



Mind the gap

**Building
digital bridges
to community**

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Introduction

Mind the Gap is an international research project inspired by the creativity and resourcefulness of arts education professionals throughout the Covid-19 crisis.

Studies show that the participatory arts, which engage communities in the creative process, can have a positive impact on physical, social and mental wellbeing. Digital technology can increase participation in arts education by breaking down geographical and social barriers, enabling educators to connect with communities who rarely participate in cultural experiences. At the same time, it has the potential to increase the social benefits of participation in cultural activities, such as improved wellbeing, more connected communities, acquisition of new skills and improved sense of entrepreneurship (OECD, 2022).

Addressing the digital gap through arts and culture

Organisations and their staff can feel they lack the skills, knowledge, equipment or confidence necessary to engage with participants online. At the same time, the communities they work with are often affected by the “digital gap”, or inequality of access to digital tools and resources, which further impacts their access to participation. Digitalisation of cultural activities can therefore become a double-edged sword: while it can increase and diversify audiences, it has the potential to exclude those who struggle to get online. The Mind the Gap project is therefore based on a twofold objective: to provide arts education workers with the resources, tools and inspiration necessary to successfully implement online participatory projects, while analysing existing barriers to participation and the best ways to address them.



About this report

This report was coordinated by the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences. It is based upon a literature review of existing research into digital inclusion and exclusion and the use of digital technologies in the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs). The ten key issues addressed within this report were identified via a Europe-wide survey of arts education professionals implemented in late 2021 and a series of follow-up interviews with organisations and freelance educators delivering online arts education activities.

This report aims to provide creative and cultural organisations and policymakers with an analysis of existing barriers to digital participation, and actionable recommendations for enabling inclusion. It is designed to be used in conjunction with two other resources produced as part of the Mind the Gap project: a database of case studies of online education projects from across Europe (www.mindthegap-project.org/case-studies) and a Knowledge Hub of resources aimed at educators and organisations seeking to implement digital creative projects (www.mindthegap-project.org/knowledge-hub). Case studies and Knowledge Hub tools pertaining to each key issue can be found under “Related Resources” sections.

About the Mind the Gap project

An international research project funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Commission, Mind the Gap: Building Digital Bridges to Community was powered by a consortium of six European arts and culture organisations from 2021 to 2023. The project was led by RESEO - European Network for Opera, Music and Dance Education (Belgium) in partnership with Garsington Opera (United Kingdom), Irish National Opera (Ireland), Les Clés de l'écoute (France), Materahub (Italy) and the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (Norway).

For more information about Mind the Gap and this report, please contact europe@reseo.org.

Key issue 1 Prioritising inclusivity

"Further efforts also need to be made to increase diversity within theatre teams" (European Commission, PPMI, KEA European Affairs, 2022). Many opera and theatre companies aspire to create more inclusive environments. Using technology in the arts carries with it the opportunity to reach out to new communities and engage in different and more relevant ways. That being said, consideration must be given to the societal digital divide between those who have the necessary provisions and desire to access the internet and those who do not, in order for a project to be socially responsible. Working simply with those who are "digitally included" (Yates, 2020), and therefore by definition not with those who are "digitally excluded", is socially irresponsible.

Enabling digital inclusion through the arts

In some case studies, practitioners found that the use of technology meant they were able to reach individuals they otherwise wouldn't have been able to. This theme is also present in Arts Council England's case study work: "Sometimes if you have anxiety, it's the physical burden of getting dressed, getting out of the house, that can stop you." (Mackey, 2022).

Digital exclusion is an issue that society needs to address in order to ensure those cut off from society aren't further removed as public services and interactions become increasingly digitalised. Within this space is an opportunity for the arts sector to develop practice centred around societal digital inclusion. The arts can be "non-threatening environments where they can learn about digital technologies" (Moffat, 2019). Arts organisations should begin to consider what they can do to help digital inclusion, rather than the other way round.

Care must be taken in order to avoid projects deepening division. There is a need for organisations to be "addressing rural/urban divides in access to broadband and underserved socio-economic groups" (OECD, 2020). The same report also warns that "increased reliance on digitalisation could risk opening new digital divides and/or exacerbating those that have proved persistent over the years" (OECD, 2020). Furthermore, "the sector remains imbalanced in terms of gender distribution" (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and

Culture, 2022) and "addressing the digital gender divide remains an important policy goal" (OECD, 2020). Equally, "Internet usage of those aged 50-74 remains well below the average share of daily Internet users aged 16-24" (OECD, 2020). All this is to state that digital exclusion is multi-faceted and not a one-size-fits-all model for excluded communities. Some participants may face a number of different barriers for a variety of unrelated reasons, and acknowledging where these barriers have come from is an important part of the process in establishing dialogue.

