

# Activism and bottom-up narratives of change in Greek cultural policy: the case of #SupportArtWorkers

Aktivismus und Bottom-up-Narrative des Wandels in der griechischen Kulturpolitik: der Fall von #SupportArtWorkers

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## *Abstract*

All over the world, Covid-19 revealed long-term issues concerning the structural vulnerability of artists and cultural workers. In Greece, during the first lock down, an independent initiative, Support Art Workers (SAW), brought to the spotlight artists and cultural workers and their needs and narratives about what needs to be changed in Greek cultural policy. Organised around and expressed through an online and off-line activism campaign, SAW enabled them to articulate their particular status and needs—both in that particular timing, and with forward-looking approaches on overall policy adjustments required in Greece. Such an advocacy-rooted mobilisation holds particular interest in a country where cultural policy has focused predominantly on cultural heritage, largely ignoring contemporary cultural production. Through focus groups and interviews with artists and cultural workers in 2020 and in 2022, we capture the main narratives of artists and cultural professionals in Greece and what has remained from this mobilisation.

Überall auf der Welt wurden während der Covid-19-Pandemie langfristige Probleme im Zusammenhang mit der strukturellen Gefährdung von Künstlern und Kulturschaffenden deutlich. In Griechenland nahm eine unabhängige Initiative, Support Art Workers (SAW), während des ersten Lockdowns Künstler und Kulturschaffende sowie ihre Bedürfnisse und Erfahrungen in den Fokus, um Änderungen in der griechischen Kulturpolitik aufzuzeigen. Die SAW organisierte eine Online- und Offline-Kampagne, um den besonderen Status und die Bedürfnisse von Künstlern zu verdeutlichen—sowohl zum aktuellen Zeitpunkt als auch perspektivisch für die in Griechenland erforderlichen politischen Anpassungen. Eine solche Mobilisierung auf der Grundlage von Lobbyarbeit ist besonders interessant in einem Land, in dem sich Kulturpolitik vorwiegend auf das kulturelle Erbe konzentriert und die zeitgenössische Kulturproduktion weitgehend ignoriert. Durch Fokusgruppen und Interviews mit Künstlern und Kulturschaffenden 2020 und 2022 erfassen wir die wichtigsten Narrative und analysieren, was von dieser Mobilisierung übrig geblieben ist.

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## **Introduction**

All over the world, the cultural sector suffered extensively from the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic. This unexpected, disruptive process revealed long-term issues concerning the structural vulnerability and precarious conditions of cultural and creative workers while opening questions about the resilience and sustainability of the sector as a whole, that were raised by researchers, international intergovernmental bodies and cultural networks (COMUNIAN/ENGLAND 2020; CULTURE ACTION EUROPE/DAMASO 2021; EENCA 2021; IDEA CONSULT et al. 2021; MAGKOU 2021). Nevertheless, it has been acknowledged that this period triggered collective approaches, practices of solidarity, collective mobilisations and activism, and re-addressed the role of unions and other organisational forms (ENGLAND et al. 2022).

Our case study contributes to the literature on collective mobilisations and activism following the Covid-19 outbreak by providing a case study of the SupportArtWorkers (SAW) movement in Greece. SAW was an initiative organised around and expressed through an online and off-line activism campaign that put the spotlight on Greek artists and cultural workers' own narratives. Articulating their particular status and needs—both in that particular timing, and with forward-looking approaches on overall policy adjustments required in Greece—artists and cultural professionals managed to mobilise the sector around a specific cause, as well as to receive wider support and recognition from Greek society. Such a creative, advocacy-rooted mobilisation of artistic and cultural sector professionals holds particular interest in a country where cultural policy has focused predominantly on cultural heritage, while at the same time largely ignoring contemporary cultural production.

