

# Building Cultural Value: Local Government, Policy, and the Arts in Ireland

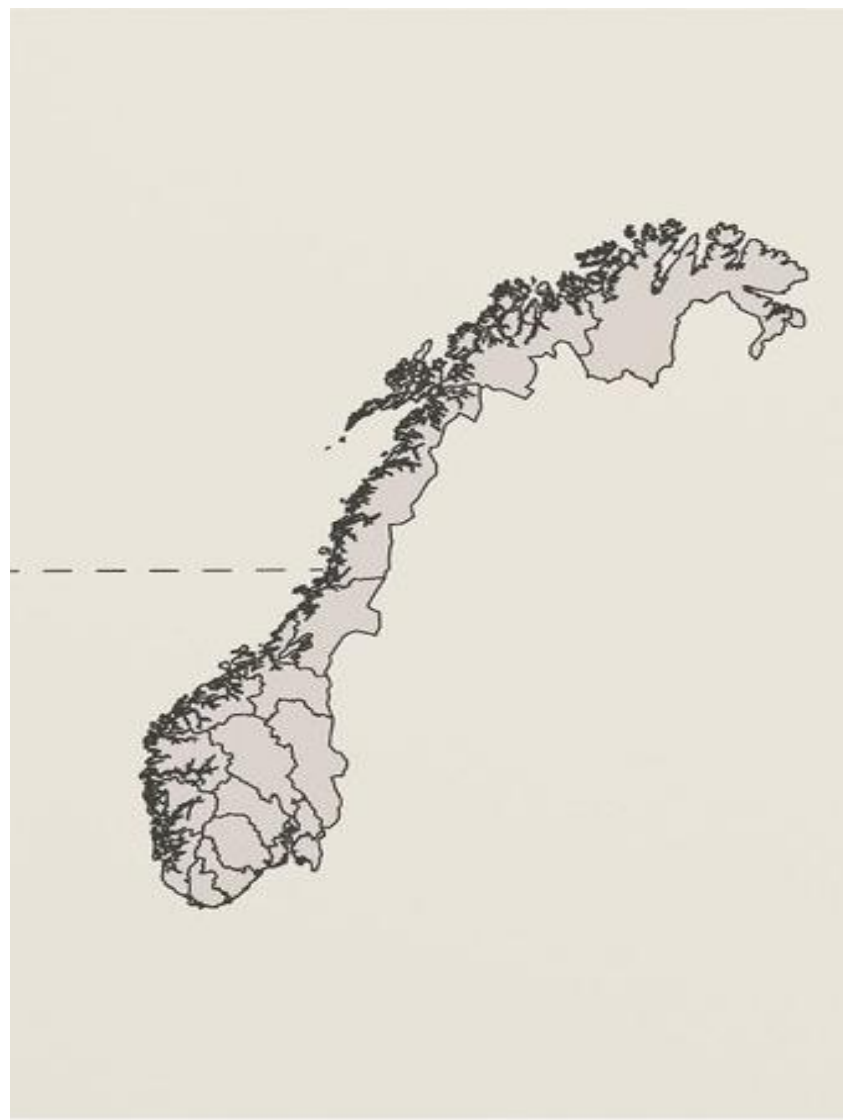
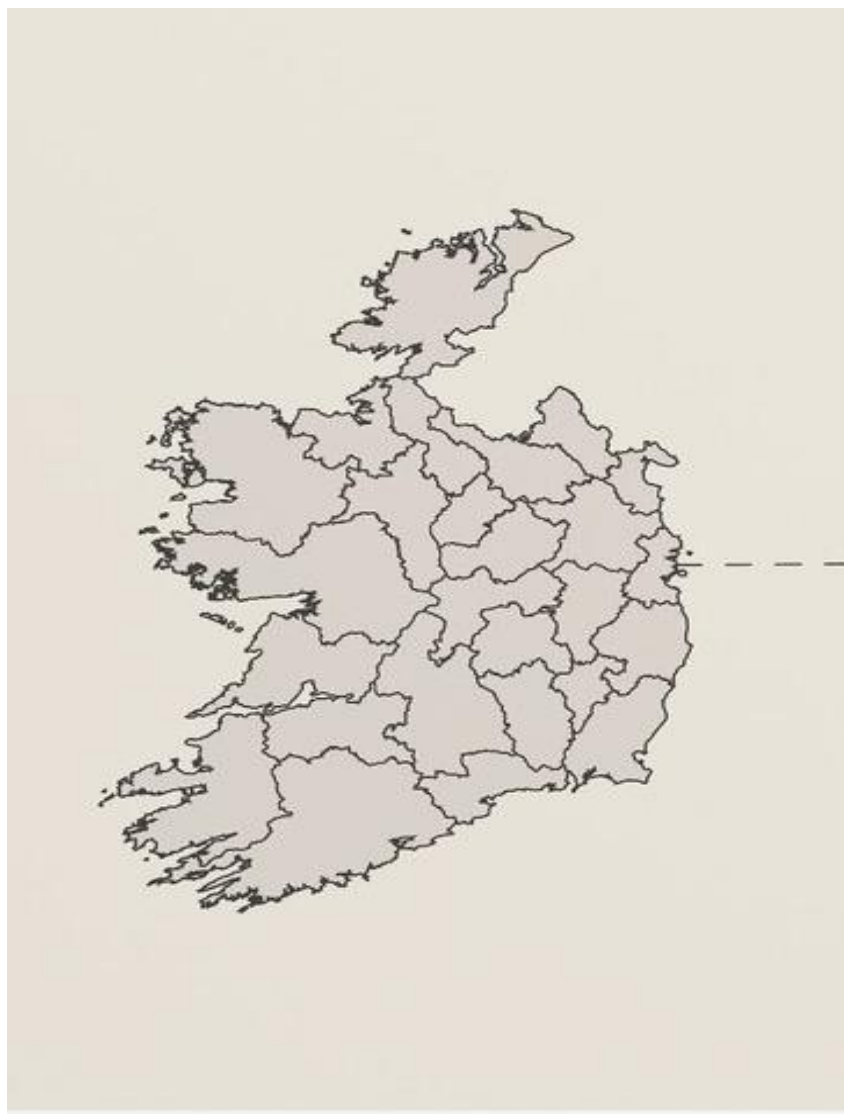
Michelle Carew

