

EUNIC Knowledge Sharing Workshop

Role of Research & Insight in the Advocacy, Financing & Programming of Cultural Relations

London, 16 – 17 March 2023

Co-hosted by British Council & ifa

Workshop report

High-quality research and evidence are important assets for the programme development, policy influence and stakeholder engagement of all EUNIC members. Many members are actively engaged in different kinds of knowledge production, and there are strong examples of impactful research collaboration in the network.¹ However, there is a lack of clear and comprehensive understanding of which members are involved in what kinds of research activities, on what topics and with what outcomes and objectives.

This 2-day workshop, co-hosted by British Council and ifa at the British Council headquarters in London, was an opportunity to address this and work towards a more coherent plan for sharing research, evidence, and insight internally within the EUNIC network and with mutual external stakeholders.

The workshop allowed experts from EUNIC members' headquarters and branches actively working on research and knowledge management in their organisation to identify areas of research synergy and capacity, and to point out knowledge gaps and areas where future collaboration and investment might be needed. It also helped to raise the profile and visibility of cultural relations as a distinct area of policy-relevant research and evidence, complementing the work of platforms such as the International Cultural Relations Research Alliance (ICRRA) and the Siena Cultural Relations Forum.

¹ See the references on p. 8 for some examples.



Sharing EUNIC member practices - Insight presentations & survey results

Participants were welcomed at British Council headquarters by **Scott McDonald, Chief Executive of British Council**. Following these opening words, **EUNIC Director Andrew Manning** gave a short introduction to the broader EUNIC network and an overview of current relevant topics and programme areas.



As an entry point to following discussions about different research and insight practices, colleagues from different EUNIC members gave short insight presentations on their own institutional experiences.

Christine Wilson introduced the **Research and Insight team at the British Council** and shared reflections on the development of a research culture within the organisation as well as the current focus on and vision for knowledge exchange. She highlighted the shift from disjointed research to a more knowledge-led and evidence-based approach by British Council. The structure of the Research and Insight team and its key areas of focus, including Arts, Education, English, Soft

Power, and Research Excellence, were presented. Christine emphasized the importance of internal knowledge exchange within a large organisation in addition to external exchanges. For this, British Council has established a community of practice to ensure regular exchanges. She also underlined the need to professionalise and widen external exchanges, which would allow to identify shared challenges and areas where deep impact is possible. **Ariadna Tsenina** shared additional reflections on the challenges and opportunities for British Council's research in terms of knowledge sharing and exchange. These include the need for ethical standards in commissioning research, mutual values with partners, and the importance of how research outcomes are presented. British Council is shifting from content creation to content design, the latter being more about using a research product or service to answer a stakeholder's (user) need in the best way for them to consume it. This requires collaboration (between research, knowledge exchange, communications, marketing), understanding of user needs and experiences, creation of tailored content, and iteration (testing and revising). In other words, content design is a much more collaborative process than content creation and places the user at its heart, and is driven by data, feedback and evaluation. This concept created a vivid discussion in the participants group around its implications on the understanding of research.

Odila Triebel discussed **ifa's approach to research** and underlined the importance of taking into account an organisation's history to understand its approaches and strategies. ifa is noted to have the largest cultural relations library in Europe with over 440,000 volumes. research at ifa addresses concepts, methods, topics in the general field of culture in external relations and is independent from the institution's other programming. Ifa works with open calls and commissions predominantly to academics. Odila provided an overview of ifa's research and reports, outlining key research topics and existing collections of research outputs (currently SDGs and multilateralism). ifa's [Forum for International Cultural Relations](#) serves as a hub presenting research-based knowledge at the interface of science and practice from the field of foreign cultural policy and international cultural relations including ifa's research activities. The forum offers targeted content for specific audiences such as journalists, researchers and policy makers in form of reports, policy briefs, podcasts or essays.



Eva Van Passel explained how the **research team at the Flemish government's Department of Culture, Youth and Media** focuses on working with stakeholders within the Flemish government - including policymakers in cultural diplomacy and policy - as well as general audiences and the cultural sector. However, finding a balance between different actors, insights, and interests was noted as a challenge. The research coordination team aims to build shared ownership of knowledge and insights with stakeholders through formal and informal collaborations. However, it faces challenges in reaching its goals of broader knowledge sharing, for example when it comes to reaching people through tailored content on a website that doesn't have research communication as its primary goal.

