

REPORT

Expert Meeting on a European Arts Index

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The Expert Meeting, involving key experts from Europe and the USA, the European Commission and the Council of Europe, was organised by the European Cultural Foundation with the aim of taking stock of the various attempts for measuring the contribution of culture and the creative industries in terms of economic, social and human development. The US Arts Index was the inspiration, raising the question whether such an index, with the required adaptation, could work for Europe and if yes, what role it could fulfil.

Introducing the US Arts Index

The US Arts Index, known more precisely as the National Arts Index (NAI), was presented in a background paper and extensively discussed at the experts meeting as a possible starting point for a European Arts Index or a similar index for culture in Europe. The discussion that arose covered the following main issues:

Availability of data

Data, that is regularly collected and available nationwide (i.e. in all 50 States of America), is only available or matched in a small number of European countries. In Europe, there is a considerable lack of reliable and comparable data and, trans-national data collection and analysis is still in an embryonic stage. The ESSnet-Culture (European Statistical System Network on Culture) task force has done a great job in laying the foundations for statistical harmonisation in culture.¹ Nevertheless the actual state of regular data collecting practice does not support such European endeavour even if making concessions such as reducing the number of indicators and the number of primary data composing the indicators (e.g. the 2012 US Arts Index is composed of 83 indicators that are built on 194 primary data), and starting only with a few countries that are able and willing to start the research.

Considering the low priority that European Member States, European institutions and their statistical agency Eurostat give to consolidated European cultural evidence through concerted and harmonised action, it is improbable that a European Culture Index would see the light in a short, or even medium, term future. In a climate of huge economic and financial drawbacks, investing in such a costly and labour intensive exercise does not seem realistic.

Close examination of the US Arts Index nevertheless reveals the possibility for civic initiatives and private involvement. Although the majority of data is produced by public authorities, key indicators come from private sources, both from business and non-profit organisations. The main credit for the entire project in the US goes to a non-governmental organisation, Americans for the Arts. Furthermore, private sponsorship allowed for the purchase of licensed statistics to be included among the indicators.

Private initiatives can (in general) employ more pragmatic and innovative means than public administrations. Indeed, expressing an abstract concept such as the “health and vitality” of a nation’s culture using only a

¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-policy-development/documents/ess-net-report-oct2012.pdf>

single numeric requires civic courage! In being a relative score - instead of an absolute metric - also inhibits easy perception of the index. These challenges are nevertheless substantiated by the attention that the US Arts Index has generated (including from overseas), even without knowing the sophisticated statistical rigour² behind each of the 83 indicators.

Having screened the statistical resources available across Europe, the introductory paper came to the conclusion that the main spill-over effect of the US Arts Index is that it offers a model to national cultural indexes like the one in the UK and in the Netherlands, and that it stimulates reflection among diverse stakeholders about the need to improve the state of statistical evidence about culture in Europe.

Setting the agenda

While some invitees to the expert meeting expected the drawing of concrete scenarios for the future, the gathering quickly made clear that bringing different national experiences and perspectives around a table and freely exchanging concepts, definitions and approaches in relation to measuring culture was a truly inspiring experience and very valuable in terms of knowledge formation and sharing. Rather than preparing a roadmap towards a European Culture Index, the aim of the explorative meeting was to identify existing challenges and opportunities in relation to a European Arts Index and more generally to discuss the issue of statistical evidence of the cultural sector across Europe. As a long standing player in the area of European cultural cooperation (from the Atlantic to the Ural and beyond), the European Cultural Foundation is ideally positioned for this kind of convening exercise. The involvement and achievements in the preparation of the *Cultuurindex Nederland* (the Dutch Culture Index) fully justify the role of the Boekman Foundation as the co-host of such an event.

The content of the meeting therefore took two paths, the first commenting on the US Arts Index and its possible European counterparts, and the second a discussion on issues to do with informing cultural policy – to quote a related classic.³

Discussing the US Arts Index (NAI)

The introductory analysis, presented to the meeting, was based on the US Arts Index published at the end of 2012.⁴ In the meantime however, the latest 2013 edition has been released. Its presentation revealed the vulnerability and at the same time adaptability of the instrument. The 2013 US Arts Index (concluding with 2011 data) consists of 78 indicators, which is five less than the previous 2012 edition (concluding with 2010 data). Seven indicators had to be withdrawn not being available any longer, and two new ones were added. Consequently, all the former US Arts Indexes had to be recalculated, which is an enormous challenge for the administrators. The previous US Arts Index showed a slightly positive outcome as the 2010 US Arts Index was 0.4 higher than 2009. The latest count however has produced a monotonous decline year by year since 2007. The authors of the US Arts Index (NAI) report need to dissect the (now) 78 indicators in order to explain the regression.