Chairperson, The Association of Local  
Authority Arts Officers in Ireland

Arts Officer, Cork City Council



**Comhlachas Oifigeach  
Ealaíon na n-Údarás Áitiúil  
Association of Local  
Authority Arts Officers**



# Culture as Public Policy

The Basic Income for the Arts is not an isolated innovation.

I will attempt to situate this policy within:

- Ireland's cultural policy framework
- Impact of 40 years of strategic local arts development
- Evolving public attitudes towards the arts

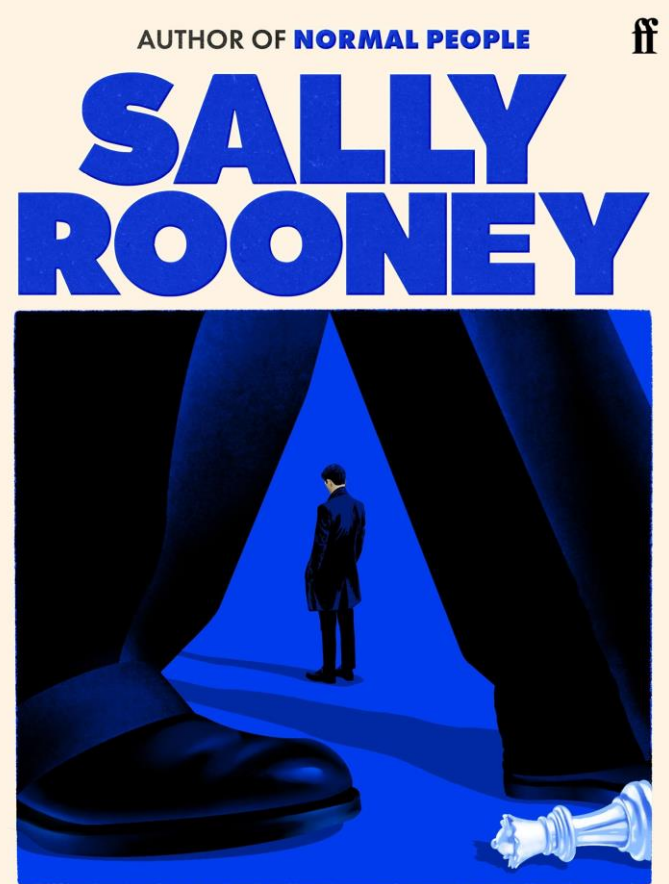
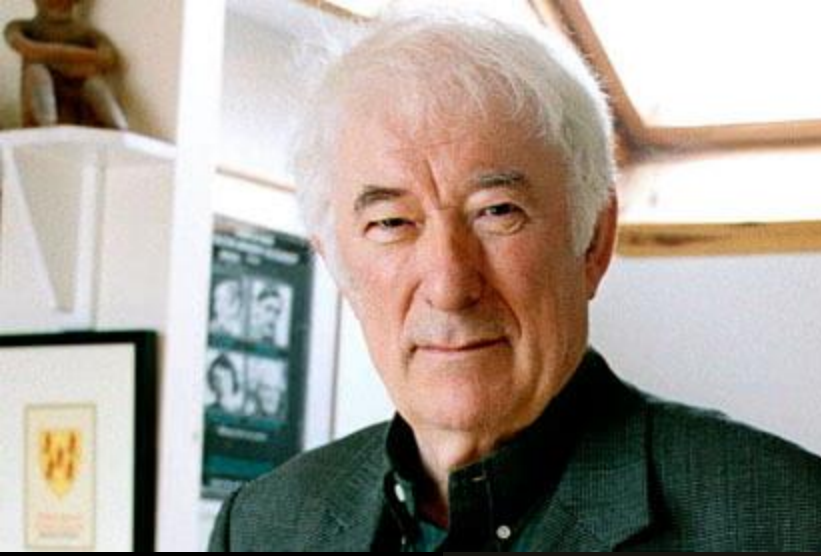


# BASIC INCOME FOR THE ARTS

NOW OPEN FOR APPLICATIONS

.....> [Gov.ie/BasicIncomeArts](https://www.gov.ie/basicincomearts)

 An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir, Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán  
Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media



# MARTIN McDONAGH

PLAYS: 1

THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE  
A SKULL IN CONNEMARA  
THE LONESOME WEST



BUT FIRST....

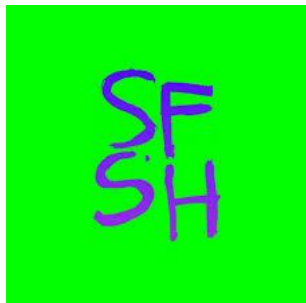
# Cork



# A City of Culture

- European Capital of Culture 2005
- 2<sup>nd</sup> amongst 79 cities for it's cultural and creative participation

