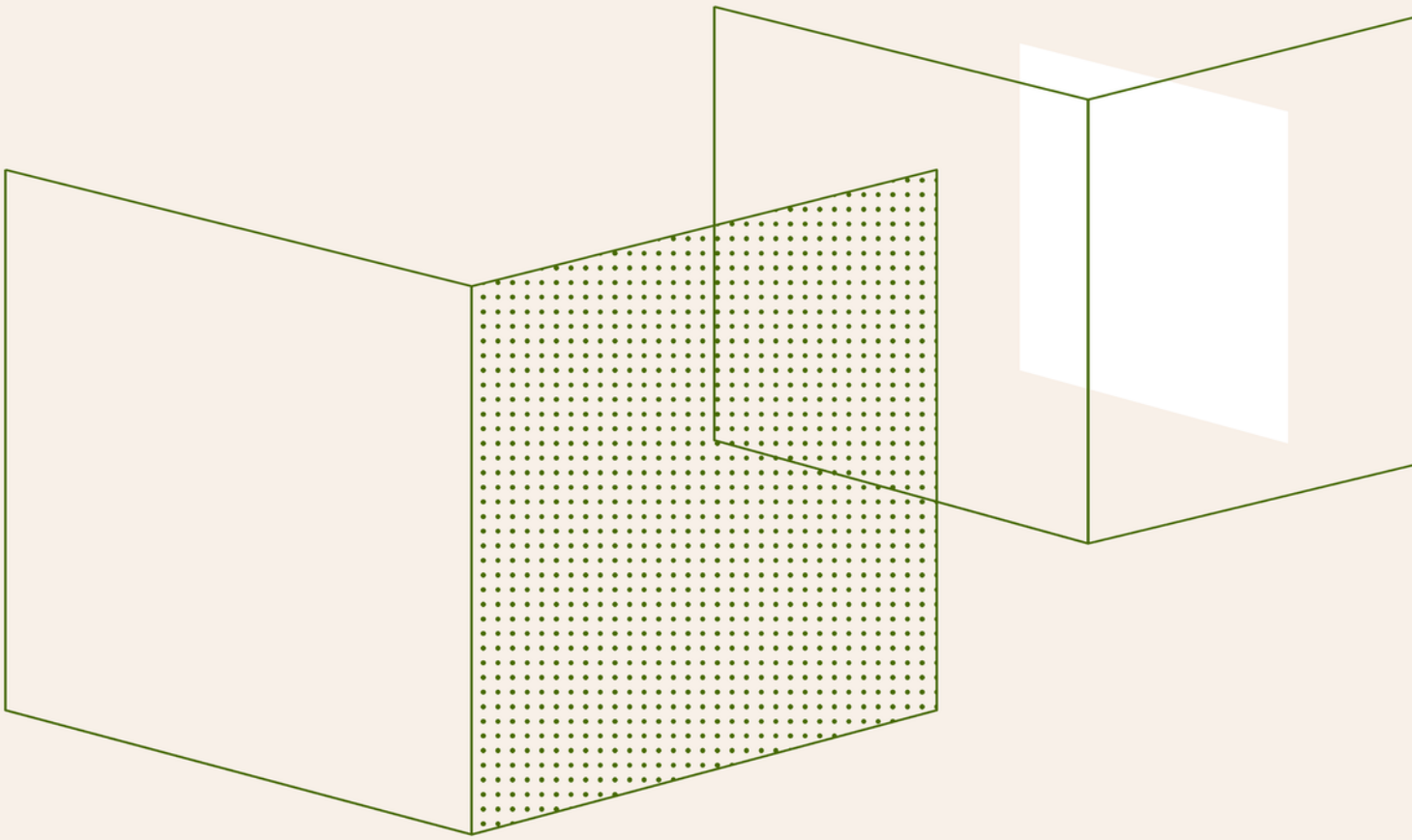
ON THE MOVE

What support for European cultural networks under AgoraEU?

Position paper



Co-funded by the European Union

On the Move is the international information network dedicated to artistic and cultural mobility, gathering 85 member organisations from 33 countries, representing the interests of 4,260+ members and affiliated organisations in Europe and the world. Since 2002, On the Move has been working to provide regular, up-to-date and free information on mobility opportunities, conditions and funding, and to advocate for the value of cross-border cultural mobility. Co-funded by the European Union and the French Ministry of Culture, On the Move is implementing an ambitious multiannual programme to build the capacities of local, regional, national, European and international stakeholders for the sustainable development of our cultural ecosystems.

In addition to its open call listings, On the Move regularly creates, updates, and publishes Cultural Mobility Funding Guides. These guides are meant to be a resource for artists and other arts workers looking to finance their cross-border travel to and/or from a specific country, world region, or continent. They also serve as mappings of existing opportunities that can be a useful reference document for policymakers and funders at the local, national, European and international levels.

http://on-the-move.org

Author Yohann Floch

Graphic design Marine Domec

This publication uses the font Atkinson Hyperlegible – a typeface developed explicitly for visually impaired people: **https://www.brailleinstitute.org/freefont/**

Creative Commons Licence - Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

What support for European cultural networks under AgoraEU? is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. To view a copy of this licence, please visit **https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0**

Suggested citation format: Floch, Y. (2026), *What support for European cultural networks under AgoraEU?*, On the Move, available at **https://on-the-move.org/resources/library**

Artificial intelligence tools were used to proofread this publication in British English. All content, analysis and editorial decisions remain the responsibility of the author(s).

