

# PLAN TO SUPPORT THE CULTURAL ACTORS OF THE CITY OF BRUSSELS



## AGENDA 2030 - SDGs



## CULTURE 21: ACTIONS - COMMITMENTS

2. HERITAGE, DIVERSITY AND CREATIVITY
5. CULTURE AND ECONOMY
9. GOVERNANCE OF CULTURE

SUPPORT, MONITORING, INSTITUTIONAL,  
EMPLOYMENT, DIVERSITY, BOTTOM-UP,  
ECONOMIC, CULTURE, COVID

# 1. Brussels and culture

Brussels is both the Belgian capital and one of the top European cities. Indeed, according to the IOM, it is the second-most cosmopolitan city in the world. In fact, 62% of its inhabitants are immigrants and more than a hundred languages are spoken here in addition to French and Dutch. It is a mosaic city where 180,000 people live together in a culture of diversity in an area of just 32 square kilometres. It is home to 57 museums, 150 art galleries, 21 libraries, 15 theatres, 8 cultural centres, a dozen concert venues, as well as cinema, dance, and circus spaces, as well as places of residence and creation.

However, after March 2020 its cultural and artistic sector suffered immensely. According to SABAM, the Belgian cultural sector saw an 87% decline in revenue from cultural events. Music festivals lost 99% of their ticket revenues. According to Brussels Museums, museum attendance dropped 58%. On top of this, there was an unclear timetable for the future, difficult rules for operators to follow, mass psychological and emotional fatigue from the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment, and layoffs.

The support plan arose from an impetus by the Councillor for Culture and Tourism, who decided to set up a "New Deal" for culture. Faced with an unprecedented and exceptional circumstances of the pandemic, cities had to propose concrete, rapid, and effective solutions to support sectors threatened by COVID-19, such as the cultural sector.

Brussels therefore decided to offer direct financial support to project leaders. Although this is not a municipal authority, the city wished to provide an immediate solution, with the aim to encourage the creation of cultural projects and events and to support local artists.

The city's cultural policy was geared towards vulnerable audiences in order to reduce social inequalities via a mediation program, pricing policies, participatory projects with neighbourhood housing, schools, and sports centres, among others. A special effort was made to implement a gender equality charter for cultural issues. A program for training, coaching, and meetings was to be set up to educate cultural professionals on these issues.



**THE OBJECTIVE OF THE PROGRAM IS TO PROVIDE DIRECT, CONCRETE, AND UNRESTRICTED FINANCIAL AID TO CULTURAL PROFESSIONALS BY RELYING ON THE REGION'S INSTITUTIONS AND WORKS.**

## 2. Project goals and implementation

### 2.1. Main goal and specific objectives

The objective of the program is to provide direct, concrete, and unrestricted financial aid to cultural professionals by relying on the region's institutions and works.

### 2.2. Project development

#### **Phase 1: March 2020 - 137,221€: support for innovative projects**

- Funding YouTube platform for hospitalized children
- Support for activities in neighbourhood housing outside the downtown area
- Live streaming platform for DJs from Brussels and Europe



- Support for a jazz festival
- Platform #culturetogether: videos dedicated to cultural actors
- "Social distancing": digital compilation by a club
- "Support your locals": livestreaming platform for Brussels artists
- Bruxelles Ma Belle: 7 video performances in 7 cultural places. Two approaches: to highlight spaces and to help the greatest number of sector stakeholders find work
- Recording and broadcasting of organ concerts in 5 European cities including Brussels.

**Phases 2 & 3: May 2020 and September 2020 - 300,000€: support for artistic and technical staff**

These phases took place during the beginning of the pandemic when cultural activity was almost nonexistent. The city asked fifteen cultural venues such as museums, theatres, art centres, and concert halls, among others, to propose cultural projects. There was an allocated budget of 7,500€ per venue in order to support culture sector employment.

The goal was not to strengthen cultural venues but to support professionals. For phase 2, 22 stakeholders benefited from the action plan for 22 projects. For phase 3, 15 operators received support for 18 projects.

**Phase 4: November 2020 - 51,620€: support for innovative projects**

For this new confinement, Brussels supported 7 new cultural projects adapted to the context: concerts in lines, meeting of the inhabitants from their balconies, realization of a fresco to support and thank the nursing staff...

**Phase 5: July & August 2020: 105,000€ in additional funding: a cultural & participative summer**

Hello Summer is an event organized by the city every year. The program takes place during the 2 months of summer, with concerts, sports, dance, cartoons for children, shows, theatre, folklore shows, and exhibitions all held at different public sites. A total of 625 artists + 21 organizations + 100 staff + 20 technicians took part in the event. Over 45 days, there were 186 events held at 37 places, with an additional budget of 105,000€ used to meet the COVID-19 health measures, and to increase the number of events.

**Phase 6: January 2021: 65,000€: support for the nightlife and museum guides**

**Phase 7 : January 2022: 69,550€ for innovative projects**

The city has continued to support innovative projects such as the Festival of Arab Revolutions by Itinérance asbl, the Music for All project at the Atomium, the Urban Poetry Festival, and the Circus on the Balcony for young audiences and families.



**THE SUPPORT PLAN AROSE FROM AN IMPETUS BY THE COUNCILLOR FOR CULTURE AND TOURISM, WHO DECIDED TO SET UP A “NEW DEAL” FOR CULTURE.**

## 3. Impacts

### 3.1. Direct impacts

This action plan has had a positive impact and has provided direct financial support. More than 900 cultural professionals have been paid, 72 cultural facilities have participated in the action plan, and 723,000 € have been given. In addition, project leaders were encouraged to propose projects outside the usual framework of their activities. The proposed scheme was focused on “action” both here and now. Some of these new initiatives have proven to offer genuine added value and have been continued.

### 3.2. Assessment

- The calls for projects were sent to a limited number of stakeholders, and 100% of those submitted proposals. None were refused.
- The project leaders submitted their supporting documents, and 95% of the supporting documents submitted were related to employment.
- The participating venues evaluated the system according to 3 criteria: usefulness of the budget (100% YES); constraint of the proposed framework (100% NO); and possibility of execution without the aid (86% NO).

### 3.3. Key factors

- Step-by-step support plan adapted to each phase of the pandemic: quarantine, open, relaxed rules, etc.
- Venues that allowed projects to proceed without additional funds.
- Flexible system: selection of operators (100% of the selected projects), simple presentation of the project(s), and supporting documents at the end of the project
- No restrictions: formats, artistic disciplines, number of projects supported per venue, and objectives
- No particular targets: no particular audience.



**THE CITY PLANS TO ORGANIZE MORE SUPPORT PLANS LIKE THIS ONE BY CREATING GRASSROOTS PROGRAMS.**

### **3.4. Continuity**

The city plans to organize more support plans like this one by creating grassroots programs. The objective is to gather the opinions of cultural operators about their needs, wants, and challenges, and thereby avoid calls for public projects that are energy-consuming, offer no guarantee for success, too rigid in structure, and that do not always meet the sector's needs.

## **4. Further information**

Brussels was a candidate for the fifth UCLG Mexico City – Culture 21 International Award (February - June 2022). The jury for the award drew up its final report in September of 2022, and requested that the UCLG Committee on Culture promote this project as one of the good practices implemented under Agenda 21 for culture.

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