One key issue identified in the digital divide is access to appropriate technology, or, more immediately, that technology is cost prohibitive for participants (Mackey, 2022), meaning there is a direct link to economic status in this division. From there, simply possessing appropriate technology is not enough for individuals to feel digitally included. Individuals need to have the desire and impetus to engage with technology in the first place, creating an exciting opportunity for the arts to create a genuinely stimulating incentive. In addition, participants may feel underqualified to engage with technology, afraid of feeling stupid and being put in a position of vulnerability. Again, the arts can absolutely step in here to support: the outreach arts sector is principally about giving people the confidence to be creative themselves, while offering the appropriate support.

Related resources

Case study: Opera-tic - a digital opera co-created with people living with Tourette's Syndrome

Knowledge hub: Promoting digital inclusion and accessibility within an arts education project

Recommendations

- The arts sector must consider the ramifications of a digital project in relation to the digital divide, so as to avoid projects contributing to the deepening of societal divisions. To disregard these concerns would be irresponsible, and arts organisations should be developing policies on how their practice is addressing the digital divide.
- Digital projects that seek to be truly inclusive must be prepared to concentrate resources in recruitment and support towards participants that are most substantially affected by the digital gap, and recognise that these particular communities may differ from those excluded owing to more prevalent factors such as socio-economic challenges. Funding bodies for the arts should look to incentivise this practice by weighting funding opportunities to those with a practice that focuses resources in this manner.
- Finally, the arts sector should look to work with other sectors to offer support in fostering digital literacy and addressing the digital divide. There are soft skills and experience within the industry that are invaluable to other sectors.

Key issue 2 Digital strategy and inclusivity

Digital tools and platforms can offer arts organisations a myriad of opportunities to connect with previously unreachable audiences, to experiment with new audiences, distribution channels and business models, and explore new content and form. Digital technologies can also be an asset for organisations wishing to experiment with innovative methods for participation or user-centric approaches. These tools can help promote participation, bring culture "to life" through dynamic and interactive experiences, foster co-creation, and facilitate inclusion for communities with less access to culture.

However, inclusivity must be made part of those cultural experiences by default, in order to reap the potential benefits of digital and ensure equal access to arts and culture. To do this, cultural organisations must develop their digital strategies in a way that prioritises diversity, equity and inclusivity.

Addressing barriers to inclusive digital experiences

The European Union recognises that "Digital inclusion is an EU-wide effort to ensure that everybody can contribute to and benefit from the digital world" (European Commission, 2022). An inclusive digital strategy involves making every aspect of an organisation's online presence or activities accessible to all participants and reflective of their lived experiences. Recognising the barriers that some people face in accessing online content and addressing them preemptively fosters equity, giving participants greater choice over the cultural experiences they take part in, and is key to developing an effective strategy.

The barriers to online participation are multiple and can overlap, encompassing issues related to digital literacy, self-confidence, physical ability, and/or language. Digital equity must be built into organisations' strategies as far upstream as possible, in a way that is meaningful to their community, including staff, beneficiaries, volunteers, freelance artists and other stakeholders.

Digital tools can help us make the spectator central to a performance and enable people to interact with a work in a way that differs from the usual concert-going experience.

BERLIOZ TRIP ORCHESTRA | A digital journey through the world of Berlioz

Staff members and higher management must be aware of and in agreement with their organisation's digital ambitions, and how they contribute to an overall strategic vision. However, lack of resources and skills can be a major barrier for arts organisations seeking to implement an inclusive digital strategy. Added to this, there is a strong temptation to "lead with technology" - i.e. join a given platform and create content for it, without first reflecting upon how it can serve the organisation's aims, beneficiaries and staff. This makes it difficult for organisations to advocate for funding for upskilling or further development, ultimately leading to considerable time and effort being channelled into a project with unsatisfactory results.

Ultimately, an inclusive digital strategy is an ongoing process. Organisations are advised to start small by exploring stakeholders' needs, valuing existing strengths and assets, and ensuring staff and management are on board with shared goals.

Related resources

- Case study:** Berlioz Trip Orchestra - A digital journey through the world of Berlioz
- Case study:** Carmen and the Other Extraordinary Women: co-creating with women from Northern and Southern Italy
- Knowledge hub:** Promoting digital inclusion and accessibility within an arts education project

Recommendations

- Organisations should set clear objectives and identify where online activities can add true value to the overall vision by asking the question "Can digital help us reach an audience we are struggling to connect with, and how?".
- Data from website visits or social media can be an important asset, but can't explain everything. Organisations need to be aware of participants' feelings, behaviours and needs. User research can provide valuable information, as can focus groups and in-depth interviews with members of the communities organisations are aiming to reach.
- Organisations should lay out a clear strategy for inclusive digital transformation and identify the non-technology resources required to implement it successfully. The strategy should include specific plans for marginalised groups based on user research, testing, and a checklist of specific user needs.

Key issue 3 Developing a growth mindset

Research shows that mindset plays an important role in determining outcomes, including within an organisational context.

A "growth mindset", characterised by adaptability, flexibility and open-mindedness, enables people to see challenges as opportunities to reflect, learn and grow. The pandemic and its accelerated digitalisation demonstrated the growth mindset inherently present in many arts institutions, which were obliged to take participatory activities online in order to maintain connections with their communities, in some cases leading to a major organisational shift.

