



**Opening Speech**  
**at**  
**2021 Encatc congress**  
**Artists in the spotlight!**  
**In search of new agendas for education and research in the**  
**cultural management and policy field**  
**by**  
**Ambassador MORIKAWA Toru,**  
**Executive Director, Asia Europe Foundation (ASEF)**

Distinguished participants,  
A very warm welcome from Singapore.

I am delighted to be part of this timely conversation on *Artists in the spotlight!* I would like to thank our partner ENCATC for this opportunity.

Yesterday, I was deeply impressed by the remark made by pianist Ms. Emmanuelle Stephan before her beautiful piano recital at the Encatc closing session. She talked about the situation of artists in the midst of the pandemic and her will to continue her artistic activities for the people, despite all the difficulties around such artistic activities. It made me believe even more strongly that we need to listen to the artists. I would like to thank Encatc for giving us the opportunity to listen to her. Today I will speak in this spirit.

For those who do not know us, ASEF is an inter-governmental organisation, established in 1997 under the auspices of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Since then, ASEF has been facilitating multilateral co-operation in and between Asia and Europe. Culture & Education are priority areas for us.

Distinguished participants,

Almost 2 years after the on-set of the global pandemic, artists continue to be amongst the most affected by the global crisis. The impact on the freelance artists continue to be very deep and to secure the same rights as workers in other sectors is the challenge.



This is the shared understanding by all who are working in this sector. Yet, it is a pity that almost 2 years since the pandemic, this issue still remains unaddressed in many parts of our regions.

Let me touch upon 3 points.

First, this is partly due to the fact that culture and creative industries are less regulated, and artists are often employed informally, which makes them particularly vulnerable to social and economic dynamics. Furthermore, their professions tend not to be viewed as economically essential. This has unfortunately intensified with the current global crisis.

A recent [UNESCO report on the impact of Covid-19 on the arts](#) confirmed that even countries with a robust social security system covering artists and cultural professionals, may not consider the culture sector as a priority in terms of urgent response measures.

People have been actively consuming the arts during the pandemic; however, the creators of these cultural assets are not getting enough support. Our increased reliance on such cultural assets reflects how important art and artists are for our mental health and wellbeing in times of crisis and isolation.

Second, due to this perception, society does not pay attention to the challenges facing artists.

One of the ways is to present in a concrete manner the situation of the artists. Even now available data especially for freelance practitioners is very limited. The data is a first step to understand correctly the situation of the artists and advocate for their benefit and construct policies to support artistic communities for the sake of our own societies. We would like to appeal to all partners to make an investment to support this. ASEF is ready to play its part in these efforts by linking with our alumni including the artists supported through ASEF Mobility First! grant.

The third point is the necessity to share good practices and lessons learned. Governments continue to play a critical role in this process.

There are indeed positive signs in terms of cultural policies.

In the context of Asia, countries like Australia, Japan and Singapore, amongst others are actively addressing these issues, by creating direct support schemes for artists and increasing government commissions.



Another example is skills development with an emphasis on building knowledge bases, collaborative skills, and managerial methodologies. New policies have been put in place to protect the rights of artists.

The Republic of Korea has recently passed an Act on the *Status and Rights of Artists* that aims to protect the freedom of artistic creation and expression. This act, amongst other objectives, supports the development of the arts by creating a gender-equal artistic environment.

Cultural institutions such as ENCATC and intergovernmental institutions such as ASEF can play an important role in shaping new agendas in the fields of cultural policy and management. Partnerships with such institutions can enhance a stronger mechanism to advocate for support to artists through new cultural policies. ASEF is willing to play this role within the framework of ASEM, by channeling these issues to the ASEM Ministries of Culture.

Distinguished participants,

It is important for us to strengthen international cooperation to establish equal partnerships and provide a safe platform for the exchange of views.

I believe there are three ways to accomplish this.

Firstly, we must support the digitalisation efforts. Harnessing digital platforms for artists is key. The pandemic has forced us to be creative in the way we use digital platforms to stimulate collaboration and cooperation.

As an example, ASEF and ENCACT co-organised their first virtual residency called *Virtual Crossovers* this year. This virtual residency provided a digital meeting space for capacity building and knowledge sharing.

Hosted on ASEF's arts platform, [culture360.ASEF.org](http://culture360.ASEF.org), this online residency provided emerging arts journalists from Cambodia and the Russian Federation an online connection with a dedicated mentor to develop their research and writing skills.

Secondly, we must reduce the digital divide amongst the artists in some countries and some segments of societies. While we recognise the growing importance of digital platforms, we should not forget that not all have easy access to these technologies.

The [Rome Declaration of the G20 Ministers of Culture](#) addressed this issue. The G20 stressed the need to overcome digital divides that have been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. The



declaration includes proposals to support access to cultural resources through digital tools and literacy training.

Finally, we must increase the visibility of indigenous and local cultural communities. I would like to share the importance of locally created knowledge. By locally created knowledge I am referring to the knowledge systems and traditional crafts of indigenous and local communities.

These play an instrumental role in heritage preservation and sustainable development, including issues around climate change and economic challenges such as fair labour conditions for local artisans, skills transmission and the durable use of natural resources and lands. This is not receiving the visibility or attention that it deserves. We must leverage tools and platforms to increase the visibility of this very important segment and create scope to build on this local knowledge by empowering local communities.

Distinguished participants,

These are some of the ideas that I would like to leave with you as 'food for thought'. I hope they will add to your collective reflections during the Congress.

I wish you all fruitful deliberations in the days to come.

Thank you.