultural organisations define professionalism, measure success, and exercise leadership. For without a culture of risk, there can be no culture of renewal - and without renewal, even the most impressive cultural achievements risk becoming static monuments to what once was possible.

The Anatomy of Risk Aversion

The decline of cultural risk rarely results from a single decision. It accumulates through the gradual sedimentation of procedures, incentives, and anxieties that reshape how institutions perceive their mandate. In the Gulf, as elsewhere, the very frameworks designed to ensure accountability and excellence can, over time, narrow the space for experimentation. Risk aversion thus becomes not an

act of censorship but a culture of over-management - an environment in which innovation is constrained by the very systems that once made it possible.

1. Governance and the Tyranny of Metrics

In the formative years of cultural investment, visibility was synonymous with legitimacy. Governments and agencies needed evidence that large public expenditures were producing measurable outcomes, and performance frameworks provided reassurance. Attendance, social-media reach, and international press coverage became the default proxies for success. Yet these metrics, useful in early phases of development, have since become self-perpetuating. They reward scale, predictability, and short-term visibility while penalising the slower, riskier processes through which genuine creativity unfolds.

The result is a form of **KPI inflation**: institutions compete for ever-higher targets, diverting energy from experimentation toward compliance. Exhibitions are selected for their likelihood of popularity rather than their potential to advance discourse. Festivals reproduce familiar formats that guarantee audiences but seldom stretch their imagination. Over time, managerialism replaces mission, and the courage to attempt the uncertain is replaced by the comfort of repetition.

2. Reputational Anxiety and the Politics of Visibility

The Gulf's cultural sector operates under intense global scrutiny. Every opening, commission, or acquisition is read not only as an artistic act but as a signal of national identity and soft-power intent. In such conditions, reputational management often eclipses curatorial curiosity. Institutions become risk-averse not out of lack of ambition, but out of fear of misinterpretation. The line between professionalism and prudence blurs: caution is mistaken for maturity.

This anxiety is compounded by social-media amplification, where controversy can escalate rapidly beyond the control of curators or

policymakers. As a result, internal review processes lengthen, approvals multiply, and experimental projects are quietly postponed. The governance mechanisms that ensure accountability thus generate a secondary effect: a pervasive culture of caution in which innovation is tolerated only when its outcomes are predictable.

3. The Contractor Economy and Outsourced Creativity

As analysed in *Curators, Not Contractors*, the region's reliance on external expertise has delivered extraordinary speed but limited institutional depth. A less visible consequence of this dependency is the displacement of creative risk. Contractors are hired to deliver results, not to take chances. Their contractual obligations reward efficiency and reputational safety. Temporary teams seldom have the mandate - or the institutional protection - to fail.

Over time, this produces what might be called **risk displacement**: instead of taking creative risks internally, institutions outsource them to consultants, who in turn avoid them to preserve their reputations. The cumulative effect is a system optimised for delivery rather than discovery. What appears as competence on the surface conceals a structural aversion to uncertainty.

4. Cultural Sensitivity and the Misreading of the Public

Another source of risk aversion lies in the persistent underestimation of audiences. Across many systems - Gulf and global alike - decision-makers often equate inclusivity with neutrality, assuming that public engagement requires avoiding complexity or controversy. Yet research consistently shows the opposite: audiences respond positively to authenticity and challenge when framed with respect and context.

By conflating sensitivity with avoidance, institutions deprive audiences of precisely what they seek from culture: the opportunity to encounter difference, to think otherwise, to feel surprised. This misreading produces

a cycle of self-censorship: policymakers anticipate backlash, curators internalise restraint, and public debate contracts into safe consensus. The result is cultural programming that is polished, professional, and strangely hollow.

5. Temporal Compression and the Fear of Failure

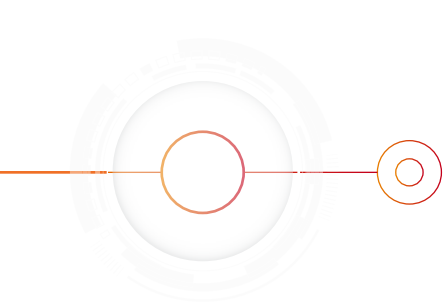
Finally, the compressed timelines that define many large-scale cultural projects leave little room for iterative experimentation. Political and fiscal cycles demand visible results within months or a few years, while artistic processes unfold over decades. Under such pressure, failure becomes intolerable. Projects are launched fully formed rather than prototyped; evaluation focuses on delivery rather than learning.

This disjunction between cultural and political timeframes - the "acceleration gap" - creates structural intolerance for uncertainty. Yet, as Mariana Mazzucato reminds us in her theory of mission-oriented innovation, experimentation is inseparable from progress: public value emerges precisely through the willingness to test and adjust. Without temporal elasticity, even visionary strategies become administratively rigid.

Risk aversion, then, is not a single pathology but a systemic condition: the outcome of managerial over-correction, reputational exposure, external dependency, misread publics, and compressed time. It thrives in mature ecosystems where the appearance of stability becomes more important than the capacity for change. To confront it requires not defiance but design - a rethinking of how institutions frame, measure, and manage uncertainty.

The Strategic Case for Cultural Risk

If the previous section described how risk aversion takes root, this one argues for the opposite: that managed risk is not a threat to cultural systems but a condition of their vitality. The capacity to tolerate uncertainty, test ideas, and absorb failure is the hallmark of resilient institutions. Cultural ecosystems that eliminate risk in the name of stability end up eliminating the very dynamics that



sustain their relevance. To treat risk as a liability is, therefore, to misunderstand what culture is - a field defined not by certainty but by interpretation, dialogue, and change.

1. Risk as the Engine of Renewal

Every major period of cultural innovation has been born from experimentation. The Renaissance workshop, the Enlightenment salon, the Bauhaus studio, the post-war artist-run space - all thrived on the freedom to test boundaries and to fail productively. In cultural systems, renewal depends less on resources than on the ability to generate novelty within constraints. Risk, in this sense, is not an aberration but an organising principle.

As the management scholar Peter Drucker observed, organisations stagnate not because they plan poorly but because they stop experimenting. In cultural terms, experimentation is not only an artistic act but a policy function: the capacity of systems to evolve by learning from deviation. A museum that never offends, a festival that never fails, an agency that never revises its strategy - all may appear successful, but they are in fact disengaged from the generative uncertainty that defines culture's social purpose.

2. The Public Value of Uncertainty

Cultural risk also has a public dimension. Our societies rely on spaces where ideas can be tested without fear of sanction. Cultural institutions - museums, theatres, archives, festivals - are among the few arenas that make such testing visible and collective. When these institutions retreat into caution, societies lose their laboratories of empathy.

The public value of culture, as theorised by John Holden and later developed by Mark Moore, resides in the creation of legitimacy and trust:

the sense that citizens can confront complexity together. This requires institutions that model curiosity and vulnerability. The courage to take artistic or intellectual risk is thus not merely aesthetic but civic. It demonstrates that public institutions can hold uncertainty without collapsing into conflict - an ability increasingly vital in polarised societies.

In the Gulf, this civic dimension takes a different form but no less importance. As governments seek to foster knowledge economies and creative citizenship, they require cultural ecosystems capable of intellectual agility and experimentation. Without them, innovation remains confined to technology and design, while culture risks ossifying into celebration rather than exploration.

