



European Network for Active Participation in Cultural Activities

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Amateo Memorandum

This memorandum, addressed to European policy makers as we approach the European elections in 2014, is written to give profile to the amateur arts sector which is fundamental to culture and civil society, economic growth, development and innovation.

Amateo is a young, diverse European network, that represents active participation in cultural activities i.e. millions of amateur artists across Europe who passionately engage in the arts in their free time. The amateur arts are a driving force for creativity in society, for which we ask value, commitment, space and respect.

European policy has an important role in supporting and sustaining the amateur arts sector and providing it with opportunities to facilitate artists and groups to create, connect, share and perform... From stakeholders in European policy we ask:

- to recognise and promote the value of active cultural participation
- to recognise and promote the role of amateur arts in society
- to integrate active cultural participation into European culture policy
- to initiate cross-European scientific research on the practice of amateur arts
- to set out an evidence based education and learning policy that recognises the contribution of active participation to lifelong learning
- to enable networking and exchange in the field of amateur arts throughout Europe

As the European network for amateur arts we are committed to stimulate the debate and dialogue on the value and role of amateur arts and culture in society. Reflections on this memorandum and opportunities to engage in conversation on its content will be welcomed and appreciated. With this memorandum Amateo wishes to contribute to, stimulate and inspire the debate on culture and civil society.

Amateur arts & the value of culture

Culture sits at the very heart of society. Art and culture are terms used to describe the core of human existence; meanings are attributed to these key elements in life according to their use in different contexts and by different communities... When speaking of cultural policy the role of governmental action and its impact in relation to arts, culture and society needs to be (re)defined. Policy at all levels carries a substantial responsibility towards arts and culture and policy makers have the chance to hand tools to citizens and communities to use arts and culture to create, define identity, speak out and shape society.

Millions of people throughout Europe engage in arts practice in their free time (cfr. annex). Given their passion for practicing the arts – for no financial gain - we call them amateur artists (cfr. amare = to love). In several countries over years amateur artists have organised themselves through networks and informal associations. People making and performing arts seek out similar-minded people to create together, to interact, to join forces and to exchange.

Music, choir singing, theatre, dance, photography, multimedia, conceptual arts, fine arts, literature exist in endless shapes and forms and combine easily into various interdisciplinary practices that shape, extend, cross and reshape the boundaries of arts practice.

Now what is the value of arts and culture? Can it be measured scientifically?

We note that in several countries at the same time research is being done to measure and quantify the value of arts and culture for society (cfr. www.artscouncil.org.uk & www.cjasm.be/cultuur).

Completed research confirms the huge potential that exists in amateur arts practice, as a source of creativity and innovation in society, as a source of health and wellbeing, as a source of social cohesion, inclusion, interaction, and solidarity. And even so as a source of critical reflection and debate leading to renewal and development.

European policy should maximise on that potential and celebrate that cultural capital by investing in the amateur arts as a tool to stimulate, cultivate and make visible this enormous source of creativity.

Amateur arts as a life continuum

Taking in to account the benefits of amateur arts on health, wellbeing and social cohesion, we also are convinced that engaging in the arts from a young age is crucial. Research has shown that active engagement in the arts as a child results in both receptive and active participation in cultural activities in later life. Continuity is of great importance here: all people have a relationship with culture and should be offered opportunities at a young age to engage with the arts; this relationship changes and evolves but remains a constant throughout life. Involvement in the arts is intrinsic to a higher quality of life.

There is no age limit to art practice. Throughout life art, especially where the practice is creative or performance, contributes to personal development; building personal social networks, challenging oneself and placing oneself within society... Also for seniors and elderly amateurs arts practice helps individuals to remain active and healthy longer, boosts self esteem, ensures social interaction, provides personal support networks, stimulates creativity and prolongs life. With an aging population in Europe active cultural participation offers huge potentials for elder citizens in sharing experience and in addressing cross-generational issues.

