BeHome – Residencies on Focus

Key insights and policy contributions emerging from

#TEH99 Conference in Sofia, Bulgaria

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Foreword

Dear reader,

What you have in front of you is the first version of key outputs from our sessions at #TEH99 Conference in Sofia. These insights are intended to inform and support ongoing policy development and advocacy efforts. Developed as a continuation of the TEH Advocacy Working Group that was launched in 2025, this paper forms part of our broader effort to strengthen our coordinated advocacy at a time of increasing political and financial pressure. Thank you to everyone who contributed by sharing their notes, thoughts, insights and inputs after #TEH99 Conference in Sofia. With the aim of strengthening both this handout and the process behind its development, we look forward to continuing to reflect, draft and test TEH's advocacy work together with you in the future.

TEH Coordination Office team

Introduction: Toplocentrala welcomes TEH in Sofia

The 99th **Trans Europe Halles Conference** (#TEH99) was hosted by a TEH member centre **Toplocentrala** – Centre for Contemporary Arts in Sofia, Bulgaria, between **5–8 June 2025**. By meeting the international community of the network around the theme "Residencies on Focus", Toplocentrala advanced discussions for the development of artist-in-residency funding schemes in Bulgaria. Artist residencies are a powerful tool for cultural mobility and innovative creative practices. The European framework, outlined in documents such as the *Policy Handbook on Artists' Residencies* (2014) and the *Culture Moves Europe* programme (2022), view residencies as catalysts for social integration, diversity, and cross-border collaborations. #TEH99 provided a forum for exchange of ideas, practical collaboration, and policy dialogue, helping to map concrete steps toward sustainable support models for artistic residencies in contexts where such opportunities are still limited.

This report is based on a structured policy extraction methodology developed within the focus points of the Common Spaces project – one of the key TEH network EU-funded projects (2025-2028). Through this methodology, complex discussions and TEH members' contributions are transformed into **key insights** and actionable **policy recommendations for local, national and EU-level advocacy**. The methodology draws on the collective intelligence of TEH network by employing a shared analytical template that focuses on five key dimensions:

- key issues discussed;
- barriers experienced;
- ideas for change and proposed solutions;
- actions and stakeholders involved;

- and the governance level responsible for implementation.

Insights were systematically collected through facilitated sessions and workshops across four thematic areas, structured notetaking, post-session written inputs, moderated discussions, and additional materials shared by the network. The data was subsequently systematised and synthesised. By consolidating the findings into four overarching policy areas, the methodology ensures comparability, clarifies the basis for advocacy messaging, and facilitates targeted policy engagement across multiple governance levels.

The four overarching policy areas are:
- sustaining artistic residencies;
- digital transformation;
- ecological transformation;
- *extra*: TEH network advocacy roadmap.

Diving deeper into each of them, #TEH99 Conference allowed us to look at the residency theme with a focus on funding, e.g. "Workshop on residency funding schemes" with successful examples from Italy and Slovakia, shared by Michal Klembara and Davide D'Antonio, an "Interactive session on rural residencies" with a discussion on social-inclusion on social-inclusion with Yanina Taneva, Lia Reithner, Dela Miessen. Expanding on digital perspective, Ville Laaksonen offered a session entitled "Beyond Borders: Co-creating culture through digital & virtual residencies and the SocialVR." Further, we were joined by TEJA, the Network of Cultural Spaces in Support of Emergency Situations addressing the importance of residencies as spaces of refuge and protection. The Sustainable Building Hubs session expanded on the ecological perspective. This being by far not all, this paper summarises is the essences of TEH99 conference sessions contributing to key

questions around residencies and how we sustain them, promote them, use them for more than cultural production, how we make them accessible and how we embed them socially and financially in our local contexts.

1 Sustaining art residency models

Under the first policy objective on residencies, we gathered insights from the opening panel (1.1), the workshop on residency funding models (1.2), the session on rural residencies (1.3) and TEJA (1.4).

1.1 TEH99 Conference opening panel

Participants

Facilitated by Frido Hinde (President of Trans Europe Halles).

