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CITIES



CreArt - networking creative cities

Valladolid champions artistic creation

Valladolid has developed a cooperation project to enhance the lives of artists and citizens in similarly-sized cities. By increasing the transnational mobility and visibility of artists and strengthening cultural management skills, 'CreArt - Network of Cities for Artistic Creation' is boosting the economic, social and cultural contribution of the arts in participating cities.



CreArt has become a school for 'Europeism', where people and institutions from different European cities want to come together to work on common projects and to make it possible for their artists to do exactly the same. This is what the European Union advantage is all about.



Juan Gonzalez-Posada, CreArt coordinator and director of exhibitions and museums, Valladolid

Valladolid has reinvigorated its cultural offer over the last two decades, opening new cultural venues and hosting high level exhibitions. The development of the creative sector was made a strategic priority to help diversify the local economy. This has, however, been against the backdrop of one long standing challenge. Cities of Valladolid's size - it has a population of 300,000 - tend not to have access to mainstream international contemporary art exhibitions and activities. More recently, another significant challenge has arisen: the sector has been especially affected by the economic crisis.

The city resolved to respond to these challenges with a bold and sustainable new approach to supporting visual artists. This approach should, it decided, make the most of Valladolid's advantages: extensive national exhibition hosting experience, and direct contact with its artists, something more difficult for Europe's largest cities. By creating a network of similar sized cities with similar agendas and needs, Valladolid sought to enhance and modernise the visual arts sector at both local and European level.

Encouraging networking

Valladolid's thinking developed into CreArt, a permanent and professional system for cultural exchange, skills development and art promotion. As CreArt's ambitions mirror those of the European Commission's cultural

cities in action

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where: Valladolid, Spain
what: cooperation
when: 2012 - 2021

programme, the city submitted its proposal to an open call, winning almost €3.5 million over five years, which was subsequently matched by participating administrations. CreArt, coordinated by Valladolid's municipal foundation for culture, was ready to get started.

The mayors of 200 cities were invited to join the new network. Fifty replied and 12 municipalities, public institutions and independent foundations, from nine countries, signed up. Regular communication and two annual meetings ensure partners feel connected, share learnings and jointly develop plans. Valladolid's coordinating team of two also makes full use of the CreArt website and newsletter plus press contacts to spread the word about its projects and open calls.



Through CreArt's 'artist in residence' programme, exhibitions and conferences I have met and collaborated with artists across Europe, discovered other cultures, started to use different materials, made myself known and been awarded a prestigious scholarship. I was living in Madrid but thanks to the resurgence of Valladolid's cultural activity through CreArt, I now live in my home city again.

Amaya Bombin, artist and CreArt participant

Enabling mobility

Four main groups are encouraged to get involved. The first of these is the 'creative core' of artists, cultural managers, curators, art journalists, galleries and creative industries. Then there are educational communities, cultural policy makers and citizens. But it is emerging artists who are the main players in CreArt. They take part in its overseas 'artist in residence' programme, travelling exhibitions, week-long workshops led by renowned artists, international conferences and seminars on practical issues such as financial management.

Developing the skills and experience of curators and cultural managers is fundamental to CreArt's approach. The programme meets their needs by providing opportunities to organise collective exhibitions, take part in training workshops and conferences, meet colleagues from other cultural traditions and generate spin off projects. CreArt is also committed to increasing local audiences for contemporary art. To create a new visual art experience for citizens, it brings European exhibitions to their door and organises workshops, open arts activities and art in public spaces.



Catalysing action

In its first five years, CreArt organised 26 artist residency programmes, four workshops, 20 seminars and conferences and five travelling exhibitions showcasing the work of 100 artists. It also established the European Day of Artistic Creativity. This annual celebration of the creative process brings art closer to children and citizens, promoting a new relationship between artists and audiences. CreArt has also acted as a catalyst for action among artists themselves, many of whom have formed collaborations with others they have met through CreArt.

CreArt has become a movement for artistic creation and experience and a symbol of quality. Key to its success has been the mobility of cultural stakeholders and artworks - and the way these are managed. Its 'artist in residence' programme was held up as an example of best practice by the European Commission. Moreover, participation has helped network coordinators in their daily work, giving them experience of organising European exhibitions, integrating networking into their working methods and embedding CreArt activities into the cultural life of their city.

CreArt's positive impact on cultural management was highlighted in research by the KEA European Affairs agency into the contribution of artistic creation to local development. Another compelling indicator of success is the European Commission's decision to continue its support for a further four years, from 2017 to 2021. The second CreArt programme will capitalise on lessons learnt from the first. As a result, it will require city coordinators to be in roles closer to local artists and activities and focus on improving the quality, number and variety of activities, particularly for younger audiences. There are also plans to transform the European Day of Artistic Creativity into a month-long celebration that fills city streets and spaces and sees cultural activities pop up in unconventional venues such as bars and shops to reach and inspire new audiences.

