Understanding, Capturing and Fostering the Societal Value of Culture

UNCHARTED

D6.3 First Policy Brief

Technical References

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1. Introduction

As indicated in the project's abstract:

"*In recent decades, with the growing emphasis on the creative economy, culture has tended to be increasingly seen in political circles under the exclusive lens of the economy and its contribution to it. To counteract this tendency, it is necessary to define the social values associated with culture on a different basis from the traditional one.*"

The research work of UNCHARTED is based on four work packages that investigate the mechanisms of creation of cultural values from complementary perspectives:

WP1 Understanding the societal value of culture

WP2 Identifying the emergence of values of culture

WP3 Measuring and imagining the plurality of values of culture

WP4 Analysing political intervention and impact

The present document is based on the results of the investigation carried out in WP1 and the six deliverables produced in the framework of it.

This is the first policy brief of a series of three that the project aims to offer as 'food for thought' to policy makers who have a stake in formulating or influencing policies about valuing culture in all its forms.

Key messages

Society, culture and economy became intertwined in a complexity of values and roles.

The following factors are proposed to policy makers as a basis for reflection on the development of policy lines that can contribute to a better awareness while shaping European, national and local cultural policies:

1. Gender equality in European societies matters

2. Urban development and the social processes of gentrification, touristification and segregation have consequences on urban heritage preservation and on the society at large

3. Globalisation and digitalisation have a strong influence on choosing future directions for cultural valuing

4. Neoliberalism affected the cultural policy regimes of the thirty European Countries (the EU 27, plus Switzerland, Norway and the United Kingdom)

5. Historical and political experience in the last 20 years plays a relevant role in shaping cultural values in Europe today

2. Evidence and Analysis

A shift in the values of culture is occurring today in Europe.

Along the five key messages suggested in the previous section, the following policy-relevant findings and challenges are proposed as the basis for further reflection by European policy makers.

Several factors contribute to the growth of the role of diversity and gender equity in determining cultural values:

- Short- and long-term socio historical factors and social movements transformed the values of culture, with new positive values emerging in the society. These values became part of the institutionalized culture - including cultural administrations and cultural policies – as well as of the citizen culture. Tolerance and respect towards ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious and sexual orientation differences have grown.

- The trend towards increased diversity of artistic and cultural contents and repertoires from different origins and their legitimization in consecrated spaces (such as museums, festivals, biennials, etc.) contributes to valuing culture representing the different existing diversity profiles in Europe.

Urban regeneration is permeable to neoliberal logics and characterized by gentrification phenomena:

- Cities are becoming a "brand", involved in powerful marketing campaigns, in search for authenticity, but at the same time prey to standardizing concepts and commercial strategies.

- Houses, factories and traditional markets are rehabilitated and transformed into artistic residences and cultural centres. Consequently, public space is privatised and the former popular residents and workers are expelled from these places.

- Urban spaces are major hubs of human mobility, including migrations and growing tourism. They are multicultural places, where heritage, cultural industries and multi-ethnic neighbourhoods are economic assets of the tourism industry. However, this trend is also creating socio-spatial segregation, as much as overtourism.

Globalization and digitization influence the configuration of the values of culture:

- Multiple and sometimes contradictory conceptions of cultural globalization exist. Does internationalisation – and the values it carries - imply homogenization of culture, hybridization, or even rejection through effects of cultural resistance?

- The development of the internet during the 1990's, as a global access to information, gave new shapes to cultural globalisation. Digitisation increased the complexity of the values of culture, in particular relating to cultural administration, production and participation. Digitization of culture is perceived as offering new opportunities to take part in cultural expressions.

- Within the digital sphere, access is considered as a tool for inclusion, cultural democracy and democratization. Participation and engagement might lead to empowerment and identification at community level. On the contrary, from the angle of the cultural producers, the overall stance of digitisation is more negative than positive: after an initial, mainly positive, attitude towards the early phases of digitization, the effects of technological development, moving towards robotization and AI, raised critical voices within the field of culture.

A broad correlation between the centrality of market-based logics in cultural policy and the importance of civic and politico-economic cultural values is recognised:

- The deployment of civic values increases with greater cultural participation but declines with increased expenditure on culture as a percentage of total government spending, and this impacts also the effects of Europe's subsidies to cultural fields.

- A challenging comparative analysis of cultural policy regimes in the European countries indicates that existing cultural policy typologies do not reflect either the hybridised nature of government intervention or the universal dissemination of market-based logics in the contemporary European cultural field. For Western European countries, the justification for state support of culture has moved from elitist conceptions of art's intrinsic value to a marketised regime of justification, which legitimises state expenditure in the cultural field. Post-Communist Eastern European countries have also arrived at similar marketised justifications. And, the European Union is explicit in promoting instrumental rationales for cultural expenditure across its member states.

Through a thorough analysis of a wide range of resources - scientific articles, books and research reports, press articles – numerous values emerge in the history of cultural policies in Europe. Reflecting on these shows that values already present in the 20th century are becoming increasingly important in cultural policies, without taking precedence over values with which they can compete or, on the contrary, find a form of compatibility.

