

Alliance for

Socially
Engaged
Arts

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

CONSTELLATIONS OF



C H A N G E

SOCIALLY ENGAGED ARTS
ORGANISATIONS ACROSS EUROPE

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INTRODUCTION

Constellations of Change is a new report from The Alliance for Socially Engaged Arts, bringing the field of socially engaged arts into sharper focus, celebrating its diversity and articulating its transformative potential and far-reaching impact. The report concludes with a set of recommendations for the field to thrive, aimed at policymakers and funders at a local, national, and EU level.

This advocacy toolkit is designed to help you leverage the report for advocacy at these three levels. You'll find a summary of the key findings, recommendations for tangible actions that can be taken to ensure the field is supported and resourced, and an overview of the field's impact. There are also a number of social posts you can use to define and advocate for the field, policy briefs you can use to communicate its value with funders and policymakers, and specific examples of socially engaged arts organisations across Europe.

NARRATIVE

We're in a moment of growing inequality, social isolation, ecological crisis, heightened polarisation and declining institutional trust. Socially engaged arts (SEA) are playing a unique role in translating these global challenges into local action, tapping into creativity to help communities come together, address systemic problems and imagine a better future.

SEA organisations offer a transformative approach to social change, collaborating with communities to respond to complex lived realities. They create spaces where people can reflect together, deepen mutual understanding, navigate complexity, solve problems and shape new collective identities. This ultimately fosters agency, democratises culture, and redefines art's potential for aesthetic, social and structural impact.

Co-creation with communities lies at the heart of socially engaged arts. Rather than producing work about communities, practitioners co-develop creative responses with communities, rooted in their needs, lived experience and collective aspirations. They not only respond to social challenges, but actively reshape the conditions in which those challenges emerge. Through participatory methods, they surface and reconfigure power dynamics, enabling communities to directly influence the systems that affect them.

The diverse nature of SEA means the practice isn't limited to a single sector or public service, instead addressing challenges across health, education, migration, democracy, climate, displacement, conflict, and more. But while governments, funders and institutions recognise the value of social cohesion, SEA remains under-recognised and under-resourced. Within the European Union, cultural spending at large is on average 0.5% of GDP – a stat that hasn't moved since 2014. As such, many of these organisations face fragile funding conditions, without the systems in place to fully reflect the complexity of their impact.

This report, then, serves two purposes. First, it recognises the broad and varied impact of the many socially engaged artists and organisations across Europe, including their potential to:

- **Build inclusive social relationships and trust**
- **Enable participation, civic agency, and democratic engagement**
- **Foster reflection, social imagination, and systemic thinking**
- **Strengthen individual and collective agency**
- **Generate knowledge, learning, and cultural ecosystems**
- **Support migration, exile, and post-conflict recovery**
- **Support wellbeing, health, and resilience**
- **Transform space, place, and local environments**
- **Enable environmental awareness and action**
- **Influence institutions and systemic change**

Second, it makes the case for SEA not just as short-term cultural projects, but as essential and adaptable social infrastructure uniquely capable of changing the way everyone, everywhere sees the world around them.

ABOUT THE REPORT

METHODOLOGY

This report is the most comprehensive European mapping of socially engaged arts organisations to date, driven by insight and input from over 1,000 organisations across 39 countries within the field, combining data analysis, case studies, interviews, surveys and policy analysis across Europe.

KEY FINDINGS

The findings demonstrate that socially engaged arts, a growing and interdisciplinary field driven by artists and communities, contribute significantly to social cohesion, participation, wellbeing, democratic practice and systems change, despite remaining under-recognised and under-resourced.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report includes a host of recommendations for policymakers and funders at the local, national, and EU level, that if met, will pave the way for this field of practice to meet its fullest potential.

KEY FINDINGS

[Download key findings.](#)**1****The majority of SEA organisations are grassroots non-profits with modest budgets.**

SEA organisations have been on the rise since the late 1990s, which coincides with SEA being seen as a practice in scholarship, as well as its increasing recognition in policy, its integration into mainstream arts programming, and the formation of the Alliance. But many organisations in the field still operate with limited resources, exposing a need for more sustainable investment models.

