

ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF THE CULTURAL SECTOR IN POLAND

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Purpose: Cultural operators contribute significantly to economic and financial performance and stimulate innovation in other sectors. The aim of this study is to determine the importance of the cultural sector in the economy. The Polish cultural sector was assessed in the context of the performance of other EU countries.

Design/methodology/approach: The focus was on the quantitative approach to the issue discussed here. Therefore, in order to achieve the aim in question, relevant literature and secondary Eurostat data on culture and selected aspects of the economy were analysed.

Findings: The results obtained show that Poland ranks below average compared to other EU countries, taking into account metrics such as the share of people employed in the cultural sector in total employment, the share of enterprises in this sector in total enterprises, the share of value added generated by the cultural sector in industry, construction, and market services, as well as value added per capita. On the positive side, the balance of trade in cultural goods was positive. Such results suggest that the potential of the cultural sector in Poland is underutilised.

Practical implications: It is necessary to make full use of the potential of the people employed in cultural sector, especially their knowledge and creative skills. To this end, however, it is necessary to create legal conditions regulating the employment of these employees to a greater extent, as well as economic conditions fostering cooperation between culture and business. An economy based on culture will enable the production of more complex and innovative technologies and goods.

Originality/value: The article provides current evidence on the state of the cultural sector in Poland, taking into account its economic aspect. The sector's situation is presented in comparison to other European Union countries.

Keywords: cultural sector, cultural goods, economy.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The changes taking place in modern societies and economies, especially the transition to a knowledge-based economy, globalisation, and the widespread use of new communications solutions, make intangible factors, particularly those generated by human capital, increasingly important in gaining competitive advantage for enterprises and countries (Mackiewicz, Michorowska, Śliwka, 2009). The role of industries based on knowledge, creativity, and innovation is increasing in the economy, including cultural industries (Krapieński, 2014). The creative and cultural industries play an important role in generating economic goods from creative activities, thus contributing to the economic and social development of countries, they are essential for territorial competitiveness (Ortiz-Ospino, González-Sarmiento, Roa-Perez, 2025). They are recognised as “dynamic economic sectors fostering cultural diversity, social cohesion and technological innovation” (Holy, Budak, Medić, 2025, p. 1). In consequence, the economic aspect of sectors offering cultural goods and content is increasingly emphasised. The cultural and creative sectors are among the most dynamic sectors. They generate annual revenues of nearly USD 2.3 trillion worldwide, which accounts for 3.1% of global gross domestic product and for an estimated 6.2% of global employment (United Nations, 2024). These data show the important role of the cultural sector in the economy.

The economic importance of culture has been highlighted in many international documents. The UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) emphasises that culture is one of the main driving forces behind the development of countries and that cultural activities, goods, and services have both economic and cultural importance. The economic role of culture is also emphasised in the strategic documents of the European Union, in which the cultural and creative sectors are seen as a source of innovative ideas that give rise to products and services driving economic growth and job creation. Moreover, these sectors contribute to the fight against all forms of discrimination, including racism and xenophobia, and are a platform for freedom of expression and for the promotion of respect for cultural and linguistic diversity (Regulation of the European Parliament, 2013).

Cultural operators contribute significantly to GDP and stimulate innovation in other sectors. They also play an important role in the formation of the information society, the implementation of investments in modern information and communications solutions and the development of e-skills, the stimulation of research, the provision of innovative products and services, and the promotion of social dialogue (European Commission, 2010). A stronger focus on the cultural sector's contribution to economic and financial performance is therefore necessary.

In the literature, there is a lack of up-to-date research on the economic significance of culture in Poland in comparison with other countries. The regional and national aspects have been examined, but without a comparative context—the conducted studies cover the period only up to 2020. This study addresses that gap.

The aim of this study is to determine the importance of the cultural sector in the economy. The significance was established based on changes taking place within the cultural sector, alongside an analysis of its current state, taking into account the economic dimension.

This paper addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the situation of Poland in the analyzed scope compared to EU countries?

RQ2: What changes can be observed in this regard?

To achieve the objective, the method of literature analysis was applied. An analysis of Eurostat secondary data on culture and selected aspects of the economy was also conducted.

In the first part of this study, the concept and characteristics of the cultural sector are presented based on an analysis of the literature. In the empirical part, secondary Eurostat data were used. In order to assess the role of the cultural sector in the economy, an analysis of the cultural sector was conducted, taking into account the sector's impact on job creation and employment conditions, value-added generation, and commercial performance.

