Digital Cultural Policies in Europe and Croatia

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Digital Cultural Policies in Europe and Croatia

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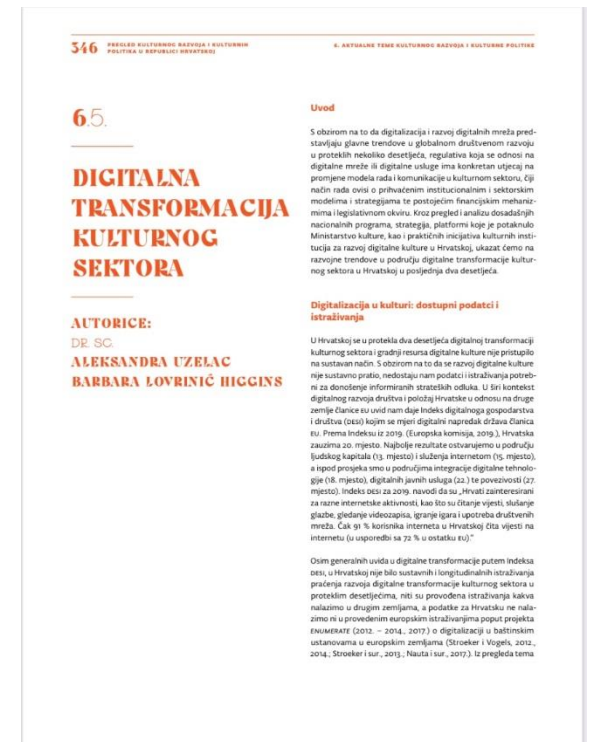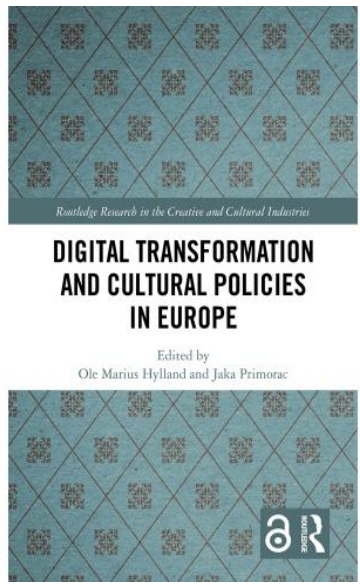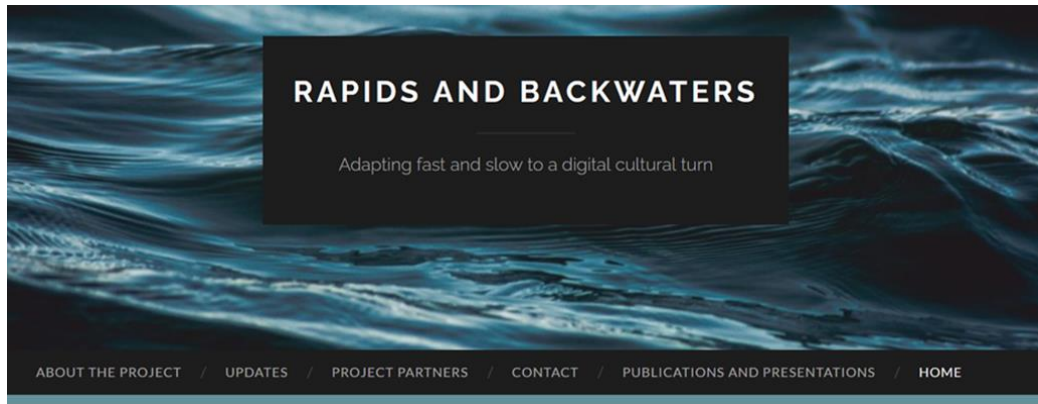
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Central challenges for digital culture that cultural policies need to respond to:

- the internationalisation and integration of online markets;
  - the free trade and non-discrimination clauses in international trade agreements -> making it difficult for cultural policy to prioritise cultural products from certain countries or a single country;
- the emergence of intermediary platforms (e.g.Amazon, Spotify, and YouTube), with significant market power and effective lobbying on both the national and international level;
- the role of streaming services (e.g.HBO, Netflix) for distribution and production of cultural and media content;
  - tax and regulation evasion of different cultural and media platforms -> different agents of cultural and creative industries that could potentially contribute to diminishing national cultural budgets;
- technological convergence; AI impact on creation
- an apparent pre-eminence of market logic – making market value the primary value of a cultural product.

- Lack of research in cultural policy studies on these issues.