Additionally, in order to raise understanding and awareness of the research strategies, priorities, and plans of EUNIC members, participants had been asked to answer an online survey ahead of the workshop. These **survey results were presented by James Perkins and Ian Thomas** from British Council, highlighting some interesting patterns in the responses. This included highlighting some shared research interests (e.g. responses to Covid within the culture sector and cultural policy research more broadly) as well as noting that all institutions represented had a clear commitment to using research to support evidence-based policy making and programming. The survey results indicated that practitioners, policy makers and academics are seen by all representatives as core audiences for research. All survey results can be found in the Annex of this report on p. 10.

In sum, the discussion during this first session highlighted the existence of **very similar challenges around research and knowledge in relation to policy advice across different EUNIC members with research departments**. It also identified prompts for further reflection to explore further throughout the workshop.

Group discussions on approaches to research & insight

In small groups, participants discussed their organisational approaches to commissioning research, establishing and maintaining research partnerships, in-house capacity building and research skills, and tracking, documenting and evaluating research impact. Group discussions and findings were shared in plenary.

Topics discussed included:

- **Research agenda:** Who is setting the agenda? How much independence do we have in setting the research agenda, depending on the arm-length variations of the institutions and of internal programme needs. What is the role of respective governments in setting the agenda?
- **Pool of researchers:** Efforts to access an international and diverse pool of suppliers, challenge of limited research/budget cycles, time frames and strict regulations.
- The **procurement journey** of research, being constricted by the nature of public-sector organisations, was identified as another common challenge for many.
- **Publication of research:** How efficient is a differentiation of formats depending on target groups of advice? Should internal research be published, and does it count as 'published' when publicly available?
- **Commissioned research vs in-house research:** Long-term analysis of data and strategies affords building up of in-house capacity. Secondments of external researchers is facilitated; when institutions assess and archive programmes, data is structured and transparent. In-house capacity to make greater use of existing data beyond any immediate project needs has been identified as shared challenge.



- **Capacity building:** Participants agreed that continuous training opportunities such as conference participations and peer group exchanges are needed to keep the methodologies actual and maintain overall quality of publications. This includes practices that maintain the in-house researcher's abilities to assess the robustness of research methods and findings.
- **Measuring impact:** Most organisations are at an early stage when it comes to tracing the impact of their research, knowing who uses the research and in what ways. Participants agreed that it would be good to understand this in a robust and systematic way. But what is the best system to evaluate impact, within others on policy advice?²
- Beyond the direct **policy impact of research**, the importance of engaging in thought leadership was discussed in order to consolidate one's reputation as a credible research organization and to get a seat at the table when it comes to policymaking. Thought innovation from institutions that are practitioners in the field and with limited research budgets comes often more from initializing topics and refiguration of disciplines than from new long-term data.



Participants enjoyed a short **guided tour of the new offices of the British Council headquarters**, accompanied by a brief presentation of **British Council's wider programme activities** by **Rosanna Lewis**.

Current state of cultural relations research

Online interventions by external researchers J. P. Singh and Floresca Karanasou allowed participants to learn on the current state of cultural relations research from a wider perspective. This session was streamed online live to make it accessible to the wider EUNIC network and colleagues not present in London.

J. P. Singh, Professor of Global Commerce and Policy at George Mason University, reflected on issues around definitions in cultural relations research, and presented some key challenges and findings related to different approaches and understandings of cultural diplomacy worldwide. Main findings revolve around questions such as where cultural relations are practiced (increasingly along the North-South dimension), who engages in cultural relations (state or non-state actors), and how cultural relations are studied, with a call for robust methodology to ensure credible findings. Other observations include that

² A [Knowledge Sharing Workshop on precisely the topic of monitoring & evaluating the societal impact of culture](#) took place in Brussels in February 2023. While the workshop focused more on project evaluation, links to the impact evaluation of research could be made in the future.



cultural relations approaches seem to converge among countries, while soft power approaches do not, with examples such as the USA using the term public diplomacy instead of soft power in their reports.