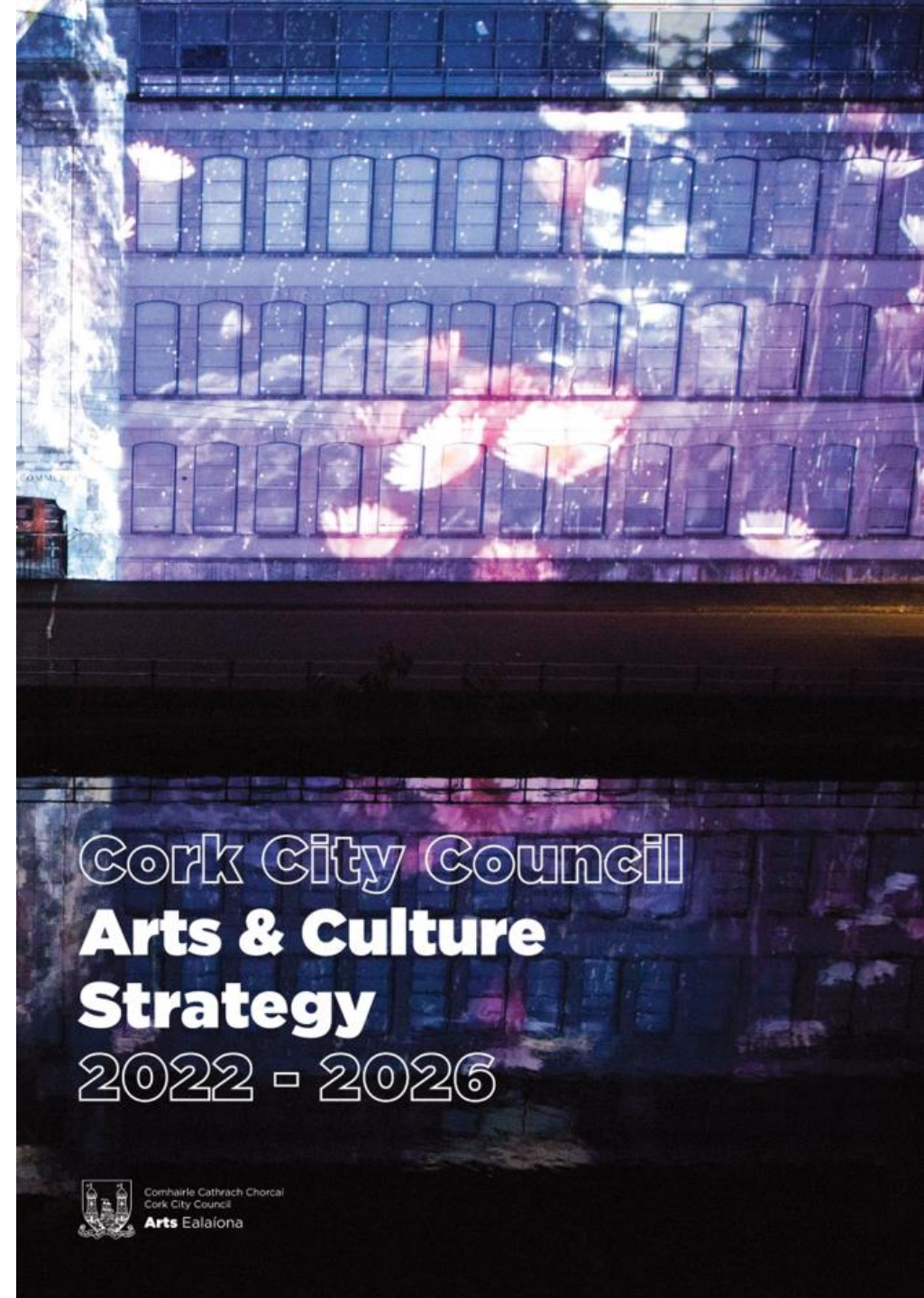
The European Commission's Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor 2019



# Culture as Public Policy

## Legislative Foundations:

- Arts Act 1951 established the Arts Council
- Arts Act 1973 increased emphasis on access to the arts
- Arts Act 2003 introduced statutory requirement for local authorities to plan for the development of the arts
- 2001 Local Government Act



