



## When the gigs are gone: Valuing arts, culture and media in the COVID-19 pandemic

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### ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated health care systems and economies around the world, but at the same time it has focused attention as never before on the cultural sector and on the role of digital technologies in disseminating content to locked-down, stressed-out and bored populations. This article proposes a four-part conceptual framework that uses economic, social, creative, and sustainability lenses to examine the immediate impact of the pandemic on creators, curators and the media. After reviewing a sample of policy and creative responses to these challenges, it discusses the possible implications for how governments and citizens value the creative sector.

### 1. Introduction

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit – first in China in December 2019, then spreading rapidly to other countries in the early months of 2020 – the health care systems and economies of nations across the world were quickly overcome. As this article was first being written in mid-to late-April 2020, the global total of confirmed cases of the disease was approaching 3.0 million and over 200,000 people had died. By the time it was being revised in August 2020, these numbers had risen to 21.7 million cases and nearly 800,000 deaths (Johns Hopkins University, 2020). These figures reflected only a fraction of the true incidence due to limited testing in most countries. In spring 2020, approximately 4 billion people or half the world's population was under lockdown as governments attempted to limit the spread of the disease by enforcing physical distancing (Sandford, 2020). With the widespread closure of industry, businesses, places of worship, theatres and galleries, sports venues, bars and restaurants, and parks, the world economy fell into a deep recession. The World Bank estimated that global GDP would fall by an average of 5.2% in 2020, with per capita income in advanced economies shrinking by 7% (The World Bank and 8 June 20, 2020).

Amid the social and economic disruption caused by COVID-19, one feature of the social landscape stood out. Unlike during previous pandemics, the world was interconnected through digital technologies, which were widely used not only to convey information (and disinformation) and to keep businesses and families in touch, but also to provide diversion, solace and inspiration to the legions of people confined to their homes as part of national pandemic control measures. The situation was

fluid and constantly changing, but even in the first weeks of the pandemic, it was evident that those working in the creative sector were providing what many viewed as an essential service, almost as important as those provided by the health care, the food production and food retail industries.

Governments, citizens, artists, cultural workers and citizens reacted to the unprecedented disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic in a variety of ways, but all of these actions suggested that creative activity was important on a number of levels. Cultural value was most prominently evident in the economic sphere, but was also reflected in actions aimed at strengthening the social and democratic fabric of society.

This article examines the immediate impact of the pandemic on creators, curators and the media through economic, social, creative and political lenses and discusses the possible implications of these impacts for how governments and citizens value the creative sector. Because of the fluidity of the situation, it relies mainly on a information derived from digital sources as the pandemic unfolded. These sources frequently changed as the pandemic evolved and, while current at the time when they were accessed, may not have remained stable or been archived consistently for future reference.

In the light of these limitations, the intention of this article is not to provide a definitive assessment of the value assigned to the cultural sector's during the pandemic. Rather, it provides a tentative framework for a closer examination of the heightened role played by creative resources in responding to the stresses of an unprecedented global emergency and the policy responses to them. A concluding section discusses the sustainability of these policy responses and the possible implications

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of value shifts for cultural policies and creative practices in the coming years.

## 2. Theories of the value of culture – a research framework for public policies in the era of COVID-19

Guersen and Rentschler have suggested two main conceptualizations of cultural value: the **aesthetic** view, focused on quality of life, and the **neoclassical economic** view, focused on the monetary value of culture in an economy (Guersen and Rentschler, 2003). These are essentially public policy concerns. As Williams has argued, the concept of culture is a complex, but useful, way of charting society's reactions to important and continuing changes in social, economic and political life (Williams, 1958). However, in most policy discussions the value of culture as a means of understanding and reacting to these changes has tended to be marginalized.

Blomkamp has proposed a framework for understanding the value of culture and for applying it to policy discussions. This conceptualization views culture as process, object, individual, and collective entity (Blomkamp et al., 2015). The idea of culture as an **object or commodity** that is part of a global system of production, distribution and consumption has dominated cultural policy frameworks in recent years, but this was not always the case. Prior to the Second World War, culture in most countries was considered to be a personal matter related to **individual** artistic or aesthetic expression, something that was a worthy and moral activity, but not necessarily one that deserved state support or policy attention. After the Second World War, this attitude changed somewhat as culture's conceptualization broadened to include **collective** considerations related to a particular nation or society – what UNESCO describes as "... the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that ... encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs" (Universal Declaration, 2001). Finally, culture as **process** generally refers to the cultivation of personal, spiritual or intellectual development, which has intrinsic benefits for a collective or civilization that cannot always be easily measured.

