

E(CULTURE) AND NEW PERSPECTIVES FOR TERRITORIAL EVOLUTION**Ana-Maria POP**

*Babeş-Bolyai University,
Faculty of Geography,
Centre for Regional Geography
Cluj-Napoca,*

Romaniaana-maria.pop@ubbcluj.ro**Alexandra-Camelia MARIAN-POTRA**

*West University of Timișoara,
Faculty of Chemistry, Biology, Geography
Department of Geography,
Timișoara,*

Romaniaalexandra.potra@e-uvt.to**Gheorghe-Gavrilă HOGNOGI**

*Babeş-Bolyai University,
Faculty of Geography,
Centre for Regional Geography
Cluj-Napoca,*

Romaniagheorghe.hognogi@ubbcluj.ro**Abstract:**

The creative cultural industry (CCI), often known as creative industries, encourages the development of one territory that is directly influenced by several factors such as: the existing cultural policies; the cultural offer proposed by the event organizers and the managers of some creative and cultural spaces; and the public interest. The immediate consequences of the Covid-19 sanitary crisis consisted in the cessation of cultural activities, the closure of cultural spaces, the absence of the public, all amplified by a vulnerability that cultural workers, especially those in the independent sector (ICCI), were already facing. The answers of the creative cultural sector came gradually, from reactions of ceasing events and activities, to relocation of some activities and creation of a new digital cultural content. After more than two years of Covid-19 pandemic in Romania, the evolution is still slow and insecure. The aim of this paper is twofold: a). to point out the immediate response reactions of the independent cultural and creative spaces in two Romanian university and cultural cities, with a strong cultural identity (Timișoara, Cluj-Napoca), by their cultural offer and b). to reconfigure new territorial evolution

perspectives by means of culture. In conclusion, the sustainability of CCI depends on the construction of some long-term cultural policies, re-balance of the ratio between the public cultural institutions and the independent and private cultural industry and the reconfiguration of the dialog between the cultural professionals, authorities and the society.

Keywords: *creative and cultural industries, Covid-19, recovery, online activities.*

Résumé :

Le secteur culturel créatif (CCI), souvent appelé industries créatives, favorise le développement d'un territoire, celui-ci étant directement influencé par les politiques culturelles existantes, l'offre culturelle proposée par les organisateurs d'événements et les gestionnaires d'espaces culturels et créatifs et l'ouverture du public. La cessation des activités culturelles, la fermeture des espaces culturels, l'inexistence du public, tout amplifié par une vulnérabilité à laquelle les travailleurs culturels étaient déjà confrontés, ont été les conséquences immédiates de l'émergence de la crise sanitaire du Covid-19. Les réponses du CCI sont venues progressivement, à partir des réactions d'arrêt d'événements et d'activités à celles de délocalisation d'activités ou de création de nouveaux contenus culturels numériques. Après plus de 2 ans de manifestation en Roumanie de la pandémie de Covid-19, l'évolution est encore lente et incertaine. Le but de cet article est a) de signaler les formes initiales de résilience, à travers l'offre culturelle proposé par les espaces culturels créatifs dans deux centres universitaires roumains, culturels et à forte identité culturelle (Timișoara, Cluj-Napoca) et b) de reconfigurer des nouvelles perspectives d'évolution territoriale à travers la culture. En conclusion, la pérennité des CCI dépend de l'existence des politiques culturelles à long terme, du rééquilibrage des relations entre les institutions culturelles publiques et le secteur culturel indépendant et privé et de la reconfiguration du dialogue entre professionnels de la culture - autorités - société.

Mots-clés : *industries culturelles et créatives, Covid-19, résilience, activités en ligne.*

Classification JEL: *Z1 Cultural Economics; Economic Sociology; Economic Anthropology.*

1. Introduction

Over the last two years, the entire population of the globe was marked by the outbreak of the Coronavirus infection, each country going through successive response periods for the mitigation of the Covid-19 pandemic effects. This social context affected different economic sectors to various extents, but culture, tourism and transports were among the most vulnerable fields (IDEA Consult et al., 2021). The vulnerability of the cultural industry has already been highlighted long before the pandemic outbreak, but this new context has shed a new light on the cultural environment, where international and national level stakeholders have tried to find viable response forms. All public measures proposed by 2021 focused on short-term interventions. To have a clearer image of the way this cultural industry was affected, we mention two evolution sequences: the period before the pandemic and the period overlapping the emergency and alert periods of the Covid-19 pandemic. Particular attention will be paid to creative industries.

