

Analysis of the cultural policy landscape in the Western Balkans: from national to regional perspectives

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Abstract

The paper presents an analysis of cultural policies in the Western Balkans, departing from a collection of evidence at the national level and therefore adopting a regional gaze to detect the degree of shared direction, joint perspective and efforts undertaken in spite of the different political and institutional set-ups, organisation and financial means, historical background and un-normalised political relations. Eventually, it pinpoints common needs for enhancement of cultural policies that would lead to positive repercussions on the overall region. Departing from the scoping of the historic and socioeconomic context and of existing cultural cooperation initiatives among cultural institutions and independent cultural organisations, the methodology of work has then entailed the elaboration and use of a framework of analysis of cultural policies consisting of 22 quantitative indicators and of qualitative evidence organised in 7 components, articulated in a total of 39 items, representing fields of application or impact of cultural policies.

Keywords: cultural policies; Western Balkans; framework; regional policies

Introducing cultural policies

Approaching the investigation of cultural policies in the Western Balkans (in short, WBs) has entailed a clarification of the ecological complexity (Mulcahy, 2006) of this domain of public policy relating to culture, in the attempt to identify the key features of this vast as well as unstable concept (MacGuigan, 2004) that has emerged in close historical association with the affirmation of the nation-state.

Cultural policy can be understood, in a first approximation, as what governments at various levels choose to do or not to do in relation to culture (Bell & Oakley, 2014), or, more explicitly, with respect to the arts (including the for profit cultural industries), the humanities, and the heritage (Schuster, 2003). Examples of cultural policy actions are, on the one hand, regulations of the cultural and creative sectors as for instance censorship, protection, or ownership; on the other measures of endorsement or support, as patronage or state funding (Bell & Oakley, *ibidem*) directed to those sectors.

Differently from what relates to other policy domains, the societal impact of cultural policies is not directly or unequivocally measurable and the choices driving the development of cultural policies largely rest on political vision, shared conception and understanding of culture and heritage roles within societies, as well as on specific strategic priorities cultural policies may be seen instrumental to achieve (as for instance the promotion of interfaith dialogue, the contrast to gender violence, and so on). Therefore, these actions, or lack thereof, constitute value choices that are politically determined (Bennett, 2004), namely they are the outcome of governments' judgement on what is considered relevant, beneficial or of priority.

More recently, the understanding of cultural policies has been extended beyond the mere set of activities that explicitly and intentionally interest cultural activities and the cultural sector in a given area, in the attempt to also encompass indirect and implicit cultural policies (Schuster, *ibidem*): actions and decisions affecting culture taken without expressed policy intention or that are the indirect result of operations or financial support. Although attempting to also draw attention on indirect and implicit cultural policies, given the breath of the context under analysis this paper has primarily investigated explicit public policies at various governmental levels referring to all the cultural and creative sectors and actors, be them state-held or independent, for profit or non-for profit. The framework of analysis

developed and adopted for the purpose of this investigation will be presented in the following paragraphs.

While, as we have seen, the concept of cultural policies has been strictly linked to the national scale, our perspective of analysis will take off from the identification of measures issued by self-governed entities to then identify commonalities, peculiarities and shared needs within the WBs setting. The driving aim behind the adoption of this regional gaze has been to detect the degree of shared direction, joint perspective and efforts that is undertaken by countries in spite of the different political and institutional set-ups, organisation and financial means, historical background and un-normalised political relations.

The Western Balkans: a heterogeneous area in transition

Our analysis has considered the cultural policies scenario in the Western Balkans (Figure 1), understood as the geographical area comprising Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo¹, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.



Figure 1: States of the Western Balkans | Photo: pyty © AdobeStock

Geographical scale and population numbers vary across the region, as presented in Table 1.

