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**POLICY BRIEF: SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES
FOR CULTURAL AND CREATIVE SECTOR (CCS)
PROFESSIONALS AND MICRO FIRMS
IN THE NORTH BASQUE COUNTRY (FR)**

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Table of contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	2
2. CURRENT LANDSCAPE OF CCS PROFESSIONALS AND MICRO FIRMS.....	4
3. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS.....	6
4. CONCLUSION.....	8

1. INTRODUCTION

Purpose and scope of the policy brief

The purpose of this policy brief is to provide an overview of the initiatives and strategies aimed at supporting the Cultural and Creative Sector (CCS) professionals and micro firms in the North Basque Country (FR). As a partner organization in the European project DiGiPORT, our objective is to equip adult trainers and adult education organizations with the necessary tools and resources to assist CCS professionals and artists in developing essential skills for their sustainability and resilience.

The scope of this policy brief encompasses the identification of key challenges faced by CCS professionals and micro firms in the North Basque Country (FR). By addressing these challenges, we aim to provide recommendations and policy measures that will enable the growth and development of the Cultural and Creative Sector. Our focus will be on fostering collaboration, providing access to resources, and creating an environment conducive to the success of CCS professionals in the North Basque Country (FR).

Through this policy brief, we seek to advocate for the necessary support structures and initiatives required to uplift the CCS professionals in the North Basque Country (FR). By leveraging the expertise and experiences of our European partners within the DiGiPORT project, we aim to create a framework that aligns with international best practices while addressing the specific needs and context of the North Basque Country (FR).

Introduction to the project DiGiPORT

Cultural and creative sectors (along with the tourism sector) are among the most affected by the current Covid-19 crisis throughout whole Europe, with jobs at risk ranging from 0.8% to 5.5% of employment across OECD regions. Social distancing measures had a severe negative impact on the venue-based sectors, such as galleries, pop-up shops, handcraft stores, performing arts, museums, etc., affecting negatively their revenues and, therefore, their financial sustainability and viability. On the other hand, online content platforms have profited from the increased demand for cultural content streaming during the lockdown, however the benefits from this extra demand have largely accrued to the largest firms in the industry and not to the self-employed artists and professionals. Specifically for the creative arts market on which the DiGiPORT project shall mainly focus, it relies heavily on a dense European calendar of venue-based events (i.e. art fairs, biennial events, gallery exhibitions, etc.). Covid-19 crisis has led to the cancellation of most such activities and the foreseen major downsizing of European mobility in the short and medium term. Such trends make it highly unlikely that the European art agenda may quickly recover. CCS is largely composed of micro-firms and creative self-employed professionals, often operating on the margins of financial sustainability. However, according to the Pilot Policy Project's "Creative FLIP" field research conducted in 9 European Countries (<https://creativeflip.creativehubs.net/project/>), one of the main skills needs that CCS professionals have reported is the lack of entrepreneurial skills. According to the relevant report, educational and training courses available at national level are able to provide them with the basic technical skills of their profession, but do not provide them with the necessary and market-based skills. While creativity encourages creative individuals to create products/services that are entirely new and innovative, the skills to assimilate into the world of business and thereby get the products/services to market are often weak. Furthermore, massive digitalization combined with emerging technologies (VR and AR) can create new forms of cultural experience, dissemination and new business models that are well adapted to the new needs and trends. There is an opportunity for a major innovation breakthrough in terms of the deployment of state-of-the-art technologies that allow "presence at a distance" (artificial intelligence,

virtual and enriched reality, Internet of Things, etc.) to build a new “experience economy”. New forms of digitally mediated, decentralized creative production allow for engagement with larger and wider communities, not only at the receiving end but also in terms of content production. To capitalize on them, there is a need to address the digital skills shortages within the sector.

The DiGiPORT project aims to equip adult trainers and adult education organizations in order to enable them support CCS professionals and artists from France, Italy, Ireland, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Greece with developing the necessary digital and entrepreneurial skills that will allow them to ensure their sustainability and, also, to enhance their resilience towards similar challenges and crises. Moving onwards from the competences' development, the DiGiPORT project developed and established a pan-European online platform that allows CCS professionals and artists to establish their own digital pop-up shops, through which they are able to promote and disseminate their work and reach out to their target groups.

2. CURRENT LANDSCAPE OF CCS PROFESSIONALS AND MICRO FIRMS

The cultural landscape of the North Basque Country (FR) is deeply rooted in its rich and diverse heritage, often referred to as "Basque culture." This cultural identity is central to the region's uniqueness and authenticity. However, as the North Basque Country (FR) undergoes significant socio-economic and societal changes, it becomes essential to assess the current situation and challenges faced by CCS professionals and micro firms.

