

International Virtual Conference

COVID-19 crisis & Emergency Funding Mechanisms : What action plan for the **Cultural and Creative sector** ?

Under this once-in-a-century pandemic hitting the world economy, saddled with record levels of debt and followed by official government measures for enforced closure, hundreds of concerts, festivals and events have been cancelled and postponed in Tunisia and all around the world. Artists as independent workers, arts organizations dependent on gathering groups together, creative people engaged in travel and exchange, art technicians as the industry's invisible hands and the whole ecosystem may be especially affected. The sudden implosion of the cultural and creative sector has confronted us with a brutal reality and an urgent call for an industry emergency support, in order to help the most vulnerable creatives, workers and organisations stay afloat during the COVID-19 crisis.

In the past few weeks, emergency relief funds and other campaigns or online petitions to raise awareness on the massive impacts of the Corona virus on the arts and cultural sector have been created aiming to provide support and temporary financial assistance to members who are in need to help the culture sector withstand the crisis - yet it does not even begin to answer, in concrete terms, the many questions concerning the modalities, coordination and organization of such emergency mechanisms.

On March 20th, Culture Funding Watch in partnership with Rambourg Foundation have joined with various parties of the Creative and Cultural sector around the world to gather their knowledge and experiences of best practices in the field, to debate and carry out an inquiry by putting into profit the technological and digital assets we have to communicate and connect in this time of physical disconnection, through an international virtual conference.

In the first part of the conference, a plenary session was conducted where speakers and participants shared informations on impact assessment, from personal experiences to what is available on the market.

Then, in the second part, attendees were split into 3 workshops, based on their choice to discuss the different past experiences and current initiatives being taken from the public and governmental institutions (W1), the community of cultural and artistic practitioners (W2) to the private institutions and foundations (W3).

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Plenary

The plenary session was opened by Ouafa Belgacem, CEO and founder of Culture Funding Watch and later co-moderated with Shiran Ben Abderrazak, CEO of Rambourg Foundation.

O. Belgacem opened the international video conference with a depiction of today's critical situation as she says "it's an emergency that requires emergency actions. While some of us are used to work in such hard contexts, this crisis is unique in the sense that it is hitting us all at the same time with, quite similar impact but at different scales." She adds "For the first time in our generation lifetime, a crisis is affecting us all collectively and individually with no distinction of social class, sector or geographical location."

She then began the plenary session with a presentation of its core purpose, "our main objective is not to come with final announcements and solutions, but instead to know who is working on what, and to try in place of duplicating, completing each other in a more efficient way by sharing strategies and experiences in collecting data for needs assessment purposes and evidence based advocacy." Major questions that were the very essence of what this conference was about have also been brought up clearly, as an expression of common questioning: Do we have an estimation of the financial impact on our sector? Can it be measured? Should the funding beneficiary list be the result of a selection and if so, under what conditions? How can priority be assessed and how can we optimize funding distribution in order to save the maximum of actors?

Next, **Ahmed Amine Azouzi**, Minister's counsellor for Cultural Affairs gave an overview of issues and quantitative impacts regarding the current situation in Tunisia: "20 cinemas, 57 art galleries, 40 theatres and more than 700 cultural and creative activities were closed, cancelled or postponed including major music festivals and fairs, in a country of 11M people." As a major public institution and the sector's regulator, the awareness of such unprecedented impact is felt and considered, knowing that this emergent sector is mainly made of small and medium sized enterprises, making the situation even harder to sustain. As a possible line of approach, the Ministry had proposed the conversion of cultural manifestations into numeric

platforms when possible, with an attention brought to various technological assets and possible network connections. Gabès Film Festival has for instance started its campaign for the projection of its film festival online, "at home", in partnership with the VOG platform artify. The ministry's office is reacting as fast as it can in order to assess and launch initiatives to limit the disastrous impact. An overall hypothetical evaluation of the financial streams which will be injected in the cultural and creative economy if the lockdown lasted for 2months has been conducted, on which talks with the ministry of finance will be based, to ensure that the government will set up measures to support the sector. A list of emergency measures, to be announced publicly, will be activated in the meantime and as fast as possible.