Cork City Council  
**Arts & Culture  
Strategy**  
2022 - 2026

Culture is not optional

It is not decorative

It is a core public service responsibility



**An Roinn Cultúir,  
Cumarsáide agus Spóirt**  
Department of Culture,  
Communications and Sport



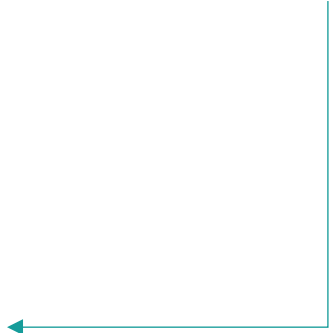
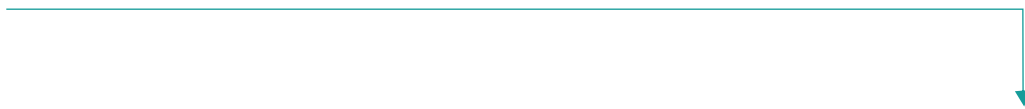
**Clár Éire Ildánach**  
*Creative Ireland  
Programme*



**Rialtas Áitiúil Éireann**  
Local Government Ireland



**Comhlachas Oifigeach  
Ealaíon na n-Údarás Áitiúil**  
**Association of Local  
Authority Arts Officers**



# The Local Authority Arts Office Model

**31 Local Authority Arts Offices in Ireland**

One in each Local Authority - led by appointed Arts Officer

**Association of Local Authority Arts Officers**  
National Network

**40 years of partnership between local government and the Arts Council of Ireland**  
First Arts Office established in 1985



# 40 Years of Strategic Local Arts Development

- Local Authorities are the second largest public investor in the Arts - €49.6 million in 2025
- Integrated cultural delivery within local government systems
- Translating national policy into lived cultural experiences





Comhairle Cathrach Chorcaí  
Cork City Council

**Arts** Ealaíona

**The role of Cork City Arts Office is to enable and champion the artistic and cultural ambitions of Cork city and its people. We advise and support the Council on all arts and cultural matters and ensure the development of arts and culture in Cork City. We do this through investment, advocacy, connection and animation.**



Photo: Darragh Kane

## The Role of the Arts Office

# Community and Cultural Democracy

## The Role of the Arts Office

# Supporting Artists



Photo: Joleen Cronin



Photo: Clare Keogh

**The Role of the Arts  
Office**

**Children and Young  
People's Arts**



## **The Role of the Arts Office**

# **Public Art and Infrastructure**



**The Role of the Arts  
Office**

**Festivals and Cultural Life**

# Culture Night



[Culture Night 2025 - Thank you!](#)



Photo: Joleen Cronin

# The Role of the Arts Office

## Broader Policy Contribution





VISUAL

[Celebrating 40 years of partnership between the Arts Council and local government](#)

