

EU funding for culture: the regional dimension

Although competence for culture policy lies with the Member States, various EU programmes and funds are available for cultural projects. The contribution of culture to regional development is increasingly recognised and EU regional funding can finance projects with a cultural dimension.

Culture, innovation and economy

The cultural sector has a strong impact on the EU economy and employment. In 2012 the creative and cultural industries (CCI) contributed some [4.2 %](#) of Europe's GDP, and accounted for 3.3 % of the EU workforce, a higher figure, for example, than the [chemicals and plastic products industry](#) (2.3 %) or real estate activities (2.1 %). The CCI proved to be more resilient than many other sectors in the 2008–2012 crisis; its annual employment creation rate fell from 3.5 % to 0.7 % while the rest of the economy registered an overall decrease from +1 % to -0.7 %.

The sector has a positive [regional, economic and social](#) impact. A recent [Europa Nostra](#) report points to cultural heritage as central for [cultural tourism](#) and for regional economic development. Cultural heritage is an important asset for sustainable tourism and, together with cultural infrastructure, can play a significant role in urban and rural development strategies.

Moreover, active participation in artistic activities has an impact on innovation. The European Innovation Scoreboard, quoted in a [2011 analysis](#) on structural funds for culture, provides a comparative assessment of research and innovation performance in Europe. Its 2008 edition relating to 15 EU Member States shows that countries with high active participation in cultural and artistic activities also [rank high in innovation](#).

In a [resolution](#) of 8 September 2015, the European Parliament called for an integrated approach to cultural heritage, stressing its economic potential (digitisation, cultural tourism) and its place in developing macro-regional strategies. It called on the Commission to increase the initial €5 million funding earmarked in various funds (among others, the regional development fund, rural and maritime funds) for cultural heritage small-scale infrastructure projects up to €10 million. In its opinion on the 2016 budget, the EP's [Committee on Culture and Education](#) urged that investments in CCI be included in the European Fund for Strategic Investment.

From 2007 to 2013 an estimated [€6 billion](#) support was granted from EU structural funds to cultural projects, compared to €400 million from the Culture programme and €755 million from the Media programme. The overall level of regional funding for culture was not high: in 2007–2013 only [1.7 % of structural funds](#) were allocated to culture (0.9 % for cultural heritage, 0.6 % for cultural infrastructure, and 0.2 % for cultural services). The structural funds can be used flexibly in terms of the rate of allocations. Thus, the initial 1 % allocation for culture in the operational programme for [Austria](#), for example, had grown to 5.71 % by the end of the programme.

Funding for culture and regional policy, 2014–2020

In the current funding period, despite its contribution to the economy and the resistance of the CCI to the 2008 crisis, EU support for the cultural sector in the only EU programme specifically earmarked for culture, the [Creative Europe Programme](#) (CEP), amounts to just [0.14 %](#) of the 2014–2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (or €1 462.72 million). As figures for the previous programming period show, the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) can offer more substantial financial support for cultural projects. The two funding instruments differ in focus: the CEP aims at promoting cultural and linguistic diversity as well as European heritage, whereas the objective of the ESIF is to foster socio-economic development and regional cohesion. Financing can be obtained for cultural projects that correspond to a relevant [thematic objective](#) (TO) and investment priority.

The horizontal ESIF [Regulation 1303/2013](#) sets the rules for the five funds belonging to ESIF and introduces 11 thematic objectives to be pursued in order to implement the objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth of the Europe 2020 strategy. These thematic objectives are then formulated as investment priorities for every fund and are specified in a separate regulation. Funding for culture is available mainly via the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF), as well as (to a lesser degree) the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). Taking into account national and regional needs and potential for development, the national reform programmes and, where appropriate, country-specific recommendations formulated by the European Commission, Member States define their priorities for regional development and prepare operational programmes aimed at achieving the Europe 2020 goals.

[Regulation 1301/2013 on ERDF](#) mentions small and medium-sized enterprises in the CCI, innovation, sustainable tourism, culture (small-scale cultural and sustainable tourism infrastructure), and access to social and cultural services as areas to be supported. Four of eleven TOs include investment priorities in culture.

- TO 2: **access to, use of and quality of ICT**. This objective includes strengthening ICT applications for e-culture. This corresponds to digital growth strategies and covers [digitisation](#) projects that facilitate access to cultural content, also by vulnerable groups, and its use for other purposes by the CCI.
- TO 6: **preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency** can cover conservation, protection, promotion and development of natural and cultural heritage.
- TO 8: **promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility**. This can include the development of endogenous potential via conversion of declining industrial regions and enhancement of accessibility to, and development of, specific natural and cultural resources.
- TO 9: **promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination** includes measures to improve access to social, cultural and recreational services and the transition from institutional to community-based services.

TOs 8 and 9 are also covered by the ESF although the current ESF Regulation (like the previous one) does not mention 'culture'. Nevertheless, the ESF was used as a financial tool to support cultural activities and the CCI sector during the previous financial period in terms of social inclusion and coherence, and job creation.

The [EAFRD](#) and the [EMFF](#) can cover investments with a cultural dimension in two domains: cultural heritage ([rural heritage](#) and [maritime heritage](#), to develop tourism in rural and maritime areas) and small-scale cultural infrastructure (to provide cultural services and offer better quality of life).

Member States can also include culture, as advised in [a 2012 study](#), in other areas, such as:

- Smart Specialisation (SS), social enterprises and [R&D](#) covered by TO 1 (**strengthening research, technological development and innovation**). In 2014–2020, [CCI projects](#) under national SS strategies amount to 4.6 % in the 'research and innovation capability' priorities and to 4.0 % in terms of 'business areas and target markets';
- innovative financial instruments, and support for SMEs in the creative sector, as listed in TO 3 (**enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises**); and
- training for officials in charge of culture, included in TO 10 (**investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning**).

Cooperation instruments

European territorial cooperation is a support instrument of the ERDF for cultural-heritage activities. It includes interregional, cross-border and transnational cooperation. For example, the [Alpine Space](#) 2014–2020 territorial cooperation programme aims at increasing cultural and natural heritage activities in the Alps. It covers cooperation in the fields of technological development and innovation, the shift towards a low-carbon economy, environmental protection, resource efficiency and research.

Community-led local development (CLLD) is an approach which involves local populations in development strategies and in finding solutions to local problems. It aims at fostering social cohesion and employment, among other things via support for material and immaterial cultural heritage and cultural activities. The [Fisheries Local Action Groups](#) provide for partnership between local public and private bodies, and fisheries stakeholders, in designing and implementing development strategies for their area. Such CLLD projects can focus on [cultural heritage](#) with a view to creating employment, and enhancing local identity and traditions.