Following this intervention, **Toni Attard**, founder and director of Venture Culture Malta gave a clear and consistent presentation of an impact study on the effects of the pandemic on the CCI in his country, but first starts with a depiction of the health calamity's impact and a presentation of our role in this time of crisis: "as the frontliners of the health sector continue doing their utmost to address the emergency situation, it's in our duty as policymakers, culture leaders or culture practitioners to support the frontliners of our sector, the artists. While health workers are helping people stay alive, the artists are helping people stay safe and sane at the time of global physical distancing."

One other way for artists to address the pandemic is, for **Milena Dragicevic Sesic**, professor at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Serbia, to continue entertaining our communities and thinking of other ways of reaching them, but also other ways of producing content that is adaptable to our technological platforms. That way, we might approach this crisis differently. Her students that were supposed to have an International Theater student festival ended up organizing it online via live streaming performances and panel debates.

On top of that, she adds that most of compendium of European cultural policies and practices have launched research and investigation of what is happening as public policies but also as solidarity and bottom-up practices in the field, to help artists especially performing artists who are living on contracts in this situation.

International Virtual Conference

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Workshop 1

Initiatives to take from an institutional perspective

One of the major roles of public institutions is arts advocacy by ensuring that people, particularly those who are most vulnerable in the sector, are able to have their voices heard on issues that are important to them and having their views genuinely considered when decisions are being made about their lives. Thus, funding is crucial as a practical answer for advocacy, reinforcing the creation of a supportive environment. Here are some emergency funding mechanisms presented by country or regions.

Caroline Vincent : Nashville Office of Arts + Culture (USA), highlighted the role of the city council in supporting the sector being in the case of Nashville double hit by a hurricane as well as by the COVID-19. She brought their experience in coordinating with the art and culture community to mobilise resources and prepare a response. Caroline also highlighted how often we are unprepared to face such large scale crisis.

Unlike other countries, the US National Endowment for the Arts represented by **Ouida Maedel** does not dispose of a comfortable budget. Thus, Relief stimulus packages in Arts sector represent an opportunity to provide financial support, like it was the case during the 9/11 and 2008 financial crisis. Another financial alternative would be "crowdfunding" along with a prerequisite of short- and long-term planning. With regards to the estimation of the financial impact of the pandemic, numerous organizations are sharing information on data collection mechanisms focusing primarily on surveys.

On the other hand, and in order to deal with the current situation, the cultural sector at UNESCO represented by **Saori Matilda Machimura** set up a task force to comply with the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions worldwide by ensuring that artists, universities and institutions are supported, monitoring the sectors and producing data.

As for the measures taken in the French institutions for the cultural and creative sector, **Didier Zyserman** representative of the French Institute in Tunisia, states that they primarily come from the Ministry of Culture, such as compensations for the Culture and Arts industry

following the cancellations of events and donations of 22 million euros dedicated to fragile cultural organizations to mitigate the risk of their losses. However, all stakeholders must be involved to overcome this crisis by setting up and developing an emergency plan in all structures and take the right decisions as quickly as possible.

In Tunisia, **Ouafa Belgacem** CEO and founder of Culture Funding Watch affirms that, however, in emergency responses, institutions do not respond to the civil and the community of practice's call for support at the same speed as in normal times, because of the on-going pressure it is receiving from healthcare institutions, now a priority. Transparency and good managerial system appear to be crucial in such a framework. Unfortunately, the Arts & Culture sector is unfamiliar with emergency responses compared to other sectors which are well organized with somehow effective coordination mechanisms. She also underlined the necessity to learn from fast processes as emergency mechanism response in humanitarian crises, that are clear and standardized from international institutions, not to forget the importance of open resources and valuable platforms to learn from such as bond.org platform.

To conclude, we may ask ourselves what are the lessons learnt on strategies to face COVID-19?

What is happening now is an overlapping situation where all actors are trying to do the same thing. Sharing roles and responsibilities among the civil society, foundations, public and private institutions, community of practices is a must to perceive the emergency mechanism's rapid action plan, limits and added value by responding from a double viewpoint: From "what" and "whose" perspective is each added value most effective and efficient?

International Virtual Conference

COVID-19 crisis & Emergency Funding Mechanisms : What action plan for the *Cultural and Creative sector* ?