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

What support for European cultural networks under AgoraEU?

by Yohann Floch

European cultural networks are not simply project-delivery partners. They are part of the cultural infrastructure that makes European cooperation possible: they connect organisations across borders, sustain professional communities, carry knowledge between local and European levels, and give cultural civil society a collective voice. As the EU prepares AgoraEU for 2028–2034, the question is not whether networks can be fitted into another set of project priorities, but whether the programme will recognise and finance the conditions that allow this infrastructure to function.

That is why support for transnational cultural networks should remain a distinct action under AgoraEU. The EU's role in culture is based on cooperation and complementarity, not harmonisation. Networks are one of the practical ways that role is exercised: they make exchange possible where national systems remain separate, include organisations that would otherwise be isolated, and help the institutions hear a diverse cultural field. Removing or diluting dedicated support would weaken not only individual organisations, but the connections through which European cultural cooperation acquires continuity, reach and legitimacy.

Today, under Creative Europe, the European Commission's own portal reports that, in the 2024 selection, 39 "projects", backed by around 40 million euros, involved more than 5,000 organisations, with networks ranging from small alliances of 14 members to structures of over 400, and a combined reach of 125 countries.[1]

European Cultural Networks

European cultural networks exist in nearly every field of culture, including performing arts, music, museums, heritage, festivals, and some cut across them all. Many networks began as informal professional gatherings, long before the Union had any role in culture. That role is relatively recent. It dates from the early 1990s and today rests on Article 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which allows the Union to support and complement what Member States do in culture but not to harmonise their laws.[2] The Union therefore works by encouragement and cooperation, and networks have become one of its main partners in doing so. Under the Culture Programme of 2007 to 2013, the Union set aside a budget for organisations

---

1 European Commission, ***European networks of cultural and creative organisations***, Culture and Creativity portal.

2 Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union - PART THREE: UNION POLICIES AND INTERNAL ACTIONS - TITLE XIII: CULTURE - Article 167 (ex Article 151 TEC). ***Official Journal 115***, *9 May 2008 P. 0121 – 0122.*

active at European level, offering operating grants, which help an organisation to cover its running costs, to networks.[3] I will return to why that matters.

Ways of telling the story

Different people describe networks in different terms, and it helps to hear three voices side by side.

The first is the networks' own. In a joint manifesto entitled *The Value of International Cultural Networks*, twenty networks set out why they exist. They describe themselves as builders of trust across borders whose purpose is to inspire, to be inclusive, to test new ideas and to pilot new projects, and to help the sector take risks. Their role, they say, is to connect, to bridge, to advise, to host and to mediate. They commit to cultural equity, to supporting grassroots actors facing hard political and economic times, and to defending the intrinsic value of the arts.[4]

The manifesto also needs to be read in its context. It was published when European policy discourse was dominated by recovery from the global economic and financial crisis, which had affected every sector, and when creativity, competitiveness and economic resilience were the watchwords of the day. Against that background, its insistence on trust, equity and the intrinsic value of the arts reads as a reminder, at a moment when one was needed, of what networks stand for beyond growth.

The values that appear in the manifesto are consistent and quietly ambitious. They concern trust, openness, risk-taking, and care for those on the margins. The manifesto speaks of empowering arts organisations, letting creative workers grow, introducing an international dimension, and supporting grassroots players whom political and economic hardship threatens to marginalise.[5] It also insists that the arts have value in themselves, and not only for what they contribute to growth. These are the values that the people working in networks tend to name when asked why they do the work, and they deserve to be taken seriously as the starting point of any discussion about networks' future.

The second voice is the funder's. The Commission's portal describes networks as key instruments for reaching the aims of Creative Europe, as bodies it consults on the design and delivery of EU cultural policy, and as guided by the European values of artistic freedom, diversity, fairness, inclusion, solidarity and sustainability.[6] The call for proposals published for the 2024 selection, *European Networks of Cultural and Creative Organisations*, is more specific about what is expected. It seeks highly representative, multi-country, membership-based networks of European cultural organisations, covering a wide range of Creative Europe participating countries, and it justifies its support by what such networks are expected to deliver: to enhance

---

3 European Parliament and Council, Decision establishing the Culture Programme (2007 to 2013), **Decision No 1855/2006/EC**, 12 December 2006.

4 ARRE – Association of European Royal Residences; CAE – Culture Action Europe; ECHO – European Concert Hall Organisation; EMC – European Music Council; ELIA – European League of Institutes of the Arts; ETC – European Theatre Convention; EMCY – European Union of Music Competitions for Youth; Eurozine; Res Artis; OTM – On the Move; ECA-EC – European Choral Association – Europa Cantat; ENCC – European Network of Cultural Centres; IMC – International Music Council; IETM – International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts; TEH – Trans Europe Halles; RANN – Réseau Art Nouveau Network; FACE – Fresh Arts Coalition Europe; NEMO – The Network of European Museum Organisations; Triangle Network; RESEO – European Network for Opera, Music and Dance Education, ***The Value of International Cultural Networks***, joint manifesto, 7 March 2016.

5 Ibidem.

6 European Commission, ***European networks of cultural and creative organisations***, Culture and Creativity portal.

the capacities of the European cultural and creative sectors to face common challenges, to nurture talent, to innovate and prosper, and to generate jobs and growth.[7]

The third is that of the researcher Carlotta Scioldo, who describes networks as hybrids: partly a civil-society phenomenon that grows from the bottom up, and partly a tool of European governance that has been encouraged from the top down. Because the Union cannot legislate on culture, she argues, it relies on soft ways of coordinating, and networks are among the most important. She also asks whether they serve as tools to strengthen the Union's legitimacy.[8]

None of the three is wrong. Each emphasises something different: community, delivery and governance. A good deal of what follows is about how those emphases fit together, and where they pull apart.

