

The commons as ecosystems for culture

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Commons as ecosystems for culture

This work is the outcome of a process of action research, coordinated by Maria Francesca De Tullio and facilitated by Angela María Osorio Mendez. The work has been fulfilled by three research groups, who authored the three essays of this collection

1. Introduction - Maria Francesca De Tullio

All around Europe, Commons have been crucial in the political debate [for a definition, see Annex 1.1]. Not only do they allow the mutualisation of spaces and means of production, but also they are places where new public policies are conceived, starting from the practices of self-management and self-government.

This finding can be observed under a new light in the wake of Covid-19. The urgency to provide an immediate and concrete response to the crisis has given rise to a sudden increase of mutual aid initiatives. Communities have proved to be resilient, able to gather together and give answers to basic needs. Shared resources have provided first aid to many. This is why commons are also regarded as a source of inspiration in the immediate aftermath of the crisis.

The central question of this research is how the EU can create the preconditions for commons to be supported and promoted as a way to create sustainable ecosystems for cultural and creative work.

Sustainability is understood, here, under the framework of Pascal Gielen's (2018) biotope. This one represents an ideal-typical abstraction of what is needed to build a long-term artistic career. The model derives from a series of interviews with different kinds of creative workers, highlighting that cultural work is only sustainable when there is a balance between intimate spaces of research and production, peer-to-peer learning, the market and the civil dimension. Moreover, evidence showed that, while at some point in time all these domains used to enjoy some form of collective or institutional protection, now the same is almost only true for the market. Especially in the aftermath of the financial and debt crisis, European governments have approved austerity policies, which harshly affected the culture and the arts. Furthermore, socio-economic changes have weakened the traditional institutions that used to foster each domain of the biotope.

In that scenario, commons are rebalancing the biotope by filling the voids of institutional protection. For example, they usually provide artists with shared means of production, as well as opportunities of relationships with peers and the community in general. At the same time, they are democratic laboratories, through which artists and activists experiment with new policies for the management of collective resources, and propose them to the public decision-makers in processes of policy co-creation.

Thus, it is important to investigate if and how the EU can finance and support these experiences in order to foster sustainable artistic careers. This means above all to implement the recommendations of the OMC on participation in the governance of cultural heritage¹, but also to safeguard the very existence of public heritage, as a way to keep urban spaces open to open social use and participation. entails the constitution of favorable funding schemes for individuals and

¹ Report of the OMC (Open Method of Coordination) working group of Member States' experts, available at <https://op.europa.eu/it/publication-detail/-/publication/b8837a15-437c-11e8-a9f4-01aa75ed71a1>.

organisations, but also a proper infrastructure for commons and democracy provided in EU cultural policies.

This research holds the standpoint of both research and practice. This document stems from l'Asilo, an experience that was born from an artists' occupation and defines itself as a commons - and recognised as such by the city government - because of its direct management of a public building by assemblies of artists, activists and citizens which are open to everyone and decide by consensus [see Annex 1.2]. For the same reasons, l'Asilo was also formally recognised as a commons by city institutions, through an innovative legal tool. L'asilo whole life has been based upon activists' direct and voluntary work, as well as artists' civic engagement and collectivisation of means of production. Moreover, l'Asilo elaborated a new legal tool, namely the "urban civic and collective use", through which the city government could formally recognise the community's self-regulation, without any contract entrusting the building to an individual natural or moral person² [--> see Annex 1.2].

By now, l'Asilo is a variegated reality. Here, it is considered as an interdependent center of cultural production, collectivising spaces and equipment. As such, it welcomes artists and creatives - individuals and collectives - regardless of their identity and especially when they are in need of time and space for experimentation. In the era of permanent economic crisis, austerity and budget cuts to culture, these actors are growingly excluded by the market and external to patronage circles. In the first 4 years, L'Asilo hosted about 2000 people, 5800 open activities for about 200 thousand viewers. Notwithstanding that, self-organisation is not considered as a complete solution in itself, but a tool to claim a social intervention from institutions, as well as a way to imagine new forms of economic democracy that can inspire and accompany this intervention, starting from grassroots practices.

Hence the text synthesises a reasoning that connects the growth and evolution of a public and community-run public space with a EU policy centered around forms of support to individual income and diffused funding for culture.

The recommendations laid down in these documents are the outcome of a theoretical study and analysis of political documents, but also a field work of participant observation fulfilled with the post-Covid-19 workers' movements. In this context, l'Asilo participates in the effort for a broad and unitary mobilisation, by both bringing its contribution and as an open space hosting some meetings. Therefore this work owes a lot to organisations such as Attrici e Attori Uniti, E come Eresia, Intermittenti Spettacolari, Lavoratrici e Lavoratori dello Spettacolo Campania, Zona Rossa.

Moreover ideas and inputs born from the research were discussed in focused meetings with l'Asilo's community, as well as working tables hosted by l'Asilo and open to the broader community of activists, inhabitants of the city and artists. Finally, the research group organised public meetings with international academics

² A focus on the studies from and around l'Asilo is available at: <http://www.exasilofilangieri.it/approfondimenti-e-reportage/>.

and cultural practitioners. To that regard credits have to be given to our guest experts who shared their knowledge in this community process: Luisella Carnelli, Roberto Casarotto, Giuliana Ciancio, Cristina Da Milano, Giorgio De Finis, Pascal Gielen, Bertram Niessen, Hanka Otte, Christian Raimo.

Such an opening to the broader context of the city and cultural operators was vital in the process. This is why a special thanks is due to Angela Maria Osorio Méndez who has facilitated this complex process of open learning, and Luna Caricola who has enabled participation through her communication and dissemination efforts.

2. Commons and Cultural/Creative work: rebalancing the biotope

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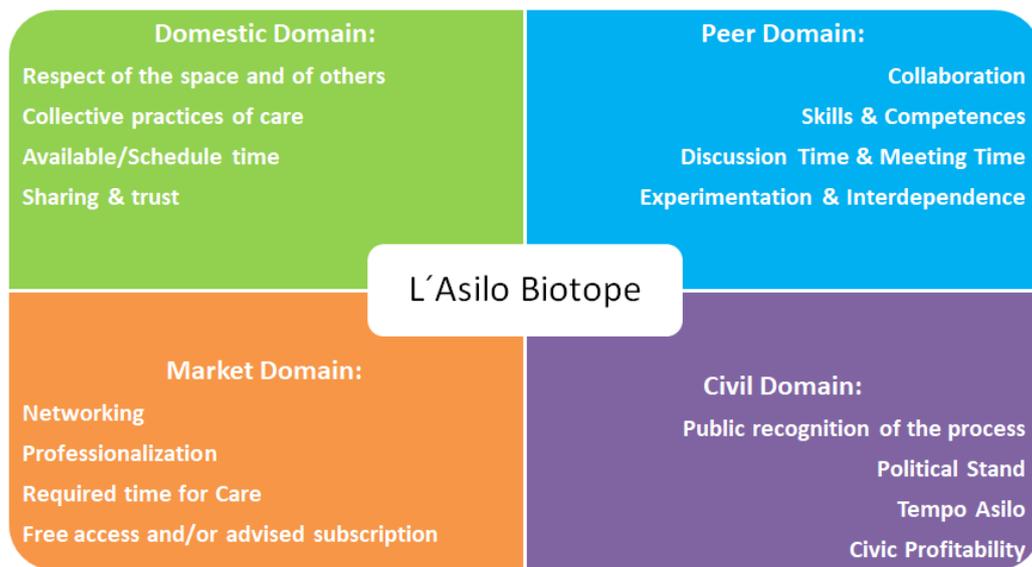
Angela Dionisia Severino

The first step of the research is meant to deepen the beneficial role of commons in the creative biotope. Against this background, public support becomes a necessary intervention giving institutional enforcement to the commons as a way to rebalance the biotope against the absolute dominance of the market sphere. In that sense there is so much that the EU could do by designing funding programs in a way which is more suitable to such organisations.

