EASPD is the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities and represents over 17,000 support services for persons with disabilities across Europe. The main objective of EASPD, based on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, is to promote the equalisation of opportunities for people with disabilities through effective and high-quality service systems. We believe in interdependence and partnership of user organisations, providers and authorities at all levels to tackle the challenges ahead.

Cope Foundation is a Cork-based non-profit organisation supporting over 2,800 children and adults with intellectual disabilities and/or autism.

The European Network of Cultural Centres (ENCC) represents over 5,000 cultural centres throughout Europe, with programmes and activities that aim to empower them and their communities.

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INTRODUCTION

“Diversity is being invited to the party, inclusion is being able to enjoy the party and even be the organiser of the party.”

Pedro Velázquez Hernández, Deputy Head of Unit Creative Europe, European Commission

The ‘Art of Inclusion: Disability and Diversity in Arts and Culture’ conference was originally planned to be held in Cork, Ireland. Due to the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic, the European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD), Cope Foundation and the European Network of Cultural Centres (ENCC) were forced to take the event online and the conference took place on the Zoom platform on 14th and 15th October 2020. Advocates, experts, policymakers, thinkers and inspiring practitioners leading in the field came together to discuss how cooperation between the cultural sector, disabled artists and disability service providers can form innovative and exciting inclusive opportunities. Through its four thematic panels and six interactive workshops involving keynote speakers from all over the world, the conference had multiple objectives:

- Reflect on the role the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities plays in the art and culture sectors, and whether it is being implemented successfully.
- Showcase the work of internationally renowned practicing artists in a range of creative disciplines including visual arts, dance, film and music.
- Hear directly from disabled artists where we are now in relation to professionalism and programming the work of artists with disabilities.
- Share personal and professional experiences of how arts and culture is an empowering tool for persons with disabilities and disability service providers.
- Discuss with experts and policy makers on how to construct change at policy level.
- Involve participants in creative and experiential workshops led by experts.
The UN CRPD is relevant at three levels: personhood and self-expression, access to cultural patrimony and an equal opportunity to participate in the production of cultural patrimony. Persons with disabilities are entitled to belong to, and participate in the production of cultural patrimony as much as persons without disabilities.

The goal for this conference was to have the participants interact and unleash their creativity as much as possible, as well as make them feel as if they were in Cork, where the gathering was supposed to happen. The day was kickstarted with a morning dance booster (a short movement session) by CIM Dance Company from Portugal, followed by the first ‘Flavour of Cork’ video, a series of short films showcasing the beauty and the magic of Cork city. The conference was then officially opened by James Crowe and Sean Abbott, respectively the Presidents of EASPD and Cope Foundation, and Ivo Peeters, Chairperson of the ENCC Board of Directors.

Plenary 1: What can the UNCRPD do for the Arts?

Speakers: Gerard Quinn, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; Kaite O’Reilly, Award-winning playwright, radio dramatist, writer and dramaturg working in disability arts and mainstream culture, United Kingdom; Derval MacDonagh, General Manager, Cope Foundation, Ireland; Lisette Reuter, Creative Director, Un-Label, Germany; Ilina Cholakova, Social Services Specialist, Agency Vision, Bulgaria.

The first panel discussion, moderated by Sabrina Ferraina, Policy Manager at EASPD, explored the potential of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) to achieve equality for persons with disabilities in the art and culture sector and whether it is currently being implemented correctly. Although the Convention gives a strong European framework and support to the concept of disability equality, it emerged from the conversation with the first set of panellists that there is still a long way to go to achieve total inclusion in arts and culture for artists and persons with disabilities. The panel’s key messages were the following:

The Convention
- The UN CRPD is relevant at three levels: personhood and self-expression, access to cultural patrimony and an equal opportunity to participate in the production of cultural patrimony. Persons with disabilities are entitled to belong to, and participate in the production of cultural patrimony as much as persons without disabilities.
• Article 24 on education and Article 27 on employment of the UN CRPD are also very relevant as they state that national governments must encourage entrepreneurship.
• The UN Convention makes those that identify as disabled feel seen. It gives their position some weight by advocating for the needs and rights of disabled audiences and artists, and provides a legal framework that acts as a reference, although its implementation does not always happen.

Stigma and lack of awareness
• Artists with disabilities are stigmatised within their own industry. This stems from the misconception that art created by persons with disabilities is only a part of their exploration and self-expression. It is not regarded as professional work and should be exhibited in mainstream galleries and events, instead of being considered ‘too niche’.
• It is crucial to start viewing artists with disabilities as high-level professionals, able to bring innovation and game-changing ideas.
• More communication with the disability community is needed in order to develop better strategies to involve persons with disabilities in art not only as spectators, but as artists as well. This includes work to be done at the marketing and gatekeeping level.