Bojana Panevska, residency advisor at *DutchCulture | TransArtists* and President of On the Move. Bojana brings over 15 years of experience in strengthening the position of artists within society. As a researcher and advocate for cultural mobility, she has been instrumental in leading initiatives that promote freedom of expression and the accessibility of artistic opportunities across Europe.

Davide D'Antonio, artistic director, lecturer, advocate, and former board member of IETM, the international network for contemporary performing arts. With 12 years of experience in contemporary creation, Davide has played a key role in shaping cultural projects across Italy. As a trainer and advocate, he's worked to strengthen the Italian residency model and continues to champion international mobility in the arts.

Yana Genova, cultural policy expert and cultural manager. Based in Sofia, Yana has worked extensively in building sustainable international cultural partnerships. Her focus on community care and creating long-lasting collaborations in the arts sector aligns with her vision for future cultural mobility.

"Imagine being a mayor with a derelict public building: will you turn it into a hotel, or a hub for international cultural exchange?"

Yana Genova

"An urban fabric beaming with art and creativity at every cell and corner of its expanse is a win-win for all: policy makers, real estate developers, artists, and residents" (Alexander & Anglès, 2019, p. 87)

Overview of art residency functions

Artist residencies are **structured, time-limited programmes that provide artists and cultural professionals with space, resources, and context to develop their work, exchange ideas, and engage with new communities**. They may take place in **urban, rural, digital, or cross-border settings**, often hosted by cultural centres, institutions, or independent initiatives. Beyond production, residencies foster **research, reflection, and collaboration**, acting as platforms for **mobility, cultural exchange, and social innovation**.

Residencies have power and potentials

Residencies, just like cultural centres are unique and meet different local circumstances, therefore, there is no one size fits all solution. Below are a few options how we can think of them and how they might serve us.

Residencies have translocal relevance

Residencies provide a temporary basis, a home, for residents, and at the same moment they enable translocal exchange and positioning of hosts and resident artists. A hybrid of local integration and global dialogue, and, as **Davide D'Antonio**

articulated, this dual positioning allows residencies to become dynamic agents of social cohesion locally and facilitate intercultural exchange, which makes them globally relevant, yet they are grounded in place.

Residencies provide space for innovation and resistance

A recurring point raised was the need to recognize residencies not solely as production sites but as places for reflection, and research. Several speakers and participants challenged the expectation for tangible outcomes, calling for greater appreciation of the intangible value of residencies—connection, critical thinking, and community engagement. As one participant aptly summarized: "We are not always producing products. We are producing relationships, questions, and spaces for focus." In increasingly autocratic contexts, residencies provide safe zones for critical thinking, dissent, and systemic renewal. Residencies become additional spaces where we cultivate artistic practices that can subvert dominant narratives through long-term, embedded engagement within communities.

> *"Residencies should not be seen as extensions of embassies, but as places of empathy, co-creation, and listening."*
>
> **Yana Genova**

Residencies have impact on several dimensions

Residencies programmes are economically smart, socially beneficial, and politically attractive, here is why:

Economic multiplier effects

Data from Italy indicates residencies are economically efficient, with a €5 million public investment generating €7 million in direct artist support. Their decentralized,

co-funded models encourage local fundraising and engagement, enhancing their sustainability and cost-effectiveness compared to traditional theatre institutions.

Social and professional development

Residencies help to democratize artistic ecosystems, offering emerging artists platforms for experimentation. The local embeddedness of residencies *and* international exposure grants emerging artists access to local, regional and national scenes, while it helps expanding their international network and visibility. In Italy, the rise of new artists into established institutions is a direct outcome of residencies' bottom-up logic.

Cultural innovation and diversification

As **Yana Genova** notes, residencies act as cultural laboratories, importing and incubating new aesthetics, methods, and audience engagement practices. They enrich the local cultural life, especially in peripheries and post-industrial spaces that lack vibrant artistic ecosystems.

"International artistic residencies may be viewed as tools of cultural diplomacy. Demonstrating artistic hospitality is far more powerful than simply exporting culture."

Yana Genova

Diplomacy and visibility

Residencies offer a subtle but powerful form of cultural diplomacy, fostering trust and visibility through hospitality rather than export of cultural productions. Their impact may be delayed but is often more authentic and lasting than curated international showcases. Located in, or attached to independent cultural centres,

residencies underline the importance of diverse cultural landscapes, beyond institutional flagship projects.

