



Policy recommendations

Arts and Culture Sector

Key strategies and contents on digital skills for hybridization of jobs in the arts, entertainment and culture sector

CONTEXT

This policy paper contains a set of recommendations based on the workshops carried out in the framework of the ACSOL Erasmus+ project by the respective working group in the field of arts and culture in the regions of South West England (UK), Basque Country (Spain) as well as Saxony Anhalt, (Germany).

Our considerations assume that the development and training of digital skills will prove crucial for job retention in the face of technological change and the impact of the COVID 19 crisis on jobs and labour market conditions.

The workshops were conducted with different "triple helix stakeholders". These included (employers, representatives of educational organisations, trade unions and cultural institutions, associations, policy makers/local governments). The common objective was to identify opportunities, needs and risks of the digital transformation as well as key digital competences and proposals to promote training within our target group.

Based on the data collected in the regions under consideration, recommendations and strategies are derived at sectoral level for the EU to better meet both the digital skills need of workers and the needs of employers in the arts, entertainment and culture sector in Europe.

CHALLENGES

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit Europe in spring 2020, the cultural and creative sectors have been among the most negatively affected sectors. Addressing the challenges associated with this has increasingly brought into focus the importance of digital transformation and its design in these sectors.

At the European level, the generic term cultural and creative industries has become increasingly established to cover organisations and institutions of the culture-influenced sector. This also includes private, public and non-profit sectors of the cultural and creative industries.

The arts, culture and entertainment sector is very broad and diverse with different sub-markets and occupational fields, which makes it difficult to give uniform descriptions and recommendations. Rather, in addition to different levels of maturity of digitalisation, there are also different needs and

requirements in the sub-markets to achieve digital transformation. For example, the digital skills required for sub-sectors such as video games or audiovisual activities are very different from those required for the performing arts.

It can be stated that the cultural sector in the broadest sense is expanding and becoming more and more differentiated. The reasons for this lie primarily in a considerable expansion of the state cultural infrastructure, the emergence of new cultural institutions, the culturalisation of markets and even the dynamic development of a commercial cultural sector. Its great economic importance is shown by data from the time before the Covid 19 pandemic. Thus, in 2017, there were more than 1.1 million cultural enterprises in the EU-27, representing approximately 5 % of all enterprises within the non-financial business economy. Together they generated a total value added of more than EUR 145 billion, equivalent to 2.3 % of the total non-financial business economy. Despite the heterogeneity of the various submarkets and sectors of culture- and creative-based services, certain structural commonalities can be identified, which can be described with greater fragility compared to other sectors, for example, on issues of social and financial insecurity. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (enterprises with less than 250 persons employed) dominate the vast majority of cultural activities within the EU-27. Micro-sized enterprises (with less than 10 employees) also make up a large part of this. Almost one third (32%) of the cultural workforce in the EU-27 was self-employed in 2019. Furthermore, the sector is made up of many non-standard workers often freelancers and temporary and intermitted workers.¹ The high percentage of particularly low-paid non-standard workers is also related to this. In addition, the fragmented value chains with numerous non-standardised workers and organisations of different types and sizes that have to work closely together to bring cultural and creative products and services from the creator to the consumer/viewer are also named as typical.

Some key challenges regarding the digital transformation in the arts, entertainment and culture sector were identified by the stakeholders in the various workshops. Summarising these, it becomes clear on the one hand that the digital transformation, as differently as it influences the activities and services in the cultural sector, should be more understood as a process of change. Organisations from the cultural sector must therefore increasingly engage in a process of self-reflection. What does digitalisation mean for our institution, our products and services and our field of business? It must be clarified which framework conditions must be created for this and how actors and employees can be involved in this change. The creation of structures of networking and self-organised learning seems to be a central part for this. Here, support options open, for example, by contributing financially via public tenders so that individual and organisational learning processes can take place in the areas of digital skills, such as the future application and use of AI.