Freelance researcher Floresca Karanasou presented her findings from the first part of a two-part research for the British Council, which examines the [International Collaboration Grants programme](#). Floresca's analysis compared the approaches to funding artistic collaborations by three cultural organizations – namely British Council, Goethe-Institut & EUNIC – and four UK arts councils. Four distinct characteristics of the cultural relations approach were identified:

1. **Quality of support for collaborating artists:** Compared to UK arts councils, cultural relations organizations prioritize the quality of relationships that can develop from collaborations, dedicating more resources and staff time to supporting international partners. They are more interested in cultural relations outcomes, such as building long-term trust, understanding, and fair partnership, rather than just the end product of collaboration, commercial success or reaching large audiences. Cultural relations organisations also provide more support throughout a project, such as offering peer-learning sessions during the collaboration, monitoring and supporting partnerships, etc.
2. **Innovation in international collaboration:** Cultural relations organizations emphasize introducing new ideas, issues, and approaches, as well as promoting egalitarian partnerships. Equality in partnerships is a core value of the international cultural relations approach, although it may require experimentation and openness to the possibility that not all relationships will work well. Decolonising international work is of interest to all three cultural relations organisations studied, as well as the Arts Council of Wales.
3. **Commitment to achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** A common feature of British Council, EUNIC and Wales Arts International is their commitment to achieving the SDGs and linking outcomes of their work to SDGs.
4. **International networks:** Cultural relations organizations utilize their international networks to foster connections between artists, understand local contexts in other countries better, and publicize successful collaborations.

Common topics of interest

EUNIC network manager Michelle Sun and Andrew Manning gave a brief overview of **EUNIC's latest research projects and of upcoming works**. Recent relevant work includes the [Cultural Relations - Key Approaches in Fragile Contexts Report](#), the report from the Knowledge Sharing Workshop on the [Cultural Dimension of Sustainable Development](#), the commissioned work on [Not a toolkit! Fair collaboration in cultural relations: a reflAction](#) and research on the [development of the EUNIC cluster network over the past 10 years](#).

Upcoming research projects include a follow-up piece on the **alignment of national cultural institutes with the SDGs**, the development of an interactive **skills and competencies framework together with Goldsmith's university to cultivate a shared EUNIC cultural relations approach** and for working with the EU and especially EU Delegations on cultural relations, and finally a piece on **shifting geopolitics** and the evolution, role and contribution of cultural relations in light of this. These will be implemented in different ways and with the involvement of EUNIC members at different stages.

Together with the insights gained from the pre-workshop survey, the presentation of these future plans led into a wider group discussion to identify shared themes of interest and opportunities **for future collaboration, partnerships, and co-commissions between EUNIC members**. In addition, participants identified advocacy needs, intended outcomes as well as relevant and potential target audiences.



Among others, the potential of such **Knowledge Sharing Workshops** in raising important questions rather than providing ready-made and potentially biased responses to confirm previous assumptions was highlighted. A possible future topic proposed was to organise a workshop on the actual theme of knowledge sharing within organisations and with partners. The precise design of the workshop focusing on shifting geopolitics will have to be discussed among EUNIC members to find a language that speaks to all members, balancing topics between fragile context and geopolitical and other crises.

Other research topic suggestions included further research on the important role of culture in addressing climate change, linking to discussions at Mondiacult and COP, and the sustainability of the culture sector itself.

Fair knowledge distribution, access & visibility for cultural relations research

Ifa colleagues Odila Triebel and Stefan Seeger gave a deep-dive presentation on **ifa's efforts to practice fair knowledge distribution and facilitating access to cultural relations research** through their library.

Some **key questions** raised in this context include where and how physical copies of reports and publications should be stored, how to ensure easy access in the future, and how to centralize research outputs in one online location for better search and browsability. Additionally, Odila emphasized the importance of inclusivity and representation in discussions about how libraries, archives, and similar systems are built, and what kind of knowledge is considered relevant. ifa is committed to efforts to build a library that is not dominated by research from the global North and recently published a [study by Nora Schmidt](#) on how to make international cultural relations research more openly accessible.

The results of this research inform the future processes of ifa's library. With ifa's research department being part of the ICRRA network, this platform has been a key part in bringing in voices from outside Europe and Northern America to broaden access and participation.

The need to focus on both subtraction (from over-represented areas such as the global North) and addition (from under-represented areas) in knowledge representation has become clear, as well as the need to involve diverse voices from the beginning, supporting translation of literature from under-represented areas to overcome language barriers, promoting multilingualism, establishing standards and experiments recognizing the importance of interoperability and access in low-connectivity environments, and maintaining a humble and perpetually learning mindset.