Residencies vary in type and impact

Panellists noted significant diversity in residency structures: from place-bound and topic-cantered formats to multidisciplinary, privately-run or grassroots models. Such diversity contributes to a broader ecosystem but also demands tailored policy tools. Yana Genova emphasized that different models create varied outcomes, such as writer residencies contributing to literary diplomacy or rural residencies supporting local regeneration. A common thread, however, is their multiplier effect: residencies often leverage modest funding into extensive cultural, social, and economic returns.

Drawing on experiences from Italy, Bulgaria, and the Netherlands among others, the opening panel underlined the transformative potential and pointed to structural vulnerabilities of diverse residency models. Practitioners emphasized the need for policies that treat residencies as commons, spaces co-designed by artists of diverse backgrounds, intergenerational cohorts, and underrepresented communities.

Key insights:
- Investing in artist residencies activates underused public spaces for culture that potentially deliver more value than they cost, multiplying every euro of local funding into activity, stronger community ties, and international visibility for a hosting city.
- A residency can host and empower; offering space for temporary production and foster long-term engagement, benefitting the resident artist and the local context.

Securing artist residencies

Residencies need support but not a one-size fits all model: For a residency to unfold its full potential it is necessary to take its context into account, to acknowledge possible links with local actors and support these accordingly. Relationships take time to develop, but if they are built, they protect the residencies and

Structural challenges and opportunities

Funding fragmentation

Bulgaria and other countries suffer from inconsistent residency funding lacking continuity. The current situation hampers to develop reputations or stable partnerships and thus to unfolding long-term local impact and global competitiveness. To make a residency programme successful, structural funding is needed

Network gaps and knowledge transfer

While networks like Trans Artists, Res Artis and On the Move provide invaluable support infrastructure, data inconsistency, due to part-time staffing, and regional imbalances persist. Many programmes rely on outdated listings or ad-hoc partnerships, limiting transparency and access.

Application burdens processes and selection barriers

Several contributors expressed concern over burdensome application processes that demand significant unpaid labour. Furthermore, highly selective eligibility

requirements (e.g., nationality, production output, career stage) often exclude underrepresented artists, caregivers, or those from non-EU countries. Suggestions included simplifying application forms, adopting alternative selection models (such as lotteries), and co-funding schemes that involve both host and artist's home institutions.

Cultural workers and non-artists lacking access

While many programmes cater to artists, cultural workers such as curators, producers, or community organizers are often left out. Panellists advocated for expanding residency definitions to include these profiles, recognizing their critical roles in supporting artistic ecosystems, especially in fragile contexts.

Equity and risk

Residencies increasingly support artists at risk—from war, political persecution, or climate collapse. However, many EU-funded programmes restrict eligibility to artists from Creative Europe countries, leaving vulnerable populations excluded from essential support. To strengthen trans-local ties and export the benefits and values of European culture, future residency schemes should enable non-European collaboration to bring inspiration to Europe and support to allies.

Additional insights from engagement with the audience

The panel welcomed active participation from the audience, who brought valuable reflections on the everyday realities and broader implications of residencies.

Several participants highlighted the potential for expanding residency ecosystems by fostering partnerships with institutions such as universities and municipalities.

These suggestions emphasized the importance of aligning residencies more closely with educational frameworks and civic infrastructures, reinforcing their role as embedded, cross-sectoral actors within local development.

Concerns were raised about the transparency of application and selection processes in residency programmes. Contributors stressed the need for inclusive procedures that address structural inequities, particularly those affecting artists from marginalized or underrepresented communities.

The discussion further examined the political context in which residencies work. Participants noted the difficulties of advocating for residency programmes in environments where cultural infrastructure is undervalued or under threat. The importance of sustained, localized advocacy and the integration of intersectional design principles was underscored as essential for long-term policy relevance and impact.

Overall, audience input reaffirmed the report's key themes: residencies must evolve toward models that are participatory, context-aware, and rooted in social value. Enhanced collaboration between sectors, inclusive governance structures, and ongoing policy dialogue were identified as critical enablers for the future of artist residencies in Europe.