What networks deliver

The most visible things networks deliver are connections: meetings, partnerships and exchanges across borders. Behind them sit services that are less visible but just as practical, such as training and skills exchange, information on funding and mobility, research and data, platforms and pilots for emerging artists, and support for projects that individual organisations could not manage alone.[9]

Networks also deliver collective thinking. Thirty cross-border networks, brought together by Culture Action Europe, produced a sector blueprint for the Commission's new cultural strategy, the *Culture Compass for Europe*, covering ten priority topics: artistic freedom, working conditions, artistic research, international cultural relations, health and well-being, sustainability, cultural participation, arts education, security and digital change.[10] They also deliver collective action when it is needed. Ahead of the 2026 EU budget, Culture Action Europe and thirty networks wrote to national ministers asking them to reverse proposed cuts of 27.56 million euros to Creative Europe,[11] and in 2026 hundreds organisations, many of them networks, signed an open letter calling for a stronger culture budget in AgoraEU.[12]

---

7 Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, **CREA-CULT-2024-NET** – European Networks of Cultural and Creative Organisations, Call document (CREA), version 1.0, 31 October 2023.

8 Scioldo, C., ***Transnational cultural networks: soft mechanisms for cultural diversity and frictionless mobility: Tools for EU legitimacy?***, Cultural Trends, vol. 34, no. 1, Routledge, 12 March 2024 (online); Scioldo, C., ***European Networks and Cultural Governance: How Culture Makes Policy***, Routledge, 2024.

9 Szűcs, T. and Carlini, R., Foreword to European Commission: European Education and Culture Executive Agency, ***Creative Europe Networks – 28 pan-European organisations connecting and strengthening Europe's cultural sectors*** – *October 2019*, Publications Office, 2019.

10 Culture Action Europe, ***Towards the Culture Compass: A Sector Blueprint***, discussion paper, 30 September 2025; European Commission, **Culture Compass for Europe** – Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 12 November 2025.

11 Culture Action Europe, ***Letter regarding the Council's position on the draft general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2026: Creative Europe programme***, 1st October 2025.

12 Culture Action Europe, '**150+ organisations call for a more ambitious budget for culture in AgoraEU**', 7 July 2026.

What Holds Networks Back

European cultural networks remain necessary, but the conditions in which they operate have become more volatile. Their work responds to enduring needs across the cultural and creative sectors: exchange across borders, professional development, access to knowledge and mobility, collective representation, and support for organisations that cannot achieve these things alone. The case for a dedicated European support mechanism therefore remains strong. The question is whether its design matches the reality networks now face. Some pressures come from outside – political change, conflict, climate disruption and shrinking public funding – while others arise from the programme's funding rules and narrow expectations of delivery.

A useful starting point is a recent position paper, *The New Challenges of European Cultural Networks*, written in 2026 by Toni González, a Barcelona-based consultant in the strategic development and mobility of the performing arts. González was a member of IETM, the international network for contemporary performing arts, for thirty years and served on its board in the 1990s and again in the 2010s. He has recently resigned, and his paper tries to turn that decision into an analysis of the whole field.[13]

His argument runs as follows. Networks began in the 1990s as informal, independent spaces funded by member fees. After the introduction of Creative Europe in 2014, he says, the Commission stopped funding the running costs of network secretariats and moved to project funding with priorities it set itself. Networks had to grow in order to manage the work, then needed more projects to pay for the staff, and so became production agencies for Brussels. He proposes several lines of action: to break away from the spiral of competitive projects, to preserve independence of judgement and to review the ethics of cultural funding.[14]

I take the paper seriously because it names real tensions, in some cases more directly than the sector tends to do in public, and because it gives us a chance to test those tensions against the evidence. Readers will find that some of his concerns are well supported, others need qualification, and a few point at the wrong target.

Paying for projects, not for organisations

Here the evidence supports much of the critique. The 2024 call for proposals for European networks, the document in which the Commission sets out what it will fund and on what terms, states plainly that it finances projects, not operating costs. Statutory activities such as board meetings and general assemblies are explicitly ineligible.[15] Proposals must also be organised into work packages, each corresponding to one of the call's priorities, which means that a network's own mission has to be expressed, as a requirement, through the programme's headings.[16]

There is a paradox in that arrangement, and in fairness it is the funder's, not the networks'. The same call requires networks to be highly representative and to have statutes, governance rules and members' rights

---

13 González, T., ***The New Challenges of European Cultural Networks: Strategic analysis and proposal in the face of systemic crisis***, position paper, Barcelona, 2026.

14 Ibidem.

15 Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, **CREA-CULT-2024-NET** – European Networks of Cultural and Creative Organisations, Call document (CREA), version 1.0, 31 October 2023.

16 Ibidem.

and obligations.[17] In other words, a network must prove its democratic life and is then given no means to pay for it. A democratic life is how a membership organisation hears its members, and it is the one thing the programme will not fund.

This is all the more striking because the same funder expects networks to carry out advocacy and policy work, and to bring the voices of civil society organisations, artists and cultural practitioners to the policy table.[18] Those voices are gathered precisely through the democratic processes that the programme declines to pay for.