1.1. The cultural industry on the verge of the Covid-19 pandemic

The economic crisis of 2008 has subjected the cultural industry worldwide to the most recent resilience situation over the last decades, but the adaptation is mistaken for the survival of those operating in this industry. On the other hand, the cultural sector stood out as an industry,

while creative and cultural industries or the creative economy were those that propelled culture in the economic sectors, subject to the profitable “creativity” attribute (Banks and O’Connor, 2021; European Commission, 2010). Among the nine fields of activity (advertising and marketing; architecture; crafts; design; film, TV and Radio; IT, software and computer services; museums, galleries and libraries; music, performance and visual arts; publishing) the creative industries improve productivity in other fields of activity, too, providing cultural export services also (Bazalgette, 2017).

In terms of the *turnover*, the cultural and creative industry (CCI) in Europe was contributing in 2019, by 4.4% of the value of the European GDP. In addition, as compared to the year 2013, the number of jobs in CCI increased by 10%, i.e. by 700,000 new jobs in the EU member states, predominantly in video games, advertising, music and architecture (EY Consulting, 2021). The states in Central and Eastern Europe, as compared to countries like France, Germany, Italy, UK or Spain where CCI contributions were constantly recorded in the European economy, have been characterized over the last decades by a more accelerated increase rhythm (EY Consulting, 2021).

Another feature of CCI is given by the form of organization and the human capital engaged. Those activating in this industry are SMEs, associations and freelancers, many of them conditioned by a determined or intermittent work duration. Moreover, the cultural workers in the independent industry are invisible in the official statistics, which leads to an undersizing of the social capital associated to CCI (IDEA Consult et al., 2021). For this reason, no precise regulations related to the payment of fees, nor programs associated to social protection are stipulated.

As for the use of digital technologies, the promotion of digital content or the acquisition of digital skills, some companies operating in the cultural sector were among the first to innovate. These used digital technologies (online platforms, streaming, virtual reality, DVDs and Blu-ray) and the social media platforms, facing at the same time challenges generated by the use of copyright, unfair competition, etc. (EY Consulting, 2021; Nikiel, 2019). In the context of globalization, public subsidies reduction or even digital content increase, CCI develops new business models (crowdsourcing, self-publishing, peer to peer models, streaming platforms, gamification, etc.). The beneficiary/consumer can become a creator by user-generated content. Additionally, another factor determining some other dynamics of CCI is represented by the way the activity is organized, by the occurrence of some coworking spaces, laboratories affiliated to universities, cultural hubs, start-up accelerators, etc. (European Expert Network on Culture, 2015).

1.2. Culture during the Covid-19 pandemic

With the installation of the Covid-19 pandemic, especially with the lockdown periods imposed in different periods at international level, a series of restrictions and limitations of international mobilities had a strong impact on the workers in various fields of activity, mainly in the recreational sector, including art and culture (Böhme and Besana, 2020). The year 2020 caused a loss of the CCI incomes by 31%. The most affected states were those in Central and Eastern Europe, where losses of 44% were recorded (EY Consulting, 2021).

On the other hand, this pandemic social context has determined the occurrence of some more sustainable trajectories. At the same time, this also generated challenges translated into new costs, generated by the compliance with the safety measures imposed by the authorities. New public attitudes were highlighted towards online or *en plein air* events. Moreover, new cultural contents emerged (IDEA Consult et al., 2021).

Throughout the emergency period, measures to revive CCI were taken throughout entire Europe. The report drafted by IDEA Consult et al. (2021) highlighted the following aspects: support measures (temporary incomes for cultural workers, loans and warranties, support schemes); cost reductions (contribution payment delay, compensations associated to social contributions, exemption from fiscal charges, grants for artists and freelancers); innovation support measures (programs, webinars); and social cohesion consolidation measures (digital platforms).

Beyond these minimum short-term intervention measures, designed as an immediate response to the sanitary crisis, the problems of the cultural sector are much more profound. The artists and cultural workers still do not have a legal status in the EU member states. The professionalization of the work of those operating in the cultural and creative industries should not be limited or exclusive, while the lack of some minimum social protection measures, especially for the freelancers, is a common reality in the cultural sphere (Goethe Institut, 2021).

The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the digital distribution models. More and more cultural creators extended their intervention area outside the creative and cultural industry, all the more so since, in 2019, 43% of the jobs in CCI at European level were occupied by people under the age of 39 (EY Consulting, 2021).