The role of service providers in implementing the Convention
• The role of service providers is to act as advocates and catalysts for change in terms of access to and participation in the arts for persons with disabilities. To do so, they should mediate between inside and outside the community: having conversations and building meaningful relationships with people employed in the arts sector could enable significant doors to be opened.
• Organisations should emphasise the importance of arts and culture within their inner structures as well, and highlight their role as essential to the health, well-being and quality of life of the people that they support.
• Good partnerships with municipalities may give the opportunity to organise and participate in different events in cities.
The role of authorities and policymakers

- Full implementation of Article 30 is currently not a reality in many member states, authorities must design a concrete plan of action and necessary framework to ensure it is enforced effectively.
- Authorities should ensure that organisations that receive public funding have regular disability equality training and other support to challenge systemic ableism and bias.
- Local authorities must foster artistic training for persons with disabilities, as it is more difficult for them to access academic training in the field.
- Public procurement policies can be used to expand the access to culture.

The first successful panel discussion was closed by another Flavour of Cork video. We then moved on to the six parallel workshops, where the topics were dance, music, theatre, access to culture, visual arts and funding of cultural projects. The goal of the workshops was to inspire participants to engage in cultural activities and projects by either directly involving them in said activities or through sharing best practices and information on funding opportunities. Here we take a deeper look at each of them:

DANCE
Speaker: Frauke Seynnaeve, Dance Education Collaborator, Platform K, Belgium.

As Platform K works specifically with talented dancers that also have a disability, Frauke Seynnaeve gave an insight into dance training and her creation process. She explained the staff select people based on their dancing skills and the potential to grow as dancers and become professionals. The topic of the workshop was therefore professional training and how to motivate and stimulate people to reach a higher level, helping them reflect on their artistic identity. Frauke highlighted that Platform K is a dance company and not a social service. They treat their dancers as actual trainees working towards professionalism and at the same time provide the dancers with the environment for self-advocacy. The main challenges for Platform K are the little funding available in the arts sector and the lack of support and clear vision from policy makers on professional arts for persons with disabilities.
MUSIC
Speaker: **Frank Lyons**, Dean of Research and Impact in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Ulster University, United Kingdom

Frank Lyons presented a range of music hardware and software that have been used for inclusive music-making over a number of years in composition and performance projects. Given the range of musical environments such tools are used in, much of this technology needs to be inexpensive and accessible whilst providing enough depth to remain engaging over longer periods of time. Frank presented a number of applications for smartphones and tablets. In most of these visuals appear and sounds are produced as the user taps or drags their finger on the screen. This unfortunately makes them inaccessible visually impaired persons, but they work well with children with disabilities who tend to prefer applications that give an immediate musical response. According to Frank, future accessible music technologies might include eye gaze and hands-free control.

THEATRE
Speakers: **Fionula Linehan**, Actress and Speech and Drama Teacher; **Paul Sherlock**, Professional Production/Stage Manager, Ireland

Fionula and Paul gave a practical workshop on how theatre and theatrical techniques can be incorporated into social service provision. Warm up exercises were praised as important to loosen the body and mind and participants had the chance to try this out themselves. Fionula and Paul explained that the main barriers that usually prevent persons with disabilities from attending drama classes are the lack of accessible theatre groups in accessible locations and the confidence of persons with disabilities who believe they cannot try it. Nevertheless, the key messages that emerged from the workshop are that anyone who is passionate can partake in theatre, as theatre communities are based on collaboration and supporting each other.
ACCESS TO CULTURE

Speakers: Ana Isabel Violante, APPACDM Coimbra, Portugal; Tadhg Crowley, Senior Curator–Educator and Community, Glucksman Gallery, Ireland; Fabrizio Fea, Medical Director and Responsible for International Relations, Associazione Scuola Viva Onlus, Italy; Ana Rita Barata, CIM Dance Company, Portugal

This workshop showcased projects that have facilitated inclusion in cultural settings. In relation to museums, Ms. Violante introduced the ‘Culture is also for us’ award-winning project about making museums more accessible, and Mr. Crowley presented how the Glucksman Gallery and the municipality of Cork cooperated to make their gallery and cultural hotspots around town more accessible. On the other hand, Mr. Fea from Associazione Scuola Viva Onlus explained the role of service providers in making art and culture accessible to the people supported by the association, and Ms. Barata talked about how at CIM Dance Company they use dance to foster inclusion. Once again, the challenges presented by the speakers involved the prejudices towards persons with disabilities within the art sector and funding. There is a need to create spaces in which persons with disabilities are free to express themselves; staff training is key to successfully achieve such spaces, as well as funding and political commitment.