In regard to the structure of our study, we first stress the fact that there is little existing knowledge about activism by the cultural sector, itself, for supporting its own rights, for which SAW provides an insightful case study. We provide an overview of Greek cultural policy to explain the context in which the movement was born. In the next part, we present our methodology, followed by the results of our inquiry, and a discussion of the findings. We show that by using social media, the sector

managed to self-organise and articulate collective narratives addressing not only short-term solutions but also substantial reforms that should be introduced in Greek cultural policy, to respond to artists' and cultural professionals' needs and aspirations.

### Activism and the SAW movement

Trade unions and professional guilds in the field of culture have traditionally played a central role in advocacy and lobbying actions to communicatively construct the notion of public interest to influence political and public spheres. In past years, citizens' activism and participation has exploded with the arrival of the Internet, giving a platform for various groups to organise themselves around a specific cause. We have witnessed several movements, such as #Occupy, #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, providing strong evidence that "new media environments" foster civic engagement to solve common problems and implement solutions (SEELING et al. 2019: 15).

As FABIAN and REESTORT (2015) argue, "culture is often emphasised as ingrained in activism; but in academic work on cultural activism it is often unclear what culture actually constitutes or is believed to consist of" and "this multiplication of critical terms" is, in many ways, "a sign of the very elusiveness of 'cultural activism' as a concept" (6). Additionally, there is very little knowledge of activism by arts and cultural professionals, themselves, advocating for their own rights. COMUNIAN and ENGLAND (2022) observed that the Covid-19 era revealed that,

within the sector itself, it is also important for this reframing to take place, and for the examples of (often grassroots) mobilisation, activism, collaboration and mutual aid emerging from the pandemic, to be coordinated and resourced in order to make this work of collectively caring for creative workers both accessible and sustainable in the long term (3).

WESNER (2018) suggests using further narrative-oriented methodologies for the development of cultural policy research and action, and underlines the importance of these narratives for yielding long-term policy solutions. We use this as a starting point to discuss artists' and cultural professionals' bottom-up narratives as legitimate voices to be heard regarding policies that affect them, and the ways SAW triggered small and slow, but promising developments, on the policy level and on self-organisation of the artistic and cultural sector in Greece.

KARAKIOULAFIS (2021) captured the first evolutions following the Covid-19 outbreak and the syndicate mobilisation of actors as a professional group in Greece as part of her longitudinal work on professional careers of actors in Greece. To our knowledge there is no other study that touches particularly on this issue. We expand on this work by capturing the views of artists and cultural professionals, in Greece, on this mobilisation, and its spillovers two years later.

### **The current state of affairs in Greek cultural policy: Focus on heritage**

The SAW movement emerged during the first Covid-19 lockdown in Greece. As noted on the initiative's website, SAW arose

as a reaction to the fact that art workers remained surprisingly invisible for the state as it announced its support measures for the different sectors, without taking art workers into consideration at all (SAW 2020).

To understand the conditions under which SAW was born, we provide a short overview of the Greek cultural policy landscape.

Greek cultural policy has put “emphasis on the diachronic unity of Greek cultural heritage and on the prevalent views expressed both in policy documents and in public debate about the uniqueness and distinctiveness of Greek culture” (DALLAS/MAGKOU 2014: 3). Cultural policy has been evolving around three poles: cultural heritage; the return of the Parthenon Marbles; and culture and tourism (KOURI 2012). This prioritisation of cultural heritage has been visible in numerous policy initiatives and measures, adopted by the Ministry of Culture, at the expense of contemporary culture (AVDIKOS 2014). The dominant cultural policy model for the past four decades has been a top-down, selective and centralised one, which never managed to develop a dialectic communication with society (ZORBA 2014), leaving the contemporary cultural sector without the attention it deserves. Greece's financial crisis, which started in 2009, accentuated the weaknesses of state cultural policy, especially with regards to the limited financial resources available for culture (KOLOKYTHA 2022). It was also a catalyst for a series of transformations in the Greek cultural landscape. It cultivated a spirit of solidarity and grassroots creativity (ARAMPATZI 2016), a more collective approach to artistic work expressed through co-productions, collaborations and partnerships (KOLOKYTHA 2022) and a boom in the creative

and socially engaged arts scene (KANELLOPOULOU 2019; MAGKOU et al. 2022; TSIARA 2015).