2. Literature review

2.1. The concept of cultural sector

The cultural field is defined taking into account artistic value, creativity, or copyright. It includes not only culture understood in the traditional way, but also activities within the cultural and creative industries in which cultural activities of a commercial nature are conducted. Cultural industries comprise enterprises producing and selling market-oriented and mass-produced cultural goods and services based on copyright, whereas entities operating within creative industries seek to create and sell goods and services that result from the consumption of cultural resources, require creative input, and carry cultural content (GUS, 2018).

In their research, authors frequently employ the concept of cultural sector used in various contexts. Understood broadly, it encompasses all cultural operators engaged in cultural activities for which these activities are the main purpose, such as public institutions (state and local government), private institutions, and non-profit organisations that, while established on private initiative, pursue public goals. Such an interpretation also includes artists and cultural managers or informal cultural initiatives (Krasucka, n.d.). A broad interpretation is also used by the European Union. The cultural and creative sectors are defined as all sectors whose

activities are based on cultural values or creative, artistic expressions, regardless of the nature of these activities (market-oriented or not), the type of structure, and the method of financing. The activities of operators in these sectors include the development, creation, production, dissemination and preservation of goods and services that embody cultural, artistic or other creative expressions, as well as related functions, such as education or management (Regulation of the European Parliament, 2013). In a narrow perspective, the focus is on that part of the cultural and creative sectors that produces consumer cultural goods and services, which are an end in themselves for related activities (Kosińska, 2020).

It should be emphasised that there is terminological ambiguity in the literature regarding the concepts of cultural sector and creative sector (as well as cultural industries and creative industries). They are either analysed together, or one is seen as part of the other (Kosińska, 2020). This study will focus on the broad interpretation of the cultural sector. This means that the cultural and creative sectors will be analysed together. The category referred to as related industries, which includes those economic activities that are dependent on cultural and creative industries, but are not based on artistic and cultural creativity, will not be included.

The interrelationships between the cultural and creative sectors are represented as concentric circles. A model developed by Throsby shows the economic interdependence between the cultural and creative sectors and other industries (Reid, Albert, Hopkins, 2010). Throsby emphasises that the value of cultural goods is transferred from the inner “core” outwards, to broader economic categories, which then commercialise these goods (Throsby, 2001), which shows the link between the cultural and creative sectors and other economic sectors. A model based on the division of the above sectors into individual areas was also developed by the KEA consultancy for the European Commission (Kea European Affairs, 2006) (Figure 1). The inner circle includes core arts, such as visual arts, performing arts, and cultural heritage. Arts that are non-industrial in nature are the foundation of the model, and the outputs are used by cultural industries, which includes sectors such as film and video, television and radio, video games, books and press, and music. These industries reproduce and distribute creative products on a mass scale, while at the same time affecting creative industries, shaped by design, architecture, and advertising (Pięta-Kanurska, 2013).

In the concentric circles model, effects diffuse from the inside to the outside. However, the links between the individual sectors can work both outwards and towards the inner circles, as well as within the same circle (Szultka, 2012), generating cultural, social and economic effects.

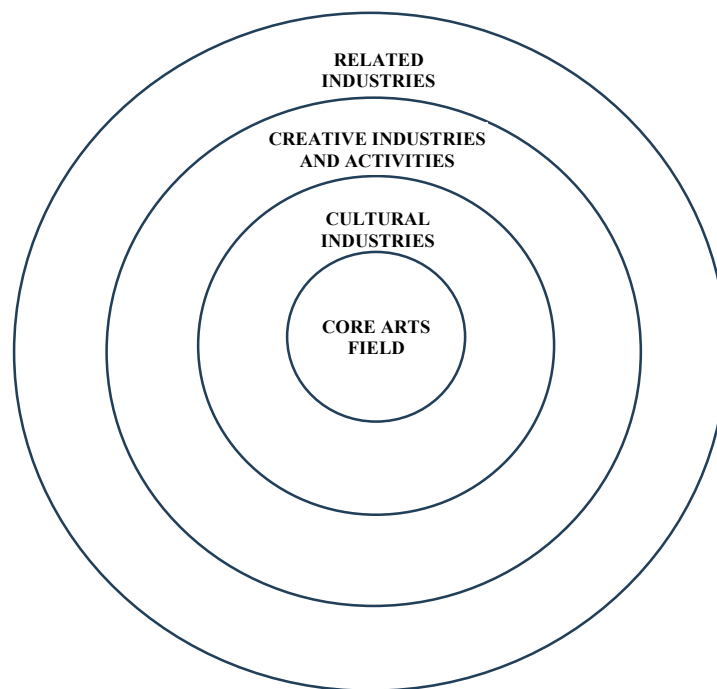


Figure 1. The concentric circles model of the cultural and creative sectors.

Source: Kea European Affairs, 2006.