VISUAL ARTS

Speaker: Jesús Placencia Porrero, Freelance Arts Teacher, Spain

Andy Warhol’s quote “We are all artists” was Jesús’ motto for this workshop. We all can express ourselves in different ways, and no physical or psychosocial disability is a limit to the expression of our own selves when painting, drawing, writing, creating. To prove this, the workshop participants expressed themselves through imaginal language; their drawings were then compared to other art forms throughout the years, ranging from the cave paintings to 21st century art. Through creativity and simple tools such as pencils, and charcoal used to draw lines, dots, or more complex drawings, anyone can be an artist, regardless of their gender, age, ethnicity or social background. Art is universal and all about expressing oneself! Unfortunately, persons with disabilities often are fearful of using art to share their emotions due to social stigma. To change this, Jesús welcomes all kinds of people at his graphic workshops and encourages everyone to express themselves using art in any manner they please.
FUNDING OF CREATIVE PROJECTS

Speakers: Barbara Gessler, Head of Unit Creative Europe, European Commission, Belgium; Marta Gutierrez-Benet, Programme Manager and Expert on the Erasmus Inclusion, European Commission; Martin Essl, Founder, ESSL Foundation, Austria; Graciela Murga, Project Officer, ENCC, Belgium. Day 2: Pedro Velázquez Hernández, Deputy Head of Unit Creative Europe, European Commission; Stefania Coni, International Projects Coordinator, Fondazione CRT, Italy

This workshop brought together experts from the public and private sector as well as past European-funded projects with the aim of informing and inspiring participants on the funding possibilities available for the creation of projects in line with Article 30 of the UN CRPD. The challenges presented involved the difficulties for individuals to apply for EU funding, the need for more accessible art in museums and communication, and culture as a source of diversity that can be challenging in the EU. To overcome these issues, Ms. Gessler explained that Creative Europe promotes social inclusion in all areas, and that discussions are being carried out to involve disadvantaged people, including persons with disabilities, not only as audience but also as actors. Member States have an important job, which is to cooperate more on culture-related themes to ensure inclusion and equality. Ms. Gutierrez-Benet added that there should be a joint approach between Creative Europe and Erasmus+, as the new Erasmus+ programme makes it easier for newcomers and experienced organisations to partner up. This will mean fostering synergies in different funding schemes will be possible.

Plenary 2: The Voice of the Artist

Speakers: Simon Mckeown, Artist and Professor, MIMA School of Art and Design, Teeside University, United Kingdom; Matthew Murphy, Film director and script writer, Cope Foundation, Ireland; Ellice Patterson, Founder and Executive and Artist Director, Abilities Dance Boston, United States; Sara Beer, Performer and National Officer for Performance Art and Creative World, Disability Arts Cymru, United Kingdom; Marko Vuoriheimo aka Signmark, Performer, Finland.

Moderated by Kris De Visscher from ENCC, this panel showcased the voice of internationally renowned practicing artists in a range of creative disciplines.
Each of them presented a short overview on their individual work and experience as a practitioner, where we are now in relation to professionalising and programming the work of disabled artists, and gave key recommendations on what needs to be done for the future to ensure the full implementation of Article 30 of the UN CRPD. Here are the key messages that emerged:

**The current situation for disabled artists and art**
- Although there have been huge improvements over the last few years in the provision for disabled people within the arts, there is still a lot to do.
- Artists with disabilities have also been severely affected by the Covid-19 crisis and are more isolated than ever.

**Attitudes and perceptions**
- Art can be more than a leisure or therapeutic activity for persons with disabilities, as they are capable of producing professional work and enriching our society with it.
- Organisations need to ensure that persons with disabilities are put in pivotal positions across the whole arts and cultural sector.
- Every individual’s experience is valid, and time must be taken to listen and go through the creative process to represent them in the best way possible. Working with persons with learning disabilities might take time but it is important to be a listener to facilitate the process. This does not mean that the finished product is less valuable and should be seen as ‘other’ art.
- Cooperation with people is key: a big inner audience, supporters and enablers is critical to bring attention to art by persons with disabilities.

