

Study paper

The art of survival:

Slovenian cultural and creative workers in the time of the COVID-19 epidemic

by **Eva Matjaž** and **Teja Kosi**, Poligon Creative Centre

»If there is one lesson we can take from this forced stop, it is mostly about how thin the ice our cultural workers are on really is, and how any crisis will just mow them down.«

»The policies of our current government are extraordinarily harmful to culture, and appear closer to an intentional extermination of culture, than an effort to provide aid.«

respondents from the »Slovenian Cultural and Creative Worker in Times of COVID-19« research

Summary

The cultural and creative sectors (CCS), were among those hardest-hit by the COVID-19 crisis. This prompted the team of Poligon Creative Centre to immediately take on longitudinal tracking of its effect on cultural and creative workers in Slovenia. Based on the research, which included two surveys – in spring and autumn 2020 – with 3.099 respondents from the ranks of Slovenian cultural and creative workers, the article analyzes the characteristics of non-work and business during the time of the epidemic, the views and coping mechanisms of the workers and their chances of getting through it. Our analysis shows how cultural and creative workers already lead modest lifestyles before 2020, with the COVID-19 crisis radically changing their situation for the worse. The most endangered of all are the workers in highly precarious forms of employment (those employed through the “Student Work” instrument, contract workers, unregistered workers and self-employed cultural workers with subsidized social contributions), who are already the lowest-paid and have seen their incomes drop even further. Government aid measures have consistently let

them down, leading to a drastic increase in the discrepancy between the workers in public, safer employment positions and those in precarious forms of employment. The alarming state of cultural and creative sectors in Slovenia calls for the planning and implementation of solutions on both national and EU levels. On the national level, alongside the solutions proposed by the survey respondents (establishing efficient communication between sector advocates and the government, vouchers for culture¹, universal basic income, temporary tax relief...), vital measures would include the introduction of well-calibrated actions for slowing the COVID-19 epidemic, equal treatment of CCS when compared to other sectors and an increase in local and national funds, which already represent an exceptionally small part of funding. At the same time, due to the means of operation of the Slovenian Government and its general attitude towards culture – described by The New York Times as “a cultural war” (Marshall, 2021), ensuring government-independent European financial aid, remains crucial.

Introduction

In the grim silence of harsh restrictions imposed in the name of the global COVID-19 crisis, the only thing crying out on the streets of Slovenian capital Ljubljana, are the walls themselves. Specifically, the graffiti they bear, responding to the public health, social and economic measures the Slovenian government put into effect to prevent the spread of the disease. »Comrade covid undresses the system«, »If I stay home, I'll be left without a home« and »We will not go back to normality because 'normality' was the problem«² are only some of them. Unconventionally crafted using wood, sheetrock or car paint they reflect both the sudden closure of all but the most essential stores, as well as the general state of society (Velikonja, 2020). »Never in the history of humanity have such drastic interventions into the lives of populations occurred in the name of health on such a scale and in such a short period of time« (Caduff, 2020, p.467), as there have been, during the COVID-19 crisis. During the extreme social upheaval of the first few months of the epidemic, the lockdown and its total cessation of all public life, it was the consumption of art and other cultural content – the internet and television, the movies and books – which brought some positive influence for our mental health. Yet in spite of that, it was precisely the cultural and creative sectors (CCS) who suffered a horrifying paralysis, with the OECD (2020) ringing the bells, placing it among the sectors worst hit by COVID-19 crisis.

¹ A proposal modeled after the successfully executed government program which granted every citizen and permanent resident of Slovenia a voucher for a fixed sum (200 Euro for adults and 120 Euro for children under 14) which could be spent on tourist services in 2020 and 2021.

² Translation taken from »COVID-19, MY COMRADE: Central European Graffiti and Street Art Responses to Pandemic« (Velikonja, M. - 2020, 3. november, The Nomadic Journal) and edited for clarity.

Even as the very first epidemic countermeasures were undertaken, it quickly became painfully clear how the CCS in Slovenia had basically ground to a halt and been squeezed into a corner. In light of this, already during the first spring lockdown in 2020, Poligon Creative Centre started measuring the effects of the epidemic on the workers in CCS, being among the first in the EU and (to date) the only entity in Slovenia to do so. The goal of this research is a longitudinal tracking of the effects the epidemic has on the CCS. We are interested in finding out how cultural and creative workers are dealing with the radically altered working conditions, by studying both the economic aspect, the new ab-normality of work, and the broader socio-psychological reality. The purpose of this diagnostics of reality within the sector is to provide Poligon and similar organizations with the necessary data which facilitate our advocacy role. Two such measurements – spring and autumn of 2020, have already been accomplished, with another taking place in spring of 2021.

The present article first presents the key characteristics of Slovenian CCS at the moment before the onset of the COVID-19 crisis. This is followed by an outline of the course the epidemic took in Slovenia and the corresponding actions taken by the Slovenian government. The results include key insights from the autumn 2020 survey and certain notable comparisons with the spring 2020 results, pertaining to the nature of non-work, the changes in business and operations, the perceptions of and coping with the crisis and an assessment of the resilience of CCS and its chances of surviving the COVID-19 crisis. We conclude with a presentation of crucial outcomes and recommendations.