These elements have been incorporated, to varying degrees, into four main frameworks for policy development in the field of culture: culture and sustainability, culture and the economy, culture and society, and culture and creativity. It is sometimes difficult to separate these frameworks, as economic and social considerations often figure prominently in policies aimed at sustainable cultural development. However, this article will examine each of these frameworks in turn, and then explore how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected cultural activities and cultural policies in each of these overlapping spheres.

### 2.1. Culture and sustainability – collective and procedural values

Around the turn of the millennium, increased attention began to be paid in policy circles to the ways in which culture contributed to the sustainability of societies, not just in the ecological sphere but also in the economic and social domains. UNESCO was at the forefront of efforts to bring culture into the discourse on sustainability, arguing that the "three pillar" model of sustainability – ecological, economic and social – was incomplete and should be supplemented by a "cultural" pillar to account for the fact that "cultures frame people's relationship to others in their society and the world around them, including the natural environment, and condition their behaviours" (The Future We Want, 2020). These ideas were taken up by the United Cities and Local Governments organization (United Cities and Local Gov, 2018) and were elaborated by John Hawkes in an influential treatise that argued persuasively for the inclusion of culture as a "fourth pillar" of sustainable development (Hawkes, 2001).

From a procedural perspective, the 'four pillar' model of sustainability has been adopted in many local planning exercises, notably in Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands (Duxbury and Jeannotte, 2012). However, its application at the national and international levels has

been mixed. That has probably been because the model has encouraged policy makers to view culture as separate from the other three pillars – a stance that has been characterized by Dessein, Soini, Fairclough and Horlings as 'culture in sustainable development' – with a separate and autonomous role to play. Instead of viewing culture as a process running in parallel to ecological, economic, and social considerations, Dessein et al. see two other possible roles for culture in sustainability: culture **for** sustainable development and culture **as** sustainable development. In the former, culture plays a mediating role connecting the other dimensions of sustainability – a sort of interlinking process that balances competing and conflicting demands and guides ecological, economic and social policies toward their goals. In the latter, culture takes on a transformative role by shaping and articulating society's underlying values and thus providing a new paradigm for understanding the relationship between human beings and their environment (Dessein et al., 2015). While the latter two perspectives are compelling from a conceptual viewpoint, they have been applied in only a limited manner in the policy sphere.

### 2.2. Culture and the economy – valuing culture as an object or commodity

In the past couple of decades, a great deal of policy attention has begun to be paid to the role that culture plays in post-industrial economies, particularly at the local level (see for example, Florida (Florida, 2002), Currid (Currid, 2007), Landry (Landry and Bianchini, 1995) and Howkins (Howkins, 2001). Cunningham, Banks and Potts have described four models of culture and the economy:

- (1) the welfare (or subsidy) model, which views culture as a public or "merit" good that extracts "rents" from the rest of the economy;
- (2) the competitive (or cultural industries) model in which large media firms operate in a way similar to other large legacy industries;
- (3) the growth (or creative industries model) which creates value not only within the industry itself but also for other sectors of the economy (e.g. creative design in the car or video game industries);
- (4) the innovative (or creative economy) model in which the creative industries act as a producer of or conduit for new ideas or technologies that bring about societal change (b2015 et al., 2015; [18]; Cunningham et al., 2008).

Models (1) and (2) dominated public policy decisions about culture during most of the twentieth century, but towards the end of the century and the beginning of the twenty-first, models (3) and (4) began to receive more policy attention at international, national, and local levels.

In terms of economic impact, research carried out by EY in 2015 found that, globally, the cultural and creative industries generated \$2250 billion in revenues annually and employed 29.5 million people. The top three earners were television, visual arts, and newspapers and magazines, but cultural content was also the biggest revenue source for the digital industries, generating \$66 billion in content sales and almost \$22 billion in advertising sales in 2013 (b2015 et al., 2015; [18]; Cunningham et al., 2008). The same report also found that the informal cultural economy, consisting of free and sponsored performances and cultural products, was estimated to be worth about \$33 billion in 2013, and employed about 1.2 million people.

A few countries have developed Culture Satellite Accounts to calculate the size of the culture GDP. For example, Canada's culture GDP in 2017 was C\$53.1 billion or about 2.7% of the country's total GDP. Over 666,000 people held culture-related jobs, which was about 3.6% of all jobs in the economy (Statistics Canada, 2019, 2019, 2019). In the United States, the contribution of culture to national GDP is even higher at US\$804.2 billion or 4.3% in 2016, with five million people employed in the cultural sector (National Endowment for the Arts, 2019).

