

Handbook: Measuring the social dimension of culture

9th of March 2023 · Paris

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MESOC

measuring
the social dimension
of culture



This project has received funding
from the European Union's Horizon 2020
research and innovation programme
under grant agreement No 870935

MEASURING THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF CULTURE

HANDBOOK

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Aims: to disseminate the main results of the project and provide a set of resources, texts and elements for reflection around the topic of assessing the social impact of culture.

Beneficiaries: cultural professionals, policymakers, managers of private funding programmes and academics.



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Figure 1:
The MESOC
Social
Impact
Dimensions



how the impacts of culture on health and wellbeing, urban and territorial renovation, and people's engagement and participation, operating respectively at individual, community, and societal level, influence and reinforce one another. It also stresses that these are complex relationships that cannot be measured exclusively through quantitative indicators, but rather through an identification of the enabling conditions and factors that may contribute to impact as well as the impact transmission variables and indicators that can allow measurement.

MESOC acknowledges that cultural policies and activities cover a wide range of areas, disciplines or 'domains' – e.g. cultural heritage (museums, archaeological sites, intangible heritage, etc.), libraries, performing arts (theatre, dance, circus, etc.), architecture, etc. In addition, as explained by EUROSTAT's [ESSnet-Culture Methodological Framework for Culture Statistics](#) (2012), cultural activities may serve different functions (cultural creation; production or publishing; dissemination or trade; preservation; education; and management or regulation). Therefore, the examination of impacts needs to recognise that different cultural activities may be able to contribute differently to societal value, as a result both of the cultural domains covered and the

internal and external enablers that inform the development of activities. In addition to the aforementioned ESSnet framework, the definition of domains used by MESOC draws on the [UNESCO Framework of Cultural Statistics](#) (2009).

Indeed, since MESOC's key themes have been extensively explored in theory and practice in the past, MESOC has drawn on a wide range of contributions from academics, policymakers, practitioners, and citizens, building on existing knowledge, through an extensive identification and analysis of existing literature. On this basis, it has developed new, innovative methodologies for measurement and evaluation, which have been tested in 10 city pilots.

What has MESOC involved?

Between 2020 and 2023, MESOC has primarily involved the following activities:

- The elaboration of **two literature repositories** on the societal impact of culture, covering respectively academic articles (with over 640 references) and 'grey literature' (i.e. research reports, policy documents, project evaluations, etc., comprising over 280 references). An abstract has research reports, policy,



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1. ATHENS DIGITAL ESCAPE ROUTE

Athens, Greece

Institution: Municipality of Athens, Athens Culture Network, So7

The Athens Escape Route is a digital treasure hunt created jointly by the Municipality of Athens and its Culture Network ([Athens Culture Net](#)) in collaboration with the civic non-profit company, So7 and Escaped Live Adventure Rooms during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first game of its kind, this online puzzle and virtual tour game exploring Athens and its culture was made available to the local public free-of-charge from 29 April to 3 May 2020, during the first COVID-19 lockdown. While it was initially planned as an in-person treasure hunt as part of Athens Culture Net's pilot program "Culture in the Neighbourhoods", the onset of the pandemic led to the game's reconfiguration as a digital escape room that aimed to connect residents with local cultural events and expand their knowledge about Athens and its neighbourhoods, culture, architecture, and other key landmarks in the city.

More than 3,500 players took part in this online gamified experience over the course of five days, reflecting a high level of citizen engagement and participation. In addition, the game's restricted hours of play encouraged citizen interactions, with as many as 600 people playing simultaneously and collaborating with one another to solve the escape route's puzzles. As a result of its success, the European Union National Institutes of Culture (EUNIC) requested its creators' help in creating a similar game for the European Day of Languages in 2020.

Innovative online treasure hunt created through a public-private partnership, aimed at fostering citizen participation, engagement, knowledge, and appreciation of local cultural heritage.



Case studies

3. FABBRICA DEL VAPORE

Milan, Italy

Institution: Municipality of Milan

The Fabbrica del Vapore is a creative hub and cultural production centre instituted by the Municipality of Milan in 2001 in response to a policy measure aimed at regenerating abandoned industrial areas of the city through cultural and artistic activities. Located in a former electromechanical factory in a semi-central area of Milan, the Fabbrica del Vapore covers more than 30,000 square metres of land, including 14,000 square metres used for cultural activities, which are divided evenly between spaces for creative residencies and public exhibitions. This use of space reflects the centre's varied goals: encouraging youth creativity, participation, and development; acting as an incubator for cultural projects; providing spaces for artistic and community connections; and presenting cultural, performative, artistic, and multidisciplinary content to the public.

The Municipality of Milan has played a key role in establishing and overseeing the Fabbrica del Vapore since its inception, from the initial policy measures leading to its creation to the

centre's current structures of governance and management. For instance, the Fabbrica's day-to-day operations are managed by the municipality's Department for Youth, University, and Advanced Training, while the centre's artistic residencies and entrepreneurial incubator spaces are assigned to young artists and producers through public calls managed by the municipality. The latter two activities are perhaps the most successful offerings the Fabbrica offers to date. The centre's project incubator provides space for young artists and professionals in a variety of disciplines to complete their training in emerging entrepreneurial realities and begin their professional activities with the support of a like-minded community. The creative residency program quickly achieved similar goals, with former residents forming a consortium (Associazione FCVLAB) for the cooperation and management of the residencies that lasted until 2016, when the Municipality launched its new public bid for use of the creative residency spaces.