Slovenian CCS pre-COVID-19 crisis

A statistical analysis of the state of CCS in Slovenia for the period of 2008-2017 (Murovec Et Al., 2020), allows us to outline its profile within the Slovenian economy before the start of the COVID-19 epidemic. The authors of the study define CSS as encompassing architecture, advertising, design and visual arts, cultural heritage, archive and library studies, literature and publishing, arts and cultural education, music, performing and intermedia arts, media, software and game development, film and audio-video production, cultural tourism and other artistic activities or practices. In 2017, the CCS represented 7% of the employed workforce and 10,5% of all registered business entities. In the same year, it produced nearly 3 bln. Euro, with a gross value added (GVA) above the general economy average. The majority of those employed in CSS are registered in the Central Slovenia Region. The major shares of employees in CSS are held by the books, publishing and print sector (25%) and the software and game development sector (20%), followed by the subsector of archives, libraries and cultural heritage with 12%. Among the legal organizational forms in CCS, there is a notable prevalence of self-employed persons (56%) – well above the average of the rest of the economy (43%). The share of limited liability companies (LLC) on the other hand is significantly lower, at 23% to the 33% of the rest of the economy. CCS created 2,5% of all revenues from sales in 2017, being

reasonably comparable in terms of employment and gross value added (GVA) to the automotive industry, lead only by the chemical industry and the manufacturing of computers and electrical products.

In Slovenia, the creative sector represents 7% of the entire workforce, compared to 8,7% in the UK or even 10,5% in Switzerland. However in spite of employing a slightly smaller percentage of the population than the EU average, it creates a similar percentage of GDP (Murovec Et Al., 2020). Similarly to the rest of the world, the Slovenian CCS form an idiosyncratic ecosystem, with public cultural institutions and large private organizations intricately linked to and codependent on a network of micro companies and self-employed individuals, with the latter remaining the key generators of creative content, products and services. The frailty of such a formation, which arises from non-standard, precarious forms of work, makes it highly susceptible to financial and economic instability (OECD, 2020).

The assumptions about the vulnerability of the sector and the difficulty of restoration after financial upheaval were confirmed by numerous surveys (Ograjenšek and Perviz, 2015; Ograjenšek, 2018), which analysed a narrower subsegment of Slovenian CCS workers – the self-employed in culture, who comprise as much as 12% of all legal organizational forms (Murovec Et Al., 2020, p. 68). The workers themselves point out the problem of rising payment indiscipline and the cancellations of public open calls, as well as a reduction of commissions from the public sector. The pre-pandemic state aid for the self-employed in the CCS is inadequate (Ograjenšek, 2019, p. 52), with a full quarter of the self-employed in culture reporting a 2016 income below the poverty line (Kučić and Topolovec, 2018). Given all these facts, the researchers are calling for urgent improvements when it comes to recognition of social rights, consideration of job specificities and special work conditions. While the sector is yet to recover from the consequences of the last crisis a decade ago (Ograjenšek, 2019, p. 52), the current COVID-19 crisis is already exposing it to further tumult.

The COVID-19 epidemic in Slovenia and government actions

Slovenia officially declared a state of epidemic on 12th March 2020, with a new right-wing government headed by Janez Janša taking over on the next day. The new administration immediately set out to put into effect measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, which drastically curtailed the (public) life of citizens. Closures of schools, kindergartens, bookshops, galleries, cinemas, theatres and other cultural institutions, a mandated curfew and a dying down of the event industry are only some of the measures, which have in time become the norm. Cultural institutions were among the first to have their doors shuttered, stopping their activities in their tracks, leaving the whole sector paralyzed for the entire year since; barring a few short and limited exceptions. While the measures allowed for a limited reopening along the lines recommended by the National Institute of Public Health (NIJZ) in May

2020, and even theatres, cinemas and organizers of public events started preparing to get back on track, their activities never really came to life, due to continued alterations of allowed audience sizes and mandatory social distancing separations imposed by NIJZ. The start of a new season in the fall of 2020 was interrupted by a state of an epidemic being proclaimed once again, calling for a gradual closure of all institutions, with the sole exception of library services (Slovenian Press Agency – STA, 2020). Even during the periods when certain other sectors (such as religious and non-essential retail) were allowed to continue, the disproportionate measures continued to apply for CCS, enforcing in effect a total »cultural lockdown«.

The same disproportionate action can be found when it comes to government aid for CCS. The closing of cultural institutions during the first wave of the epidemic saw a raft of appeals for government help, from a list of societies representing their professional fields. The period also saw the formation of an action committee of cultural workers, who attempted to put pressure onto the Ministry of Culture by a series of performative and protest events in front of the Ministry headquarters. The two hardest-hit sectors of the Slovenian economy are culture and tourism. Yet whereas the tourism sector received targeted and specific aid packages (tourism vouchers and other reinforcements), the government never provided the cultural sector with a single corresponding measure. Any and all measures benefiting the workers in CCS only applied to them as a result of being a specific type of legal organizational form or business entity (e.g., the so-called »anti-covid packages« do not include aid for cultural workers specifically, but apply to anyone registered as self-employed or private entrepreneur – STA, 2020).

Slovenia declared the second wave of the epidemic on 19th October 2020, with continued extensions until the current date. After the drawn-out period of drastically limited public life and lockdown, certain institutions are slowly starting to open up again, while other limitations to personal freedom (such as prohibition of public protest and a curfew) remain in effect. With the end of February 2021, all libraries, museums, galleries and bookshops are open, the operation of cinemas is prohibited, while concert venues and theatres are legally allowed to organize events, yet with the limitation of attendance currently standing at 10 people per event, they remain effectively closed (GOV, 2021).