Cultural policies in support of economic development include a wide range of subsidies, grants, tax measures, treaties, trade agreements, commercial arrangements, and partnerships.

### 2.3. Culture and society – valuing individual and collective well-being

Culture has traditionally been considered a social asset, primarily as Blomkamp has indicated, as a personal attribute that contributes moral and aesthetic value to the producers and consumers of cultural goods and services. As Williams has pointed out, one of the meanings of the word “culture”, dating back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was “an area of personal and apparently private experience” (Williams, 1958a, p. 17). This meaning later evolved to mean “a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual” (Ibida). Within this broader meaning, it became possible to consider how culture affects whole societies.

Like society itself, culture’s effects are complex and cannot be neatly categorized, making them harder to measure than culture’s economic impacts. However, Jeannotte has examined a broad range of social impacts that have been widely studied in the literature and has found four general frameworks for analysis:

- (1) Holistic frameworks examining the relationship between culture, sustainability and community development
- (2) Frameworks that link culture to the concepts of wellbeing and social cohesion
- (3) Frameworks that examine culture’s role in promoting connect- edness and participation
- (4) Frameworks that examine culture’s role in building citizenship capacity (Jeannotte, 2017a, 2017b).

A large body of literature has linked the positive effects of cultural participation on the creation of identity, social cohesion (primarily in the creation of social capital and collective well-being), and personal health and security (Jeannotte, 2017a, 2017b, p. 8). While there are difficulties in scaling these effects down from the national to the community level, there is some evidence that cultural participation can be linked to various forms of civic participation, such as voting and volunteering (National Endowment for th, 2009; Polzella, Forbis).

Policy interventions in this area are less easily categorized than those aimed at economic aspects of culture and are frequently embedded in other policy domains, such as education (including arts education), health care (such as policies to mitigate illnesses and disabilities through creative activities), and urban planning (such as policies intended to improve quality of life through aesthetic improvements, heritage preservation, and cultural infrastructure).

### 2.4. Culture and creation –valuing the imagination

Because the act of creation is essentially intangible until an artistic product or activity results, it is generally difficult to assign a value to it. However, the products of the imagination hold a symbolic value that is central to both individual and collective identities. Such values are habitually maintained, even in the face of hardship and oppression. For this reason, they occupy a policy domain that is sometimes contentious, as it deals with questions of identity, belonging, and connection.

In the words of Max Wyman, ‘Simply put, physical health is a necessity of for life, but culture, the arts, our expressive heritage, are reasons for living, catalysts of our imaginations and prompters of our dreams’ (Wyman, 2004, p. 10). Most countries now recognize these benefits to some degree and have policies and programs in place that support artistic creation, heritage protection and preservation, and production and dissemination of creative content (primarily but not exclusively domestically produced). Many also encourage cultural participation by citizens, and some also invest in sharing of diverse forms of cultural expression both nationally and internationally. In several countries, such as France and Canada, heavy emphasis is placed on supporting domestic cultural creativity as a reinforcement of national identity.

## 3. COVID-19 in the cultural sector - policy and societal impacts and responses

While the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing as this article is being written, it is possible to provide a general overview of its global impact on the cultural sector. Using the research framework described above, what follows is a preliminary overview of how the disease has affected the sector economically, creatively, and socially. The question of how these changes will affect sustainability – both of communities and of the sector itself – requires a more long-term perspective, but is discussed briefly as an area requiring continuing strategic attention.

### 3.1. The cultural economy - when the gigs are gone

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on the world’s economy, but certain parts of the cultural economy have been particularly affected. Overnight, lockdowns of entire populations led to the cancellation of cultural events, such as concerts and theatre performances. Cultural venues, such as galleries, museums, libraries, and cultural/recreational centres, were forced to close, and the news media drastically cut back coverage of the cultural sector as it too curtailed production. All tourism, including cultural tourism, ground to a halt due to domestic and international travel restrictions by most countries. These measures led to widespread layoffs or termination of jobs in the creative sector, including performers, visual artists, museum and library personnel, writers, journalists, and the audiovisual trades that support them (Bresge, 2020; Wu and Solly, 2020).