2.2. The economic dimension of the cultural sector

Culture encompasses all material and spiritual wealth created by man over the course of history or in a specific period, accumulated, preserved, enriched over time, and passed on from generation to generation (Doroszewski, 2000). It has an impact on the economic and social aspects of the activities of individuals (Kutwa, 2022), as well as economic development. This impact is considered in three dimensions (Błaszczyk, Banaszak, 2020; cf. Mazurkiewicz, Szara, 2024):

- economic, which emphasises the economic effects relating to culture,
- the quality of life of individuals, as the consumption of cultural content is significant for the well-being of individuals for whom postmaterialist values are important,
- the foundations of social order, as the consumption of culture is a form of inclusion into social and public life.

This study will focus on culture as a factor driving economic development, influencing the behaviour of market participants, and supporting or initiating the production of specific products (Kasprzak, 2013). In the context presented, it is important to emphasise the institutional approach to culture, whereby it is interpreted as a “sector of the economy comprising various forms of cultural activities and their outputs (goods and services)” (GUS, 2018, p. 24).

Entities operating in this sector influence everyday life - they shape relations between cultures, thus creating new ways of perceiving society. Cultural goods and services, through their economic, cultural, and expressive value, enrich the lives of those who use them (Ortiz-

Ospino, González-Sarmiento, Roa-Perez, 2025). At the same time, research increasingly explores the impact of culture, focusing primarily on its economic implications. In this context, culture is recognized as a distinct sector of the economy, and its analysis is crucial for developing effective public and private strategies (Gandini, Olaskoaga-Larrauri, Usobiaga, Sopelana, 2025).

Thus, the status of the cultural sector as a strategic pillar of the national economy is gaining in importance (Deng, Chen, Jiang, 2025). There is growing recognition of the role of the cultural sector in driving territorial development and competitiveness (UNESCO, 2012), as well as the contribution of culture and creativity to global GDP (UNCTAD, 2024). Astikè (2022) identifies the impact of individual factors of the cultural sector on the competitiveness of EU countries, confirming that they contribute to increased competitiveness. Activities involving the production, promotion, and dissemination of cultural goods and services transform territories into smart spaces, also contributing to the improvement of residents' quality of life (Ortiz-Ospino, González-Sarmiento, Roa-Perez, 2025).

Studies presented in the literature confirm a positive relationship between the cultural sector and the economic growth of regions (Liang, Wang, 2020; Zhou, Siriboonchitta, Yamaka, Maneejuk, 2020). At the same time, the growing economic significance of culture raises the question of how to harness the potential of the cultural sector, considering both supply and demand factors.

On the other hand, entities operating in Poland's cultural sector are primarily micro-enterprises, which employ the majority of workers in this sector (Kutwa, 2022). Since enterprise size is positively correlated with innovation capacity (Arora et al., 2022), this suggests a limited impact of the cultural sector on socio-economic development in Poland. This observation highlights the need for empirical research focused on the economic dimension of the cultural sector.

3. Methods

To evaluate empirically the theoretical observations reported in the literature, secondary Eurostat data on cultural sector and selected aspects of the economy were also analysed in EU Member States.

Although national statistics collect information on the economic aspect of culture, the concept and definitions of the cultural sector are diverse and reflect the cultural diversity of individual countries. This is manifested in different statistical methodologies and classifications used. Comparing sectors between countries - and thus the outcomes of research - requires adopting a specific conceptualization of the broadly understood cultural sector.

In this study, the following indicators reflecting the economic dimension of the cultural sector were considered (Kutwa, 2022):

- cultural employment: number of employees; share of people employed in the cultural sector in total employment; educational attainment of cultural workers; form of employment,
- activities of cultural enterprises: number of cultural enterprises; share in total industry, construction, and market services,
- value added generated by cultural enterprises: value added; share in total industry, construction, and market services; value added per employee,
- trade in cultural goods: exports; imports; trade balance; share of cultural trade in total exports; share of cultural trade in total imports,
- percentage of people working in the cultural sector in EU countries vs. GDP per capita.

The analysis of status focused on 2023 (where data for this year were unavailable, reference was made to 2022), while the analysis of changes covered the period 2014-2023.

Knowledge of the cultural sector in terms of indicators can provide a significant argument for its importance to social and economic development.

3. The research results

3.1. Analysis of employment in the cultural sector

7.8 million people were employed in the cultural sector in the EU in 2023, which accounted for 3.8% of total employment. The lowest share of people employed in this sector was recorded in Romania (1.5%), while the largest was in the Netherlands (5.3%) (Figure 2). Overall, this share was higher in the northern and western EU countries (with the exception of Spain) than in the southern and eastern countries. In Poland, 622,300 people were employed in this sector, which accounted for 3.6% of total employment, putting the country below the EU average.