European policy should invest in arts education and cultural education for children and young people enabling them to experience the joy of engaging in active arts participation through experimenting in multiple arts opportunities. At the same time policy should recognise and value the benefits of amateur arts practice throughout life and create opportunities for older citizens to engage actively in amateur arts.

Amateur Arts and European Cultural Policy

The added value of individuals and groups practicing arts in their free time links and contributes directly to several of the European targets set out in the Europe 2020 Targets (<http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/targets/eu-targets/>).

Amateur arts practice contributes directly to social cohesion and inclusion. The amateur arts are egalitarian and democratic and available to everybody, regardless of ability, age, gender, sexuality, race, ethnic origin, belief system, economic status or social background... Amateur arts work as a binding force between individuals, cultures and communities often providing the tools to both break down barriers and to integrate. There are fewer barriers to actively take part in the arts than exist to being part of an audience where there are considerable barriers, like cost, travel, inaccessibility and lack of understanding... Whilst with active participation in the amateur arts the relationship often begins at home or in peer groups or within communities where people culturally link in an organic way.

Amateur arts lay close to the field of cultural education; by practicing amateur arts people learn new skills and continue to develop these skills throughout life. Research shows that learning is a key motivation for people to engage in arts practice. Through active participation people gain and develop skills that are useful to different areas of life.

The European Culture Programme should recognise and celebrate the contribution the amateur arts make to the very fabric of civil society. People shape art and culture in their daily lives and amateur artists build bridges across cultural divides, borders and languages... by arts creativity through their shared passion and interests. Amateur arts can contribute to intercultural dialogue; deal with cultural diversity, to accessibility of cultures, and to the quality of (experiencing) culture. In this way the amateur arts contribute to a more cooperative and collaborative social society by building bridges across European communities.

European policy should focus more on active cultural participation. Europe should seek partners and support projects that work with amateur artists in a variety of target groups, approaches and contexts.

Amateo network

Amateo is a young, diverse network that focuses on three core objectives: (1) developing a network that exchanges expertise and experience in the field of amateur arts, (2) European research on amateur arts and (3) coordinating a European Week of Amateur Arts. Amateo has 23 member organisations in 13 countries and is working to build a broad, dynamic network of partners that work through the amateur arts to facilitate exchange of practice and expertise. These multi-disciplinary art organisations represent individual amateur artists, performers and groups numbering in their millions.

As a network Amateo should find support within European Cultural Policy to practice, develop and sustain the amateur arts throughout Europe. Financial support is needed to build the

network to include more countries, to work on content, to monitor and collect data on the field of amateur arts and to plan and deliver strategy in relation to European policy. Funds are needed to develop the digital platform that connects member organisations and facilitates exchanges on amateur arts activities throughout Europe and to ensure the inclusion and prioritisation of active participation in cultural activities in European Cultural Policy.

Amateo organises an annual conference where content, research and practice on amateur arts is presented and discussed. Our 7th annual conference will be held in Stockholm, Sweden, 8-10th of May 2014 on the theme 'Culture, Health and Wellbeing'. Our host organisers are ax – the Swedish Amateur Culture Council. The conference has a focus on culture in Europe and provides a meeting place for cultural practitioners, cultural organisations, and cultural researchers within Amateo's member countries. The keynote speakers will introduce different research areas: culture in relation to happiness, culture in relation to elderly people, and culture in relation to social inclusion. The conference will be held in connection with Amateo's General Assembly meeting 2014. Further information on www.amateo.info/agenda.

Amateur arts organisations should find support at all levels of cultural policy. Policy makers at European, National and local level should take into consideration the value of active participation in cultural activities and support the activities of amateur cultural creators. Amateo as a network, its members, and the millions of amateur artists and their associations are dependent on the support of policy makers at all levels.

European research on amateur arts

Amateo is developing a project and establishing partnerships to conduct transnational pan-European research to collect and collate comparable data on amateur arts practice. Several member countries have already conducted research on amateur arts (e.g. Flanders, Netherlands, UK, and Czech Republic). These research projects show that a significant percentage of the population of these countries is actively involved in creative hobbies and the amateur performing arts. In different countries research scale, design and concepts vary which generates results which are hard to compare. For example in some countries crafts and creative hobbies are also subject to research, while in other countries the focus was limited to the performing arts.