3. Risk as Institutional Learning

Complexity theory, from organisational scholars such as Mary Uhl-Bien and Pier Luigi Sacco, emphasises that systems adapt through feedback loops. Mistakes are not anomalies to be hidden but data to be processed. A risk-averse institution is one that blocks feedback and therefore loses its capacity to learn.

Sacco's *Culture 3.0* framework is particularly instructive here. He describes mature cultural systems as **adaptive ecosystems** - open, networked, and self-correcting. In such systems, risk is distributed: small-scale experiments generate collective intelligence, while failures at the micro level prevent collapse at the macro level. This is the principle of **antifragility** identified by Nassim Nicholas Taleb - systems that strengthen through stress rather than erode under it.

For cultural policy, the implication is profound. The task is not to eliminate failure but to design structures that make failure informative. This could mean funding mechanisms that reward learning outcomes, evaluation frameworks that capture qualitative insight, or governance cultures that recognise iteration as progress. An institution that never admits error cannot accumulate experience; it merely repeats it.

4. From Control to Calibration

In most public systems, the instinct is to control risk - to prevent deviation, contain controversy, and pre-empt criticism. Yet control and creativity operate on different logics. Where control seeks stability, creativity thrives on variation. The alternative is not anarchy but calibration: building systems that can absorb uncertainty without losing coherence.

This is what Mariana Mazzucato describes as *mission-oriented innovation*: ambitious public agendas pursued through iterative experimentation rather than rigid planning. In cultural terms, this means reframing governance as stewardship rather than supervision. Leaders must learn to distinguish between **recklessness**, which damages trust, and **risk-taking**, which deepens it. The difference lies in whether uncertainty is managed transparently and connected to institutional learning.

Risk, properly calibrated, thus becomes a form of strategic intelligence. It allows cultural systems to sense change early, to test emerging ideas, and to adjust course before irrelevance sets in. Far from undermining authority, this kind of managed openness enhances it. The institution that learns visibly earns legitimacy.

5. Courage as Competence

Ultimately, the capacity to take risk is not a matter of temperament but of competence. Courage can - and must - be institutionalised. It is expressed in procurement rules that allow prototyping, in boards that reward curiosity, in leaders who protect staff from punitive reactions to failure. These are not cultural luxuries but governance tools.

The British cultural economist John Holden once noted that "the opposite of risk is not safety but stagnation." Professionalism, in the cultural domain, should therefore be redefined: not as the absence of error but as the ability to navigate complexity with integrity. Mature institutions do not fear mistakes; they design systems to learn from them.

Risk, then, is not peripheral to cultural policy - it is its organising energy. The question is not whether institutions can afford to take risk, but whether they can afford not to. The next section turns to this operational dimension: how risk can be managed, embedded, and made productive through deliberate institutional design.

Managing Risk: A Three-Dimensional Framework

While cultural risk is often discussed in abstract terms, effective management requires tangible structures that make experimentation both possible and productive. Institutions cannot simply “become bolder” by decree; they must build environments where uncertainty can be explored safely and constructively. Drawing from global cultural governance models and adjacent fields such as innovation management, behavioural economics, and public-sector reform, this section proposes a **three-dimensional framework** for managing cultural risk across **strategy, organization, and practice**.

1. Strategic Dimension: Reframing Risk as Investment

At the strategic level, cultural organizations need to move from a mindset of risk avoidance to one of risk capitalization. In this reframing, risk is not the opposite of value - it is its precondition. The capacity to engage with uncertain outcomes is what allows culture to generate meaning, novelty, and relevance.

• From mitigation to portfolio thinking.

Institutions should treat cultural programming as an innovation portfolio - balancing safe, audience-tested formats with a deliberate percentage of exploratory work. Much as venture funds accept a distribution of outcomes, cultural systems should expect that not every initiative will succeed, but that collective experimentation will raise the overall level of insight and resilience.

- **Transparent risk communication.**

Strategic risk-taking requires leaders who can articulate why certain experiments matter, even if they fail. Communicating uncertainty as part of cultural value builds institutional trust and educates stakeholders - including funders and policymakers - about the nature of cultural innovation.

- **Policy-level adaptation.**

Governments and funding bodies can reinforce this approach by embedding "experimental" or "innovation" lines within grants, allowing failure as an acceptable learning outcome. Several European councils, including Arts Council England's *Developing Your Creative Practice* fund, explicitly support risk as a professional practice - a model that Gulf agencies could adapt to support creative experimentation without reputational penalty.

2. Organizational Dimension: Designing for Flexibility and Trust

At the organizational level, risk management depends less on procedures than on cultures of trust. Institutions that encourage open dialogue, cross-functional collaboration, and reflective practice are better equipped to identify, assess, and learn from uncertainty.

- **Psychological safety as infrastructure.**

Research from Edmondson and others shows that innovation correlates with psychological safety - the shared belief that one can express doubts or ideas without fear of retribution. Cultural institutions can foster this through clear communication channels, mentorship, and a culture that values questioning as much as performance.

- **Iterative governance.**

Traditional hierarchies tend to suppress feedback; iterative governance models—such as agile steering groups or rotating review

panels - allow risk to be surfaced early and addressed constructively. The Louvre Abu Dhabi's use of thematic "concept boards," or the V&A's internal innovation labs, exemplify how curatorial, operational, and audience insights can interact dynamically.

- **Embedding reflection loops.**

Institutions should institutionalize reflection: post-project reviews, failure audits, or "learning reports" that capture insights without blame. These mechanisms transform individual errors into collective intelligence - an approach common in design-led innovation and increasingly present in cultural organizations like the Van Abbemuseum or Sharjah Art Foundation.

3. Practical Dimension: Tools for Risk Navigation

At the operational level, the management of cultural risk is about *tools*, not *tone*. Institutions can deploy concrete mechanisms that structure uncertainty and turn it into an asset.

- **Scenario-based planning.**

Rather than forecasting singular futures, cultural institutions should explore multiple scenarios - optimistic, conservative, disruptive - mapping how each affects programming, audiences, and resources. This practice, pioneered by the Shell Scenarios team and later adapted by cultural think tanks like Nesta, helps organizations anticipate volatility while maintaining creative adaptability.

- **Rapid prototyping and micro-pilots.**

Borrowing from the innovation economy, institutions can test ideas in small-scale pilots before committing full resources. Temporary exhibitions, digital activations, and artist residencies can serve as "safe zones" for experimentation - spaces where risk is contained but learning is maximized.

- **Learning-based evaluation.**

Instead of binary success/failure metrics, evaluation frameworks should focus on what was learned, who benefited, and how insight will inform future practice. UNESCO's *Culture 2030* indicators and the OECD's *Culture and Local Development* guidelines both emphasize adaptive learning as central to cultural resilience.

4. **Toward a Culture of Institutional Bravery**

Risk management, at its most mature, is not defensive but developmental. It transforms uncertainty from something to fear into something to cultivate. Institutions that practice **institutional bravery** - that document their learning, communicate their intent, and embrace vulnerability as professionalism - set a precedent for others.

The Gulf region, with its strong institutional leadership and agile policymaking, is uniquely positioned to pioneer this next phase. Having mastered the architecture of cultural ambition, it now faces the subtler challenge of building the *architecture of trust*: a system where taking creative risks is not seen as defiance, but as a disciplined contribution to collective intelligence.