Beyond the urgency of the pandemic, maintaining a growth mindset is conducive to an effective digital transformation.

The importance of a growth mindset

A growth mindset can enhance the performance of Culture and Creative Industries (CCIs). CCIs have a dual impact on innovation: they represent a diverse area comprising innovation of the past (cultural heritage) and innovation of the future (e.g. VR, digital arts, NFT, etc.). Digital transformation allows for a rethinking and reshaping of existing distribution models that can expand existing audiences.

Enabling effective digital transformation is more about strategy and mindset than technology.

The term "growth mindset" was developed by the psychologist Professor Carol Dweck in 2006. According to her research, people who believe they can develop their talents tend to achieve more than those who think their abilities are innate. As a result of the pandemic, educators and organisations were obliged to adapt quickly and under adverse conditions, with 80% changing their activities to include online aspects.

I normally think about digital as something that needs to be quite polished, with a pilot year and expert input, but given the situation, we thought, *let's just do it.*

GARSINGTON OPERA | How the Learning & Participation department went digital

From an organisational standpoint, a growth mindset involves encouraging staff to try new things, experiment, collaborate, and learn through failure, enabling the organisation to become more adaptive and responsive to contemporary shifts and challenges.

Enabling inclusive digitalisation through a growth mindset

Inclusive digital transformation requires a growth mindset to be successful. Digital transformation can be expensive, and represents a significant investment for arts and culture organisations with stretched budgets. According to research, 70% of digital transformation projects fail as they require "a major reset in mindsets and behaviours - something that few leaders know how to achieve" (Bucy, Finlayson, Kelly, and Moye, 2016). Investing in staff and their skills before investing in technologies is key to fostering a growth mindset - but many organisations do exactly the opposite.

To foster a growth mindset, organisations should set specific goals for digital transformation, and encourage staff to upskill in the required areas by providing access to training and educational resources. The project European Open Design School for Regional Sustainable Development (DeuS) provides a tailored training approach to help creative professionals develop soft skills such as self-awareness and adaptability that are conducive to a growth mindset. In the Netherlands, CLICKNL has developed a national knowledge and innovation agenda for the creative industries aimed at facilitating collaborations and fostering innovation among creative professionals and organisations.

Above all, it is important to create an organisational culture that rewards curiosity, innovation, risk-taking and experimentation, both online and off.

Recommendations

- Staff should be provided with opportunities for upskilling and encouraged to use them - this could be an annual training budget, an internal training programme, or access to online resources and networking opportunities. When working with freelance collaborators, any upskilling required in order to deliver the project should be taken into consideration.
- Organisations should recognise the importance of facilitating a growth mindset by embracing innovative and creative methodologies for problem solving, ideation and team building, acceptance of change and agility.
- A design thinking approach that allows every voice to be heard and to work effectively with the resources available can enable organisations to adopt a non-hierarchical, peer-to-peer approach.

Related resources

Case study: Garsington Opera: How the Learning & Participation department went digital

Knowledge hub: Using design thinking in creative projects: a methodology

Key issue 4 Bridging the skills gap for educators

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, teaching artists accustomed to delivering in-person creative workshops were obliged to work online. According to research carried out by Mind the Gap, 80% of arts educators adapted some or all of their activities to include online aspects between 2019 and 2021.

"In their efforts to provide meaningful and effective education, art educators have had to manage new instructional delivery systems and to ensure the health and safety and social emotional learning of their students and themselves in their educational spaces. They responded by using social media, video conferencing, and other digital technology to deliver instruction". (F. Robert Sabol, 2022).

This was a challenging shift for many practitioners, who were obliged to upskill quickly. Not only did many practitioners have little or no experience in delivering digital work before the pandemic, they lacked the skills necessary to deliver inclusive online experiences.

Challenges related to the digital skills gap for practitioners

35% of practitioners had adapted some or all of their activities to include online aspects in late 2021, when some pandemic restrictions were still in place. While the vast majority of European cultural institutions have now reopened, the pandemic has undoubtedly impacted the way teaching artists and creative practitioners work. Has the landscape for participatory practice shifted and adapted as a result?

Creative practitioners are met with a high demand to upgrade their current skills and meet the demand for digital capabilities (Yende, S.J, 2022), however "there are... questions to be asked regarding artists in the outreach sector working more hours (and therefore by extension being paid unfairly) on digital projects, as practitioners are having to learn new skills and methodologies" (Webb, A. and Layton, J., 2022). This raises several questions, notably that of who should pay for upskilling opportunities for teaching artists. During a focus group held in Matera, Italy as part of the Mind the Gap Beyond Zoom training, it emerged that freelance artists are often expected to be "the expert" when it comes to digital capabilities, and that any extra time spent on mastering new tools or upskilling for a project is often unpaid.

However, other artists found that their creative thinking skills were an asset that enabled them to find solutions to technical issues and adapt to new technical requirements.

[We were able to] develop the ability to capture and showcase our participants' voices and contributions really effectively...Working online requires patience and the ability to think outside the box and seek workarounds. Facilitators shouldn't feel held back by their tech skills - these will naturally progress - or feel the need to compare themselves to others.