The nature of the expert meeting however, directed attention to the methodological aspect: namely that a technical factor, the availability of certain data, can considerably modify the instrument. This underlines the responsibility of using composite indexes. However, the more composite an index, the less reliable it gets. The great merit of the US Arts Index is its transparency, the care taken in communicating the contents of each indicator. Laudable are also the pains taken by readjusting former calculations to the new composition of data (as well as archiving the old indexes).

Randy Cohen, Vice President of Research and Policy at Americans for the Arts and the main engineer behind US Arts Index made two important points: first, that although there is clear value in collecting and

² An unpublished paper by one participant, Anton Maertens: Crossing the Atlantic - The National Arts Index in Europe, helped understand the deeper theoretical apparatus of NAI rooted in management sciences.

³ Mark J. Schuster: Informing Cultural Policy – The Research and Information Infrastructure. 2002, CUPR.

⁴ http://www.americansforthearts.org/information_services/arts_index/001.asp

disseminating data on and for the arts and culture sector, the US Arts Index has proven limited use in influencing policy; and second, that despite continued and varied efforts the organisation never succeeded to secure funding from public or private sources to make the project cost-effective and sustainable.

He also spoke about the initial scepticism that the undertaking had to fight with, which reminded the participants of the doubts that used to accompany the Compendium project that since has received general recognition, notably under the Council of Europe aegis.⁵ More direct is the analogy with the Dutch exercise that generated a relation-building exercise and an alliance between State institutions, researchers and representatives of many cultural professions.

Fundamental differences were highlighted between the continents. In America, culture depends mainly on the efforts and achievements of various communities, thus the main target of the US Arts Index are individuals who make decisions in corporations, foundations, municipalities and of course public authorities. In Europe, the latter mentioned public authorities are still the primary addressees of projects such as an Arts Index.

European experts also preferred the term Culture Index, rather than Arts Index (used in USA and UK) because it is more relevant to the European context.

An important challenge is how to handle bad news or to find the right application of an honest approach. The US Arts Index has taken a straightforward stand in this regard.

The pragmatic approach of the US Arts Index was repeatedly underlined. Combining a large variety of sources, without establishing a hierarchy among them and applying the simplest arithmetic at devising the main index (or the four dimension indicators) demonstrate this common sense approach.

A considerable and interesting part of the discussion centred on how the results are or should be communicated. Rank lists are considered a hazard for a number of reasons; yet, they are eye-catching, particularly for media channels. Flexible, variable benchmarking techniques can help bridge the dilemma.

Numbers, especially too many and expressing too complex abstract issues must be accompanied by stories. Smart visualisation may achieve the same, appealing to the senses and the mind at the same time.

Interactive techniques (characterised by the twin project of the US Arts Index and the Local Arts Index) respond to a number of needs and are therefore greatly commendable.

Presenting the Dutch Culture Index

Highly inspired by the US Arts Index, Cultuurindex Nederland, the Dutch Culture Index will be officially launched on 9 December 2013 in Amsterdam. Apart from the governmental data production, this project is a bottom up initiative, funded by private sources, and aimed at creating an independent empowering tool by and for the cultural sector in the Netherlands. Cas Smithuijsen, Director of the Boekman Foundation presented the new initiative and made the following four observations:

Data acquisition: Not all data needed to compose the Dutch Culture Index already exists. The Statistical Office will need to buy new data or produce new data that is not yet available. This will require new partnerships in order to be able to deliver the needed data collection.

- Sector involvement: For the Dutch Culture Index to fly, the arts and culture sector will have to pick it up and use it for its research and advocacy purposes.
- Cooperation: Researchers and statisticians have come together in this exercise that led to a very fruitful exchange to be continued and strengthened in the years to come.
- Mobilisation of public opinion: It is hoped that the Dutch Culture Index will broaden and deepen conversation about the value of the arts and culture and mobilise different groups on Dutch cultural policy issues.