Methodology

The research »Slovenian Cultural and Creative Worker in Times of COVID-19« is a co-production of Poligon Creative Centre and Centre for Creativity (CzK). Its framework included the execution of two surveys. Both survey questionnaires were published on the online platform Ika, with the questionnaire used in the spring 2020 survey published between April 6th and May 3rd 2020, and the fall 2020 questionnaire from September 29th until October 25th 2020. Both included all the worker

segments regardless of their legal status: students, contract workers, self-employed in culture, employees of companies and private institutions, associations and cooperatives, employees of public institutions, as well as unregistered workers. Both surveys included several different question types (closed-ended, open-ended, combined, rating scales and numeric rating scale). The spring version totalled 41 questions and the fall version 55.

The research analysed the current state of the following subsectors of CCS: architecture, landscape architecture, film, audio and video production, fashion and textile design, graphic design, product design, service design, advertising and marketing, software and game development, research and development, performing arts (theatre, music and dance), visual arts (illustration, sculpture and painting), intermedia arts, media (television, radio, print, online media...), literature, print and publishing, creative crafts, creative tourism and others.

The last, fall 2020 survey included 1.578 respondents active within the Slovenian CCS, and 1.521 participated in the spring 2020. The sample has a majority share of women (63,8% in fall, 63,4% in spring), with an overall age average of 38,3 years in the fall, and 38,8 in spring. The majority of respondents holds a university degree (41,4% in spring, 42,2% in fall) and either a status of a private entrepreneur (22,5% fall, 22,4% spring), or a self-employed cultural worker with subsidized social contributions³ (20,8% fall, 22,1% spring). The majority is active in the field of performing arts (12,8% fall, 10,7% spring), graphic design (10,1% fall, 10,6% spring), music (10,0% fall, 9,2% spring) and film, audio and video production (9,0% fall, 11,3% spring). Only a tenth of the responders (10,0% fall, 12,9% spring) works only in a single subsector of CCS, with almost half (42,8% fall, 48,5% spring) being active in two. A full 72,2% of the fall responders and 64,3% of those in spring, are residents of the Central Slovenia Region, with most of them (68,7% fall, 60,0% spring) also working there. The average work experience is 12,4 years for the fall and 12,9 for the spring survey.

Results

The section below presents key findings of the fall 2020 survey, alongside certain comparisons with the spring 2020 data on the characteristics of non-work, changes in business and operations, the views and coping mechanisms of the workers and

¹ The Ministry of Culture of Slovenia allows self-employed cultural workers (a status separate from but similar to »private entrepreneur«) to apply for the right to have their social contributions (pension fund, healthcare and disability insurance) paid by the Ministry. The mechanism is merit-based and requires the applicant to demonstrate their work represents »a high-level contribution to the development of Slovenian culture«. A recipient of the status must re-apply every three years and may not exceed an annual income limit set by the Ministry (currently 19.890 Euro, calculated as a 3-year average.).

the sector's chances of weathering the COVID-19 crisis.

The characteristics of non-work

The COVID-19 epidemic has fundamentally altered the very nature of work itself. When compared to march 2020, additional 12% of Slovenian cultural and creative workers were working from home at the time of the fall 2020 measurement, with the percentage of those working on different locations also dropping. One in ten cultural and creative workers stayed at home, or did not work at all, due to the lack of available work. Over a half of all workers (55,6%) reported a lower or significantly lower work efficiency in the fall 2020, when compared to the pre-pandemic period. For some (13,8%) on the other hand, the changed working conditions brought an increase in productivity.

Table 1: Causes of low work efficiency, fall 2020

Causes of low work efficiency

1 Impeded planning

"There are no prospects, the deadlines are shifting all the time, there are no guarantees of execution. But we have to keep on planning and working anyway, because some things are just tied to the organization of events that are supposed to happen months from now."

2 Impeded execution due to strict regulations

"The NIJZ-mandated restrictions made organizing and executing cultural programmes much more difficult and stressful. Three times the work and a third of the audience."

3 The impossibility of online work

"Being able to just hop online for a short meeting is great, but the more important things also need smell, eye-contact, the dynamics of the space, physical presence."

4 The heavy toll of balancing work and housekeeping

"When the kids are at home, I have to add housekeeping and education to the primary activities of my work time, which leads to my work time spreading out over the entire day. Which means a lower work efficiency and quality. And eventually, lost commissions"

5 Disrupted organisation and work atmosphere

"After a prolonged period of working apart, we had to re-establish a certain relationship dynamic and work structure. There was a notable lack of personal interaction, which had a detrimental effect on the quality of relationships and ultimately, the quality of the work being done."

6 An uneven workload

"The assignments come in waves. They are either urgent, or too big. Meaning you are overwhelmed, because you cannot afford to turn down an opportunity. Then in other periods, there isn't enough work and you have trouble finding it."

The key reasons for a lower work efficiency as noted by the workers are impeded planning, impeded execution of projects due to strict regulations, the impossibility of working online, difficulties balancing paid work and housework, disrupted organisation and work atmosphere and an uneven workload, with periods of either too much or not enough work.

Table 2: Causes of higher work efficiency, fall 2020

Causes of higher work efficiency

1 More flexibility and resourcefulness

"The new ways of thinking, the constant adaptation to new situations, new approaches, better executions, better audience reactions, the reduced scale of events, a more creative thought process, increased awareness of the value of each project, originality, uniqueness and sustainability coming to the front, our relationship to the environment and our values being changed..."

2 Less dead weight

"In our cultural industry, we 'trimmed off' all the dead weight, which proved very advantageous, at least for the time being. Before, we used to wear ourselves out, work on unnecessary productions, that deprived everybody of quality, just to assure quantity."