Long-term planning for digital transformation and the initiation of learning processes such as training are hindered by the widespread precarious structures in the sector e. g. with many part-time workers also a large proportion of older workers. In addition to strategic approaches, financial and time resources are lacking here. It is precisely here that many people show a lack of basic digital skills.

In the future, further challenges will increasingly be seen in the questions of dealing with intellectual property rights to digitally based products and services in the cultural sector.

¹ IDEA Consult, Goethe-Institut, Amann S. and Heinsius J. 2021, Research for CULT Committee – Cultural and creative sectors in post-Covid-19 Europe: crisis effects and policy recommendations, European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, Brussels, p.15

DIGITAL SKILLS IN THE SECTOR

The surveys and discussions during the various workshops also aimed to gather information on where workers and managers/owners in the sector think new skills are needed and what problems there are in accessing the right training. Some of the needs and gaps are very specific and complex and differ within job profiles and sub-sectors, but several aspects can be elaborated here.

At the core, basic digital skills should be present, such as writing emails, using MS Office tools or searching for information on the internet. This also includes the use of online communication tools such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom. Furthermore, requirements can be identified in the areas of digital competences for management tasks (e.g. social media management, use of digital device operating systems, planning of digital marketing) as well as sector-specific software knowledge like digital competences for product/service development.

Needs were expressed to the effect that a digital mindset must be developed more strongly in the future, especially among those who directly create culture-based products and services. In many areas, there is little knowledge about how new, digital-based offers can be developed, what the needs of the audience are and how the organisations must change in this respect.

One example given in the UK working group workshops was the screen sector, which has a high demand for labour due to the emergence of new streaming services. New professional requirements are becoming apparent here. The demand here is increasingly in the area of "create-tech", i.e. for people who aspire to a creative career but also have sound ICT skills, such as programming skills and digital technologies. At the same time, the need for more technically oriented employees to work together with colleagues from the art department and the design team also opens up, which ultimately makes the need for social communication skills and their training more necessary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Within the cultural sector, there seems to be a lack of funding, guidelines, measurement tools and long-term strategies for the use and development of digital skills training. From the regional challenges and needs identified, recommendations can indeed be derived to support both the digital transformation of cultural institutions and the development of individual digital competences and skills at European level.

Labour market analysis

The heterogeneity of the arts, culture and entertainment sector as well as the different needs and requirements in the individual subsectors but also in the individual countries in Europe make it difficult to make uniform statements. It is recommended that analytical structures be set up to regularly identify specific needs in the cultural and creative sectors. It is important to collect specific knowledge and data on the labour market in order to be able to draw conclusions. On the one hand, strategies can be derived from this as to how the sector can be further developed and which framework conditions are necessary at the regional level. On the other hand, specific training offers for certain activity profiles can be derived from the needs, which can then be offered regionally or locally by the network partners. Strategies for improving employability can also be derived from this. For this purpose, it is important to study the labour market and for example analyse job vacancies. As an example, an approach from the UK should be mentioned here for a transferable approach.

The University of Exeter developed a very successful Skills Escalator to help identify where new provision is needed in the Data Analytics sector (<https://escalate.projects.uvt.ro/data-analytics-skills-escalator-video>). A similar model would appear ideal for helping to meet a very considerable growing demand in the CREA-TECH sub-sector – where there is a massive need for new staff but this demand may not be apparent to potential learners and training providers.

Support to build a digital strategy

Cultural institutions must be able to successfully shape the digital structural change in order to continue to be perceived in the digital world. For this, strategic questions must be answered and conceptually implemented. This includes the question of how a mindset for digital transformation can be created and communicated. This implies that organisational aspects must be considered individually for each institution, e. g. clarification of the needs of the target groups (customer journey); development of an internal participatory approach. This is where demand for advice and coaching as well as methodologies for digital transformation arise. This should also be reflected in training and qualification concepts. Associations and regional partners can support small cultural institutions in particular, e. g., with infrastructure, workshops or by taking on tasks in the context of digitalisation. Enablers - "digital pilots" can accompany transformation processes.