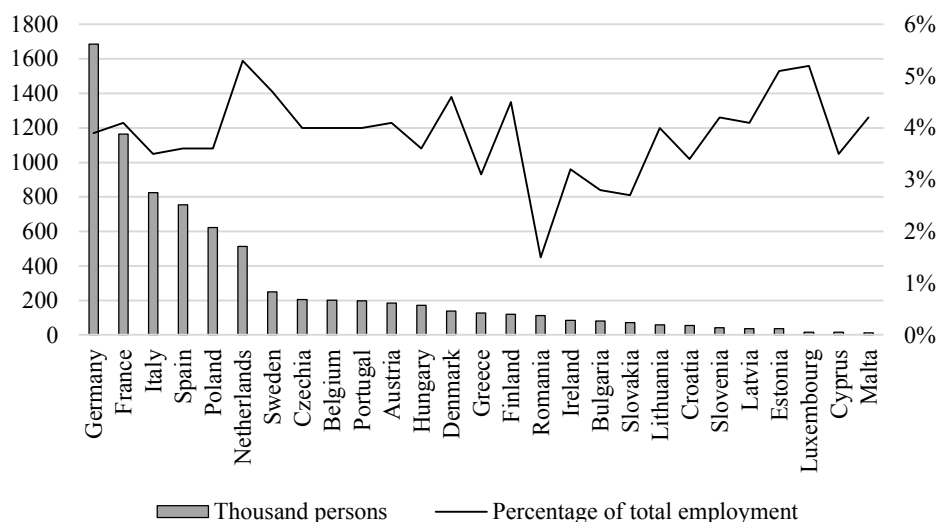


Figure 2. Cultural employment in EU countries, 2023.

Source: Own elaboration based on Eurostat data.

The analysis of employment by basic socio-demographic characteristics (especially by gender and age) does not show any significant differences between the cultural sector and total employment. The differentiating factor is the level of education – it is primarily people with higher education who find employment in the cultural sector, accounting for 61.8% of all cultural workers in 2023 (which far exceeds the total employment figure, i.e. 37.8%). The employment structure is also described by the form of employment. The cultural sector is characterised by a high share of self-employed workers. Almost one-third (31.7%) of cultural workers across the EU were self-employed (compared to 13.8% in the whole economy). It should be noted that there is great variation between the EU countries in this regard – in Italy and the Netherlands, self-employment accounted for nearly half of all employment in the cultural sector (46.6% and 45.7% respectively), while in Bulgaria, Luxembourg and Romania, it was less than 20%. At the same time, this sector is characterised by a lower percentage of full-time employees (75.8%, i.e. 5.4 p.p. less than in the whole economy). As with flexible employment, there is also great variation in full-time employment (ranging from 58.9% in the Netherlands to 95.6% in Bulgaria and 97.6% in Romania). While there are also differences in terms of employment stability, they are less pronounced. Employment in the cultural sector is characterised by lower stability than in the whole economy (81.8% vs. 86.5%), ranging from 68.5% in the Netherlands to 99.5% in Romania (Eurostat, 2024a).

At the same time, it should be noted that there have been significant changes in employment in the cultural sector over the last decade. Between 2014 and 2023, the number of people employed in the Member States, with the exception of Romania, Croatia and Slovenia, increased. In spite of this, the share of employees in this sector in total employment decreased in a third of the Member States. This trend also applies to countries with a high increase in the number of people employed, such as Malta (47.1%), the Netherlands (35.2%), Spain (27.2%),

and Estonia (25.0%). Such a change may imply that the cultural sector plays a smaller role in the economy than other industries, despite a growing interest in employment in it.

3.2. Activities of cultural enterprises

In 2022, there were 2.0 million of cultural operators in the EU, which accounted for 6.3% share of total in industry, construction, and market services. The largest number of enterprises were active in France (355,300), followed by Italy (253,600) and the Netherlands (243,000), with the least enterprises active in Luxembourg (2600) (Figure 3). The share of these operators in the total number of operators in industry, construction, and market services was highest in the Netherlands (11.0%) and Sweden (10.8%), and lowest in Bulgaria and Slovakia, standing at 3.1% in each. In Poland, even though there were 115,700 registered enterprises operating in the cultural sector, their share in the total number of enterprises was only 4.3%, with the country ranking third from bottom.

The analysis of the structure of cultural enterprises' activities shows that enterprises in the EU focus primarily on publishing activities (27.4% of cultural enterprises), whereas in Poland, they focus primarily on architectural activities (19.8%). Apart from publishing, which was the fourth most common activity in Poland, there are no significant differences between Poland and the other EU countries in terms of how the individual activities were ranked.