Funding competition and ecosystem fragility: Some residency hosts struggle to survive without charging artists. While this clashes with Western ideals of free access, participants stressed the need to acknowledge regional funding disparities before passing judgment.

Residencies as "bridges, not fortresses": A powerful metaphor from the discussion emphasized residencies' role in connecting artists to local realities rather than isolating them in elite or disconnected spaces.

Policy recommendations

Based on the opening panel we propose the following recommendations to address governments on different levels:

For national and local governments

- ***Support residencies as innovation hubs:*** position residencies within smart specialization strategies and creative economy policies, acknowledging their role in local development and innovation.
- ***Foster rural and peripheral models***: encourage municipalities—especially in depopulated or economically declining areas—to transform underutilized buildings into cultural assets.
- ***Use vacant public properties:*** convert underutilized municipal assets into artist residency spaces rather than privatizing them, transforming cultural liability into civic value.
- ***Incentivize regional co-funding:*** create matching-fund mechanisms between national, regional, and municipal budgets to promote shared responsibility and investment.
- ***Institutionalize residency funding:*** establish multi-year funding schemes (minimum 3 years) to allow residencies to plan, evaluate, and integrate into local ecosystems.

- **simplify application procedures**: develop standardized, lightweight applications and ensure transparency in selection processes to reduce unpaid labour and increase inclusivity.
- **Support alternative residencies:** acknowledge the legitimacy of residencies that prioritize research, rest, or community engagement without demanding tangible artistic output.
- **Use and strengthen residencies' regenerative capacity** in local cultural ecosystems

For the EU and transnational actors

- **Address gaps in artist at risk support**: develop emergency schemes that extend beyond Creative Europe countries to include displaced, stateless, or at-risk artists from other regions.
- **Enable co-funding across borders**: pilot mechanisms where both the artist's country of origin and the host country/institution contribute to residency costs, reducing pressure on a single funding source.
- **Invest in networks supporting cultural workers**: expand network funding to include mentorship and mobility for cultural professionals beyond artists (e.g., technicians, curators, producers).
- **Ensure inclusive mobility funding:** broaden eligibility in programmes like Culture Moves Europe to support artists from non-EU countries and those at risk.
- **Invest in data infrastructure:** fund platforms such as *Trans Artists* to maintain accurate, real-time databases and enable AI integration for improved accessibility and outreach.

- *Foster regional networks:* support cross-border residency collaborations through network incubation grants, especially in under-resourced regions.
- *Align with climate and social goals:* encourage residencies formats to adopt sustainable practices and offer fellowships related to ecological transition, social justice, and cultural resilience.

"Always look for loopholes. Find funding that was never meant for you and claim it through creativity."

Bojana Panevska

1.2 Workshop on artistic residency funding schemes

The workshop on funding models facilitated by Michal Klembara (Malý Berlín - a TEH member, TEH Executive Committee member) & Davide D'Antonio (Idra Teater) brought together experiences and practices from different countries currently providing schemes for artist residencies across Europe as **tools for creativity, mobility, and social cohesion**. Italy and Slovakia offer two contrasting models: one highly structured, the other still evolving, while other countries (France, Belgium, Germany) present complementary examples of how public and civic actors can share responsibility for residencies.

Country snapshots

COUNTRY	FUNDING MODEL	STRENGTHS	CURRENT CHALLENGES
ITALY	**State–Region co-funding system** under Article 43 (Ministry of Culture + regional match). Over 62 residencies in 19 regions; 3-year cycles with monitoring.	Long-term stability and shared governance; flexible local models; legal framework ensures continuity.	Payment delays (6–12 months); unequal regional investment; balancing openness with administration.
SLOVAKIA	**Arts Council–based support** launched	Covers salaries and facilities;	Political uncertainty and

	post-COVID. Residencies included under broader cultural centre funding; some EU/Interreg use.	growing professionalisation and expertise on residencies.	shrinking budgets threaten programme continuity.
CZECH REPUBLIC	**Highly centralised cultural funding**, with around 40% from the Ministry of Culture; limited regional coordination. Residencies mainly driven by independent organisations with ad hoc municipal or EU project support.	Strong independent scene and growing advocacy for decentralisation; active TEH members promoting mobility.	Lack of coordinated national framework; funding volatility; weak cooperation between state and regions.
THE NETHERLANDS	**Mixed public funding and foundation-based support**, coordinated nationally through DutchCulture.	**Trans Artists** and the **Creative Industries Fund NL**. Residencies often co-funded by municipalities, provinces, or private partners.	Ecosystem with clear guidance, mobility information platforms, and strong links to EU and international networks.
FRANCE	**State-driven and centralised**, focused on accessibility and public	National funding and institutional support.	Potentially limited flexibility

