

EXPLORING THE NORTHERN DIMENSION



Northern
Dimension

NDI Policy Brief

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Culture must be recognized as a driver of sustainable development

This Policy Brief highlights the **potential of culture to create stability and to support sustainability**. It argues that culture directly affects our attitudes towards change, our wellbeing and our ability to feel empathy, which are the source of stability. Cultural activities support our experience of meaningful life and the sense of inclusion. The accelerating climate change with all its side effects leads to increasing instability in societies. Sometimes its connection to individual crises can be difficult to see, but like the complex entirety of sustainable development, the sources of instability are also multi-layered and systemic. Societal unrest can be triggered by energy shortages, financial crises, human rights disputes, political conflicts etc. **Maintaining stability by means of culture is vital to successfully cope with both long-term changes and rapidly emerging challenges.**

Culture and creative sector is **struggling** at the moment, as it is one of the sectors that has suffered the most from the COVID-19 crisis. Innovative solutions such as moving services and cultural products online have partially helped the sector, but **financial support is still needed** to cover their development costs. When thinking beyond the crisis, we need a **new policy which recognizes the importance of culture in the building of the sustainable society of the future**. This implies viewing culture as a resource for other spheres of economy and society, and supporting the **generation of new employment opportunities for arts and culture professionals**. Such reconceptualization of culture not only as an object to be protected and supported, but also as active contributor to sustainable development has eventually a positive impact on national budgets.

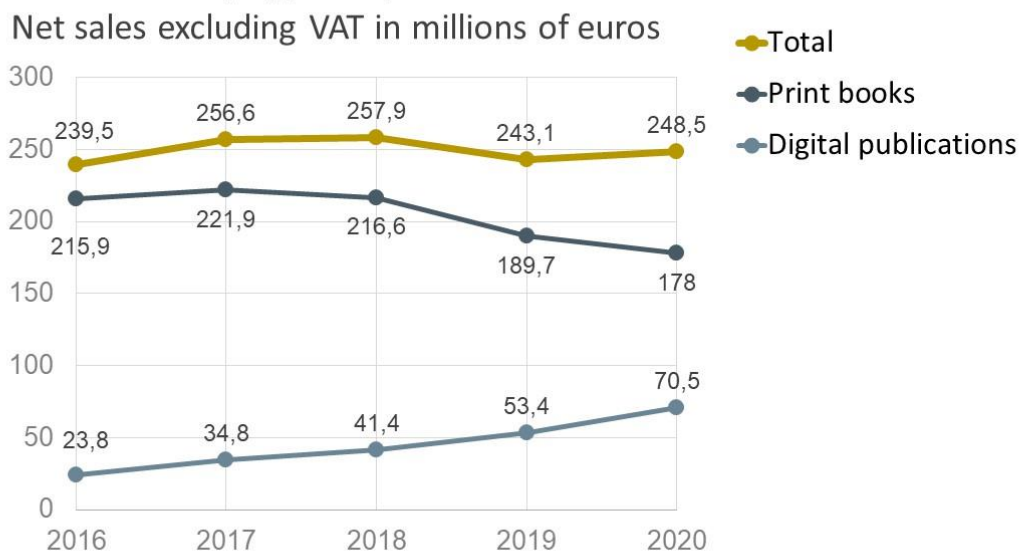
- **Recommendation 1:** Continue to guarantee financial support for the creative sector to develop and introduce new kinds of business models based on digital platforms.
- **Recommendation 2:** To deepen knowledge-based political dialogue to integrate sustainability discourse and cultural policies, and thereby strengthen the position of culture in budgetary allocations.
- **Recommendation 3:** Promote the employment of artists in a context of sustainable development by encouraging researchers, policymakers, funders and stakeholders to engage in pilot and demonstration projects that can lead eventually to a successful scaling.

Slow recovery of the creative sector

The creative sector has been badly damaged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Artists and cultural professionals, who often are freelancers without social and economic security, have directly suffered from lockdowns and physical distancing measures. The creative sector has been one of the most affected areas of economy in Europe along with the tourism and aviation services. Many countries have reacted to this abrupt and severe financial crisis: latest figures show that 14 countries out of EU26 have included culture in their National Recovery and Resilience plans. Support that has been mobilized for culture through this way is estimated to be 12 billion euros.

Part of the creative sector is also changing rapidly: some media companies have increased their sales during the pandemic, as the crisis has created increasing demand for digital services such as streaming of events, and accelerated the consumption of certain art genres such as audio books. Figures from the Finnish Publishers Association show how the sales of digital publications have grown exponentially.

Total sales by type of publication 2016-2020



Source: Finnish Publishers Association

Picture 1: Total sales by type of publication. Annual statistics by the Finnish Publishers Association.

