

**Culture &  
Creativity**

EU-Eastern Partnership Programme



# DEVELOPING A BALANCED ECOSYSTEM FOR VISUAL CULTURE AND PHOTOGRAPHY IN UKRAINE

*A policy brief for Culture & Creativity  
EU-Eastern Partnership Programme*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is no developed photography market in Ukraine which leads to the following:

- Modern photography is not being understood by the wide audience and we observe the lack of demand for photo-works, which in turn does not stimulate development of the necessary infrastructure.
- Works of Ukrainian photographers are in general uncompetitive at the developed markets.
- Traditions of Ukrainian photography are not shaped because the knowledge is not being transmitted among masters and students and because of the lack of institutional memory.
- Documentary photo-stories and reflective conceptual photo-projects are not used as the global translators of Ukrainian culture in cultural-diplomatic relations.

Both the historical aspect (the cultural policy that inherited Ukraine from the Soviet system) and the lack of attention to photography by the key stakeholders in Ukraine (primarily educational institutions) are reasons which led to this situation.

So, taking into account the modern Ukrainian context the purpose of this Brief is working out the methodology for development of the balanced photography ecosystem in Ukraine. The breakthrough is possible precisely by support from the side of the drivers of the photographic ecosystem development and the consolidation of key players. We do consider that the leverage for running such changes would be the platform decisions which would attract the most active players, using the natural interest of each participant and answering to the external context as flexibly as it is possible.

## RELEVANCE AND PROBLEMS

Ukraine's photography sector, including higher education in photography, is underdeveloped. At present photography is not taught at the Academy of Arts in Kyiv, most photography exhibitions are not reviewed by arts critics and little analysis is published. ART Ukraine one of the leading art magazines in Ukraine publish mostly news about photography, but not analytical articles or reviews, for example (<http://artukraine.com.ua/tag/photo/>). Their last critical article or rather interview about Ukrainian photography was published in August 2016. The same can be found in another magazine that reviews modern culture, KORYDOR. This year their only article related to photography was an article about the Shilo art group from the Kharkiv School of Photography. However, the article is about a project "Finished Dissertation" that PhotoCULT Centre exhibited during 2013 in Kyiv.

The recent exhibition of the great Ukrainian photographer Mykola Trokh (an artist from the legendary Parkomuna squat in Kyiv) in March 2017 also had no critical analysis to accompany the show.

There is no specific financial support for artists, no copyright regulation, no research, no collecting and no archiving of photographs. The National Art Museum, for example, has no regular photography exhibitions and does not own any photography collections itself. There is also no definitive textbook on the history of Ukrainian photography.

Ukraine also suffers from fragmentation among the few photography operators and lacks experience in combining their effort to develop a contemporary photography market, while in comparison during the European Month of Photography in Vienna, Bratislava or other EU capitals galleries, museums, photography bookshops and libraries collaborate to present their artists and collections, work in a collegiate manner and communicate about developing new joint projects.

This underdevelopment of the photography market causes the following problems:

- The work of Ukrainian photographers is not generally competitive in Europe, USA and Asia because many photographers create their work without taking research, visual methods and language, originality, strong storytelling, self-promotion etc. into account. Photographer Boris Mikhailov one of the “fathers” of the Kharkiv School of Photography (in a meaning of flow) with his Case History project is the only widely-recognised and serious Ukrainian photographer on the international art scene (Venice Biennale 2017, MoMA). Internationally very little is known about Ukraine except for its connections to the Soviet era, Maidan, the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in the Donbass and Ukrainian photographers rarely present new subjects on the international stage. The current wave of decommunization only strengthens this situation of promotion the Soviet in the history of Ukraine . However the predominance of interest to only Mikhailov’s art work does not debunk the myths and stereotypes about Ukraine and inhibits the development of other facets of Ukrainian visual culture. The artworks of younger followers of the Kharkiv School of Photography are becoming increasingly famous in Ukraine and internationally thanks to their provocation and epatage, but they are still not as widely known as Mikhailov. It will take years to research and represent their and other young artist’s art and to analyse their place in art history.
- The traditions of Ukrainian photography have not been preserved because knowledge is not transmitted from professional experts to apprentices. Consequently there is no institutional memory, long-standing academy or

school to act as the foundation for a knowledge base and for teaching traditions to be systematically developed.