The **ifa library, as described by Stefan Seeger**, has a rich history and extensive holdings related to international cultural relations. The library's scope includes topics such as foreign cultural and educational policies, international cultural relations and exchanges, intercultural communications, cultural area studies and nation branding, European cultural policies and relations, minorities and migration research, and German minority groups abroad. The library boasts over 440,000 volumes, more than 700 journal subscriptions, over 12,000 catalogued articles from books and magazines, and several thousand online publications, and some hundred newspapers on microfilm. The collections are primarily in German or English, with some materials also available in French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian.

The library also houses special collections, including publications from Goethe-Institutes worldwide, LitProm translations of fiction from Africa, Asia, and Latin America into German, and German-language newspapers from abroad. Additionally, Stefan mentioned the library's digital collections, including open-access digital resources available through the online repository at www.digishelf.de. Ifa's own repository is available online. It allows open access to the [ifa-Edition Culture and Foreign Policy](#), [ifa-Inputs](#)



and the external cultural policy (ECP) country reports and comparative reports as well as in nearer future ICRRRA publications.

ICRRRA & other knowledge exchange platforms

With the aim to raise awareness of existing knowledge exchange platforms such as ICRRRA and the Siena Cultural Relations Forum, **Odila Triebel and James Perkins gave a brief introduction to the ICRRRA network**. Being a network of individuals rather than institutions, membership is open to individuals with [criteria outlined on the website](#). With the goal of being a global network, they highlighted ICRRRA's focus on increasing representation from the global South as well as the network's aims to develop an open-access repository of international cultural relations research curated through the network.

Being politically independent, ICRRRA aims to raise the profile of international cultural relations as source of knowledge and insight useful to both academics and the general public. In this sense, the dialogue between policy and practice is crucial.

ICRRRA hosts an annual conference (usually online in autumn), and the group explored potential topics for the next conference, including the role of cultural relations in addressing the SDGs, equitable and inclusive cultural relations practice, cultural relations as a methodology for research, e.g. in commissioning and conducting research, evidence and impact evaluation in cultural relations, the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in cultural relations, and policy needs in cultural relations to better understand research needs and opportunities from the perspective of policymakers.

EU funding opportunities

To conclude the workshop, **Walter Zampieri, Head of the Culture Unit at the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) shared insights into EU funding instruments** in the sphere of culture and research. For this final session, around 30 EUNIC members from around the world joined online.

Walter noted that cultural relations is a growing field of research, and the number of cultural relations scholars has notably risen in recent years. There are also increasing connections between practitioners, researchers, and policy makers. It is however important to distinguish between academic research and applied research in this field. Perspectives for future research include the need for Europe to stand for culture and its people-to-people approach in the face of global crises, the relevance of global cultural citizenship and universal values, and the importance of cultural capabilities. Researchers should develop a shared agenda around these possible directions for interesting research to then being promoted to policy colleagues at the European Commission and the European External Action Service. Recent impactful areas of cultural relations research include the role of cities and climate change, extending beyond academic impact.

Inclusion of researchers into own structures

To conclude, it was discussed **how researchers could be better included in the broader EUNIC network, and how individual members include researchers in their own structures at the moment**. For example, the EUNIC office receives a high number of ad-hoc requests from students researching international cultural relations. With limited capacities, it is difficult to respond adequately to all these requests. It would be important to find structures for student and young researcher secondments. A way to streamline efforts for now has been to join different training opportunities organised by EUNIC members.



There is no individual placement within the EUNIC office for researchers at the moment, but an idea could be to include them in the [EUNIC Mobility Scheme](#). British Council offers post-doctoral fellowships only, those are co-funded in cooperation with universities such as Siena through the [CREDO project](#) or self-funded. Although very interested in recruiting researchers from outside the UK as this allows insights and knowledge different from commissioned work, this is often a difficult process. In the case of ifa, requests vary, but there is the aim to have more structured replies. So far, ifa offers talks with universities with diplomatic and international relations courses and organises an annual colloquium for students to foster student network exchanges. The ifa-library is a constant host to researchers visiting. The Flemish government occasionally attracts research interns or adds relevant topics to be suggested to interested students to university databases. Knowledge centres receive subsidies for several years to conduct specific research which informs the Ministry – in this case, it is tricky to balance between objective academic work that is still applicable and valuable to the Ministry's work. In general, the pool of researchers is not very diverse. EUNIC noted that as a network, it could also be worthwhile to have a living list of relevant topics that could be shared with interested researchers.