Leadership, Learning, and Psychological Safety

If risk is to be treated as a productive asset, leadership must make it livable. Policies can authorise experimentation, but people enact it; and people will not experiment where status, careers, or reputations feel precarious. The decisive variable is therefore not the presence of rules that "permit" risk, but the presence of **psychological safety** - a climate in which individuals believe they can speak candidly, test ideas, and surface weak signals without fear of sanction. In cultural organisations, where expertise is distributed across curators, educators, conservators, and producers, psychological safety is not a soft virtue; it is operational infrastructure. Three leadership moves are critical.

1. From heroic authority to stewardship.

Institutional bravery begins at the top, but it is sustained in the middle. Directors and board chairs set the tone by reframing "professionalism" away from error minimisation toward integrity in uncertainty. That shift must then be modelled by middle managers who translate vision into daily practice - simplifying approvals for pilots, protecting staff during post-mortems, and rewarding transparent escalation of risks. Stewardship means leaders own the risks publicly while distributing authorship internally; when failures occur, responsibility is collective and learning is documented.

2. Make learning visible and routine.

Learning cultures are designed, not intuited. Two habits matter.

- **After-action reviews (AARs)** that are blameless, scheduled, and short - held within days of an opening, commission, or festival. They answer four questions only: what was intended, what happened, what was learned, what will we change next time?
- **Working notes and insight logs** that capture tacit knowledge from visitor services, front-of-house, digital analytics, and community partners. When synthesised quarterly, these furnish a living evidence base for curatorial and policy choices.

Over time, routine reflection converts localised experience into institutional memory, reducing the political cost of admitting uncertainty. In systems terms, it strengthens the feedback loops that allow complexity to be navigated rather than denied.

3. Rewire incentives and governance.

Courage cannot rely on charisma; it must be institutionalised. Boards and executive teams should embed risk-literacy into their governance architecture. This means:

- **Performance frameworks** that measure learning outcomes, not just delivery.
- **Procurement rules** that permit staged funding and adaptive scopes.

- **Leadership evaluations** that include a criterion for fostering innovation and staff empowerment.
- **Review mechanisms** that treat constructive failure as evidence of engagement rather than incompetence.

Governance should also guard the **epistemic autonomy** of expert staff. Curatorial charters, transparent programme rationales, and independent peer review processes help preserve professional judgment while maintaining accountability to funders and publics. The objective is not freedom from oversight, but freedom **within** oversight.

Building Learning Cultures: A Practical Roadmap

Translating these ideas into practice requires persistence and structure. The following five-step roadmap offers a pragmatic approach for managers and policymakers seeking to embed risk-conscious learning in cultural organisations.

● **Step 1 – Diagnose the Current Culture.**

Begin with an internal audit of how the organisation currently treats uncertainty: when mistakes occur, how are they discussed? Is feedback upward as common as downward? Anonymous surveys, structured interviews, and document reviews can reveal hidden patterns of fear or rigidity.

● **Step 2 – Establish Shared Language and Intent.**

Hold a leadership retreat or cross-departmental workshop to define what “acceptable risk” means in your institutional context. Agree on categories - artistic, operational, reputational - and set proportional responses. This prevents over-reaction when something goes wrong and builds confidence around boundaries.

● **Step 3 – Pilot Learning Mechanisms.**

Select two or three upcoming projects as test beds for structured learning. Apply AARs, publish short learning notes, and share findings

internally. The goal is proof of concept, not scale: demonstrate that reflection can occur without blame and that insights feed forward into new planning cycles.

● **Step 4 – Align Incentives and Communications.**

Integrate the new behaviours into job descriptions, annual reviews, and public communications. Praise curiosity and transparency in staff briefings. When reporting to funders, include learning outcomes alongside performance metrics. Externally, narrate failure as evidence of exploration, not incompetence.

● **Step 5 – Institutionalise and Share.**

After 12–18 months, codify these practices in governance documents - strategic plans, policy manuals, and induction programmes. Create an internal "Learning Library" or digital dashboard of insights. Encourage peer exchange with other institutions adopting similar models to reinforce sectoral norms around openness.

This roadmap is not prescriptive; it is iterative. Each step generates feedback to refine the next. What matters most is consistency - leaders who listen, document, and respond visibly. Once staff see that curiosity is rewarded rather than punished, the organisational climate shifts from defensive compliance to creative participation.

In conclusion, leadership for cultural risk is a moral as much as managerial act. It requires humility - the courage to admit what is unknown - and discipline - the rigour to learn systematically from experience. In the long term, institutions that embed these habits become more than administrators of culture; they become *cultures of learning* in themselves. The real measure of maturity, therefore, is not how flawlessly an institution performs, but how intelligently it learns. When directors, boards, and policymakers create the psychological and procedural space for risk to be explored, they transform uncertainty from a threat into an engine of renewal. And only then can the promise of cultural ambition - so evident across the Gulf and beyond - translate into lasting creative vitality.

Regional Reflections: Risk and Innovation in the Gulf

The Gulf's cultural transformation over the past fifteen years has been unprecedented in its scope, speed, and ambition. Few regions have invested so deliberately in the symbolic and institutional power of culture - reframing it not as a decorative adjunct to economic growth but as a foundation of national identity and diversification. Yet the next phase of development will depend not on the multiplication of projects, but on the cultivation of institutional behaviours. The question is no longer how to build culture, but how to keep it alive.

The region's cultural ecosystems - particularly those of the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar - now face a paradox of abundance: substantial infrastructure, well-funded institutions, and coherent national visions coexist with limited tolerance for experimentation. The challenge ahead is to convert **policy ambition into institutional agility**, ensuring that maturity does not harden into managerialism. This section outlines how risk and innovation can be integrated into the governance, programming, and leadership practices of Gulf institutions, translating strategic intent into cultural vitality.

1. Divergent Starting Points, Convergent Challenges

Across the Gulf, national cultural strategies have taken distinct paths but share a common aspiration: to leverage culture as a pillar of soft power, social cohesion, and creative-economy growth.

- **The United Arab Emirates** has evolved a multi-polar cultural landscape led by Abu Dhabi's museum infrastructure and cultural diplomacy, Dubai's innovation-driven creative economy agenda, and Sharjah's sustained curatorial experimentation and civic engagement. Together, these ecosystems position the UAE as the region's most diversified cultural model. Its strength lies in policy coherence and institutional professionalism, yet its governance systems can still prioritise control over curiosity.
- **Saudi Arabia**, through Vision 2030, has pursued one of the most ambitious cultural reform agendas in the world - launching new

commissions, heritage projects, and cultural industries at record speed. Its priority now is to consolidate learning across this vast institutional expansion, embedding reflection and experimentation as normal features of state-led development.

- **Qatar** has established a cultural model that combines heritage preservation with contemporary experimentation, driven by Qatar Museums and a national vision that positions culture as both civic pedagogy and international dialogue. Its task now is to systematise innovation within governance, ensuring the next generation of leaders can manage creative risk with confidence.

Despite different trajectories, these systems converge on similar bottlenecks: **the difficulty of institutionalising risk in state-enabled environments**. This is not a matter of political constraint alone but of governance culture. The legacy of top-down delivery—so effective during the infrastructure phase—can inadvertently stifle adaptive learning once institutions mature.

