

# CULTURE AND SOCIETAL CHANGE IN EU INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

## SUMMARY REPORT



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### OVERVIEW

This report summarises the online policy dialogue organised by the British Council and Tfanen-Tunisie Créative project (Tfanen) on the 3rd of December 2020. The webinar aimed to highlight and advocate for the main achievements and lessons learnt from Tfanen, a pioneering project in the field of cultural cooperation funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented by the British Council on behalf of European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) as a part of the Programme to Support Culture in Tunisia (PACT).

It followed an Intercultural Digital Lab organised by Tfanen on the 1st of December 2020, where 60 Tunisian and European policy makers and cultural actors engaged in an interactive discussion on the learning journey of Tfanen and reflected on the challenges, lessons learnt and recommendations that could feed into future EU policy and programming in Tunisia and other parts of the world. **Sofiane Ouissi**, Tunisian cultural professional and general director of Tunisian association ‘L’ART Rue’, shared the outputs from the Lab.

The webinar, moderated by EU commentator and analyst **Shada Islam**, welcomed European and Tunisian policy makers, cultural professionals and persons working in culture and international cooperation. The session provided participants with an opportunity to exchange ideas and ask questions about the positioning of culture as a vector of democracy, social cohesion and inclusion.

### WELCOME WORDS

**Robert Ness**, British Council Tunisia Director and Country Director of the project, opened the webinar by emphasising how essential it is to support and continue cultural projects in Tunisia despite the Covid-19 crisis.

He also recognised the role played by EUNIC in supporting the Tunisian cultural sector. Then **Bilel Aboudi**, the national director of the PACT, stressed that Tfanen is an example of cultural cooperation that enables the strengthening of democracy in Tunisia through enhancement of cultural diversity, tolerance and cultural rights. Through Tfanen, arts and culture are recognised as a solid pillar for development in Tunisia.

## CELEBRATING TFANEN

A five minute video of Tfanen, with vibrant music from one of its beneficiaries “Mohamed Ali Kamoun”, emphasised the main achievements of the programme through three main instruments: 1. grant funds ; 2. technical assistance; 3. support of public institutions.

The video also highlighted how Tfanen aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 4 (Quality education), SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities), SDG 5 (Gender equality), SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals).

**Damien Helly**, the Tfanen Team leader, stressed the uniqueness of Tfanen as a pioneer bilateral EU-funded cultural project in Tunisia. It is an unprecedented initiative in the EU neighbourhoods, especially during a time marked by mistrust and tension around values.

Tfanen is an ambitious project launched in the mindset of the 2016 joint communication on EU international cultural relations, as it is based on mutuality instead of soft power influence. It promotes societal change by leveraging organic change and supporting citizens triggering the change they want.

Since 2016, the project has invested in knowledge generation, changing perceptions of the creative sectors and building trust among people.

Damien Helly called on the EU and its Member States to develop, in each partner country, a joint country-specific cultural strategy.

He stressed that Tfanen can inspire future EU cultural programming through its alignment to the SDGs. To conclude, Damien Helly highlighted the project’s contribution to building a balanced collaboration between civil society and the public sector in Tunisia.

## LAB’S KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

**Sofiane Ouissi** shared the impressions and recommendations of the Lab’s participants: Tfanen is an exemplary project in terms of its operational and organisational modes. It has also helped civil society by creating a true coalition capable of influencing and



co-constructing public policy instead of ‘being its victims’.

The speaker stressed that, in the wake of the Tunisian revolution, civil society benefits from a wider ambit of action and needs to be reinforced through international cooperation.

Referring to the recommendations of the Lab, Sofiane Ouissi mentioned the importance of promoting access to culture in marginalised areas and within communities that are isolated from the cultural offer. It is essential to conceive cultural projects that are relevant, purposeful and appealing to local communities. According to the participants of the Lab, societal change is based on effective intersectoral and interregional partnerships. Success stories and best practices in the field of culture need to be promoted and shared with wider audiences, mainly through digital communication channels.