⁵ www.culturalpolicies.net

The above observations were supported by the French example. Philippe Chantepie, expert at the Ministry of Culture and Communication, and one of the *rapporteurs* of the ESSnet Culture report underlined that although France has a long-standing tradition and dedicated department responsible for collecting, assessing and publicising cultural statistics (Department of Research, Forecast Studies and Statistics) - and although each government asks about return on investment, employment, and economic growth - the quality and quantity of national data considerably varies from discipline to discipline (e.g. it is still very difficult to collect data from the fields of visual arts and performing arts).

Developing a European Arts Index

Until now there have been two direct followers of the US Arts Index in Europe: the Dutch undertaking and the UK Arts Index. The UK Arts Index used a smaller number of indicators arranged in a larger number of dimensions than the American model: 20 indicators and 7 issues. After the first edition in 2011, the second edition is still waiting to see the light. Both national culture indexes, the British and Dutch, were initiated in countries where culture was a prominent loser as a result of austerity measures. Therefore, the projects are evidently driven by advocacy purposes.

Despite the engaged discussion, few of the experts' interventions anticipated the prospect of a transnational Arts Index in Europe in the near future.

However, it remains important to keep the issue of transnational data collection, analysis and comparison under serious consideration because:

- a uniform method of data collection and Index would help mainstream culture in the European agenda
- a European approach would benefit the harmonisation of concepts, definitions and methodological approaches in the measurement of culture
- comparison and benchmarking between countries, regions or cities could take place on more sophisticated level
- cultural policy making could become more informed and intelligent

With those opportunities in mind, it was emphasised that the process is at least as important as the result, since dialogue is often worth more than the data that prompts it. The possibility of starting with smaller coalitions of willing partners, using the frame provided by the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) was raised, as well as chances of attracting global enterprises to the task. Regions and municipalities are more eager to resort to culture when their own image and international perception will benefit. This provides the argument that more than country level indexes should be considered.

Alternatives to complex culture indexes were also considered like surveys on cultural practices, participation, consumption, use of digital technology by arts and culture organisations (e.g. in the UK). The Culture Watch Europe selection of six key performance indicators deserves mentioning, or an even narrower choice of three or four indicators to be modelled upon the Human Development Index. A pilot project of the Budapest Observatory represents another more alternative approach.⁶

Inspiration can be gathered from a number of related practices. The UNESCO Culture for Development Indicator Suite (CDIS) is a pioneering research and advocacy initiative that aims to establish a set of indicators highlighting how culture contributes to development at the national level.⁷ CUPIX, the Cultural Price Index on Goods and Services across Europe is itself a small culture index (connected to the Compendium programme).⁸ Although the Urban Audit project by Eurostat appears to have lost the initial impetus, it has a rich mine of evidence on relevant areas such as the cultural conditions that European cities

⁶ http://www.budobs.org/files/cultural_policy_barometer.pdf

⁷ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/cultural-diversity/cultural-expressions/programmes/culture-for-development-indicators/>

⁸ CUPIX <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/statistics-markets.php>

offer.⁹ The Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities Index has been applied for half a decade.¹⁰ Community Innovation Surveys (CIS), the main data source for measuring innovation in Europe, as well as MIPEX (Migration Integration Policy Index) produced by the British Council and the Migration Policy Group, a fully interactive tool and reference guide dedicated to the measuring of integration policies both have some cultural relevance.¹¹ Interestingly, the Council of Europe has launched a discussion on developing a conceptual and pragmatic approach to a future "indicator framework on culture's contribution to democracy" (IFCD). This series of indicators would serve as an analytical tool as well as a basis for a new narrative on culture and democracy.

Hasan Bakhshi from Nesta in the UK presented a concrete list of eleven questions to answer before launching a project like an Arts Index (see Annex One).

Measuring the value and impact of culture

Participants agreed that demands for more sophisticated instruments for measuring the value and the impact of culture will increase as goals are defined and expanded, in conjunction with other social spheres like education, health or environment. The same effect will be created by steps like culture's acknowledgement as the fourth pillar of sustainable development; its full incorporation into the Millennium Development Goals; advanced monitoring of the UN Alliance of Civilisations; the UNESCO Diversity Convention; the different heritage agreements of the Council of Europe as well as; the flagship projects defined by the Council of Europe's Moscow Agenda etc.

