

**Culture &  
Creativity**

EU-Eastern Partnership Programme



# A New Cultural Policy for Armenia's Regions

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

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# Executive Summary

Cultural events are currently concentrated in the capital and the Prime Minister's speech "Armenia 2020: Balanced social and economic development" identified the development of regional cultural activity as a priority. This is because emigration has in the last five years by 3% every year according to the 2017 census.

The artistic community is one of the most affected sectors because the Ministry of Culture of RA supports organizations but not individuals (the majority of the nation's artists). A recent law to close local authorities and centralise them in the Marz centres has made the situation even harder. The increasing number of artists leaving the country over the past few years is especially evident in the small towns in Armenia. Consequently, young arts graduates find it hard to return home because of no cultural environment or opportunities for professional growth.

However, there are some best practice examples. Bishop Bagrat has spent four years activating the cultural and social life of Tavush Marz by organising Haghartsin Cultural Week, the Art and Crafts Centre, the Music at the Border Festival and the Honey Festival which has created jobs for young people. Tavush Marz now has young people returning back to their home towns.

The Ministry of Culture has the convening power to become a platform where the state and non-governmental/independent sectors can meet, communicate and develop.



# Recommendations

In order to deliver that option effectively the ministry could focus on two priorities:

1. Delivering a targeted training for cultural professionals
2. Decentralisation

Some of the first steps could include:

- Deliver training courses for cultural professionals in the regions
- Insisting on regional events as a precondition for state funding of national cultural events
- Establish a national cultural database
- Develop a national curriculum for arts lessons in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools
- A cross-ministerial team develops a programme to boost national tourism



# PROJECT DESCRIPTION

## INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Armenia's Ministry of Culture is an executive authority, which develops and implements main policies of the Republic of Armenia Government in the culture sector. The Ministry's activities are provided by its structural units and individual units (departments, divisions, and agencies), 84 state non-profit organizations (theatres, concert halls, museums, libraries, educational institutions) and closed joint-stock companies. The Ministry also cooperates with NGOs and other organizations. The purpose of the ministry ([http://mincult.am/purpose\\_activity.html](http://mincult.am/purpose_activity.html)) is to maintain and replenish cultural heritage, and to promote and develop contemporary art. To be able to reach these goals, the Ministry develops draft legislation, targeted programmes, strategies, concepts, and short-term development programmes, where the main emphasis is placed on establishing cooperation with foreign state and international organizations, local government bodies and those of territorial administration, creative unions, and culturally-oriented non-government organizations (NGOs).

In Armenia the implementation of the cultural policy ([www.mincult.am](http://www.mincult.am)) by the state happens mainly through:

1. Disposition theory, which considers general development trends, the ideology of a given social system and achievements in sociology and culture.
2. Making smart aims and objectives for cultural policy.
3. Designing a strategic methodology and targeting the implementation of cultural policy objectives.

## Current Situation

However the ministry has not mapped the cultural sector in Armenia or identified ways to support its development since the country regained its independence 25 years ago. There are few culture professionals with qualifications in cultural management. Yerevan State Institute of Theatre and Cinematography has four students studying Arts Management but after our years they graduate aged 21, but unable by law to apply for a management position in the state sector where the minimum requirement is work experience of more than 10 years. Consequently many stage directors, sound engineers, light and image editors, cultural production staff are professionals who received their training abroad. The alternative talent pool is to use expensive foreign specialists.

The increasing number of artists leaving the country over the past few years is especially evident in small towns. Young arts graduates find it hard to return to their village because there is no cultural environment or opportunities for professional growth. In the best-case scenario they end up as school teachers. This leads to small towns and villages losing their creative and talented potential, which in its turn implies the loss of innovative and creative development opportunities. Most young people travel to the capital in search of employment, especially in the creative sector. There are 17 state theatres in Yerevan but only nine in the rest of the country. This ratio is reflected in all other cultural sectors.

Armenia could reverse this trend by promoting and supporting long-term, regular, cultural events (festivals, award ceremonies and cultural days) in the smaller communities of Armenia. There are already some best practice examples. Bishop Bagrat has spent four years activating cultural and social life of Tavush Marz by organising Haghartsin Cultural Week, the Art and Crafts Centre, the Music at the Border Festival and the Honey Festival



which have created jobs for young people. Tavush Marz now has young people returning back to their home towns.

To achieve more widely the informal structures of the cultural sector in the regions need support. NGOs and cultural groups that plan to boost the cultural profile of communities need support to develop cultural incubators and studios from a wide variety of financial and non-financial means such as state support, grants and lobbying business sectors to support culture. Regional cultural centres require special attention to cast off their post-soviet status in terms of logistics, human resources and methodology. A state programme to place young culture graduates in leading roles in these centres, and providing them with small grants to implement pilot projects may be an effective way of reviving local arts communities.

Most Armenians take holidays outside of the country for the both economic and cultural reasons. This is because a vacation in Batumi (Georgia) is cheaper than in Armenia. National tourism needs to develop an infrastructure for the regions and invest in their economies. For example a three-star hotel in Sevan costs 60\$ and in Batumi 40\$.

## **Recommendations:**

In order to deliver that option effectively the ministry could focus on two priorities:

### **1. Delivering a targeted training for cultural professionals**

The increasing popularity for lifelong education in Armenia means professionals from different age groups and of different occupations are willing to join various training courses to learn new skills and build capacities, upgrade their knowledge and develop their expertise. This new thirst for professional training and education could be harnessed to secure development opportunities.