**Cultural Value is  
not abstract. It is  
built through  
sustained,  
practical work.**

# Attitudes to the Arts in Ireland

## Arts Insight 2025

The national arts engagement survey

Ipsos B&A for The Arts Council



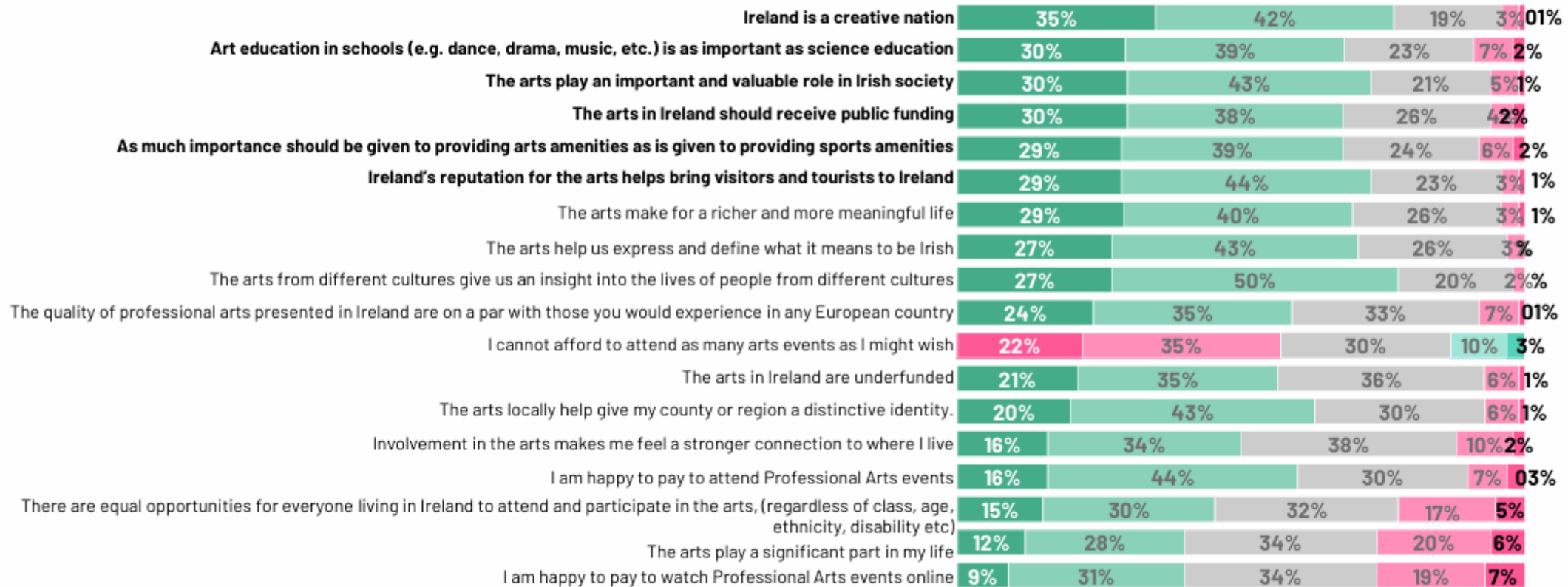
77%

agree that Ireland is a creative nation

# Attitudes towards the Arts 2025

There is a powerful and widespread belief in the intrinsic value of the arts. An overwhelming majority agree that Ireland is a creative nation (77%), that the arts play a valuable role in society (73%), and that they should receive public funding (68%).

■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagreed ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