City-led project in Milan targeting the urban regeneration of a former industrial area, with a strong focus on the social value of arts and culture, providing space for creative residencies, and cultural programming.



Case studies

4. RECETA CULTURA

Valencia, Spain

Institution: Las Naves (Valencia City Council)

Receta Cultura was a pilot project based on a local policy in Valencia, Spain that aimed to improve the emotional wellbeing and quality of life of people who are lonely and/or affected by sedentary lifestyles. Started in the early months of 2020, this project was run by Las Naves (the Innovation Centre of the City Council of Valencia) and the Regional Ministry of Public Health in collaboration with varied cultural, community, and health centres. It consisted of prescribing participants guided tours of six museums and other cultural spaces in the city, combining these with walking tours departing from neighbourhood health centres. In this way, the project aimed to shift the medical paradigm of prescribing medications toward the prescription of physical activity, social connections, and cultural activities in order to promote healthier lifestyles and improve individuals' overall quality of life.

The tour activities consisted of a 50-minute walk from a health centre to a cultural institution and a group visit under the guidance of experts

from each of the museums or cultural institutions (free of charge). In this way, participants' curiosity and learning were stimulated, as well as allowing them opportunities to interact with others in the group, express themselves without feeling judged, and gain the satisfaction of sharing new experiences and exchanging their differing perspectives. Although the project planned to carry out two visits per month for at least the first six months of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted this schedule; only the first two months of visits were realized, and the project has not yet been reinstated. However, both Valencia and other Spanish municipalities are interested in reviving the initiative due to its possibilities for incorporating culture as an element for improving health and wellbeing.

Pilot project to improve the health and wellbeing of local residents in Valencia through the innovative approach of prescribing cultural experiences, social connections, and physical activity in walking tours of museums and other cultural centres in the city.

Impact area



Sector



Target groups



Strategy

Art Therapy

More information

[:https://www.culturaydeporte.gob.es/mnceramica/institucion/proyectos/proyectos-en-cursol/reseta-cultura.html](https://www.culturaydeporte.gob.es/mnceramica/institucion/proyectos/proyectos-en-cursol/reseta-cultura.html)



Case studies



Further reading on the impacts of culture on urban and territorial renovation

- UNESCO (2016). Culture Urban Future: Global Report on Culture for Sustainable Urban Development. UNESCO. Available at <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/publication/culture-urban-future>
Published in the context of the 3rd UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III, 2016), where the New Urban Agenda was adopted, and in the footsteps of the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, this report aimed to summarise and illustrate evidence on the connections between culture and the different dimensions of urban development, with contributions and examples from around the world.
- Cultures for Cities and Regions (2017). Future creative cities. Why culture is a smart investment in cities. KEA. Available at <https://keanet.eu/wp-content/uploads/Future-creative-Cities-01122017-KEA.pdf>
Culture for Cities and Regions was a EU-funded project led by Eurocities and KEA, in partnership with the European Regions Research and Innovation Network (ERRIN). The project produced a catalogue of 70 case studies on culture and urban and regional development, and enabled capacity-building and peer-learning. This document summarises some of the knowledge generated by the project, on issues including cultural and creative industries as a driver of urban regeneration, as well as culture as a vehicle for social inclusion, social innovation and intercultural dialogue.
- BOP Consulting and Korean Research Institute on Human Settlement (2020). Creative and Cultural Industries in Urban Revitalization: A practice-based handbook. Inter-American Development Bank. Available at <https://publications.iadb.org/en/creative-and-cultural-industries-in-urban-revitalization-a-practice-based-handbook>
Based on a set of in-depth international case studies, expert interviews, and a broad literature review, this Handbook analyses what makes for success in urban revitalisation projects involving the cultural and creative industries.
- Papamanousakis, Y. (c. 2020). Urban regeneration knowledge base. A thematic review of projects and resources. Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities. Available at <https://www.urbantranscripts.org/wp-con->

<tent/uploads/2021/03/CCSC-Urban-Regeneration-Knowledge-Base-copy.pdf>.

Produced in the context of the EU-funded Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities project, this short report is based on a review of 55 projects and 45 resources on culture and urban regeneration in Europe. It introduces a contextual and theoretical background for a range of themes that underpin such initiatives, including public space, community building, industrial heritage, and participation.

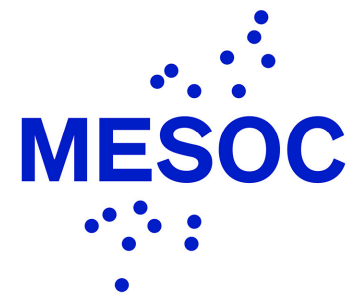
- Rausell-Köster, P., Ghirardi, S., Sanjuán, J., Molinari, F. & Abril, B. (2022) Cultural experiences in the framework of "cultural

cities": measuring the socioeconomic impact of culture in urban performance. City, Territory, Architecture, 9(40). Available at <https://cityterritoryarchitecture.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40410-022-00189-8>

Drawing on work conducted in the context of MESOC, this article presents a model for connecting cultural experience with urban performance, with particular emphasis on the socioeconomic impacts of culture. It presents proposal for some transitional indicators connecting different tactics in connecting culture and urban development with the effects observed as a result.