	POPULATION (Mln)	TOTAL AREA (Km²)
ALBANIA	2,8	28.750
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	3,5	51.209
KOSOVO*^[1]	1,8	10.908
MONTENEGRO	0,6	13.812

¹ *Throughout the whole article, this designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

NORTH MACEDONIA	1,8	25.713
SERBIA	6,7	88.407
TOTAL WB REGION	17,2	218.800

Table 1: Population and area per country. Source: Eurostat, Demographic balance, 2022

To ground our investigation on the peculiarities of the countries in the region, preliminary research activities have been directed towards the historic and socioeconomic context of the area, leading us to conceive the WBs as societies in transition (see for instance Milohnić, & Švob-Đokić, 2011). When referred to the state-of-the-art of cultural policies in the region, this has determined for us to understand it not as a *status quo*, but more effectively as a stage in the broader course of a consolidation that is still in progress and concerning which at least three fundamental factors shall be kept in mind and understood as system conditions.

One is the renewal of political and administrative structures, as both the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the end of the communist regime in Albania have led to the revision or creation of cultural governance structures, the establishment of new administrations and competent public bodies and of new legislative frameworks for the protection of cultural heritage and the promotion of culture and creativity.

A second factor is the adoption of new economic systems, as all the countries have undergone a transition to a liberal market economy over the last three decades. This has resulted in obvious changes to the model of cultural governance and funding for the arts and culture, as well as initiated or increased the participation of private actors in these sectors.

The third factor is that all the countries under consideration have undertaken the process of accession to the European Union² and the ongoing integration has been determining a ‘soft conditionality’ on cultural policies in the region due to the demand of adjustment to EU standards on culture-related matters, to the encouragement of structural and institutional reforms, and to the entity and modes of EU investment in culture in the region (Vos, 2017), that also attempts to address the role of culture in promoting intercultural dialogue and peace-building (Brkić, 2011).

Having considered these commonalities, it is nonetheless important to stress the fact that the WBs is a heterogeneous region with multiple identities and cultural expressions, and whose inhabitants, for instance, speak a variety of languages, with different degrees of possibility of understanding from country to country. This diversity should be kept in mind when observing the levels of reciprocal influence, as well the ease of circulation of information, artists and cultural works among countries or the diverse connections and intertwining among heritage expressions, sites, and communities in the region. The different pasts and recent historical events also determine differentiated relations with neighbouring countries and the desire, also expressed by several actors from the region, to be seen as part of a wider geographic and cultural horizon, be it the Balkans, Southeast Europe, or the Mediterranean area.

As our attention will focus on joint cultural policy measure in the region, it shall be acknowledged that cultural cooperation is already structured among institutional as well as independent actors by means of regional strategies, forums, action plans and networks. At the institutional level, noteworthy initiatives include the Regional Strategy for Cultural Cooperation launched in 2014 by the Council of Ministers of Culture of Southeast Europe, delineating priority intervention areas and methods for monitoring, alongside the Memorandum of Understanding of Cultural Cooperation in the Western Balkans, and the Regional Programme on Cultural and Natural Heritage in Southeast Europe, initiated in 2003 to foster reconciliation processes through local development and intercultural cooperation. Within the independent sphere, various NGOs operating in the cultural and creative sectors have undertaken valuable endeavours centred on regional cooperation, some significant examples are the Kooperativa Regional Platform for Culture, which unites national organisations and networks engaged

² The countries are currently at different stages of the accession process. Five are granted EU candidate status: North Macedonia (whose membership application was submitted in 2004), Montenegro (application submitted in 2008), Serbia (application submitted in 2009), Albania (application submitted in 2014), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (application submitted in 2016), which received candidate status in December 2022. Kosovo* is a potential candidate to EU membership accession.

in independent culture and contemporary art in Southeastern Europe; the Nomad Dance Academy, a Balkan contemporary dance network that actively enhances local and regional creative landscapes; and The Balkan Museums Network, which seeks to establish a network for the preservation, exhibition, and accessibility of Balkan common heritage.