The same logic produces the cycle González describes. Project funding rewards delivery, so networks hire staff to deliver, and staff need the next project to keep their jobs. The pattern is plausible, and the call does little to break it. Three qualifications are worth adding. First, before Creative Europe, the Culture Programme of 2007 to 2013 did offer operating grants to networks,[19] so many were already partly funded by the Union well before the 2010s, and the later change was a loss of structural support rather than a first encounter with public money. Second, the remedy he proposes, keeping public funding below half of a network's income, would be difficult for most. Member fees alone cannot sustain a pan-European secretariat, and a fees-only model would leave out the smaller and poorer organisations that networks exist to include. Fee-based models also tend to favour better-resourced members, those with the time and means to take full advantage of the activities coordinated by the secretariat, or to assume commitments such as volunteer governance roles. Third, González leaves aside other drivers of growth, such as the professionalisation that members themselves have asked for, the withdrawal of national funding and the sheer logistics of running pan-European services.

Scarcity, competition and concentration

Scarcity breeds competition, and competition sits awkwardly beside the call's own hope that selected networks will build a "network of networks".[20] It also favours those with the most administrative capacity. The Commission's evaluation observes that funding tends to flow to countries with strong cultural sectors or that serve as regional hubs, such as France, Italy, Germany and Belgium.[21] Networks are pan-European in membership, but the work of coordination, and the money that goes with it, is concentrated in a few places, mostly in what are perceived as the cultural centres of western and northern Europe.

There is a history behind this concentration. Those places were traditionally more stable administratively, and networks based there could find matching funding and grants at national level, because their authorities supported the international dimension and believed that the European dimension deserved support. Some of them even sought to attract the secretariats of European networks to their own cities. It is fair to ask whether that would happen today. With public funding cuts, and with populist movements questioning the place, role and value of arts and culture, the conditions that made these hubs attractive can no longer be

17 Ibidem.

18 Ibidem.

19 Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, ***Culture Programme (2007–2013): Programme Guide***, *Strand 2*, May 2010.

20 Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, **CREA-CULT-2024-NET** – European Networks of Cultural and Creative Organisations, Call document (CREA), version 1.0, 31 October 2023.

21 European Commission, A Decade of Creative Europe, **COM(2025) 768 final**, 17 December 2025.

taken for granted, and the geography of European networks may change as a result. The point matters for what follows, because it shows how dependent the current model is on national matching funds that are becoming harder to secure.

Mixed expectations

Networks are asked to be several things at once. They are to deliver projects in line with programme priorities. The last call describes them as reliable policy networks whose collective task is to help shape cultural policy in Europe.[22] They are also expected to embody European values, in the Commission's phrase, as the guiding principles of their work.[23] Meanwhile their own manifesto speaks of values they have chosen for themselves.[24] The difference is subtle but it matters. Declared values can be defended, even against a funder. Attributed values become conditions of funding.

The balance between the economic and the intrinsic value of culture shows the same tension. The general objectives of both Creative Europe and the proposed AgoraEU pair the defence of cultural diversity with the competitiveness of the sector, and the call speaks of generating jobs and growth.[25] The Council's working text now says more firmly that the intrinsic and artistic value of culture should be recognised alongside the economic one,[26] which is welcome, though nothing yet says how that value would be recognised when "projects" are assessed.

This is part of a wider problem of measurement. The assessment criteria are impact, quality and relevance,[27] and the call speaks of numbers of activities and of visibility.[28] The participants in the Salzburg Global convening, whom I introduce below, make a similar point about narrow metrics that fail to capture the wider contributions of cultural institutions.[29] Trust, relationships and a field's sense of itself are exactly what networks produce, and they are what current indicators are least able to see.

There is also a matter of classification. The proposed AgoraEU legal base describes civil society organisations as actors who hold institutions to account through advocacy and watchdog work, who must be able to operate independently, and with whom the programme should keep up a structured and continuous

---

22 Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, **CREA-CULT-2024-NET** – European Networks of Cultural and Creative Organisations, Call document (CREA), version 1.0, 31 October 2023.

23 European Commission, '**European networks of cultural and creative organisations**', Culture and Creativity portal.

24 ARRE et al., ***The Value of International Cultural Networks***, joint manifesto, 7 March 2016.

25 Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, **CREA-CULT-2024-NET** – European Networks of Cultural and Creative Organisations, Call document (CREA), version 1.0, 31 October 2023; European Commission, Proposal for a Regulation establishing the 'AgoraEU' programme for the period 2028–2034 and repealing Regulations (EU) 2021/692 and (EU) 2021/818, **COM(2025) 550 final**, 16 July 2025.

26 Council of the European Union, Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council Establishing the "AgoraEU" Programme for the Period 2028–2034, and Repealing Regulations (EU) 2021/692 and (EU) 2021/818 – Partial General Approach, Note from the General Secretariat of the Council to the Council, 8313/26, **2025/0550(COD)**, 5 May 2026.

27 Ibidem.

28 Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, **CREA-CULT-2024-NET** – European Networks of Cultural and Creative Organisations, Call document (CREA), version 1.0, 31 October 2023.

29 Niederseer, F., '**Coming Together to Rethink Cultural Institutions, Infrastructure, and Investment**', Culture Update, Salzburg Global, 8 April 2026.

dialogue.[30] That language sits in the section on rights and democracy. In the culture section, the single reference to networks appears among the means of building capacity to drive innovation and competitiveness.[31] Cultural networks are civil society organisations in every ordinary sense, yet the programme speaks of them mainly as instruments. That is the heart of González's concern about independence, and I share part of it.