3 A calmer pace

"A calmer work pace; people (clients) are much more considerate, have more respect for 'regular working hours' (e.g., they no longer call late in the afternoon/in the evening/over the weekend)"

4 Higher efficiency when working from home

"Since I'm working from home, I feel more rested, I don't have to waste time with needless socialization, I use the car far less, spend less on useless items. My work productivity went up, and I can finally work on development."

5 Efficient online work

"The clients realized how most of the work can really be done online in their own time and there is no need to waste time on meetings (physically, such as business lunches and drinks, etc.) This in no way leaves them with an inferior end product."

6 The rise of solidarity

"Regarding the operation of the teams I am a part of, I believe this period of crisis reinforced the sense of mutual connection and fraternity, as well as the willingness to help their colleagues out in periods of increased time pressure or workload."

Among the reasons for an increase in productivity, respondents listed higher flexibility and resourcefulness, less dead weight in their work process and a calmer work pace. Some claim working from home makes them more productive, as opposed to working in an office, and likewise, that working online gives them a productivity boost. Also notable is the perceived increase in solidarity among workers.

The fall of 2020 saw the cancellation of nearly half of all the concerts (49,8%), 39,7% of all theatre shows and performances, 24,3% of exhibitions, 20,8% international projects, 26,2% workshops, 23% of rehearsals and 17,7% of conferences or other

smaller education events. Among the activities which successfully migrated online and continued without significant interruption are meetings, counselling and/or mentorships, research, project presentations («idea pitching») and prototype development. Among the activities listed as cancelled, on hold indefinitely or postponed until after the crisis, the majority are concerts, theatre shows and performances, exhibitions and international projects.

Additionally, we inquired about the cultural and creative workers' work spaces. Half of them (49,3%) do not have a place of business, either because they do not need them for their activities, or are unable to afford renting them. 35,3% of all respondents either hold a lease or are paying off a loan, with only 15,4% owning their space without an outstanding loan. In continuation, we were interested in learning whether the landlords were responsive to the plight of their tenants; the percentage of those willing to reduce their rent (21,8%) is significantly lower than those, who insisted on keeping the same rent in spite of an appeal (34,1%).

Changes in business and operations

In the fall 2020, 41,8% of all workers had just enough, or even more work than they could accomplish. In the open-ended questions, the respondents noted a new wave of work for a shorter time period right before an announced tightening of restrictions, as people scrambled to finishing projects in time. 40,4% of the respondents reported having some, but not enough work, and being under-employed. Almost one in five workers (17,7%) is out of work. In October 2020, a full 40% of all workers did not have enough guaranteed work to last them until the end of the year.

Between the start of the epidemic and the fall of 2020, three quarters of all workers had already experienced a cancellation of business. Four out of every ten respondents expected to lose additional work by the end of the year. The average value of lost business in the seven months since the start of the epidemic stands at 16.582 Euro, with the expected loss for the last three months of 2020 valued at 9.540 Euro. The largest loss of business by the end of 2020 was reported by the music (62,5%), performing arts (52,7%), photography (52,9%), film, audio and video production (50,0%) and fashion and textile design (50,0%). In terms of predicted loss of business by end of 2020, the safest proved to be architecture (11,4%) and landscape architecture (16,7%), software and game development (11,1%) and service design (25%). The surveyed cultural and creative workers estimated an overall 38,8% drop in turnover, when compared to the previous year. The largest drop in turnover can be noted in the fields of cultural and creative tourism, service design, film, audio and video production, and music. 78,5% of all workers report a moderate or significant drop in their business income.

Table 3: Causes of business reduction, fall 2020

Causes of business reduction

1 Reduced demand

"The market is closed, or at least significantly slowed down, so we receive less orders or sell less."

"The organization of events that I used to do, has become virtually redundant."

4 More work for the same income

"There is an extraordinary amount of duplicate work, which is not correspondingly doubly paid: organization, then cancellation, or adaptation of events to new rules, then new organization followed by another cancellation."

"I get paid less, for working longer hours, because I work at significantly lower hourly rates and also put in more voluntary hours."

2 A hold on execution

"One gets started on something, invest tonnes of time and energy, then overnight it all just closes down and you can no longer sell or present your 'product', or basically get any return on the investment of the work and effort you put into it."

"Less socialising, less business."

5 Payment delays

"We still haven't been paid for projects long since completed (since the government is holding back on the payment)."

"Payment due dates are getting pushed back since the beginning. From 30 days before corona, to 60 today."

3 Fewer new business contacts

"The work I do is based on informal relationships and COVID has hit hard the entire field, one that is vital for setting a future project, for communication and successful collaboration. There is more distance, every contact not deemed 'vital' is avoided, but it is precisely this informal contact which is crucial for networking."

6 Lack of payment

"Order cancellations keep happening overnight and work already done is not being paid, since our clients are in the same predicament."

"Payment indiscipline like right after the 2009 recession."

When asked about the key reasons for a drop in business as related to the COVID-19 crisis, the respondents noted six major issues: reduced demand, the hold on execution of projects (either due to the cessation of public life during the epidemic, or excessive restrictions which followed it over the summer), reduced possibility of establishing new business contacts, more work for the same income and growing payment indiscipline (stalling or refusal of payment). An example of this, which received a lot of public attention is the Slovenian government's sudden freezing of all funds and refusal of payment for already finished projects (with valid and legally-binding contracts), for the entire film industry.

Perception of and coping with the crisis

When tasked with rating the government's response to the crisis with school grades of 1 to 5, over a half (56,8%) of the Slovenian cultural and creative workers gave it the lowest score – »inadequate« (1). A »sufficient« grade (2) was given by 28,6% of all respondents, while 8,8% assessed the government's work as »good« (3), 3,4% as »very good« (4) and only 2,3% as »excellent« (5).

