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Critical feedback from artists: initial findings of the impact of the health crisis on the field of art and culture

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Our research project aims to study the impact of the Covid crisis on the professional cultural sector in the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region. To achieve this objective, the research team has joined forces with several stakeholders in a participatory process. Initial consultations with artists from various disciplines show that the crisis has affected the relationship to time and space in terms of the creative process and the relationship to audiences and inhabitants. It also reveals the need to rethink the organisation of the cultural system in order to better support artists and include them in the decision-making process.

KEYWORDS

Covid crisis, artists, impact, time space, re-organisation

Introduction

Financed by the Nouvelle Aquitaine regional authorities for a duration of 3 years (2021–2024), our research project aims to observe and analyse the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and its consequences on cultural and artistic activities, for those who work in this field, those who are involved in it on a voluntary basis, and those its content is addressed to. The objective is to bring to light and analyse the way in which the different categories of actors have worked and operated in order to maintain cultural and artistic activities, whether in terms of creation, dissemination or reception, in the various types of relational space in which they have been conducted: physical space, digital space, institutional space. The attention given to their actions, their testimonies and their processes will make it possible to stimulate reflection on contemporary cultural issues and to study their potentially innovative nature for the evolution of the sector. The productions that have emerged are also prisms through which it is possible to analyse our social ties and the role of art as an indicator of our relationship to the world (Simmel, 1988; Baudry, 2009).

Our main thesis is that the health crisis and its repercussions reveal and/or accelerate changes in the field of culture: the taking into account of people's cultural rights and participation, competition from mass culture, the impact of digital technology, new forms of cultural practices on- and off-line, environmental issues. . . (Donnat, 2007; Henry, 2014; Lucas, 2017; Cardon, 2019; Lombardo and Wolff, 2020).

In terms of methodology, the originality of the project consists in proposing a research process based on participation. Participatory research consists in associating non-scientific actors, citizens and or professionals, to the observation of data and knowledge production. By mobilizing different types of knowledge and expertise, it aims at developing appropriate solutions (Lamoureux, 2021) that will serve the community (Bergold and Thomas, 2012). We are currently working with professionals in the cultural sector—a theatre, a local community organisation, a cultural mediation association, a media library, a festival organizer, and artists' collectives—to build a common understanding of the crisis and its effects. Together we are defining and developing research protocols suited to different professional contexts and for dealing with specific issues. In a cross-sectional approach, questions and elements of analysis are shared and discussed within a common research space.

Current research in the field of arts and culture has so far focused on monitoring the crisis in terms of its economic impact on the professional sector (Département des études, de la prospective et des statistiques, 2021; GESAC/EY, 2021; Giorgi and Scott, 2022). Our research aims to provide qualitative insight into the crisis through the analysis of experiences and practices. Beyond this, the choice of conducting a participatory project should enable us to develop a shared knowledge of the pandemic period with the professionals in order to accompany them in the process of change and evolution of the sector.

In addition to this participatory process, more traditional methods are used by the researchers, namely, semi-structured interviews with cultural operators and their team in order to gather data on a broader spectrum that will feed the study conducted by the mixed research team (researchers and stakeholders).

This paper aims to report initial findings derived from interviews with artists conducted during the health crisis. This data is of particular importance in that it shows how the actors experienced this extraordinary period and reveals ongoing issues and transformation processes of the professional sector.

Indeed, the first stage of this research has consisted in gathering testimonies in order to record the individual experiences that have resulted from the disruption caused by the pandemic before they give way to more practical considerations. Collecting this shared experience in the time frame following the crisis when memories are still vivid, was of particular importance to the research as it points out the ongoing changes and/or the elements potentially leading to them. This collection process is part of a monographic study (Dufour et al., 1991) which, through the use of qualitative methodologies, aims to study what “a cultural or artistic job” consisted of during the first lockdown period. Indeed, in methodological terms, the goal of this research is to adopt a comprehensive approach (Weber, 1995; Watier, 2002).