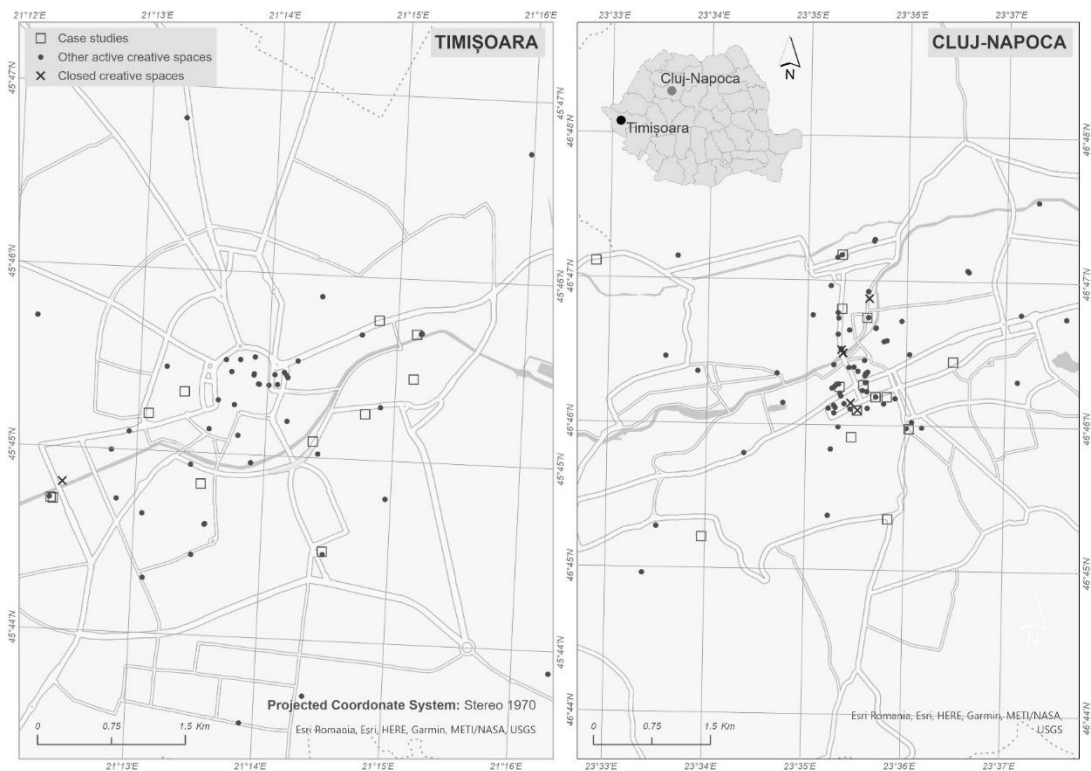
Despite the restrictions imposed by the national authorities, during the states of emergency and alert, the professionals in the cultural industry continued to offer cultural content to communities. A particular situation comes also from the public sector. If, so far, attention was focused on the cultural private and independent institutions, the public ones (more than 85,000 museums at global level) were closed, intermittently, throughout the pandemic. Stopping their activity in physical format meant also their disappearance from the public consciousness. Many museums promoted their activity by means of virtual tours, webinars addressed to visitors or quizzes (UNESCO, 2020). According to the UNESCO report (2020) validating the digital measures developed by the museum institutions during the Covid-19 pandemic, Romania was listed, by 12 museums, among the states in Central Europe conducting virtual activities.

In the context of accelerating activity in the CCI sector in Central and Eastern Europe over the last years and the high adaptability of the professionals in this field, the aim of this paper was a). to identify the immediate response reactions of the independent cultural and creative industries (ICCI) in two Romanian cultural centers (Timișoara, Cluj-Napoca) to the sanitary crisis over the last two years, and b). to reconfigure new territorial evolution perspectives by means of culture in the abovementioned cities.

2. Methodology

According to *The Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor*, the 2019 edition, 190 European cultural cities were analyzed and their creativity was measured by a series of cultural indicators (Montalto et al., 2019). Among these, Timișoara and Cluj-Napoca, two Romanian cultural centers presented in this study, together with other four cities (București, Iași, Baia Mare, and Sibiu), were characterized by prestigious university tradition generating various specialists in the CCI field (theatre, visual arts, design, translations, music, etc.). In addition, the two cities stood out over the last years, especially after the fall of the communist regime (after 1989), by an intense multiplication of the independent creative and cultural industries (ICCI) (n = 141, of which n = 82 in Cluj-Napoca and n = 59 in Timișoara) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Independent creative and cultural industries in Timișoara and Cluj-Napoca (2020)



Source: Popa et al. (2021)

To identify the response forms of ICCI, in direct conditioning with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted, in the 1.10-17.11.2020 interval, with the managers of some creative spaces in the two cities. As a national database of cultural operators in the independent cultural sector is not available, all the cultural and creative spaces in the two cities were identified and validated in the field during the period before the pandemic (2019-2020).