In 2017, the first mapping of the cultural and creative industries in Greece (AVDIKOS et al. 2017) was published. The sector was presented as a top priority for the Ministry of Culture and Sports, introducing into its vocabulary concepts of cultural and creative industries and workers. In August 2019, the post of General Secretary for Contemporary Culture was created. Nicolas Yatromanolakis was its first appointee. Just before the pandemic outbreak in January 2020, Yatromanolakis was promoted to Deputy Minister of Culture, demonstrating a political intention to shift from a purely heritage-based paradigm of cultural policy to one acknowledging contemporary cultural and artistic production.

### **Covid-19 early policy responses**

The Covid-19 crisis hit Greece at the time it was still recovering from the financial crisis. The Ministry of Culture and Sports announced a €15m support plan to stimulate and enhance the resilience of contemporary culture and creators and professionals. Measures included financial support through open calls and activities especially designed to move cultural content online. Almost all cultural sectors were addressed through these open calls; however, the competitive process could not cover all professionals. Such open calls required artistic and operational energy from interested parties and did not address individuals, but rather cultural organisations, thus providing a short-term solution for some artists and cultural professionals.

The Ministry announced that it would make structural changes so that artists and cultural professionals could be further supported. Cultural professionals, including freelancers, received either support of 800 euro for the month of April 2020 as compensation for lost activity, or access to a training voucher worth 600 euro. A prerequisite for eligibility for Covid-19 compensation was the registration of all interested cultural professionals to the Directory of Artists, Creators and Arts Professionals. Relief measures were also implemented to address issues such as VAT and social security for freelancers, but there were strong protests about the effectiveness and timescale of the measures, especially because not all cultural professionals met the criteria for registering in the Directory. A study was announced the same month (GREEK MINISTRY OF CULTURE 2020) stating that the research would be part of the wider strategy

of the Ministry for Contemporary Culture. According to the press release, the aim of the research would be to capture the short and long-term impact of the health crisis on cultural professionals, evaluate the impact of the measures undertaken and design policies that would contribute to the sustainability of the cultural sector in the long term. At the writing of our case study, two years after the Ministry of Culture's Announcement, there has been no presentation of any results of such a survey regarding the impact of Covid-19 on the working conditions of the sector.

Overall, the Ministry's measures to address Covid-19 implications in the cultural sector were met with skepticism and disappointment by artists and cultural professionals, as they did not sufficiently address the problems they faced, but provided fragmented and short-term solutions, instead, also with much delay. This disappointment led to a need for action, which prompted the creation of SAW.

## Methodology

As methodology we chose an an intrinsic case study (STAKE 1995) of the SupportArtWorkers (SAW) movement. We aimed at capturing narratives produced both during the first lockdown period and two years later. Therefore, data covers the period from May 2020 until May 2022, as we wanted to include the timeframe from the first, very active period of the movement, until recently when its activity seems to have faded and transferred to other domains.

The first group of our informants were participants in five focus groups conducted during the first lockdown period (May-June 2020) in the framework of the evaluation of START-Create Cultural Change, a capacity-building program for young cultural managers that took place in Greece from 2015 to 2020. Although the purpose of the focus groups was the evaluation of the program itself, unintentionally, the SAW movement appeared as a prevalent topic among participants. One of the questions posed to them concerned their future professional prospects following participation in the program. Focus groups lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Participants were all young cultural managers and artists, under 40 years old, from all over Greece. Fourteen out of the thirty-five focus group participants made explicit reference to the SAW movement, which was at its peak at that time.