The second set of recommendations addressed emerging creativity among young artists and small/medium cultural organisations.

The Lab’s participants suggested that future EU projects should foster

learning and sharing mechanisms, mentorship programs and cultural entrepreneurship. The professionalisation of the cultural sector was also highlighted by the rapporteur, who invited EU policy makers to invest more in developing jobs and competencies frameworks in culture. Cultural actors need to be more structured in the formulation of their long-term strategic plans, and supported in their creation" might be better. More sustainable professionalisation programs like "Tfanen Takwin<sup>1</sup>" need to be available for various specialisations.

Public-private partnerships (PPP) were also discussed in the Lab. Participants recommended that a dedicated unit needs to be created to ensure the coordination of PPP projects. They also called for more ERASMUS+ programmes to be developed for the cultural sector. The Lab's participants suggested that international cooperation should finance more sectoral studies, surveys and statistics around culture, and ensure that the generated knowledge and data is accessible for all. The number of virtual spaces for knowledge and values sharing, artistic creation and public debate needs to be multiplied, especially during the current Covid-19 crisis.

There needs to be better monitoring of and full transparency in cultural cooperation projects. To avoid the negative effect of political instability and ensure continuity, participants advised European stakeholders to collaborate with autonomous public institutions (EPNAs) and to consolidate efforts on common projects. On a personal note, Sofiane Ouissi insisted on both financing and facilitating cultural mobility as it is "the best bulwark against radicalisation and illegal immigration".

**Stephen Stenning**, British Council Head of Arts and Society, was struck by the optimism and ambition that came across Sofiane's speech. Not accepting being a victim of cultural policies is a strong message for international relations. Cultural policies should be co-created and shaped by all of us. It is also key to have a wider scope of culture. Supporting emerging artists and "giving room for new voices" is also absolutely vital.

**Catherine Magnant**, Head of Unit Cultural Policies, DG EAC, then explained how culture, since 2016, has become a pillar of EU external relations strategy, and paid special tribute to Federica Mogherini, former head of the European External Action Service (EEAS). She stressed that the strategy, based on principles of co-creation and partnership, are reflected in Tfanen.

The speaker also thanked the Lab's participants for the quality of their recommendations and acknowledged the similarities between EU Member States and Tunisia's priorities (including access to culture for disadvantaged populations, cultural sector restructuring, statistics). She invited young cultural actors to seize existing opportunities to apply to the ERASMUS + programme, which already covers architecture, heritage, design and arts.

**Gérald Audaz**, Team Leader cooperation with Maghreb DG NEAR, and familiar with the Tunisian context thanks to his experience at the EU delegation in Tunisia, greatly appreciated the recommendations related to public-private partnerships (PPP). This is a common practice globally, including in the cultural sector. According to him, PPP have long been a

## PANEL DISCUSSION

<sup>1</sup> Tfanen-Takwin is a one-year training course equivalent to a 2nd year of professional master's and intended for professionals in the cultural sector in Tunisia.

## PANEL DISCUSSION

sensitive topic in Tunisia and need to be encouraged by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs.

As a president of the EUNIC Tunisia, **Andrea Jacob** agreed with the definition of culture given by Sofiane and the Labs' participants. This definition emphasises that culture is not an elite concept but rather accessible to different generations and social classes. She also recognised the importance of exchange between Tunisian and European artists, now included in Tfanen Tfakwin.

**Bilel Aboudi** mentioned that Tfanen supports cultural sector reforms in Tunisia. He considers Tfanen to be a laboratory of cooperation between artists, civil society, the private sector and public bodies to build common projects.

Through Tfanen, the Tunisian Ministry of Cultural Affairs is providing favourable conditions that catalyse the reform of cultural policy with civil society. Finally, Mr Aboudi pointed out that, although negotiations related to cultural cooperation are not an easy task, culture is a strategic sector to fight radicalisation, emigration and violations against minorities' rights. "We don't have to ignore culture in any bilateral cooperation programme", said Bilel.

