

2021 ENCATC Education and Research Session PART 2
Session 5: Impact of COVID-19 on the cultural and creative sectors

CHAIR: Roberta Comunian, Reader in Creative Economy, King's College London, United Kingdom

The show must go on? Transforming the creativity industry during the Covid-19 pandemic. Evidence from Italy

Chiara Carolina Donelli, Post-doc, University of Parma (Italy), Ruth Rentschler, Professor, University of South Australia (Australia), and Lorenzo Pratici, University of Parma (Italy)

Type: Abstract

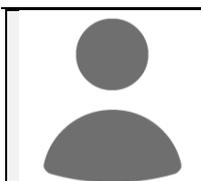
Keywords: crisis management, cultural sector transformation, resiliency

Description of the proposal: This paper examines the global pandemic, COVID-19, in relation to the case of Italy and the creative industries, identifying the responses, recovery and resets in the first two phases of the pandemic (March – June 2020 and September- December 2020).

This study addresses the literature gap in crisis management and resiliency theories (Duchek, 2020), by assessing the case of Italy and the creative industries during the pandemic. While we know about the pandemic, and about the general effect it had on other sector (Sigala, 2020), what we do not know is how it affected a major industry of national and international significance, the creative industries, one of the most vulnerable, first to shut down and last to open up, with creative workers (e.g., artists, arts leaders, policy makers and technicians from carpenters in theatres to electricians at festivals) vulnerable and in precarious jobs, working event to event, without secure long-term employment. This has led to financial hardship, personal stress, unemployment and under-employment as the support packages provided by governments did not cover these workers.

Hence, there is an urgency and immediacy to study the transformational role of culture, that has been overlooked in other studies on the pandemic. In order to examine the unparalleled disruption and unique transformational opportunities caused by the pandemic (Ku, Cavusgil et al 2020) in Italy, this study undertook a multi-method approach to content analysis with the purpose of gathering and analyzing data, drawing on an interpretive approach in a two-phase project. Based on content analysis, undertaken from textual data from Twitter, using two major sources: all tweets posted including the hashtag #laculturanonstiferma (the culture won't stop) and the posts from Artribune Journal, a major art journal published in Italy. The choice of using tweeter finds its roots in the fact that social media represents a suitable instrument for analysis as it is the most popular microblogging provider in the world (Dubey, 2020).

In this study we identified how the Covid19 as a game changer for the arts and creative industries, in particular the emergence of transformations which have occurred during COVID-19, the outcomes of which in creative organisations have focused on digitalization and how it leads to innovation; radicalization of art's workers (asking for recognition and more rights for the sector) and how it leads to restructuring; and glocalism and how it leads to a re-consideration of why, who and what it serves in the community and the role of arts institution without the main tourism industry. This study examines the insufficiently funded creative organisations in Italy, as influenced by national economic and cultural policy during COVID-19. Such an analysis enables a functional combination of social and commercial understandings of creative organisations in times of crisis.



Presenter: TBA

The Value of the Arts for Social Cohesion During COVID-19: An Interdisciplinary Study in Rural Canada

Amber J. Fletcher, Associate Professor, University of Regina (Canada), Barbara Meneley, Post-doctoral Researcher, University of Regina (Canada), Mary Blackstone, Professor Emerita, Theatre, University of Regina (Canada), and Marnie Gladwell, Executive Director, Saskatchewan Arts Alliance (Canada)