Table 4: Causes for a high level of discontent with government measures, fall 2020

Causes for a high level of discontent with government measures

1 The (purposefully) overlooked sector

*"The measures are selectively targeted at protecting certain sectors, e.g. tourism, while I can't think of a single one for the culture and creative sectors."
"As long as we have mass, bars and shop, the absence and prohibition of cultural events is a mere whim, punishment and folly."*

2 The lack of support from the Ministry of Culture

*"It is shocking how in certain areas, the Ministry is even now failing to resolve the funding insecurities of NGOs for 2020, or communicating its decisions regarding funding for this year."
"Already approved state funds are not being paid out. Funds for the entire film industry are frozen. No pay-outs for already completed projects."*

3 The impossibility of execution

*"We cannot work in conditions which change every day."
"This year, I've had 15 concert cancellations, 5 of which with only a few days to go, resulting in 3.000€ of expenses, which I cover myself."*

4 Hidden agenda behind government

*"I am both angered and saddened by the fact, that the pandemic is being exploited for a deconstruction of democracy and an utter devaluation of the media and cultural landscape in Slovenia."
"The government is taking advantage of the virus, to increase its control over people, their lives and their freedom."*

The reasons given for such a high level of dissatisfaction are numerous, but the majority can be grouped into four categories. The workers assessed the government measures as discriminatory against the CCS and wilfully ignorant of their needs when distributing aid, while the Ministry for Culture's stalling on urgent issues further deepens the workers distress, rather than providing help. The majority of respondents express a very high level of distrust towards the government in general, with the major cause likewise being the impossibility of or extreme impediment to the execution of all productions.

Table 4: Causes for a high level of discontent with government measures, fall 2020

Causes for a high level of discontent with government measures

1 Establishing a dialogue between CCS and the government

*"Instead of communication, the Ministry of Culture opted for intimidation. They failed to understand the structural need for help and continued to themselves introduce even more uncertainty, than necessary."
"An advisory group for close collaboration, removing doubts and establishing a more transparent information flow is needed urgently."*

2 The introduction of vouchers for culture

"The option of using government-issued vouchers not only for tourism, but also for cultural services. Which would give those citizens, who are less familiar with culture, to learn and participate, while also supporting cultural institutions and cultural workers."

3 Introduction of a real UBI

*"UBI, as we all know, stand for Universal Basic Income. Its universality means it goes out to all citizens. As long as only 15% actually receive it, it does nothing but drive down the cost of labour.
"UBI should be FOR EVERYONE, without setting conditions or calculating percentages, because we have all been hit by this crisis in one way or another."*

4 Tax relief

*"A social contribution write-off for the entire duration of the corona crisis."
"It would also be right, to follow the German example and drastically reduce VAT, making Slovenian companies more competitive on the European and world market, but mostly help the Slovenian consumers in the lowest income bracket."*

The respondents point out an urgent need for planning and implementation of additional solutions targeted at saving the CCS, with a prerequisite being that of establishing an effective channel of quality communication between the CCS and the government (or the Ministry for Culture). They suggest numerous concrete and specific solutions and incentives for the sector; the most often mentioned are the vouchers for culture⁴, the introduction of a true UBI – i.e. a universal basic income for all citizens, without any additional requirements (as the case had with all aid packages to date), and temporary tax relief, to stimulate a recovery of the sector.

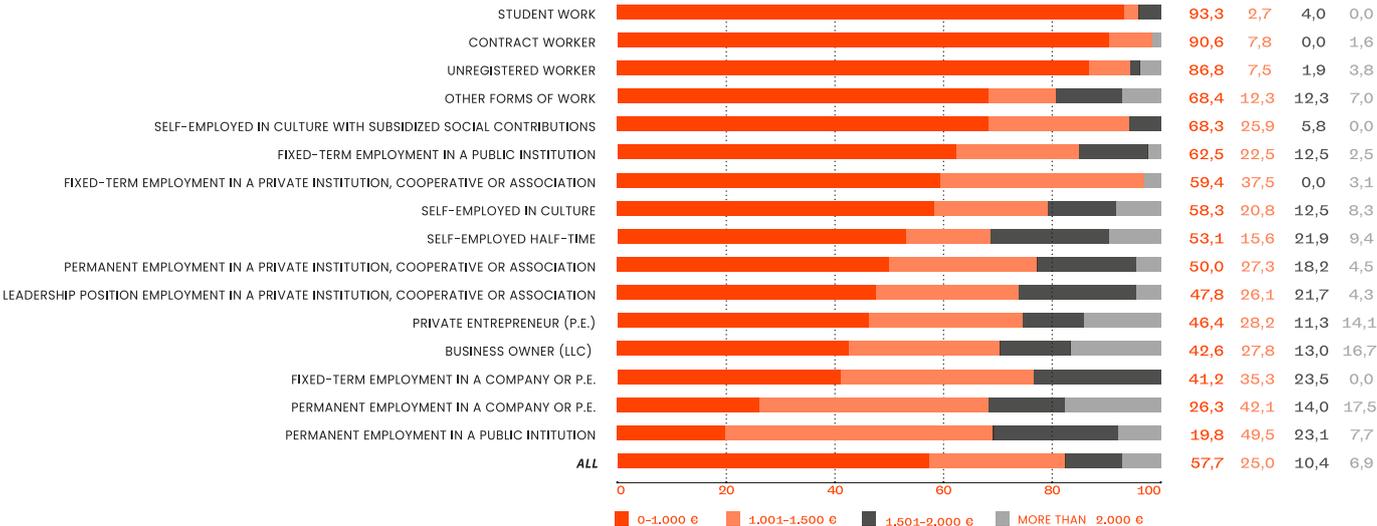
In the light of all this, it should not come as a surprise that the respondents in both the spring and fall 2020 surveys consider the work of the CCS to be underappreciated, see the sector as too fragmented and foresee a difficult future ahead. Certain convictions expressed in the spring – that the crisis would trigger a brain drain, hope for an increase in collaboration and cohesion within the sector, and the expectation of higher post-crisis funding aimed at bridging the recession, are less present in the fall survey. In the fall of 2020, the majority of participants in the survey agreed that, when compared to the financial crash a decade ago, the current crisis would bring broader and longer-lasting effects, and that we are witnessing irreversible societal change. The cultural and creative workers do not expect the epidemic