EV'RY STITCH IN THE QUILT

An interactive digital exhibition created by people with Parkinson's

Meeting the needs of teaching artists, facilitators, and participants

There is, to date, very little academic research exploring the digital/hybrid delivery of participatory arts projects, with existing research focusing mainly on the formal education sector. Mind the Gap has documented existing projects in this area, and highlights the need for further academic research.

European networks such as RESEO (European Network for Opera, Music and Dance Education) and ITAC (International Teaching Artists Collaborative), can offer training opportunities and offer a collective voice for freelance arts education professionals and teaching artists.

It is important that we learn from this dramatic period of change and begin to embrace new technology, and understand that this means artistic teams having new types of practitioners on board.

Recommendations

- Organisations should consult with both in-house and external educators and facilitators in order to identify any barriers to delivering inclusive digital experiences.
- Organisations should adopt a proactive practice in highlighting and promoting opportunities for exchange and representation offered by membership of national and European networks to their freelance artists.
- National bodies and network organisations should consider creating resources for creative artists to deliver and innovate online.
- Arts institutions and arts education departments should consider online and virtual options as traditional in-person workshops.

Related resources

Case study: Ev'ry Stitch in the Quilt:

An interactive digital exhibition created by people with Parkinson's

Knowledge Hub: Funding opportunities for CCIs

Key issue 5 Enabling digital participation

Pre-pandemic, most adult participants had engaged purely through in-person workshops and rehearsals, and the majority had never participated in a creative project online.

In a series of case studies, the Mind the Gap project identified how artists harnessed digital ways of working throughout the pandemic and continued to engage with communities and participants. Many of the adults who take part in participatory arts projects can be considered hard to reach.

50% of respondents to our survey regularly work with people living with a disability and/or low-income communities, and over a third run creative projects with migrants and refugees, senior citizens and/or beneficiaries of mental health services. These members of the population are disproportionately likely to be affected by the digital gap.

Challenges of online participation

"Many forms of support for people with dementia and their carers, including singing groups, have moved online using videoconferencing." (Dowson, Schneider, 2021). Throughout the pandemic, participants in creative arts activities were thrust into a potentially lonely and isolated place when in-person activity was restricted. Online activities can help geographically distant members of the population, or those living with physical or mental disabilities, access cultural activities more easily, but can aggravate isolation when those potential participants are unable to get online. 64% of participants in our research said that participants' lack of skills and/or technical resources was an obstacle they faced when implementing online arts education activities.

Participants have varying degrees of experience when it comes to digital technology, and some can be left behind. Digital skills gaps can pose barriers to access. Lack of interest was also identified as a barrier by Mind the Gap respondents, alongside reduced group cohesion. Furthermore, "Encountering obstacles when using technology can make participants less motivated to engage with it in the future, so care should be taken to minimise such problems and provide adequate support... In addition to providing clear and simple instructions, previous studies indicate that support from another person to use unfamiliar technology may promote successful participation." (Dowson, Schneider, 2021).

Enabling participation in the digital space

However, arts and culture can act as a hook that encourages non-internet users to get online. Kate Moffat wrote in 2019 that "...Not for me digital exclusion can be tackled by providing people with safe, non-threatening environments where they can learn about digital technologies," referring to those who voluntarily exclude themselves from digital activities, often through embarrassment about lack of skills.

It's given me confidence and reduced isolation. It's given me new friendships. It's given me something to look forward to. It's given me happiness and a sense of something achieved. I never thought I'd sing and now I have recorded myself singing.

EV'RY STITCH IN THE QUILT

An interactive digital exhibition created by people with Parkinson's

Participants who would not normally engage in in-person arts and culture activities can find the digital landscape more accessible, as a significant barrier to participation has been removed. The report Roma in the EU and Norway: Challenges and Best Practices for Empowerment found that "musical activities facilitate the inclusion and learning development of young Roma talents...

Many of the projects aiming to empower Roma women focus on art. Digital and visual art appear as a method to promote Roma culture and a way of engaging Roma women in social activities." (Rød & Gurvich, 2022).

Now pandemic-era restrictions have been lifted, it is essential to continue to provide people with significant barriers to participation with opportunities to take part in arts and culture activities.

Recommendations

- Identify barriers faced by participants and support them to overcome these barriers. Barriers related to skills gaps, lack of access to equipment or a fitting space from which to participate can be overcome with the help of partner organisations such as libraries, adult education centres or non-profit organisations.
- The benefits of singing are well documented, but how this translates into online practice is new. More research should be done to assess this new and evolving way of working in order to provide greater access to all, especially vulnerable adults.

Related resources

- **Case study:** Ev'ry Stitch in the Quilt: An interactive digital exhibition created by people with Parkinson's
- **Knowledge Hub:** Promoting digital inclusion and accessibility within an arts education project

Key issue 6 Centring audiences

As a result of social distancing measures implemented during the pandemic, cultural organisations worldwide were obliged to cancel in-person performances and events. With creators unable to gather in order to produce new material, back catalogue streaming - or the broadcasting of existing recordings of productions - dominated the first months alongside work created in lockdown conditions, such as Zoom live performances.