3. Policy Implications and Recommendations

Understanding how cultural values are constructed in European societies today is very important for the development of effective cultural policies.

The notion of cultural heritage is more and more complex, moving from conservation oriented approaches (objects) to subject oriented ones (values).

The number of heritage sites is growing. At the same time, due to new concepts of cultural heritage preservation (intangible heritage, cultural diversity, sustainability, resilience), the range of values to be preserved is expanding as well. In this situation, the role of local communities and participatory approaches can help to avoid undesirable outcomes (such as gentrification).

Heritage can not only act as an enabler on transformation of cultural spheres but with its increasingly important position in contemporary political and professional discourse on urban development and on urban configurations.

These processes are accelerated by the diffusion of globalisation and digitisation of culture, which is producing often-contradictory reactions by different actors, including cultural heritage institutions, cultural producers, researchers, students and the citizens.

The research in UNCHARTED highlighted four key aspects that have policy implications in the construction and definition of cultural values in Europe and the tensions that are implied:

i. Intrinsic values vs. extrinsic values

A shift in the values of culture is marked by the loss of centrality of the intrinsic values of culture (linked to the autonomy and independence of art) in favour of extrinsic values (linked to the instrumentalisation and use of art and culture for other economic and social purposes).

ii. Economic orientation vs. social orientation

The instrumentalisation of culture opens up a set of tensions between its social and economic purpose, which is reflected in the orientations of cultural policies and appears at the centre of disputes in the urban sphere.

iii. Homogenisation vs. cultural diversity

On one hand, the emergence of a global culture (accentuated by digitalisation and the concentration of major cultural industries) leads to the appearance of standardised cultural products; on the other hand, cultural diversity is legitimated in the field of specialised culture and cultural administrations.

iv. Impositions (top down) vs. resistances (bottom up).

There is a plurality of values in different cultural contexts, which often enter into tension and conflict. These tensions reflect unequal structures between the social agents that participate in different cultural environments: actors with an interest in the status quo and actors with an interest in subverting the reference values.

The development of European cultural policies, at local, national and trans-national levels should be based on a solid awareness of the implications coming from the transformations that are occurring in the contemporary society and those deriving from the trends and tensions discussed in this paper.

The UNCHARTED reports are the basis of this first policy brief are fully documented in the six deliverables D1.1, D1.2, D1.3, D1.4, D1.5 and D1.6 that are available for public download through the project's website at https://uncharted-culture.eu/research-fields/wp1-understanding-the-societal-value-of-culture/

Recommendations

The investigation conducted during the first year highlighted a range of tensions that exist with regard to several aspects of the values of culture, and in particular in relation to their implications at social and economic levels. A basic tension exists between the cultural sector and the other sectors of the society, which are reflected on the evolution of intrinsic values – such as those connected with aesthetics and cultural production – and that of more general extrinsic values. This is the case for example of the relevance that economic values have taken on other values in the latest years.

A plurality of factors emerged from the research, demonstrating the need to combine different values and to contrast the risk of applying unidimensional foci. However, the initial results after the first year of the project do not yet allow deducting general normative perspectives. Nevertheless, a wider recommendation is proposed to policy makers, that is to play attention to problems and contradictions that can be provoked by not-resolved tensions. In this light, a range of topics are listed below as factors to be taken into account in the development and implementation of cultural policies:

- ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious and sexual orientation differences
- mono-cultural mechanism of integration versus multiculturalism and interculturalism
- diversification of cultural expressions and practices of public action, including cultural democracy and participation
- legitimation of cultural content and repertoires from different origins in consecrated spaces - such as museums, festivals and exhibitions – and in public cultural programmes
- impact of culture-led urban regeneration on heritage preservation and on social and spatial segregation
- reconfiguration of urban territory and transformation of the sense of belonging of local communities, due to gentrification and touristification
- contraposition of Western cultural values with other different values that are represented in the Western society
- effects produced by digital transformation in the cultural field
- core importance of heritage values in the construction of identities

Further research will be conducted in the coming period by the project in the context of specific cases. This is expected to offer a better identification of the processes that bring to the emergence of values of culture from which more deductions will come.

Remaining knowledge gaps

The analysis and the investigation about the values of culture continues in UNCHARTED. The next priorities will focus on the understanding of:

- the emergence and plurality of values linked with cultural participation in live arts, media, cultural production, cultural administration and heritage management, identifying also tensions, conflicts and public controversies in these domains
- the behaviours of different actors in the cultural field (i.e. citizens, professionals, public administrators) and how they construct, measure, compare and rank the values they attribute to culture
- the assessment of the strategies and the effectiveness of cultural policy and institutions interventions in taking full advantage of the potential benefits of culture for society

These analysis and investigation will be assessed in a range of experimental demonstrations carried out from the second half of 2021.

The second and the third policy briefs of UNCHARTED, expected respectively by summer 2023 and beginning of 2024, will recapitulate evidences and recommendations distilled from these analysis, investigation and experimental demonstrations.

4. Project Identity

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