Workshop 2

Initiatives to take from the artistic and cultural community of practice perspective

The second workshop, moderated by **Toni Attard** founder and director of Venture Culture Malta, was about sharing creative solutions and initiatives emerging from the cultural actors and artistic community, to help the cultural and artistic scene who has sustained a financial loss stay afloat during the COVID-19 health crisis.

Quite a few speakers were at the head of fundraising programs, amongst them, **Morgan Brophy**, administrator of « Artist Relief Tree » an online fundraising platform open for artists from all over the world “first-come, first-served”, that makes need-based financial grants of 250\$ available to artists in need of assistance, especially freelancers and vulnerable actors. Also, **Julie Trébault**, director of PEN America’s Artists-at-Risk Connection project, works on helping artists by connecting them with organizations willing to support. She highlights one of the many challenging fundraising aspects she has been facing with the community behind ART, the selection of beneficiary and distribution criteria for grants in order to answer as many requests as possible. But, as resources are multiplying, the call to action is becoming less cumbersome. Several initiatives, as for instance the COVID-19 Freelance Artist Resource shared by J. Trébault presents a list of free resources, opportunities and financial relief options available to American artists of all disciplines.

As for **Raneen Bukhari**, curator and cultural producer from Saudi Arabia, the initiatives she has been working on come from a personal perspective, as she finds ways and means by putting into profit her reach on social media platforms, to contribute to her community of artists in the Middle East. There is at present a remarkable flowering of the Saudi art scene, as the kingdom opens its doors to music festivals, film festivals and other cultural events.

Therefore, many artists have left their jobs to join what used to be their hobbies, and now are constrained by the financial and social turmoil. Considering herself privileged to have monthly income, she started small personal initiatives which essentially aims to give direct funds or by giving them funds or work opportunities by networking and connecting people. Raneen’s initiative is still at a very early stage, however she has already

achieved an important impact : her network is growing, some artists got financial support and major community relief funds in Saudi Arabia have come into view, and one can cite as an example the relief fund for filmmakers that compensates artists who were financially damaged as a result from the postponed Red Sea Film Festival.

During the second part, **J. Trébault** bounced back on the genesis of Artist-at-Risk Connection project. As a non-profit organization, PEN America has two main missions « celebrating littérature and helping writers, and celebrating and defending freedom of expression. » Through their experience and expertise of helping persecuted writers, they’ve realized that artists and creative thinkers in general don’t have the needed protection mechanisms when they are facing risks. Thus, the Artist-at-Risk Connection project was developed to help threatened artists provide emergency solutions by offering them a database of useful resources and connecting them with organizations that can help immediately.

Julie mentioned that since the lockdown, they have received a big number of help requests from artists who have lost their income. About the financial support she added that « at PEN, we have an emergency fund for professional writers that exists from two decades (2000\$ in the US) [...] now this fund is open not only for writers but also for creative thinkers. » The latter is still US based, but they are working on the possibility to make it international as soon as possible.

Participants from different worldwide regions shared a lot of similar experiences. Additional subjects and important questions were raised such as the importance of volunteering, the digitalization and free resources sharing, the virtual experience and its limits, the panic online solutions, the dilemma between the emergency and the need of time taking to understand the situation and to propose sustainable initiatives.

Above all, fantastic examples of artists, creative thinkers and active organizations were present, reflecting on this situation on small or large scale, locally and globally, supporting and inspiring each other.

International Virtual Conference

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Workshop 3

Initiatives to take from the private sector and foundations

Like in almost every area, postponements and cancellations are subject of necessity and apply to every business. **Shiran Ben Abderrazak**, CEO of Rambourg Foundation and moderator of the session, opened the talk with a brief description of its core activities then quickly highlighted the importance of resources re-allocation in such situation, later stressed by **Shelagh Wright**, where she underlines the opportunity of this shift to the sector. Sustainability of actors and projects in the Cultural and Creative industry must always be considered as a priority issue. Thus, the RF Grants' program have been modified to best address the current needs of artists whose creative practices and incomes are being adversely impacted by COVID-19 and are currently reallocated to be part of the ministry's relief fund " Fonds Relance Culture" in collaboration with other foundations and organizations.