A silver lining of live performance cancellation was thought to be increased access to arts and culture for wider audiences. However, while the shift to digital did transform cultural engagement for people already engaged with the arts, it failed to diversify existing audiences (Walmsley, B. et al, 2022).

Challenges related to audience development via digital means

Digital art and culture experiences can reach more people than in-person versions (Mackey, 2021). A Mind the Gap case study explores how people living in a rural area were able to take part in cultural experiences via digital platforms:

The experience opened up new perspectives for the theatre on how to foster creativity and enable connections between the audience and the institution, which have been maintained since reopening.

HAUGESUND THEATRE | Building online connections through two collaborative video projects

According to the report Voices of Culture: (Re)-Engaging Digital Audiences – Challenges and Opportunities, audiences affected by the digital gap are particularly heterogeneous, with significant variations in cultural practices, making it difficult to develop strategies that are tailored to their needs. The report estimates that a common challenge is "feeling overwhelmed by digital content".

Related resources

Case study: Haugesund Theatre: Building online connections through two collaborative video projects

Case study: Officina Educazione Futuri: Rethinking education through a series of participatory online events

Knowledge Hub: Using design thinking in creative projects: a methodology

Meeting the needs of online audiences

The first step to ensuring quality and inclusivity is identifying needs and wants, and investing in the necessary resources for a positive experience. In order to create a cultural offering that is inclusive, engaging and tailored to audiences' digital literacy, it is crucial to first develop an understanding of those users and their specific needs. The UNESCO report [Designing Inclusive Digital Solutions and Developing Digital Skills](#) suggests developing a comprehensive picture of a target audience member and their ecosystem through desk research, the creation of user personas, journey maps and scenarios, and mapping of local ecosystems - otherwise known as a user-centric design approach. Merete Sanderhoff, senior advisor in the field of digital museum practice, [suggests that](#) "In order to learn and understand how we can use new technologies and benefit from the opportunities they open up for us, we must explore and incorporate not just technologies themselves, but also the changes in behaviour and expectations they prompt in users. We must think like users." (Statens Museum fur Kunst, 2014).

Voices of Culture suggests data collection and management can be a means to reach and diversify audiences, including the "digitally deprived", via digital means. Digital audience data can help organisations understand their audiences better and tailor their offerings through insights into spectators' online behaviour, habits and needs.

It is also worth remembering that while digital can be a means to bring art and culture to wider and more diverse audiences, the inverse is also true: online cultural experiences can be an incentive to acquiring digital skills.

Recommendations

- Organisations should design for inclusion by ensuring their online platforms adhere to good accessibility principles. This benefits everybody, not just people with disabilities - but those with disabilities are disproportionately affected by less-than-accessible design.
- Collecting and managing audience data can provide a picture of how audience members interact with online content and help organisations identify barriers to access.
- Conducting a thorough evaluation of online activities through feedback surveys, focus groups, interviews and case studies can provide qualitative insights into audience behaviour.
- Strategising for digitalisation is crucial for succeeding, as is investing in time to plan, looking for similar organisations' strategies, and adapting new models.
- It is essential to make it clear who is in charge of digital inclusion. Staff should be given clear instructions and the appropriate amount of resources on how to work towards reaching a given audience.

Key issue 7 Working sustainably

Digital practice in artistic outreach carries with it opportunities for innovation and a chance to engage with new communities in unique ways, as well as ethical considerations from a sustainability perspective. While interpretations of the meaning of 'sustainability' vary, the concept is commonly accepted as having three pillars: environmental, economic, and social (Purvis, B., Mao, Y. & Robinson, D., 2019).

For the CCIs, the potential sustainability risks posed by digital technologies can include issues related to fair remuneration for artists and educators, impact on mental health, privacy and trust, and environmental impact.

Related resources

Case study: Future Visions - a participatory video project connecting the arts, science and conservation
Knowledge Hub: Understanding the carbon footprint of digital and online activities

Fair remuneration of artists and educators

When working online, there is "not yet a business model for earning income which means artists often work for free" (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (European Commission), KEA European Affairs, PPMI, 2022). Beyond the monetisation of the art itself, there are also questions to be asked regarding artists in the outreach sector working more hours (and therefore by extension being paid unfairly) on digital projects, as practitioners are having to learn new skills and methodologies. In some of Mind the Gap's case studies, artists spoke of having to learn new digital tools and spend more time preparing for workshops when done in a digital space. What's more, in some projects, where artists or producer are working in a digital medium that is new to them and with technology they have never tried before, such as virtual reality, an understanding of the scope of a project may not always be as easy to ascertain as it would be for traditional practice where conventions have been well established. Therefore artists, often reluctant to turn down work, are taking on projects that have a far bigger scope than may initially be evident when fees are discussed.

The environmental perspective

Environmental sustainability is a value all arts organisations should take seriously, yet "the sector lacks both the financial resources to invest in more sustainable practices, and expertise in transforming its activities.