Proposal of a framework for the analysis of cultural policies

After a review of literature that has allowed us to identify other authors' theoretical understanding and empirical observation of the salient elements that make up a country's cultural policy, we detected a gap in the existing methodologies available to analyse in an extensive and thorough manner the multifaceted components and implications of cultural policies. We therefore proceeded to elaborate a framework suitable to the breath of our investigation and that would allow for the systematisation and confronting of data and information across countries. The framework has been subject to applied tests to confirm its overall efficacy and completeness, and two rounds of revisions were required to reach satisfactory levels of use. After validation by the authors, the framework has been used, at first, to identify each country's cultural policies set-up and as a means for organising the evidence collected country by country. The collection of information at this stage was carried out thanks to the support of a mother tongue native collaborator in each country and then revised and homogenised by the authors. It shall be noted that differences exist among countries in the allocation of competences and responsibilities for culture between the central and the subnational levels. Moreover, as defined by its constitution, in Bosnia and Herzegovina culture-related competences lie in the hands of Ministry of Education and Culture in the entity of the Republika Srpska, in the Department for Economic Development, Sports, and Culture for the Brčko District, and they are under the individual jurisdiction of the 10 cantons that form of the entity of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina; this composite picture has led to greater complexity of investigation for the country.

In a second phase, the collected country frameworks have been object of joint analysis and comparison to make emerge the commonalities of cultural policies in the region, as well as the shared needs for the enhancement of cultural policies. These latter two will be further illustrated in the following paragraphs of this paper.

The framework of analysis has been organised in two parts. Part 1 is composed of 22 quantitative indicators to describe (in absolute values or percentage) public spending on culture; the size of the cultural and creative sectors in terms of employees, enterprises, gross domestic product; the level of wages; women labour participation; cultural consumption in the country. These indicators were collected with reference to either the last year available or to a time span ranging from 2017 to 2022, where available. Part 2 addresses qualitative information by organising evidence (sources have included, but were not limited to, legislative documents, strategic documents, action plans, statistical data, evidence from scientific literature, country sector monitoring reports, information available on institutions' web portals, compendium of country cultural policies) in seven components that altogether represent concrete fields of application or impact of cultural policies and by detailing a variable number of items each (39 in total) to be considered for the investigation of each component:

- Legal standards on tangible and intangible cultural heritage and contemporary cultural expressions (6 items);
- Governance systems, relating institutional competencies and decision-making processes (8 items);
- Cultural rights, in terms of access and participation in cultural life (3 items);
- Funding schemes and supporting programmes (4 items);
- Work conditions in the cultural and creative sectors (8 items);
- Education and training opportunities in arts and culture-related subjects (6 items);
- Intersections with green transition processes (4 items).