Two years after the Covid-19 outbreak (when this article is being written), the SAW movement has lost its intensity. We expanded our inquiry

by exploring artists' and cultural professionals' current views towards the movement and what it achieved in terms of policy developments. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 8 artists and cultural professionals during the period April to May 2022. Half of the interviewees were from our network of contacts with the sector. The rest were approached using the snowballing method, following suggestions from our first interviewees. Interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. Interviewees represented a variety of artistic sectors. Table 1 provides interviewee demographics. Our sample is small, but our aim was not to be representative but rather to unfold common patterns, views and perspectives of the artistic community, and capture the evolutions. The interviewees were not connected to any participants from the 2020 focus groups. Interviews covered four areas: initial involvement or reaction in the movement; opinions about SAW's evolution; and finally what SAW managed to achieve on both the policy level and regarding self-organisation of the artistic and cultural sector.

<b>Artists and cultural professionals interviewed in May 2022</b>					
<b>Interview code</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Residency</b>	<b>Date</b>
I-1	Lighting designer	female	43	Athens	09/05/2022
I-2	Actor	male	27	Athens	19/05/2022
I-3	Actor	male	42	Heraklion	21/05/2022
I-4	Theater director and producer	female	35	Heraklion	21/05/2022
I-5	Actor	male	35	Athens	25/05/2022
I-6	Visual artist	male	43	Athens	22/05/2022
I-7	Film director	male	52	Athens	27/05/2022
I-8	Dancer	female	39	Athens	27/05/2022

Table 1: Artists and cultural professionals interviewed in May 2022

We also reviewed secondary sources, including legislative and policy documents issued by the Ministry of Culture from the beginning of the lockdown until May 2022.

## Findings and discussion

### Cultivating a feeling of collective engagement

Those participating in the focus groups in 2020 demonstrated great enthusiasm and hope in regards to the mobilisation of the sector around the SAW movement. Those interviewed in 2022 referred to the first period of the movement in spring-summer 2020 in almost a nostalgic way. One observation was that SAW, as a campaign, was emotional in the sense that it resonated strongly with those who identified themselves as artists or cultural professionals. Participants in the focus groups that took place during the early days of the movement pointed to the fact that artists and cultural professionals—in a wave of solidarity and collective awareness—were committed to the endeavor and deeply believed in the change it might bring about. One SAW organizing committee member said:

We perform political pressure. In addition to social solidarity we try to demand political change. [...] The network works—because we have a good understanding of culture and of our conditions—we also have the knowledge, the vocabulary and the networks (actor and director, male, 29 years old, focus group participant 30/05/2020).

Another focus group participant stated:

What is happening with SAW is that it is a good vehicle because it's open. It has transcended a grasp of artists—it now includes all 'losers of the guild'. I support it with all my being (co-owner of artist-run-space, male, 36 years old, focus group participant 25/05/2020).

Overall, the perception was that when the movement emerged in spring 2020, it served as a collective voice for artists and cultural professionals who were facing a common threat, “in this case to vent the feeling of fear, of anger and insecurity” (cultural manager, 32 years old female, focus group 23/06/2020) and was on the right direction in order to “put on the map different professions and their rights and to build our identity” (producer in theater productions, male, 36 years old, focus group 25/05/2020).

The personal, and for that reason emotional aspect of the campaign and the mobilization around it was also very vivid in the interviews that



took place two years later in April-May 2022. The initiator of the movement, a young actor from Athens (I-5), underscored that this was not an “adolescent’s impulse” but the outcome of the common consciousness of a younger generation of artists and cultural professionals around the established conditions of their profession: undeclared work, lack of adapted social security schemes, low wages, unpaid rehearsals. For him, the important element of this initiative was that members of the sector met with each other and tried—beyond political parties, guilds or sub-sectorial approaches—to think together about the challenges they faced.

### Revisiting artists’ self-organisation and advocacy practices

Behind the campaign, there was a big mobilisation of artists and cultural workers within the SAW movement. SAW operated through a number of interconnected subgroups: the Action Team, the Open Assemblies Team, the Communication Team, the Writing and Publishing Team, the Solidarity Team and the Nexus Team. All teams were coordinated by the Organisation and Coordination Assembly of SAW. As XAFIS stated when writing on the movement, “We are remaining non-institutional, preserving our political freedom and independence. This also allows us to think and act out of norms in a genuine, creative and activist way” (2020: 4). One notable element of this mobilisation was the work of the Solidarity team: they organised the community in order to collect food, medicine and other things for artists and cultural professionals in need, while also offering a support line to lawyers and accountants to help those needing professional advice on their situations and rights.