	mission (e.g., Centres Nationaux).		and local adaptability.
BELGIUM (FLANDERS)	**Artist-centred, flexible residencies**, often process-based (e.g., WP Zimmer, BUDA).	Encourages experimentation and artistic autonomy.	Small scale and dependence on regional priorities.
GERMANY	**Federal mixed model**, combining institutional and grassroots initiatives.	Diversity and local regional identity.	Fragmented coordination across Länder; uneven access to support.

Additional insights from engagement with the audience

- Build/use a shared knowledge bank (via TEH): practical guides on private match, corporate sponsorship, crowdfunding, and legacy giving; templates for residency partnership agreements and cash-flow planning.
- Adopt a light-touch standards pack: minimum duration, "no artist fees," openness across disciplines, and basic infrastructure criteria strong enough for quality, light enough for flexibility.
- Co-funding playbook: replicate Italy's narrative locally—region/municipality + ministry + private foundation matches—paired with evidence on public-to-private leverage.

Potential pitfalls on various funding schemes

- Policy volatility & (re)centralisation: lines can vanish between funding cycles; over-central rules may ignore local realities in the Czech context
- Payment lags: even "approved" funding can arrive late

Policy recommendations to TEH members

- Position the residency as a **public service for cultural participation**, not an elite artistic project.
- Present the residency as **a strategic investment**, not a subsidy, that attracts talent, funds, and visibility to the locality.

"Residencies are not just homes—they are powerful engines of social integration, cultural resistance, and systemic change."

Davide D'Antonio

1.3 Session on rural residencies

An interactive session on residencies in rural contexts was facilitated by Dela Miessen (Fix in Art, a TEH member) & Yanina Taneva (board member of Toplocentrala, a TEH member). They opened the session with an interactive centre/periphery-dynamics activity to illustrate how crucial these dynamics are for both example residencies: *echoes* & Baba. Both examples are examples of how rurality itself is not a backdrop but an active agent in residency-making, transforming artistic research to enable deeper resonance and more sustainable community engagement.

Yanina Taneva, is further one of the founders of the **Baba residency** programme in Bulgaria, an interesting case through which the facilitators illustrated the rural dimensions and possibilities of residencies. This residency programme does not only bridge the urban rural gap, but also the intergenerational gap. By bringing urban youth together with elderly rural residents, exchange happens between life in the village and the city, between intangible and tangible cultural heritage and contemporary arts and culture.

Participants (artists and cultural professionals in the last 5 editions) receive training in design thinking and social entrepreneurship, field work approaches etc. to be equipped to develop meaningful practices and innovations in the villages, directly contributing to their access to culture. While the residency stay is one month short, the programme has been successful for over ten years (starting as a volunteer residency, then a social entrepreneurial, then artistic) and proves that meaningful relations, trust, and friendship require time to develop. Not granting this time risks not only wasting personal and financial resources but also forecloses the mutual benefits.

Whereas rural residencies are often discussed in terms of decentralization or provision of cultural access outside the metropolitan centres, **echoes residency** based at **Fix in Art** in Epanomi, Greece, highlights the capacity of the rural context to host **alternative / non-institutional, relational forms of knowledge production.** *Fix in art* and *echoes* residency show how rural environments precisely operate in different temporalities, social fabrics and infrastructural constraints which can become a fertile ground for forms of learning that are less extractive and more interdependent.

While many of the general points regarding residencies brought up earlier in this report hold truth for rural residencies, their potential to provide access to arts and culture for rural populations, as well as a different quality of artistic freedom are mentioned as benefits. Yet, there are additional challenges:

- **Temporal needs:** While long-term horizons are to the benefit of residencies, both the design and implementation of residencies in rural areas are said to take especially long time to fully unfold their potential and most importantly, gain recognition within the local community. The duration of a residency programme is ideally longer, for the residents and local community to connect meaningfully, as local acceptance takes time. Further, local audiences and artistic content might require additional translation to be appreciated.

