



## **EIBF Contribution: Funding for Competitiveness in the 2028-34 MFF**

The **European and International Booksellers Federation (EIBF)** is the voice of booksellers in the European Union and globally. EIBF's members are national Booksellers Associations, who represent all kinds of book retailers, a majority of those being small and medium-sized independent and family-owned bookshops. In 2022, thanks to the invaluable support of the Creative Europe (CE) funding programme, we were able to launch RISE Bookselling, a co-funded network project designed to boost the sector's overall competitiveness, innovation and resilience through increased cross-border knowledge exchange, further access to cutting-edge information and know-how, and reinforcement of adequate tools and skillsets.

As the only standalone funding programme entirely dedicated to culture, the Creative Europe programme has increasingly recognized over the years the crucial role that culture plays in propelling the economy of the European continent forward – nurturing innovation, creating jobs, and bolstering its overall competitiveness. This realization was clearly spelled out in the 2021-2027 programme priorities, highlighting that: *'Culture has a positive role to play in reinforcing the resilience of European society and the economy. The cultural and creative sectors fully contribute to the EU's economic development, generating jobs and growth'*<sup>1</sup>.

As the European Commission prepares to submit its draft proposal for the 2028-2034 MFF, and considering the current geopolitical context, EIBF welcomes this opportunity to raise awareness on the paramount importance of funding for culture, not only through Creative Europe, but also through the other funding programmes, taking into account the spillover effects of cultural investments, specifically for the European Union's **competitiveness on a global stage**.

### **Culture as a pillar of competitiveness**

In the European landscape, cultural and creative industries (CCIs) are a major locomotive for economic growth and competitiveness, and bookshops are no exception. They are even quite remarkable in the transversal way they do so. Being intrinsically tied to their environment and their local communities, bookshops not only generate profits that feed into the local ecosystem, pay local taxes, and create new and skilled jobs - but they also help build the robust community bonds that are needed in a competitive economy. Overall, the bookselling sector is one of remarkable resilience and strength – despite operating with very low margins, booksellers give a lot more than they take when it comes to the economy.

For instance:

- In Ireland, it is estimated that in 2021 bookshops **generated €189 million for the economy, paid €43.7 million in wages, and around €9.6 million in taxes**. Additionally, it is estimated that **for every €1 paid in wages by Ireland's bookshops, an additional €2.20 was generated in the wider economy**<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 20 May 2021 establishing the Creative Europe programme \(2021 to 2027\) and repealing Regulation \(EU\) No 1295/2013](#), EUR-Lex.

<sup>2</sup> [Bringing Culture into the Heart of Communities - The Cultural Role and Value of Ireland's Bookshops](#). Booksellers Association of the UK and Ireland.

- In the Netherlands, in 2024, **43 million books** were sold, amounting to **€690 million in gross turnover**, recording a 1% increase from the year prior despite mounting economic challenges such as inflation and the cost of living.<sup>3</sup>
- The Italian economy receives a substantial benefit from Italians' book purchases, amounting to **€1.7 billion** nationally, with a multiplying effect that generates an impact of more than double the original spending at the **GDP level (€3.7 billion)**, not counting the significant added value of the cultural, educational and civic effects of the book sector.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to this, and when looking at the wider CCI context, according to the European Parliamentary Research Service, **each euro** invested in common EU actions supporting or complementing existing funding for the creative and cultural sector could potentially generate a return of **up to €11**.<sup>5</sup>

### **Culture as competitiveness beyond monetary value**

While 'standard' unit of measurements like contribution to GDP or employment rates highlight the CCIs' added value to the European economy using hard data and quantitative measurements, they only capture a fraction of the role that these industries play as cultural and economic hubs. In the case of bookshops, these wider, qualitative, spillover impacts include:

- providing an environment conducive to interactive involvement that encourages reading for pleasure, especially among children, thus bolstering invaluable skills such as literacy and critical thinking – vital for education, innovation and economic growth, as well as democratic participation;
- promoting European authors and publishers, as well as European-sourced non-book products, thereby contributing simultaneously to the European way of life, values, cultural exports and economy;
- supporting wider commercial activity in their highstreets, city centres or local areas, preventing urban decay, increasing or maintaining property values, and providing footfall for neighbouring businesses;
- contributing to mental health and emotional wellbeing, with significant spillover effects on the economy. Bookshops offer spaces of calm and connection that were particularly vital during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, when access to cultural and intellectual resources became essential for coping with isolation and anxiety;
- driving innovation and the adoption of digital technologies, with economic spillovers – many modern bookshops incorporate and promote digital reading platforms as well as implementing innovative technological solutions in their businesses;
- supporting the green transition and contributing to the circular economy by encouraging local, low-impact shopping and reducing the need for long-distance shipping, playing a role in lowering carbon footprints while fostering community-led sustainability efforts, which in turn bolster green jobs and responsible consumer behaviour.