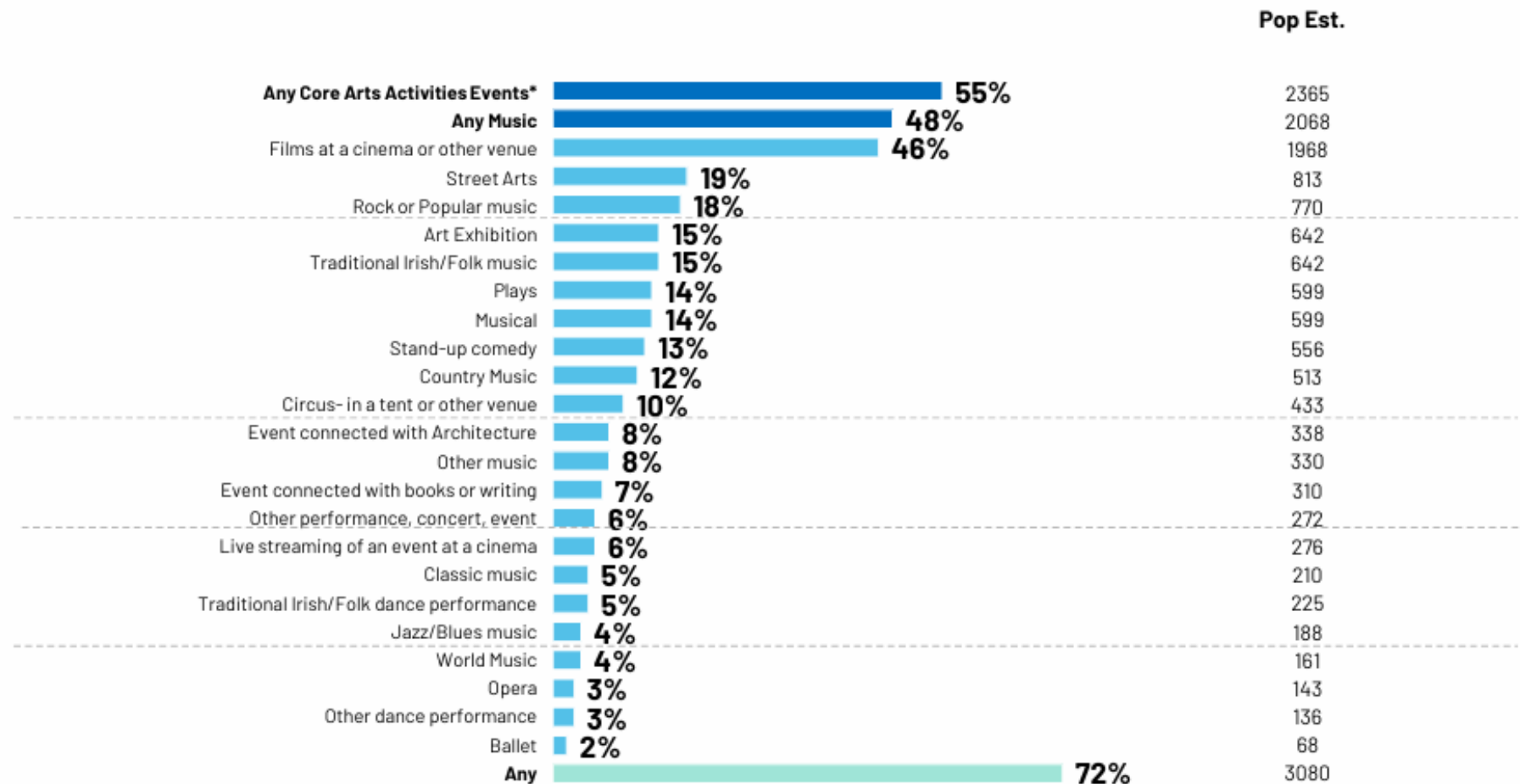


Q.30 How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements

Base: Adults aged 16+ n = 1060

