

# Europe's Creative Thought Leaders Come Together for Digital Empowerment – Bojana Dobran

The [4<sup>th</sup> Council of Europe Platform Exchange on Culture and Digitisation](#) will be a pageant of innovation, creative thought and democratic spirit in digital culture! Conceptual and multimedia artists, art historians and researchers, teachers and academics, as well as activists, writers and journalists will gather to discuss trends that are shaping Europe's online culture.

Taking place on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> October at the Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, the conference will highlight the vital role of Europe's creative and cultural sectors in fostering democratic thought and citizens' cultural participation online.

The aim of the discussions is to raise awareness of the potential of digital tools for citizens' cultural empowerment, highlight the role of culture, arts and scientific actors in promoting democracy and addressing populism, xenophobia and fake news, as well as to encourage new collaborative efforts to fulfil these goals. The thoughtful keynote speeches and interactive panel sessions may inspire future Council of Europe policy guidelines for using cultural digital tools to combat anti-democratic sentiment.

The centrepieces of the event will be the panels featuring Europe's illustrious arts, culture and science professionals, whose knowledge and experience can make a difference for Europe's digital culture.

Cultural digital tools used to fight populism, fake news, xenophobia and ideological political movements

The transformative power of digital technology greatly changed the global cultural landscape. New forms of expression are forged every day by enabling citizens to access information in real time, explore previously inaccessible cultural treasures, share opinions and interests with global reach and promote values that are part of their identity. Parallel to building this open pool of information, digital media also offer a space for dissemination of populist thought and ideological political movements - that again can be countered by digital artistic and cultural means.

These are some of the issues that will be addressed at the first panel, through insights from the following specialists:

- Peter Sloterdijk, a philosopher, cultural theorist and one of the most influential German intellectuals writing today, whose 1983 publication of *Critique of Cynical Reason* became the best-selling German book of philosophy since World War II, will intrigue participants with a keynote speech on "Democracy as Pseudonymy";
- Julian Oliver, a critical engineer and artist, whose work and lectures have been presented at many cultural institutions, events and conferences, including the Tate Modern, Transmediale, the Chaos Computer Congress, Ars Electronica, FILE and the Japan Media Arts Festival;
- Cornelius Pushmann, a researcher from Hans Bredow Institute in Hamburg with extensive knowledge on the use of social media by populist movements;
- Alex Verhaest, a visual artist exploring the nature and boundaries of language, communication and social conventions through innovative visual storytelling.
- Jing XU, a UNESCO representative, whose extensive experience in digital innovation in creative sectors brings fresh insights to digital media culture;

- Lis Zacho, a maths teacher and supervisor focusing on promoting creative IT skills among children;

The power of European cultural, arts and scientific networks vis-à-vis undemocratic political or ideological movements

Another group of panellists will delve deeper into the role of culture, arts and science networks in empowering pro-democratic and pro-human rights sentiment online. As key actors in creating and promoting culturally relevant information, these sectors are instrumental in creating a culture of democracy.

The panellists' diverse professional and cultural backgrounds will spark creative discussions and offer insightful commentary on the topics of focus. The key names on the second part of the conference are:

- Hito Steyerl, a filmmaker, visual artist, writer, and innovator of the essay documentary, with a keynote speech on "Digital Competence?";
- Paolo Celot, interested by the challenges posed by emerging media forms and issues relating to media literacy and European public spheres, brings extensive experience in the public and private broadcast media industry in London, Milan and Brussels;
- Katherine Heid, representing CultureActionEurope, a coalition of more than 100 organisations and many artists across Europe, in strategic partnership with the European Cultural Foundation, and bringing an exciting mix of professional experiences from arts to networking and advocacy to the discussions;
- Anna Sienicka, whose background in capacity-building of NGOs, social inclusion, employability, social enterprises helped create the TechSoup Europe Network that consists of 28 capacity-building organizations active in 44 countries serving over 250,000 registered NGOs;
- Josh Smith, a software developer and researcher, with a particular interest in the application of natural language processing to social research;
- Salomé Voegelin, an artist and writer engaged in listening as a socio-political practice of sound. Her listening and writing bring the philosophy of sound to a participatory engagement.

Empowering democracy through culture — digital tools for culturally competent citizens

The conference will close with a reflective concluding session dedicated to citizens' digital enablement. The prelude to the concluding discussion will be offered by Martin Emmer, who will talk about "Citizens, state, culture — digital tools for culturally competent citizens."

- Kimmo Aulake, Chair of The Steering Committee for Culture, Heritage and Landscape (CDCPP), who has an extensive background in cultural policy development, as well as in a number of transversal themes including information society, trade policy, cultural diversity, development policy, evidence based development, and creative economy;
- Martin Emmer, professor of Journalism and Communication Studies at the Institute for Media and Communication Studies at Freie Universität Berlin, focusing on media use, especially in the digital realm;
- Hannes Grassegger, a journalist and an Internet theorist, best known for his economic manifest "Das Kapital bin Ich," where he describes how data capitalism and cybernetic concepts change society;

- Nathalie Théberge, Director General at Canadian Heritage / Government of Canada, engaged in international negotiations related to copyright and culture;
- Peter Weibel, Chairman and CEO at ZKM, whose professional experience as an artist, curator and media theorist will help provide a brilliant summary of the conference's key topics.

The diversity of topics, the mix of perspectives and experiences, as well as the creative and analytical energy are bound to fuel productive discussions at the 4<sup>th</sup> Council of Europe Platform Exchange on Culture and Digitisation. Cherishing European democratic values in digital worlds, each participant will make a significant contribution to building Europe's online culture of the future.