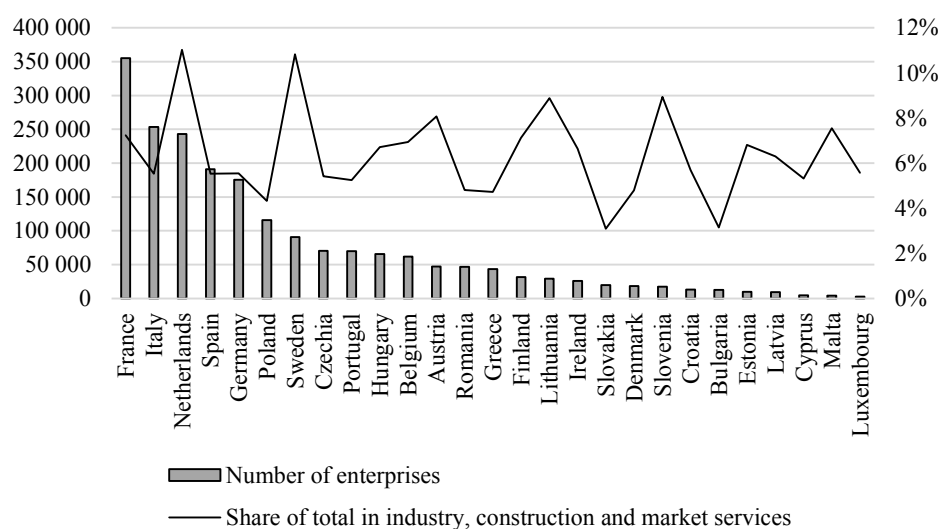


Figure 3. Cultural enterprises in EU Member States, 2022.

Source: Own elaboration based on Eurostat data.

3.3. Value added generated by cultural enterprises

In 2022, cultural operators generated EUR 198.52 billion in value added, an increase of 18.5 billion compared to 2021. Germany generated the highest value added (EUR 52.5 billion), followed by France (EUR 34.6 billion) and Italy (EUR 22.8 billion) (Figure 4). On average in the EU, the share of generated value added in industry, construction, and market services was 2%, ranging from 1% (in Slovakia) and 1.1% (in Luxembourg) to 5.4%

in Cyprus. The figure for Poland was EUR 6.3 billion, which accounts for 1.7% of value added in industry, construction, and market services, putting the country below the EU average.

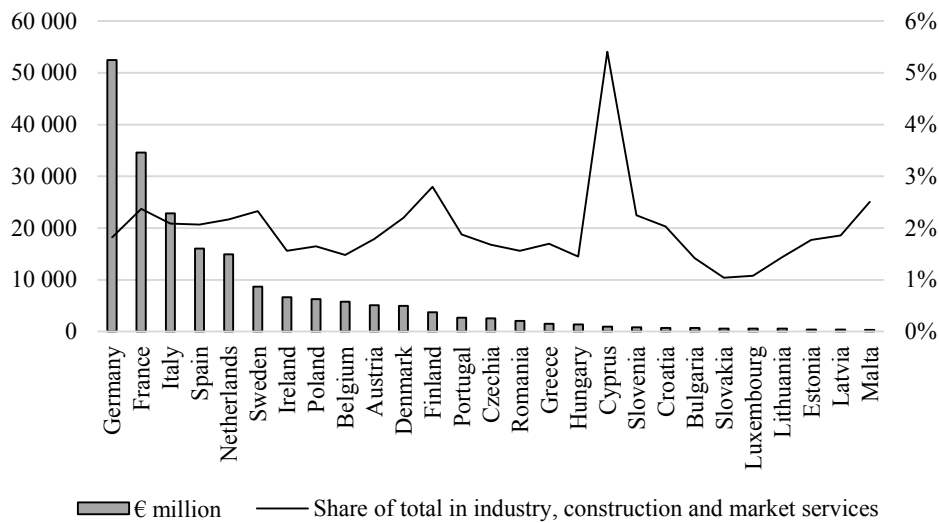


Figure 4. Value added of the cultural sector, 2022.

Source: Own elaboration based on Eurostat data.

Looking at individual cultural activities, publishing; architectural activities; and motion picture and television, music; renting of video tapes and discs accounted for the highest shares of value added (15.0%, 14.7% and 14.2% respectively), while the share of activities such as libraries, archives, museums and other cultural activities; and cultural education was negligible, standing at 0.8% and 1.2% respectively. In Poland, printing and reproduction of recorded media, manufacture of musical instruments, and manufacture of jewellery accounted for the highest shares of value added (26.2%), while the least important were the same activities as in the EU, whose share was 0.9% and 1.4% respectively.