# Arts Attendance Past 12 Months 2025

Estimated attenders in numbers.



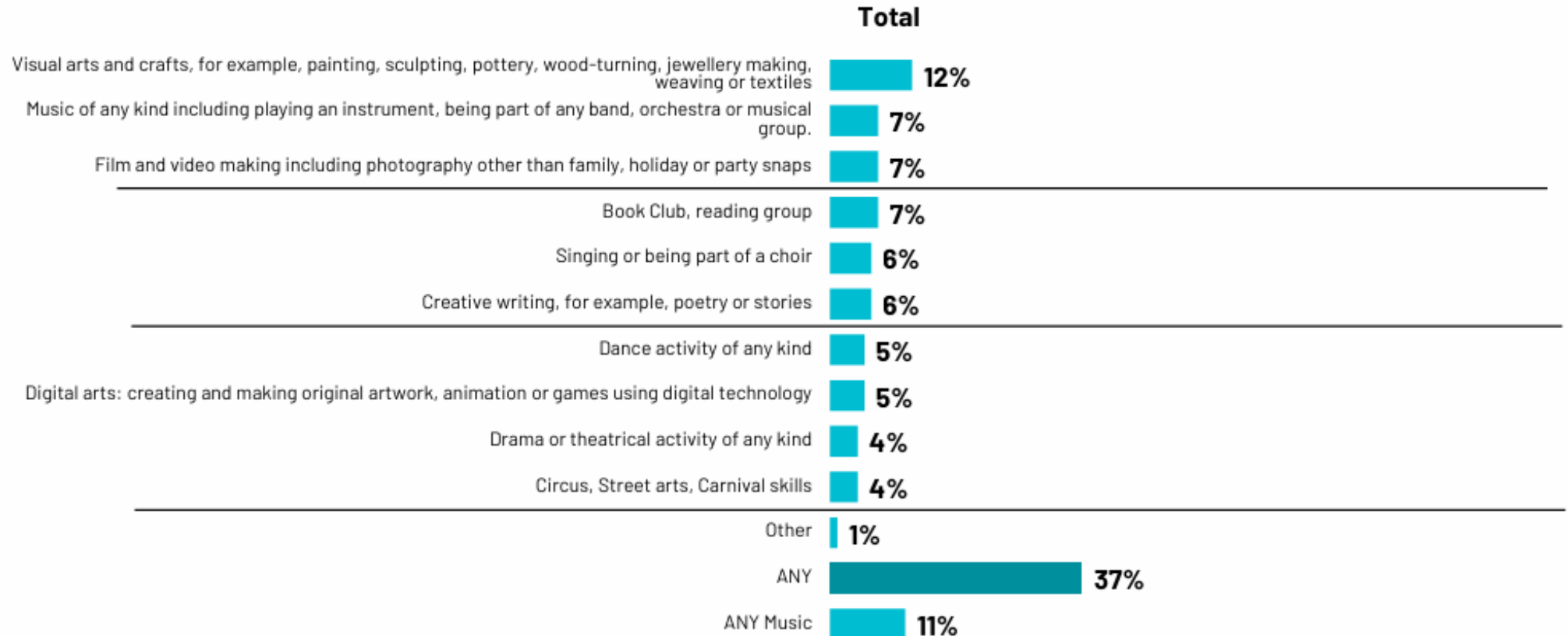
Q.2 In the past 12 months, have you been to any of these events?