Type: Abstract

Keywords: artists; social cohesion; COVID-19; older adults

Description of the proposal: While the global COVID-19 pandemic exposed and magnified the negative impacts of social isolation, it also revealed both the importance and precarity of the arts within Canadian communities. For older adults in rural Canada, pre-existing isolation was exacerbated by physical distancing measures required during the pandemic. Disproportionate rates of social isolation have been shown to negatively affect older people's physical and mental health in addition to overall quality of life (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2014; Wilson et al., 2017). Further, despite the ongoing importance of the arts for people's wellbeing (MacLeod et al., 2016; Stickley et al., 2016), artists also experienced pandemic-related challenges to their creative practice and livelihood (SAA, 2020). In this presentation, we report the results of an interdisciplinary project examining the contributions and challenges of the arts and artists in creating community cohesion during COVID-19. The project featured a total of 36 creative-engagement workshops delivered over the telephone by artists to 54 older adults (aged 55+) in the province of Saskatchewan, Canada, as well as a survey of Saskatchewan artists and cultural workers (n=284) to examine their experience of the pandemic. Workshop participants were interviewed before, during, and after completing a 6-week program to examine whether arts activities influenced people's wellbeing and sense of community connection during the crisis. This paper draws together the results of these semi-structured interviews (n=150) with older adult participants, 6 interviews with artists who delivered the workshops, and survey data from 284 artists and cultural workers to examine the interrelated impacts of the crisis on artists and the communities with which they work. The results demonstrate the importance and value of the arts for reducing social isolation and enhancing community cohesion—yet, at the same time, they reveal the tenuous nature of artists' creative practice and challenges to their long-term sustainability. The conflicting data highlight the need for significant changes in cultural policy that better align the multiple benefits that artists provide to society and the capacity of artists to make a living from their creative practice. We present our model for telephone-based creative engagements designed for rural older adults, including both benefits and lessons learned, and we make recommendations for enhancing the sustainability of the artists, and their communities, into the future.



Presenter: Amber J. Fletcher

Dr. Amber Fletcher's research examines how gender and social inequality shape the lived experience of climate change through the lens of climate disasters (flooding, drought, and wildfire). Focusing on rural and Indigenous communities in the Canadian Prairie region, her work reveals the lived impact of inequality in the context of crisis. Amber is currently Principal Investigator on a SSHRC-funded project (2016-2022) entitled "Social Dimensions of Climate Hazards: Adapting to Wildfire and Flood in Saskatchewan's Farm, Forestry, and First Nations Communities" and a Mitacs-funded project on "The Value of Arts and Culture for Community Cohesion". She is co-investigator on several other projects, funded by SSHRC and CIHR, on the topics of environmental impact assessment and public safety. Her research has been published in international peer-reviewed journals, including *Regional Environmental Change*, *Agriculture and Human Values*, *Journal of Rural Studies*, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, Evidence & Policy*, *Natural Hazards*, *International Social Work*, and *The*

Canadian Geographer/le Géographe canadien. She has also published book chapters in 12 anthologies, including *Water Security Across the Gender Divide* (2018, edited by C. Fröhlich et al.) and *Gender and Climate Change in Rich Countries: Work, Public Policy and Action* (2017, edited by M. Griffin Cohen). Her own book (with Wendee Kubik) entitled *Women in Agriculture Worldwide: Key Issues and Practical Approaches* was published by Routledge in 2016. Amber has delivered 44 presentations in Canada and worldwide—including invited talks in Spain, England, Italy, and the USA—and has contributed to expert testimonies for two Standing Committees of the Parliament of Canada. In 2012 she spoke at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women on the topic of rural women's wellbeing. Dr. Fletcher has also served as a consultant to the United Nations World Water Assessment Programme. She is a contributing author to Chapter 7 of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) *Special Report on Climate Change and Land* (2019). Dr. Fletcher is a past President of the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (2018-19). She holds two medals from the Governor General of Canada for her research and advocacy on gender equality in Canada. She teaches courses in the sociology of gender, sociology of families, and social research methodology.

COV'culture. Impact of the health crisis on the field of culture and art. Study of emerging forms of innovation.

Sarah Montero, Lecturer in geography, Université Bordeaux Montaigne (France), and Aurélie Chêne, Lecturer in information sciences, Université de St Etienne (France)

Type: Abstract

Description of the proposal:

A research project based in Nouvelle Aquitaine, France. Financed by the Nouvelle Aquitaine regional authorities for a duration of 3 years (2021-2024) and focused on the public cultural sector, our research project aims to observe and analyse the impact of the pandemic and its consequences on cultural and artistic activities, for those who work in this field, those who are involved in it on a voluntary basis, and those who appropriate its contents. The objective is to make visible and analyse the way in which the different categories of actors have worked and proceeded in order to allow cultural and artistic activities to be maintained, whether from the point of view of creation, dissemination or reception, through the different relational spaces in which they have taken place : physical space, digital space, institutional space. The attention given to their actions, their testimonies and their processes will make it possible to stimulate reflection on contemporary cultural issues and to study their potentially innovative character for the evolution of the sector. The productions that have emerged also constitute prisms through which it is possible to analyse our social ties and the role of art as an indicator of our relationship to the world (G. Simmel ; P. Baudry).

