

UFISC Manifesto (Federal Union for Intervention of Cultural Structures) for an alternative economy for art and culture

Condensed version

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As professional organisations representing the art and cultural sector, we have come together to be the heart of UFISC, the Federal Union for Intervention of Cultural Structures:

- LA FEDERATION – Professional Association of Street Arts
- FEDUROK – National Federation of French Amplified/Modern Music Venues
- SYNAVI – National Union of Living Arts
- SCC – Union of Creative Circus
- FSJ – Federation of Jazz and Improvised Music Scenes
- CITI – International Centre for Travelling Theatre
- LE RESEAU CHAINON (Federation of New Territories of Living Arts)
- ACTES-IF – Solidarity network of Ile-de France cultural venues
- RIF – Confederacy of departmental networks of modern/amplified music for the Ile-de-France region
- SMA – National union for small and medium non-profitmaking Modern Music Structures
- ZONE FRANCHE – Network of World Music

We the above have written and signed this manifesto and we are fully committed to defending the values and demands stated herein to construct a new social and economic space for art and culture.

The overarching principle of UFISC is to represent over 1500 organisations, developing artistic and cultural projects, combining a multitude of activities: production and dissemination of shows or events, cultural activities in a region in direct contact with the public, artistic creation of spaces for the public and citizens, sharing of know-how and support for amateurs as they develop their practice.

The UFISC founding organisations met in 1999. Their objective was to suggest that the specific nature of the activities carried out by their member structures should be considered. At UFISC we aim to represent this innovative space, promoting this field of experience in the domain of living arts, asserting our thinking and demands in the defence of this sector. We propose a unifying channel through which we can demand other legitimatisation processes for artistic and cultural productions. It is this refusal of the dominant (perhaps systematic) rationalisation of the selection criteria that artistic and cultural structures oppose, both in terms of the rationale of “excellence” followed by public intervention, as well as the financial return that is essential for cultural industries. With their deep-rooted independence, intrinsic to their source of creativity and innovation, they have created this intermediary and alternative space, which is the vital core of a progressive society.

Our values

Art as a driving force for democracy

In part, the foundations of democracy are built upon respect and the consideration of the differences that exist between its members. Art contributes to the implementation of these two principles. By calling upon the imagination, people are able to experience two possible worlds with art, one of difference and one of plurality:

- Difference, because art emerges from the gap between the mundane and the new, offering different perspectives of the same reality;
- Plurality, because one possibility leads to another, even if it is contradictory, meaning that works of art do not exclude each other, but coexist as complementary universes.

Art therefore contributes in developing the personality of each individual and their respect towards others, promoting development and upholding the vigour of democratic societies.

Democracy is also the collective construct of “togetherness”, which in turn becomes ingrained in the peculiarities and differences of each individual, breaking down boundaries. Profoundly relevant, the artistic experience is both unique and collective, whether lived within or outside its creation (artists, spectators, amateurs). Art is founded on this relationship, encompassing both the artist and the perceiver in one interaction, one exchange, and one work. As the result of the human spirit and relationships, art is designed for the community, and cannot, therefore, be viewed as mere merchandise. Likewise, the aim of art is not to contribute to the increase of goods and private wealth. Its fundamental objective is to provide a source of collective interest to enrich each member of society. Artistic experimentation, just as with scientific experimentation, exists to advance knowledge, therefore playing an essential role in the development of awareness and critical thinking concerning human beings and society.

Given their collective nature and history, live performances also constitute an art form and are particularly emblematic of the issues of democracy in a dynamic that oscillates between the individual and the community.

Concerned about their autonomy, the structures represented by UFISC are constructed within a “plural” economy. Implementing their projects and developing their ideas require a variety of economic resources.

Contrary to an ideology in which the market is the only constituent of trade regulation, they have diversified their resources by aligning with market principles (performance tickets, various loans); redistribution (public financing through public service projects undertaken); and reciprocity (significant voluntary involvement, pooling, sharing resources and know-how). This specialisation imbues a certain richness to structures that combine pragmatism with experimentation, in keeping with their artistic and cultural projects.