The campaign used social media, but engaged with traditional media as well to explain, in more depth, the needs and aspirations of the sector. Especially after the announcement of the first wave of measures, the SAW initiative published a lengthy text and gave interviews to different media outlets to explain why they believed that the Ministry’s announcement was misleading to the public, as well as detailing which issues remained unsolved (TA NEA 2020).

The movement also opened the door for consideration of more creative engagement tools for advocacy actions, using “images and symbols to express their goals and identity, to mobilize new participants, to attract and shape media coverage and to win the support of a range of publics” (ROVISCO/VENETI, 2017: 273). According to one of the artists:

Even when they’re not entangled with political parties, traditional guilds have an outdated “trade union” approach when it comes to protecting the rights of their members. Theoretically, initiatives like SAW can pack more punch and reach a

wider audience, especially if they take advantage of their exclusive privilege in creativity. No one cares for yet another press release or typical demonstration about the problems of a handful of professionals in a specific field. Imaginative and comprehensive forms of protest can turn viral, however, obliging the state to take action (I-8).

In 2022, the initiator of the SAW campaign recognised that although the movement was less active, it had transferred its dynamism into various other areas while keeping its core values, and was functioning as a source of information for the arts and creative sector while supporting other movements and initiatives that had come about. According to him, during the previous two years, SAW had to “decode everything, from the vastness of the cultural and artistic landscape, to guilds, syndicalism, the #MeToo movement in the Greek artistic sector, the outbreak of political violence, while remaining an independent but politically engaged collective of artists” (I-7).

### **Reinforcing the role of the trade unions and of collective action**

Those interviewed in 2022 mentioned that the movement revived the belief in the power of representative structures, such as professional guilds, and wider solidarity movements. According to one interviewee in this group, the mobilisation created a consciousness about their place in contemporary culture:

I had no contact with the Ministry of Culture, nor did I ever feel the need to address the Ministry of Culture or to think that the Ministry of Culture had to take me into consideration. But they had, because contemporary culture it's me and the Ministry of Culture does not take me into account (I-1).

A number of further spillover developments were highlighted by interviewees. The first one was the creation of a new guild called “Kato apo ti skini” (translated as “under the stage”) that brought together professionals working, literally, under the stage or behind the scenes, such as playwrights, costume designers, music curators, set designers, directors, composers, lighting designers, choreographers and the many assistants of these professionals.

Another important element underscored by interviewees was that SAW never had the intention to replace the role of professional guilds. “Very early in the movement we took the decision to support professional guilds and not to go against them”, explained the young actor who was the initiator of the SAW campaign (I-5). Throughout contemporary Greek history, professional guilds, especially in the field of arts and culture, had been an important stakeholder (MOSHONAS 2010). However,

in recent years, the Greek trade union system has been characterised as low in density, weak in its negotiating capacity and unsuccessful in its response to austerity policies imposed on Greece after 2010 (VOGIATZOGLOU 2019). As one interviewee (I-8) explained, SAW functioned as a “communicating vessel” to the professional guilds, for the reason that there was no collective professional consciousness nor advocacy activity for professionals in the field. Following the SAW movement, many of them joined the guilds and even took positions on their governing bodies. “Depending on our own previous level of engagement [as active citizens] we all went a step up” (I-8), the interviewee added.