Expertise is especially lacking with regard to data collection and measuring the sustainability of the sector" (European Commission, PPMI, KEA European Affairs, 2022). Therefore, there is a potential for arts organisations to practise policies that superficially look to be sustainable, such as carbon offsetting, that may in reality have a negligible or possibly even a negative impact on the environment.

Recommendations have been made in the sector for greater transparency in sharing of practices in measuring the impact of a digital project's sustainability. This an important and collective value for all to aspire to across the sector. Measuring impact is something that could be standardised, and the creation of an independent agency, or similar body to implement green practice guidelines across the sector, as well as a framework for measurement, could be considered.

Data and privacy

One quality fundamental to arts sector outreach practice is human interaction. Principally, practitioners should be concerned with participants' welfare above all else. One reticence many have around the use of technology is how this core value of welfare can be blurred, when products produced by multinational, for-profit tech companies are not principally designed with welfare of the user in mind, leading to concerns around privacy, data harvesting and security. Furthermore, knock-on effects of this environment lead to "questions around data-driven healthcare, disinformation and screen addiction" (OECD, 2020). Fundamentally, research points toward the need to ensure "trust in the digital environment" (OECD, 2020). There is a culture in technology industries that does not and should not align with the human-centred values that the arts sector strives for.

Recommendations

- Facilitate training and development opportunities for artists interested in working with new technologies, enabling artists to make informed decisions about the projects they accept. These training opportunities should not just be targeted at early career practitioners, but at those with more established careers too.
- Facilitate training opportunities for arts educators to understand how to scope and price their work and, by extension, effectively communicate the social welfare value and impact they have on individuals and organisations. Therefore appropriately paid training, as an investment in the sector, is worth considering here.
- When looking at fostering trust within a digital environment, greater investment must go towards not-for-profit technology that principally deals with the welfare of the participant. Open-source, affordable, technological research that is usable by the arts sector would be of huge benefit. On a more practical level, recommendations have been given to consider "funding streams outside the arts and cultural sector (such as those that focus exclusively on funding digital inclusion initiatives)" (Mackey, 2022). This taps into a broader desire beyond the sector itself to consider ethics when engaging with technology.
- Digital projects often carry with them the inherent benefit of sustainable solutions, but finding a framework in which to measure and quantify these impacts is vitally important, to avoid practice that superficially feels sustainable, but in reality is not.

Key issue 8 Safeguarding and ensuring compliance

Compliance is an area that is easily neglected within digital transformation.

Working with legal and regulatory compliance can be seen as a tick-box exercise to "get over with". However, several case studies studied in Mind the Gap show that awareness and knowledge about compliance is extremely important both in an ethical and legal sense. The Mind the Gap project therefore considers this as a key issue that stakeholders and higher management in digital art practice should pay particular attention to.

Protecting the individual and intellectual properties

Any project involving members of the public or the property of others (music, images etc.) will require compliance issues to be handled carefully. Protecting the individual and their property is hence considered a key issue when working with people and art projects. When adding a digital dimension, this process can become even more complicated, especially bearing in mind that the digital platform is much larger than when working within a physical framework. Online, the whole world can access material produced within a project. This requires stakeholders and higher management to consider risks for facilitators, teachers, users and audience in digital art projects.

Working with compliance means keeping track of the latest applicable laws and regulations, such as GDPR, safeguarding and copyright. Mind the Gap research shows several examples of how compliance matters are handled. An example of this is found in the Global Science Opera (GSO): the project shows an extremely careful process of writing up consent forms for students' participation, guided by a legal expert. Meanwhile the management of GSO carefully advises participants on how to make all content original in order to follow the laws of copyright.

In an international project it is in practice impossible to obtain copyright for a composition when you are showing it on YouTube, as you would have to pay copyright institutions in all countries in the world. We encourage participants to compose their music and make it part of the creativity

learning process. GLOBAL SCIENCE OPERA | A borderless digital co-creation project

Clear guidelines and high awareness can help to navigate rules and regulations, but also to broaden the creative project and to build bridges between communities. One of the participants in the project explained that through being urged to use original music, new doors for collaboration across cultures, age groups and communities were opened up. Being from a rural area, with not much knowledge of producing music, they were able via the digital world to use music composed by other participants in the project, whilst a third person in a different area could edit the video material. This shows an example of how an apparent limitation in the creative process does not only help protect individuals and their properties, but also open up for new cooperation.

Digital platforms can help project leaders navigate laws and regulations by offering guidelines and systems.

Related resources

Global Science Opera - a borderless digital co-creation project

Knowledge Hub: Understanding copyright for a digital creative project

Recommendations

- Invest in human resources that can help keep track of laws and regulations, including staff members who have the space and skill set to manage compliance. Make sure the process is thorough.
- Organisations should not expect facilitators to be responsible for compliance alongside other tasks, but should protect them from potentially stressful situations by investing the necessary resources.
- Make systems for compliance training: not all laws and regulations within compliance are a given for everyone working in the field of digital art practices. It is recommended organisations provide quality training for new members of staff or for freelancers who are hired to lead projects. This will also help protect the organisation.
- Provide clear instructions on what is expected from whom. To protect the organisation, facilitator, participants and audience, provide clear guidelines and instructions when it comes to who does what. Higher management and stakeholders should lay out what is expected from educators and facilitators.