Support measures in the areas of digital equipment and infrastructure

A frequently mentioned obstacle to digitisation in the cultural sector is insufficient infrastructure. Often the infrastructural prerequisites for the use of digital tools are not given (slow internet; restrictions on the selection of tools by the employer; no financial resources). Especially for small institutions and companies, the selection and introduction of new tools can fail due to financial issues. Hardware and software are subject to constant updates. Content often has to be migrated. Digital cultural change is also an ongoing task in this area, which requires a great deal of financial, personnel and strategic effort from all involved.

Highlight basic digital skills opportunities for those working and volunteering

A high proportion of precarious workers can be found in large parts of the sector. This includes voluntary workers, part-time workers but also solo self-employed. There is also a high proportion of older workers who as a group may have a high need for improved digital skills compared to the younger generation. Here, many showed a lack of basic digital skills, not least in the context of the Covid 19 pandemic. The groups seem to have less access to training offered, lack of time or have difficulty accessing funding. In all regional studies, it became clear that more targeted offers of basic digital skills programmes tailored to the sector are desirable. Here, flexible and time-independent online learning programmes are particularly suitable, which can take up the needs of sub-sectors such as museums or galleries, address the latest developments and even provide training in basic digital skills.

Sector-specific mid-life skills reviews are an example of involving older workers in digital skills issues. The Value My Skills Tool developed by the TUC (UK) and offered free of charge could be one way of engaging with older workers, particularly if it is part of a wider Mid-Life Career Review. <https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/value-my-skills>

Get a transparent overview

There is already a multitude of offers online. But there is a lack of structure and overview for potential users. An overview of links would be desirable; where can one get information on certain topics, tools e. g. office tools, social media training, funding in the cultural sector/application forms? One idea could

be regional competence centres with a focus on the cultural sector that receive state funding. In Germany, there are already similar structures aimed at small and medium-sized enterprises. Here, offers could be made for managing directors and human resources managers who want to develop new skills in their workforce. With strategic and methodological support, customised solutions can be found for individual learning types and further training needs. Users can determine in advance the status of their own company in the area of digital continuing education. On this basis, they then receive a detailed evaluation with best practices and concrete recommendations for action. With the materials and recommendations, users receive answers to the relevant questions in the continuing education process - for example, on a corporate culture conducive to learning, on financial support options or on the evaluation and transfer of what has been learned.

Establishing structures for the communication of Best Practice

In cultural institutions, the situation of digital transformation is very different. Some institutions already have advanced digital strategies, others are still at the beginning, theatres have different competences and expectations than e. g. museums or freelancers. The development of new digital cultural offerings is often driven in larger and publicly funded cultural institutions. Here, there are usually better financial conditions for the use and implementation of new digital instruments, tools and programmes. In this process, experience is gained with the use and development of offers that are often valuable for smaller institutions as well. Successfully implemented concepts should therefore be prepared in such a way that they can have a low-threshold effect as best-practice examples. For example, you can look at topics such as

- How to create a web presence?,
- Using social media for content,
- Shifting to virtual presences,
- Youtube channels, podcasts,
- How to price products/services offered online?

Building alliances and networks for regular exchange

Alliances should be formed between two or more cultural institutions with previous digital experience and partners with digital expertise who share their knowledge and support each other in experimenting and raising their digital profile. For example, the audiovisual sector could lead the other sectors as it is very advanced in terms of digital capabilities. In the best case, the knowledge gained can be shared in a straightforward way. Via open access, open content and open source approaches, both the content of the digital applications and the insights gained can be made transparent and available.

About the Acsol project

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Project web page: <https://www.lanbide.euskadi.eus/erasmus+/-/acsol/>

Project Partnership