Have national cultural policies, faced with digitisation, *adapted* or *abdicated*? / What is their role in shaping or creating a field of digital cultural production?

RAPIDS AND BACKWATERS

Adapting fast and slow to a digital cultural turn

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Routledge Research in the Creative and Cultural Industries

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND CULTURAL POLICIES IN EUROPE

Edited by
Ole Marius Hylland and Jaka Primorac

MINISTARSTVO KULTURE I MEDIJA:

PREGLED KULTURNOG RAZVOJA I KULTURNIH POLITIKA

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DIGITALNA TRANSFORMACIJA KULTURNOG SEKTORA

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Digital cultural policies -> Digital + culture + policy Solving an equation.

- Explicit : the part of cultural policy that explicitly relates to digital production, distribution or consumption of cultural expressions

- Implicit : the parts of other policy areas that affect digital production, distribution, and the consumption of cultural expressions.
  - broadband infrastructure, tax regulations, broadcasting licences, competition law *and* strategies and schemes for supporting the production and/or distribution of digital content.

Aim to *serve* and *protect* both producers and consumers of culture (democratize and regulate, communicate and moderate, promote and control).

Constituted through public regulation and commercial interest, referendums and technological innovation, neo-liberal ideology, protectionist ideas and welfare politics, elections, party politics and a number of contextual and *ad hoc* factors.

Digital heritage

- Digitizing of cultural heritage has been an integrated part of digital cultural policies in all analysed countries.
  - Public, government-supported, heritage digitization projects constitute the first involvement of public cultural policy in digital culture.
- Different policy ideas converge: a focus on preserving national identity and cultural heritage, technical innovation within the heritage sector, the democratization and accessibility of cultural heritage, the inclusion of a broader audience.
- Digitizing heritage developing side by side with platform services (e.g. Google Books, Google Art), highlighting challenge:
  - what part of digital cultural heritage is it necessary for national cultural policies to take responsibility for, and what part can be left (and whether it should be left) to big tech and platform companies?

Contextualisation of digital cultural policy

What is the right approach in research to avoid the pitfalls of techno-determinism and epochalism?

→to move from *singularity* to *specificity* in the analysis of "the digital"

→employing historical perspective that highlights *continuity* and *change*

→fine-grained *sector*-specific and *actor*-specific analysis

Cultural policies - a slow and reluctant digital turn?

Relevant questions in research

- Are *national* digital cultural policies
  - at all possible, or
  - more important than ever?
- Does EU regulations contribute to making national (digital) cultural policies becoming more similar?
  - Most researched countries explicitly relate to EU legislation and regulation. E.g. Audio-Visual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) – affecting also non-members like Switzerland and Norway.
  - The EU as a global player vis-a-vis platform companies.
- Little evidence that the EU is making digital cultural policies converge across different European countries;
  - A combination of strictly enforced subsidiarity principle, national cultural policy path-dependency and historical and contextual factors explain why the *differences overshadow the similarities.*

Comparing digital cultural policies of seven European countries

Research focus

- **Croatia, Germany, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.**

  Diversity in terms of the policies of national cultures

  Diverse range of parameters :

  - the level of economic development,
  - the relations with the EU (old, new, and non-members of the EU),
  - the different sizes of the countries and their populations,
  - different representations of welfare states.

  - Additional case study at the supranational/EU level.

The art of comparison

- More than numbers.
- Traditional comparative indicator: *role and responsibility of the state* (system, role of private funding, role of sub-national levels of government).

- Three axes of comparison:
1) centralizations and decentralization,
2) division of responsibility – digitalization and cultural policy,
3) relations to the EU.

Policy narratives?

- No single narrative that captures the essence of the different digital cultural policies.

- Techno-optimism *and* techno-determinism -> digitalization seen as a force of nature, an outside pressure.

- A number of the identified policy solutions come across as inconclusive or incomplete -> the **policy narratives** might be understood as **incomplete** or emerging, as if reflecting *an **emerging sector in search of robust and consistent policy solutions***.

Challenges and solutions

- Still fragmented approach to digital cultural policy -> the division between cultural, media and communication policies remains relevant.

- Development of digital cultural policies needs to include both national and supra-national agents (European Union as an important actor globally).

- More agency needs to be given to public policy in this field. Less agency to technology as an 'independent' agent.

- Challenging issue: What is within the reach of public policy and what is not?

- *digital cultural policies are works in progress -> policies seem rather immature and are struggling to align their aspirations with their effectiveness*.

