



Cultural Heritage and Identities of Europe's Future



Policy Brief #4/July 2021  
Published September 2021

## Investing in Culture for Young Europeans

### ABOUT THE STUDY

This is the final policy brief in a series published by the Cultural Heritage and Identities of Europe's Future (CHIEF), a research project funded by the European Commission and led by Aston University (UK). It brings together cross-national findings and recommendations from nine countries (Croatia, Georgia, Germany, India, Latvia, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey and the UK) to investigate how young people develop cultural heritage and identity. This briefing presents an overview of the key findings from our research, and policy recommendations.

In light of well-documented challenges to minorities' rights and experiences of cultural diversity across Europe, it is important for government to acknowledge the value of culture and invest in young people's cultural education. The CHIEF project examined the processes and environments that influence young people's cultural literacy and identity – with the aim of changing how cultural literacy is shaped and encouraged.

Based on our research findings, we noted that a lack of understanding of young people's cultural identities and values by government and cultural institutions resulted in inadequate funding for young people's cultural education and representation. To enhance cultural literacy and identity and challenge intolerance, we have developed strategies that advocate for a more inclusive interpretation of Europe's cultural heritage as a foundation for cultural identity. Our research demonstrated that European populations are not – nor have ever been – homogenous.

Our overarching recommendation is that government and policymakers listen to and engage young people in decision-making processes, as well as provide adequate funding, to enable them to build relevant and fulfilling cultural engagement for young people.

### CROSS-NATIONAL FINDINGS

#### Narrowly defined culture

Culture and diversity are often understood in ethnonationalist terms, or by a perceived tension between ethnonationalism and multiculturalism, which pits 'we' against 'other'. Definitions of culture are often narrow and one-dimensional and are limited to a dominant white and Eurocentric perspective.

While governments express commitments to cultural and social tolerance through cultural education, they fail to recognise the complex relationship between national identity and inclusion and conflate inclusion with the integration of minorities into prevailing cultural norms.

National narratives often do not engage critically with difficult pasts, which limits the recognition and participation of those whose histories are excluded and misses opportunities to question exclusionary views. The preservation of local and regional, as well as diasporic cultural traditions remains important for young Europeans. However, this diversity of traditions is not always reflected in cultural institutions. National museums, for example, institutionalise the heritage of ethnic majorities – which is often white, western history – while local institutions and non-formal organisations are left with presenting wider histories.

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## Disconnected institutions

There is disconnection between official discourses on heritage and the needs of young people, with significant discrepancies between cultural activities available to young people and what interests and matters to them. This disconnect underpins a low level of cultural engagement by many young people, particularly in relation to 'high culture', and means that young people from diverse backgrounds often lack opportunities to practice, celebrate and share their culture.

Young people's needs are often best met by grassroots cultural organisations and youth clubs, which are more responsive to their diverse cultures and interests and deliver less formal and structured activities. However, public funding is often targeted at large institutions that represent 'high culture', leaving these semi-formal and informal organisations underfunded.

This disconnection also stems from the lack of appreciation for young people's engagement with online and digital spaces – particularly social media. There is a need for cultural institutions to look beyond traditional ways of presenting culture and to engage young people through the creation of online and digital spaces.

## Barriers to participation

Racial, religious, gender- and disability-based inequalities hinder participation in cultural activities and access to cultural resources. Family and socio-economic status also significantly limit young people's access to cultural opportunities.

Culture is seen as an expense rather than an investment, leaving cultural activities undervalued and under-resourced, and young people without opportunities and choices.

There are limited opportunities for young people, particularly those from diverse ethnic and socio-cultural backgrounds, to participate in decision-making processes for the allocation of resources to cultural institutions and activities.

## Formal educational institutions

There is a lack of promotion of cultural diversity in school settings, with school curricula not reflecting the lived cultural experiences of pupils' families and local communities.

There is also a lack of provision of diverse cultural activities both in school and through extracurricular visits to cultural heritage sites. This is particularly acute in rural areas, and, in some contexts, opportunities may be unequally dispersed across multiple educational pathways.

This lack of provision is further problematised in the least diverse localities where opportunities for inter-cultural contact in school are also limited. In some instances, racism and discrimination in schools are normalised, with no recourse to complaint and no training or other support for school leaders and staff.