To this end, group interviews were organized in partnership with the Nouvelle Aquitaine cultural Agency and UBIC, Bordeaux Montaigne University's Valorisation Unit, during the last lockdown period in France (3rd May–30th June 2021). They targeted a broad range of artists based in Nouvelle-Aquitaine from different fields: theatre, visual arts, danse, music, cinema, writing. These artists represented a diverse panel, both in terms of professions and fields of application: We opted for a multi-centric qualitative study in order to account for the heterogeneity of the experiences and to put this diversity to work by identifying the underlying common issues. 57 artists¹ participated in videoconference interview sessions between April and May 2021. The participants were questioned on how they felt about the crisis, how they responded to the challenges, how they adapted to the constraints in their creative work, and how they saw the future of their artistic activity.

These first collective sessions have enabled us to identify key issues raised by the health crisis that will be discussed and analysed in upcoming focus group sessions with the artists (Table 1).

The study of the economic impact of the health crisis shows that the French cultural sector was more impacted than any other sector but there is significant heterogeneity in how the effects were experienced, depending on the artistic field (Giorgi and Scott, 2022).

The performing artists in our panel were forced to stop their activity whereas visual artists and authors were able to continue working despite constraints. The French system of individual financial support, known as “the intermittence system,” was reinforced during the crisis and has benefitted performing artists whereas the former category of artists had to deal with the usual financial difficulties made more acute by the reduction of projects.

For many performing artists, being unable to perform for their audience seems to have led to a loss of sense and purpose, whereas for other categories of creators, isolation and remoteness could be experienced as an opportunity to invest the digital space for new projects or to develop new skills. Although ways of dealing with the situation can also be related to each individual's

TABLE 1 Research timeline.

April–May 2021	Initial consultations with artists
September 2021–June 2023	Individual and Focus group interviews
September 2023–June 2024	Data sharing and collective analysis
June 2024–November 2024	Dissemination and optimization of research results

¹ 32 performing artists, 12 visual artists, 8 cinema and audiovisual artists, 5 authors. Of which, 22 were intermittent employees, 20 under the author's status, 4 self-employed, 4 on long term contract.

own way of perceiving reality, the exchanges we had with the artists have brought to light common issues at a collective level.

The closure of cultural venues, interrupted or disrupted artistic activity, investment in the digital space: changes in cultural and artistic practices were observed during the health crisis, in all artistic disciplines.

The COVID pandemic appears to have caused an upheaval in practices both in terms of space and time. Interrelated in the process, space and time constitute both a constraint and an opportunity for change. On the one hand, the spatial-temporal disruption signifies loss of control, uncertainty, a limited power of action; on the other hand, it can foster reflexivity and lead to new perspectives.

Thus, the pandemic can be seen as having highlighted or accelerated the transformations that have been taking place in the artistic and cultural fields, and in so doing emphasizes the need to rethink time and space factors in the creative process and in the relationship with audiences and inhabitants, and to reconsider the role of artists in the cultural system.

A new relationship to time

Most of the artists in this research have placed the question of creative time at the heart of their comments and questions. After experiencing what many of them call a “*time of shock*,” they emphasize the extent to which the impact of the crisis on their artistic and creative activities has taken the form of a disruption of their relationship to time. By focusing on the way artists express their relationship to time, we wish to propose an analysis that takes into account the modulations and transformations of creative practices brought about by the temporal dimension of the crisis. In this analytical approach, the notion of time is seen as a framework that shapes the activities of artists (Ricoeur, 1983).

Regarding this issue, the crisis has brought to light two temporal categories: constrained time and new free time.