2.1. The commons' biotope: the case of l'Asilo

L'Asilo is an example of an open and interdependent cultural space self-managed by an open community for social aims. In that sense it could be regarded as a creative office that does not compete with the programme of the city system made of small theaters and private artistic centers, perpetually in difficulty. Provided that, in turn, integrates the production cycle, where the intermediate rehearsal spaces necessary to complete the realization of a work from its initial idea to the finished product are missing. Furthermore, the savings that the workers of the arts and culture get from the free use of spaces and means of production, the promotional outreach that l'Asilo brand offers as a co-producer, in terms of credibility obtained over the years, and the work on communication that its community of reference makes available in mutual and solidarity terms, generates an indirect income deriving from a considerable reduction of the basic production costs.

However, the account for the cost of labor remains mainly missing. Firstly, for the productive subjects hosted by l'Asilo, which even if they should provide for their own wages, it is also true that due to the nature of their particular economic fragility, they would still need direct financial support. Secondly, for the also missing economic sustainability of all those who donate their time and skills to the care of the space, those who facilitate the organization, programming and the general self-governance process which is always open to everyone who wants to participate.



Undertaking the exercise of depicting the Creative Biotope of l'Asilo enabled a process of identification and evaluation of practices that are implemented at l'Asilo and by the people who work and live the space. It also allows us to understand how in our current context a commons (like l'Asilo) can foster artistic careers in a sustainable manner. The impact of l'Asilo in the different domains of the Biotope is unbalanced, yet this doesn't have to be regarded as a failure or a weakness of its organization. In fact, according to Gielen (2018), traditionally, there are different institutions that support the development of the artist in each domain. The results of our exercise demonstrated that l'Asilo has a greater impact in the Peer Domain, followed by the Domestic Domains. This is because it is a space of creation which provides artists with the conditions and means of production necessary to develop their work, but it does so under governance rules and community practices that overturn neoliberal logics of competition and hyper efficiency. L'Asilo in turn fosters spaces and moments of sharing and learning that spark synergies and interdependence either in artistic creation or socio-political initiatives. We could note that l'Asilo can not provide fully for the classic Domestic Domain as it is not focused on individuals and proprietary logics, as a common the place belongs to everyone and this makes it hard to fully account for intimacy and "own time".

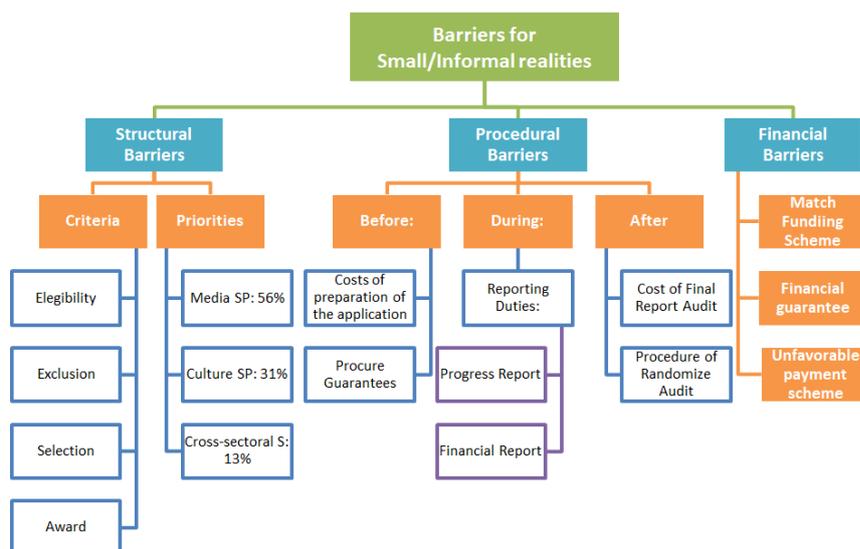
Regarding the more outward looking domains, l'Asilo as "a process" is very dynamic in the Civil Domain. Moreover l'Asilo enjoys international recognition as an interdependent production center for the arts and culture, with an increasing professionalization and expendable curriculum, the result of eight years of collective work, that today has the opportunity to become a formal co-producer of individual works, a relevant bank for many professional circuits. Moreover, l'Asilo has been able to advocate for the recognition of the "civic profitability" generated by the activities carried out in the space and by the community. In this regard, civic profitability consists in the positive effects (positive externalities) that the activities developed at l'Asilo offer for the city and the society at large; these advantages are not part of a dense artistic city program, but an inherent component of its nature of

commons.

Finally the market domain is the hardest domain to foster for a commons. By the mutualization of means of production and free use of the space, l'Asilo breaks down some market logic and helps reduce significantly the cost of production for the artists. But it is not in the capacity to offer an income, grant or scholarship to the artist, even though Urban Commons do generate an "indirect income"³. However, there is a way to foster the Market Domain at large and it is through means of creating an ecosystem of institutions and dispositive that can facilitate the access to funding and to the market. The aim is not to comply with the practices of this domain as we know it, but to improve it by changing neoliberal logics that hinder the development of a "more inclusive and less competitive" market domain. Some actions to undertake could be: to change the way funding schemes for the arts and culture work within European projects, as well as the eligibility criteria that block the participation of small and informal realities and commons initiatives, among others.

2.2. Barriers to participation in European Projects for small/informal realities

There are many barriers the small/informal realities can face when trying to apply to European Funding mainly because these grants are designed to target medium to large scale organisations. Hence when small organizations decide to apply many barriers can discourage their participation. We recognize three main groups of barriers are: Structural Barriers, Procedural Barriers and Financial Barriers. Informal realities as long as they are not constituted as a legal person, they cannot participate in the funding.



³ This indirect income for the cultural work is better grasped by accounting for: the reduction of costs of production that artists benefit from, through their right to use collectively and for free an urban commons space and means of production that are mutualized inside; the recognition of immaterial value, such as being part of the community, pooling of multidisciplinary skills and knowledge, and the opportunity to establish relationships with peers.

2.3. Recommendations to enable participation of Small Informal Realities

1. Improve and upgrade the role and competences of the Creative Europe Desks to empower practices of commoning in cultural project proposals. Every participating Country has a Creative Europe Desk that provides information, guidance and assistance related to the programme (how to access funding opportunities) and helps cooperating with organisations in other countries by facilitating Networking support.

2. Diversify funding delivery mechanisms⁴ at the heart of the CE Programme and in particular in the Culture sub-programme. This is to favor a plethora of actors that are not traditionally considered by funding schemes and at the same time to address the issue of sustainability which is not always attained by participant organizations. Conversely, previous and current practices have fostered a “business model” for organizations based on refining their expertise of applying to grants and not on the structural change that would enable sustainability.