**Training**
- Although there are now more accessible training opportunities, young disabled persons must be empowered to believe they can pursue a career in the arts.
- The role of teachers and mentors is fundamental. They must be properly trained to be able to support and inspire disabled art students and emerging artists, a job that is often gladly carried out by professional artists with disabilities.
- More funding opportunities are needed for schools and professionals.
Barriers

- Establishments and venues are not always accessible; therefore, artists with disabilities must sometimes create their own spaces. It should be demanded that Article 30 of the UN CRPD is adhered to when entering into contracts with education establishments or venues, so that physical accessibility to classes is always granted to students with disabilities. The same level of accessibility should be ensured to audiences.

- Nowadays the technology is out there for all organisations to enjoy access to cultural materials in accessible formats.

- Students and artists with disabilities may need special support, but that does not mean they must be trained in a specialised organisation. Such misconception has other negative consequences, such as teachers not willing to accept persons with disabilities in their classes. The role of cultural educators and gatekeepers here is key to let artists with disabilities into the mainstream art and culture sectors.

- Professionalising disabled artists is still very difficult for all sorts of reasons but for a lot of disabled performers it is due to the ‘benefits trap’ and finding people who really understand this is often a challenge.

Representation and awareness

- The way artists with disabilities are represented in the media plays a central role. Their work and stories should be presented to inspire and prove to people that a path in the arts is possible for persons with disabilities.

- Living with one or multiple disabilities makes a unique experience that is important to express in various art forms.

Policy

- EU and national level policymakers need to ensure the correct implementation of the UN CRPD principles. Governments have the power to remove huge barriers, such as access to sign language, mobility and education.

The day concluded with the showing of an evening pre-recorded performance kindly provided by Korean dance group K-Wheel.
The development of new technologies has allowed musicians to enhance their digital skills while also enabling them to compose music through new mediums. In particular, musicians with disabilities gain confidence and independence thanks to the interaction with music technology.

The use of music technology by musicians in many cases drives support services to improve and raise their game to match the demand of the musicians using this technology.

In this session, we heard the five panellists give their insights, experience and expertise on how they have witnessed the arts empower people and disability services.

**Technology and innovative methods**

- The development of new technologies has allowed musicians to enhance their digital skills while also enabling them to compose music through new mediums. In particular, musicians with disabilities gain confidence and independence thanks to the interaction with music technology.
- The use of music technology by musicians in many cases drives support services to improve and raise their game to match the demand of the musicians using this technology.
- Music technology can have an empowering effect of persons with severe impairments and can also transform traditional methods of doing things like speech and language therapy.

**Traditional attitudes to art and service provision**

- Especially during such difficult times, we need to recognise the importance of art: artistic practice with people in marginalised positions challenges us to navigate the complexity of their artistic production and challenges us to knit together concepts and practices that are usually seen as being distinct from one another.
In service provision, artistic thinking really makes space for us to facilitate the emergence of individual voices: persons with disabilities have experiences and a voice that deserve to be expressed and shared.

We must celebrate unique aesthetics in artistic production and stop seeking ‘normative’ forms of artistic production.

Challenges for service providers
- In many countries there are a lack of experts who are competent in art activities, as well as difficulty in sourcing equipment, materials, and locations due to these being expensive.
- Lack of financial support.

Empowerment of users
- Inclusive artistic activities raise awareness of disability issues and have had very positive results such as motivation, purpose and a space to meet up with friends and socialise.
- Artistic activities promote co-production. It is crucial to involve staff as facilitators, but also to make them understand the importance of such activities.
- Inclusive creativity aims to explore creative technologies to level the playing field for people of all ages and abilities who wish to compose and perform music.
- Cultural and artistic inclusion and participation is absolutely an empowering and transformative force.

After panel 3, another round of the first day’s workshops followed. Workshops were repeated in order to give participants the chance to attend two different ones over the two conference days.
Plenary 4: Spotlight on the EU:
What role can policymakers play?

Speakers: **Pedro Velázquez Hernández**, Deputy Head of Unit, Creative Europe, European Commission; **Pat Clarke**, Vice-President, European Disability Forum, Ireland; **Ben Evans**, Head of Arts and Disability covering the European Union region for the British Council, United Kingdom; **Kirsi Mustalahti**, Founder, ACCAC Global (Accessible Arts and Culture) network, Finland; **Eoin Nash**, Chair of EASPD Member Forum on Arts and Culture, Manager of Arts and Creative Arts Therapies, Cope Foundation, Ireland.