Our main thesis is that the health crisis and its repercussions reveal and/or accelerate changes in the field of culture : taking account of people's cultural rights and participation, competition from mass culture, the impact of digital technology, new forms of cultural practices on and offline, environmental issues... (Ph. Henry Ph. ; Négrier ; J. Rieffel ; O. Donnat ; D. Cardon). Through its approach and methods involving the actors concerned in the research process, this study should provide answers to this premise and help to propose courses of action.

In terms of methodology, the research team, composed of specialists in social geography, information and communication sciences, sociology, and arts, will deploy qualitative social science methods : semi-structured interviews (individual and groups), participatory and non participatory observations, artistic productions analysis....

In addition to these classic methods, the originality of the project is to propose a research process based on participatory science. Participatory research consists in associating non scientific actors, citizens and or professionals, to the observation of data and knowledge production. In order to anchor this research in the reality of the field and to operate in close partnership with actors, we will define and develop on site a research protocol with several stakeholders : a theatre, a family-aimed community organization, a cultural mediation association, a media library, a festival organiser, and artists' collectives. The implementation of this protocol will be progressive and will take into account the temporalities and wishes of the actors.

The first stage of this research consists in gathering testimonies in order to keep track of singular histories and experiences induced by the disruption of the pandemic before they vanish or give way to more practical considerations. Collecting this shared experience in the time frame following the crisis when memories are still vivid, is of particular importance to the research as it should point out the changes in progress and/or the elements potentially leading to them.

In order to start gathering this information, the first focus groups have been organised in partnership with the Nouvelle Aquitaine cultural Agency and UBIC, Bordeaux Montaigne University's valorisation unit, during the last french lock-up period (may 3rd – june 30th 2021). They have targeted a broad range of artists from different fields (theatre, visual arts, danse, music, cinema).

Six group interview sessions, involving 57 artists, took place, via videoconference, between april and may 2021.

The participants have been questioned on how they felt about the crisis, responded to the challenges and adapted to the constraints in their creative work.

First observations

The COVID pandemic has caused an upheaval in practices both in terms of space and time. Closed places, interrupted activity, investment in the digital space, emergence of a new available time : changes in cultural and artistic practices were evident during the health crisis.

In so doing, the pandemic can be seen as a revelation and an accelerator of the transformations taking place in terms of the relationship to time and space in the artistic and cultural field.

1. The relationship to time: between constraint and opportunity

Most of the artists of this survey have placed the question of creative time at the heart of their comments and questionings.

Regarding this issue, the crisis has brought to light two temporal categories: a constrained time and a new available time.

A constrained time. The first reason for the artists ' feeling of a time under pressure lies in the disruption caused by the crisis. The disorganisation of the sector has led to a feeling of loss of control over time. Schedules and projects have been rushed : postponements and cancellations had to be managed, funding had to be sought in a hurry... Creation time is now constrained and framed by the crisis.

The second reason for it lies in multi-activity, which, in the face of income uncertainty, has imposed itself and has often become essential. Forced to carry out several activities in order to make a living, artists are then "caught up in time" and no longer have enough time to create. Even before the crisis, artistic activity was "competing" with dissemination and mediation functions that greatly reduced creative time. To these must now be added the presence on the Internet, which implies a very substantial investment. In these conditions, creative time becomes a small part of the total, in a crisis context marked by increasing precariousness and lack of means.

A new available time. For some, this year of crisis, while complicated in many ways, has brought about a 'different time': one of possible reflection on their projects (past and future), of the completion of projects that had previously been put on hold, or of the emergence of new ideas and their implementation.

The crisis has provoked a sense of urgency that has led artists to question the profound meaning of their artistic process in regard to the transformation of society. "What do I have to say" when time seems to be running out and existential priorities are emerging.