- **Overcoming physical distances:** Residency facilitators are self-dependent and with a lack of social- but more importantly transportation infrastructure, solving accessibility issues requires unforeseen work, often invisible care work to facilitate residents' integration. This work, difficult to translate into

policy language, remains overlooked and leads to risks of burn out. While it is important to recognise the work that it takes to integrate a resident into a local context, rural resident artists are at greater risk of isolation and social exclusion.

Policy recommendation for TEH network

- Recognise residencies and their potential.
- Facilitate network-rural residency collaborations.
- Identify common ground among the residencies' differences.
- Identify strategic moments to advocate, e.g. European Capital of Culture.

"Residencies are guerrilla spaces. They can react faster than institutions, becoming shelters for artists at risk, often before policy catches up."

Bojana Panevska

1.4 TEJA – Network of Cultural Spaces in Support of Emergency Situations

Founded in May 2022, TEJA is a transnational network that provides temporary residencies in Spain for artists and cultural professionals affected by conflict or political crisis. Its mission is to safeguard artistic freedom and cultural continuity where these are most at risk. The initiative was launched by three independent spaces in Madrid—Nave Oporto, Paisanaje, and Planta Alta (hablarenarte)—as a gesture of solidarity following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Since then, TEJA has expanded to include 15 public and private organisations from Madrid, Barcelona, and Bilbao, and has extended its work to other emergency contexts such as Palestine and Iraq, building new alliances across the cultural sector. Through its residency programme, TEJA offers accommodation, legal and psychological support, and access to a professional network that helps artists continue their creative work despite displacement or crisis. It also facilitates dialogue and collaboration between residents and host communities, ensuring that freedom of expression and cultural diversity remain protected. The name TEJA—Spanish for "roof tile"—symbolises collective shelter: each participating organisation acts as one tile within a shared structure of care and solidarity. Together, they form a protective network that preserves creativity as a form of resilience and cultural survival.

Having Bojana Panevska's words in mind "the question isn't how to support artists at risk, it's how to support all artists in need, without being selective", TEJA shows how independent cultural spaces can act collectively as protective, resilient infrastructures, ensuring that artists can continue their work and contribute to host communities despite displacement. Therefore, governments and EU institutions should recognise and fund emergency residency networks as vital cultural infrastructure safeguarding artistic freedom and cultural diversity in times of crisis.

Policy recommendations

- Establish **dedicated rapid-response funding** for emergency residencies and mobility.

- Integrate **cultural protection into humanitarian and civil response frameworks**.

- Support **national and regional networks** linking public bodies, independent spaces, and private partners to provide safe residencies and professional integration.

- **Recognise and fund cultural solidarity networks** like TEJA that protect artists at risk and uphold freedom of expression through emergency residencies and cross-sector cooperation.

2 Virtual spaces and digital residencies

Ville Laaksonen (CULTURHUB – Virtual Art House Turku) hosted a session with the title "Beyond borders: Co-creating culture through digital & virtual residencies and the SocialVR" , where it was explored how virtual spaces could enhance creative collaboration and cultural exchange based on the snsights from CULTURHUB - Virtual Art House.

The digital cannot replace the physical, but digital residencies add to physical practices in many important ways. Presenting the platform [CULTURHUB](#), the session focussed on digital residencies capacity to support cultural centres, more than individual artistic projects. It calls out for cultural professionals to collaborate.

The open platform CULTURHUB allows digital cultural professionals to collaboratively explore the possibilities of arts and cultural productions facilitated and/or enhanced by virtual reality (VR) or artificial intelligence (AI). The platform is co-created by a global community (partners on every continent except Antarctica). The platform is linked to the Virtual Art House (VAH), funded by NextGeneration EU and the Art House in Turku.

For artists directly, the CULTURHUB provides a platform for peer to peer and artist to audience interactions, equipping the artist with a customisable virtual room. Artists can share documents, media, and live performances. In June 2025, the community includes 75 actors (artists, curators, tech partners, and funders). The platform allows networking and partnerships both with curators and organisations, inside the field but also with the tech-industry. Such knowledge exchange benefits both cultural centres and the tech sector gains into digital

creativity and cultural values. And, Ville emphasised, this is not volunteer based, but paid jobs are created. EU partnerships secure funding and policy engagement.