Where I differ is that I do not believe that any engagement with the Commission becomes evidence of accommodation. Networks have a record of voicing public criticism of programme architecture and budget proposals, as the open letters and the sector blueprint show, and structured access has produced policy gains. The relevant question is therefore not whether networks are funded by institutions, but whether they retain the capacity to criticise them, and whether the architecture of funding protects that capacity.

A related question deserves to be asked. Networks are asked to advocate on behalf of the culture field, yet we have little evidence of what influence they actually have on policies and decision-making. It would be informative, and probably sobering, to measure the gap between the values and conditions that the field defends through its networks and the extent to which EU institutions take them into account.

A changing political climate

Networks do not work in calm conditions. A wider conversation among cultural leaders and funders helps to place their challenges in context. In April 2026, the Salzburg Global Seminar, an independent non-profit that has brought together international Fellows since 1947, convened 45 institutional leaders, funders, policymakers and practitioners under the title *Creating Futures: Rethinking Cultural Institutions, Infrastructure, and Investment*. The programme was co-designed with participants, and selection gave priority to people from across the Majority World and from communities less visible in the arts.[32] The gathering is global and concerns cultural institutions in general, not European networks specifically, so it should be read as perspective and not as evidence about networks. It is nevertheless instructive.

In its summary of the discussions, Salzburg Global notes that in many places state influence over cultural institutions and funding bodies has intensified, narrowing the space for dissenting views, and it cites figures from UNESCO's *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* report: only 9 per cent of artists and culture workers report adequate protection of their economic and social rights, and public funding for culture stands below 0.6 per cent of GDP worldwide.[33] Its central argument is that sustainability is structural and not only financial. It calls for a shift away from short-term, project-based financing towards models that are more context-driven and locally rooted, and for funding to be connected to governance, labour conditions and the design of the whole

---

30 Council of the European Union, Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council Establishing the "AgoraEU" Programme for the Period 2028–2034, and Repealing Regulations (EU) 2021/692 and (EU) 2021/818 – Partial General Approach, Note from the General Secretariat of the Council to the Council, 8313/26, **2025/0550(COD)**, 5 May 2026.

31 Ibidem.

32 Salzburg Global Seminar, ***Creating Futures: Rethinking Cultural Institutions, Infrastructure, and Investment***, programme description, Culture, Arts and Society series, Salzburg, 13–18 April 2026.

33 UNESCO, ***Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity***, UNESCO, 2026.

ecosystem, rather than judged by narrow metrics.[34] A follow-up piece from September 2026 reflects on three years of the series in the same spirit.[35]

Those conclusions echo, from an entirely different starting point, what networks in Europe say about project cycles and what the funding rules do to organisations. If the sector worldwide reaches similar conclusions about project funding, then the problem is a feature of how culture is financed and not a failure of the people who lead networks.[36]

The consequences are concrete inside secretariats. Workforce precarity follows the project cycle, even as the programme asks the sector to promote fair working conditions. Cash flow is another problem: networks may have to spend before interim or final payments arrive, while few have reserves or access to affordable loan. Projects have also had to absorb climate-related disruption, armed conflicts, event cancellations and last-minute programming changes that could not reasonably have been anticipated when applications were written. Yet these shocks have generally had to be managed within the original budget. Inflation is not adequately reflected in grant calculations, while the cost of transnational travel has risen substantially. A more resilient model would combine predictable core support with the ability to adapt activities, timelines and budgets when circumstances change. Such a model rests on trust. Trust should be at the core of the relationship between funders and beneficiaries, rather than an assumption that is tested at every reporting stage. Networks are, in most cases, the actors best placed to adjust a work programme as conditions shift, and they have every interest in doing so: their credibility depends on reaching the goals they set out at the start. A funder that trusts networks to adapt the route is more likely to see the destination reached, and to obtain outcomes comparable to those originally promised, than one that treats the initial work plan as a contract to be executed to the letter.

Partnership across borders: equal in name, uneven in practice

The last call speaks of partnerships on an equal footing and of co-creation, but its priority on external relations asks European organisations to become more active outside the Union, with the aim of communicating European values and helping to contain authoritarian systems.[37] The subject of the action is European, and partners elsewhere are its object. The proposed AgoraEU Regulation repeats the pattern in softer words, speaking of international cultural relations that contribute to the Union's external action objectives.[38] My earlier analysis of EU international cultural relations noted the same gap between a language of mutuality and funding channels that favour European organisations and national institutes, together with an assumption that capacity and expertise travel in one direction.[39]

---

34 Ibidem.

35 Hobson, F., '**Creating Futures: Three Years of Reimagining Culture's Role in a Changing World**', Culture Update, Salzburg Global, 25 September 2026.

36 Niederseer, F., '**Coming Together to Rethink Cultural Institutions, Infrastructure, and Investment**', Culture Update, Salzburg Global, 8 April 2026.

37 Ibidem.

38 Council of the European Union, Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council Establishing the "AgoraEU" Programme for the Period 2028–2034, and Repealing Regulations (EU) 2021/692 and (EU) 2021/818 – Partial General Approach, Note from the General Secretariat of the Council to the Council, 8313/26, **2025/0550(COD)**, 5 May 2026.