- Audience development is poor. A culture of gallery and a museum attendance needs to be developed. There are no quality cultural and art programmes in kindergartens, schools and universities. This lack of visual education for Ukrainian audiences has led to a lack of understanding of contemporary art in general and contemporary photography. The works of photographers are not an objects of interest for Ukrainians and are rarely purchased. The unsuccessful attempt to sell photographs on the websites 5,6 and ARTELECT recently reflect this. Not a single visitor bought prints at the PhotoCULT photo fairs between 2011 and 2013. Just photographers bought a few prints from other photographers. Only a handful of galleries in Kyiv including Ya Gallery, Brucie Collections professionally represent and try to sell the works of five to seven photographers. Ukraine's leading museums have no photography departments, no regular exhibitions or collections. Photography books are published very rarely in Ukraine. In the last four years 25-30 books by Ukrainian photographers were published which is as many as one publishing house in New York would release in a year.
- Given the political crisis and conflict with Russia, photography should have great potential. It is a powerful medium that can attract the attention of the international community through documentary photo stories and conceptual photography projects that can allow for a Ukrainian voice to be heard. However Ukrainian photographers' lack experience in photojournalism's social themes and storytelling skills. This undermines their ability to recount the history of Ukraine to the world.

## WHAT SHOULD BE CHANGED?

This brief will consider methods for developing a balanced ecosystem in the Ukrainian photography market, specifically through:

- Identifying the most effective operators in the photography market. This could be done by group of researchers who are experts in photography who could create a working group.
- Initiating dialogue and cooperation between these operators at roundtables, consultation meetings and informal discussions. Ukrainian leading cultural events such as the Odessa Film Festival, Molodist film festival, the Book Festival, Publishers' Forum, the Contemporary Art Week in Kyiv, etc. should hold regular debates on photography.
- Historians and art managers should develop a comprehensive development plan for the Ukrainian photography market, including the creation of an updated map of the ecosystem of Ukrainian photography in consultation with educational institutions. Our Policy Brief working group has already begun

work on this but the process requires additional research to test some hypotheses. The participants of the meetings and drafting the concept should include educational art institutions, art historians, curators, cultural managers.

- These meetings require a trusted and respected independent party as the initiator. Only after holding consultations and understanding the players' willingness to cooperate would it be possible to develop options for implementing the ideas in more detail.

## WHO ARE THE PRIMARY STAKEHOLDERS?

We consider all organizations which have an institutional capacity to involve or to set the vector of development of the photographic ecosystem as stakeholders. At the same time, these organizations may not be direct market operators and have a direct interest. Such organizations are: photographers communities (art, documentary and commercial), community of cultural managers, museums, galleries, publishing houses, universities, non-government education centers, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture, municipality, Ukrainian Institute, Cultural representatives of the foreign embassies in Ukraine, auction houses, festivals, business corporations, manufacturers of photographic equipment, mass media, photo studios, photo stocks, archives, international partners and funds. In total there are more than 100 stakeholders across Ukraine's.

## WHO CAN IMPLEMENT THESE CHANGES?

To start the changes a concerted work of stakeholders at different levels is important. But the initiator of the first steps still has to act a direct player in the photography market. We distinguish specific roles among the potential initiators of this process: Photographers, artists, teachers, museum employees, cultural managers, curators, critics, gallery owners, art historians, business strategy experts, auction houses, photographic agencies, festival and exhibition managers, international copyright and art experts, magazine and book publishers, photo news agencies, commercial studios, PR agencies.

**WHAT PRIORITY NEEDS/CHALLENGES SHOULD BE MET/OVERCOME to develop the ecosystem of the photography market in Ukraine?**

## CREATING A PHOTOGRAPHY ART WORK

1. Education (formal, informal, including workshops/studios, exchanges, art residences) – relevant art education that would allow artists to be immersed in the context of contemporary art and photography and be competitive in the world.
2. Creative production cycle development (photography, photo story, book/publication)

## DEMONSTRATION/PROMOTION/DISTRIBUTION

1. Develop an education for curators (a master's and doctoral programmes in the history and theories of the arts and arts criticism)
2. Develop an education for art managers (specialised programmes for the professional training of arts managers who work with cultural product)
3. Research and archive photographic heritage
4. Stimulate galleries' and museums' interest in photo exhibitions
5. Develop photo book publishing in Ukrainian publishing houses
6. Develop photography art criticism through education of critics, increasing interest and payment for reviews and analysis by cultural critics media
7. Stimulate an interest in Ukrainian photography domestically by working with international gallery owners, curators and collectors
8. Improve the knowledge of journalists including cultural journalists/culture departments in TV, radio and newspapers
9. Create a demand for photographic art in the population