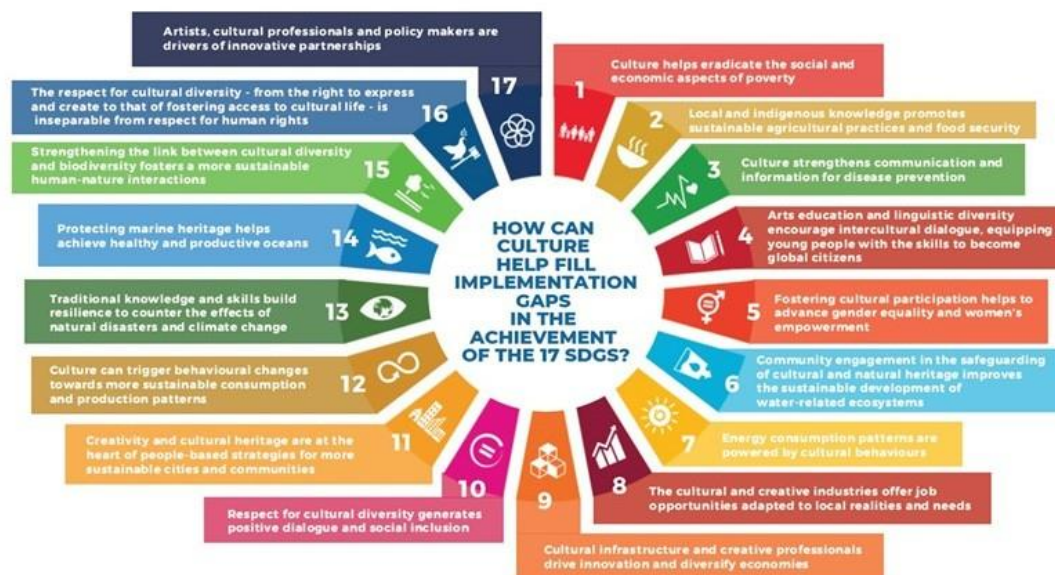
The EU recovery plan includes a declaration that 2020 will be Europe's digital decade. Actors in different art sectors are looking forward to major investments from the NextGenerationEU instrument of the Plan to help them to go online, but in the meanwhile artists are wondering how to be innovative in a middle of ongoing crisis.

In Finland, the Ministry of Education and Culture made an online survey on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the activities of cultural organizations and individuals. 64% of the respondents said that they had developed new types of activities and 44% had introduced new digital services targeted to the public. Interestingly, the survey also revealed that the work had not yet been economically profitable. Therefore, it is clear that we need to continue nation-level financial and technical support for artists to create new business models and applications.

Culture should be a stronger part of the sustainability discourse

Over the past decade, Finland has sought not only alternative funding mechanisms for culture, but also a new political discourse. Like in many other EU countries, the Finnish government is struggling with the sustainability of public finances, which implies rethinking the position of culture among other sectors. The biggest shift, which started between 2010 and 2014, is based on the findings that culture can promote health and wellbeing. Particular attention has also been paid to the effects of culture on the vitality of regions and the creativity of other businesses. However, these ideas have not been significantly reflected in the national budget.

Another avenue for raising the prestige of the cultural sector in political discourse and thereby strengthen its position in budgetary allocations is to integrate it in the sustainability discourse and policies. Although culture as such has not been at the heart of the *Agenda 2030* sustainable development program, it is vital for the achievement of almost every sustainability goal. UNESCO has declared that it will ensure that the role of culture is recognized through a majority of the Sustainable Development Goals and it has also published a few guidelines like the *Culture in the sustainable development goals: a guide for local action (2018)*.



Picture 2: Culture - a transformative force for sustainable development (VNRs flyer).

The discourse can be expected to intensify at 2022 UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development in Mexico. At the same time an in-depth evaluation of the different effects that culture has on sustainable development is needed at national level. This would on the one hand contribute to recognizing culture as an integral part of sustainability agendas, and on the other, to promoting this idea in cultural policies.

The new forms of employment need to be promoted

We should promote the involvement of the arts in solving the most wicked problems together with science, economics and public administration

Committee for the Future (Finnish Parliament) 13.10.2021

The systemic nature and the importance of Agenda 2030 is easily lost unless we build a connection between sustainable thinking and our daily lives. This is an opportunity for the experts and workers of the creative sector. Recognition of the transformative power of culture - direct and indirect - can create both growth and positive employment effects.

In recent years the Arts Promotion Centre Finland has successfully tested ways for the artists to find employment in completely new sectors. The Centre has conducted experiments in the context of environmental protection, space research, maritime development etc. At these interfaces, the artist has represented the *professional of creativity* and offered a new mindset to boost business competitiveness and promote the culture of innovation.

In collaboration with the Arts Promotion Centre, the Finnish parliament's Committee for the Future has also carried out tests on how artists can help members of the parliament to predict and solve future problems. Based on these experiments the Committee gave a proposal to the Finnish Government: "*we should promote the involvement of the arts in solving the most wicked problems together with science, economics and public administration*".

In order to support this experimental approach, we should encourage researchers, policymakers, funders and stakeholders to engage in pilot and demonstration projects that can lead eventually to a successful scaling.

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