Constrained time

The first reason why artists experience a feeling of time pressure lies in the disruption caused by the crisis. The disorganisation of the sector has led to a feeling of loss of control over time. In the testimonies collected, this period is presented as a period marked by the interruption of activities, but also by an awareness of uncertainty about the future and a blurring of temporal reference points. Schedules and projects were rushed, postponements and cancellations had to be managed, the search for funding had to be made in a hurry . . . The time for creation was constrained and framed by the time of the crisis. This disturbed temporal experience gave rise to changes in projection: how does one project oneself into future when the near future is uncertain and when temporal

organisation is no longer under control? The artists reported feeling a lack of visibility of the situation and indecisiveness and also emphasized the extent to which this period gave rise to contradictory feelings: between the desire to act, to create, to move forward and the constraints imposed by the time of the crisis. The superimposition of the time of the crisis and the time of creation brings to the fore issues related to constraining, challenging and contradictory temporalities. In our analysis, we hypothesize that this temporal configuration, which was strongly characterized by uncertainty and an awareness of troubled times, present and future, reveals a problematic relationship to time that was already at work before the crisis and with which artists are confronted in their daily practices.

The second reason lies in the need, for many artists, to conduct several activities, a need which has emerged in recent years due to income uncertainty (Gouyon and Patureau, 2013).

Forced to carry out several activities in order to make a living, artists are “*caught up in time*” and no longer have enough time to create. Artistic activity is also “*competing*” with dissemination and mediation functions that considerably reduces creative time. Artists’ testimonies have underlined that much of their activity is now devoted to meeting institutional constraints (administrative, cultural, financial). The organisation of their work, based on the “*trptych creation/production/distribution*” seems to be questioned. The time spent trying to “*fit a project into an imposed system*” results in a lack of time for creation. In the artists’ comments, the idea emerged that this crisis has highlighted the need to change this mode of organisation, in order to find space and time for creation. The desire to regain control of time is therefore at the heart of their testimonies.

The pandemic has added to this the need to be present and active on the internet, which implies a substantial investment. Thus, in a context of crisis marked by increasing precariousness and a lack of financial means, creation time becomes a small part of their overall activity.

New free time

For many artists, the pandemic year, although complicated in many ways, has given rise to “a new time”: a time to reflect on their projects (past and future), to complete projects that had been put on hold, or to come up with new ideas and implement them. Some of them reported that this new “free” time had led them to reflect on their creative process. One visual artist wondered “*For what and for whom do we create?*” The question of the audience and the artist’s relationship with them seems to be one of the subjects that emerged from this period of reflection. One theatre director said: “*During that period, I asked myself a lot of questions. Like how can we get closer to the audience?*” The distance that was imposed between artists and their audience seems to have also led to a focus on venues and how they operate. The theatre director told us how

the pandemic period gave him the idea of working on smaller performance projects and to bring them to places where culture was not easily accessible (countryside, poor neighbourhoods). One performing artist described how the question of proximity to the audience was also at the heart of her reflection on her creative process. The development of a small project, she said, creates intimacy and helps to restore meaning. She also emphasized the importance of moving away from a strategy of big shows with a large number of spectators, and of fostering connection and closeness. The desire to reconnect with the public was also central to a project developed by an artist involved in the performing arts: for 3 days, a “space-time” was set up in the city of Bordeaux to collect the dreams of passers-by. The artist also emphasized the extent to which this new-found time had made it possible to produce small, easy-to-implement creations. This feeling was shared by another artist who explained how she tried new forms of creation during that period. She set up small performances in the public space which were filmed *in situ*. She explained that this had allowed her to rediscover the pleasure of creating quick art projects that could be produced and implemented within a short time. This new approach seemed to her to be the opposite of the lengthy processes that her previous projects usually involved. Reflection on how to develop a community-based culture is not entirely new in the arts sector but the exceptional pandemic period has provided more time to develop it further and has made it more prevalent and urgent.

The crisis has indeed generated a sense of urgency that has led artists to question the profound meaning of their artistic approach in light of society’s transformation. “*What message do I want to convey*” when time seems to be running out and existential priorities are emerging? Some of them talked about how this period led them to question the role that an artist plays in society. One author told us that the lockdown was not a time for creation but for listening. It was now more important for her to “*take the pulse*” of society, to listen to the experiences of others, to hear what was being said and talked about in society.