In the United States, as of August 2020, it was estimated that the cultural sector had sustained economic losses of over US\$10 billion, over 62,000 cultural workers had been laid off, 96% of cultural events had been cancelled, with total lost attendance of over 96,000,000 (Americans for the Arts. N, 2020). In Canada, in July 2020, actual hours worked in the arts, entertainment and recreation sector were over 40% lower than in July 2019, well below an all-industries average of about 10% of hours lost (Canadian Association for, 2020). Globally, UNESCO estimated that 95% of the world’s museums were closed in May 2020 due to COVID-19 and that the global film industry had lost an estimated US\$10 billion by the end of May 2020 (July 3, 2020. Cult, 2020). A special report prepared for the European Commission suggested that cultural jobs were most at risk in European cities that relied heavily on tourism to support both live events and cultural institutions (Montalto, LSacco, Alberti, Panella, & Saisana, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d).

Despite the deluge of new cultural content during the COVID-19 pandemic, as one artist observed, “You can’t go on tour on the internet” (Saxberg, 2020). Artists cannot count on people to tune into their Instagram or Facebook pages every day, nor can venues, from concert halls to art galleries to cinemas, survive without fresh live performances and exhibitions. The magnitude of the problem is suggested by Canada’s “I lost my gig” survey. It found that as of April 19, 2020 (based on 695 responses) that over 25,000 gigs had been cancelled with a total economic impact on artists of C\$16.6 million or C\$23,840 per artist (ost My Gig Canada. htt, 2020). Since the median income of a Canadian artist in 2016 was about C\$24,300 (Hill, 2019), this was a catastrophic collapse.

Governments around the world have responded to the COVID-19 crisis by implementing support programs for citizens who have lost their livelihoods during the pandemic, and in many countries, efforts were made to accelerate payments already promised to the cultural sector. For example, arts councils such as the National Endowment for the Arts in the United States, and the Canada Council for the Arts elected to distribute funding to organizations and individuals quickly despite the collapse of planned projects (Canada Council for the Ar, 2020; National Endowment for th, 2020). Similar measures were put in place in Austria, the Czech Republic and Croatia to speed up payments for projects already approved or delayed by the pandemic (Montalto et al., 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d).

Some governments went further to set in place specific programs to address the crisis. For example, the Norwegian Ministry of Culture established a program that would allow organizers to apply for compensation for loss of income from events that were to be held between 5 March and April 30, 2020 (Arts Council of Norway, 2020). Creative Scotland set in place three bursary funds to compensate freelance creative professionals, screen sector workers and other individuals working in the creative sector for lost earnings (Creative Scotland, 2020, 2020). Creative New Zealand put in place a COVID-19 Emergency Response Package worth NZ\$29 million to help the arts community cover loss of income (Creative New Zealand, 9 J, 2020). Germany earmarked €1 billion for the cultural sector to help cultural institutions reopen with new hygiene protocols, such as updated ventilation systems and new socially-distanced visitation arrangements. Germany also decreased the tax rate on art by 3% (Brown).

### 3.2. Culture and creation – the rise of digital platforms

As the pandemic took hold, both creators and audiences made a rapid pivot to digital means of creation and distribution. The largest digital platforms for the dissemination of cultural content boomed. With people forced to stay at home, looking for something to fill their time, streaming services experienced an influx of new viewers. For example, Netflix reported an increase of over 15 million subscribers in the first quarter of 2020, about twice the number expected, for a total of 182 million subscribers worldwide (Alexander). Meanwhile, most audiovisual program production ceased, due to social distancing rules and travel restrictions imposed to contain the coronavirus (Perman et al., 2020). The somewhat paradoxical result was a financial bonanza for streaming platforms, such as Netflix, Disney+, Amazon Prime, Hulu, and Spotify, while the majority of the artists featured on these platforms lost their jobs and were forced to find other means of not only earning a living, but also practising their art.

Many artists and cultural workers have complained, with some justification, about exploitation by the digital platforms. For example, Spotify royalty rates are so low that it takes approximately 438 streams to earn the price of Kraft Dinner (Kitching, 2020). As a result, all but the biggest stars in the music business have increasingly relied on live concerts and merchandise sales to make a living, since revenue streams from recorded music have collapsed in recent years. As one observer noted “Having weathered a global storm, this industry found stability in the one thing that digital technology can’t replicate: a communal live experience among other human beings from different backgrounds” (Harrison, 2019). This communal experience reinforces social capital (including trust and belonging) and cultural capital (including personal empowerment and quality of life) that are central to community sustainability and cohesiveness (Jeannotte et al., 2005; McCarthy et al., 2004).