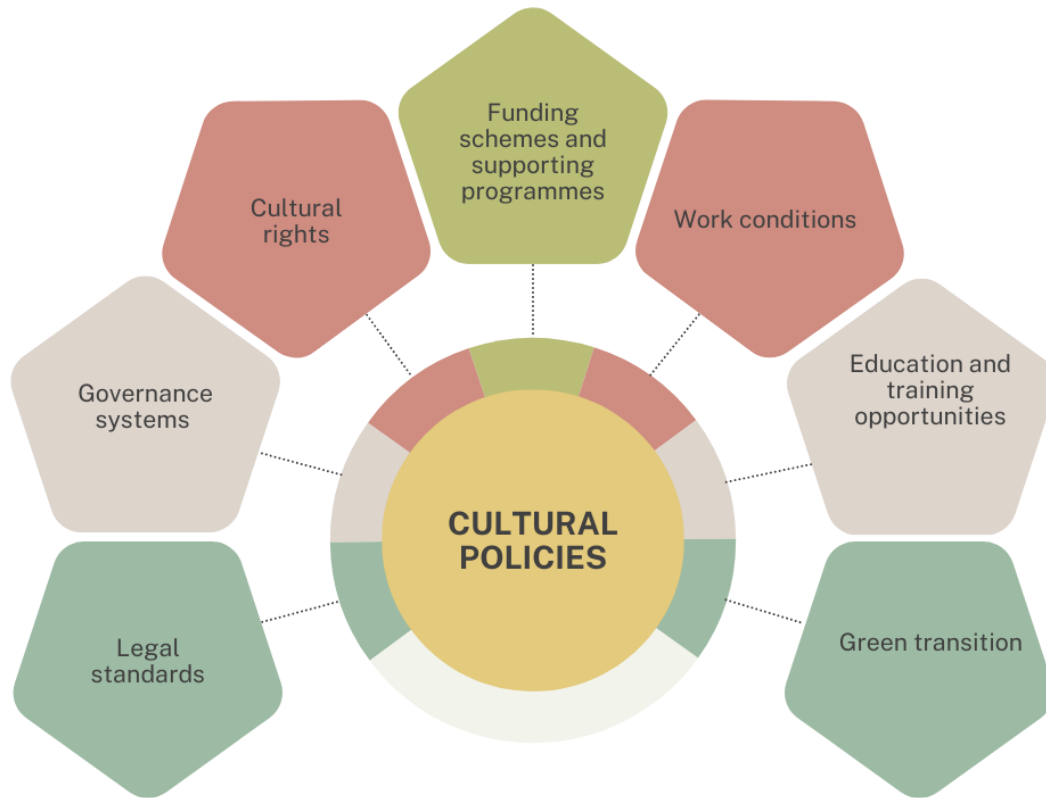


Figure 2: The seven components adopted by part 2 of the framework developed by the authors to describe cultural policies.

Although with some possibility of intersection, these seven categories appeared, through the testing of the framework, as satisfactory proxies to resume the complex nature of cultural policies. While the first six components in the list represent elements applicable across contexts or time, the last one (intersections with green transition processes) was added to keep track of the most recent evolutions of cultural policies due to societal pressures, to a growing understanding of the role of culture in sustainable development processes, as well as in consideration of the European Commission’s Green Deal policy priority and of the repercussion this may also have on neighbouring countries in the process of accession.

Since this paper’s primary aim is to provide an overview of cultural policies on a regional scale and the data collected through part 1 of the frameworks has proved to be non-confrontable due to different ways and timings of organising cultural statistics throughout the countries (issue upon which we will return later on in our text), the following paragraphs will review the seven components analysed through part 2 of the framework developed.

Commonalities among cultural policies in the region

After gathering country-level information and evidence, we have adopted the same cultural policies analysis framework for the examination of the commonalities at the WBs regional level. This paragraph will present the main findings for each of the seven explored components.

Legal frameworks

In terms of legislative frameworks, the countries in the region exhibit a comparable level of progress across selected sectors, alongside common shortcomings in others, albeit with distinct nuances and minor discrepancies across contexts.

Notably, tangible cultural heritage emerges as a sector boasting one of the most advanced and extensive legislation, marked by active engagement across all countries in terms of ongoing updates, adjustments, and deliberations. The progress in regulatory frameworks in the cultural heritage sector is evidenced by the breadth of existing legislation, which encompasses various aspects such as establishing conservation

typologies and management standards, alongside the fact that five countries are signatories to most UNESCO Conventions³. Additionally, all countries have demonstrated visible efforts to align with EU standards, particularly in policies addressing the illicit trafficking of cultural goods.

Overall, a recurring feature is the partial incorporation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) into WBs' legislation, with the majority of countries beginning to prioritise this aspect following the ratification of the 2003 UNESCO Convention and generally appending ICH provisions to existing legislation on built heritage, rather than formulating separate ones.

The culture and creative sectors are primarily governed by umbrella legislative frameworks - known in most countries as "Law on Culture" - which typically address a wide variety of aspects, including general principles, organisational structures, funding mechanisms, policy directives, support initiatives for artistic endeavours, participation frameworks, and distribution of competencies. In general, most countries across the region exhibit relatively comprehensive legislation addressing culture and creativity at a formal level, featuring dedicated sectoral laws targeting a diverse range of creative industries.

Governance systems

In the broad context of cultural governance structures and administrative frameworks across the region, a prevailing tendency towards centralisation is evident. For the majority of countries, the central role in cultural policy development and support for cultural production is assumed by national-level ministries dedicated to cultural affairs, with the exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as previously explained. Some countries have appointed thematic directorates and national councils to ensure - *inter alia* - the involvement of experts and leaders in decision-making processes. In select instances, capitals and other main cities complement central functions with activities undertaken by local authorities, nonetheless these instances represent the only scenario where local administrations wield significant influence over central governance through cultural planning, policymaking, and the facilitation of networking opportunities within their respective territories.