## DEGREE OF SUBJECT PREPAREDNESS

The first meeting of an ecosystem of players called Platform took place in February 2017 at a roundtable at the initiative of the Kyiv-Mohyla Business School (kmbs). The aim was to initiate a dialogue between operators in the photography market and launch joint actions. Leading representatives of Ukraine's photography and related sectors took part in a discussion. This included Viktor Marushchenko (V. Marushchenko School of Photography), Anna Gaidai (PhotoCULT Cultural Centre of Photography), Alina Sandulyak (photography historian, art historian), Kateryna Radchenko (Odessa Batumi Photo Days initiator), Natalya Synepupova (Head of

School of Visual Communication), Denis Bloschynskiy (musician, volunteer, Music of Dignity Festival organiser), Oleksandr Savruk, Pavlo Bilodid, Yan Likarenko (a kmbs dean and a cultural managers).

A deeper understanding of how the interaction between the operators of the photography market is going on today and how the evolution of the photographic ecosystem of Ukraine took place were set and solved tasks for the meeting. An important outcome of the meeting was an understanding of the readiness and motivation of key ecosystem players to work together. It became obvious that:

- the discourse on the level of entire ecosystem development is in demand from the players
- it is necessary to create platforms for discussion, which should result in the future scenarios processing for the development of the photography market in Ukraine.

Also, one of the stages of the Ukrainian photography market research was a group work within the framework of the training modules of the EU-EaP Culture and Creativity Programme in 2016-2017. During the study, *stakeholder mapping in policy making, de-constructing value chain in the Ukrainian context* methodologies were used. Another important factor in the successful analysis of the photography market was the participation of managers who work in related to photography areas in the working group. This allowed to work with the nature of the ecosystem of photography in Ukraine more qualitatively.

The “ideal” photography market ecosystem, the problems of systemic research and preservation of photographic heritage were mapped (See images below).

## #1

### The problem: the lack of a systematic preservation and research in Photography

Strategic Approaches: opening the department of photography on the basis of (1) the state or (2) non- state institution, (3) creating a new institution.

STAKEHOLDERS	POLICY IMPACT	INFLUENCE ON POLICY	INTEREST PA1	INTEREST PA2	INTEREST PA3
MINISTRY	+	++	NO	DO NOT CARE	-
ARTISTS	+++	+++	YES (guaranties)	YES	YES
PUBLIC	++	+	YES	YES	YES
SPONSORS	+	++	NO (complexity	YES	YES

			of relationships)		
MEDIA	+	++	YES	YES	YES
EDUCATION	+	+	YES (methodical difficulties)	YES	YES
COLLECTION	+++	+++	YES (demand)	YES	YES
ARCHIVES	+++	+++	YES	NO	YES/NO
NSDAU (UNION)	+	+	++	++	++

How to begin the process of systematic preservation? To create a contest of projects for the preservation and research of photographs for state non-profit institutions.