¹ See ann. 1, p.1.

to blow over and life to return to normality by 2021. Compared to the spring results, there is a further drop of trust in government measures and a rise in the conviction the state is exploiting the epidemic to introduce an increasingly authoritarian style of governing. At the individual level, there is a notably expressed trend of taking on the epidemic through reduced consumer activity, as brought forth by the spring lockdown and self-isolation (prudent spending, purchasing only the essential goods, choosing local products). Equally high is the level of concern for the well-being of friends and relatives, particularly those in high-risk COVID-19 groups.

Sector resilience

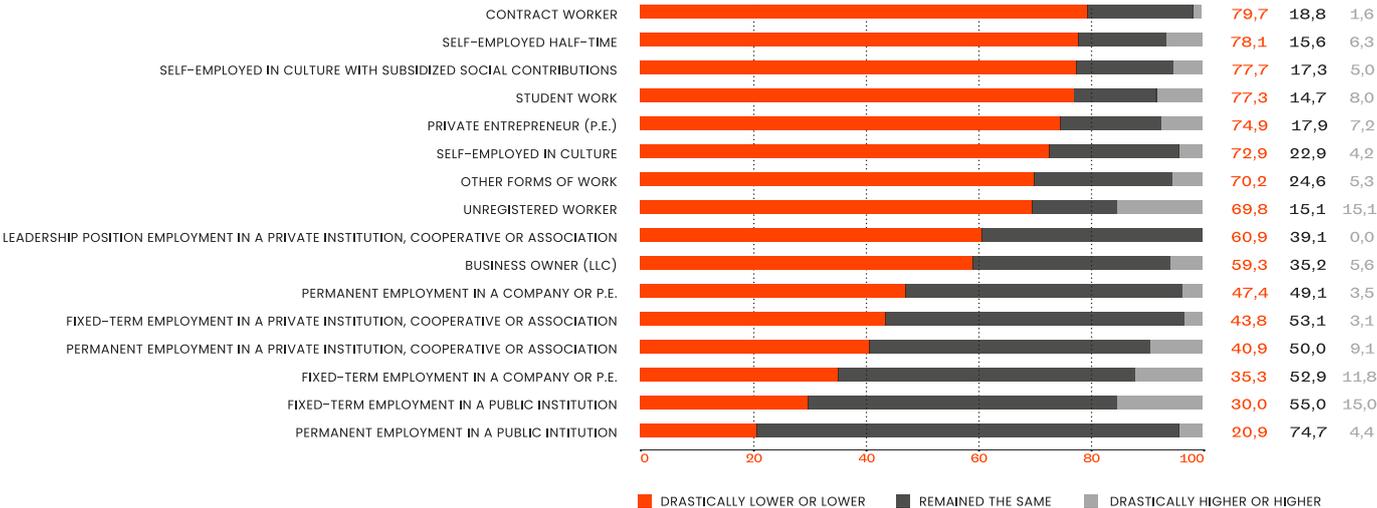
Since it is clear not everybody possesses the same means of dealing with the crisis, it is vitally important to assess the sectors’ resilience and their chances of surviving the crisis. Starting with the CCS workers’ income, a notable fact is that over half of them (57,7%) report an average net monthly income of under 1.000 Euro. Only 17,3% make over 1.500 Euro. In a further important point, over half (55,4%) have no, or very limited savings. The already low average income of the sector saw a moderate or significant drop for 66,2% of the workers in the sector, as a consequence of the epidemic. An equal drop can be noticed for 70,6% of the worker’s joint households. 30% of all workers’ partners are likewise employed within the sector. 42,2% of the workers pay standard commercial rates for their housing or are paying back an outstanding loan. Thus the inequalities keep adding up.



Picture 1: Net monthly income by legal status, fall 2020 (in %)

An average monthly income of 1.000 Euro or lower is reported by 93,3% of student workers, 90,6% of contract workers, 86,8% of unregistered workers and 68,3% of

self-employed cultural workers with subsidized social contributions. The fall 2020 survey exhibits the same trends as can be noticed in the spring 2020 – the workers in the most precarious forms of employment are also the worst paid. Safer forms of employment – permanent jobs in public institutions and even fixed-term employment in the private sector, remain on the other hand the best paid even during the epidemic.



Picture 2: The effect of the COVID-19 epidemic on the changes in monthly income in relation to legal status, fall 2020 (in %)

Not only are precarious workers the least paid, but have also seen the largest drop in income since the start of the epidemic. We can note a rapid increase in inequality between the workers in public, safer forms of employment, and private individuals in precarious employment. Music, film, audio and video production, fashion and textile design, cultural and creative tourism, creative crafts and the performing arts are all subsectors with three quarters of all workers reporting a moderate or significant drop in earnings. The only workers not to experience a notable COVID-19-related drop in income are those employed in software and games development.