A comparison between the value added per employee figures shows a noticeable difference between the EU average and Poland. One employee in Poland generated EUR 45,660 in value added, which accounted for 59% of the EU average, standing at EUR 77,050, despite the fact that the average number of people employed in enterprises was the same and stood at 2.0. The figures show that the cultural sector in Poland is less productive.

3.4. Trade in cultural goods

The characteristics of the economic aspect of culture also include trade in cultural goods. The analysis took into account goods that use “creation” in the production process and whose purpose is to transmit aesthetic, symbolic or artistic values, or to provide access to cultural content. They include antiques; works of art; craft articles; jewellery; books; newspapers, journals and periodicals; maps; architectural plans and drawings; photographic plates and films; recorded media; video game consoles; and musical instruments (Eurostat, 2024b).

The value of EU exports of cultural goods (taking into account only trade with external partners) in 2023 was EUR 26 billion, EUR 1.3 billion higher than the value of imports. This represents a 44.6% increase in exports and a 77.6% increase in imports over the decade. The trade balance for the EU, while still positive, decreased by 67.8%.

The analysis for individual EU Member States takes into account both intra-EU and extra-EU trade. It shows great variation between the countries. The largest exporters of cultural goods were Italy (EUR 12.4 billion) and France (EUR 10.4 billion) (Figure 5). Poland was also one of the larger exporters of cultural goods, ranking fifth with EUR 2.9 billion. Over the decade (2014-2023), the value of exports of cultural goods increased in 21 EU countries (the largest increase was in Romania, where the value was 2.65 times higher than in 2014). Poland saw an increase of 112.1%.

The largest importers in 2023 were France (EUR 9.3 billion) and Germany (EUR 8.7 billion), but the largest increase in imports was recorded in Ireland (the value of imports in 2023 was 2.6 times higher than in 2014). Only Malta and Finland reduced their imports (by 10.6% and 10.1% respectively). In Poland, imports amounted to EUR 2.5 billion, an increase of 143.7%.

Only 9 EU countries had a positive trade balance in cultural goods in 2023. The largest trade balance was in Italy (+EUR 8.2 billion), while the largest trade deficit was in Austria (-EUR 3.1 billion). In Poland, the balance was positive and stood at EUR 0.47 billion (the fourth highest figure in the EU by value).

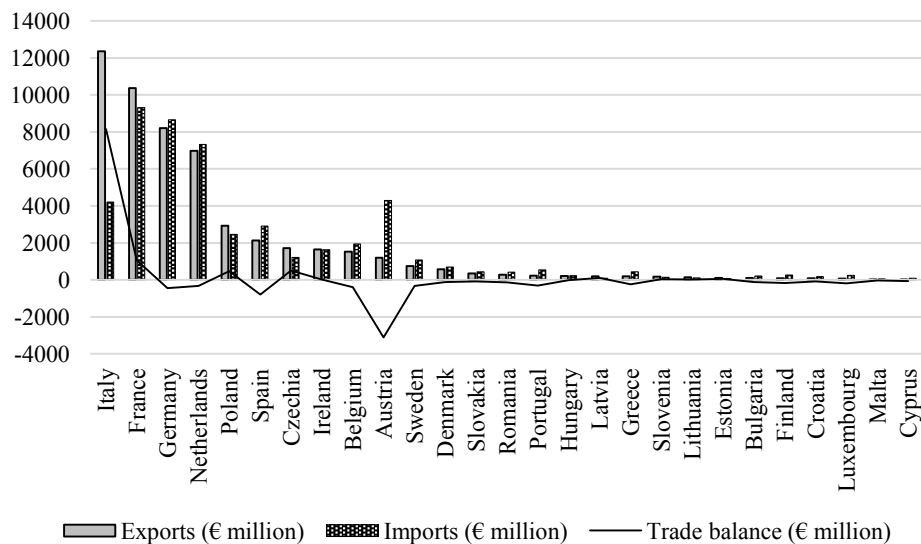


Figure 5. International trade in cultural goods, 2023.

Source: Own elaboration based on Eurostat data.

The share of exports of cultural goods in total exports in 2023 was highest in Italy (2.0%) and France (1.7%) (Figure 6). Cultural goods accounted for a relatively low share of total exports in Hungary and Finland (0.1% each), as well as in Bulgaria and in Cyprus (0.2% each). An increase in this share compared to 2014 was recorded in 10 Member States, the highest in Romania, where this share doubled. In Poland, it remained unchanged, as in Bulgaria.