Nevertheless, he adds that guarantee of shift efficiency can only be given to countries where funds programs and mechanisms already exist and have been implemented long before the crisis, allowing them to have a direct assessment of the needs and the right tools for the beneficiary selection and funds distribution.

Heba Hage-Felder, Lebanese Senior Program Manager at Arab Fund for Arts & Culture and **Arundhati Ghosh**, Executive Director at India Foundation for Art, both underlined the impact of on-going political, social and financial crisis through some regions long before the pandemic hit. These regions are somehow « well-positioned and privileged places to quick actions and strategies ». This said, they certainly do not escape the brutal reality that piles their vulnerability. Regardless of the lack of legal and institutional measures and data bases, both agreed that priority is now in the necessity to support and get supported by creating a dynamic of solidarity and care between the actors and reconsidering the value of art in societies to impact social crisis, build knowledge, consciousness and well-being in the societies.

Culture and art should represent a tool to be used, a "weapon" that unites us all to fight back COVID-19 and "instead of social distancing, we should practice physical distancing and social solidarity", says **Sarah Qudah**, representative of Abdul Hammed Shoman Foundation from Jordany. Governments and institutions must adopt initiatives that adequately support the sustainability of the sector's ecosystem: support new imaginative ways of creating a culture of concrete solidarity and people-to-people interaction that create a sentiment. Similarly, **N. Mabote** evokes online based platforms for artists that are yet to be an advantage for live performers "one other way as artists to address the pandemic is to continue entertaining our communities and uplifting their spirits."

On the long term, according to **S. Ben Abderrazak**, rethinking of a model to adopt for the sector with the implementation of sustainable plans and new links will help keep, or at least save its remaining prosperity. Following this statement, **Julie Chenot**, representative of the Camargo Foundation in

France puts the accent on the same difficulties being faced by sectors at different levels of maturity, and that a connected and solid network between the fields could bring more strength and support to the sector once it's ready to get back on its feet.

As for **Ricardo Peach** taking part from South Africa, the priority is also in the real dimension of the issue, by helping artists physically and not only virtually, especially in countries where the unemployment rate is high, lack of budget is considerable and government's funds distribution measures grant, what is from their perspective, the prioritized sectors affected by the crisis.

He adds that a close attention is to be given to new funding model, for it not to be confused for a living allowance but rather as a development grant. He does not believe in the idea that lost gigs have to be immediately refunded, but instead supports the idea of reconceptualization (rethinking/redoing) knowing the evolutive aspect of arts its does not need an immediate outcome in terms of performance.

International Virtual Conference

COVID-19 crisis & Emergency Funding Mechanisms : What action plan for the *Cultural and Creative sector* ?

When it comes to developing activities on online platforms, as the rise of support initiatives we are witnessing now, **S. Wriath** raises a legitimate question on information accessibility in a world of information overload: "not every artist has an easy and sometimes obvious access to these medias in terms of logistics but also content, and it can also be the role of organizations to facilitate the access to these supports."

Internationally, and by considering all that has been said for an urgent solidarity wake-up-call, **Marie Le Sourd** representative of On The Move France, suggests to develop public-private partnerships to engage on and advocacy platform, that unifies and makes implementation of processes and models fast and more efficient.

To end the workshop, a list of recommendations that were brought during this session were identified and compiled into bullet points as such:

- The urgent need to set up mechanisms between different actors from the grant making field and coming from different geographic contexts in order to cover a larger scope of situations, allocation mechanisms, but also the implementation of international solidarity policies.
- Find connection between different sectors and fields to develop system and bring more knowledge to the discussion.
- Encourage artists to remain responsible for other people from vulnerable class through artistic practices and actions.

International Virtual Conference

COVID-19 crisis & Emergency Funding Mechanisms : What action plan for the *Cultural and Creative sector* ?

References and sources

Plenary

→ Toni Attard – Venture Culture Malta survey
https://docs.google.com/document/d/120ihByMwafNGNG_PB4IMW7MqWilyP02g1UBsAzE7oYA/edit

→ Online surveys
<http://on-the-move.org/news/article/20675/corona-virus-resources-arts-culture-and-cultural/>

→ Artist survey launched by The Americans for the Hearts
<https://surveys.americansforthearts.org/s3/CoronavirusImpactSurvey>

→ Hashtag #togetherwecan: An initiative for anyone who can do virtual training starts to do videos. And we are contacting the institute if they can support small amount of payments to support us as our works stopped.