As an integral objective and as a consequence of their organisational nature, the innovation and experimentation dimension represents a key aspect for companies within this industry. For these small, private structures, in which hierarchy and formal protocol are ultimately underdeveloped, embarking upon collaborations with structures and networking contribute to creating a dynamic which confronts diverse realities, an aspect which in itself contributes towards the constant renewal of projects. Thanks to the close link they seek and build with the public, artists and social fabric, these structures are becoming increasingly attuned to the current developments of cultural and social behaviour.

Craft and workforce economy

Within the activities of performing arts, the unique and artisanal nature of artistic production and distribution, as well as the substantial burden of the “work” factor, lead to a constant relative increase in costs, especially as these activities do not allow for significant savings. Company revenues, essentially made through organising performances, are not enough alone to balance out these costs. Thereby follows a chronic and widespread situation of under-funding, which thwarts the chance of development - hence the need to call upon alternative public aid, even if these now support more one-off projects rather than sustainable structures. Likewise, irrespective of ideological and active choices, varied forms of non-monetary exchanges are used (volunteering, work experience placements, etc.) that complete the configuration of multi-financed nature of these organisations. The often experimental and non-standardised nature of the activity carried out by small companies represented by UFISC places them in an even more difficult economic situation.

New working relationships

Faced with this radical professional and economic uncertainty, and with a view to providing better social protection of employees in relation to that of contractors and freelancers, the trend of looking for statutory employee solutions is set to gain momentum. The emergence of a real “neo-wage system” is aligned with current developments, moving away from the economic and wage management model that has been around since the Second World War. Today, the disparity between the subordination of workers and the responsibility of contractors is becoming increasingly blurred; within this field, performing arts organisations are a perfect example.

The structures represented by UFISC are deeply mired amidst all of these issues. Taking on their role of employer, they nevertheless represent a specific form of organisation and work coordination, where this role is simultaneously supported by volunteers and paid workers. Their operational method is crying out for a reconsideration of work relationships, and in particular payment forms.

What we advocate for

Primacy in citizen initiatives for non-profit making purposes

Profits cannot be the sole purpose of economic activity, because this would lead all company activity into being governed upon the criterion of financial profitability alone. Action within environmental, social, political, artistic and cultural domains cannot be subservient to financial interests. The very purpose of the structures represented by UFISC is to embody and collectively build an artistic and cultural project, whether one-off or established over time. The aims of these organisations are clearly not profit making and their management is altruistic, in that the activities and work undertaken by the individual have greater value than money. Consequently, these structures rely essentially on their associative status and belong to the artistic and cultural “third sector”. To bestow a true identity on the space represented by UFISC, it is vital to establish a legal framework that recognises the plural nature of economic modes. In particular it is a matter of coming up with legal and tax provisions so that non-profit making citizen-led initiatives are no longer systematically torn between commercial logic and public administration logic.

- Promoting the reinvestment of all possible financial surpluses back into the artistic and cultural project, regardless of the legal status of structures.
- Demanding a specific operational mode that blends reciprocal economic resources (non-monetary exchanges, such as volunteering), the market economy (sale of goods and services) and the redistributive economy (public or civil subsidies).
- Intervening to ensure that the artistic and cultural “third sector” has an adequately specific and stable legal space.
- Defending the idea that despite work duration being the same, the difference between personnel wages within the same structure are limited, insofar as the extent that the exchange value reaped at the end is primarily the outcome of collective work.
- Clearly defining the roles, rights and responsibilities pertaining to the status of volunteer or intern within the framework of the performing arts third sector.
- Defending the idea that an organisation with substantial resources (human, spatial, technical, financial, etc.) should support the development of emerging or more disadvantaged structures in the region or within that sector of activity, as opposed to reinforcing its hegemonic position to the detriment of project and initiative diversity.

Primacy in cooperation

The different possible forms of cooperation are the very cornerstones upon which all human activities of real value, both symbolic and economic, are built. The present day hegemony of exacerbated by competition and competitiveness, lead to an all-encompassing impoverishment of the very nature and condition of mankind. Another way of producing and developing wealth is possible. More qualitative, it rests on the foundations of shared and interdependent organisation and management, which benefit people across the board in all areas of corporate activity.