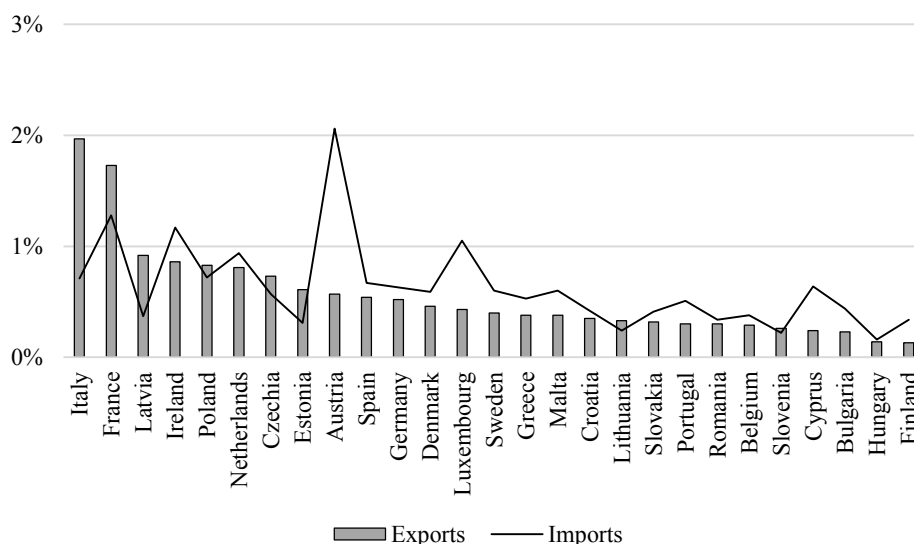


Figure 6. Share of cultural trade in total exports and imports, 2023.

Source: Own elaboration based on Eurostat data.

The share of imports of cultural goods in total imports in 2023 was highest in Austria (2.1%) and lowest in Lithuania, Hungary, and Slovenia (0.2% each). As with exports of cultural goods, the share of their imports in total imports increased in 10 countries (the most in Austria, by 67.5%, and in Ireland, by 58.5%), remained unchanged in Germany, and decreased in the remaining EU countries.

In Poland, the share of exports and imports of cultural goods in total exports and imports was 0.8% and 0.7% respectively, high figures compared to other EU countries. However, the above changes cannot be assessed positively – the share of imports increased by 20%, but the share of exports remained unchanged.

To round off the analysis of the economic importance of the cultural sector, taking into account the value added it generates, data on employment in this sector are compared with the level of per capita income. In this regard, a positive correlation can be observed. The more affluent the country, the higher the percentage of people employed in culture (Figure 7). On this basis, it can be concluded that as income rises, the importance of culture in total employment increases.