Other artists also emphasized that taking time for listening was necessary for engaging in a creative process. One of the actors explained that this “*physical and psychological*” availability was one of the characteristics of the artist’s work and as such was an integral part of the creative process (Nicolas-Le Strat, 1998; Jedy, 1999; Jedy, 2011).

One of the artists interviewed perceived this time of “*nothingness*,” of “*emptiness*” as a time for observing the social environment. It is a necessary step that must come prior to the time of creation so that the artists can put into words, give shape, or stage their observations of society. In this approach, the role of the artist is reminiscent of that of the mediator: the function of the artist lies in his or her power to reveal social issues and the collective social imagination (Jedy, 1999). In this perspective, the role of the artist is inseparable from a social act: that of restoring, translating and interpreting the problems of society in a sensitive form (Bourdieu, 1992). It is in this sense that Tim

Ingold proposes to draw an analogy between art and anthropology and, more precisely, between the creative process of artists and the research process. According to Ingold, art can have an anthropological dimension when the artist, engaged in a sensitive relationship with the social world, produces a work which, for the public, bares a relationship to knowledge (Ingold, 2013).

The question of artistic creation, as a social act, is therefore inseparable from the question of transmission. Indeed, the pandemic period seems to have given rise to this question among artists: “*Why create if your work cannot be transmitted?*”. Because the crisis temporarily distanced audiences from places of culture, artists were led to reflect on the forms of transmission of art and culture, which can make sense in a social context marked by the dematerialization of works of art. Thus, it is important to place the notion of transmission in a double dynamic: both as a movement that ensures a link between the artist and the public and as a movement that allows for the establishment of a relationship with the work being disseminated (Davallon, 2006).

Thus, a tension is perceptible between the feeling of having experienced this “*return to oneself*” as an opportunity to confront one’s desires and draw new energy from them, to become aware of the social role of the artist, and the feeling of not being able to move forward, of being stuck.

The relationship to cultural venues: rethinking spaces and artists’ mobility

Artists have expressed their difficulty in creating art in the absence of suitable spaces: a major constraint was that interiors were too small and unsuitable for their artistic practices.

Some of them found a solution in moving to rural areas, as the latter offered artists facilities that were better suited to the pandemic situation, such as larger work and exhibition spaces.

These newcomers have discovered opportunities offered by rural spaces which artists that were already residing in those areas have been exploring for some time. Indeed, the attractiveness of the countryside for artists has been growing for several years (Delfosse, 2011). They move to rural areas in order to find the space they cannot have in urban areas, as well as work opportunities, non-dedicated places to create, as opposed to studios or cultural facilities, (landscape sites, heritage sites, farm buildings, etc.), new sources of inspiration and creation as well as new relationships with the public. In a context of widespread criticism of urban life (metropolitan congestion, air, and noise pollutions, artificialization and loss of connection with nature), recently accentuated by the experience of lockdown, artists are also sensitive to the benefits and positive representations of the rural world: the quality of the living environment, proximity to nature, closer social relations with the inhabitants (Delfosse and Georges, 2013).

One director in the audiovisual sector described how his view of the village he moved to during the first lockdown has changed since. This period, he said, “*has given me time to think about the challenges associated with the creative process in the public space and the relationship with the inhabitants.*” Today, he is involved in a creation project that promotes a close relationship with the inhabitants of the village, the farmers and other local actors. According to him, it is the rural environment that allows for relationships of proximity.

Cultural resources are increasingly identified as driving development in rural areas, and the presence of artists is perceived as a factor of attractiveness, a means of creating an image and a narrative for the area, their contribution can also help to enliven and enhance the area.

This desire of artists to invest in rural spaces should lead us to question what types of relationships to rural space they forge, the effects of their presence in those areas and how artists contribute to reorganizing the public’s relationship to art and culture, but also social relationships and spatialities in the rural world. This also implies thinking with artists about how to accompany them in this shift in creative activity, the types of support—financial or otherwise—to be mobilized, as distance from networks and institutions can be an obstacle to the development of their production and consequently their career. Just like art renews itself through its margins (Becker, 1985; Becker, 1988), the renewal of territories may thus mark the renewal of artistic creation.