The reactions in ICCI were exclusively analyzed in this study, without contesting the activity of the public cultural operators.

2.1. Elements of ICCI representativity

The European cultural sector has evolved differently in longitudinal terms, from the East to the West. The Eastern and Central European space was familiar to a different, highly centralized historical-political context. Following the fall of the communist regime, the states in Central and Eastern Europe have tried to insert, fast forward, a series of cultural infusion elements, based on the turbocapitalism model. The adaptation forms were, however, differently transposed. The public cultural sector has continued to be subsidized by the state, a stability guaranteed by more classical and safer cultural “recipes”. As opposed to the public sector, spontaneous cultural spaces began to appear in Romania, after 1989, more or less regulated by a legal status (freelancers, SMEs, certified natural persons, etc.). Among them, innovation elements emerged continuously, some even less approved by the cultural consumer, used to the statist productions. The independent cultural industry is still not institutionalized today.

The first national statistical inventory initiative of the cultural sector emerged during the second part of 2020, launched by the National Institute for Cultural Research and Training. According to the *Cultural Sector Register*, at national level, there were 6,606 cultural workers (natural persons), 1,179 cultural NGOs, 3,35 companies, covering all fields of cultural-artistic activity (performing arts, visual arts, books, heritage, and audio-visual).

To understand how the cultural operators in ICCI emerged, special attention was paid to the motivation to create these creative and cultural spaces. Therefore, one can identify:

- the need to be, to have a job that continues the educational training or the insufficient representation of some cultural subdomains:
“Cluj is among the few cities in the country which is very active in the contemporary art area and it is a very good city for such activities. We reckon that the number of contemporary art galleries is too small and there is still room for more” (WhiteCuib, Cluj-Napoca); *“The idea was to bring more music in the society and to help people, but also to give bands the opportunity to perform”* (MusicHub, Cluj-Napoca);
- the conversion of some unused or vacant spaces by turning them into cultural spaces:
“There were very many empty spaces, on Eroilor Street, downtown [...] at that time we did not even know why they were like that, now I understand that the real estate market has a strong effect and that many spaces are blocked pending resolution of retrocession disputes before the courts ... the first impulse was that this (our) generation of artists not painting but interested in a somehow more conceptual art [...] created a project for the activation of the spaces through art” (Aici Acolo Pop Up Gallery);
- training of human, creative capital:
“The main purpose is not to organize exhibitions, but to create an industrial space available for the artist” (Uzinaj, Cluj-Napoca);
- recreation;
- dialog, networking, creation of some creative communities:

“The project is related to location [...] for 22 years this is the most longeval alternative cultural space, as far as I know ... many ideas and projects occur; it is a space for dialog” (Casa Tranzit, Cluj-Napoca);

“We try to build a community of artists” (Rondul de noapte, Cluj-Napoca).

On the verge of the pandemic, 141 independent cultural spaces were identified in the cities of Cluj-Napoca and Timișoara. Their initial motivation for establishment faced, as in many cases, a series of challenges (identification of funding sources, rental prices for the physical locations, space set up and adaptation to the conducted activities, the real estate pressure, etc.). Then, these spaces were strongly affected by the restriction measures generated by the Coronavirus spreading. The managers of some cultural spaces have temporarily ceased activity, going through an exploratory period related to their future evolution, while others were closed, relocated or reinvented, under the management of other associations.

2.2. Post-pandemic cultural responses

With the outbreak of the pandemic in Romania, gradually, in accordance with the safety conditions imposed by the national authorities, the cultural entities closed their physical spaces. They ceased the classical activities conducted before, relocated in the virtual environment and tried to find a sustainable trajectory of their activities. Whether we refer to Cluj-Napoca or Timișoara, the two cultural cities under investigation, the adaptation reactions of the professionals in the independent cultural sector fit within a few trajectories.

The first trajectory, approved by many managers of independent creative spaces, was the **digitization of activities and existing cultural resources**. These took the form of some virtual tours (Create.act.enjoy, by the virtual tour created for Doina Cornea’s memorial house¹), online exhibitions, events/online performances, virtual training courses.