In the context of cultural heritage, legislative prominence translates into a robust articulation of cultural administrations. In this sense, almost all countries in the region have established specific bodies and subordinate institutions to support the ministerial functions of preservation and management of cultural heritage. These typically include thematic directorates, cultural heritage inspectorates, archaeological institutes, national museums, and – occasionally – private foundations with public shareholding. At the municipal level, local regulatory powers vary and sometimes lack coordination with other levels of government.

Concerning intangible cultural heritage, most countries lack dedicated offices within relevant ministries, often delegating safeguarding, administration, and research functions to departments within national museums or specific subordinate institutions.

Cultural rights

While cultural rights are generally enshrined within the constitutions of the six countries, legislation dedicated to social priorities rarely includes references to the cultural sphere and, when present, they are mostly limited to issues of access and participation rights, or employment conditions. Recent legislative developments have significantly advanced these rights, indicating a concerted effort to adhere to international norms. In this context, observations regarding efforts in the region point to three specific social demographic groups:

1. Efforts to promote women's participation in the cultural sector predominantly originate from the private and independent spheres rather than public initiatives. Some countries have implemented measures to enhance access and engagement of women from rural and disadvantaged backgrounds by providing appropriate venues for women-led cultural endeavours and initiating programmes to involve them in various events;
2. Legislation dedicated to upholding youth rights is reasonably well developed across the region, although it often lacks explicit references to cultural issues, with only a small portion directly

³ While Kosovo applied for membership in UNESCO in July 2015, the bid was ultimately unsuccessful, leaving Kosovo's UNESCO membership status still pending.

addressing youth-culture interactions. While we have observed some encouraging (albeit isolated) practices fostering youth' cultural participation, funding opportunities remain limited;

3. Legislation aimed at supporting vulnerable social groups, including ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and the LGBTQ+ community, has made some progress across the region, partly to harmonise with EU standards. However, general observations indicate that there is a significant discrepancy between the formally established legislation and strategies and the available data on their actual implementation.

Funding schemes and supporting programmes

Overall, public expenditure dedicated to culture is remarkably low, with a general scarcity of long-term investments. Ministerial budgets typically allocate more detailed expenditure chapters to cultural heritage than to the creative industries, with funds predominantly directed towards restoration activities or the reconstruction of built heritage.

For the creative sector, a significant portion of funds comes from international programmes: all six countries participate in the Creative Europe programme, while other transnational funding programmes include Erasmus+, INTERREG, ADRION, and the UNESCO International Fund for Cultural Diversity. While several organisations have successfully secured funding through international cooperation projects, ministries have often only pledged co-financing support, with actual implementation occurring in a minority of countries.

Work conditions

WBs countries share a complex and scarcely comprehensible scenario regarding cultural employment, which is primarily due insufficient statistical data on the characteristics of the cultural workforce and to the absence of a clear taxonomy to identify employees and jobs in the field.

Broadly, it can be observed that trade unions or organisations representing cultural workers are rare across the region. While some branch organisations exist for instance in North Macedonia and Serbia, few associations represent workers in the creative industries comprehensively, and cultural employees are often grouped within unions for the educational sector.

The lack of relevant data makes it challenging to fully understand the cultural workforce's composition in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, etc., limiting the depth of analysis possible. However, some observations can be made:

- Employment rates among women are relatively high, and in some countries, women are well represented in senior public cultural sector positions. However, they remain underrepresented in decision-making roles in the private sector.
- Unemployment and inactivity rates are high among youth and ethnic minorities, although these data do not specifically reference the cultural sector. Regarding youth engagement in cultural entrepreneurship, specific although limited budget allocations and targeted calls for proposals were identified.

Education and training opportunities

Across the region, advanced curricula cater primarily to classical competencies required by heritage administrations, such as antiquities, archaeology, architecture, and conservation studies. Regional universities offer limited interdisciplinarity, and programmes in relatively "newer" disciplines are available only at a few, albeit highly esteemed, institutions. This restricted educational landscape, coupled with limited training opportunities in emerging fields, hampers the growth of cultural professionals. Consequently, the region remains less attractive and offers limited mobility prospects for regional experts, who primarily rely on foreign-funded mobility programmes.