- Re-granting/Sub-granting by a primary grant recipient (financial support to third parties): financing mechanism whereby funding is provided to an organization of reference which, in turn, facilitates funding (sub-grants) for a number of smaller or grassroots organizations. This mechanism could be particularly useful to support grassroots and community-based organizations (small/informal) - without forcing them to contract any loan or changing their nature - to create networks and support their participation in political dialogue and in the innovation of both policies and practices.
- Follow-up grant: An additional grant would be awarded to an existing beneficiary in order to continue a successful action. This implies a reconsideration of the evaluation criteria, focusing on social impact, civic profitability and the dissemination of best practices instead of the evaluation of the financial reports. This proposition, however, should still adhere to the principles of transparency and non-discrimination.
- Ring-fencing: This practice focuses on setting aside all or part of a budget for a particular type of beneficiary or action. Thus supporting commons initiatives can be passed by funding particular activities or actors. In this scenario, the objective to support specifically would be the regeneration of the social tissue through cultural initiatives of small/informal realities.

3. Besides of more adequate and favorable funding schemes that would better serve small organizations, it is important to start a reflection about the inclusion of informal realities in order to open the Creative Europe programme and its platform to a variety of new voices coming from grassroots movements that are more directly in contact with the territory and therefore through the Arts and Culture can have a more effective and honest impact in the regeneration of the social tissue. To do so, it is necessary to

⁴ The funding schemes are identified in the Report: “EU Funding Delivery Mechanisms, New Trends in Europe Aid Funding, and what they mean for Civil Society Organizations”, commissioned by CONCORD Europe (European Confederation of Relief and Development NGOs): https://concordeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/CONCORD_publication_EUfunding_DeliveryMechanisms.pdf

reevaluate the different priorities and criteria established in the CE programme, which have become structural barriers for the further democratization of the programme. As a case in point, within the “Eligibility Criteria”, it is required to demonstrate the existence of the applicant as a legal personality (with the same name and legal status and for at least 2 years), in order to be considered an eligible applicant, precluding both the informal realities and the formally recognised commons that have chosen not to establish themselves formally as a political choice as well as an alternative practice of creation-production-exchange

3. Bringing to the surface the commoners' work: vindications about income

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The above recommendations can shape a financial support for the commons. Though, considering the experience of l'Asilo, one of the unsolved problems of the commons is the salary related to the intrinsically activist tasks: organization and care of the space, planning and the whole self-governance process which is always open to the people who wish to participate.

The work connected to the care and self-management of l'Asilo as a commons is totally volunteer, since there is an effort to avoid relationships of power and competitiveness related to the dynamics of employment. Given that, the economic sustainability of a commons opens a question that contains a possible contradiction. On the one hand, there is the voluntary dimension of activism, as a practice of solidarity and commitment to the community. On the other hand, there is the need to make this work free from the chains of economic livelihood; otherwise, commoning risks becoming a privilege for those who already have the means to fulfil their basic needs. Such an unrecognized amount of work, in an era characterized by very high unemployment and dismantling of public services, produces such an impressive civic profitability and such social impact on city life.

This issue cannot be solved through traditional financing programs for private structures. Indeed, a commons like l'Asilo is self-managed by open and potentially unlimited communities gathered in assemblies that have the right to self-manage the space, such as "Institution of the Common" (Dardot & Laval 2014). These communities do not underwrite any contract with public institutions that own the properties. Rather, their "eco-system-assembly" is formally recognised as a management body of the public-common space.

The presence of a paid organization, with a standard management team, would reduce a wide and diffuse participation. Instead, it would empower in the direct management of the commons certain subjects rather than others. This mechanism runs the serious risk of generating iniquity: the horizontal-management approach is a fundamental element for an active and effective aggregation.

For these reasons it is necessary to introduce an alternative type of support to the income, that cannot be considered as a standard salary for the "management" team. In short, there is a need for individual economic support for all those people not receiving a salary even if they actively and fully contribute to the development of the cultural and social life of cities.

3.1. Lots of incomes under the sky ?

While the pandemic crisis has relaunched the universal income discussion,

these claims seem to be aggregated in a precarious way. Income is aggregating different demands under the same "empty signifier" (Laclau 2005).

In this scenario, art workers have played a special role. Not only do they represent one of the sectors most affected by current lockdown restrictions, but also their own professionalism risks to be affected in the long term in a permanent way. That is why they have been one of the central drivers of the protests. As already happened with the French intermittent struggles of the 1990s, these workers from "peculiar and particular category" became a category capable of interpreting wider needs, that fit to other types of workers similarly affected by the radical change of world of labor (Corsani & Lazzarato 2008).

Our study shows that the claims of cultural workers oscillate between two types of interventions related to income. On the one hand there are those who support an "intermittent income" as a social safety net dedicated to art workers; on the other hand there are those who claim a universal and unconditional income for all (UBI - universal basic income) (Fumagalli). In both cases there is talk of a different way of financing culture, which does not support the structures but the individual artist.

The real problem is that the EU cannot provide a binding harmonisation of the internal rules, and its competence is rather to support and coordinate the states' policies [see Annex 2.3]. Each of these income's model is provided by national states. We believe that this is unfair. Following this strategy will create a dangerous and unacceptable unequal treatment of EU citizens, creating anger, resentment and nationalism, which is the real poisoned fruit of competitive policies that have never been dormant, indeed are intensified in the Eurozone.

This disparity would have devastating effects not only in the immediate future, on the citizens in the flesh, but affecting directly the culture it will sacrifice the vision of a common European culture, because it would strike at the heart its plurality, favoring even more the culture produced in the wealthiest countries. We risk also to miss the opportunity to think of a stable and lasting, sustainable and sensible form of income, thus promoting a mere stimulus to support demand, perfectly fitting to neoliberal rationality.

The introduction of a conditional basic income must be thought of as a means of redistributing wealth, both from the point of view of citizens and from that of states. Only in this way can it be adjusted to the vital survival income for all. But that is still not enough: we want bread, roses and even stages where dream!

3.2. A new policy proposal: an income of creativity and care

Income is already a living proposal in EU policies. The European Social Statute of the Artist of the European Parliament of 7 June 2007⁵, contains a section dedicated to the protection of the artist. In light of that, income support becomes a fundamental proposal to support and protect not only the path of commons and participation but also to adapt the entire cultural system to those minimum standards of civility that the European Union should impose member countries by default.

⁵ European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2007 on the social status of artists (2006/2249(INI)).

For those who do not fall within these parameters and for all those who finish the indemnity period, it is necessary to introduce a basic income which must not be lower than the vital income, not conditioned by unemployment, universal for all the people under a middle-high wage, in this sense differently from Van Parijs' proposal (2017)

Taking in consideration the atypical nature of an artist's working methods, the commission should recommend permanent measures regarding income to the Member States, taking into account the specific cultural sector.

3.3. A funding scheme for art beyond market value

A second proposal is to establish a special cultural fund to be established at both EU and city level, which are the first institutional level to benefit directly from cultural enjoyment.

Cultural work needs, as any kind of work, good social safety nets. But we aim to break the blackmail that force to accept de-professionalized jobs in order to not lose income subsidies. Our proposal tries to subvert the role of the employer: neither state nor market but workers themselves. It's a new interpretation of social self-valorisation (Negri & Hardt 2009).

