



IETM REPORT

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# ADVOCATING FOR THE ARTS

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# Advocating for the arts

The goal of the session was to exchange ideas, experiences and best practices on how to convince policy-makers – on local, national and European levels - of the essential role culture and the arts play in the development of European societies.

## Moderators:

Nan van Houte - IETM, Belgium  
Hermann Lugan - [Le Phénix](#), France

## With:

[Julie Ward](#), Member of the European Parliament

Hermann Lugan, Deputy Director of Le Phénix, presented the manifesto “[The power of culture and the arts](#)” of the European Alliance for Culture and Arts pleading for placing culture and the arts at the forefront of the European project. The Alliance is formed by 30 European cultural networks including IETM and [Pearle\\*](#) (Performing Arts Employers Associations League Europe).

This manifesto is the outcome of 2-year deliberations initiated by [SYNDEAC](#) (syndicat des entreprises artistiques et culturelles) between various cultural actors from all over Europe. The starting point was a critical look at the evolution of the Culture Programme (transformed into the Creative Europe Programme) – under the impact of



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the neoliberal priorities of Agenda 2020 - and the state of affairs in regards to considering/neglecting culture in other EU programmes/policies.

The main objective of the Alliance is to advocate for including culture and the arts in the strategic goals of the European project, while:

- responding to the mid-term evaluation of the EU Agenda 2020
- influencing the Agenda 2030, which is currently being shaped

Everyone is encouraged to support the Alliance by [signing the manifesto](#), individually or on behalf of his/her organisation, and by spreading the word.

Further steps include mobilising the sector and wider civil society (inter alia via collecting signatures) and influencing policy-makers at all levels – local, national, European. Every European / international organisation can request joining the Alliance as a member.

Two observations launched the discussion:

### 1- less funds for cultural projects at national and European levels

Finance distribution is being increasingly influenced by neoliberal and nationalist agendas, hence shrinking budgets for culture and the arts. Funding difficulties result also from stricter criteria (Ireland), lack of objective criteria and redistribution of the money in favour of “specific types of culture” (Poland) or no more cooperation between the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Finances (Hungary).

Besides, culture is getting away from the radar of the European Union. Alongside with the above mentioned transformation of the Culture Programme, shifting the emphasis from culture and the arts to “creative industries”, some schemes stopped supporting culture at all, like for instance, 2014 – 2020 INTERREG programmes.

### 2 - more recognition of culture as a shared resource to celebrate diversity and encourage intercultural dialogue

Both Julie Ward and Hermann Lugin pointed out that the European project is currently being emptied by neoliberalism and nationalism, while culture and the arts can provide it with a stronger, more humanistic content.

Culture is the best answer to terror, and human rights are the foundation of everything.

Cf. Italian MEP Gianni Pittella, after the attacks in Paris: “[...] terrorists want to destroy our fundamental values and freedoms. We will not let them; we will never give in to terrorism”

Cultural practitioners have proved to be influential on evaluating operational programmes funding cultural projects by sharing best practices and formulating leverage points for improvement.

So, how to engage with politicians, influence policy agendas and get endorsements when advocating for the arts?

Artists and cultural actors are the best lobbyists as they can cross borders – geographical and sectorial - more easily than anyone else. They are also the best lobbyists as they make the arts in the field.

The timing for stirring up the advocacy efforts is right, as policy-makers are getting short of solutions to cope with the current challenges. Lobbying for more money is not enough: we must influence the schemes and programme priorities. Narrow schemes - even with ample money – are hardly impactful.

The different experiences shared by the speaker, the moderators and the audience all pointed out that it is important to report on what has already been achieved via documents and consultative relationships.

#### Examples:

The above referred manifesto “The power of culture and the arts” summarising main arguments of why art and culture are essential pillars of the European project. The document is meant to serve the Alliance as the main tool to build constituency, to undertake negotiations with the EU policy-makers, and to arm the culture community lobbying at the national and local levels.

IETM Paris Satellite Meeting 2016<sup>1</sup>, report “Valuing the arts” is a concise mapping of the ideas, questions and trends that have been addressed and a summary of recommendations to be taken forward.

<sup>1</sup>The IETM Satellite meeting in Paris gathered around 60 participants from across Europe and beyond – arts sector representatives, researchers, policymakers and intermediaries organisations - to develop a collective view on why and how to advocate for the arts in local, national and European policymaking processes

How can artists and cultural actors concretely frame the cultural agenda along with their political representatives?

“The arts world should get better at lobbying!” stated Julie and drew up some recommendations:

Build long-term relationships with policy-makers - via ongoing communication, regular meetings, expertise exchange, etc. Start with identifying your MEP's - elected representative of your country. You may hardly speak up at the European Parliament meetings, but you may ask you MEP to pose a question on your behalf. Referring to her own example, Julie claimed many MEP's are highly reliant on their networks and value connections with the civil society.

Developing advocacy strategies at small-scale levels. Local and national counsellors are often more accessible than MEP's and are more likely to experience the reality by attending performances for instance.

Look at the bigger political picture. Make connections with politicians from sectors committees/departments other than culture, such as Foreign Affairs Committee, Employment, Environment, etc. Get involved in intergroups or other institutions such as Committee of the Regions that may find more connections with cultural topics than politicians who have culture on their agendas. But, needless to say, don't lose sight of the Culture Committee, as it consists of many those people who need to be better informed about the state of affairs in the cultural sector and values of the arts.

Share narratives. Speaking the political language can help the politicians to understand what the art sector does. Nevertheless, a personal story about a real project carried out by real people will speak louder than figures and facts.

Involving general audience and researchers in the evaluation of the intrinsic impact of culture and the arts. As other beneficiaries of the cultural policies for the former and as specialists with hindsight for the

latter, their contributions will bring another added-value to the exchanges.

Recommendations by cultural operators experienced in advocating for culture on a national level:

- Target the most efficient scale.
- Join forces internationally facing those challenges that are common across borders
- Stay united with other arts disciplines. Challenges may differ, but similarities – in terms of working processes and conditions - are of greater importance.
- Get precise speaking about culture and/or arts vs “creative industries”; independent arts vs institutionally funded arts.
- Tackling cultural policies, avoid deliberations about quality (quality problems persist in every sector).
- Mobilize support and demonstrate it in numbers of signatories, endorsements, etc.

Anita Debaere, Director of Pearle\*, shared some observations regarding advocacy on the EU level:

European Commission: unlike national governments, it holds the right of legislative initiative. DG Culture has limited power, but it's essential to maintain two-ways dialogue, exchange on a regular basis. Undertaking consultations and stakeholder meetings with other DG's may be of help: Enterprise, Digital, Employment, Enterprise, Foreign Affaires, Tourism, etc. They often admit they have never considered culture developing policies in their areas.

Council: influence can happen at the Cultural Affaires Committee that prepares the work of EU ministers for culture in a wide range of areas relating to EU cultural cooperation and to cultural cooperation between the EU and non-EU

countries.

OMC (Open Method of Coordination) form of intergovernmental policy-making that does not result in binding EU legislative measures, but serves as a sort of a soft power.

Suggestion to use “their” language, even if it instrumentalises the arts (as opposed to the above recommendation to delineate the terms instead): “if that makes them understanding what we're doing, I don't mind to speak about “creative industries””.

Advocacy is about never giving up. Keep up with your goals and avoid falling into cynicism and scepticism.

One of the suggestions was to develop a toolkit – based on these recommendations, as well as conclusions taken forward from the previous sessions on advocacy (organised in 2008, 2009 and 2011) on how to undertake strong and effective advocacy for culture and the arts on national, local and European arenas.