Green transition

Several countries in the region have taken some steps towards establishing national sustainable development frameworks to guide initiatives and legislation across various sectors. This is evidenced by the adoption of multi-sectoral sustainable development strategies and specific strategies targeting areas such as sustainable urban development and the sustainable development of cultural heritage in different countries. Efforts recognising the cross-dimensional role of culture in development processes include the adoption of the UNESCO Culture for Development Indicators Suite (CDIS) tool, with

reports from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia. Despite these initiatives, significant shortcomings in sustainable development and ecological transition remain.

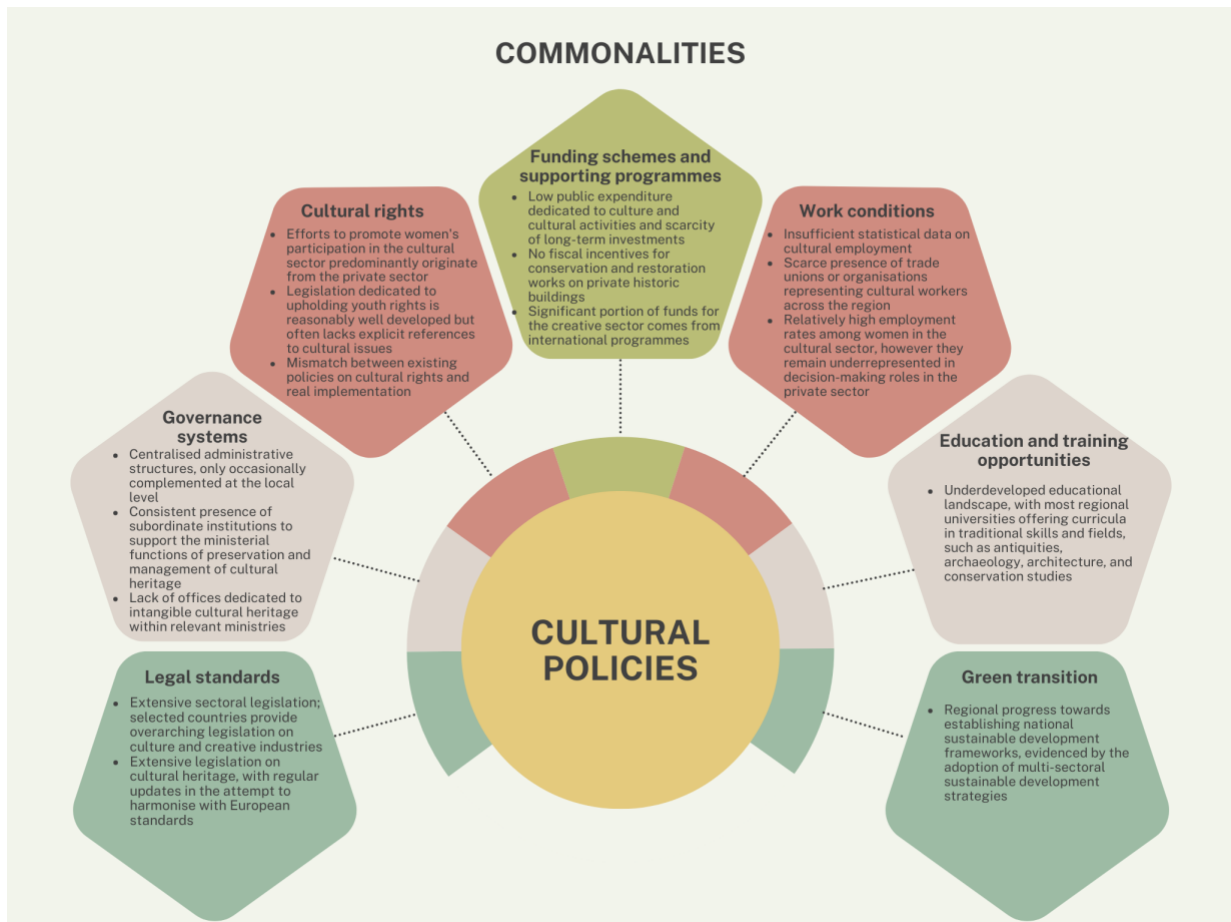


Figure 3: Commonalities among cultural policies in the WBs, represented according to our framework of analysis.