COVID-19 removed this last advantage from the music business, as well as from other cultural sectors, such as the visual arts, museums and historic sites, that also rely on personal engagement with art and heritage within a communal setting. Yet, these sectors have been among the most creative in using digital platforms, particularly social media, to try to recapture and connect with audiences and patrons.

While some artists and cultural organizations used social media in an attempt to re-monetize their work through independent online booking sites such as Sidedoor (<https://sidedooraccess.co>, 2020), many creators offered free performances on their Facebook, Instagram or web pages (see for example online readings of Shakespeare’s plays featuring actors connected through Zoom (Miles, 2020)). Cultural service organizations, such as ENCATC put together an online Creative #StayHome Pack offering links to concerts, artworks, and museum collections (Creative #StayHome, 2020). Canada’s Culture Days, which organizes participatory arts events across Canada, provided digital links to mostly free digital performing, visual and literary arts events (Culture Days – Digital Ex, 2020). YouTube and Spotify launched a channel featuring “Quarantunes” from a variety of artists from around the world performing from their homes [see, for example (The Mavericks and Quarantune, 2020),].

Museums and galleries, large and small, offered virtual tours of their collections and links to past lectures and presentations (Art Gallery of Ontario and A, 2020; Smithsonian Museum of Nat, 2020). Choirs organized concerts on Zoom and even strangers were invited to join in virtual collective performances (Walker-Arnott, 2020 and Marc). In short, a vast array of special cultural content was released to respond to the exigencies of social and physical distancing resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and to attempt to recreate some of the feeling of personal contact with neighbours, favourite artists, institutions, or even strangers.

Governments did what they could to promote digital cultural content to locked-down citizens. For example, public broadcasters aired special presentations showcasing heritage sites (Ontario, 2020) or theatre performances (Canadian Broadcasting Cor, 2020). The European Union provided funding for digital culture and virtual mobility, and launched a social media campaign called #CreativeEuropeAtHome to promote online cultural content (European Union website -, 2020). In Europe, local cultural organizations have been very active in forming alliances with the private sector to utilize digital platforms as a means of disseminating local cultural content. For example, in Berlin shuttered nightclubs set up a live music stream called to United We Stream to promote local electronic music and provide fair compensation for the artists producing it (Berlin United We Stream w, 2020). In Turin, Italy an innovative project merged food delivery with a digital performance platform that also aimed at providing fair compensation for artists by providing free access to concerts but charging for food and drink (delry – Arts and Food an, 2020).

### 3.3. Culture and society – Fostering connections in a socially-distanced world

Another notable feature of culture in the COVID pandemic was the degree to which artists and cultural workers attempted to raise money, as well as spirits, on behalf of organizations and health care workers battling the coronavirus. One of the most high-profile of these was a global “Together at Home” concert curated by Lady Gaga that raised \$127.9 million for WHO’s COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund (Wattercuter, 2020) and was broadcast around the world on various platforms, including traditional television and radio networks. In Canada, Stronger Together, Tous Ensemble was a multi-platform event featuring prominent Canadian artists and athletes that aimed to raise C \$150-million to provide support to Food Banks Canada (Canadian Press et al., 2020). In Leeds in the United Kingdom, performance artists formed teams to deliver food and medicines to locked-down citizens (Lachance, 2020). In some places, ordinary citizens got into the act, with neighbours getting together for sing-alongs in support of frontline health care workers (Lachance, 2020; Taylor, 2020).

The need to connect and participate with others in collective cultural settings appeared to be the impetus behind many of the social initiatives that emerged during the pandemic. While national governments were sometimes involved, local governments were the primary promoters and supporters of such activities. For example, the City of Ghent in Belgium brought recordings of cultural productions to residents in seniors’ facilities (Stad Gent programmeert cu, 2020). The Cities of Prague in the Czech Republic, Jyväskylä in Finland, and Aarhus in Denmark set up programs for music lovers that allowed them to book outdoor concerts by local musicians outside private homes, hospitals, and nursing homes (Montalto et al., 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d). Municipal libraries in Prague, Turin and Gothenburg (Sweden) launched services for clients in isolation, such as book packages to be picked up or delivered and book readings over the phone (Ibidb).

