

CONFERENCE CONCEPT

Overview

The Council of Europe together with the ZKM | Centre for Art and Media Karlsruhe is organizing the 4th Platform Exchange on Culture and Digitisation. The meeting will be held at ZKM in Karlsruhe, Germany from 19–20 October 2017. Its title is “Empowering Democracy through Digital Cultural Tools for Culturally Competent Citizens”.

The 4th Platform Exchange on Culture and Digitisation will try to reveal the underexploited potential of Culture, Arts and Science as a strong resource for empowering democracy for culturally competent citizens. Its overall aim will be to raise member States’ and other stakeholders’ awareness of the role of Culture, Arts and Science in addressing populism, fake news, xenophobia and undemocratic ideological political movements in Europe.

The ZKM | Center for Art and Media is a cultural institution unique throughout the world. ZKM was founded as a museum in 1989 with the mission to perpetuate classical arts in the digital age. Today it is a house for all media and genre, including spatial arts, such as painting, photography, and sculpture as well as time-based arts, such as film, video, media art, music, dance, theatre and performance. Beyond that, ZKM houses institutes and laboratories for carrying out scientific research, development, and production. Alongside the classic guiding principle of a museum, namely, to save artworks from disappearing, ZKM has also taken on the task of creating conditions under which works of art arise.

Background

The rise of ideological political movements and the success of populist parties in Europe are calling into question the resilience of democracy. In many parts of the world, Europe remains a beacon of democratic progress. However, recently many societies seem to be less protective of their pluralistic and democratic values and more accepting of populism and its anti-establishment political forces which offer simple solutions to complex problems, invoke the proclaimed “will” of “the people” and the moral authority therefore to stifle opposition, to take over state institutions and, when it suits, to bypass existing democratic constraints. Populists’ battery of machinery includes “fake news”, constant references to xenophobia and their ability to exploit public anxieties over migration.

While populism seeks to exclude voices and thus damages democracy, Culture, Arts and the Sciences on the other hand have been instrumental in conserving and transmitting democracy’s ethos and the spirit of democratic values. In this respect, digitisation plays an innovative role in the spreading of democratic messages conveyed by cultural tools. Digitisation creates a unique virtual public space that empowers individuals to produce and distribute their work unimpeded by gatekeepers.

The 4th Platform Exchange on Culture and Digitisation will focus on various digital cultural tools used by artists, cultural practitioners and scientists to deal with current challenging developments, i.e. populism, fake news, xenophobia and undemocratic ideological political movements. It will highlight the power of European cultural, arts, technological and scientific connections that have grown over the past centuries and are an infinite resource, outliving undemocratic political or ideological movements.

Conference Objectives

The Conference objectives are to:

- i. raise arts and culture actors' awareness that as nurturers of digital arts and culture they have an important role to play in counteracting anti-democratic and anti-liberalism sentiment, as well as channelling citizens' desire to participate politically and culturally, as facilitated by digitisation, towards a pro-democratic, pro-human rights, pro-rule of law discourse;
- ii. raise their awareness that this role can be strengthened in cooperation with other culture, arts and scientific actors;
- iii. emphasize the role of Arts, Culture and Science in bringing citizens together and in giving citizens new skills to apprehend threats of undemocratic movements in the digital age;
- iv. inspire arts and cultural actors with existing digital cultural tools and cross-disciplinary networks with demonstrable success of addressing populist and anti-democratic thought and movements.

In so doing, the 4th Platform Exchange on Culture and Digitisation aims to underline the resilience of democracy and to gather examples of good practices for the attention of politicians', practitioners' and citizens'.

Conference papers

Input papers will deal with digital cultural tools for encouraging citizen participation through a human rights lens and with making digital art activism an effective means for counteracting populism, as well as new skills for democratic citizens in a digital age.

Results and Follow-up

The results of the Platform Exchange will be assembled either into a set of Council of Europe policy guidelines for combatting anti-democratic sentiment through digital culture, or, given the event's more technical focus, into a compilation of concrete examples of how digital cultural tools and cross-disciplinary digital networks can contribute to counteracting populist and anti-democratic movements. The work will be disseminated to the Steering Committee for Culture, Heritage and Landscape (CDCCP) and other relevant cultural, arts and science stakeholders for promotion in the member States of the Council of Europe.