In that direction, the EU could support such an hypothesis by creating a beneficiary profile for "Artist" and establishing coherent funding opportunities available to this population target⁶. This profile could be modeled based on the benefits that eventual immediate homologue profiles enjoy⁷. The profiles to be taken in consideration are:

- o Natural Persons Grants: both the EU framework program for research and innovation (Horizon 2020) and the common agricultural policy (CAP) recognise single natural persons to be grant receivers in the profile of Researcher and Farmer, respectively.

- o Young Artists as Young people profile: The EU budget already includes specific programmes to support young people to gain work experience or study abroad, as well as programmes targeting unemployment among young people. Creating a Young Artists programme would enable a dedicated fund to help the Young Artist navigate the market domain, and thus supporting their path of professionalization. In accordance to the Young people profile, this grant would be open to young people (age 13-31), youth organisations and other stakeholders working with young people. Thematic areas of interest could be signaled for priority support if it is in line with the aims of the

Therefore, a fundamental proposal would be a funding scheme for "artists", following the priorities of the EU work plan on culture. Such a funding program should create an ecosystem for sustainable creative work, by financing artists with

⁶ Funding opportunity for young people in the current EU programmes and schemes: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/how-eu-funding-works/who-eligible-funding/funding-opportunities-young-people_en and https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/how-eu-funding-works/who-eligible-funding/other-funding-opportunities-open-young-people_en

⁷ Current beneficiary profiles are detailed by the EC: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/how-eu-funding-works/who-eligible-funding_en

an important non-refundable component, necessary for the peculiarities of artistic experimentations and research. Moreover, it should favour the interaction among individual artists and emerging communities, allowing the acknowledgement of initiatives with the highest social impact on the territories, even when such organisations cannot demonstrate a long-lasting experience. This approach, oriented towards individuals, would also help bringing the EU closer to territories, following the success of the Erasmus+ program (which is different in nature, but very effective in building European identity, since it gives concrete opportunities to individual students).

In concrete terms, we propose a non-refundable funding scheme, articulated in at least two strands:

1) the first strand would be aimed to guarantee a medium-long term income (semi-annual or annual) as an interval from the period of employment recognized as such on the number of homogeneous working days in all EU countries. This is a new type of creativity and care income. An income that can be claimed either during unemployment, or as a paid suspension from paid work. During this period one should have the right to follow one's own desires for social and professional growth, borrowing and improving the sabbatical model foreseen for the academic world.

In a certain way, we can address it as an income of potential, which should guarantee first and foremost a study and training project. For this reason, we propose to start from the implementation of the European Social Statute of the Artist, approved by the European Parliament on 7 June 2007⁸.

It is much more than a training aid, however necessary, because it enables the possibility of producing artistic experimentation, crossroads between the arts, ideas and thought little explored because apparently without any exit from the point of view of the product to be placed on the market. Income means freedom, and to free art we need to free it from the anxiety of product performance; creative and care income could generate cultural operas otherwise unthinkable because unthinkable in the given market conditions.

This idea is in full line and coherent with what is already produced in the emerging urban commons, where spaces of possibilities are built for artistic creations without the anxiety of deadlines, project and output to be sold.

As can be seen from Pascal Gielen's research, in the artist's professional and creative path the study and relational efforts made in the domestic, peer and civil domains escape from the market domain. Also for this most artistic labor is too often underpaid.

2) The second strand would establish dedicated Grants for the conformation of Artistic Collectives, fashioned in the form of a ERC Starting Grant (from the Horizon 2020 programme) that is designed to support excellent Principal Investigators at an early career stage. A dedicated fund for the collectivization (creation of artistic collectives) could aim at providing an income to the members of the collective, in order to recognize the importance of the process of creation

⁸ See art. 25-29, "Lifelong training and retraining"

(artistic research and conception of one's work), as well as financing the acquisition and mutualisation of means of productions, that would set the bases for the economic sustainability of the collective, once the project is finalized. This would also mean that this grant scheme should foresee a contingent budget line dedicated to small organizations and/or informal realities that serve as a host institution.

In both cases, such an income can also be used to implement collective care. This is one of the most advanced hypotheses of the actual political debate. This strategy originates from the struggles of the feminist movements that in the 70s launched a global campaign for a wage for domestic work (Barbagallo & Federici 2012). Today, even more after the Covid crises, what we address such as care has grown into a wider sense (Dalisa 2020). Through the reinterpretations of ecofeminist and commoners movements, the creative and care income period can be oriented to finance collective interest's project, such as: the collective and mutualistic management of social spaces, emerging commons, natural resources, neighborhoods, rivers, lakes, mountains and many other places of heart that need a new kind of "widespread custody".

Accordingly, we could envision that both strands, highlighted above, should be paired with an additional fund that would be directed to financially support a "host institution" of the choice of the artists. Just as the ERC grants consider an allocation for a host institution as a recognition of the administrative work, this additional budget line would further recognize the civic profitability that small/informal realities generate in their territory. In this regard, small organizations and informal realities would be preferred, as a recognition of their grassroots work and to follow a redistributing logic that aims at tackling inequalities. This initiative would support not only the daily activities of these spaces, it would also empower them to take their mission to a broader scale and approaching them to the EU⁹.

This can be a great opportunity to rethink the social value of arts, and hybridize artistic skills with the civic and democratic dimension¹⁰. The income that really frees from the bad work is the one that allows you to create a good one.

⁹ An example of how to enable a connection between artists and a non conventional - host institution see the attached document "A research action sympathetic connection _artist residencies in Roccapiorena", see [Annex 2.2].

¹⁰ This aim is shared by many different good practices, inside and outside the "commoning" framework. For example, one is the one by "AFIELD international network of creative and civically minded communities" with its fellowship and a mentorship programme, which supports each year "artists and cultural entrepreneurs who instigate sustainable initiatives that benefit society": <http://www.council.art/fellowship/>. Another one good example is the Institute of Radical Imagination (Mollona 2020), an international think tank "of curators, activists, scholars and cultural producers with a shared interest in co-producing research, knowledge, artistic and political research-interventions, aimed at implementing post-capitalist forms of life": <https://instituteofradicalimagination.org/about/>.

4. A shift of mindset. A EU policy to infrastructure the commons

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Benedetta Parenti

All the recommendations proposed since there involve a structural rethinking of the prevailing paradigm of the European Union, whose political economy is basically based on a mix of neoliberal policy and fiscal austerity (Talani 2016) [see Annex 2.3]. The prolonged adoption of austerity measures in the last decades translated into a progressive decrease of public expenditure, affecting also the cultural sector. Alongside single member states' different situations, European cultural policy suffers an important problem of underfinancing. Meanwhile, with the emerging of “creative industries” model, culture has become part and parcel of the new market logic and has been mainly interpreted as an economic asset and critical factor for development strategies, especially in urban contexts. The economic impact of the cultural and creative sector seems to overtake its social relevance in terms of collective emancipation.

In this context, a structural change is needed in order to set cultural domain among the priorities of European institutions, and, as a consequence, to foster democracy in decision-making and establish an adequate level of economic resources for the sector. Starting from the awareness that culture and the arts have a key role in the development of democracy and social justice in Europe, the policy recommendations defined in this paragraph enhance the democratic potential of the commons. In structuring our set of proposals, we list a series of general purposes first, and then a specific set of issues.

