

Call for Contributions

In April 2025, Erasmus University Rotterdam and the Boekman Foundation (Boekmanstichting), in collaboration with the National Network for Cultural Policy (Landelijk Netwerk Cultuurbeleid), will organize the conference '*Culture as a Problem Solver?*'. What role can arts and culture play in addressing public issues? Are the expectations of this role too high or either too low? How does the use of art for broader societal goals relate to autonomy and artistic freedom? Should this even be the task of arts and culture?

We invite researchers and representatives from the cultural and creative sectors to present their research on the role of culture as a problem solver. Contributions from a diverse range of disciplines are welcome, such as academic, design-based, artistic and policy research and examples of citizen science.

Creatives, cultural institutions, and funds are increasingly emphasizing a societal approach to arts and culture, as reflected in government policies. For example, since 2022, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has been funding a design-based research program to encourage creators and institutions from design disciplines to contribute to issues such as energy transition and housing challenges. Various studies also indicate that participation in culture has positive effects on well-being and social cohesion. In February 2024, a national research agenda for art in healthcare was introduced.

Despite the enthusiasm for the broad possibilities of arts and culture, the role they can play in solving social issues is complex. For instance, there are concerns within the sector about instrumentalization. Den Hartog Jager (2023) wrote that “art funding has essentially become an ideological instrument: the unique power of art: to disrupt, to question, to contradict, to seek, has been sacrificed for social objectives.” Another risk is wishful thinking regarding the capacity of arts and culture to help solve societal issues. Often without distinguishing between different types of societal contributions, such as raising awareness, providing perspective of action, or achieving results (Berenschot, 2023).

The conference centers the following question: *What contributions can arts and culture offer in helping to solve societal problems (and also: which contributions cannot)?*

We encourage researchers engaged with this question to submit a brief proposal. Contributions may relate to the following themes: (1) *inclusion & democracy*, (2) *sustainability & (economic) resilience*, (3) *health and care*, and (4) *spatial planning*. As a guideline, the focus can be on one or more of the following questions:

- In what ways can arts and culture contribute to solving social problems? And how do we approach this in research?
- Which (good) practices exist, and what can we learn from them about the possibilities and limitations of arts and culture as problem solvers?
- What risks are associated with the instrumentalization of arts and culture? And who is accountable to manage these risks?
- How do we research issues like this? What is the role of different forms of research, such as design-based research, scientific research, artistic research, or citizen science, in creating a solid knowledge base for policy and practice?

- Is it possible and desirable to train cultural and creative practitioners to respond to societal challenges?

The proposal should:

- Explicitly address one or more of the questions mentioned above or add new relevant questions;
- Briefly describe the nature of the research, for example, artistic, design-based, scientific, policy research;
- Briefly describe the intended format of presentation (lecture, performance, workshop, panel, intervention, etc.);

Proposals can be submitted in written form (250-300 words) or audio/video format (2 minutes).

The proposal should also include short bio(s) of the creators/researchers involved.

Presentations during the conference will last twenty minutes. From there, discussions will explore what the research can possibly mean for the design and implementation of cultural policy – and vice versa. The deadline for submitting a proposal is **October 1, 2024**, via callforcontributions@boekman.nl

The conference main language will be Dutch, English contributions are welcome.

Through this conference, we aim to contribute to a solid knowledge base for future cultural policy and foster fruitful collaboration among the worlds of scientific research, policy, and practice. The conference builds on previous conferences at Utrecht University (on the value of culture post-COVID, 2022) and Radboud University Nijmegen (on 25 years of specific cultural policy law, 2018).

With the conference 'Culture as a Problem Solver?', we build upon the lecture by Eleanore Belfiore (University of Aberdeen) at the conference in Utrecht (2022), where she stated that researchers have a responsibility to act as agents of change. The message she conveys is that researchers in the field of culture and policy should consider the impact of their work, the partners they collaborate with, and how they define cultural disciplines. Seeking connections with society and cultural practice is a responsibility more researchers in cultural policy should embrace, according to Belfiore.

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