“We tried to develop various digital projects. One of them refers to 3D sculpture exhibitions, another one to a 3D sculpture competition; [...] audio studio for experimental poetry performance; another project refers to the creation of kits for learning digital art, electronics, IT in the field of digital art.” (Lapsus, Timișoara);

“The creative sector is pretty widely defined, most of it can go online, that is basically everything that can be moved online.” (Milestone, Cluj-Napoca);

“The activity conducted can largely be transferred into the online environment. The digitization of the activity now becomes plan A, the only viable short- and medium-term solution” (Lapsus, Timișoara).

Another option adopted by some of the independent professionals was the **relocation of some events conducted in physical spaces to the virtual environment**, by means of streaming platforms (Magic Puppet, Launloc etc.), without many adaptations of the shows/concerts or **in open-air spaces**, during the restrictions loosening periods (Zug.zone, Create.act.enjoy, Magic Puppet, Galeria Jecza, AiaArt, Școala de circ Cluj-Napoca, ClujHub etc.). The reluctance of the public consuming culture became a constant, regardless of the location of events, boosted by a decrease of the safety degree. With all these new realities, many independent artists and

¹ https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=zSn3euHwVpW&fbclid=IwAR3ykRexwwfkCB_9jdbqg-TnOwKsKZrBbCKRbheuL6xTfbG4gdi0Lvnph5w

cultural workers were more susceptible to a resumption of activities in the physical environment. They argued that, as opposed to other fields of activity, the interactivity with the public was an essential component for the performance of a cultural act.

On the other hand, the creativity of the cultural operators did not cease with the outbreak of the pandemic and many of those working in ICCI moved towards the **creation of new cultural products**, by opening and cooperating with staff or institutions outside the field. For example:

- the creation of new products obtained by entrepreneurial programs or initiatives, mainly in the fields of architecture and design;
- some cultural entrepreneurs, both in Timișoara and in Cluj-Napoca, belonging to the category of the making space type of cultural spaces (Mulas et al., 2017), expanded their range of activity towards the creation of medical products (visors, etc.);
“The activities were transformed in such manner that they did not imply physical interaction, but kept the same dose of closeness and empathy that the beneficiaries were used to. We installed a series of artistic installations in hospitals, which had the advantage of producing long-term effects. In all hospitals (in Cluj-Napoca) we installed libraries, with books made available for patients, interactive paintings with sterile pencils dispensers. In one of the hospitals, we installed a musical installation, so that ambient music could be listened to in waiting areas at any time.” (Create.act.enjoy, Cluj-Napoca)
- development of new cultural products, created for the virtual environment (such as the case of the Exeunt show, created by Reactor de creație și experiment, Cluj-Napoca or the “Virus Diary” exhibition, signed by Dan Perjovschi for White Cuib).

Of course, all these trajectories recorded in ICCI in Romania, are those that defined the emergency and alert periods of the pandemic, the future evolution perspectives are still to be investigated.

2.3. Urban reconfigurations by means of culture

With the pandemic and the rethinking of the activities in the physical spaces, regardless of the activity sector addressed, the scenes of some cultural and artistic acts go beyond the borders of some conventional spaces. This context is not a new one, as it is highlighted in some situations and over the last few years, by relocations of some activities in public spaces (squares, streets), former industrial platforms, the banks of some water courses, etc., of a temporary nature.

Mural painting is associated with unconventional spaces (building facades, river banks, unused walls, public transportation means, etc.), the plastic artists express their creativity in the form of manifests (Figure 2). Throughout the duration of the pandemic, paintings and temporary artistic installations were displayed in unusual locations, initiating a certain immersiveness of the public.

For the both cities investigated, the river sectors crossing parts of the cities (Bega, Someșul Mic) generate real cultural synergies. Such an initiative belongs to Someș Delivery, starting from organizing a festival on the banks of the Someșul Mic River; this initiative led to the

creation of a sustainable community (“Clujul sustenabil”), where the participation of the public in the creation of a socio-cultural program is essential. Then, a second example is given by the festival Lumen in Timișoara, created for the reactivation of some industrial spaces by means of some light art installations.

Figure 2. The mural painting on Constanța Street (Cluj-Napoca), marking 30 years of town-twinning between Cluj-Napoca and Nantes



The digital scene was, however, the result of the pandemic. Many local artists went international, especially if the quality of the created product had the intended impact.