2. The Institutional Maturity Gap

The Gulf's cultural institutions have moved rapidly from inception to maturity without passing through the long evolutionary cycles typical of their Western counterparts. This "compressed development curve" has produced organisations that appear sophisticated in structure but remain nascent in behavioural depth.

Decision-making often remains highly centralised, with limited delegation to curatorial or managerial levels. Short project timelines compress reflection. Evaluation systems emphasise visibility and attendance, reinforcing a culture of success narrative. As a result, many institutions excel at execution but struggle with iteration - the capacity to learn from experimentation and reinvest insight into future work.

Bridging this maturity gap requires reframing what institutional competence means. Rather than equating professionalism with predictability, Gulf institutions can pioneer a new model of **adaptive professionalism** - one that values experimentation, reflection, and the ability to navigate uncertainty as essential markers of excellence.

3. Emerging Practices of Risk-Literate Innovation

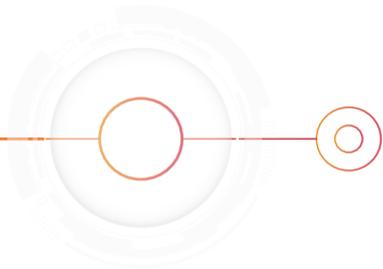
Encouragingly, several institutions across the region have begun to develop mechanisms that align with the principles outlined earlier. These examples are still emergent but signal a shift from infrastructural to organisational innovation.

- **Sharjah Art Foundation** has demonstrated a sustained commitment to experimentation through its iterative programming, commissioning cycles, and willingness to pair established artists with emerging voices. Its long-term curatorial approach normalises exploration as a structural rather than exceptional practice.
- **Louvre Abu Dhabi** has used thematic “concept boards” and cross-departmental innovation sessions to encourage internal learning, allowing curators, educators, and digital teams to co-design exhibitions that test new interpretive approaches.
- **Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Culture** has piloted experimental festivals and digital initiatives, using short review loops and public feedback to refine formats—an important step toward normalising trial-based governance.
- **Qatar Museums** and the **Doha Film Institute** have both integrated mentorship and reflection into their creative programmes, treating public engagement as a laboratory rather than a showcase.

These examples illustrate that innovation in the Gulf is not constrained by resources or ambition but by **institutional design**. Once feedback loops, pilot mechanisms, and learning cultures are embedded, risk becomes manageable - and productive.

4. Embedding Risk into Governance: Three Levers for Change

To transition from infrastructure-led growth to ecosystem maturity, Gulf cultural agencies and institutions can act on three interconnected levers:



- **Governance Modernisation.**

Boards and cultural councils should evolve from supervisory bodies into learning organisations. This requires shifting focus from compliance and image management toward evidence-based adaptation. Creating *innovation subcommittees* or *learning task forces* within cultural authorities can institutionalise reflection. Periodic cross-institutional reviews - shared among peer organisations - would allow for system-wide learning, reducing redundancy and aligning experimentation with national priorities.

- **Policy Instruments for Experimentation.**

Funding frameworks can explicitly include *exploration allowances* or *pilot grants*, insulating early-stage projects from reputational risk. Just as cultural funds globally now dedicate a portion of their budgets to innovation, Gulf agencies could earmark 5–10 percent of programming budgets for “prototype projects,” evaluated by learning criteria rather than attendance metrics. Over time, such instruments would cultivate an evidence base for what works - and what fails productively - in the region’s unique cultural context.

- **Leadership Development and Capacity Building.**

New leadership programmes are needed that train directors, managers, and policymakers in risk literacy. Beyond technical skills, such programmes should cultivate *adaptive intelligence*: the ability to interpret feedback, manage complexity, and communicate uncertainty. This could be achieved through executive education partnerships with leading universities, mentorship exchanges among Gulf institutions, and “learning residencies” where cultural leaders shadow experimental organisations abroad.

5. From Vision to Experimentation: A Regional Roadmap

Translating these ideas into policy and practice requires a coordinated approach. A regional roadmap could follow five sequential steps:

1. **Map the System:** Conduct a comparative audit of existing innovation practices, governance mechanisms, and institutional pain points across the Gulf.
2. **Create Shared Language:** Establish a “Cultural Risk Charter” endorsed by key national agencies, defining types of risk (artistic, operational, reputational) and principles for their management.
3. **Pilot and Test:** Launch three to five regional pilot initiatives - small-scale cross-institutional collaborations designed explicitly to test experimental models of programming, community co-creation, or digital curation.
4. **Evaluate and Disseminate:** Develop a shared platform - such as a *Gulf Cultural Learning Hub* - to document and disseminate insights, success stories, and lessons from failure.
5. **Institutionalise Learning:** Integrate these practices into national cultural strategies and performance frameworks, ensuring that risk literacy becomes a sustained competency rather than a one-time initiative.

Such a roadmap would position the Gulf not only as a centre of cultural production but as a leader in cultural innovation governance - demonstrating how risk can be managed systematically in contexts of high ambition and political visibility.

Without Risk, Culture Becomes Administration

The history of cultural progress is, at its core, a history of risk. Every breakthrough - whether artistic, institutional, or civic - has emerged from the willingness to challenge precedent and accept uncertainty. Yet as the cultural field matures, it often forgets this origin story. Bureaucracy replaces bravery, metrics substitute for meaning, and institutions once created to nurture imagination become consumed by the task of managing themselves.

The argument advanced throughout this essay is that risk is not an aberration within cultural systems - it is their organising energy. The capacity to tolerate ambiguity, to test and to learn, is what distinguishes living institutions from static ones. To govern culture without risk is to reduce it to process; to lead culture without risk is to curate consensus. When experimentation disappears, relevance soon follows.

In the Gulf, this insight is especially urgent. The region's extraordinary cultural expansion has reached a turning point: the foundations are laid, the infrastructures are operational, and the narratives are globally recognised. What remains is the more difficult work of cultivating the *behavioural infrastructure* that sustains creativity over time - the leadership habits, governance frameworks, and psychological environments that allow uncertainty to become generative. This is the true mark of cultural maturity: not the perfection of delivery, but the sophistication of learning.

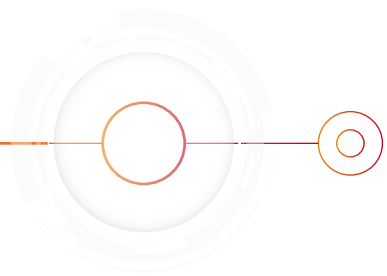
To preserve vitality, cultural institutions must rediscover three simple but demanding virtues.

First, humility - the recognition that cultural authority derives not from certainty but from inquiry. Institutions that ask questions of themselves stay porous to the societies they serve.

Second, transparency - the courage to share not only achievements but also doubts, lessons, and unfinished thoughts. In doing so, they invite the public into the process of cultural creation rather than merely its consumption.

Third, perseverance - the discipline to maintain experimentation even when it yields no immediate success. Sustainable innovation is not episodic but cumulative, the product of systems that protect and value iterative progress.