Research in Belgium and the Netherlands showed that around one third of the population engages in the amateur arts; a figure of around 9 million people for these two countries alone. This is a massive number. Data shows that among young people the number of frequent practitioners in the amateur arts represents 65% of the population. Research included breakdown by gender and social background of amateur artists. Data was also collected on the amount of time spent on amateur arts activities and the different art forms practised. Research also investigated the motivating factors behind individuals engaging in cultural activity. In addition to personal development and learning new skills, data collected demonstrated that social motivations like 'a safe environment' and 'spending time with friends', play an important role.

It is essential that we collect a pan-European picture on the practice of amateur arts in order to create a picture of the effects of active participation in cultural activities across countries and the continent. This, in turn, which would enable policy makers to target funding priorities to best effect in creating and developing an engaged civil society in Europe.

Amateo is in cooperation with Audiences Europe Network, a European network that focuses on audience development and receptive cultural participation. It would be of great value to European Cultural Policy if data could be gathered on both active and receptive cultural participation in a joint cross-European research project showing parallels and correlation between the two methodologies.

Amateo requests support from Creative Europe for the gathering of data on amateur arts practice throughout Europe. Creative Europe should recognise the value of this data and support the undertaking of pan-European research on amateur arts. In order to set up an appropriate research project an initial financial contribution is needed to deliver preparatory work in close cooperation with academic institutions that will conduct the pan-European research.

European Week of Amateur Arts

Amateo promotes the amateur arts through a high profile, high exposure, and celebratory project throughout Europe. The annual Week of Amateur Arts takes place in several European countries. This successful event stimulated through energies within the Amateo network member countries inspired where organisations encouraged one another to highlight amateur arts throughout their region or country by creating a Week of Amateur Arts. In Flanders, the Netherlands, UK, Sweden, Czech Republic... a Week of Amateur Arts takes place on a yearly basis. Amateo connects these initiatives through facilitating exchange of practice and experiences. Planned future developments of this event include an online exchange platform, international exchange of amateur artists, expand and outreach to involve new countries to create a European Week of Amateur Arts. International mobility carries in itself great possibilities and added value when it comes to intercultural exchange, perceiving identity and dealing with diversity in all its forms.

The European Week of Amateur Arts (which takes place in several European countries on different time sequences) deserves support and attention on a European policy level, being a positive and uplifting way to celebrate the power of communities to motivate themselves in creative cultural diversity and activity.



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Member organisations

AKKS, DK
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Centrum voor Beeldexpressie, BE
Danspunt, BE
Finlands Svenska Ungdomsförbund FSU, FI
Forum voor Amateurkunsten, BE
Interfolk, DK
JSKD, S
Kulturelle Samrad, DK
Kunstconnectie, NL
KUNSTWERKT, BE
Landsforeningen for Dramatisk Virksomhed DATS, DK
Landelijk Kennisinstituut Cultuureducatie & Amateurkunst LKCA, NL
Muziekmozaïek, BE
Národné Osvetové Centrum NOC, SK
NIPOS, CZ
Norsk Teaterrad, NO
OPENDOEK, BE
Savez Udruga HSK, HR
SO!ART, BE
Teatarska Mladina na Macedonija TMM, MK
Vlamo, BE
Voluntary Arts, UK & IE

Annex

Selected figures from Special Eurobarometer 399, publication November 2013

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_399_sum_en.pdf

Active participation as the creators or performer of artistic activities – citizens (aged 15 and above) from EU 27

Countries represented in Amateo (alphabetically)

DK 74 %

BE 46 %

CZ 37 %

FI 63 %

HR 21 %

NL 58 %

SE 68 %

SI 49 %

SK 38 %

UK 41 % & IE 41 %

EU average 38 %