Examples, such as those listed above, call for issue based measurements, relating culture to concepts like human rights, diversity, equality, growth and jobs etc. Equally important are the regular health checks of the sector, exemplified by the US Arts Index.

Some white spots, familiar to statisticians, such as individual artists and/or creative workers employed in branches that are statistically labelled "non-creative" are difficult to cover. Whole sub-sectors are sometimes difficult to grasp (e.g. dance). Specificities of heritage or the audiovisual sector require particular treatment. An international project "Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe" coordinated by Europa Nostra promises great steps forward towards indicators on the social and economic impact of built heritage. These endeavours call for similar action with regard to the relatively new concept of intangible heritage and other cultural assets.

Cohabitation with creative industries continues to be an overarching challenge and this is an area that the US Arts Index has not tackled. New concepts call for definition, especially in the digital realm. The increasing body of evidence about the positive effects of cultural participation in fields like health, education, justice etc. calls for further research and more elaborated approaches in terms of defining the social impact of culture. Such measurement requires greater use of qualitative data and indicators to complement statistical information.

While wrestling with new challenges, proven instruments like national satellite accounts for culture are applied in a few countries, and the European Commission administers the checking of different composite indicators on a high professional level. And, those who take part in projects supported by the Structural Funds have had plentiful experience with the output and impact indicators applied there. Finally, forthcoming editions of the Eurostat Pocketbook on cultural statistics as well as the next edition of the Eurobarometer Special Survey on cultural participation were announced and greeted.¹²

Conclusions

⁹ http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/region_cities/city_urban/

¹⁰ http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/Cities/Index/default_en.asp

¹¹ <http://www.mipex.eu/>

¹² http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_special_399_380_en.htm#399

The plea for “**evidence based cultural policies**” needs to gain more flesh and precision. The growing appeal of competitiveness and branding exercises and the increasing recognition of **soft power** call for new ways to measure the value and impact of culture, going beyond purely economic arguments about the contribution of culture to jobs and growth. The European Commission’s ‘Beyond GDP initiative’ that is about developing indicators that are as clear as GDP but more inclusive of the social aspects of progress and wealth, could provide an avenue for more comprehensive approaches towards measuring culture. Sporadic, random surveys and research thrusts must (and will) develop into **systemic, regular** exercises.

The reasons for intensifying the collection of information on culture are manifold – all of them legitimate and slowly gaining ground. Raising and also satisfying **curiosity**, defining the lay and professional, attracting **more attention**, are the most general motivations. A more pragmatic aim is to serve **advocacy** purposes. Enabling **informed, intelligent cultural policies** and evidence-based decision-making is another, more sophisticated goal. Increasing demand is felt for issue-based and policy-related **watchdog functions** that could serve as early warning, monitoring and impact detection.

Public authorities are in charge of developing standard and basic **infrastructure** and for providing a supportive, receptive **environment** for collecting cultural evidence. The miserable state of cross-continent **harmonisation** of principles and techniques cries for increased efforts at intergovernmental level.

All professional **associations** in culture should pay more attention to gathering and submitting data from their remit. The diverse and dynamic nature of the new generation indicators predestines private, non- and for-profit, actors to take the **main initiative** towards universal indexes.

Poverty of direct culture performance and related statistics is no excuse for delaying work on indicator exercises. Standardised indicators (NACE¹³, COFOG¹⁴, etc.), data gathered by associations, qualitative checklists and a diverse array of business, media and academic surveys lend themselves to a **harvesting of information** that could provide intelligent evidence. In this context, involving the European cultural sector is pivotal in refining the tools and improving the process and its outcomes.

The multiple difficulties of a transnational culture index in Europe suggest a step-by-step approach. Any initiative is likely to produce a snowball effect, gathering more and more data and places to be involved and covered. Public (national and European) authorities can play a role by endorsing the idea, and by obliging their institutions to co-operate. The decisive thrust however, can be expected from the non-governmental sphere, especially organisations that are broadly entrenched across the continent. The Dutch example proves that it is a long haul. From the first steps of documenting, determining and establishing a task force, years may pass before a first limited European Culture Index is born.