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<sup>3</sup> Verkoopcijfers 2024. <https://kvbboekwerk.nl/monitor/markt/verkoopcijfers-2024>

<sup>4</sup> Impatto del mercato del libro in Italia, OpenEconomics. [https://www.openeconomics.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/OE\\_Impatto-Libri\\_130524.pdf](https://www.openeconomics.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/OE_Impatto-Libri_130524.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> *Increasing European added value in an age of global challenges*. European Parliamentary Research Service.

### **Culture as competitiveness in need of transversal support**

This renewed focus on the competitive aspect of culture at large is greatly welcome, especially at a time when the necessary cultural investments are stagnating.

Indeed, according to data from UNESCO, global investment in culture has decreased over the past decade. Within the EU, government spending on cultural services has averaged no more than 0.5% of GDP and has remained stable since 2014. Between 2014 and 2022, only six EU countries saw a modest increase in this share (by an average of 0.2%), while nine experienced a decline and 12 saw no change<sup>6</sup>.

This is further proven by how EU member states did not prioritize culture in their recovery plans after the COVID-19 pandemic. Countries such as the Netherlands, Estonia, Germany, Sweden, and Slovakia either omitted culture from their National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs) or allocated less than 2% of their recovery budgets to the cultural and creative sectors. This highlights that, in several instances, culture was not a central component of national recovery strategies.<sup>7</sup>

In this context, the 66% budget boost for the CE programme from €1.47 billion in 2014–2020 to €2.44 billion for the 2021–2027 period was very much welcomed. However, despite this growth, CE remains relatively modest in size when compared to other major EU programmes: Erasmus+ has a budget of €26.2 billion, while Horizon Europe stands at €95.5 billion.

Culture touches our societies and communities at every level, from education to employment opportunities to politics. Support across the EU's different funding programmes is thus vital, and it must continue to be reliable and more ambitious in its funding of culture, especially when member states falter. Investing in culture through dedicated funding strands and actions means investing in thriving local economies, a resilient ecosystem with tangible and intangible added value, as well as a competitive sector with a high return on investment in the long term.

### **Our asks**

- Despite the significantly increased CE budget for the period 2021-2027, which we greatly welcomed, the programme is still oversubscribed considering the demand for such funds<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, **we strongly advocate for increasing the EU funding for the cultural and creative sectors and industries to 2% across all EU programmes**. If the EU were to increase its expenditure on culture to 2% (approximately €24 billion) of the MFF budget, the measure would be expected to generate **€266 billion of additional GDP or €38 billion annually**.
- There is a need to integrate culture into a broader range of funding programmes to reflect its cross-cutting and transversal nature across a range of disciplines. In the next MFF, it is thus recommended to strengthen synergies across EU funding opportunities for culture.
- In a world where data has become a currency, it is essential for the CCIs – and any sector that wants to remain competitive – to own, understand and master their own data. Funding opportunities for innovative projects that contribute to data collection, analysis and ensuring concrete business actions should find a dedicated place within the competitiveness funding strands.

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<sup>6</sup> EUROSTAT 2024, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov\\_10a\\_exp\\_custom\\_1111466](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp_custom_1111466).

<sup>7</sup> *How do the National Recovery Plans benefit the Culture and Creative Sector (CCS)?*  
<https://keanet.eu/research-apps/nrrp-funding-ccs/>



- Support businesses in raising awareness on the importance of buying locally and reinvesting in the local economy through funded projects, campaigns and other activities aimed at European citizens.
- Support businesses beyond the initial start-up or launch phases, to ensure their long-term security, viability and motivation to expand.
- Dedicate some of the funding to provide concrete, solid and more accessible support to micro and small businesses across the Union in implementing the recent legislations such as EUDR, GPSR and the likes that currently prove to be an additional administrative and financial burden, rather than an asset in enhancing their competitiveness.
- Allocate a portion of the funding to assist micro and small enterprises in the CCI with their green transition. This includes supporting the adoption and scaling of new technologies, fostering a balanced and stable work environment (which improves mental health, reduces absenteeism, and enhances competitiveness), promoting workforce diversity and inclusion, and investing in training and education for the next generation of employees.
- It is crucial to **ensure that the current and pressing need to align the MFF with the Union's priorities** of Democracy, Security and Competitiveness, **do not result in further diminishing the CE budget and its standalone position.** This has become even more pressing given that the recent years have been tremendously challenging to the CCIs, with rampant inflation, skyrocketing energy costs, and the complexities of both digitisation and greening, which all affect the operational capacities of CCIs – bookshops especially, given their low profit margins and relatively high operational costs.