References

Find below some examples where EUNIC members have been using research and evidence to inform policy:

- **International Cultural Relations:** [Culture in an Age of Uncertainty](#) (British Council & Goethe Institut); [Cultural Relations: Key Approaches in Fragile Contexts \(EUNIC, ifa & British Council\); Culture and Foreign Policy](#) (publication series, ifa)
- **UN Sustainable Development Goals:** [The Cultural Dimension of Sustainable Development: Opportunities for National Cultural Institutes \(EUNIC\); The Missing Pillar: Culture in the Sustainable Development Goals](#) (British Council); [Culture in the Sustainable Development Goals. The Role of the European Union](#) (Gijs de Vries, ifa Edition Culture and Foreign Policy)
- **UN Year of Sustainable Creative Economy in 2021:** [A Global Agenda for the Cultural and Creative Industries](#) (British Council)
- [Informal Economy in the Global South](#) (British Council)

Other relevant resources:

- [Cultural Value. Cultural Relations in Societies in Transition: A Literature Review](#) (British Council & Goethe-Institut)
- [International Cultural Relations Research Alliance](#) (ICRRA)
- [Cultural Relations Essay Collection](#) (British Council)



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External & online speakers

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Stefan Seeger	Ifa - Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen	seeger@ifa.de
J.P. Singh	Professor of Global Commerce and Policy, George Mason University	
Walter Zampieri	Head of Culture Unit, EACEA	



Annex – Pre-workshop survey results

How do we generate research and insight?

- Commissioning IIIII
- Partnerships IIIII
- In-house IIII
- External grants II British Council and ifa
- Scholarship awards II British Council and RCI
- Hosting placements II British Council and ifa



Which parts of your organisation are responsible for research, evidence & insight?

Central team	II	(<u>ifa</u> and Flemish Govt.)
Various teams	II	(Cervantes and Poland MFA)
Both	I	(British Council)
Library / archive	I	(<u>ifa</u>)

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Published research strategies

Cervantes

ifa

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Research themes and topics of interest

- **Poland MFA:** War in Ukraine, **post-pandemic** landscape in culture, the image of Poland in the context of war in Ukraine
- **British Council:** Arts and culture, education (all forms), English language, cultural relations and soft power
- **Ifa:** Security, climate change, SDGs, Europe
- **RCI:** Visual arts, curatorship, museology/museography, Music and musicology; Architecture, town-planning and design; Literature and literary criticism; Cultural patrimony; Cultural management; Economic sciences; Human and social sciences.
- **Cervantes:** Support the internationalisation of the Spanish creative and cultural industries after **pandemic** times; Enrich our local audiences; Strengthen links with the key local arts agents
- **Flemish govt:** Topics related to the EU presidency (Belgium, Jan-June 2024), for example digital transformation of the cultural sector, cultural participation; but also more specific topics such as the evaluation of specific decrees and regulations

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Relevance of research on:

Cultural policy	30 (out of 30)
Cultural programming	27
Creatives industries	26
Culture and the SDGs	23
Cultural Heritage	23

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Research methodologies

- **quantitative**
- **qualitative**
- “qualitative research methods more important than quantitative research methods” (Poland MFA)
- **mixed methods**
- **co-creation**
- **action-based and arts-based research methods** (Flemish Govt)
- “we favour creative and participatory approaches where appropriate” (British Council)
- **online platforms**
- **information exchanges between partners**
- **audience data** (Cervantes)

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How do we share research and insight?

- **Institutional events** 22 (out of 30)
- **Institutional website** 21
- **Social media** 19
- **External websites** 17
- **External events** 17
- **Podcasts** 13

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Who are our audiences?

• Academics	26	(out of 30)
• Practitioners	26	
• National policy makers	26	
• <u>Programme participants</u>	25	
• International policy makers	22	
• Think tanks and policy influencers	20	
• Media	18	

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Why do we actually do research at all?

As a strategic tool

To support **evidence-informed policy** throughout the entire policy cycle. It is for policy makers, the sectors we support, and for the general public.

For **evidence-based diplomacy and policy**

To ensure we are **driven by evidence** from our programmes and the knowledge we derive from our experience; we share our insight generously with stakeholders including policy makers, practitioners and academics

For **evidence based argumentation** as a precondition for sustainable credibility and trust

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