¹³ Nomenclature statistique des activités économiques dans la Communauté européenne

¹⁴ Classification of the Functions of Government

Annex I

Eleven questions that one needs to answer when considering investment in a culture index (or arts index in Anglo-Saxon parlance) by Hasan Bakhshi, Nesta, UK:

1. What 'problem' is the arts index trying to address?
2. Why is an arts index the solution to this problem, as opposed to other possible solutions?
3. What do we actually mean by an 'arts index'?
4. Who are the audiences for an arts index?
5. What has been the value of arts indexes in countries that have already produced them? Have there been any beneficial uses that were not anticipated when the arts indexes were being put together in these countries? Have the arts indexes in these countries had undesired consequences?
6. How can we evaluate whether an arts index is meeting its intended objectives and what implications does this have for the design of an index?
7. What are the right components of an arts index and on what basis are they selected?
8. At what level of aggregation (geographical, art and culture form etc.) should the index be constructed?
9. What are the data requirements for an arts index?
10. How should the arts index be communicated to its audiences?
11. What is the business model of the arts index? Who should pay for it?

Annex II

AGENDA

Co-moderators: **Mats Rolén**, ECF Board member, former Research Director, Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, and **Isabelle Schwarz**, Head of Advocacy, Research and Development, ECF.

9:30 – 9:35 Welcome by Katherine Watson, Director ECF and Cas Smithuijsen, Director Boekman Foundation

9:35 – 9:50 Introduction of the participants

9:50 – 10:15 Presentation on existing approaches and examples of arts/culture indexes: challenges and opportunities for a European Arts Index - by Peter Inkei, Budapest Observatory

10:15 – 11:15 Discussion (1)

- What challenges and what use of arts indexes at national level? Insights from Americans for the Arts, Cultuurindex Nederland, United Kingdom, France and other relevant national experiences.
- What learning to take for a possible European Arts Index?

11:15 – 11h30 *Coffee break*

11:30 – 13:00 Discussion (2) on possible scenarios/pathways to a European Arts Index

- What added value would a European Arts Index bring to the arts and culture sector? What added value would it bring to Europe? (Input from experts from European Commission, Council of Europe/ERICarts, heritage sector)

13:00 – 14:30 *Lunch*

14:30 – 16:00 Discussion (3) on possible scenarios/pathways to a European Arts Index (continuation)

- What index methodology would be most suitable for a European Arts Index? (Input from JRC, European Commission, ESS-net, heritage sector)

16:00 – 16:30 Conclusions and recommendations

Annex III

List of participants

1	Tsveta	Andreeva	Policy officer, European Cultural Foundation, Bulgaria
2	Hasan	Bakhshi	Director, Creative Industries, NESTA, UK
3	Philippe	Chantepie	DEPS – Ministère de la Culture et de Communications, France
4	Randy	Cohen	Vice President of Research and Policy, Americans for the Arts, USA
5	Marielle	Hendriks	Boekmanstichting, the Netherlands
6	Peter	Inkei	Director, Budapest Observatory (BUDOBS), Hungary
7	Anton	Maertens	Expert, researcher, Belgium
8	Catherine	Magnant	Acting Head of Unit, Cultural policy and ICD, European Commission
9	Kathrin	Merkle	Head, Policy Development, Directorate of Democratic Governance, Council of Europe
10	Robert	Oosterhuis	Research Co-ordinator Culture and Media, MINOCW, the Netherlands
11	Mats	Rolén	ECF Board member, Sweden
12	Isabelle	Schwarz	Head of Advocacy, Research and Development, European Cultural Foundation
13	Cas	Smithuijsen	Director, Boekmanstichting, the Netherlands
14	Koenraad	Van Balen	Professor, 'Raymond Lemaire Centre for Conservation', Belgium
15	Paul	Van Haver	Vice President of Global Data Services, TechSoup Global, UK Program Manager, Creative Europe Program and EU cultural policies. DG
16	Rob	Van Iersel	EAC, European Commission
17	Henk	Vinken	Expert, Cultuurindex Nederland, the Netherlands
18	Katherine	Watson	Director, European Cultural Foundation
19	Dorota	Weziak-Bialowolska	Joint Research Center, European Commission
20	Andreas	Wiesand	Executive Director, ERICArts, Germany