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## Q&A SESSION



In response to **Shada Islam's** question about societal change through culture, **Stephen Stenning** referred to 2016, when he was involved in designing Tfanen as Director of Arts in the Middle East and North Africa region at the British Council. The first ambition of cultural institutes via EUNIC Tunisia was to look beyond national interest, consider culture in a broad sense and to create a separate Tunisian entity that would be genuinely accepted by Tunisians.

Secondly, Tfanen's logical framework was initially based on a broad understanding of culture and on the idea that local Tunisians can formulate their own outputs and outcomes. This allows for responsiveness and creativity in implementing actions. "Change comes from within. To initiate change, you have to touch people at an emotional level", said Stephen. To answer the second question about the contribution of culture to the SDGs, **Catherine Magnant** explained that, despite the fact that culture is not an explicit SDG, EU institutions are working on operationalising SDGs through culture. She also mentioned the UNESCO SDGs indicators and that DG DEVCO of the European Commission is currently conducting an experimental work across six different countries in order to assess how cultural policies are contributing to SDG's indicators.

To promote social cohesion and inclusion among young people and women in countries in the Middle East and North Africa, **Gérald Audaz** explained that it is essential to use adapted policy instruments. If these topics are wisely tackled by public policies, it will lead to an appeased society where everyone has a place and can safely exert their rights. Since the European Neighbourhood Policy has been launched, the EU has

been working on creating a space of mutual understanding and socio-economic cohesion between Mediterranean countries. Hundreds of cooperation programmes, such as ERASMUS+ and Creative Europe, offer funding and knowledge sharing mechanisms to local actors.

Tfanen is an emblematic project that addresses various thematic areas: social cohesion, inclusion, and strengthening democracy. **Gérald Audaz** believes that Tfanen supports the fundamentals of democracy and civic engagement through its funded projects. He quoted the project 'l'école de la caricature' in Sfax that stresses openness and tolerance, and others offering access to culture for marginalised populations such as disabled people and prisoners.

To answer an audience question about the replication of Tfanen's operating model and governance in other countries, **Andrea Jacob** emphasised the importance of collaborative work within EUNIC. This involves leaving national interest behind and being open to perspectives of experts from different countries. From her experience, the European experience is more interesting than a single national one. It is crucial to gradually build trust by listening to your partners and respecting them. It is also best to start engaging with small groups.

**Bilel Aboudi** believes that, along with the twinning programme, the aim of Tfanen's mechanisms is to trigger change in the cultural sector. The programme aims to integrate culture in economic and social development. Its success is also derived from the fact that the Tunisian State wanted a change in its cultural policy.

On whether the EU will continue to finance programme related to the EU strategy on cultural relations, **Catherine Magnant** and **Gérald Audaz** expressed that there is a political commitment to support other cultural cooperation programmes. However, it is a transitional period of planning and financial negotiations and therefore too early to confirm at this stage.

## CONCLUSION

Cooperation, collaboration and mutuality are words that transcend both Tfanen and this policy dialogue and speak to the broader value of the arts, culture and international cultural relations. Tfanen acts as an example of how international cooperation can serve both local and national development. It also demonstrates how international cooperation can play a role in inclusive policy making.

Culture is rarely mentioned in international cooperation but the case of Tfanen has showed that culture has value in societal change and should be considered in these broader conversations. This includes in broad ranging issues such as those captured in the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Seminar participants expressed a strong desire for the new EU financial framework to integrate culture in its new multi-year programming.

As for Tunisia, a new EUNIC project 'EU4Youth', to be implemented by AECID and the British Council, builds on Tfanen and opens new areas of intervention to increase impact of this approach.

Given the example that Tfanen has set, it is important to further encourage dialogue around how culture, in synergy with other sustainable development priorities, can best contribute to EU international cooperation objectives.