When it comes to government financial aid, four out of every ten workers were either ineligible for it, even though they would require it, or received it, but found it insufficient. Only 28,3% both received financial aid and deemed it adequate for solving their financial and business difficulties. A further 29% never applied, because they did not require it. Of the workers who were not eligible for aid or found it insufficient, a third weathered their financial crisis by loaning money from friends and relatives. 12,7% applied for aid from the Centres for Social Work or similar institutions. One in five will have to apply for aid again.

Table 6: Distress of workers, fall 2020

Distress of workers

1 Fear and anxiety

"A great amount of psycho-financial pressure and fear. I am in great distress personally, and who knows how many more have it even worse? This year, everything is falling apart radically and the future of existence is growing dark. Psychologically, it is a very difficult situation"

2 Exhaustion

"The first lockdown period in March was still manageable, but by now, we are increasingly exhausted and no longer as optimistic."

"My experience of non-work is one of toil. The amount of unpaid, house work has increased enormously."

3 A sense of futility

"I sometimes even think it would be more permanent, safe and sensible to just go pick apples or help out on a farm, since it's needed. But that's just a thought, my mission is in culture, and that's food for people as well."

4 Loneliness

"But we are still human and it is not OK, to just be online all the time, we need company, embraces, smiles..."

"There is less contact, more loneliness and searching down empty streets and meadows."

5 Penny-pinching

"I reduced my TV, internet and telephone bills down to the bare minimum; I switched my subscription plan, cut down on food to only the essentials, I no longer buy clothes, I cancelled all paid dental services."

6 Difficulty paying rent

"I am currently four months late with my rent."

"I can't make the payments on monthly expenses (rent, utilities, food...), without delays and final notices."

7 Accumulating debt

"I am currently incapable of making the ends meet and I'm forced to borrow money for the bare essentials (bills, rent, ...)."

8 Sliding into poverty

"My meals are limited. 1-2 daily at the most. I am afraid to hope it will all be all right."

"The heating season is coming up and if nothin changes, we be cold."

In the fall of 2020, the workers reported experiencing a wide array of different types of COVID-19-related psycho-social and economic distress. Among those are fear and anxiety, exhaustion, a sense of futility and loneliness. An increasing number of cultural and creative workers are sliding into poverty. They are forced to resort to penny-pinching, have difficulties paying rent and basic expenses, and are unavoidably accumulating debt.

Half of all CCS workers are able to make a living with their chosen profession, while almost a third (31,6%), must supplement it with other activities, unrelated to their professional field. In most cases, this is not creative work, as it either cannot be

classified as CCS, or it is a form of creative support for CCS. Most often, these are in the catering and hospitality professions, personal care and assistance, sales and retail jobs, teaching, administrative work or various manual or delivery jobs.

Already in the spring of 2020, we could identify the sectors' low dependence on public funding, with the fall 2020 survey further confirming the results. A self-assessment of income by the workers in the CCS for 2019 shows that only 8,2% of all sources in the spring and 12,9% in the fall, came from tenders in Slovenia (state or local). Funds from EU tenders represented a mere 2,3% (spring 2020) and 5,4% (fall 2020) of all 2019 income. The fall survey shows a further 11,3% of all sales turnover indirectly linked to or derived from tenders – i.e. services contracted to creative workers and are funded by public tenders, e.g. photography for an event financed by public tender funds. Put succinctly, even by taking into account indirect financing, the CCS' dependence on public funding from tenders is low – 29,6%, contradicting the established belief that the sector relies on public money.

Recommendations and conclusion

The article provides an analysis of the position of Slovenian cultural and creative workers in the time of the COVID-19 crisis. Specifically, our goal was to use the data gathered in the spring and fall of 2020 surveys, to assess how creative and cultural workers' work functions, how their business and operations are changing, what is their perception of the crisis and how they are coping with it, as well as what is their capacity and probability of overcoming the crisis. Based on a sample of 3.099 respondents working in a wide variety of CCS subsectors, the research shows the workers' lifestyles were in average at best modest even before the onset of the crisis, mostly living hand to mouth. The current crisis radically shifted their position. While creating the cultural and creative content, which makes the society's days in isolation bearable, their own days are hard in the extreme. Two thirds of saw either a moderate or a large drop in their income, the same holds for 70% of their households. Workers in the most precarious forms of employment (student, contract and unregistered workers, self-employed with subsidized social contributions) are also the worst paid and experienced the most severe reduction of income during the epidemic. Many fell through the cracks of government aid measures, leading to a notable increase of inequality between the workers in safer, public forms of employment, and precarious workers.

On a five-grade scale, as many as 56,8% rated the government's help for CCS with the lowest possible score – »inadequate«. The workers believe the government is being wilfully ignorant of their distress, deepening it further by stalling on urgent actions instead of offering aid. Rather than any special treatment for CCS, the call is merely for equal treatment, when compared to other sectors (Matjaž Et. Al., 2020a). Cultural and creative workers report experiencing numerous types of psycho-social

and economic distress, an increasing number slides daily into poverty, with almost every third worker forced into seeking out additional sources of income, unrelated to their profession, to make the ends meet.

Based on the data gathered in the fall 2020 survey, we can reason that the state aid packages were insufficient for the CCS, and when combined with the rigid regulation of organizing cultural events, devastating for many of the subsectors and their workers. On the verge of winter of 2020, many of them – precarious workers in particular, found themselves below the poverty line. We have to keep in mind that these are not work profiles with a low added value. On average, they are exceptionally highly-educated and qualified individuals, who given the right encouragement have the capacity to enrich society on a plethora of levels (Matjaž Et. Al., 2020b).