39 Floch, Y., '**Reshaping EU International Cultural Relations**', On the Move, 2026.

A further difficulty concerns the countries outside the European Union that participate in Creative Europe. European cultural networks aim to represent organisations across all participating countries, yet participation remains uneven. An earlier baseline study for the EU–Eastern Partnership Culture and Creativity Programme found that only a limited number of European networks had members from Eastern Partnership countries. Although the membership of EU-funded networks has since become more geographically diverse, participation from countries outside the EU27 remains limited, and formal representation does not in itself guarantee meaningful involvement.[40] Organisations and individuals based in these countries often lack the financial resources needed to benefit fully from what transnational networks have to offer. Dedicated support for international cultural cooperation may be scarce at local or national level, while the practical obstacles to participation can be considerable. These include difficulties in making international bank transfers, obtaining visas and covering the additional costs associated with cross-border mobility. Moreover, the conditions vary significantly from one country to another: organisations based in Tunisia, Georgia, Ukraine, North Macedonia and elsewhere do not face the same constraints, nor do they enjoy equivalent access to public funding or international cooperation opportunities. Treating these different circumstances as though they were interchangeable risks reproducing the very inequalities that European networks are intended to overcome. If AgoraEU is to support genuinely transnational cultural cooperation, it must therefore move beyond geographical eligibility and formal representation towards measures that enable organisations to participate meaningfully, taking account of their differing financial, administrative and political contexts.

Participation is one side of representation; voice is the other. The foreword to the Commission's brochure calls networks representative bodies,[41] and representativeness has to be earned. How far do the voices of small, informal and grassroots members shape what a network says in public? How easy is it for a member without a travel budget or a permanent project team to take part? These are questions that every network can usefully put to itself from time to time, with two simpler ones: whose agenda does our presence in the room serve, and who, among the networks that are not funded by the EU, is missing from it?

What the critique gets right, and where I would differ

The González paper is best read as a provocation from someone who cares about the field. It is right that project-based financing erodes governance and autonomy, and that the framing of international cultural relations is too one-directional. Where I would differ is on the diagnosis and the cure. The paper reads as moral failure what is better explained by design. If networks are asked to behave as delivery partners and are funded only as such, we should not be surprised when they do.

González also treats the programme's horizontal priorities, the digital transition, environmental sustainability and social inclusion, as requirements that distort what networks are for. I would put it differently. These are not inventions of Brussels. They are realities that every cultural organisation now has to face, and, as his own introduction acknowledges in speaking of social and climatic urgencies, they are matters on which the sector

40 EU–Eastern Partnership Culture and Creativity Programme, '**How many EaP organisations are members of European networks – research results**', 2017.

41 Szűcs, T. and Carlini, R., Foreword to European Commission: European Education and Culture Executive Agency, ***Creative Europe Networks – 28 pan-European organisations connecting and strengthening Europe's cultural sectors*** *– October 2019*, Publications Office, 2019.

itself wishes to act.[42] The legitimate criticism concerns the way they are operationalised: as additional requirements in every proposal, such as a strategy and a path towards sustainable practices with tools to monitor progress,[43] without matching resources for the expertise and time they demand. The difficulty lies in how the priorities are delivered, and not in their presence on the agenda.

I would suggest a more productive way forward. If networks are hybrids that lend legitimacy to the Union's cultural policy,[44] the question is no longer whether they are independent or captured, but what they are owed in return. That is the question for the next programme.

What AgoraEU Could Offer

AgoraEU offers an opportunity to correct a structural mismatch. The programme expects networks to be representative, to sustain dialogue with institutions, to contribute to policy development and to connect a diverse field across countries; yet project-only grants do not reliably pay for the governance, staff continuity and member participation on which those functions depend. Dedicated support should therefore remain visible in the legal architecture of AgoraEU and be translated into practical funding conditions: stable operating support, realistic co-financing rules, inflation-sensitive budgets, flexibility during delivery, proportionate evaluation and a timetable that allows organisations to plan.

A visible place in the law

The first step is visibility. At present the legal base mentions networks once, among several means of building capacity and skills.[45] Networks should be named as a distinct action line, set out in an annex of funding lines that also lists cooperation projects, cascading grants and artists' mobility, as many networks have asked and as the Parliament's draft points towards.[46] The text should also recognise their contribution to cultural policy, democratic participation and cultural rights, as well as to capacity and competitiveness. This would answer the problem of classification: networks would be seen as part of cultural civil society, and not only as instruments of the programme.

---

42 González, T., ***The New Challenges of European Cultural Networks: Strategic analysis and proposal in the face of systemic crisis***, position paper, Barcelona, 2026.

43 Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, **CREA-CULT-2024-NET** – European Networks of Cultural and Creative Organisations, Call document (CREA), version 1.0, 31 October 2023.

44 Scioldo, C., ***Transnational cultural networks: soft mechanisms for cultural diversity and frictionless mobility: Tools for EU legitimacy?***, Cultural Trends, vol. 34, no. 1, Routledge, 12 March 2024 (online); Scioldo, C., ***European Networks and Cultural Governance: How Culture Makes Policy***, Routledge, 2024.

45 Council of the European Union, Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council Establishing the "AgoraEU" Programme for the Period 2028–2034, and Repealing Regulations (EU) 2021/692 and (EU) 2021/818 – Partial General Approach, Note from the General Secretariat of the Council to the Council, 8313/26, **2025/0550(COD)**, 5 May 2026.

46 For example, '**On the Move's communiqué on the Draft Report on the AgoraEU Programme 2028–2034**', 22 May 2026; Culture Action Europe, '**Reading between the strands: AgoraEU after Parliament and Council**', 29 May 2026.

