

Fund artists and not institutions!

Proposal by Ian Biscoe and Nika Wegosky

EU funding that is currently available for arts projects (e.g. EU-Eastern Partnership Culture and Creativity Programme) is focused on governmental departments and cultural institutions to support research, policy and information about potential collaboration with EU members.

Funding directed at - or funneled through – these institutions is typically inefficient. The low level of pay and woefully inadequate in-country cultural funding ultimately means that much of this EU funding will go to support basic running costs of operations, investigations, meetings and discussions and not to help local artists.

On the other hand, the relatively low income and lack of domestic funding for artists in the EaP countries (even worse for those artists that do not receive state approval!) means that even small amounts of funding can have a significant impact for supporting arts initiatives and individual artists at the local level.

The idea for improving the situation is as follows: apolitical, non-governmental, cross-border, non-territorial, infrastructure that supports grassroots artistic activity in the EaP countries: funding, advice, web/mobile based infrastructure, cross-cultural communication and collaboration. The languages and cultures of each Partnership country would be equally represented. Parallel coverage in English would support the communication of artist's practice and send stories to the EU and elsewhere. Use of professional auto-translation software (backed by wiki-style editing by members) would ensure that artists across the Eastern Partnership could easily share their stories, apply for funding, report and collaborate on projects.

A focus on the application of new media art (or art that can equally be distributed by and/or accessed from digital devices) will not only allow wider access and distribution but equally encourage development of new digital skills that can lead to entrepreneurial development emerging from arts practice.

The initial programme should run for at least three years and have sufficient funding to operate the infrastructure - a low overhead supervisory team, and critically offer funding of between 1,000 EUR and 10,000 EUR on an equitable basis to independent artists and small collectives/organisations. Funding would be offered via a number of ongoing and open funding calls over the life of the initial programme. The aim would be to support at least 150 projects per year across the six countries (based on funding of 1 million EUR per year over 3 years).

The infrastructure and supporting organisation should cost little to run and make sure that 75% of programme funds would directly reach artists! Funding decisions would be made through a combination of a small review panel of in-country part-time advisers and online peer reviews open to all members and artist colleagues. Promotion and reach would be extended through low-cost, in-country, town hall style meetings to promote and discuss funding opportunities.

There is a desperate need for such EU support of artist development in the Eastern Partnership countries. A little cleverly managed funding will go a long way to developing collaborative arts practice, freedom of artistic development and emerging entrepreneurial arts based development across the region!