4.1. General points:

(a) Consolidate the idea of culture and the arts as commons while also critical resources to the development of communities.

(b) Consolidate the idea of participation not as mere post hoc consultation but as institutionalised networks among public authorities and artists, stakeholders, and citizenship;

(c) Consolidate a holistic and horizontal view of culture. Thus, while culture is not an instrument of direct/indirect political consensus and legitimation, on the other hand it can foster collective growth and social emancipation, and inclusion of disenfranchised minorities.

(d) Following [c], artists and creatives are not ‘instruments’ to revitalize democracy as such, but workers in the fields of culture and the arts; on the other hand, they perform a key public function. The role of public institutions – from local to supranational level – is to improve the overall working conditions and thus the production and circulation of cultural products.

(e) Foster the connection between culture and the commons/commoning practices.

(f) Acknowledge the critical importance of material and immaterial infrastructures to the development of culture and the arts.

4.2. Participation and public-private network/institutional infrastructure

- Address how socio-economic inequalities, and other specific issues concerning the local context may affect the overall participation of workers, activists, and citizens in the fields of culture and the arts.

- Involve local communities and stakeholders in policy-making and policy initiatives, for instance through a structured framework of public-private partnership. More specifically, local public institutions should regularly gather needs, concerns, first-hand information by a broad range of subjects (artists, cultural operators and entrepreneurs, activists) and introduce more targeted policy and policy implementation.

- Promote the creation of an institutional infrastructure by recognising, into one comprehensive legal/institutional framework, those experiences that work in the culture/commons field as ‘informal institutions’. Consider building a comprehensive public-private network through which (a) public authorities can establish a window of dialogue with such ‘informal institutions’ and also open to single/groups of cultural operators, activists and other stakeholders, in turn favouring participation and co-decisions; (b) the different informal institutions linked to commons and other cultural/artistic forms of expression can share.

- Drawing on the case of L’Asilo, consider involving commons-based experience in the field of culture and the arts into the creation of shared legal, institutional and policy guidelines related to the management of commons and the legal recognition of commons as informal institutions.

- Acknowledge that – as the case of Naples testifies – cities are places of relevant spatial socio-economic and territorial inequalities. Addressing the inequalities within the city is of great importance to promote a broad participation. Thus it is important to start with peripheries and suburban areas in order to let culture and commons express their potential in such contexts.

- Consider that the Covid-19 crisis will involve a significant worsening of the general working and livelihood conditions. Especially workers in the arts and culture, gig and freelance workers will be negatively affected by the pandemic at least throughout 2020. In this background, it is important while urgent to take action and promote forms of basic income and income support.

- Target specific policy initiatives on marginalised groups and on groups in marginalised city areas.

- Keep all public policies and practices revolving around culture and commons accountable by stakeholders and citizens more broadly.

4.3. Funding and material infrastructure to set the bases for sustainability

- Improve the fight against (local) clientele-based distribution of funds by pushing local institutions to act in two ways: first, through promoting the method of the open calls to have access to funding; second, through addressing an alternative development of cultural agendas based on the structured involvement of as many as possible local cultural operators, artists, activists. This can create a less vertical and more bottom-up local cultural agenda, and on the other hand improve the transparency in how funds are distributed among local (and non-local) stakeholders, artists, cultural operators.

- Consider the importance of the material infrastructure for the development of culture and the arts, and to sustain the work of people in this sector. Work in liaison with institutions at local and institutional level to allocate a part of the municipal asset – e.g. disused buildings – to cultural workers, gig and freelance workers. Rent such spaces for free or through applying public rental controls. Such assets could be transformed into workshop, factories, atelier, or commons labs through which (i) workers can earn an indirect income i.e. by being relieved from renting costs (or paying a moderate rent); (ii) citizens/activists could find a house in which developing, along with public institutions, a network of participatory practices within the city space.

- Consider especially the channel of microfinance and interest-free loans. Importantly, such facilitated forms should address in particular the purchase of means of production that can become collective resources (material and immaterial). On the one hand, this would foster more horizontal/commoning practices and the learning processes related to these; on the other, such use of funding could also have a windfall effect and benefit as many people as possible.

4.4. Learning processes and the costs of participation

- The management of creative spaces and practices in a ‘commons perspective’ is not easy. It involves a learning process that, over time, allows the participant to shift their vision from a vertical perspective to a horizontal daily practice in which each and every one share a certain amount of responsibilities and involvement.

- Participation – as the experience of L’Asilo testifies – is a costly activity. It is important to acknowledge such costs and compensate it through a range of means: (i) by allocating public asset and heritage to groups of workers; (ii) by offering training and consultancy.

4.5. EU level practices

- Broadly speaking, EU needs to improve its overall democratic fabric. Acknowledge the importance to improve representative and accountable institutions—first and foremost the European parliament. The current legitimation crisis of the EU is partly related to ongoing austerity therapy (output dimension), and partly to the lack of political representation of different social groups and mass democratic channels (Input dimension).

- Consider the creation of a Europe-wide network of cultural practices in the perspective of commons and commoning. This would be also a key infrastructure to (i) promote, on structural basis, the encounter of such experiences across Europe and foster a permanent window of dialogue; (ii) promote the sharing of best practices related to culture and commons.

- Rethink the funding mechanism to culture and the arts, and creative spaces. Consider to shift from a strict competition-based accession to platforms of funding based on (i) smaller amounts of individual funds but granted to a bigger crowd of cultural operators across Europe; (ii) inter-free loans; (iii) micro-financing.

- Consider reducing the (bureaucratic) complexity of application of EU project and project management, which can affect especially more marginal groups, less endowed with structures capable to bear the competitive pressures and bureaucratic activities.

- Many commons and creative spaces that work in a commons-perspective often lack a proper legal recognition (like foundations or associations)—also given the oppositional/conflict-based of such experiences. Thus consider to ‘open up’ more channels to let also to informal/grassroots experiences access EU projects.

Annexes

1. Glossary:

1.1. Commons (Ana Sofía Acosta Alvarado)

In her 1990's seminal work (*Governing the Commons*), Elinor Ostrom presents a thorough study of the governance of natural resources as common goods. For Ostrom, commons, studied as CPR (Common Pool Resources), referred to "a natural or man-made resource system that is sufficiently large as to make it costly (but not impossible) to exclude potential beneficiaries from obtaining benefits from its use". Her work criticized the traditional perspective of policy analysis of management of large resources and provided evidence that CPR problems can be solved by a third way, staying at the margin of state and or market solutions. Nonetheless, this "third way" does not imply a strict theoretical prescription of actions on how to proceed; on the contrary, it represents a diversity of imaginable answers.

Ostrom aimed at demonstrating how certain institutions may influence behaviors and outcomes of users and their interactions when dealing with common-pool resources situations, the author proposes a set of design principles embodied in strong and long-lasting CPR institutions (Ostrom, 1990). Furthermore, her work provided a conceptual analysis to the relationship between property rights and natural resources within bundles of rights (Schlager & Ostrom, 1992). In addition, Ostrom and company furthers on the analysis of collective action and the commons, proposing revised theory of collective action. They pay a special focus on the topics of "individual decision making, micro situational conditions, and features of the broader social-ecological context" (Poteete, Janssen, & Ostrom, 2010).