The social context over the last two years generated other spatial reconfigurations of CCI, by the disappearance of some creative spaces (with their closure, the situation amplified by the stagnation or even increase of the rent prices), the creation of other spaces (in former synagogues or in certain industrial platforms) or even the reuse of some industrial areas (especially in Timișoara, since the real estate developers managed to monopolize these spaces in Cluj-Napoca).

3. Conclusion

The initial resilience stages (adaptation, recovery) of CCI highlighted also the fact that any recovery solution developed for the problems that existed before the pandemic were not necessarily those intended by workers in the cultural sector. The “normality” previous to this sanitary crisis was not an optimum normality, nor desired in the cultural environment.

Moreover, a series of contradictions occurred as reflections, placing the sustainability of culture under a magnifying glass:

- *the classical cultural creators vs entrepreneur cultural operators* – even before the manifestation of this sanitary crisis, the cultural entities generating profit had a certain financial and social stability, being often criticized in terms of the more commercial content promoted. The recently developed assistance programs for the cultural environment (Creative Europe, Culturpreneurs, etc.) support the entrepreneurial component of the cultural professionals.
- *the cultural creators conducting activities in physical spaces vs creators of digital content* – a reality that has already been manifested for several years in the advertising and audio-visual fields. The digital content created determines, in its turn, new curatorships, new consumers.
- *center vs periphery* – while cultural operators have preferred, for a long time, the central and semi-central urban areas due to the easily accessed locations, activity and events, more recently peripheral spaces have become more attractive because of their cost-effectiveness. This happened especially if the cultural activities were also reviving these places. This trend was accelerated over the last months, in the context of increased rent prices in downtown areas.

CCI sustainability depends on the development of long-term cultural policies, re-balance of the ratio between the public cultural institutions and the independent and private cultural sector. Another important factor is the reconfiguration of the dialog between cultural professionals – authorities – society. Others include identification of public and private funding sources for all the professionals in the cultural sector and the reduction of dependency degree to the public funding and even the change of the legal framework applicable to CCI by a more inclusive nature.

Another aspect, less discussed in literature, but with long-term effects, is a better representation of ICCI, in the form of cooperatives, communities, unions, federations participating in public policies and representing artists' status and work conditions.

4. Acknowledgements

This research was funded by PNCDI III: PN3/3.1 Bilateral/multilateral AUF-RO program, grant number 17-AUF/01.03.2019, name of project, "Heritage and urban renewal: creative spaces, inclusive culture and civic engagement".

References

- Banks M., O'Connor J. (2021), „A plague upon your howling”: art and culture in the viral emergency, *Cultural Trends*, 30(1): 3-18, DOI: 10.1080/09548963.2020.1827931.
- Bazalgette P. (2017), *Independent Review of the Creative Industries*.
- Böhme K., Besana F. (2020), *Understanding the territorially diverse implications of Covid-19 policy responses*, Spatial Foresight Briefing 13, Luxembourg, www.spatialforesight.eu.
- European Expert Network on Culture (2015), *New Business Models in the Cultural and Creative Sectors (CCSs)*.
- EY Consulting (2021), *Rebuilding Europe. The cultural and creative economy before and after the COVID-19 crisis*.

- European Commission (2010), *Green paper. Unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries*, Brussels.
- Goethe Institut (2021), *Voices of Culture Report. Status and working conditions for artists, cultural and creative professionals*, june 2021.
- IDEA Consult, Goethe-Institut, Amann S., Heinsius J. (2021), *Research for CULT Committee – Cultural and creative sectors in post-Covid-19 Europe: crisis effects and policy recommendations*, European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, Brussels.
- Montalto V., Tacao Moura C.J., Alberti V., Panella F., Saisana M. (2019), *The Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor. 2019 edition*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, doi:10.2760/257371, JRC117336.
- Mulas V., Nedayvoda A., Zaatari G. (2017), *Creative community spaces. Spaces that are transforming cities into innovation hubs*, World Bank.
- Nikiel S. (2019), New business models for Cultural and Creative Institutions, *Management*, 23(2): 124-137, DOI: 10.2478/manment-2019-0022.
- Popa N., Pop A.M., Marian-Potra A.C., Cocean P., Hognogi G.G., David N.A. (2021), The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Independent Creative Activities in Two Large Cities in Romania, *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, 18,7674. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18147674>.
- UNESCO (2020), *UNESCO Report. Museums around the world in the face of Covid-19*, Paris.