2**SEA is an interdisciplinary field that responds to community needs and desires.**

SEA combines multiple artforms, participatory methodologies and cross-sector collaborations. This way of working positions SEA organisations as valuable partners in the delivery of social policy, democratic innovation and frontline public services, while contributing to the democratisation of culture by putting power in the hands of the communities themselves.

3**Artists play multiple roles in SEA organisations.**

Alongside community members, artists are crucial to the intellectual, artistic and political development of the field. They aren't just collaborators, but leaders, board members and researchers, too.

4**Communities are involved at every level of SEA activity.**

There's a shift from communities simply participating in arts activities to actively making decisions about them and even initiating them. 85% of surveyed organisations co-create artistic work with communities, and 38% on average involve communities in organisational governance.

5**SEA interventions are working to reverse years of damage.**

The artistic process at the heart of SEA organisations supports personal and collective wellbeing, learning and agency, creating safe spaces that encourage self-expression and restore agency. They also connect communities with public services, local authorities, cultural spaces, policymakers, and funders. These practices are crucial if we want to rebuild social infrastructure damaged by polarisation, discrimination and declining trust in public institutions.

6

SEA creates the conditions for systemic change.

The function of SEA organisations is moving beyond simply producing cultural value to enabling social, civic and ecological systems to operate and adapt. This impact catalyses change at personal, relational and structural levels, meaning it addresses the root causes of social and environmental challenges on multiple fronts.

7

Evaluation frameworks aren't capturing SEA's social impact.

Practitioners, academics, policymakers, and funders emphasise the need for creativity to address complex social challenges including wellbeing, social cohesion, environmental sustainability, and economic stability. But research tells us that the best way to capture the impact of SEA – and to evolve its impact – is through qualitative, embedded, community- and context-specific evaluation methodologies. Current approaches don't do this, even though SEA organisations are receptive to collaborating with funders to evolve more nuanced and collaborative approaches.

8

There is a persistent gap between policy and implementation.

Transnational and national governments increasingly acknowledge the power of participatory arts to create change, but their policy intentions rarely evolve into implementation strategies or funding frameworks. This prevents SEA organisations from benefiting even when policies endorse their value.

9

European funding for SEA organisations is unevenly distributed.

SEA organisations exist between cultural and social funding systems, often neither prioritised within arts funding nor fully integrated into social service provision. As it stands, the SEA funding landscape is characterised not by a unified European funding landscape, but by a highly diverse matrix of public and private sources.

10

Political and socio-economic instability threatens SEA work.

From funding cuts, economic austerity to corruption, political censorship and threats in authoritarian contexts. Despite this, SEA organisations often actively hold spaces for resistance and critical thinking in these contexts, making them even more vulnerable to harmful consequences. This tension calls for solidarity movements that can support SEA organisations operating in precarity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

[Download recommendations.](#)

RECOGNISE

1

Advocate for a clear and shared definition of SEA. The definition and framework in the report can serve as a starting point to define SEA in clear, agreed-upon terms and, in turn, better inform current and future policy.

2

Name SEA explicitly in policies, research, advocacy and funding programmes. Create coherence across policies and frameworks by grouping participatory and community-led arts activity under the SEA umbrella.

3

Shape policies that recognise the ways SEA contribute to social change. Acknowledge the transversal, cross-sectoral and systemic ways that creative expression and cultural rights enable personal and social transformation.

4

Recognise the hybrid role of SEA artists. Improve the conditions for artists to function safely and effectively as mediators and facilitators, including fair payment, social protection systems, access to professional development, adequate time to work with communities, and a specific job category to enable monitoring that reports the impact of SEA artists.

RESOURCE

5

Close the policy–action gap. Create policies that align the potential of community-led artistic activity with implementation planning, ensuring intentions translate into opportunities for the field to expand its influence.

6

Diversify funding logic. Shift from short-term project funding to multi-year, trust-based funding that targets the various needs of SEA development and community collaboration.