The artists’ reflection about space has also focused more broadly on the need to reconsider the question of venues for creation and dissemination: facilitating artist’s mobility, putting a variety of venues at their disposal, linking city and countryside, reinventing exhibition formats outside dedicated venues or in mixed venues... were some of the proposals made by both visual and performing artists.

This implies reconsidering the spatiality of the creation process as well as artists’ mobility. Itinerancy, which is characteristic of artists residing in rural areas due to a lack of dedicated cultural facilities and venues, could prove to be a pragmatic and flexible response to recurring difficulties caused by the lack of creative space and the rise of property costs. Organising the reflection at a political level between urban and rural communities and institutional actors could make it possible to develop the links and spatial modalities that are necessary today in an interconnected world where the borders between the different types of territories are becoming blurry and lifestyles more uniform. This could also contribute to meeting the need expressed by artists to reconfigure the relationship to time in order to find more time for creation. This implies profound change in spatial references as well as in the methods used for organizing the creation and distribution chain, but it also responds to current sociological changes and lifestyles (Marchal and Stébé, 2022), as well as to the aspirations of

artists and inhabitants for a quality living environment to which art and culture make an essential contribution.

Finding one’s place in digital space

Faced with the closure of venues for creation and art dissemination, artists have invested in communicating with their public through social media or, more globally, through digital technology, in order to create and disseminate their work and above all, to continue to exist in public space. Thus, digital space has emerged as an opportunity to continue the activity; however, there is often a lack of knowledge and understanding of that space among artists, which also led to frustration and misuse.

Artists reported on stimulating attempts to manage various physical, virtual or hybrid spaces. Visual artists and professionals in the audiovisual sector in particular have explained how digital technology has enabled them to maintain their activity and stay in touch with peers.

Lockdown has made it necessary for artists to familiarize themselves with digital tools and how they work; “*I progressed,*” “*It pushed me 3 years forward,*” which was beneficial to the activity. A singer trained himself in streaming and digital tools. Another singer talked about how he used video to stay in touch with the amateur singers he works with. A visual artist told us how he used Instagram to continue his sales activities and used the Internet to launch a fundraising campaign in order to make a documentary he had wanted to make for a long time.

With pragmatism, some of them insisted on the fact that the use of the tool was now essential, “*unavoidable because it is the world we now live in.*” For young artists especially, digital technology also represents an essential means of communication for making oneself known. On a more personal level, digital tools serve as a palliative to isolation and a remedy for anxiety: “*It saved my life,*” “*I took the digital pill to calm myself down,*” a visual artist explained, underlining the role of digital technology in maintaining social links.

These new users stand out from the existing digital artists who have made their mark on the virtual space, which they also use for technical support, and as a creative and social tool (Fourmentaux, 2011). For these artists, the Internet represents a workshop and an exhibition space (ibid). They master the codes, the language, the functionalities, which they can use to their advantage in their creations (bypassing computer code, hijacking interactive software applications, creating artistic viruses. . .). Artists of the Net Art movement have demonstrated the potential of the internet to generate interconnectivity and interaction between artists and receivers. At the same time, digital technologies reinforce “*le sacre de l’amateur*” (Flichy, 2010), by providing users with the means, tools and spaces to develop their skills and knowledge and disseminate their creative work. As well as being dialogue spaces to exchange with family,

friends and other users, digital social networks have now become spaces for the display and reproduction of digital works by a wide audience. The use of digital technology reveals a desire for connection, a need to communicate with others, which confirms an “aesthetic of collectivity” (Turki, 2020) specific to the Internet.

Although the crisis has revealed to some artists the potential of the digital space and encouraged them to use digital tools both in the creative process and in project design, a majority of them perceive digital technology as an imposed constraint. Its potential appears limited in that it is considered by some as just another way of exhibiting their work. For many, it was above all a palliative used “to occupy the field” so as not to lose contact with the public, and “to not be forgotten”; and it also provides temporary alternative creation and performance spaces to artistic teams.