As lockdowns began to be lifted in May, June and July 2020, restrictions on large gatherings of unrelated people were often maintained, and many cultural institutions and activities were not able to resume in their normal manner. However, within the cultural sector, many alternative experiments, often supported by local and regional governments, emerged to try to provide a semblance of communality for those

participating in artistic and cultural events. One of these alternatives was a revival of the “drive-in” theatre, once popular, especially in North America, as a venue for cinema viewing, which was rapidly adapted by many musicians for socially-distanced concerts (Lhoq; Bernardo). The City of Milan, Italy even tested a bike version of the drive-in format, staging concerts and other cultural events in open spaces where both culture and nature could be safely enjoyed (Montalto et al., 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d). The City of Vilnius in Lithuania launched an “Aerocinema”, which staged its annual film festival in an airport drive-in (Ibidc). Artists and entrepreneurs were conscious that the drive-in experience was not an ideal way to enjoy a concert, but as one musician stated, “I kept hearing from people about how bad they needed this ... People have different expectations now. ... Before I would have never wanted to attend something like this myself, but now it’s the best show in town” (Lhoq, 2020).

However, despite the limitations of drive-in events, balcony concerts, and virtual museum tours, the sheer volume of cultural production, both digital and live, unleashed during the COVID-19 pandemic hints at the social value attached both to artistic expression and “ways of living together” and to the efforts that people will make to connect, both as artists and as art lovers (Person, 2020).

In a few countries, policy interventions were also made to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cultural institutions that reinforce society’s democratic fabric, such as local communications media. For example, in Canada, a package of support measures for the cultural sector included special measures to support Canadian magazines and community newspapers during the crisis. These included access to special tax credits for journalism organizations and the waiving of 2020–21 licence fees for broadcasters to provide financial relief during a period when advertising and other revenues had fallen (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2020a; Department of Canadian Heritage, 2020b).

In more general terms, a special report by UNESCO deplored the “disinfodemic” or “mass circulation of falsehoods that have spread as fast as the virus itself”, and suggested that increased support be given to professional journalism to counteract “media extinction” and the threat to democratic and human rights brought about by widespread disinformation disseminated through social media (2020. Journalism, 2020, p. 2).

#### 4. Concluding thoughts on culture and sustainability – what next?

The actions described above suggest that culture, the arts, heritage, and media played a unique role in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic – with economic, social and creative impacts that merited policy attention from all levels of government. The evidence suggests that cultural activities during the pandemic were highly valued, widely supported, and pursued resolutely despite the many obstacles placed in the way of both creators and consumers. But once the crisis has passed, what next? To use the hackneyed phrase that became common during the pandemic, what will be the “new normal” for the cultural sector? While policy initiatives launched by governments during the COVID-19 pandemic were needed and welcome, broader questions of public policy and creative practice will arise once the crisis has passed.

The broader questions are perhaps more clearly defined in the economic sphere than in other areas of cultural value. Issues related to creative value in a digital environment should be addressed, and have already been subject to intense scrutiny in many quarters. For example, in a report on culture in the digital age released by the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies at the height of the pandemic, Kulesz identified several themes that will need to inform future policies in this area. These include the economic sustainability of the culture value chain, skills and digital literacy, preservation and visibility of national cultural expressions, social inclusion, fundamental rights (such as freedom of expression), and the availability of data to map cultural information systems (Kulesz, 2020).

Questions of value loom large from this perspective, as social inclusion is closely tied to economic sustainability in the cultural sector. Fair compensation for intellectual property, as well as reasonable taxation of digital platforms, no matter their national origin, are fundamental to ensure that creators, legacy media, and domestic content are not marginalized. While these issues have begun to be addressed by national governments (see for example (Government of Canada, 202, 2020)) and international bodies (see, for example (2019 and 9 October., 2019)), they will become more urgent in the face of the changes that have been wrought in the creative sector by COVID-19.

With regard to culture’s social value, the responses are less apparent. However, taking a holistic perspective on culture’s role in sustainability, as suggested by Dessein et al. provides a more nuanced and compelling perspective on the role that culture plays in the social and sustainable development spheres, and of how it might be valued globally. Up until the new coronavirus struck, these issues have been theorized and discussed, but it was difficult to translate these speculations into actual observations, except at a very local level and in a circumscribed manner. However, the disruptive effect of COVID-19 at a global level has thrown culture’s role into the spotlight and has given researchers an opportunity to examine its impact through various lenses. This article is a very preliminary attempt to explore the economic, social and political aspects of that role as humanity confronted an unprecedented disturbance of global “ways of living together”. It suggests that culture, arts, heritage and media should be assigned a more prominent role in the “new normal” as the world plans its recovery from the pandemic.

#### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**M. Sharon Jeannotte:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Evidence curation, Resources, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Project administration.

#### Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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