

Report on SROI in arts-based education

Summary

The *Report on SROI in arts-based education* examines the socio-economic and cultural impacts of arts-based education on social cohesion. The assessment is based on empirical data from 28 case studies in seven countries (four each in the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland), applying an integrated methodological framework of Theory of Change (ToC) and Social Return on Investment (SROI). Its findings demonstrate that investments in artistic and cultural education generate a substantial, positive net social return that transcends traditional economic paradigms. The application of a unified SROI standard – while accounting for adjustments regarding deadweight, attribution, and drop-off – has established that the acquired socio-emotional competencies possess a high degree of sustainability, persisting significantly longer than the immediate memory of the cultural events themselves.

The *Report on SROI in arts-based education* summarises the methodology and SROI estimation procedure applied, the characteristics of the case studies, key conclusions, the projects' social and economic value added, and strategic recommendations for policymakers.

The 28 case studies examined constitute a representative research sample characterised by the following features:

- The analysis covered diverse learning environments, ranging from formal education systems (general schooling) where activities were integrated into the curriculum, to the informal sphere (cultural institutions, museums, NGOs) offering flexible forms of artistic expression.
- The research encompassed a broad demographic cross-section, with a particular focus on youth from minority groups and those at risk of social exclusion. This allowed for an assessment of the role of cultural education in building a sense of identity and belonging within diverse social landscapes.
- The research and intervention methods utilised a wide spectrum of disciplines, from performing and visual arts to modern digital storytelling techniques and quest-based learning.
- The distribution of case studies across various European regions enabled a comparative analysis of cultural influences within different geopolitical contexts, taking into account local social tensions and the challenges associated with intercultural integration.

The analysis of the 28 case studies has led to the following conclusions regarding the effectiveness of arts-based education in the context of social cohesion:

- **Positive SROI:** All case studies demonstrate that every currency unit invested in cultural education yields a multiplied return in terms of social value. These investments provide tangible relief to public psychological and social care systems by preventively building wellbeing.
- **Impact beyond direct participants:** Although the SROI calculations intentionally focused on direct participants, qualitative analyses prove the existence of a strong synergy effect. Added value is generated for participants' families, educators, artists, and local communities.
- The case studies show the need for closer collaboration between schools, cultural institutions, and social services.
- The research confirms that cultural education interventions generate significant, measurable social capital that transcends traditional economic paradigms. The primary areas of value growth are concentrated around improving participants' wellbeing, strengthening civic competences, and intensifying participation in cultural life, collectively enhancing long-term social cohesion.
- The analysis demonstrates a strong dependency between the development of soft skills acquired through the arts and future potential in the labour market. The increase in self-agency and the capacity for critical analysis of cultural heritage translates into tangible economic value, measurable through improved employment prospects and future income potential.
- Innovative and inter-sectoral forms of education require rethinking of funding arts-based education in the national systems. Formal education improvements are to be linked with teachers' professional development and facilities for students.

Key Findings

An impact assessment applying SROI calculations of 28 case studies in seven countries clearly shows that investments in artistic and cultural education generate a substantial, positive net social return transcending traditional economic paradigms. Every currency unit invested in cultural education yields a multiplied return in terms of social value.

The application of a unified SROI standard – while accounting for adjustments regarding deadweight, attribution, and drop-off – has established that the acquired socio-emotional competencies possess a high degree of sustainability, persisting significantly longer than the immediate memory of the cultural events themselves.

The SROI estimation process has provided project partners with an advanced management instrument. It enables the identification of the most effective 'drivers of value', allowing for the optimisation of future operational programmes to maximise social impact while maintaining cost-effectiveness.



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- Training for various groups of stakeholders would improve the understanding of arts-based education’s social value.
- The application of a unified SROI standard has established an objective ‘shared language’ between the cultural sector and policymakers. The findings provide empirical evidence that arts-based education is an effective tool for counteracting social polarisation and fostering intercultural dialogue.

Conclusions

- Arts-based education as a catalyst for social cohesion: The research proves that arts and cultural programmes constitute a fundamental tool for building social cohesion and social inclusion.
- A sense of belonging as a key outcome: The strongest outcome across all 28 case studies showed that young people gained a strong, redefined sense of belonging with regard to their peers, the local community, and the European cultural space.
- Development of social and emotional learning competencies: Evaluation using ToC demonstrated that engaging with the arts in organised environments leads to empathy, critical thinking, and openness for cultural difference and diversity. Furthermore, participants significantly increased their cooperative capabilities.
- Sustainability of effects (drop-off and deadweight analysis): Despite the application of rigorous analytical adjustments in the SROI calculation, the net social value generated remains at a high, positive level. The impact on self-confidence and social competencies is characterised by significantly greater sustainability than the unique cultural experience itself, which tends to fade more quickly from the participants’ memory.

Based on these conclusions, the report outlines key strategic recommendations for policymakers, advocating for a transition from ad-hoc to systemic funding, the integration of the arts into civic education curricula, and the institutional implementation of objectified SROI indicators to justify public cultural expenditure.

Methodology

The report’s assessment of the socio-economic and cultural impacts of arts-based education on social cohesion is based on 28 diverse case studies in the seven participating countries (four each in the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland), applying an integrated methodological framework of Theory of Change (ToC) and Social Return on Investment (SROI). The formal evaluation triangulates quantitative data with qualitative insights gathered from a broad demographic cross-section of youth, with a particular focus on marginalised groups and those with migrant backgrounds. It was carried out between September 2025 and February 2026, preceded by preparatory work including planning (definition of scope, reporting standards, and inter-partner cooperation framework), capacity building (training on dedicated SROI spreadsheets and data collection tools), data collection (continuous gathering of empirical data from the case studies), and analysis (impact quantification in terms of final SROI calculations, data verification, and the production of 28 reports: CLiViE Deliverables D5.1 *Calculation of SROI ratio for each case study* and D5.2 *Impact Map and SROI report for each case study*).

References

- Multiple authors, *D5.1 Calculation of SROI ratio for each case study*. 2026.
 Multiple authors, *D5.2 Impact Map and SROI report for each case study*. 2026.
 Grzegorz Maśloch et al., *D5.3 Report on SROI in arts-based education*. SGH, Warsaw, 2026.

Policy Takeaways

Public funding requires a shift in evaluation priorities from artistic excellence or institutional scale toward interventions targeting disadvantaged and marginalised youth.

Predictive and retrospective SROI components are to be embedded into national, regional, and European public funding systems.

Evaluation matrices should reward project designs that demonstrate how interventions actively foster the wellbeing and professional development of educators and creative workers, thereby measuring systemic institutional capacity building rather than only end-user output.

‘Blended Social Impact’ funding facilities, co-financed by social integration and public health budgets, would constitute a big step toward recognizing art as a structural preventive intervention.

Incorporating arts-based SROI indicators into the core appraisal matrices of regional development, urban renewal, and ecological transformation projects also support the acceptance and implementation of the complex structural adaptations associated with the green and digital transitions.

The Cultural Literacies’ Value in Europe (CLiViE) project develops and applies a Theory of Change (ToC) methodology and Social Return on Investment (SROI) framework to increase our understanding of the value of cultural literacy through arts-based education on social cohesion.



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