Status of CCS Professionals and Micro Firms

CCS professionals and micro firms in the North Basque Country (FR) find themselves operating within a dynamic and evolving cultural landscape. The region has witnessed a resurgence of interest in Basque culture, including its language, traditional arts, and practices. This resurgence reflects a growing enthusiasm for cultural expression that celebrates Basque heritage while also embracing multicultural influences.

Challenges Faced

Despite these positive developments, several challenges persist:

- **Commercialization vs. Authenticity:** A complex debate surrounds the commercialization of Basque culture. While promoting cultural elements can boost tourism and economic development, it must be carefully balanced with the preservation of the authenticity and integrity of cultural practices.
- **Language Decline:** The gradual decline of the Basque language in everyday life remains a pressing concern. CCS professionals and micro firms are challenged with transmitting cultural heritage and artistic expressions within a changing linguistic landscape.
- **Access to Funding:** Access to financial support for CCS professionals and micro firms can be limited. Securing funding for cultural projects and initiatives remains a challenge, impacting the growth of the sector.

Existing Support Systems

Several existing support systems play vital roles in nurturing CCS professionals in the North Basque Country (FR):

- **Cultural Project of the Basque Community:** This comprehensive initiative encompasses education, accessibility, and linguistic support. It provides a structured framework for cultural development in the region, emphasizing the importance of preserving Basque culture while fostering multicultural exchanges.
- **Basque Cultural Institute:** This institution serves as a key pillar in supporting Basque culture and language. It offers resources and initiatives to promote various cultural practices, spanning traditional and contemporary forms.

Gaps and Areas for Improvement

To further enhance support for CCS professionals and micro firms in the North Basque Country (FR), it's crucial to address certain gaps:

- **Professionalization:** Efforts should be made to facilitate the professionalization of CCS practitioners. Creating pathways for artists and cultural workers to establish sustainable careers within and beyond the region is paramount.
- **International Visibility:** The region's cultural offerings could benefit from increased international visibility. Promoting Basque culture on the global stage can open up new opportunities for CCS professionals and micro firms.
- **Diversity and Inclusivity:** It is imperative to ensure that opportunities within the cultural and creative sector are accessible to all, regardless of linguistic or cultural background. Promoting diversity and inclusivity within the sector is essential for its continued growth and vibrancy.

Conclusion

The current landscape of CCS professionals and micro firms in the North Basque Country (FR) reflects a dynamic cultural scene with both opportunities and challenges. While support systems exist, there is room for improvement in terms of professionalization, international outreach, and inclusivity to foster a vibrant and sustainable cultural sector in the region.

3. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Promotion and Wider Establishment of Initiatives

In order to promote and establish initiatives supporting CCS professionals and micro firms in the North Basque Country (FR), it is essential to focus on diverse funding streams. This can be achieved by developing a range of financial support mechanisms tailored to the unique needs of the sector. These mechanisms should encompass grants, subsidies, and low-interest loans. Special emphasis should be placed on projects that promote Basque culture, innovation, and collaboration among professionals.

Another crucial aspect is the development of digital skills. Training programs and workshops should be implemented to enhance the digital capabilities of CCS professionals. This investment in digital literacy will enable them to effectively utilize

online platforms for showcasing and marketing their work. It will expand their reach to broader audiences, both locally and globally.

To complement these efforts, the establishment of cultural hubs is recommended. These hubs, whether physical or virtual, should serve as collaborative spaces for CCS professionals and micro firms. They should provide access to resources such as studio space, equipment, and mentorship, fostering creativity and cross-sector collaboration.

Access to Resources and Collaboration

Building strong partnerships between educational institutions and CCS professionals is essential. These partnerships can lead to curriculum development that aligns with industry needs and internship programs that provide students with real-world experience. Additionally, such collaborations offer CCS professionals access to emerging talent and fresh perspectives.

Resource sharing within the CCS community should be encouraged. Platforms or networks should be created to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, tools, and experiences among professionals. This collaborative approach will not only enhance individual skills but also promote collective growth.

Furthermore, cross-sector collaboration is vital. CCS professionals and micro firms should be encouraged to collaborate with other industries, including technology, tourism, and manufacturing sectors. Such partnerships can drive innovation, diversify revenue streams, and create new opportunities for growth.