As for performance artists, they, above all, seek to stay connected with their public. These artists insisted that interaction in virtual space could not replace real face-to-face interaction: “There is no such thing as theatre on the Internet, it is something else.” Because creation is perceived as fundamentally involving a relation to the public in a physical and sensitive way, virtual space, and the substitute for relationship it provides gives rise to a strong sense of rejection: “I refuse to adapt.” Artists experienced a kind of culture shock which they perceived as a betrayal of their own values—“I do not exist without an audience”—a mediocre way of “selling oneself for free to continue to exist.”

Indeed, what defines performing arts is the co-presence of artists and public². Therefore, the broadcasting of performances on the Internet breaks with this fundamental principle and reinforces artists’ distance from the public. But it is important to note that “remote theatre” is nothing new and that the practice of “theatrophone” developed by Graham Bell in the 1870s, for example, structured a form of regular access to theatre for 50 years (Bauchard, 2021). Online experiments were conducted—as some English theatres had done—prior to the crisis with the aim of responding to the new cultural practices of audiences (ibid).

Modes of interaction and sociability frameworks exist in the virtual space, but artists cannot use them efficiently unless they have a good knowledge and understanding of the tools available (blog, forums, digital social networks). Likewise, artists and cultural operators in the performing arts remain unfamiliar with the culture of digital mediation and are more used to traditional forms of mediation based on face-to-face encounters and exchanges. The *hic et nunc* and “life on the screen” have formatted creative activity during the pandemic period and have been perceived by many as injunctions that

professionals unfamiliar with this format of aesthetic communication have found difficult to comply with.

Beyond the variables related to discipline or age, one’s relationship to digital technology raises objective technical questions, primarily related to skills and expertise. Creating art on a digital medium implies mastering specific modes of production and distribution, their techniques, purposes and effects. The fact that one has not learned or does not have the necessary skills to use these tools generates a feeling of powerlessness, of being forced to use them, and in turn can lead to a reaction of aversion. Beyond the technical aspects, designing quality digital creations and communications requires a combination of skills and expertise, but also the creation of partnerships and the mobilization of financial resources, which an individual cannot achieve alone.

Secondly, this raises legal and remuneration questions. These are familiar issues, but the pandemic has given them more prominence and made them unavoidable. Artists have expressed frustration and even anger about the use of their productions on the Internet as well as a fear that they might lose control over video distribution. One of their concerns is that their work might not be sufficiently remunerated and could benefit broadcasting channels instead.

However, the pandemic has aroused an interest among the public for a new cultural offer on the internet (Jonchéry and Lombardo, 2020). There is growing awareness among professionals that virtual space offers opportunities to develop new artistic propositions and digital narrations, to create new forms of mediation, all of which could not only enhance and enrich the work of artists and the missions of cultural operators, but also revitalize their connection with the public.

Structuring and reorganizing the sector: putting the artist back at the heart of the system

Artists share a desire to better promote their work: to disseminate more visibly what they do, how they do it, what skills and abilities they mobilise in their artistic practices, and what they bring to society. They believe that a major effort to promote artistic practice to a wide audience is necessary and should be a priority in the months and years to come.

Our exchanges with artists have focused on the issue of collective decision-making and how to involve artists. The discussion was political in nature and was based on the premise that artists were, more than ever, the “forgotten ones in this crisis.” They felt that they had been “forgotten” in terms of support systems: whereas cultural structures, venues and operators benefited from financial support from the State and/or had their subsidies maintained without having to expand their activities, artists experienced even greater levels of precariousness.

² The legal definition of live performance in France has been established since 1999 and stipulates the physical co-presence of performers and audience.

It was also noted that young people, starting in the profession, faced important obstacles and sometimes had to give up. Several cases of career abandonment among artists of all ages were pointed out, which represents a failure and alerts us to the lack of support artists received during that period.