From a thorough analysis of the work of Ostrom, Coriat (2011) presents a definition of the Commons based on a three entries approach. According to Coriat, There are three constitutive elements that help to recognize and/or acknowledge the condition of commons, these three components are: (1) the resource, (2) the distribution and allocation of rights between users, and (3) the structures of governance. Commons are unique and each case is different because the configuration of each entry may vary greatly, but by fulfilling these prerequisites, we are able to characterize them, and consequently, to identify different types and configurations.

As Coriat points out, "commons are the result of certain attributes of goods and/or system of resources" (Coriat, 2011), and resources can be material or immaterial; hence, the discussion of the nature of the goods gives way to an important break with the classical distinction of goods¹¹. Consequently, the traditional classification of goods based on the criteria of rivalry in use and excludability in use may fell short when trying to analyze immaterial goods (knowledge commons). In general terms, the commons should not be considered or mistaken with collective goods.

The second entry is about the distribution and allocation of rights between users which refers to the notion of bundles of rights (Schlager & Ostrom, 1992) and property-right holders, because commons are characterized by particular and original property regimes

¹¹ (Samuelson P. , 1954).

(Coriat, 2011). Around the shared resource there is an ensemble of actors¹² amongst which rights and obligations are allocated and distributed. Similarly, this entry represents a break from the theory of property rights based on exclusivity of rights. The effort of Schlager and Ostrom (1992)¹³ of arraying property right regimes in a conceptual schema gave birth to the notion of bundles of rights in the commons. This “bundles” of rights held by the users within a resource system confers them particular configurations of privileges, responsibilities that determined the level of involvement in the process of governance of the resource system. The authors recognize five types of rights; the right of access and the right of withdrawal that belong to the category of Operational level property rights, and the right of management, right of exclusion and right of alienation that belong to the category of Collective Choice level property rights. The difference between one group and the other is the former implies only exercising a right while the later additionally implies the participation in the definition of future rights to be exercised. According to the configuration of these five rights, the bundles are made evident and in turn they give way to 4 classes of property-rights holders, in other words, the aggrupation of rights creates profiles of user (owner, proprietor, claimant and authorized user).

The third entry refers to the governing structure, the design principles for enduring common. The existence of commons presupposes and requires the establishment of suitable structures of governance that guarantee their sustainability (Coriat, 2011). The mode of governance guarantees the way in which the aforementioned bundles of rights are distributed between and enforced by the stakeholders. This is because having a diversity of actors gives way to a diversity of interests, sometimes conflicting between them; therefore it is paramount to find a balance for all personal objectives and interests for the sake of the sustainability of the resource. The mode and structure of governance is about the interest of a community in preserving a resource and the community (but not only) over their personal interests. When conflict arises, problem-solving mechanisms are necessary to maintain sound relationship between stakeholders. The aim of having well-crafted rules in use is to create robust commons that are able to endure through time.

The diffusion of the study of the commons has gone beyond the traditional commons. New commons (Hess, 2008), among which Knowledge commons (Hess & Ostrom, 2007), have helped paved new narratives on the commons. As a result, the discourse of the Commons has spread around many cross cutting issues in society, at a local and global scale. In this regards, from the administration of shared natural resources by small communities in recondite places, the organization common areas in cities the access to digital files, to the governance of the internet, to culture; the commons have been recovering spaces and disseminating around different spheres of human life.

In the Italian context, the Rodotà Commission offers a definition of goods common as assets that “express functional utility for the exercise of fundamental rights as well as the free development of the person, and are informed on the principle of safeguard intergenerational utility”. This Commission, chaired by Stefano Rodotà, was established in 2007 by decree of the Ministry of Justice, in order to draw up a draft law for the modification of the rules of the civil code regarding public goods¹⁴. In a complementary way, "Emerging subjectivities" have defined themselves as Commons; these experiences are noted for undertaking a direct re-appropriation of abandoned, underutilized or dismissed spaces,

¹² The role of the actors goes beyond the notion of mere user.

¹³ The authors aimed at giving some clarity to the notion of “common-property resources” and the property rights regimes attached to this notion, since previously there has been confusion in the usage of the term.

¹⁴ www.giustizia.it/giustizia/it/mg_1_12_1.wp?contentId=SPS47617.

which through various practices of commoning manage to establish shared self-government management functional to rights fundamental (Acosta Alvarado & De Tullio, 2020). Micciarelli (2014) defines these experiences as "emerging commons", or «those assets administered in the form of a cooperative and mutualistic government [...] addressed the fulfillment of fundamental rights affecting the entire reference community connected to the good itself».

1.2. l'Asilo (Angelica Bifano, Chiara Cucca, Angela Dionisia Severino)

March the 2nd, 2012: L'Asilo is born

Before the birth of l'Asilo, the city lacked a free, multidisciplinary space that could serve the needs of the non-institutionalized culture. In Naples, in those years, workers of the performing arts had little dialogue with each other and there was no free space to rehearse, create and imagine together. It was a moment of profound cultural flattening and it had been too long since anyone "dared to". That period was characterized by a profound stasis that coupled with a sectoralisation of the arts: almost a period of artistic depression.

In the wake of the experiences of the Teatro Valle and the Nuovo Cinema Palazzo, something new began to be imagined in Naples as well: a movement that brought together the discourse on cultural policies and that on the commons came to life. So it was that some workers of the culture and the performing arts began to meet regularly and shortly after the collective "La Balena" (the Whale) was born with the aim to experiment with new cultural practices and creation and production processes as inclusive as possible.

In this first phase, they started meeting in very different places, almost as an omen of the heterogeneity of the community that later would be created. The first assemblies of la Balena were held in the informality of a bar in Piazza Bellini, then at the Ska, an occupied space of the city, finally in a real cultural institution: the Madre museum, in an actual spontaneous occupation.

In no time, this collective of artists, citizens and activists gathered in the "belly of the whale" and decided to navigate an issue: to go and assembly in one of the buildings that hosted a newly appointed institution that worked and decided on the cultural policies that they wanted to change. At the time, Naples was hosting the Universal Forum of Cultures, an international cultural event intended to invest and fund cultural policies and initiatives that proved not inclusive and unsustainable and that would feed a cultural consumerism without improving the rights and conditions of the workers of art and culture. La Balena took office in the same work space of the Forum; to occupy, as the large mammal it was, the third floor of the building like at Vico Maffei n. 4. However it was not an occupation but the re-appropriation of an underused city space that had historically sheltered a vocational space for neighborhood kids facing hardship.

There was the need to dare more and act on the urgency of getting together instead of the urgency of the moment: it was so that at the end of an assembly held at the Madre museum, la Balena moved in a caravan right to the headquarters of the Forum of Cultures to reclaim the space and return it to the city and the artists.

After the first three days of occupation, of open public assemblies, concerts and projections, it was then clear that la Balena was able to welcome, not only the different groups of workers of the arts, but also the desires and urges of other social movements and even of those without particular affiliation. It was perhaps the first time that other social centers of the city and other small counter-cultural realities met and assembled together overcoming their disputes to dialogue and experience a new, open, changing and potentially infinite community. A space where the various disputes could come together

under one claim, that of the Commons. The process was carried out with great care to protect that informal community from any degeneration towards the establishment of an eventual cultural foundation or association. This gave way to a collective reasoning towards a new legal dispositive that could protect the space that was hosting the newborn community, but without any proprietary claim. This new intuition came from the land and the sea and, specifically, from the branch of law that protected the communities of shepherds, fishermen, breeders who could benefit from the civic use of resources (sea, pastures, woods) in a non-exclusive and not competitive way.