The alarming state of the CCS in Slovenia calls for immediate planning and implementation of solutions on both the national and EU level. Alongside the solutions proposed by the survey respondents (establishing efficient communication between sector advocates and the government, vouchers for culture, universal basic income, temporary tax relief...), immediate efforts to save the sector would have to include an increase in state and local funding (as opposed to the still-ongoing reduction), particularly considering the exceptionally low share it represents currently. Experience has shown how drastically the anti-epidemic measures influence the CCS. Future action should therefore be implemented gradually, be dynamic and responsive, targeted regionally and based on solid risk-assessment analysis. The social, political and economic consequences of these measures must be taken into account and addressed with strategies which will reduce collateral damage (Caduff, 2020, p. 479).

Given the aforementioned turbulent political atmosphere in Slovenia, described by The New York Times as »a cultural war« (Marshall, 2021), which led many cultural workers to occupy the streets in protest since April of 2020, any attempt to save the impoverished Slovenian CCS will have to rely on external support from abroad. The modus operandi of the current Slovenian government and its general attitude towards culture make guaranteeing independent European funding targeted at CCS a crucial priority. With the utilization of EU funds as low as it is – 2,3% and 5,4% of all CCS workers' income in the spring and fall of 2020 respectively – establishing support services to help creatives overcome the obvious bureaucratic obstacles will be of vital importance. But apart from the financial capital, the current situation calls for investment of intellectual, political and social capital in equal measure (Brown, 2020). It would be worth giving a thought to mechanisms of support for the creative and stubbornly persistent critics of the existing system, who are being cracked down on with increasing brutality by the Slovenian government, for raising their voices against the theft of (artistic) freedom. Should the truly alarming state of the CCS in Slovenia not be answered by an implementation of better solutions, we can justifiably be worried that in the future, a large portion of culture and creativity

will be replaced only by the art of survival. From there on will follow the already well-known consequences – a continued lowering of the level of innovation, decreases in the well-being of citizens, a drop in community diversity and the gradual severing of countless other channels which tie the CCS to positive social outcomes (OECD, 2020). Meanwhile, comrad covid will settle in for the long term, disguised as a way of life.

References

- Brown, A. (2020, 26 March). Life after Covid: who will survive? Arts professional. Available at: <https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/magazine/article/life-after-covid-who-will-survive>
- Caduff, C. (2020). What Went Wrong: Corona and the World after the Full Stop. *Medical anthropology quarterly*, 34(4). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/maq.12599>
- GOV. (2021). Omejitve prodaje blaga in storitev. Available at: https://www.gov.si teme/koronavirus-sars-cov-2/omejitve-prodaje-blaga-in-storitev/?fbclid=IwAR2mkSgP50z-KxgYLJ8j0oQW3_BdliANTqHovfbOjvNf4smDYELvkgOBBfA
- Kučič, L. J. and Topolovec, T. (2018, 19 July). Samozaposleni v kulturi: četrtnina z dohodkom pod pragom revščine. Pod črto. Available at: <https://podcrto.si/samozaposleni-v-kulturi-cetrtnina-z-dohodkom-pod-pragom-revschine/>
- Matjaž, E., Černič, P. and Kosi, T. (2020a). Slovenski kulturno-kreativni delavec v času covid-19. Ljubljana: Poligon. Available at: <http://www.poligon.si/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/KKS-in-COVID-19-1.pdf>
- Matjaž, E., Černič, P. and Kosi, T. (2020b). Slovenski kulturno-kreativni delavec v času covid-19. Ljubljana: Poligon. Available at: <http://www.poligon.si/raziskava-slovenski-kulturno-kreativni-delavec-v-casu-covid-19-jesen/>
- Marshall, A. (2021, 27 January). A Populist Leader Kicks Off a Culture War, Starting in Museums. *The New York Times*. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/27/arts/design/slovenia-Janez-Jansa-culture.html>
- Murovec, N., Kavaš, D. and Bartolj, T. (2020). Statistična analiza stanja kulturnega in kreativnega sektorja v Sloveniji 2008 – 2017. Ljubljana: Muzej za arhitekturo in oblikovanje (MAO) in Center za kreativnost (Czk).
- OECD. (2020). Culture shock: COVID-19 and the cultural and creative sectors. Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/culture-shock-covid-19-and-the-cultural-and-creative-sectors-08da9e0e/>
- Ograjenšek, I. (2018). Prekarizacija in kultura: preživetvene strategije slovenskih ustvarjalcev v 21. stoletju. In Poglajen, Č., Kostevc, Č. & Dernovšček Hafner, N. (ed.). *Prekarnost in družbena negotovost: interdisciplinarni pogledi na prekariat*. Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, Ekonomska fakulteta.
- Ograjenšek, I. and Perviz, L. (2015). Socioekonomski položaj samozaposlenih v kulturi: oris stanja v Sloveniji. *Andragoška spoznanja*, 21(4).
- STA. (2020, 28 December). "Vse normalne države so uredile targetirane ukrepe za področje kulture". *Kultura in korona kriza v letu 2020*. Mladina. Available at: <https://www.mladina.si/203931/vse-normalne-drzave-so-naredile-targetirane-ukrepe-za-podrocje-kulture/>
- Velikonja, M. (2020, 3 November). COVID-19, MY COMRADE: Central European Graffiti and Street Art Responses to Pandemic. *The Nomadic Journal*. Available at: <https://thenomadicjournal.com/2020/11/03/covid-19-my-comrade-central-european-graffiti-and-street-art-responses-to-pandemic/>