## CROSS-NATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

**Policymakers and decision-makers** should:

- adopt a broad and inclusive definition of culture as plural and complex, and engage openly with tensions between national culture, multiculturalism and inclusion when making cultural policies;
- bring multiple stakeholders into the cultural policy planning process, including those from under-represented groups and localities, and young people;
- ensure relevant non-formal and informal organisations are officially recognised as providers of cultural learning activities for young people on an equal footing with formal institutions, and that sustainable public funding is allocated to them;
- adopt equity as a primary objective of cultural policies and work to implement programmes that can mitigate the impact of wider inequalities on access to cultural opportunities across physical and digital spaces;
- create a commission for formal education providers through which gaps in curricula surrounding the diverse lived experiences of young people, their families and communities can be addressed, and through which appropriate anti-discrimination training can be provided for leaders and teachers.

**Cultural institutions** should:

- encourage inter-ethnic dialogue by opening up cultural institutions to difficult pasts and critical discussion of exclusionary views;
- expand and diversify approaches to culture and heritage to include local, regional and diasporic cultural traditions alongside majority culture and heritage;
- identify local, regional and national cultural opportunities in partnership with providers across formal, semi-formal and informal settings in order to shift away from the dominance of 'high culture' in the sector;
- synchronise cultural activities with young people's identities and interests, including the digital space, in partnership with young people themselves and youth workers;
- work with policymakers and decision-makers to create plans to mitigate the impact of wider inequalities on access to cultural opportunities across physical and digital spaces.

**Formal educational institutions** should:

- build recognition of young people's lived experiences and cultural knowledge into the curriculum and everyday school life;
- reform curricula to ensure that cultural education is embedded across subject areas and is accessible to all young people, regardless of their chosen educational pathway, and that appropriate training and support is provided to all staff;
- create opportunities for inter-cultural encounters to facilitate learning about commonalities and differences across diverse cultures and heritages at local, regional, national and international levels, developed through training and support for staff.

## ABOUT CHIEF

Cultural Heritage and Identities of Europe's Future (CHIEF) is an international research project funded by the European Commission and led by Aston University (UK). The project started in May 2018 and runs until October 2021. It involves academic, civil society and policymaker partners across nine countries (Croatia, Georgia, Germany, India, Latvia, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey, UK).

### CHIEF:

- examines the processes and environments that influence young people's cultural literacy and cultural identity through an inter-disciplinary and methodologically varied approach;
- advocates an inclusive interpretation of Europe's cultural heritage as a foundation for cultural literacy and cultural identity;
- challenges ethno-nationalist, xenophobic or otherwise exclusionary understandings of European cultural identity that may lead to intolerance and marginalisation; threatening the future of the European project;
- recommends effective strategies for enhancing cultural literacy among young people in ways that reflect both the heterogeneity of modern Europeans' cultural backgrounds and heritage, and diversity as a historic feature of Europeaness.

## PROJECT IDENTITY

<b>Project Name</b>	Cultural Heritage and Identities of Europe's Future (CHIEF)
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<b>Consortium</b>	<i>Aston University</i> , Birmingham, UK <i>CRRC Georgia</i> , Tbilisi, Georgia <i>Culture Coventry</i> , Coventry, UK <i>Daugavpils Universitate</i> , Daugavpils, Latvia <i>Hochschule Fuer Angewandte Wissenschaften</i> , Hamburg, Germany <i>Institut Drustvenih Znanosti Ivo Pilar</i> , Zagreb, Croatia <i>Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University</i> , Istanbul, Turkey <i>The Savitribai Phule Pune University</i> , Pune, India <i>Universitat Pompeu Fabra</i> , Barcelona, Spain <i>University of Gloucestershire</i> , Cheltenham and Gloucester, UK <i>Univerzita Komenskeho V Bratislave</i> , Bratislava, Slovakia
<b>Funding Scheme</b>	Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020), Societal Challenge 6 – Europe in a changing world: inclusive, innovative and reflective societies”, call H2020-SC6-CULT-COOP-2017-two-stage UNDERSTANDING EUROPE - PROMOTING THE EUROPEAN, topic “CULT-COOP-03-2017-Cultural literacy of young generations in Europe”.
<b>Duration</b>	May 2018 - October 2021 (42 months)
<b>Budget</b>	EU contribution: €4,580,371.25

**Website** <http://chiefprojecteu.com/>

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**Further Reading** Mapping Reports of Cultural Heritage  
<http://chiefprojecteu.com/deliverables/mapping-reports-of-cultural-heritage/>

National Cultural/Educational Policy Review  
<http://chiefprojecteu.com/deliverables/national-cultural-educational-policy-review/>

National Curriculum Review Reports  
<http://chiefprojecteu.com/deliverables/national-curriculum-review-reports/>

Policy Briefing 1  
<http://chiefprojecteu.com/wp-content/uploads/CHIEF-Policy-Brief-1.pdf>

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