Thus an open, free and multidisciplinary space was born. A space recognized as a "commons" for the civic use of the city. A non-circumscribed space, because it welcomes a potentially infinite, changing and heterogeneous community that offers concrete possibilities to artists who need spaces and means of production but who practice new ways of relating, and aiming to overcome patriarchal, intrusive, colonizing automatisms. An office for the arts, where skills multiply and the means of production are mutualized and shared. A place where artists can go to prepare before entering the market, where interdependence with other artistic sectors offers opportunities for meeting and confrontation that nourish their personal growth and artistic work. Furthermore, a community that re-appropriates public space by overturning and uniting the many positions of those who traditionally practiced politics by refusing any meeting with the institution and local administrations. This was emerging as a practice that firstly experimented with new ways of relating, capable of overcoming the disputes, the competitiveness, the individualism and the vertices that easily crept into the movements. And so it was like that the collective, aware of its limitations decided to dissolve into a larger open community guided by the practice of consensus.

The practice of care carried by l'Asilo proved, and still proves, the possibility of developing antibodies against individualism and competitiveness by opening spaces of creation and production where no one is left behind, because even those who still cannot do have the right to their space to creation and experimentation.

2. Further information

2.1. Barriers for Small/Informal realities in Creative Europe (Ana Sofía Acosta Alvarado)

The support to the culture sector has a twofold aim, firstly to protect and promote European cultural heritage while supporting the cultural and creative industries, and secondly by enabling them to act as a driver for growth and job creation¹⁵. We are confronted to the fact that Culture is conceived as a vehicle to advance an entrepreneurial logic, without regard for its potential of regeneration of social tissues and consequently disregarding the work of the many organizations (small and informal) that work towards this aim. Therefore, small and Informal organizations find a series of barriers when applying to CE funding.

Structural Barriers

¹⁵ According to the Regulation (EU) No 1295/2013 establishing the Creative Europe Programme (2014 to 2020), cultural and creative sectors are regarded as a source of innovative ideas that can be turned into products and services that create growth and jobs and help address societal changes.

Structural Barriers refer to intrinsic obstacles that some of the guidelines established to manage the CE programme can pose for small/ informal realities. The ensemble of “criteria” may become barriers to access funding if an organization falls short to fulfill the programme’s requirements. There are four types of criteria established for the CE programme: Eligibility criteria, exclusion criteria, selection criteria and award criteria. Eligibility Criteria encompass six elements, eligible countries, applicants, projects, activities and period of time. Some commons as informal realities do not satisfy one of more of these requirements. Accordingly, organizations that do not exist as a legal person are excluded from the application process. In the case of l’Asilo that as a political choice has decided to keep it’s informal character and therefore is automatically disqualified to apply either as a project leader or partner.

Another type of structural barriers is established by the “priorities” in a zero sum game logic. This means that if 56% of the Budget is destined to the Media sub-programme for audiovisual and the cinema and 13% of the budget is allocated to new cross-sectoral strand, which includes funding the new Creative Europe Desks, then only a 31% of the funding will be destined to the Culture sub-programme for performing and visual arts. This broadly reflects the hierarchy of the priorities of the programme.

Procedural Barriers

Procedural Barriers refer to the bureaucratic procedures established by the Creative Europe Culture Sub-Programme Guidelines. These barriers can be arrayed according a temporality outlook:

- Before the grant is awarded: According to the report: “Creative Europe: Programme Analysis And Recommendations¹⁶” developed by the European Cultural Foundation, the average time to prepare an application (excluding project design), is of one month. The investment in time and resources may become a barrier to access; therefore it is in place to request a tailor-made application for small and informal realities. Taking in consideration at the same time the need to recognize in a pecuniary way the work invested in the preparation stage.

- During the funding period: Reporting duties take up a significant amount of time out of the project duties, deviating attention from the actual execution of the project. Adding up the requirement to produce a financial report renders more complex the work of the organizations. A request for the simplification of the reporting procedures is widely spread between different beneficiaries of the programme. In turn a diverse way to evaluate is encouraged by the stakeholders, an evaluation that enables the qualitative importance of the projects to emerge.

- After the project is over: An audit report is required depending on the amount of the EU grant. The cost of the audit has to be foreseen in the budget form upon application and it should not surpass 7% of the budget under the

¹⁶ <https://cultureactioneurope.org/advocacy/creative-europe-programme-analysis-and-recommendations/>

subcontracting rule. Additionally, grant holders should be prepared to face a random selection process for an audit carried out by the Agency within the five years of the closure date. The Audit methods unfortunately do not take in consideration the particularities of small organization and therefore this may also represent a barrier for participation.

Financial Barriers

- The eligibility criteria expect applicants must have stable and sufficient sources of funding to maintain their activity throughout the period in which they are grant-holders. This is only possible for established organizations that either enjoy Government subventions or private funding. Small organizations, on the other hand may not be in the financial capacity to either answer to the match-funding scheme or the financial stability proof requirements (up to 40% for small scale projects and 50% for large scale projects within the cooperation scheme).

- In the eventuality that the coordinator or the partners' financial capacity is found to be non-satisfactory, the applicant has to provide a "financial guarantee" to the Agency as the agency is interested in reducing financial risk linked to pre-financing. Furthermore these guarantees have to be presented every time that a pre-financing payment is expected. In fact, small organizations are constrained to seek credit lines, which is already a difficult task because small organizations are not normally subject to credit, since they don't own assets.

- The whole process of participation in European projects, from conception to closure affects staff salary as well as the organization's budget in small realities. From the leap of faith of preparing the application in terms of time devoted by the staff to the match fund percentage, plus the cost of audit that to be put aside and the reserve of the payment of the final installment by the end of the project, a small organization is expected to supply a substantial part of the project's fund in advance. This situation is discouraging for many small actors that do not have the cash flow required to participate in these projects, therefore openness and representation are not really fulfilled in this financial scheme as economic inequalities create barriers to access.

2.2. A research-action sympathetic connection: artist residencies in Roccaporena (Umbria)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jZmnImkkshgAZZDj7StKRb9Dp3VSo7Ja/view?usp=sharing>

2.3. EU Cultural policy (Adriano Cozzolino, Benedetta Parenti)

The Background

Since the 1980s and especially 1990s, the western economic systems have been marked by deep structural changes (Jessop 2002). With the crisis of the Fordist production model ('70s), a new economic paradigm – based in particular on

knowledge and innovation – progressively started to consolidate, along with the strengthening of more finance-led models of development. In many cases the industrial production (of raw materials in particular) started to be outsourced in countries in which the labor cost was comparatively lower than in industrialized nations, thus fostering an increasing global integration of productive chains and transnational flow of services, capitals, goods and labor. On the other hand, especially in those countries inserted into the Western capitalist core the creation of value shifted towards high-added value sectors (advanced technology, research and development, finance and insurance services, and so on). Crucially, it is in this period that some scholars (among others, Garcia, 2004) underline the sea-change in the conception of the role of culture for the society. In other words, the so-called “creative industries” begun to acquire more and more importance in the political discourse, and culture became part and parcel of the new market logic.