### Geographic spreading

Although the main operations and calls for action came from the Athens-based SAW group, the movement quickly developed and reached groups in other Greek cities; they developed their own structures locally and gathered around open assemblies to collectively articulate their specific needs. In the city of Heraklion in Crete for example, one interviewee explained that “it was the first time that all the cultural professionals in Heraklion managed to meet” adding that

at first we gathered with the aim to support the activities of musicians that had already been more organised, but then we organised open assemblies and it was the first time that everyone could share their own opinions on how to respond to the pandemic, but not only about what was needed in general in the field of culture in the city of Heraklion (I-3).

Another interviewee from Heraklion mentioned that there were clear impacts of this mobilisation, both in 2020 with, for example, the creation of an online festival platform from the municipality, but also in the long-term, resulting in policy changes. As she explained:

Now the Municipality launches open calls, with criteria, with deadlines, with a dedicated budget for all different municipal festivals, and the digital channel is still available, for example someone that has not received a large budget or for visual artists [...]. There were spillovers as well: the Prefecture, because the municipality became more open and transparent, they got jealous [...] and for attracting votes reasons, they started organising festivals themselves and giving their auspices not only to traditional Cretan musicians (lirarides) but to contemporary culture as well (I-4).

### What remains

The movement transformed as time went by and spilled over from a site of advocacy, triggered by the Covid-19 setting, to other sociopolitical

sites. Anoihti Orhistra (Open Orchestra, in English) was an initiative born in Spring 2021. Its aim was to bring together and support artists from all sectors through music interventions, in the public space, as a form of political act. The orchestra performs in streets and neighborhoods and is open to all people regardless of their age and level of music education. Another initiative was Rogmi (Ρωγμή in Greek, translated as “Crack” in English), which was an initiative of workers in the field of culture. Rogmi was also behind the occupation of the contemporary stage of the Greek National Theater in Spring 2021. The initiative included activities and open assemblies around questions of how we envision art as work; education as a public good; self-organised art; abuse in the cultural sector and institutional violence; or collective action through protests, squatting and escalation of needs. Such collective expressions of solidarity were, in one interviewee’s words, “the little diamond of what was left after SAW managed to combine in a one voice political discourse, emotion and art” (I-8).

Through SAW, the Greek cultural sector became more connected with international counterparts. The initiator of the SAW movement explained that during the first lock-down they organised meetings with various artists’ and professionals’ groups in Europe, and beyond, that were also organised in ways similar to the SAW movement. A few months later, SAW members supported the initiative of French artists and cultural professionals who occupied the Odéon in Paris in 2021 in a spirit of solidarity. SAW also advocated for attracting comprehensive and longer-term support to the sector, for example by adhering to international initiatives promoted by organisations such as IETM (International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts) with the request that substantial support be guaranteed to the sector through the foreseen Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative grant for Greece.

SAW’s slogan evolved from #SupportArtWorkers to #RespectArtWorkers in an effort to raise awareness around assault and mobbing that had recently taken place, which put scandals at the forefront, especially in regards to the National Theatre Director accused of sexual abuse. But on the policy level as well, interviewees mentioned that it was a big change in Greek cultural policy to have an open call, instead of a direct appointment, for higher management positions in public arts organisations, such as the National Theatre. SAW contributed to the establishment of such transparent processes using creative advocacy tools, protests and public statements.

## Revisiting cultural policies

The Covid-19 crisis revealed the lack of preparedness of the state to adequately address the problems the pandemic brought to the cultural sector, which had already suffered for quite a long time due to the financial crisis, and was just starting to get back on its feet after almost a decade. It also highlighted the long-term deficiencies of Greek cultural policy, where contemporary culture had always been on the sidelines.

One of the elements that stood out from the interviews and the additional material reviewed by our research team was the lack of measures in Greece concerning the role and position of artists in the policy-making process, as well as the lack of consultation and exchange with them. This was not a surprising finding. UNESCO'S *Culture & Working Conditions for Artists*, based on a survey on the impact of the *1980 Recommendation Concerning the Status of the Artist* (2019) reveals that artists are absent from policies in most countries, especially when it comes to entrepreneurship or cultural and creative industries. Such policies are mainly adopted at the national level by Ministries of Culture, in line with UNESCO's recommendation, or transversal methods that would involve a coordinated approach by many different institutional actors such as ministries of culture, social affairs, economics, education, labour, and the like (UNESCO 2019). Such a re-framing of creative work implies further provision for social security, and fair and ethical remuneration (CAE/DAMASO 2021), concepts introduced for the first time in Greek public policy discourse as a result of the mobilisation of SAW.