If the first phase of Gulf cultural development was defined by *construction*, the next must be defined by *conversation* - between institutions and publics, between ambition and reflection, between control and curiosity. The region is uniquely positioned to model a new kind of cultural governance: one that aligns vision with experimentation, authority with trust. By embedding risk as a



managed, visible, and shared practice, Gulf cultural systems can demonstrate that maturity need not mean moderation.

Ultimately, the lesson extends beyond geography. Everywhere, culture's resilience depends on its capacity for risk. The future of cultural institutions - whether in Abu Dhabi or Amsterdam, Riyadh or Rio - will belong to those that treat uncertainty not as an error to be corrected but as a space to be explored. For without risk, culture becomes administration. And administration, however efficient, cannot move the human imagination forward.

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AUTHOR



Jorge Cerveira Pinto is a senior advisor and internationally recognised expert in socioeconomic policy, sustainable development, and cultural governance. Based in Dubai, he works at the intersection of research, policy design, and institutional strategy, advising governments and multilateral organisations on how to align regulation, investment, and innovation with social and economic impact.

Over the past two decades, Jorge has advised leading entities including UNESCO, UNCTAD, WIPO, the European Commission, and Gulf government authorities. His work connects cultural and creative industries policy with wider agendas of economic diversification, social value creation, and governance reform. He currently serves as senior advisor to a major UAE government entity, where he leads on socioeconomic strategy, impact assessment, and policy coherence across culture, tourism, and innovation sectors.

Previously, he held senior leadership roles at the Diriyah Gate Development Authority and the Department of Culture & Tourism – Abu Dhabi, and has contributed to major European and Gulf initiatives such as the New European Bauhaus and Vision 2030.

A prolific author and researcher, Jorge writes on cultural economics, institutional design, and sustainable development, advancing an evidence-based understanding of how culture and policy drive transformation and public value.



New Dots in European Cultural Policy Map – Finland’s Cultural Policy Report and the Super Autumn 2025

Laura Päiviö-Häkämies

Humak University of Applied Sciences

My first participation in the ENCATC conference in September 2025 with its “Future is Cultural” theme proved to be an inspiring experience that sparked reflections on how national cultural policies connect with broader European discussions at this very moment. While ENCATC represents a specialized gathering within the cultural policy field, the conversations there highlighted intriguing parallels with recent policy developments across Europe. I focus particularly on [Finland's new Cultural Policy Report](#). This connection between intimate professional dialogue and national policy implementation offers valuable insights into how European cultural policies are evolving to address contemporary challenges.

Key themes emerging across Europe – and seen in the Finnish Cultural Policy Report:

- Broad Cultural Concept
- Digital transformation and cultural heritage preservation
- Sustainability and green cultural practices
- Post-pandemic recovery and resilience building
- Cultural democracy and inclusive participation
- Cross-border collaboration and mobility

Finland's Cultural Policy Report

Overview

The Cultural Policy Report was submitted to Parliament on November 28, 2024, outlining long-term objectives and an action plan for cultural policy until the 2040s. The purpose of the Cultural Policy Report is to produce an ambitious vision for the future that enables the long-term development of Finnish cultural policy, with the vision describing arts and culture as a force to strengthen and unite Finland and inspire the building of a more sustainable, viable and humane future. This article is based on the Cultural Policy Report (Publications of the Finnish Government 2025:5) and related articles such as Education Committee Report (Sivistysvaliokunnan mietintö 2025).

Key Features and Vision

Long-term Perspective: The report extends to the 2040s, making it a strategic framework for Finnish cultural policy development over the next two decades.

Cross-administrative Approach: The report emphasizes efforts to preserve and renew the foundations of culture and make them economically viable, and to reinforce the impact of cultural and creative sectors on society through a long-term strategy that draws on continuous cooperation between several policy areas.

Broad Cultural Concept: The report adopts an expanded understanding of culture that goes beyond traditional arts policy, encompassing everyday lifestyles, cultural resilience, creative economy, and intersecting with various policy sectors.

Cross-party Support

The Cultural Policy Report received extensive parliamentary consideration. The report was prepared with everyone who wanted to participate from people's living rooms to expert tables. The report draft was examined in several committees, and the parliamentary process included extensive consultations with stakeholders – not only traditional culture and arts actors but also other sectors.

The Education and Culture Committee stated that culture is the bedrock upon which our society is built, noting that culture has intrinsic value as well as impacts on wellbeing and health, dialogue and community, and mental resilience and security of supply. The committee also emphasized the economic potential of cultural and creative sectors.

Key Policy Areas and process remarks

Cultural Diversity: Cultural diversity has been taken into account extensively in the preparation of the cultural policy report, making it a significant tool for promoting structural change. The report includes comprehensive approaches to promoting diversity and inclusion across cultural institutions.

Economic Dimension: The report recognizes the significant economic impact of the creative industries.

Cultural Heritage and Museums: The preparing committee took seriously the criticism expressed by museums and archives toward the report, reminding that significant public investments have been directed to museums, which support regional economies among other things. The different roles of Museums are discussed in the report.

Cross-sectoral Integration: The cross-administrative approach characterizing the report is strongly reflected in the Education and Culture Committee's report, which states that culture extends to several administrative sectors.

Financing and Implementation

Public Funding Rationale: The Education and Culture Committee's report provides several justifications for strengthening public funding. Public funding for culture is leveraging by nature and corrects market failures. Public funding ensures high-quality art creation – and as the committee states, only in Finland is Finnish culture created.

Implementation Plan: An implementation plan will be drawn up once the report has been completed, providing the timetable for the action plan and specifying responsible parties and other detailed plans. One of the proposed measures to monitor implementation and cooperation between administrative sectors is to create a cultural and creative sector body that will continue working across parliamentary terms.

"Super Autumn" of Cultural Policy continues 2025

The report became during what Rosa Meriläinen from KULTA ry (Central Organization for Finnish Culture and Arts Associations) described as a "super autumn" in cultural policy, as the government was planning massive cuts for 2025 and super autumn continues as the budget cuts are actual again for 2026, on top of smaller cuts already made.

The cultural policy report will represent likely the only opportunity this decade for parliament to address the entirety of cultural policy. (Meriläinen 2025.)

The significance of the report lies in its timing and scope during a challenging period for Finnish cultural policy, representing a crucial opportunity for strategic cultural policy development despite ongoing budget constraints. At least this is what we hope for.

The ENCATEC congress theme "Future is Cultural" is clearly common to all countries. This autumn will show how Finnish politicians see the importance of culture when considering building the future and the 2026 budget.

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AUTHOR

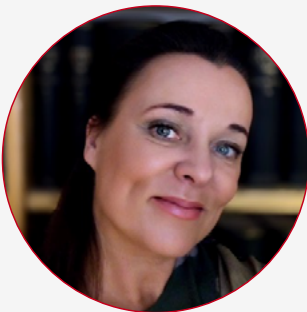


Photo: Laura Päiviö

PhD *Laura Päiviö-Häkämies* has worked as a principal lecturer in cultural production at HUMAK since 2018. In addition to her academic research in Scandinavian and European history, she has previously worked in industry management positions from 1998 onwards, including as Secretary General of an international organization The Finnish Committee for European Security, Cultural Director for the City of Kotka, Education Culture & Youth Director for Mynämäki Municipality, Managing Director of Kotka Maritime Festival, Secretary General of the Tall Ships' Races Event 2007 and Managing Director of Turku Music Festival. Through these roles, she has observed industry leadership culture from the perspectives of practitioner, researcher, and supervisor of graduate students working in the field.