→ An online festival is happening in Malta
<https://www.facebook.com/events/447214039416192/>

→ In UK
<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1cD1K7WYZwbTyA1gxLp0BRqnwL5oFY75Taizi8bKC3ik/edit#gid=0>

→ Initiative from Chicago of personal solidarity funds
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/u/1/d/1FBEU0cdAGpScU0JrOIYFm8FrY1Bjr0_HsyW4hWoj74I/htmlview?sle=true&pru=AAABcPlyhqE*-P8YNzo26-9p-r1XAXErPg#gid=0

→ #NONFERMIAMOLACULTURA is a streaming cultural program, promoted by the culture department of the city of Naples, running every day: Music, theatre, workshops...

→ Nhimbe Trust (Zimbabwe) is launching an online portal for CCIs early next week. The portal will provide information resources and technical support to the CCI ecosystem for the strengthening of COVID-19 preparedness and responses. Information that will be shared will include links to funding opportunities, online trainings, tools that can be adopted / adapted to collect / collate data on specific areas

→ Social Distancing Festival
<https://www.socialdistancingfestival.com>
- But how to monetise and get income from these virtual offers?

→ **piXel**, an online pop-up exhibition connecting people through the arts during COVID-19
<https://www.pixel-exhibition.com>

→ Debates during **FIST festival** on youtube channel
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnXVGG0sOp8>

→ **HEVA Fund** (Kenya) has waived costs of existing debt facilities for CCIs and is currently creating a tool to generate analysis on sectors most at risk to map lost incomes and provide insights on other key issues that will help prepare a response

→ **archivart.co**, a platform that helping artists to live from their own art by connecting them to potential buyers. In the next few days, archivart will launch a new project of donation to help artist to survive in this difficult time.

→ In celebration of world storytelling day, a group of arab story tellers are holding a virtual story telling event:
<https://www.facebook.com/events/521113878780386/>

Workshop1

→ Link: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/u/1/d/1FBEU0cdAGpScU0JrOIYFm8FrY1Bjr0_HsyW4hWoj74I/htmlview?sle=true&pru=AAABcPlyhqE*-P8YNzo26-9p-r1XAXEr1X

→ Some helpful emergency preparation resources for arts organizations: artsready.org

→ <https://performingartsreadiness.org>

→ <https://en.unesco.org/themes/protecting-our-heritage-and-fostering-creativity/emergencyfund>

→ <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1PKGodzO2bYp1jyF95iVC1sI25ZJaijZjNdnzRMNtN0A/edit?usp=drivesdk>

International Virtual Conference

COVID-19 crisis & Emergency Funding Mechanisms :
What action plan for the **Cultural and Creative sector** ?

Workshop 2

Initiatives shared by participants

→ **Morgan Brophy**

<https://artistrelieftree.com/>

<https://covid19freelanceartistresource.wordpress.com/>

→ **Julie Trebault**

<https://artistsatriskconnection.org/story/covid-19-resources-for-artists>

<https://pen.org/writers-emergency-fund/>

https://www.francetvinfo.fr/sante/maladie/coronavirus/coronavirus-une-aide-d-urgence-de-22-millions-d-euros-pour-tous-les-secteurs-culturels-touches-a-annonce-le-ministere_3872909.html

→ **Jeremiah**

<https://www.billboard.com/articles/business/9337908/coronavirus-resource-guide-music-professionals-help>

→ **Sepehr Sharifzadeh** (about a volunteer based online festival name Re-connect to bring artists together for solidarity during hard times)

<https://www.facebook.com/Reconnectfest>

https://www.facebook.com/JLohmannPerformanceArt/?ref=br_rs

→ **Corina Bucea** (a site for celebrating artists and the work that has been cancelled/delayed/disrupted)

<https://www.socialdistancingfestival.com/>

→ **Preeti Nangal**

<http://www.museumofmaterialmemory.com/>

Workshop3

Initiatives shared by participants

→ <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1PKGodzO2bYp1jyF95iVC1sI25ZJaijZjNdnzRMNtN0A/edit?usp=drivesdk>