- Policy inspiration -> Policies need to be platform agnostic, content agnostic and producer agnostic (Canadian recommendation)

Digital Cultural Policy in Croatia: Searching for a Vision

- Review of the available data concerning initiatives and policies concerning the cultural heritage sector, and media and the audio-visual sector
  - the existing national strategic documents that are relevant for digital cultural policy-making;
  - the impact that the EU legislative framework and the EU funds had on conceptualising digital cultural policies;
  - the implementation issues of digital culture in practice
  - recent changes and relevant challenges.

- Lack of data and evaluations

Policy issues

Short-term and implicit public policies
- No systematic practice of long term strategic planing; lack of official strategies (digital and cultural) , no vision documents

Joining the EU in 2013 has provided an impetus for the regulatory harmonisation of Croatian legislation with EU directives.
- Different policies related to digitalisation being implemented that are explicitly and implicitly influencing the cultural and media field.
  - policy harmonisation processes concerning issues of e.g. re-use of public information, open data and copyright have an impact on digital cultural policies.

  - New areas recognised in national legislation and new funding streams opened -> video games (2021)

EU funding has significantly complemented the modest domestic funding for digital cultural projects (this creates an implicit policy in itself).

A lack of policy framework that would encourage cooperation among digital heritage (MCM remit) and digital humanities (MZO remit) communities

Implementation issues

- Slow and uncoordinated digital culture development
- Modest funding
- Lack of long term perspective
- The strategies lag behind the projects which are currently being implemented thanks to the EU funds

- No independent agency responsible for steering the digital transformation of the cultural sector.

- MCM acting as the main funder and coordinator of digitalisation projects in the cultural sector. (focus on cultural heritage)

  - MCM has limited capacities for such a role -> a bottleneck for the faster and more coordinated digital transformation of the culture and creative sector (CCS) in Croatia.

Challanges

- A rather slow move from *ad hoc* policies towards a needed coherent body of policies concerning digital cultural politics
  - A long-standing lack of a strategic framework,
- Fragmentary developments concerning digital culture
  - A lack of coordination concerning existing digital activities
  - The lack of cooperation projects
  - Short term funding perspective
  - Unresolved issues of long-term sustainability and viability of services
  - No evaluation of either projects or policies
- Croatian digital cultural policy approach could be labelled as a techno-deterministic one:
  - in the absence of vision documents, the emphasis is on technical aspects of digitising cultural heritage, while the discussion on the impact of the whole process concerning the digital shift is lacking
  - presumtion that providing ICT infrastructure is enough for achieving set cultural developpment goals
- Croatia lags behind other EU countries in most of the DESI-reported issues

Towards digital cultural policies?

- Need for the evidence-based policies - supported by systematic research and monitoring of issues and developments in digital culture.

- Importance to have a dedicated agency that would be put in charge to support the digital transformation of Croatian cultural sector, having the coordination role in:
  - maintaining and developing the needed technical infrastructure,
  - supporting the sector to achieve digital competencies,
  - coordinating digitisation initiatives,
  - assessing and evaluating the policies and projects that have been undertaken,
  - being in charge of mapping trends by conducting the systematic research, networking with the cultural sector, etc.

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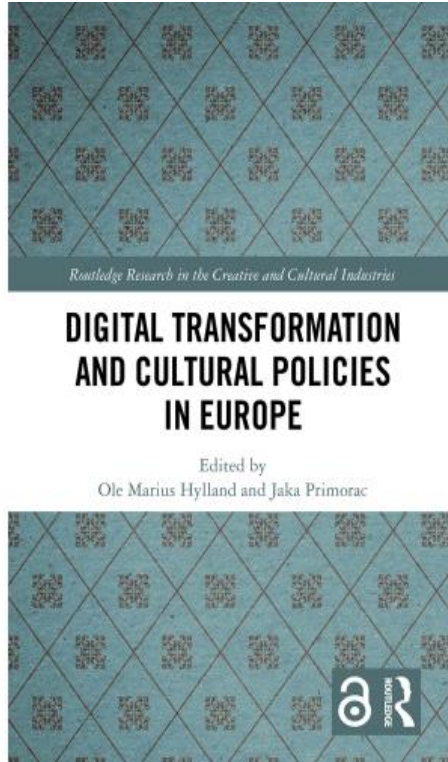
- Digital Transformation and Cultural Policies in Europe (2024)

Available for download

- [Pregled kulturnog razvoja i kulturnih politika u Republici Hrvatskoj.pdf (gov.hr)](#)

Thank you for your attention!

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