Operating support, not only projects

The central change should be to offer operating grants alongside project grants, rather than requiring networks to express their continuing mission through a succession of short-term projects. Operating support should cover the genuine costs of maintaining a transnational secretariat, including staff, democratic governance, member engagement, research, policy analysis, advocacy, communication and knowledge-sharing. These are not incidental overheads: they are the infrastructure that makes the network's public value possible. Grant levels should be reviewed against inflation and the real costs of transnational work, including travel.

The programme should allow EU financing of up to 100 per cent where the nature of the action and the applicant's circumstances justify it. The co-financing requirement has become a structural barrier: across Creative Europe countries, national and local funders face political pressure, reduce their commitments or hesitate to support international cultural activity. Networks cannot be expected to replace that lost public support from membership fees, particularly without excluding smaller and less-resourced members. Multiannual framework agreements aligned with the programme period would improve continuity and reduce the repeated administrative burden of competitive applications. Democratic processes – including board meetings, general assemblies and member consultation – should be eligible costs.

Fair pay and decent working conditions must be a real condition of support, not an unfunded expectation. Budgets should be sufficient to employ staff on appropriate terms and to deliver the work required. Any additional responsibilities, including research or data collection requested by the Commission, should be matched by resources and proportionate reporting requirements.

Stability, trust and flexibility

Payments should be designed around trust and the financial realities of non-profit organisations. Where permitted by the financial rules, the programme should provide a substantial pre-financing payment – ideally the full grant upfront – followed by proportionate accounting and ex-post checks. This would reduce dependence on reserves or bank loan and help networks maintain staff and activities throughout the grant period.

Flexibility should be built into the grant agreement. Networks need to adapt activities, budgets and timelines in response to armed conflict, climate-related disruption, cancelled events, changing travel costs and other unforeseen developments. The programme should permit transfers between work packages within clear thresholds, with simplified approval for larger changes, rather than treating the original work plan as immutable. It should also preserve the ability to organise activities and commission expertise wherever relevant stakeholders are based; narrowing the geographical scope of eligible costs would undermine networks' transnational purpose.

Finally, the end of one funding round and the start of the next should never leave a gap. Experience shows what happens when it does. At the close of earlier rounds, including 2014 to 2020, networks often faced severe difficulties: cash-flow problems with no income to cover running costs, support staff contracts terminated, and projects paused. Each time, a secretariat built up over years was partly dismantled and then had to be rebuilt, at a cost in expertise, relationships and momentum that no later grant repaid. This is the

damage done by abrupt stops in project-based funding, which treats a permanent organisation as if it existed only for the length of a project. AgoraEU should therefore provide transition arrangements, such as overlapping calls or extensions of existing agreements, open to every network eligible under the new programme. Selection would then stay a matter of merit, without prejudging who is selected, and continuity would not be left to chance.

An open and fair field

A fair programme should recognise that networks differ in scale, maturity, governance and resources. A single model built around a large, formally constituted coordinating body risks privileging organisations that already have administrative capacity. AgoraEU should offer proportionate routes to support, including smaller grants and lighter procedures for emerging or informal networks, while maintaining transparent standards of accountability. It should also address barriers faced by organisations in non-EU Creative Europe participating countries, including visa, banking and transfer difficulties, the lack of mobility funding to take part in person, and, where relevant, restrictions on freedom of expression and censorship, so that formal eligibility translates into meaningful.

Networks themselves can help to open the field. Re-granting, which both the Council and the Parliament encourage, would let established networks pass funds to regional actors on the ground, provided the intermediary's role is clear, funded and transparent. I would go further and suggest that the programme trust networks to run fund distribution in their areas of expertise, and encourage them to manage grants for small-scale and grassroots organisations. Networks could also be funded and tasked to reach the countries and sectors that the Commission itself acknowledges are insufficiently engaged.[47] Together with the dedicated support that participants outside the EU27 need, this would help to loosen the concentration.

Voice and influence

The Parliament's proposed Dialogue Platform, a forum for beneficiaries and others to discuss implementation, deserves support provided it is designed with the sector and complements the existing structured dialogue with the Commission and does not replace it.[48] The recital on civil society, which today speaks mainly of rights and democracy organisations, should extend explicitly to cultural civil society.[49] If networks supply legitimacy, the future EU programme should honour their independence in return.

Voice also needs evidence. Networks are asked to advocate on behalf of the culture field, yet we lack a clear picture of what difference that advocacy makes. The programme could support an independent assessment of the influence of European networks on policies and decision-making, comparing the values and conditions that the field defends with the extent to which EU institutions take them into account. The results might be

47 European Commission, A Decade of Creative Europe, COM(2025) 768 final, 17 December 2025.

48 Rafowicz, E. and Kuhnke, A., Draft Report on the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council Establishing the "AgoraEU" Programme for the Period 2028–2034, and Repealing Regulations (EU) 2021/692 and (EU) 2021/818, European Parliament, Committee on Culture and Education and Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, 2025/0550(COD), 7 May 2026.

49 Council of the European Union, Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council Establishing the "AgoraEU" Programme for the Period 2028–2034, and Repealing Regulations (EU) 2021/692 and (EU) 2021/818 – Partial General Approach, Note from the General Secretariat of the Council to the Council, 8313/26, 2025/0550(COD), 5 May 2026.

sobering, but they would be informative for networks and institutions alike, and they would show confidence in the dialogue that the EU institutions and the field ask for.