Armenia could develop a training programme targeting cultural professionals that develops participants' potential and meets modern standards. A training programme for cultural managers could also be developed in parallel that could be hosted by international expert trainers. They could train local trainers to continue delivering training and certified programmes in partnership with higher educational institutions and other vocational bodies. This would give rise to a new reliable "school" that would be in charge of training and certifying cultural professionals in particular specialisations.

### **2. Decentralization**

A steady and long-term approach to a decentralisation policy can address the brain drain of cultural managers and foster the development of the cultural environment in regions and rural areas.

- The regional culture sector should host vocational colleges and higher educational institutions. These education and training centres would target cultural professionals and extend continuous professional development opportunities. These cultural activities would become a platform where both independent and state cultural activities could be combined, as a part of the educational and cultural educational programmes. The educational programme should be developed in cooperation with foreign experts, who would train local experts and specialists to secure the sustainability of the centres.

Creating a regional cultural network would ease communication, co-operation and organising tours.

- The Ministry of Culture could also activate the inherited city, village and regional cultural infrastructure such as houses of culture and cinemas and reactivate local cultural life.

- The ministry could work with local cultural actors to empower community representatives on boards and in departments and provide financial support.

- There could be centres that identify and promote emerging talent in each region. These institutions could also boost employment and cultural life in their region, village or city. These cultural houses could be held accountable by local representatives and could have training programmes to produce high-quality cultural products and activate self-management and thereby support decentralization.

- The legislative change should support flexible cooperation between the regions, tour agencies and businesses to develop a programme of three visits a month to galleries, museums, monuments, cultural landmarks and theatres in the regions. This would help generate tourists' interest in Armenia and encourage them to explore new and unique destinations. Developing high-quality PR materials and increasing demand would encourage cultural institutions to improve their facilities.

- Local regional stakeholders need to set up new mechanisms and exploit existing ones that monitor, protect and enforce cultural rights and intellectual property. Copyright issues need further analysis. There is a pressing need for a properly functioning copyright system which allows authors to be paid at point of sale, rather than the current practice of artists demanding payment up front prior to sale. A flexible mechanism would engage people interested in culture, boost the production of cultural artefacts, promote creative initiatives and create competition and would lead to development.

- The current ticket policy for the locals and international visitors is discriminatory. This also applies to taxi fares, open-air market prices and



other institutions that work with tourists. Introducing a transparent policy for pricing cultural and tourist goods and services would make Armenia a more attractive destination. This policy could include discounts for everyone such as local students and international guests. These mechanisms could also include a strategy that would allow each cultural institution to offer free admission for special groups such as pensioners, and school children.

- Primary and secondary schools in the regions could have more arts lessons in order to develop an interest in culture. Students in Yerevan have visits to cultural events planned into their curricula. In the regions this would foster a general level of interpersonal culture, which would help develop greater critical thinking skills more evenly across the nation.

## Next Steps

1. Deliver targeted training courses for cultural professionals and specialists. Specially designed courses for emerging artist would increase their capacity in Fundraising, PR and Project Management cycle, marketing in the non-business sphere.
2. Decentralization; the ministry should make a part of their policy national cultural events (festivals, fairs and exhibitions) receiving state funding to have branches or events in the regions. In time this could become national events held the regions and which will develop national and international cultural tourism.
3. Establish a common and accessible database for all cultural sub-sectors. The ministry could moderate and coordinate this as a part of their long-term planning.
4. The Ministry of Culture could cooperate with Ministry of Education to develop a national curriculum for arts lessons in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools. The Ministry should also empower children to attend school theatre, dance and singing classes from a young age, to be involved in culture and to become a person who loves art. This can be done with through the advertisement, targeted grants and special porgrammes.
5. A cross-ministerial team could develop a programme to boost national tourism, this would include improved highway infrastructure, a home stay culture programme in the regions, which offers cheap accommodation with families, or provides grants to rural communities to convert empty buildings into holiday lets. This would support social entrepreneurship in small towns.

## **Bibliography**

Interviews were held with:

Representatives from the Ministry of Culture of RA

Tavush region:

- Art And Music School - Hayk Badalyan
- House Of Culture - Armen Melikyan
- Priest Aram From Saint Hovhannes Church (Berd)
- Gegharqunik region
- Sevan Youth Club - Gohar Mnatsakanyan
- Resort «house of artists» - Karen Aghamyan
- Shirak region
- State Drama Theatre – Tigran Virabyan
- Agate Center – Gayane Grigoryan

## **Links refer to laws**

[http://mincult.am/armenian\\_rules.html](http://mincult.am/armenian_rules.html)

<http://mincult.am/Inter.html>

<http://armstat.am/en/>

## Methodology

Our working group consists of lecturers, artists, PR and media specialists, social entrepreneurs, which re from Yerevan and regions. We designed questionnaire for local government, stakeholders, and cultural actors. We focused our attention on the official papers on the culture and the interviews about culture of the representatives of the government. We also started to analyses the cultural interventions to RA by the international organizations working in the region. After identifying the main recommendations, we focus on the first two; delivering a targeted training course for cultural professionals and specialists; and decentralization. We focused on these two, as we see them the shortest way to reach the targets. Being actively involved in cultural activities, we see that participatory intervention is the main efficient way to interact with the sector. The special trained specialists will empower the regions where necessary cultural atmosphere would be created.

# 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.

The report is developed with the assistance of the EU-Eastern Partnership Culture and Creativity Programme. The content of this report does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Responsibility for the information and views expressed in the publication lies entirely with the author.