Key issue 9 Creating partnerships for success

Building strong networks and advocating for greater resources for the arts and culture sector can help foster digital inclusion, while working collaboratively can help build stronger, more inclusive cultural experiences.

In 2020, Arts Council England found that **"when the cultural sector works closely with community partners, the activity itself is richer and more relevant, resources go further, and greater civic and social benefits are delivered"** (Arts Council England).

Cross-sector collaborations can be key to fostering digital inclusion and overcoming challenges related to a lack of digital skills or infrastructure. The importance of creating durable community-wide partnerships was stressed by project leaders interviewed as part of the Mind the Gap project:

Our aim was to engage, especially with people that had never been to the Vienna State Ballet. We worked with our partner Tanz und Toleranz because they are deeply rooted in one of the most diverse and disadvantaged areas in Vienna. This enabled us to reach out to people who would never go to the Ballet.

PULS EINER STADT | An inclusive digital community project for newcomers to ballet

Collaborating to address issues related to skills or infrastructure

While organisations and their staff have been accommodating to digital transformation and recognised its potential for reaching new audiences, insufficient in-house digital infrastructure or digital resources can create challenges when it comes to delivering inclusive cultural experiences, such as accessible design and adjustments for people with disabilities.

Arts educators cited a lack of equipment, ageing infrastructure, or a lack of technical skills required to implement digital projects effectively. At the same time, many participants and beneficiaries lack the confidence, ability or resources needed to participate in digital activities. Digital delivery is uneven across the arts and culture sector: some organisations don't have the resources/skills, others would like to promote and share their expertise but don't have the opportunities. The digital divide between partners involved in projects has also been proven to be a struggle that needs to be solved through sharing and support. One of the issues that can broaden the gap between participants or partners involved in digital projects is accessibility, such as to digital devices or the internet.

Along with Mind the Gap's case studies, various research reports point to the need to open up new ways of learning skills, making art, and cooperation outside the field.

Working collaboratively to share expertise and resources

Identifying the digital barriers faced by participants is a first step to overcoming them. While some organisations are able to provide direct support, others can refer participants to partners outside the creative arts who have the required equipment and skills, such as public libraries and adult education centres.

However, CCIs can lack the required integration within local networks, while funding for community organisations and adult education varies widely across Europe. CCIs should collaborate with local community organisations to advocate for place-based digital upskilling initiatives, share expertise, develop referral pathways and provide participants with integrated support.

Digital delivery is also uneven across the arts and culture sector. While some organisations don't have the resources or skills required to provide high-quality digital experiences, others would like to share their expertise but aren't provided with the opportunities to do so. Joint applications for European projects can be a pathway to building bridges and improving skills and knowledge within the field.

Related resources

- Case study:** Puls einer Stadt - An inclusive digital community project for newcomers to ballet
- Knowledge hub:** Planning a digital creative project

Recommendations

- Identify local partnerships that could help staff deliver more inclusive digital experiences, such as non-profit organisations dedicated to digital upskilling, and resources to help participants and beneficiaries access digital upskilling opportunities and equipment.
- Invest in resources to facilitate the fostering of peer-to-peer exchange/dialogues both in the organisation and in cooperation with other organisations.
- Identify funding opportunities at a national and international level.
- Collaborate with other community-based organisations to advocate initiatives for digital upskilling across organisations, including organisations outside the arts.
- Partner with other creative arts organisations within your community to facilitate cooperation, skill-sharing and pooling of resources.
- When initiating a new partnership, ensure clarity and understanding by drafting a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that lays out the ground rules for all activities.

Key issue 10 Accessing funding

The focus of the massive digitisation that took place as a result of the pandemic has shifted. There is now a greater emphasis on the quality of digital experiences, and their ability to create greater engagement, compensate artists and workshop leaders fairly, and provide inclusive experiences for participants (EUNIC, 2021).

In order to offer inclusive digital experiences, arts organisations need access to digital infrastructure and digital upskilling opportunities. A lack of financial resources was identified as a major challenge for arts and cultural organisations wishing to offer inclusive digital experiences, affecting their in-house digital infrastructure, digital resources and/or digital upskilling opportunities.

Challenges related to lack of funding

Respondents to the Mind the Gap survey identified the following barriers to access: outdated in-house infrastructure and lack of capital investment required to upgrade, lack of infrastructure or technical skills required to deliver inclusive digital content or experiences, and the cost of participating in courses that provide art educators with digital skills needed to work with disadvantaged communities.

The power of digital tools to address global challenges is increasingly recognised; many governments strengthened their digital strategy prior to the pandemic and are devoting more attention to emerging technologies (OECD, 2020). CCIs would therefore do well to look outside the arts sector for funding opportunities that could help them upgrade their infrastructure and upskill their staff. However, in order to attract private funding, they must be able to communicate the benefits of their activities effectively. Generally speaking, the sector struggles to demonstrate its relevance and potential to bring economic opportunities to communities and inspire creative solutions to global challenges.