Shared needs for the enhancement of cultural policies in the region

This section will delve into the most significant gaps and limitations prevalent across cultural policies of WBs countries, although at times observed with varying degree of priority. As they constitute arenas or areas needing intervention, shared efforts in this sense would secure an enhancement with positive repercussions on the overall region.

Culture-related statistics

The arguably most notable challenge is the recurrent scarcity of cultural statistics across all examined countries, presented herein as the primary concern due to its far-reaching impact on all other domains. This scarcity hinders in depth understanding of specific cultural domains and sectors and obstructs policymakers from the elaboration of evidence-based policies.

Specifically, inconsistencies or gaps in statistical data become apparent in two main areas: the allocation of budgets dedicated to cultural projects and activities and the distribution of the workforce employed in the creative and cultural industries at large.

Funding schemes and supporting programmes

Another predominant challenge in the region relates to the inadequate allocation of financial resources to fully support the sector. In the domain of heritage protection, distinct government levels bear responsibility for related activities in most countries. This inefficiency in the funding system within the region often arises from divergent priorities among different government levels, contributing to a lack of coordination and synergy.

For contemporary cultural and creative productions, the limited allocation of ministerial funds predominantly supports public cultural organisations, significantly hindering the development of the

independent scene. Because of the limited budget devoted to supporting independent cultural organisations, ministries tend to embrace an attitude that favours quantity over quality (i.e., funding as many applicants as possible with a small budget for each), ultimately weakening the potential impact of these support schemes. Also, the widespread, perceived lack of transparency and fairness procedures in distributing public funds and the issuing calls for projects shall be addressed.

Another critical issue affecting both fields is the general scarcity of fiscal policies and fiscal incentives to encourage private investment in culture, as well as a limited presence of financial measures to support start-ups and e-businesses and facilitate access to capital for cultural entrepreneurs.

Governance systems

While the institutional framework governing heritage protection and safeguarding reveals a complex and multi-layered articulation of cultural administration in most countries (with numerous bodies and subordinate institutions encompassing thematic directorates, cultural heritage inspectorates, archaeological institutes and national museums) a prevailing issue is the lack of coordination among these diverse entities and across government levels.

In addition, despite the recent establishment of entities such as National Councils for Culture and Councils for the Arts across the region, primarily conceived as non-partisan bodies of experts and artists entrusted with consulting and advising the Ministry and Government on cultural affairs, these councils still fall short of fully embodying the principles of arm's length institutions and often lack a dedicated budget line.

Another need in the region pertains to enhancing the status of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in the cultural domain, which remains relatively underdeveloped, with few instances of private sector engagement in heritage governance and certain countries lacking established legal frameworks to regulate such agreements.

Cultural rights

In the domain of cultural rights, numerous issues and pressing needs have come to light. Central to these challenges is the uneven distribution of cultural infrastructure, whereby their concentration primarily in urban areas not only hinders the emergence and engagement of independent artists but also restricts access and participation for individuals residing in rural and peripheral areas.

Throughout the region, the initiatives to invigorate participation and stimulate consumption of cultural goods and services appear sporadic and primarily driven by individual cultural institutions, rather than governed by a unified vision.

When considering access to culture and cultural participation among specific demographic groups, the following needs emerge as deserving rapid response:

- There exists an underdeveloped landscape of initiatives aimed at supporting women entrepreneurship, including limited availability of training opportunities and inadequate access to financial support. In addition, to ensure the full and equitable participation of women in cultural life, further provision of essential social welfare services is crucial;
- Young people from rural areas face the most pronounced challenges, stemming from a scarcity of employment and education opportunities in rural areas; urgent action is required as the WBs register among the highest rates of migration of youth population in Europe;
- The committees and councils dedicated to securing minorities' rights suffer from limited availability of funding, a factor that undermines these bodies' capacity to provide the necessary resources and opportunities for cultural expression within minority communities;
- Despite the existence of legislation that stipulates the importance of accessibility for people with disabilities in cultural settings, there is a widespread lack of facilities that effectively cater to their needs;
- LGBTQ+ artists, intellectuals and activists frequently report of violations or obstacles to their right to expression or of lack of support by public bodies.