7

Provide capacity-building infrastructure. Support the professionalisation of SEA organisations and practitioners, the transference of SEA methodologies into the wider cultural sector, and the role of intermediaries – hubs, labs, platforms, networks – in monitoring and advocating for the sustainability and quality of SEA practices.

EMBED

8

Treat SEA as core social infrastructure and embed in policy. Integrate SEA across all areas of social and environmental development – health, education, environment, youth, migration, and urban development strategies – and encourage collaboration between social services and SEA organisations to improve delivery and innovation.

9

Channel community-based collective intelligence. Collaborate with SEA organisations and communities through participatory governance structures to shape policy, funding programmes and criteria.

MEASURE

10

Redefine “cultural participation”. Redefine cultural participation from consumption of culture to engagement with and co-creation of culture, and make sure this is reflected in the monitoring of cultural participation, so that evidence for SEA participation can be built alongside standard cultural participation metrics.

11

Co-create SEA evaluation frameworks and metrics. Align frameworks with the lived experiences of communities, using context-specific metrics and qualitative, iterative evaluation models that are embedded in the artistic process to measure SEA’s complex social impact.

CONNECT

12

Encourage collaboration between SEA organisations and wider social and cultural sectors. Level the playing field between organisations, funders and policymakers to improve exchange and cohesiveness, enabling multi-stakeholder processes that address policy-action gaps and create transformative infrastructures.

13

Create alliances with SEA academics and research institutes. Build evaluation, research and knowledge creation partnerships, stay informed on best practices and emerging theories, and work together to identify priorities for field-growing research that can address some of the recommendations in this report.

IMPACT AREAS OF SOCIALLY ENGAGED ARTS

[Download impact areas.](#)

- **Build inclusive relationships**
- **Enable civic engagement**
- **Foster reflection, and systemic thinking**
- **Strengthen individual and collective agency**
- **Generate knowledge and cultural ecosystems**
- **Support migration and post-conflict recovery**
- **Support wellbeing, health, and resilience**
- **Transform local environments**
- **Enable environmental awareness and action**
- **Influence institutions and systemic change**

SOCIAL POSTS

[Download all social posts and view accompanying captions.](#)

Constellations of Change social media posts

To support your advocacy efforts, we've included a host of static social media assets that can be posted on your social media channels.

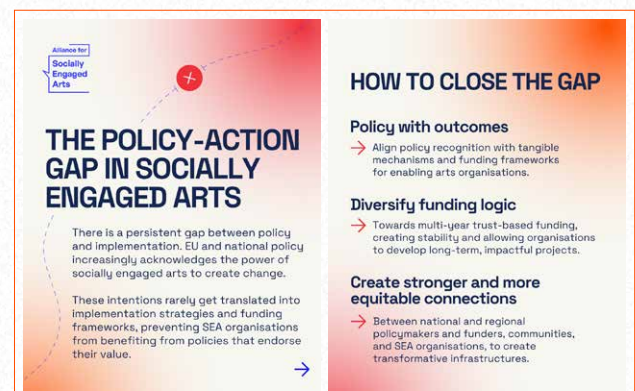
Some of these assets are designed to be standalone social posts, while others are intended to be posted as multi-slide carousels.

Included alongside the social media assets is sample caption copy for each post, which can be replicated or adjusted to match your organisation's tone of voice.

Please click the link at the top to download the social media assets and captions.

The available social posts are:

1. What are socially engaged arts?
2. What does Constellations of Change reveal about socially engaged arts across Europe? 10 key findings
3. Impact areas of socially engaged arts
4. The policy-action gap in socially engaged arts
5. Constellations of Change: cross-cutting recommendations for the field to thrive
6. Statistics
7. Quotes



POLICY BRIEFS

[Download policy briefs.](#)

Constellations of Change policy briefs

To support advocacy with policymakers at the local, national and EU-level, we have created three short and succinct policy briefs.

Each brief includes the same front page, outlining what socially engaged arts are, the impact they can have, and the structural limitations that prevent them from realising their full potential.

The second page for each policy brief outlines the specific recommendations for each level of policymaker.



STORIES OF IMPACT

[Visit interactive map.](#)