A recent development that can be considered as an outcome of SAW is the inclusion of a financial envelope for arts and culture in Greece's Recovery from Covid-19 Fund. More precisely, 774,024 euro are foreseen for professional and social security reforms in the creative and cultural sector. Even more importantly, an inter-ministerial working group comprising Greece's Ministry of Culture and Sports, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Finance was formed to examine and review the labor and insurance framework for professionals in arts and culture and propose a comprehensive plan for institutional reforms, incentives (financial, tax-related and insurance-related) and other measures, with the aim to upgrade and modernise labor and insurance frameworks, monitor employers' obligations, avoid non-declared work and contribute to the general shielding of art workers' rights (GREEK MINISTRY OF CULTURE 2022).

The group held its first meeting in May 2022. It is not however yet clear how artists and cultural professionals themselves will contribute through their own viewpoints in the development of policies and reforms that affect them the most. The fact that a direct dialogue or consultation with the sector is not foreseen or announced raises questions about whether they will be given a platform to be heard and to enact—confirming the marginalisation of artists in policy-making processes. Participatory consultations with the sector, such as the *Voices of Culture* initiative by the European Commission are a potential pathway to be considered. The recent report by *Voices of Culture* on re-engaging digital audiences in the cultural sectors (VOICES OF CULTURE 2022) for example, advocates for the inclusion of artists in different areas of decision-making in order to safeguard the protection of their work and their rights.

### Conclusions

Our research shows that the most significant repercussion of the Covid-19 crisis on the cultural sector was the self-organisation of the artistic and cultural professionals' community to advocate for long-term reforms. Furthermore, the ability of artists and cultural professionals to adapt to the unexpected crisis through advocacy, and to shift their own personal narratives into an—albeit often improvisational—well organised, collective discourse, demonstrated the power of creative tools and social media to better engage with “the political and bureaucratic apparatus that legitimates [their] work” (GASOI 2020: 12). The collective narratives produced by artists through the SAW movement contributed to a wide acknowledgment of their needs, including freelancers and those without permanent positions in the creative economy value chain.

As in other countries, artists in Greece face significant challenges such as low income, low or non-existent social protection, precarious working conditions and low or no access to benefits that employees are entitled to. It is therefore important to ensure continuous improvement of artists and cultural professionals' social conditions (UNESCO 2019). Pressure groups such as SAW manage to create a framework and conditions that allow reflection on the structural interventions needed, and the sector's need to re-organise itself on the basis of an ethics of care and collective action. As an example of a self-organised advocacy network, SAW made artists and cultural professionals powerful participants in imagining forward-looking cultural policies (MAGKOU 2020).

As explained above, cultural policy in Greece has been scarce and fragmented due to the lack of long-term strategic vision for contemporary cultural policy at the State level, and lack of systematic, empirical data to inform policy (KOLOKYTHA 2022), resulting in fragmented solutions to long-lasting problems. Although positive developments in the sector followed the financial crisis of 2009 (KOLOKYTHA 2022), the inclusion of artists in policy decisions was not, then, considered. As a result, there were no long-term policy considerations concerning the cultural sector, and artists and cultural professionals are underrepresented in policy-making processes and remain at the margins of cultural policy activity.

Nevertheless, worker-centred policy-making can only work if emphasis is on involving workers in re-defining working conditions and on publicly recognising the value of cultural professional's work (COMUNIAN/ENGLAND 2022). Advocacy-related actions such as SAW, that put artists and cultural professionals' narratives forward in imaginative and creative ways, can place artists, as a professional group, into the spotlight and pave the way for further policy developments in the near future.

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