Building a European Framework for Artists' Working Conditions: Evidence from 27 Member States and Policy Pathways

Oana Nasui

Cultural researcher

What is the Issue

The Report of the OMC (Open Method of Coordination) group of EU Member States' experts "The status and working conditions of artists and cultural and creative professionals" (2023) provides a comprehensive baseline assessment, with all 27 Member States contributing cross-sectoral expertise from cultural, employment, and social affairs ministries.

This official mapping exercise, validated by all Member States, establishes common definitions, indicators, and benchmarks that can and must inform subsequent EU policies, directives, and funding mechanisms.

Beyond mapping current systems, the report formulates specific recommendations across four key areas: artist status and social security, fair practices, skills and lifelong learning, and artistic freedom - providing both diagnosis and actionable policy solutions for Member States.

The full report is available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1677abc0-5b3e-11ee-9220-01aa75ed71a1>

Why it's relevant

The EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026 (adopted November 2022) mandates follow-up actions to this OMC report, including the development of an online platform for monitoring working conditions and continuing work on this topic through 2026.

The report's recommendations and data are particularly critical for the next Multiannual Financial Framework negotiations, where cultural sector support mechanisms will be designed based on the gaps and needs it identifies.

Furthermore, any future EU-level initiatives on social protection, taxation, or labor rights affecting creative workers will have access to comprehensive baseline data and specific recommendations documented in this report, establishing a reference framework for evidence-based policymaking in the sector.

What is the situation

The convergence of post-pandemic awareness of sector vulnerabilities, new EU competition guidelines enabling collective bargaining for freelancers (2022 guidelines allowing solo self-employed to negotiate collectively without violating antitrust laws), active reforms in multiple Member States, and new Digital Services Act and AI Act obligations with additional legal complexities for freelance creators, all create an unprecedented momentum for comprehensive reform of artist status frameworks.

Furthermore, one of the particularities of the sector also gives one of its fragilities - "the CCS ecosystem is made up of a large number of freelancers, and temporary and intermittent workers. According to Eurostat, the percentage of self-employed cultural workers is considerably higher (32 %) than in employment for the total economy (14 %), and this difference has remained almost stable over many years." (pg 5 of the Report).

The relevance

The Report "The status and working conditions of artists and cultural and creative professionals" examined extensive legislation across three levels:

● **EU Legislation reviewed:** Articles 167, 45 TFEU; Charter of Fundamental Rights Article 13; Regulation 883/2004 (social security coordination); Directive 2019/790 (DSM copyright); 2022 Guidelines on competition law and collective agreements; European Pillar of Social Rights; Council Recommendation 2019 on access to social protection; Directives on minimum wages, transparent working conditions, gender equality.

● **National legislation mapped: 16 countries with dedicated legislation:** Germany (Künstlersozialversicherungsgesetz, 1981), France (intermittent du spectacle, 1936-ongoing), Belgium (December 2022 law), Spain (Estatuto del Artista, 2022-2023), Portugal (cultural professional status, 2022), Luxembourg (2014 law), Austria (social security for artists, 2001), Italy (multiple laws since 1941), Croatia (independent artists rights, 1996), Lithuania (art creators status, 2004), Latvia (creative persons status, 2004), Estonia (creative persons act, 2004), Slovenia (decree on cultural professionals, 2004), Ireland (Tax Act Section 195, 1997), Bulgaria (Labor Code provisions), Hungary (EKHO law, 2005).

● **Countries with partial provisions:** Netherlands (artist ruling in tax law, Fair Practice Code), Finland (state artist grants 1969, supplementary pensions).

● **Countries developing legislation:** Romania (Ordinance 21/2023), Poland (draft professional artists law), Czechia (deadline 2025), Cyprus, Malta, Slovakia, Greece (all in preparation).

● **Countries without specific provisions:** Denmark, Sweden (rely on comprehensive universal welfare systems).

● **International instruments:** UNESCO 1980 Recommendation on artist status; ILO (International Labour Organization) 2023 conclusions on arts and entertainment work; Council of Europe frameworks.

Challenges / opportunities and proposals for policymakers

Challenges / opportunities

- **Structural precarity:** Project-based employment, irregular income, forced multi-jobbing for survival - with most artists relying on short-term contracts and multiple income sources to maintain decent living standards
- **Fragmentation:** 27 different national frameworks with no coordination - from comprehensive systems (France, Germany) to complete absence of recognition (several Member States)
- **Labor market exclusion:** Self-employment rate double the EU average (32% vs 14%), automatically excluding artists from standard employment protections and collective bargaining rights
- **Power imbalances:** Individual artists in weak negotiating positions against institutions, platforms, and distributors - unable to refuse unfair terms without losing work
- **Administrative burden:** Artists must navigate multiple bureaucracies (tax, social security, copyright, funding bodies) with incompatible requirements and definitions
- **Treaty limitations:** EU has restricted competence in cultural and social matters, limiting ability to harmonize or mandate standards
- **Political resistance:** Perception of "special treatment" creates opposition to sector-specific solutions, with other professions demanding similar measures
- **Data gaps:** Inconsistent definitions and lack of comparable statistics across Member States impede evidence-based policymaking

Proposals

Four main domains were analyzed in the Report, with concrete proposals.

1 Artist Status and Social Security

Findings

The report reveals significant diversity in approaches across Member States. 16 countries have dedicated legislation for artists, while others use partial provisions or rely on general welfare systems.

Germany's Künstlersozialversicherungsgesetz covers over 190,000 artists (2020 data), with artists paying only half of social security contributions while the other half comes from users of artistic works and federal subsidies.

France's intermittent du spectacle system, dating from 1936 with multiple amendments, provides unemployment benefits adapted to discontinuous employment patterns.

Belgium's December 2022 law establishes a Working in the Arts Commission to issue certificates (starter, standard, plus) giving access to specific social benefits.

Nordic countries (Denmark, Sweden) have no specific artist legislation, relying instead on comprehensive universal welfare systems.

Concrete proposals:

- Comprehensive legislation covering employment, social security, taxation simultaneously (following Spain's Estatuto del Artista model which addresses all three areas)
- Inclusive scope: minimum coverage for creators/performers, consider technical/support professions (Belgium's new law explicitly includes technical and support activities in audiovisual, visual arts, music, literature, entertainment, theatre, choreography, comics)

- Flexible eligibility recognizing "invisible work" (research, rehearsals, experimentation) - Belgium's commission will consider time investment and unpaid preparatory work over 5-year periods
- Universal social protection regardless of employment status (employed/self-employed/hybrid)
- Administrative simplification through one-stop shops (France's GUSO handles all social contributions and declarations in one platform)
- Artist registers for targeted support (Slovakia's register established during COVID-19 has more than 2,700 entries; Slovenia maintains a public register of self-employed cultural professionals)

2 Fair Practice

Findings: power imbalances leave artists vulnerable; widespread precarious conditions - project-based work, irregular income, and forced multi-jobbing; few Member States have implemented fair practice measures to protect cultural workers.