Education and training opportunities

When it comes to cultural heritage preservation and management, the region reveals a scarcity of curricula focused on new technologies or embracing interdisciplinary approaches, with regional universities lacking training programmes in emerging fields, as well as doctoral programmes in heritage studies and other specialised post-tertiary education programmes, is limited to only a select few universities in the region.

A prevailing concern expressed by stakeholders in the region, pertains to the removal of administrative, technical and barriers hindering the mobility of cultural professionals, primarily burdensome fiscal regimes and, to a minor extent, existing visa regimes.

In examining access to culture-related curricula among various demographic groups, the educational environment in the region reveals that most countries are characterised by a high enrolment rate of women in cultural programmes; however, it is important to highlight that specific contexts have reported limited implementation of measures aimed at promoting inclusive education for women hailing from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, including the Roma community, women with disabilities, and those residing in rural areas.

In terms of access to education by ethnic minorities, the prevailing pattern indicates elevated rates of inactivity and limited educational attainment among ethnic minority populations, particularly among the Roma and Egyptian communities. Notably, not all countries have established solid mechanisms to promote inclusion in education for ethnic minorities and these initiatives are often spearheaded by private organisations or receive third-parties financial support, indicating a reliance on external sources.

Work conditions

A pervasive challenge within the region is the imperative to lower unemployment and inactivity rates among specific segments of society, particularly youth, and minority groups.

The issue of low youth employment rates is interconnected with another challenge observed in the region, namely the need to retain its young population and nurture its talents. Efforts to mitigate this challenge should not only entail reducing unemployment and inactivity rates, but also implementing a forward-looking educational approach that emphasises up-to-date and innovative cultural perspectives and approaches, which could dissuade young people from leaving their home countries to pursue education abroad.

All countries have reported the presence of an occupational gap, wherein women outnumber men in cultural education programmes but are employed to a lesser extent.

Another shared challenge is a prevalent deficit in capacity faced by public cultural institutions in the region, which manifests itself in a scarcity of highly skilled trained personnel.

Green transition

Despite the progress made by the countries in the region in establishing national sustainable development frameworks and strategies, the role that cultural heritage and cultural industries at large can play in attaining sustainable development objectives is still scarcely recognised within existing strategies. Perhaps the most pervasive challenge is the lack of specific legislation addressing green transition issues in the cultural and creative sectors, particularly in areas such as energy transition and efficiency of cultural heritage venues. Notably, initiatives targeting climate change primarily emerge from private organisations and businesses, particularly in the field of audio-visual industry and festivals.



Figure 4: Shared needs for the enhancement of cultural policies in the WBs, represented according to our framework of analysis.

Concluding remarks

What is presented in this paper constitutes, to the best of our knowledge, the most overarching attempt to present the cultural policies in the Western Balkans with a transnational perspective. Upon reviewing the cultural policy landscape across the region, we observed substantial progress achieved by the six countries in establishing frameworks for the support and smooth running of the cultural and creative sectors, along with notable efforts to align with EU standards; however, this analysis also unveiled shared gaps, challenges, and needs that could potentially hinder future regional advancement and reconciliation unless addressed promptly. In this attempt to return a regional perspective of cultural policies, at least two significant obstacles were encountered. First, although the research was not intended to compare, yet to confront, the six national scenarios of cultural policies with the aim to assess the degree of shared direction, joint perspective and efforts undertaken by the countries, the collected quantitative data appeared unsuitable to this aim and we believe this shall be attributed to the non-sufficiently consistent way of organising and publishing cultural statistics in the WBs region rather than to the nature of the indicators selected. Secondly, the breath of the components under analysis has led us to favour a composite rather than an in-depth restitution of the research outcomes. In order to obviate the shortcomings that might result from this choice, we believe that future research could be aimed at investigating specific cultural policy instruments or components among those identified by the developed framework of analysis.

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