The fourth and last panel joined policy makers from the European Parliament and European Commission with representatives from cultural organisations around Europe to discuss what work the EU must do to address the artistic and cultural participation of persons with disabilities. The session was moderated by Luk Zelderloo, Secretary General of EASPD. The key messages that emerged were the following:

**Accessibility and the European Union**

- Access and diversity should be a political priority for all institutions: inclusiveness means equality, diversity and more visibility. We should put pressure on the topics of accessibility in European funding programmes to policymakers.
- In order to reverse the cultural marginalisation of persons with disabilities in the arts, it is important to have a definite cultural policy aiming at their full participation as audiences, artists and art professionals.
- This is a cultural, as well as a disability issue.

**Recommendations from European Arts and Disability Cluster report ‘Disability artists in the mainstream: A new cultural agenda for Europe’**

- Awareness-raising must happen at the EU level: the institutions have a unique role in communicating about the appalling record for persons with disabilities in the arts.
- It must be articulated that the significant proportion of the EU population who are disabled have an equal right to benefit from public expenditure on cultural activities.
- Persons with disabilities are still facing barriers both as audiences and creators in the arts.
New audiences made of persons with disabilities must be built, and art professionals with disabilities must have equal access to cultural mobility.

Creative Europe should adopt a separate and specific priority targeted at the work of disabled artists and cultural operators, not just as audiences or within the context of social inclusion.

Creative Europe should adopt the ‘access costs’ format of the Erasmus+ programme meaning they should include specific budget lines to fund accessibility costs so that Creative Europe beneficiaries do not have to fund these from their main budget and to encourage/prompt others to think of accessibility requirements.

Its successor programme should explicitly highlight, as part of its aims, that it is actively seeking applications which support the greater engagement of disabled professionals.

The future Creative Europe programme 2021-2027

- The future Creative Europe programme will have a budget increase of 33%, the Commission stated they will do their best with this budget for a more inclusive programme than its predecessor.
- In the next generation of cooperation projects, there will be a high co-financing rate. The goal is to reach 80% for small cooperation projects.
- Mr. Velazquez Hernandez committed to internally address that persons with disabilities should be the main actors of the play in the art and culture sector.

The Voice of Disabled Persons Organisations

- All outputs of the Creative Europe programme such as films etc. should be fully accessible if they have received European funding.
- More attention needs to be given to funding artistic projects in which persons with disability are displayed as fully determined, multi-faceted human beings with virtues like everybody else, to avoid approaches to disabilities which are unrealistic and based on compassion or exaggeration.
- We live in a diverse society and therefore, art and culture should reflect and respect this diversity accordingly.
EASPD’s position

- The disability movement often gets lost in the social movement bigger strands: that is why we need allies at the EU and policymaking level to represent and advocate for persons with disabilities.
- We need to maintain a vibrant and open dialogue with Great Britain as it leaves the EU as it is home to many leaders in the field.
- Social service providers are currently doing the best they can to support persons with disabilities who want to participate in the arts, although the budget assigned to art activities is very limited.
- It is important to acknowledge that service providers are at different points of development on this topic.
- We need policies to empower social services and successfully implement Article 30 of the UN CRPD and have it embedded within services alongside other mainstream policies.
- Training on the UNCRPD must be improved.
- Cultural organisations applying for EU funds should be in receipt of disability equality training.
- We must ensure that persons with disabilities who wish to have a career in the art sector have equal opportunities of doing so. Support, budget and policies must be adequate in order to ensure artists with disabilities have access to educational opportunities and the chance to professionalise these opportunities.
- Co-production is essential! All stakeholders should reach out to each other and work together.

Key Conclusions

The conference was concluded by Luk Zelderloo as he praised the fruitful cooperation and hard work of all three organisations. The challenges and barriers that the arts and culture fields are still presenting to persons with disabilities clearly emerged and were confirmed by all the speakers:
Negative perceptions around artists with disabilities need be changed through more visibility and awareness. The work of artists with disabilities must be promoted not as ‘niche’ but as mainstream art that is just as valuable as that of a non-disabled artist.

A clearer political commitment must be supported by much needed structural funding for the sector, which can enable cultural operators to develop long term strategies for systemic change.

It is crucial that the key cultural EU funding programmes such as Creative Europe, prioritise inclusion, accessibility and the promotion of disability art. Especially at this moment when the new version of this programme is being discussed.

Opportunities must be created for persons with disabilities to access better artistic education and develop and professionalise in the arts and culture sector.

Following the conference EASPD will continue to work with its members and partners including Cope Foundation and the ENCC to support meaningful inclusion and the full implementation of Article 30 of the UNCRPD.

Written by Ilaria Cassani, October 2020

Recordings of the conference can be found here >

PowerPoint Presentations of speakers can be found here >

For more information on EASPD’s Member Forum on Art and Culture contact sydney.vonihering@easpd.eu.