Collaborative Approach

Active government involvement is crucial in supporting CCS professionals and micro firms. Government entities should play a facilitative role by providing policy frameworks, incentives, and resources for the sector's growth. They can act as catalysts for change, ensuring that the cultural and creative sector receives the necessary support.

Engaging industry stakeholders, including businesses and cultural organizations, is another key element. These stakeholders should be encouraged to actively support CCS professionals through sponsorships, mentorship programs, and by integrating cultural elements into their corporate strategies. Their involvement can significantly contribute to the sector's development.

Cross-border collaboration should also be promoted, leveraging the shared Basque culture between the North and South Basque Country (FR&ES). Initiatives such as cross-border projects, joint events, and cultural exchanges can expand opportunities for CCS professionals, allowing them to benefit from a broader cultural and creative landscape.

Finally, the establishment of a collaborative advocacy group is recommended. This group should comprise CCS professionals, educational institutions, government bodies, and industry representatives. Together, they can raise awareness about the importance of the cultural and creative sector, advocate for policies and funding, and promote the region's cultural identity on a global scale. This collective effort will ensure a unified and sustainable approach to supporting CCS professionals and micro firms in the North Basque Country (FR).

4. CONCLUSION

Reflecting on the CCS Landscape and Challenges

In this policy brief, we have delved into the intricate landscape of the CCS professionals and micro firms in the North Basque Country (FR). We began by acknowledging the rich cultural heritage that forms the region's identity while recognizing the evolving challenges faced by CCS professionals. These challenges include the delicate balance between commercialization and authenticity, the decline of the Basque language, and limited access to funding.

We also explored existing support systems, such as the Communauté Pays Basque ([CAPB](#)) and the Basque Cultural Institute ([ICB](#)), which play vital roles in nurturing the sector. With a strong focus on supporting creative work by setting up artistic residencies.

However, we identified specific gaps in the support infrastructure, particularly in terms of professionalization, international visibility, and inclusivity.

Reinforce Significance of Proposed Initiatives

It is crucial to underscore the significance of the proposed initiatives aimed at supporting CCS professionals and micro firms in the North Basque Country (FR). These recommendations are not merely theoretical; they represent concrete steps toward bolstering the CCS sector. By diversifying funding streams, enhancing digital skills, and creating collaborative spaces, we aim to empower CCS professionals to thrive in an ever-changing cultural landscape.

Furthermore, the DiGiPort project, with its focus on equipping adult trainers and education organizations, has already demonstrated its pivotal role in addressing the specific needs of CCS professionals. Its contribution to developing digital and entrepreneurial skills has become increasingly essential in an era where technology and online platforms play a central role in cultural dissemination.

The creation of a pan-European online platform, a hallmark of the DiGiPort project, allows CCS professionals and artists not only from France but also across Europe to establish their digital pop-up shops. This platform serves as a bridge between artists and their target audiences, promoting their work and expanding their reach. As the cultural landscape evolves, the DiGiPort project stands as a beacon of innovation and resilience, offering valuable tools for CCS professionals to navigate the challenges and seize the opportunities of a digital and dynamic future. Its continued relevance and impact on the cultural sector in the North Basque Country (FR) are paramount for sustaining and advancing the creative community.

The initiatives also recognize the importance of partnerships with educational institutions, the sharing of resources, and cross-sector collaboration. These elements foster an environment where innovation and creativity can flourish, ensuring the sustainability and growth of the sector. The emphasis on cross-border collaboration with

the Spanish Basque Country highlights the shared cultural heritage and the potential for broader cultural exchanges.

Encourage Necessary Actions

As we conclude this policy brief, we urge policymakers to take the necessary actions to enable the growth and sustainability of the Cultural and Creative Sector in the North Basque Country (FR). It is essential to recognize that the CCS sector is not only a source of cultural enrichment but also an economic driver and a beacon of regional identity.

To achieve these goals, we recommend a collaborative approach involving government entities, educational institutions, industry stakeholders, and CCS professionals themselves. Government involvement is pivotal, as it can provide the policy frameworks, incentives, and resources needed to fuel the sector's growth. Industry stakeholders, too, play a vital role by offering support, mentorship, and integration of cultural elements into their strategies.

In conclusion, by embracing the policy recommendations outlined in this brief, the North Basque Country (FR) has the opportunity to foster a vibrant, diverse, and resilient Cultural and Creative Sector. This sector not only preserves and celebrates its unique cultural heritage but also contributes to economic prosperity and global recognition. Policymakers hold the key to unlocking this potential, and their actions today will shape the future of the CCS professionals and micro firms in the region.