Measuring impact to attract funding

Various European initiatives aim to enable CCIs to adopt new methodologies, metrics and standards in order to engage with new funders and ultimately new audiences. The Creative Europe project ME Mind (www.memind.eu/impact-

measurement-cultural-sector) aims to enhance the value of CCIs in terms of audience development, sustainable business strategies, and analysis of benefits and impact. The project showcases data and intangible value produced by cultural activities in order to measure the socio-economic impact of CCIs.

In 2015, the Culture and Creativity Programme (www.culturepartnership.eu) launched an intensive online course to help cultural entrepreneurs draw up a business plan, decide on a suitable type of external financing, and develop successful projects based on cross-sectoral cooperation.

Funding opportunities for CCIs

The European Commission offers funding opportunities for the creative and cultural sector. These opportunities are growing with an increased awareness, at policy level, of the potential benefits this sector can have on all sectors and in our day to day life.

Creatives Unite

Creatives Unite (<https://creativesunite.eu/synm/>) suggests more than 500 different funding providers working across EU member states. The tool also offers a printable personal financing toolkit which includes all the information of 500 providers and ways to contact them.

Cultural and Creative Sectors Guarantee Fund (CCS GF)

The Guarantee Fund provides up to €2 billion of loans for thousands of cultural and creative SMEs, with all details about the requirements and how to apply at https://www.eif.org/what_we_do/guarantees/cultural_creative_sectors_guarantee_facility/businesses_active_in_the_ccs_

The European Commission also provides the COSME Loan Guarantee Facility (LGF) to support financing of digital transformation projects by SMEs in all sectors of the economy, regardless of their current level of digitalisation.

Recommendations

- Organisations should seek to collaborate both with other CCIs and organisations outside the cultural and creative sector on joint applications to European calls for projects. European funding can provide access to opportunities for digital upskilling for staff and/or learners as well as research into new methodologies and technologies.
- It is important to support CCI professionals in the development of effective communication skills, thus enabling them to effectively transfer the value of their activities across all sectors and access additional funding.

Related resources

Knowledge Hub: Funding opportunities for CCIs



Conclusions and recommendations for policymakers

The findings from this report highlight the need to create enriching digital experiences and existing barriers to both creating and enabling participation in those experiences. However, the rapid evolution of technology means that the digital landscape exists in a state of flux, and the needs of educators, organisations and participants are likely to continue to change considerably over time.

Creators of online experiences have a responsibility to address issues related to environmental sustainability, remuneration of educators, protection of personal information and copyright. It is essential that CCIs continue to keep abreast of and implement best practice in their digital delivery in order to provide experiences that are both sustainable and safe for all participants. While digital technologies can reduce the environmental impact of certain activities, such as meetings or rehearsals, their use is not inherently environmentally sustainable. It is therefore important that organisations research and take into account the environmental impacts of their online or hybrid activities.

Furthermore, inclusivity is an ongoing process that requires commitment to continuous reviewing and reevaluation of digital practices. As highlighted throughout this report, creative and cultural organisations should regularly consult with their communities in order to ensure that online or hybrid experiences are accessible and centred around their needs.

Recommendations for national and European policymakers

The role of creative organisations within their communities is an essential one. The Mind the Gap project is based on the concept of arts education professionals as problem solvers with the capacity to identify solutions to societal problems that go beyond the scope of the cultural and creative sector. The consortium calls upon policymakers at the national and European level to further support the cultural and creative industries through the following recommendations:

- Recognise the potential of participatory online experiences to provide members of rural and low-income communities, senior citizens, migrants and refugees, and people living with mental or physical disabilities with opportunities to engage with arts and culture.
- Ensure that all those working directly or indirectly with communities affected by the digital gap are provided with initial and lifelong learning opportunities, enabling them to provide engaging and inclusive online experiences that recognise barriers to access and take steps to mitigate them.
- Prioritise policies that fund research into digital literacy for adults and contribute to bridging the digital gap.
- Promote the recognition of a growth mindset as a core competence for the Cultural and Creative Industries.
- Encourage policy that supports research into effective communication methods of the social, cultural and economic impact of arts education across sectors and its ability to inspire creative solutions to global challenges, such as alternative qualitative metrics and long term strategies for measuring impact.
- Fund research into open-source technology that prioritises users' wellbeing and does not tie CCIs into using proprietary software.
- Support projects across Europe that encourage partnerships among small, medium and large organisations, and foster cross-sectoral collaboration.


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The logo for 'Mind the Gap' features the text 'Mind the gap' in a bold, sans-serif font. The word 'Mind' is on the top line, 'the' is on the middle line, and 'gap' is on the bottom line. The text is centered between two sets of vertical bars. On the left, there are two bars of increasing height. On the right, there are two bars of decreasing height, creating a gap in the middle. The bars are dark gray and have rounded tops.

Mind
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gap