Concrete proposals:

- Public funding conditionality requiring fair pay as eligibility criterion
- Minimum fee regulations following Germany's three models (matrix, reference, collective agreement)
- Mandatory fair practice codes for subsidized institutions (Netherlands model)
- Independent ombudsman structures for confidential reporting (Austria's VERA, Ireland's Safe to Create)
- Implementation of EU competition guidelines for collective bargaining
- Gender equality measures addressing pay gaps, representation
- Capacity building for representative organizations

3 Skills and Lifelong Learning

Findings: artists need increasingly diverse skills (digital, entrepreneurial, cross-sectoral) but face access barriers.

Concrete proposals:

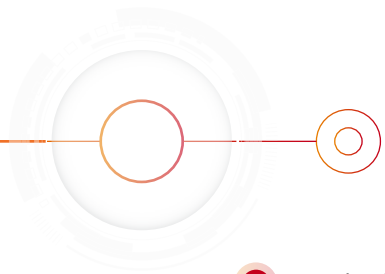
- Systemic approach: availability (map all learning opportunities), findability (Belgium's Cultuurloket model), accessibility (Netherlands' WerktuigPPO fund: up to €2,000/year per artist, between October 2020 and October 2022 received 18,000 applications with 70% approval rate), feedback loops (regular evaluation)
- Participation targets: European Skills Agenda proposes 50% by 2025, while European Pillar of Social Rights sets 60% goal for adults participating in training yearly by 2030
- Recognition of micro-credentials, short-term training
- Integration with EIT Culture & Creativity initiatives, Creative Pact for Skills

4 Artistic Freedom

Findings: no explicit EU protection; varying national interpretations create cross-border insecurity.

Concrete proposals:

- Legislative strengthening through enhanced interpretation of EU Charter Article 13 (currently states "arts shall be free" without detail)
- National-level protection through legislation or constitutional inclusion (countries with explicit protection include Czechia, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Malta, Austria, Slovakia, Finland, and Sweden)



- Include artistic freedom in EU Rule of Law annual reports
- Cooperation with EU Fundamental Rights Agency for monitoring
- "Arm's-length principle" preventing political interference (Lithuania, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden models)
- Remove access barriers (linguistic, technological, economic)

Cross-cutting recommendations

>> EU-level framework (non-binding):

- Council Recommendation or Council Conclusions establishing minimum standards
- Online platform development incorporated into EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026, to be developed through Creative FLIP/ Creatives Unite
- Integration with existing EU monitoring mechanisms

>> National implementation priorities:

- Comprehensive sui generis legislation where feasible
- Include all creative professionals facing similar precarity
- Digital infrastructure for registration, monitoring
- Cross-border portability agreements

>> Sectoral innovations:

- Expand Mobility Information Points (MIPs) network beyond existing countries
- Mutual recognition agreements for artist status
- Emergency response protocols based on COVID-19 lessons

>> Timeline and implementation

The EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026 provides the framework for follow-up actions on this OMC report. The online platform for sharing information and good practices is to be developed as specified in the Work Plan. Member States are encouraged to implement recommendations according to their national contexts and capabilities.

Conclusion

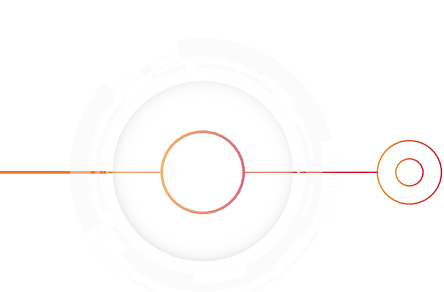
The evidence from 27 Member States demonstrates that diverse approaches to artist status can coexist within the EU framework, but improved coordination, information sharing, and minimum standards are needed. The OMC report provides comprehensive recommendations; now implementation determines whether Europe's creative workers move from precarity to sustainability.

AUTHOR



Oana Nasui is a cultural manager and cultural researcher. With professional experience in the fields of cultural expertise: consultancy, management, evaluation, professional training, communication, Oana works as a developer of cultural and creative projects and programs, evaluator of cultural and publishing projects and consultant in cultural planning – programs, strategies, policies. Among others, in Romania she coordinated the first Cultural Strategy of Bucharest (2015-2025), the public policy proposal on Artist's Status in Romania (2018-2019), and served as communication coordinator for

Sibiu European Capital of Culture 2007. She holds degrees in European Cultural Studies and Anthropology of Sacred Space, with specialized accreditations in EU funds access, training, policy and community development and is a member of Culture Action Europe, EIT Culture & Creativity and Creative FED networks. She is author and co-author of various studies, being interested in big data, the anthropology of social media platforms, AI bias, and contemporary cultural diplomacy.



The Crossroads and International Challenges for Culture and Creative Industries (CCI): A Research Perspective for MONDIACULT 2025

Sumaira Malik

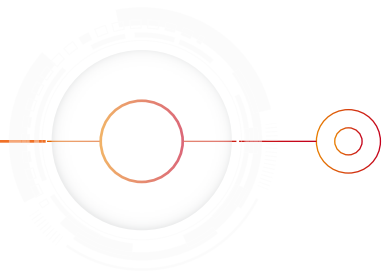
Senior Impact Analyst in Culture and Creative Industries

Introduction

Arts and culture, whether of majority, minority, or indigenous communities, are the **heart and soul of society**. Every community needs its distinct culture to shape creative voices and collective identity. While technologies and beliefs evolve, one constant remains: the persistent undervaluation of Culture and Creative Industries (CCI) as a force for progress.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** exposed this contradiction vividly. While CCIs were dismissed as “non-essential,” people around the globe relied heavily on arts, media, and cultural expressions to endure lockdowns. At the same time, the crisis highlighted structural vulnerabilities: digital divides, fragile infrastructure, and limited policy recognition of CCIs, especially across the Global South.

As MONDIACULT 2025 approaches, there is an urgent need to critically assess the **role of CCIs in sustainability, digital transformation, and cultural rights**, building on the **UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions**.



What is the Issue?

The central issue is that **CCIs are simultaneously essential yet undervalued**. They provide identity, social cohesion, and economic opportunity, but remain marginalized in policy, funding, and governance.

Several dimensions illustrate this paradox:

- **Policy Gaps:** Many governments do not view CCIs as contributors to GDP or public welfare, resulting in limited funding and weak integration into national development plans.
- **Digital Divide:** While Europe and North America advanced rapidly into digital CCIs during COVID-19, artists in Asia, Africa, and Latin America struggled due to internet poverty, language barriers, and lack of digital literacy.
- **Sustainability Neglect:** Although cultural events can raise awareness of climate change, CCIs themselves face sustainability challenges (carbon footprints, resource-intensive festivals).
- **Mobility Inequalities:** Visa restrictions and geopolitical tensions restrict Global South artists' participation on international stages.
- **Censorship and Rights:** Artists worldwide face suppression, restricting freedom of expression — one of the four pillars of the 2005 Convention.

In essence, while CCIs drive creativity, education, and sustainable futures, they are still structurally treated as “luxuries” rather than necessities.

Why is it Relevant?

1 Cultural Rights are Human Rights

The 2005 Convention explicitly links cultural diversity to human rights and fundamental freedoms. Undervaluing CCIs undermines cultural rights globally.