Consequently, we, UFISC, commit to:

- Encouraging the co-management of projects and the shared management of structures as forms of governing that are better adapted to the objectives of its members, in particular regarding the cultural and artistic enterprises they bring together.
- Striving to ensure that workers, whether permanent, temporary, or intermittent, are fully involved in structures and projects as stakeholders of their collective management.
- Fighting to make sure that the full participation of workers adheres to the informal uses of the sector as well as in the regulatory framework (including the Collective Agreement), or in the implementation of this framework by each organisation.
- Working to ensure that forms of redistribution, partly increased through collectively produced wealth, are implemented to the benefit of the majority.
- Taking action to reduce the major divisions between contractors and employees, and moving towards the concept of social rights that are more attuned to the person rather than their active or employment status, thus achieving greater personal security.
- Fostering a genuine managerial ethic among associative companies by taking into account the specific responsibility of their leaders (donors, volunteers or paid workers). This requires a progressive yet increasingly

necessary definition within organisations, of the commitments and responsibilities of each member, especially regarding the roles of funder and decision-maker on an economic and company level.

- Promoting the recognition of pedagogy and cultural action as a driver and form of expression as an integral part of artistic competencies, especially among performing arts professionals.
- Pursuing and strengthening the recognition of collective efforts to analyse and reflect upon organisation and sharing for projects, structures and organisations, by proffering particular support to peer network dynamics.
- Encouraging solid support and cooperation between artistic and cultural structures working in the same area. Striving to ensure that this shared management meets the objectives of each as well as the general interests of the area(s) concerned. Cooperating with similar organisations in other countries that form a part of the cooperative commitment, in accordance with the particular resources of each one.

Primacy in artistic and cultural diversity

Cultural diversity is shaped by the original and plural nature of group and individual identities. It is generated from a dynamic relationship between societies and localities. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity “is as necessary to humankind as biodiversity is to nature”. “It is the common heritage of humanity” (Universal declaration of UNESCO regarding cultural diversity, November 2001 – article 1). Also, defending cultural rights represents a defence of cultural diversity to the extent that these rights recognise the creativity of each individual and personal expression, of traditions, specific practices, which contribute to “a more satisfactory, intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence for everyone” (Universal declaration of UNESCO regarding cultural diversity – article 3).

We request that the contributions of artistic creation and cultural diffusion are rightfully appreciated, by empowering populations and participate to participate in building democratic right to affirm their identity, as well as in relationships and dialogues between cultures. Whether amateurs or professionals, artisanal or industrial, individual or collective, artistic processes and works, one must not be “treated as mere commodities or consumer goods” (Universal declaration of UNESCO regarding cultural diversity – article 8).

Our commitment

Cultural rights form an integral part of Human Rights. The artistic and cultural freedom of individuals and groups is an essential element of democracy. It is the right of each individual to access the resources necessary to advance their personal and social development, as well as a duty of dialogue and understanding towards others.

Consequently, we, UFISC, commit to:

- Contributing to maintaining and developing artistic creation and practices, which, given their sensory and intellectual dimension, play a major part in what makes us human, developing a critical mind-set, and opening up a whole world of belonging and solidarity.
- Standing for the respect of every forms of artistic and cultural expression and representation, developing creative capacity via the multiplicity of its material and intangible forms, confronting risks of homogenisation, concentration or the introverted assertion of identity linked to globalization ; opposing all kinds of hierarchy and desires to impose rigid cultural models among the artistic and cultural forms of expression and all references to the notion of “artistic excellence”.
- Taking action to create conditions favouring the production, diffusion and dialogue between works, goods and diverse cultural expression, representation and services by defending artisanal production. Contributing to help free movement of artists and cultural players, including through new participative and creative uses allowed by ICT.
- Defending artistic experimentation, as the key link between cultural diversity and taking action towards the deep-rooted transformation of current thinking about the artistic offering, so that the rightful place will henceforth be given to each identity and the cultural journey of each person.
- Contribute to the cultural cooperation of citizens and the establishment of a supportive human community, as an indomitable element of cultural development that should not only be structured by industries and cultural media ;
- Striving for the development of regulation ensuring that the public space remains collective property, fostering the diversity through all the forms of the citizens’ artistic and cultural expression and the free exchange amongst them.