Some questions for reflection

- Are you familiar with any programmes that have connected cultural aspects with urban and territorial renovation? If so, what positive impacts have been observed?
- And what challenges or difficulties have existed? What may have been the problem?
- Can you consider any factors that could contribute to strengthening these approaches?



- **Further readings**
- **Questions for reflection**





Photography: Zeman98

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations

This Handbook has presented information and guidance to allow artists, cultural professionals, policymakers, managers of public and private funding programmes and strategies, as well as researchers, trainers and students to better connect cultural activities with social impact. Further to providing practical knowledge, research and action conducted in the context of MESOC is also aimed at improving future planning and delivery of policies, programmes and projects in this area. With this in mind, this final chapter presents some recommendations aimed in particular at funders of activities on the social impact of culture (i.e. public authorities, private foundations, etc.) as well as to managers of programmes and projects in this area.

Recommendations for funders

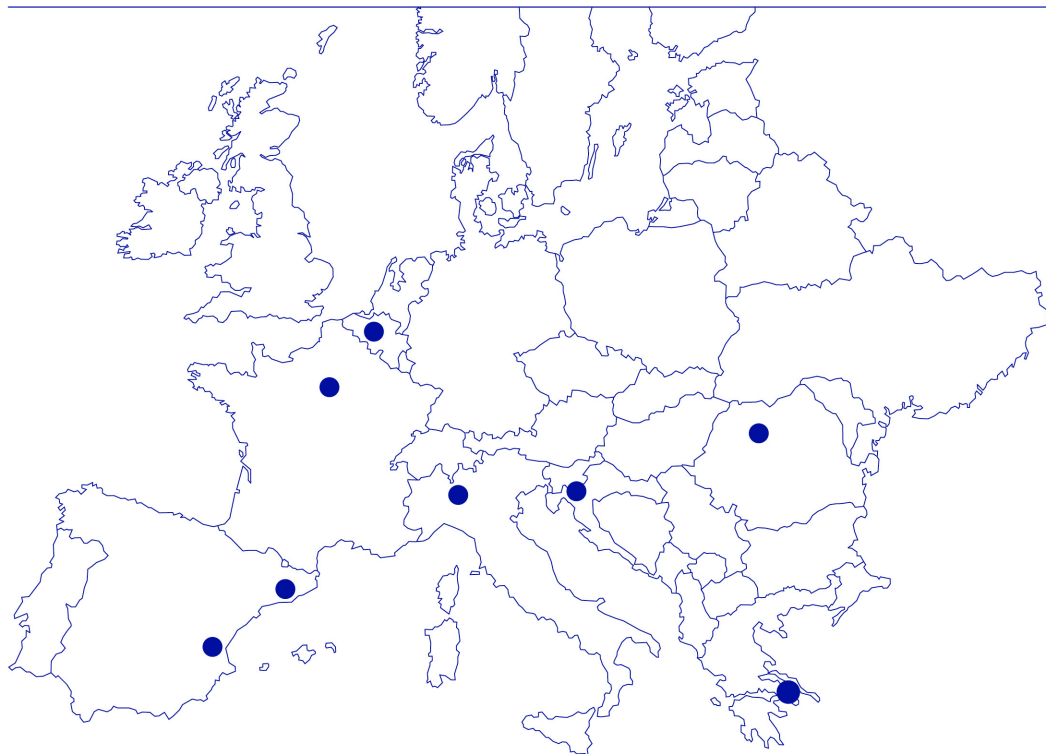
Organisations designing and delivering funding programmes on the social impact of culture, including both public authorities and private funders, should:

- Acknowledge the multiple areas in which social impacts of cultural activities may be observed, and consider establishing comprehensive assessment models in this respect, both during the analysis of funding applications and in the subsequent monitoring and evaluation of funded projects.
- Recognise the complexity of impact measurement, and consider developing theories of change relevant to their specific areas of action, which integrate transition indicators such as those proposed by MESOC.
- Involve experts from relevant areas (e.g. health and well-being, urban and territorial renovation, citizen participation, social development) when designing programmes and analysing the impacts of funded activities.
- Consider the need for evaluation approaches that recognise different timescales, ranging from short-term results to longer-term impacts, and reflecting this in funding programmes.
- Support research and development activities in the context of funded programmes and projects, including through partnerships with universities and research centres, and by encouraging beneficiaries to take into



Recommendations for cultural managers and funders





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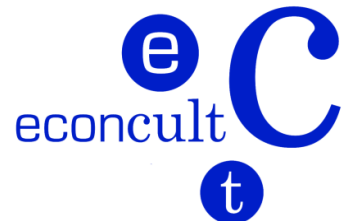


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