There are challenges and risks regarding security: while artists self-moderate, moderation is needed to prevent misuses, such as the distribution of hate symbols and messages.

In sum, virtual/digital residencies:

- Allow blending virtual and physical elements;

- enable global-scale networking;

- enhance cultural and creative collaboration and exchange;

- allow for experimentation and new cultural formats and experiences;

- complement physical interactions;

- digital accessibility of residencies increases participation;

- allow artists' work to be shared with a global audience and increase their impact;

- are flexible and adaptive to the evolving needs of cultural centres;

- provide temporal and spatial flexibility: exhibits can run all year round, host artists from all over the world and are not limited by physical spatial limits;

- reduce dependency on air travel;

- allow access to remote audiences;

- enable real partnerships, visible outcomes (e.g., curatorial collaborations),

yet to work well, they require:

- tools for cultural centres to navigate additional digital layers;

- scaling up virtual engagement;

- a resident selection process based on skills and needs.

Policy recommendations

Virtual residencies and platforms such CULTUREHUB complement physical residencies and future cultural production. Virtual residencies add value in many ways, but don't have the capacity to replace the value of a locally embedded residency programme and its community benefits. It is a unique tool to connect local audiences with global arts and culture, or vice versa, enabling new forms of participation based on cross-border cultural exchange.

Virtual residencies become a space for possibilities of collaboration and mutual, yet unequal exchanges between tech and culture. They bring momentum to critically explore support initiatives where tech companies and cultural organisations team up: There's a lot to gain from shared skills: tech brings tools and infrastructure; culture brings content and creativity.

Revised funding criteria for virtual residencies should fully recognise digital and virtual residencies in national and EU funding schemes, not as exceptions, but valid formats, because they support digital access for all, pushing for investment in digital infrastructure for cultural centres especially in regions with limited access. Virtual residencies extend the local connecting creators and audiences internationally, without relying on physical mobility.

3 Expanding environmental thinking & decolonising ecological perspectives

"Residencies compose ecologies of practices in themselves, where artists can focus on their work, form relationships, and continue or shift their participation in artistic traditions, movements, and discourses." (Roberts and Strandvad, 2022, p. 22)

Through the *Common Ground* project, TEH and its partners are actively engaged in the ecological transition. At TEH99 the Sustainable Buildings Hub's (SUB Hub) session "Emerging ecologies: Exploring the post-natural, sustainable hub" was facilitated by Leonardo Delmonte (Wunderkammer), Hugo Tiers (Oltre), and Guglielmo Capurro (Imbarchino). The session provided insights into the ongoing work in the project and specifically the building of a platform in collaboration with Polytechnic University of Turin, that helps mapping actions, sharing best practices and enabling peer exchange.

Policy recommendations

To close the gap between ecological ideals and daily practices it needs funding for more than management of programmes; by granting time for tool development and implementation in everyday actions based on broader participation from cultural workers, researchers and citizens

Conclusion TEH 99: Rethinking Residencies as Democratic Infrastructure

TEH99 in Sofia was dedicated to artist residencies primarily but not only; also considering the potentials of residencies in urban, rural and digital space, and the different ways in which they facilitate learning, thinking, and developing ideas. Together we have realised that artistic residencies in Europe today serve far beyond cultural production purposes, they are infrastructures for local cultural life: social innovation, serve cultural diplomacy, and are sites to strengthen democratic resilience. In other words, residencies serve us as additional resources to grapple with growing ecological, political, and economic pressures; residencies prove to provide critical (inter-)spaces for care and creation, where international cultural work intersects with local communities, sustainability, and cultural rights, and offer a space to negotiate the politics of mobilities.

Residencies are no longer peripheral or "extra" to cultural policy—they are central to shaping a cultural future rooted in connection, not competition. They are integral democratic infrastructures, uniquely equipped to support artists, transform institutions, and engage communities across national and cultural boundaries. As soft power tools, facilitators of diplomacy social laboratories, and economic actors, they must be recognized and supported accordingly.