#2

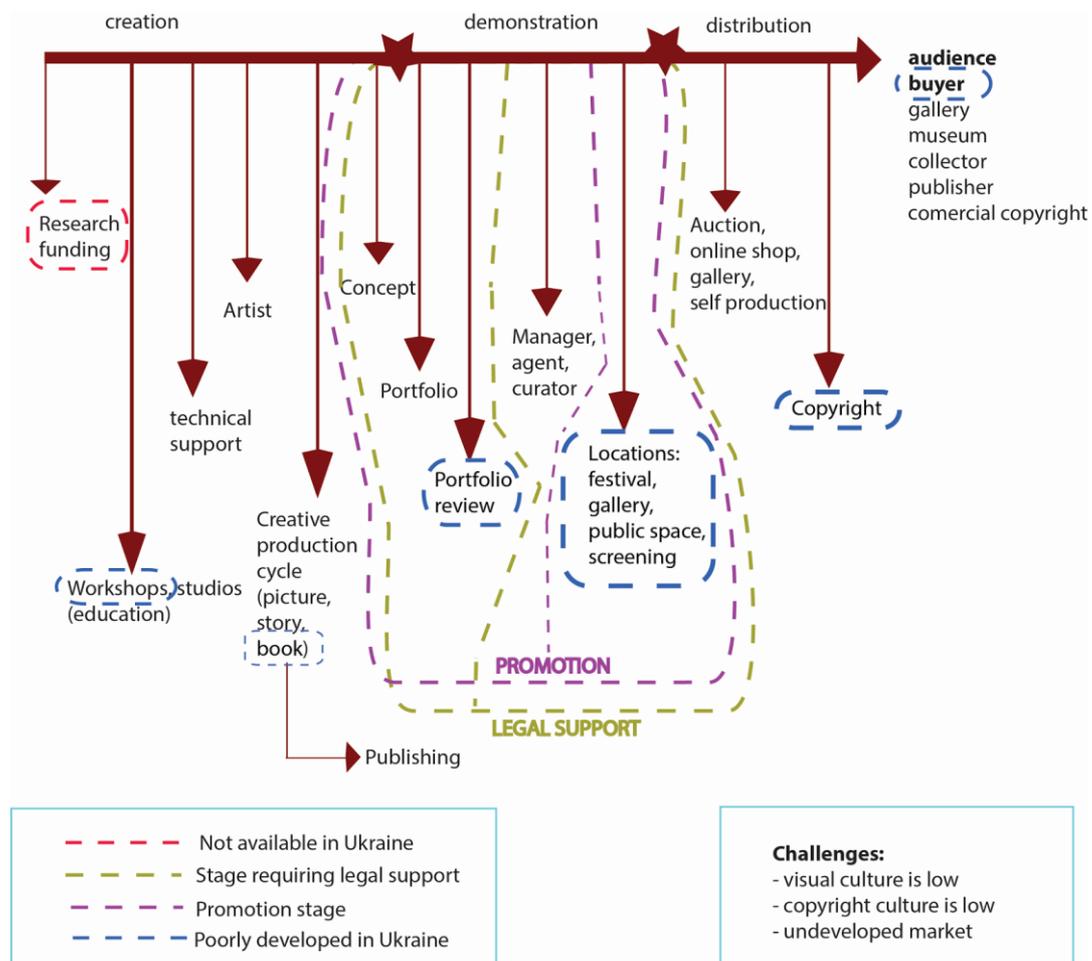


Table #1 and graph #2: developed during group discussions were held as a part of the EU-EaP Culture and Creativity Programme. Graph design by Pavlo Bilodid.

## OPTIONS TO TACKLE THE PROBLEM

1. **Further develop the Platform** working group as a tool to develop the photography market ecosystem. The Platform could be realized in format of *Regular Event* (Festival, Forum - regular multidisciplinary event aimed on being catalyst for uniting and solving specific problems in photography) or *Association* (photography NGO with active executive office and board which unites market operators and stakeholders around the country). Development of the Platform does not represent individual commercial interests but involves photography experts, NGOs and professional association in order to consolidate the sector around common problems and within five years develop joint projects.

Finance structure:

Regular Event - incomes: tickets, contributions for participation, sponsors, donors;

Association - incomes: member contributions (individuals/businesses), sponsors, donors, paid

services.

2. Establishing a **Photography Department (Institute)** within the Ministry of Culture and Photography Education Department within the Ministry of Education of Ukraine. This move immediately brings the initiative to the national level. On the other hand red tape would hinder dynamic decision-making and the ability to meet the urgency and relevance of contemporary context. In addition, there is a great risk of budgetary restrictions on the operational activities of the department.

Finance structure:

Incomes - national budget, tickets.

3. **Natural Selection:** Market operators continue to work as they did (volunteers, private initiatives, etc.) on their own, without joining efforts. As a result, positive change will take place slowly, no systematic work will happen, and the photography market participants in Ukraine will remain very vulnerable, depending on budgetary adjustments.

The most effective option in the current conditions and in the Ukrainian context is the Platform, since:

- It would attract the most active players in the photography market

- It would use the natural interest of each participant in the process
- It would have maximum flexibility in reacting to the external context of the development of photography

**To develop the Platform further the following is required:**

- Identify all existing ecosystem players
- Launch projects to consolidate the ecosystem's players (for example, a photography festival and cultural space for meetings among photographers and ecosystem players, exhibitions and photography research).
- Develop a system for recording, analysing and disseminating experience in order to develop a balanced photography ecosystem in Ukraine through writing articles, holding workshops, etc.

Kyiv, 2016-2017

## Note

The policy briefs are the result of capacity building work undertaken by the EU-Eastern Partnership Culture and Creativity Programme in 2016-2017 with 240 Programme Associates, who had completed a series of eight workshops in business management for mid-career cultural operators. The purpose of these briefs is to help them additionally understand the role of professionals in providing concise and neutral policy advice in the area of their competence. The task was to identify problems within the sector, provide potential models, options and solutions, support critical thinking, evidence-based policy analysis and the formulation of recommendations. The ideas were developed by the Associates themselves.

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