Base: Adults aged 16+ n = 1060

\*Not including commercial films, musicals, stand-up comedy, country music, rock or popular music.

# Participating in the Arts 2025

Participation in creative activities is high among this online sample, with over a third (37%) taking part. Visual arts and crafts are the most popular activities, highlighting a strong interest in hands-on creativity within this digitally-engaged cohort.



Q.15 In the past 12 months, have you taken part in any of the following activities?

Base: Adults aged 16+ n = 1060

# Arts Attitudes: Summary of Key Findings

Key findings from Arts Insight 2025 in relation to national attitudes towards the arts include..'

## Social appreciation of the arts

There is a powerful and near-universal belief in the public value of the arts. The vast majority of adults agree that the arts are vital to Ireland's identity and creative reputation, and that they deserve public funding.

## The gap with individual reality

A critical tension exists between this belief in public value and personal circumstances. Strong agreement that 'I cannot afford to attend' is significantly higher than agreement that 'The arts play a significant part in my life', highlighting a gap between societal appreciation and individual reality.

## Fostering the next generation of arts lovers

There is a strong desire to foster the next generation of arts lovers. A majority of people (55%) want their children to take a strong interest in the arts, an aspiration that far outstrips their own recalled upbringing.

# The Basic Income for the Arts

Initiative of the Government of Ireland through the Department of  
Culture, Communications and Sport



Photo: Paolo Rizzi

# Background

- 2020 Arts and Culture Recovery Taskforce – ‘Life Worth Living’
- Pilot BiA scheme recommended to address:
  - Income Instability
  - Precarious working conditions
  - Barriers to sustained creative practice
- 2000 Artists + control group selected by lottery
- €325 per week for three years 2022 - 2025



Photo: Domnick Walsh

# Impact

- Artists spent more time on creative work (+4 hours/week)
- 11 percentage points less likely to experience anxiety or depression
- 20 percentage points less likely to feel that they have to struggle to make ends meet and to experience enforced deprivation.
- Return of €1.39 for every €1 invested

## BiA (2026 – 2029)

- Scheme now permanent
- Applicants must demonstrate an active professional practice primarily based in Ireland.
- New application process – confined to 2000 recipients (over 10,000 applicants)
- BiA as research opportunity
- Opportunities and Challenges

# BASIC INCOME FOR THE ARTS



## NOW OPEN FOR APPLICATIONS

<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-culture-communications-and-sport/publications/basic-income-for-the-arts-pilot-scheme-reports/>

**The future will likely show the BiA is a significant moment in Irish Cultural policy – its success will depend on sustaining the conditions that make it possible.**

Thank You

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