2 Economic Potential

CCIs contribute over **3% of global GDP** and employ nearly **30 million people** worldwide (UNESCO, 2021). In countries like South Korea, the creative economy is central to national strategy, illustrating untapped potential elsewhere.

3 Social Cohesion and Identity

Arts and culture shape collective memory, resilience, and solidarity. In fragile contexts, cultural expression sustains communities.

4 Climate and Sustainability

CCIs are essential in raising awareness of climate change. For example, the **Karachi Biennale 2022** used the theme *"Food, Water, Shelter"* to connect environmental issues with local cultural narratives. Globally, festivals like **Glastonbury (UK)** and **Boom Festival (Portugal)** have shifted to renewable energy, demonstrating how CCIs can model green transitions.

5 Digital Transformation

Digital media and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are reshaping creation, distribution, and consumption. Yet, without equitable access, digitization risks reinforcing inequalities.

Thus, CCIs are **not optional**; they are vital to achieving sustainable development, social inclusion, and cultural resilience.

What are the Challenges?

1 Structural Marginalization of CCIs

- Governments often treat CCIs as non-essential, resulting in budget cuts and weak institutional support.
- Example: During COVID-19, artists in Pakistan and India reported losing **80–90% of income** with minimal state support.

2 The Digital Divide

- Rural artists across Asia and Africa face connectivity barriers. Internet penetration remains below 40% in some countries.
- Language is also a barrier: much international funding is advertised in English, inaccessible to non-English-speaking artists.

3 Bureaucratic and Institutional Mindsets

- Many policy-makers still perceive CCIs as entertainment, not education or civic engagement.
- This mindset blocks integration of CCIs into curricula or development frameworks.

4 Cultural Sustainability and Climate Change

- Cultural events contribute to carbon emissions, yet lack strategies for green transitions.
- Climate-driven disasters also threaten heritage. For example, the **2022 Pakistan floods** damaged archives, museums, and craft networks in three provinces, while this year's flood damages are still being accounted for.

5 Inequality in Cultural Mobility

- Artists from the Global South face visa restrictions, high travel costs, and lack of recognition, excluding them from global cultural markets.

6 Digitization and Artistic Agency

- Artists increasingly question: does digital presence improve outreach and income, or does it reinforce dependency on platforms that exploit data and content?
- AI adds new dilemmas around authorship, ownership, and cultural appropriation.

Case Studies & Lessons for Policy Integration

- **South Korea's Hallyu (K-Wave)** demonstrates how sustained investment in CCI can yield both cultural soft power and economic growth.
- **Nigeria's Nollywood** shows the potential of grassroots creativity in the absence of strong state support—yet also highlights the precarity of informal CCI ecosystems.
- **UNESCO's ResiliArt movement** during COVID-19 revealed how global dialogue can support artists' agency, but also underscored the **lack of infrastructure for local implementation** in the Global South.

These examples point to the need for **adaptive policies**: flexible enough to respect local contexts, yet aligned with global frameworks like the **2005 Convention**.

Possible Solutions / Open Questions

1 Policy Integration Across Frameworks

- Strengthen synergies between the **2005 Convention, Paris Agreement**, and **UNESCO's 2021 Recommendation on AI Ethics**.
- Example: The **European Green Deal** integrates culture into climate goals, offering a replicable model.

2 Recognizing CCIs as Essential

- Elevate CCIs in national budgets, disaster responses, and development plans.
- Adopt frameworks where CCIs are treated on par with health and education in crisis contexts.

3 Building Climate-Resilient Cultural Infrastructure

- Digitize collections, climate-proof venues, and create emergency safeguarding protocols.
- Example: **Fiji's Culture and Environment Nexus Policy** integrates heritage protection into environmental planning.

4 Bridging the Digital Divide

- Expand **capacity-building for rural and marginalized artists** in digital literacy.
- Design inclusive outreach that does not rely solely on social media.
- Example: UNESCO's **Korean-Fund-In-Trust project in Pakistan (2018–2019)** mapped creative entrepreneurs in digital media and built capacity for grassroots practitioners.

5 Strengthening Cultural Mobility and Exchange

- Expand **artist mobility schemes** (e.g., ASEF Mobility, Creative Europe) with simplified visa regimes for Global South artists.

6 Setting Short- and Long-Term Goals for MONDIACULT 2025

- **Short-Term Goals:** Strengthen cultural and creative infrastructure by integrating **digital technologies at grassroots levels**, supported by governments, NGOs, and public–private partnerships.
- **Long-Term Goals:** Translate **successful case studies** (e.g., Karachi Biennale's climate-focused curation, India's renewable-energy museums) into **policy frameworks**, embedding lessons into governance structures.

7 Open Questions for Policy Makers

- **AI and Authorship:** Should AI-generated works qualify for copyright? How to protect cultural IP in digital spaces?

- **Indigenous Knowledge:** How can digital tools safeguard traditional knowledge without exploitation?
- **Climate-Driven Displacement:** How can displaced communities preserve cultural identity when separated from their lands?

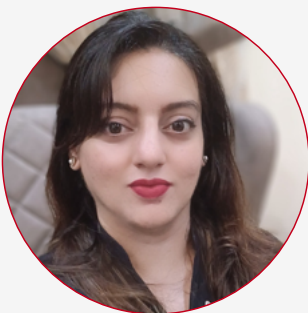
Conclusion

Culture and Creative Industries stand at a crossroads. On one side lies marginalization: limited funding, digital exclusion, and fragile sustainability. On the other side lies transformation: CCIs as central actors in sustainability, social cohesion, and digital futures.

As MONDIACULT 2025 convenes, it must propose **practical short- and long-term strategies**. Strengthening grassroots digital infrastructure, embedding CCIs in sustainability frameworks, and translating case studies into policy can turn vulnerability into resilience.

Arts and culture are not luxuries. They are lifelines that connect communities, safeguard identities, and reimagine futures. If integrated effectively, CCIs can be the driving force of sustainable development, ensuring that humanity's creative voices continue to thrive in an era of uncertainty.

AUTHOR



Sumaira Malik is a Senior Impact Analyst in Culture and Creative Industries and a UNESCO 2005 Convention Asia-Pacific Expert. She led Pakistan's first Impact Analysis in Culture and Creative Industries and authored the *Artists' Mobility Guide for the Asia-Pacific Region* with the Asia-Europe Foundation. Her research, including contributions to MONDIACULT 2025, focuses on digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and cultural policy.

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Our contributors are leading academics, researchers, experts, practitioners, and policy makers. They are recognised by the industry we belong to as influencers. For our publication, they are generously providing us with high-quality content, commentary, the best industry practices, and personal stories. Their contributions aim to help ENCATC to achieve its mission of helping the cultural sector become stronger and more sustainable. **This publication is made possible thanks to the financial support of the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.**

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Editor: GiannaLia Cogliandro Beyens

AUTHORS: Jorge Cerveira Pinto, Sumaira Malik, Oana Nasui, Laura Päiviö-Häkämies.

Coordinator: Francesca Greppi

Creative Director: Nerina Finetto

Layout Design & Production: Davide Faggiano

CONTACT: T +32 (0)2 201 29 12 WEBSITE: www.encatc.org

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CONTACT

T +32 (0)2 201 29 12

info@encatc.org

www.encatc.org

ADDRESS

Avenue Maurice 1

1050 Brussels,

Belgium



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