This lack of support for artists is seen not only as a sign of ignorance of the realities faced by creators, but also of the contempt in which they feel they are held and, more generally, of the contempt in which the artistic function is held. One scriptwriter has strongly denounced the way in which institutions keep artists on the sidelines of decision-making. On the one hand, the State or local authorities do not consult artists enough, and on the other hand, regional and departmental cultural agencies have neither heard nor accompanied artists, even though these agencies were created to serve the function of representing and associating all the actors, including artists.

Finally, many artists have highlighted the need to rethink the links between creation/production/dissemination. The majority of the artists interviewed insisted on the idea that the Covid crisis had brought to light an organisational issue that was already present and which they felt needed to be discussed. Some mentioned the difficulties linked to the permanent partitioning between institutions, operators, programmers, artists and companies. They report being generally confronted with more or less porous and frictional layers that lead to difficulties in the daily implementation of projects and criticize a constraining organisational logic that formats the process and inhibits creative risk-taking. One artist has reported that she spends a lot of time adapting her projects to distributors and broadcasters' evaluation and reading grids, and that she regretted the lack of meetings and exchanges with institutional decision makers. In her opinion, more interaction with institutional actors could help to give them a "sensitive sense" of artistic projects, which in turn could lead distributors to take more risk and include atypical and innovative projects into their programming. Another artist agreed and stated that the Covid crisis may have made it possible to rethink the relations between programmers and creators and to think about how to take into consideration the importance of a "space-time" of freedom necessary for creation.

For many of the participants, the pandemic has revealed a crisis of confidence in the role of artists, with the underlying question of what kind of society we want for the future. To fight this crisis of confidence, artists call for a real process of co-construction of cultural action and policy by better taking their needs and realities into account. They ask for new collective structures and decision-making methods.

Conclusion

For the representatives of the art world in our panel, the health crisis has played a revealing role in the world of art as in society as a whole. The pandemic has generated unexpected benefits (new free time which has been a source of reflection and innovation) and new opportunities (discovering the

potential of digital technology, and of rural areas; experimenting new creative formats), but it has also had deeply ambivalent consequences, in that it has resulted in individual and collective psychological, organisational and professional destabilization.

The COVID crisis has highlighted the structural difficulties of a fragile artistic and cultural sector and has revealed sharp differences in treatment between operators/cultural actors and independent artists. Artists have felt misunderstood and poorly supported and thus have felt violently affected by the crisis.

These first observations, although they were conducted in one specific French region, seem to reflect a general situation, and alert us to the situation of creators, their fears, and their needs, both in terms of technical support and of recognition and valuation of their work. Beyond this, what is pointed out is the need to collectively reflect on the place of creation in society and the role we wish artists to play in the transformation of society.

The reflections on "meaning" that have been expressed in the debates must be heard. While they raise philosophical or ethical questions, they also highlight concrete problems and call for tangible measures:

- The need to rethink the place and role of creation and dissemination venues by giving greater priority to the possibility of mobility, of having several venues at one's disposal, of thinking in terms of a network (town/country), of reinventing formats such as off-site exhibitions, or in mixed venues. . .
- The issue of valuing and disseminating artists' work: how can their work be made more visible and how does one highlight its social contribution?
- The question of remuneration for artistic productions. It is no longer just a question of working for symbolic "valuation," but of (re)thinking the way in which we give an economic and monetary value to artistic production.
- The challenge of the transition to a digital environment calls for an acculturation of the sector and requires an increase in technical and legal skills. From this perspective, the need for digital training must be met.
- The political challenge associated with the necessity to develop structures and collective methods in order to give artists a more active and decision-making role.

Finally, and this is also the challenge of this ongoing study, the initial results highlight the importance of understanding the frameworks of artistic creation and its dissemination by exploring the spatial and temporal issues underlying contemporary social logics: creating, transmitting and disseminating are indeed understood in the light of a more global transformation of the social uses of space and territorial

practices. This “urban world” (Lussault, 2017) in which we live is inseparable from the emergence of spatial and temporalities forms that may prove decisive in the establishment of theoretical and practical frameworks for thinking art and the role of the artist in their social link dimension.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by SM, Université Bordeaux Montaigne. The

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Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.