If residencies are to live up to their full democratic, social, and cultural potential, then they must be understood as living laboratories—not just for the arts, but as a space to rethinking how society relates to care, collaboration, and imagination. What emerges from Sofia is a call to action not only for better policies, but for a shift in mindset: from extractive funding toward regenerative ecosystems.

Appendices

Residency Data Overview (Italy)

- Total venues: 67

- Public funding: €5 million/year

- Artists hosted: ~950/year

- Staff employed: 766

Key Networks & Contact Points

- Trans Artists (Netherlands) https://www.transartists.org/en

- Res Artis (International) https://resartis.org/

- On the Move (EU-wide mobility) https://on-the-move.org/

- Artists at Risk (Helsinki & global) https://artistsatrisk.org/?lang=en

- TEJA https://redteja.org/en/home-2/

- Zapravka (Ukraine)

- Sofia Literature & Translation House: https://www.npage.org/en/page?id=25

- Residenze Artistiche (Italy): https://www.residenzeartistiche.it/

4 Advocacy: building an actionable TEH advocacy roadmap

Kick-starting the TEH-member requested advocacy working group in Sofia through a session with Christophe Knoch, we set the ground for a "TEH method of advocacy". While this is work in progress, transnational solidarity, and the importance of grassroots mobilisation stood out as TEH values to build upon.

The workshop clarified the difference between advocacy and lobbying:

- **Advocacy:** broad act of supporting a cause of idea, often through education, public awareness, or community engagement.
- **Lobbying:** specific type of advocacy involving direct attempts to influence legislation or government policy, usually by communicating with lawmaker officials.

Other workshop insights include that advocacy requires (1) an analysis to gain clear knowledge (numbers, turnover, employees, and social values) as argumentative basis for dialogue, (2) an understanding of the layers of intervention (local, regional, national, international (EU level), and the (3) identification of target groups.

2.1 TEH Advocacy Group: Creating Space, Defending Culture

A discussion of cases presented by TEH members from Georgia, Portugal, Slovakia and Luxembourg highlighted the need for contextual care and tailored approaches. A position of relative safety can be a lever to address EU level.

Recommendation: To improve the conditions for work of TEH members, it needs both tools for individual members, but also increased activity on the network level, including collaboration with other networks to be responsive in crisis situations.

Following the workshop, an advocacy working group will meet regularly to discuss strategically "How can I react in times of crisis?" and will be followed upon at TEH100 in Riga.

2.2 The hub structure's role in future advocacy? (Based on HUB coordinators session)

TEH works in a decentralised way with several thematic and geographic HUBs. The session confirmed the hubs importance as decentral TEH bodies enabling connection among members and artists (especially during COVID19) marking TEH's regional differences and diversity of experiential knowledge as key strengths. Regional hubs have localised monitoring capacity, to first report and respond on politics and crisis, report to the CO and keep the network strong despite its geographical dispersion.

During the hub-session, development potentials were identified:

- individual hubs would benefit from clearer roles and responsibility structures, stability of member engagement and coordination, as well as a redefinition of their hub's purposes (their activity or inactivity might be indicative of a hubs' needs, or whether the hub is needed in the region);
- create a joint digital infrastructure to effectively manage data and information despite changing roles and responsibilities in the hubs (keep the knowledge and own the development and growth process of hubs).

Future steps regarding hubs:

TEH office consults with individual hubs, activity status, needs assessment, possible

support strategies, making them visible to all others

Further readings

Alexander, Livia, and Nathalie Anglès. *Embedding, embedded – A residency perspective from New York.* In: Elfving, Taru, Irmeli Kokko, and Pascal Gielen. 2019. *Contemporary Artist Residencies - Reclaiming Time and Space*. Valiz, pp. 166-175.

Elfving, Taru, Irmeli Kokko, and Pascal Gielen. 2019. *Contemporary Artist Residencies - Reclaiming Time and Space*. Valiz.

Roberts, Kathryn S., and Sara Malou Strandvad. 2022. "Artist Residencies as Creative Ecologies: Proposing a New Framework for Twenty-First-Century Cultural Production." In *The Cultural Sociology of Art and Music*, edited by Lisa McCormick. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-11420-5_3.

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