The question of transmission is also linked to the time issue : « why create if one's work cannot be transmitted? »

Thus, a tension is noticeable between the feeling of having experienced this "return to oneself" as an opportunity to confront one's desires and draw new energy from them, and the feeling of not being able to move forward, of being blocked.

2. The relationship to cultural venues and digital space: rethinking spaces and supporting actors

Artists testified to the difficulty they experienced in creating in the absence of suitable spaces: interiors that were too small and unsuitable for their artistic practices were a major constraint. It should be noted that rural spaces have made it easier to maintain creative activity because they offer artists exhibition facilities that are better suited to the pandemic situation (larger spaces).

The reflection has also focused on the need to reconsider creation and dissemination venues. To facilitate artist's mobility, to have several venues available, to think of networking city and countryside, to reinvent exhibition-type formats outside dedicated venues or in mixed venues... were some of the proposals made by the artists.

Faced with the closure of creation and dissemination venues, artists have invested in social networks or, more globally, in digital technology, in order to create and disseminate their work.

For many artists, digital technology is perceived as an imposed constraint. Sometimes it is even felt as a betrayal of one's own values, as it has been necessary to "sell oneself for free to continue to exist".

Concerning relations with audiences, artists, particularly actors, insist that this medium cannot replace the relationship ("I do not exist without an audience"). Because creation is perceived as fundamentally linked to the other in a physical and sensitive relationship, the virtual space and the substitute for the relationship it offers give rise to a strong sense of rejection. Others reported on their attempts to deal with different spaces physical, virtual or hybrid ones. Some visual artists or audiovisual directors in particular explained how digital technology has enabled them to maintain their activity and stay in touch with other professionals. For young visual artists, digital technology also represents an essential means of making themselves known. Here the gap seems generational and disciplinary.

Beyond the variables linked to discipline, age or greater or lesser mastery of the tools, the disparity in the relationship to digital technology raises objective technical questions.

Firstly, it is a question of skills. Creating on a digital medium implies mastering specific modes of production and distribution, their techniques, purposes and effects. The fact that one does not learn to use these tools or that one does not have the necessary skills generates a feeling of powerlessness, of being forced to use them, and fuels reactions of rejection.

Secondly, this highlights legal and remuneration issues. These are familiar issues, but the pandemic has given them a particular prominence and made them unavoidable. Artists express frustration and even anger when they talk about the use and the outcome of their productions on the Internet. The fear that video distribution will escape them and that it will not be remunerated is coupled with the fact that it could generate income for the broadcasting channels without benefiting them.

3. Structuring and reorganising the sector: putting the artist back at the heart of the system

The desire to better promote their work was commonly shared by the artists : to transmit in a more visible way what they do, how they do it, what skills and abilities are mobilised in their artistic practices, and what they bring to society... A major effort to promote artistic practice to a wide audience seems to them to be fundamental and a priority in the months and years to come.

Many artists define themselves as the « forgotten ones of the crisis ». They feel that they have been "forgotten" in terms of support systems: where cultural structures, venues and operators have benefited from employment subsidies and/or have seen their subsidies maintained without having to expand their activities, artists feel they have suffered from even greater precariousness. For many of the participants, the pandemic revealed a crisis of confidence in the role of artists, with the underlying question of what kind of society we want for the future. To fight this crisis of confidence, they call for a real process of co-construction of cultural action or policy by taking their needs and realities more and better into account. They ask for new collective structures and decision-making modes.

Conclusion

These first observations alert us to the situation of creators, their fears and their needs both in terms of technical support and of recognition and valuation of their work.

Beyond this, what is pointed out is the need to collectively reflect on the place of creation in society and the role we wish to give to artists in the transformation of society.

For our research project, these testimonies open up avenues for further reflection on :

- the question of time and how it affects artistic work
- the relationship in tension between the different spaces of creation: physical and digital
- the role of creative artists in the transformation of the sector



Presenter: Sarah Montero

I work on issues of territorial cultural development, citizen participation and cultural mediation. I have carried out a comparative study of cultural policies in Bordeaux and Quebec City through the prism of the participatory question. My current research focuses on professional practices in the cultural sector.