Europe between austerity and Euroscepticism

The political economy of the European Union and signally of the Eurozone is based on a mix of neoliberal policy and fiscal austerity (Talani 2016). Overall centrality of the market, ‘flexibilization’ of labor, wage deflation, low inflation, privatization and liberalization constitute the backbone of the European economic model. In addition, such backbone is coupled with a tight discipline concerning state budget and public finance (in the framework of the Stability and Growth Pack [1997] and currently of the ‘Fiscal Compact’ [2013]) irrespectively of the economic cycle or other general societal conditions (such as unemployment level). Such mix was even strengthened in the background of the Global Crisis (2008) and Euro-crisis (2011-12). In this period, the prolonged adoption of austerity measures – through cuts in public expenditures – and neoliberal policies worsened the social cohesion across Europe, especially in Southern countries. Moreover, the imposition of such measures increased the perception of European institutions as an intrusive technocratic power while strengthening the crisis of legitimation of the European Union (Kreuder-Sonnen 2018). Not by chance this is also the historical phase in which eurosceptic forces and ‘sovereignism’ improved within many domestic political systems. Such political cultures, on the other hand, foster a nationalist-authoritarian view of societal relations which increasingly target minorities and differences, and calls (directly or indirectly) for the exclusion of subjects and groups that do not belong to the native population and/or belong to marginal communities.

The question, in this background, is to understand what role for culture and the arts in this process—namely, how culture and the arts may represent a critical factor in the development of democracy and social justice in Europe. Yet before entering into this in detail and outline a series of proposals, it is worth first critically framing how culture is conceived in the EU-sponsored policy programs – but also how it is changing –, and what can be done to improve further the sector.

EU and Culture

European competence in the cultural field has relatively recent origins: the legal basis for cultural activities in the European Union is the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 (Art. 151, ex art. 128). It represents the first recognition of the importance of culture in strengthening European identity. Since then, a complex process aimed at defining a European cultural policy, nevertheless, it is a widespread belief that the way forward is still long. Looking at the policy evolution, the first “policy for culture” (Gordon 2010) was the “European Agenda of Culture” adopted in 2007 which established some priority action areas and strategic objectives for the following 10 years. In the cultural sector, EU is called to coordinate and support initiatives of single countries; the strategy is based on promoting cultural exchange and guaranteeing financial support to cultural actors working on local areas (Sassatelli 2009).

Well before 2007, the Commission provided some instruments to finance projects in the domain of culture. The first step of cultural support programs goes back to 1996-97 with the adoption of Kaleidoscope, Ariane and Raphael, that evolved in Culture 2000 and Media plus (2000-2006), and then in Culture 2007–2013 and Media 2007. Through the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2014-2020 the Commission aimed to combine Culture and Media in one single programme, the mentioned Creative Europe, which will be put forth again for 2021-2027.

Although in absolute terms the amount of monetary resources has grown during these decades, the relative weight on the total budget of European Union is very limited. Furthermore, looking at the recent past, the relative increase of the last years has been small (from 1,136 for Culture 2007-2013 and Media 2007 to 1,463 millions of Creative Europe 2014-20). Moreover, the strongly hoped increase of resources for the Creative Europe 2021 – 2027 seems to be far from reality¹⁷.

The underfinancing of Creative Europe, which is the only program related to the cultural sector, is a noticeable problem also at institutional level¹⁸. Its budget is narrow not only as a percentage of the total EU budget (from 2014 to 2018 the yearly budget allocated for Creative Europe was on average the 0.13% of the total amount), but also in respect to the other programmes.

Cultural policy in EU has evolved by following a dual dimension on the one hand it has invested on the symbolic power of some cultural initiatives to foster European identity and values. On the other hand, it has focused on the economic relevance of cultural and creative sector, which is often linked to tourism related activities (see The European Capitals of Culture).

Although the economic impact is mentioned in all the programmes concerning cultural domain, it has gained a central role in Creative Europe rhetoric (Bruell 2013). The feeling is that in the recent period the economic dimension has overcome the symbolic one while, also, disempowering its overall relevance for collective emancipation.

The shifting conception of culture over time

¹⁷ <https://cultureactioneurope.org/news/uphold-culture-in-the-eu-budget/>

¹⁸ See the mid term evaluation report from the commission: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0248&from=EN>

The evolution of European cultural policy follows the process already mentioned in the Introduction for which culture started to be conceived as an industry in its own right. While in the first part of Twentieth century “culture” – broadly framed – lied at the margins of industrial capitalism, since the ’80s onwards it became an industry as such; accordingly, the “cultural economic policy” (Kong 2000) emerged and became part of the market paradigm and of the ‘competitiveness obsession’ (in the words of the political scientist Angela Wigger). Therefore culture begun a proper ‘economic asset’ – at least in the rising neoliberal discourse – and was considered a critical factor for development strategies especially in urban contexts.

Creative Europe is a case in point. While the importance of transnational linkages is aptly framed among the goals of the initiative, this program fosters an idea of culture as a business item—the function of which is (i) enhance profitability in this sector, (ii) improve the economic performance, (iii) improve the internal market through also enhancing competitiveness, (iv) help job creation and employment. Also, the EU discourse fosters the idea that those who benefit from culture are merely consumers (see Bruell 2013) and not – broadly speaking – citizens and communities. The problem in such understanding of culture and the collateral practices in cultural programs is twofold. First, culture is reduced to the market sphere, in turn decreasing its the emancipatory potential and overall impact on communities and on transnational cultural – and therefore social – relations. Second, such reductionism also disempowers the relevance of culture to foster new democratic practices (for instance in liaison with the commons and ‘commoning practices’) at all levels – from local to supranational –, and thus counteracting the wave of resentment and closure that seems to characterize the contemporary crisis of democracy in Europe.

On the other hand, it is also worth emphasising that the notion of culture at EU level is gradually changing from strict market logic. For instance, other (newer) EU cultural programs such as the Work Plan for Culture 2019–2022 (2018) (part of the European Agenda for Culture) have gradually shifted from a narrowed vision of culture to a more ‘holistic and horizontal’ (13948/18, p. 4) approach in cultural policy. Thus new priorities are (i) Sustainability in cultural heritage; (ii) Cohesion and well-being; (iii) An ecosystem supporting artists, cultural and creative professionals, (iv) Gender equality, and (v) International cultural relations. More importantly, the new discourse and practice related to commons and commoning is gradually entering in the EU lexicon. This implies a positive intertwining between the democratic potential of the commons and the emancipatory power of culture and the arts.

Rethinking the cultural sector, the arts and democratic procedures.

The category of “culture” has blurred boundaries: from an anthropologic perspective this concept is conceived as culture-as-society (Sider, 1986) involving both intangible values and tangible artifacts that identify a community. Nevertheless, the expression of “cultural sector” is often used to identify heritage,

arts and artists (Gordon 2010). Even when reducing so much the meaning attributed to “culture”, it involves a large set of domains with different characteristics and needs. From a policy perspective, hence, offering one single underfinanced program to the support of this wide sector seems to be inadequate. Indeed, also from an economic point of view culture is not merely considered an asset but instead as a “merit good” (Musgrave 1959) reclaiming public intervention for the value that is recognised by the society.

In outlining our policy recommendations, we adhere to a broad vision of culture as a domain organic to society as a whole (Bruff 2008), functional to the overall development of communities, and thus as a commons.

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