Measuring and learning

Success should be understood as the quality and durability of the relationships a network enables, not simply the number of events delivered. Useful evidence includes testimonies from artists and cultural professionals, feedback from members and partners, examples of cross-border cooperation that continues beyond a funded activity, and engagement with resources and publications, including downloads. These forms of evidence should complement rather than be displaced by quantitative indicators.

Evaluation should recognise the distinctive contribution of networks and avoid treating activity counts as a proxy for impact. A shared framework, developed with networks, should combine proportionate and realistic quantitative indicators – such as member participation, resource use and engagement with publications – with qualitative evidence: participant and beneficiary testimonies, feedback from members and partners, examples of lasting relationships, knowledge exchange, artistic mobility and policy influence. Stories from artists and cultural professionals can show the value of cultural exchange that aggregate figures often miss. This matters all the more when quantitative data may be incomplete or vulnerable to manipulation.

Responsibility for reliable sector-wide statistics should not be shifted onto networks that are already under-resourced. Member States are best placed, and have a responsibility, to maintain robust cultural statistics; the Commission should address gaps in national reporting rather than expect the weakest parts of the value chain to compensate for them. Networks can contribute insight from their fields, but any additional data collection must be properly resourced and should not become a disproportionate condition of support.

Sectoral depth and cross-sectoral reach

AgoraEU should retain both a sectoral and a cross-sectoral dimension. The sectoral strand should ensure that currently underrepresented fields, including the visual arts, have a genuine route to representation and support. Data collection requirements should be concentrated in this strand, where sector-specific evidence can be meaningfully gathered. The cross-sectoral strand should instead be assessed against thematic and transversal objectives, including well-being and care, mobility, disability inclusion, amateur practices, indigenous creative practices and international cultural relations. Thematic approaches help identify weak signals and emerging trends that do not fit neatly within established sector categories.

Application criteria should reflect how networks actually work. European cultural networks are often expected to address several programme priorities at once; asking applicants to tick predefined boxes can be artificial and reductive. Assessment should focus instead on an organisation’s demonstrated capacity to reach and engage the wider cultural field, the quality and inclusiveness of its membership and governance, and the relevance of its work to the programme’s objectives. This would preserve accountability without forcing complex, evolving activities into rigid categories.

Finally, predictability is itself a condition of effective support. The Commission should publish calls and an indicative calendar well in advance of the next programme period, communicate timelines as early as

possible, and provide bridging arrangements so that organisations funded under Creative Europe do not face avoidable gaps before AgoraEU starts. Networks need time to consult members, plan transnational activity and secure co-funding where it remains necessary; late notice undermines all three.

Reciprocity

The question behind the González paper is whether networks have a future. A better question is what kind of future European cultural policy is prepared to finance. For the funder, they are instruments that deliver programme objectives and consultation. For Scioldo, they are hybrid governance mechanisms that connect the sector to the institutions and support the Union's legitimacy. For the manifesto, they are communities of trust that defend the intrinsic value of the arts. A network funded as an instrument will behave like one: it will deliver projects, speak the language of the call and save its energy for the next application. A network funded as infrastructure can do what its manifesto promises, building trust, taking risks, advocating and remaining accountable to its members. The difference does not rest on the virtue of network leaders and should not be left to them alone.

If networks help make European cultural cooperation possible, dedicated support is not a favour but a policy instrument. AgoraEU should recognise them as cultural civil-society infrastructure: independent enough to question institutions, representative enough to connect a diverse field, and sufficiently resourced to sustain relationships beyond a single project cycle. The practical conditions follow from that recognition – operating grants, the possibility of 100 per cent EU financing, inflation-sensitive budgets, flexible work-package rules, fair payment schedules, proportionate evaluation, a balanced sectoral and cross-sectoral approach, and predictable calls. If the programme expects networks to contribute to the legitimacy and reach of European cultural policy, it must finance the conditions that allow them to do so.

About the author

Yohann Floch is the Director of Operations at On the Move, the international network dedicated to artistic and cultural mobility, and the Director of FACE, a resource platform that facilitates European capacity-building programmes in the contemporary performing arts field.

Throughout his career, Yohann has played an active role in shaping, strengthening and connecting the European cultural sector. He has initiated, structured and contributed to numerous European networks, helping to develop sustainable frameworks for collaboration, knowledge exchange, professional mobility and advocacy across the cultural and creative sectors.

Yohann has held various leadership positions, including Secretary General of the European Dance Development Network (EDN), Director of Trans Europe Halles (TEH)'s International Resource Office (IRO), Coordinator of Dansehallerne's Nordic dance network, and Coordinator of the Circostrada network.

He currently serves as a member of the international advisory board of International Migration Meets the Arts (IMMART), a Danish organisation fostering access to opportunities for foreign-born artists. He was a Board Member of On the Move from 2015 to 2021, an Advisory Board Member of IETM – International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts from 2010 to 2014, and a Board Member of the Access to Culture Structured Dialogue Platform from 2008 to 2011. From 2010 to 2012, he was a member of the European Network of Information Centres for the Performing Arts (ENICPA). In 2008, he was the founding President of the Transdisciplinary European Art Magazines Network (TEAM).

He has also designed, coordinated and contributed to numerous European cooperation projects and pilot international collaborations while working with independent arts organisations and cultural institutions. He acts as an external expert for governmental bodies and private foundations, and leads or co-authors European policy reports.