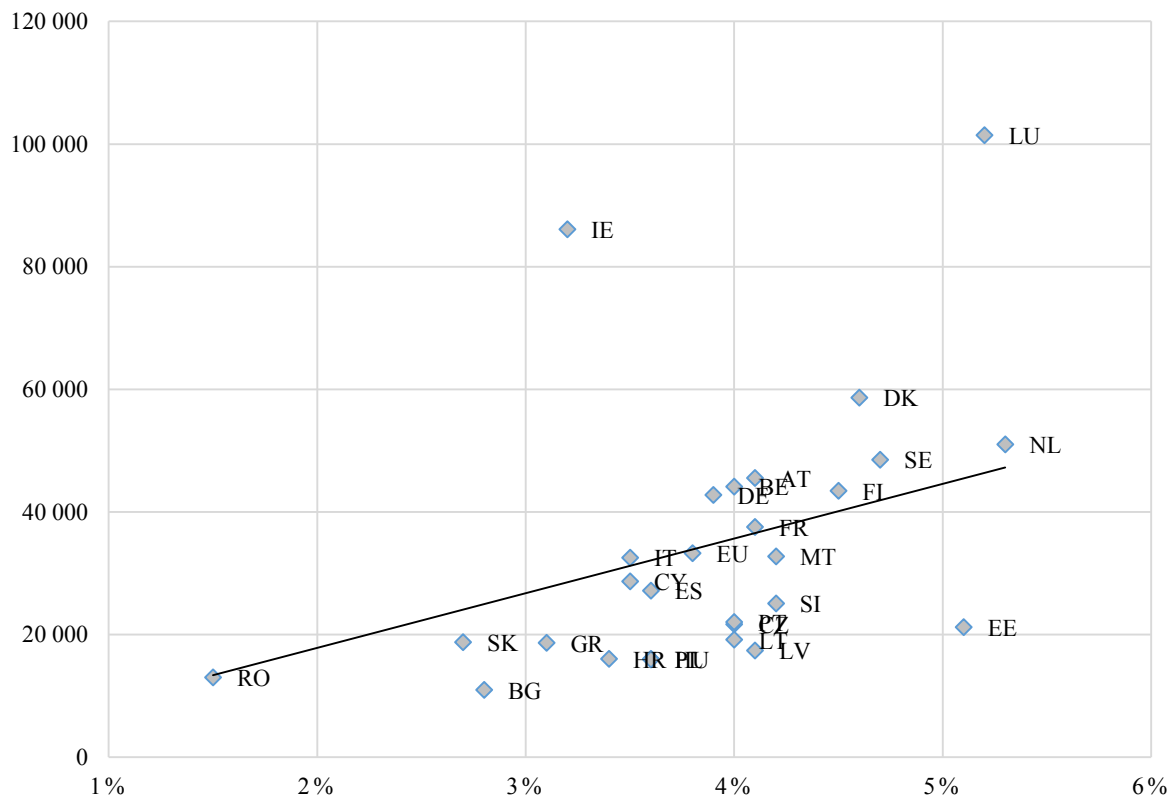


Figure 7. Percentage of people working in the cultural sector in EU countries vs. GDP per capita, 2023.

Source: Own elaboration based on Eurostat data.

4. Discussion

The results of the conducted research demonstrate that the cultural sector in the European Union plays a significant, albeit highly diversified, role with regard to employment, enterprise activity, value added, and international trade in cultural goods. The study also confirms that the potential of the cultural sector in Poland, in terms of its economic significance, remains underutilised.

The cultural sector employs a considerable number of people (622.3 thousand in Poland in 2023). However, their share in Poland's total employment (3.6%) is lower than the EU average (3.8%). The importance of the cultural sector for employment is also highlighted by the OECD (2022), which notes that employment in this sector accounted for as much as 5% of jobs in some OECD countries in 2018, and up to 10% in major cities and capital regions. Furthermore, it is estimated that around 40% of employment related to culture occurs outside the cultural sector itself (OECD, 2022).

It is important to highlight regional differences in the share of people employed in the cultural sector, with higher rates found in Western and Northern European countries.

As Bloshchynskiy (2024) points out, small and medium-sized regions often lack sufficient financial and strategic resources, and many institutions, especially in developing countries, struggle with a lack of experience and skills necessary for the effective management of cultural sector programmes. This may be due to both the insufficient number of employees and their inadequate competences in the context of development and adaptation to new conditions. Employment in the cultural sector is characterised by a much higher proportion of people with higher education than in the broader economy, as observed by Sava and Badulescu (2017). According to these authors, this demonstrates that culture requires a willingness to be acquired. This advantage may represent a key determinant of the sector's development, since, as noted by, among others, Jio and Kero (2023), Knapińska and Woźniak (2016), and Wiczerzak (2018), human capital is a source of economic growth.

The analysis of employment forms reveals greater flexibility in cultural sector jobs compared to the general economy, stemming from the specificity of activities in this sector. Due to the independent and highly specialised nature of many professions - such as authors, performers, musicians, painters, or sculptors - the cultural sector features a high share of self-employed workers (on average 31.7% in the EU). The OECD (2022) also emphasises the pronounced tendency towards self-employment in this sector, additionally noting that cultural sector workers often combine salaried positions with project-based work, thereby maintaining several jobs concurrently. While flexible employment enables autonomy and freedom in action, it may also lead to employment uncertainty, decreased social security, lower compensation, and excessive periodic workload (Berezka, 2012). Contract instability means there is greater job insecurity in the cultural sector than in other sectors (OECD, 2022).

Although significant diversity exists in this area across EU countries, these variations reflect differences in national labour markets rather than unique characteristics of cultural sector employment. In Poland, according to GUS (2025), the ratio of average employment to the number of employees in micro-enterprises was 1:5 in 2023 (for other enterprise size classes, the ratio was approximately 1:1). This indicates the majority of employees in these entities worked part-time or temporarily under employment contracts. This fact raises questions about the institutional factors and labour market policies that may encourage or restrict self-employment in the cultural sector.

Moreover, the small number of employees per company (on average two people) indicates that the cultural sector in Poland consists predominantly of small entities. This finding is confirmed by GUS (2025) data - micro-enterprises accounted for 99.1% of entities in the cultural sector in 2023. While micro-enterprises tend to be more flexible, their limited financial and human capital and restricted access to information, typical for micro and small businesses, pose significant development barriers (Stawasz, Mischczak, 2022). Other barriers limiting the sector's ability to generate value identified by Lachiewicz (2021) include low investment capacity, limited flexibility regarding the implementation of new initiatives, and heightened

risk associated with long-term innovative activity. Additionally, the high specialisation in skills means that adapting to new conditions would require retraining (Lisowska, Stawasz, 2020).

It should also be emphasised that small and medium-sized cultural enterprises have less access to external financing than SMEs in traditional sectors. This is mainly due to the intangible nature of cultural assets, which results in a lack of physical security required to obtain external financing (OECD, 2022), the niche character of certain markets, and the financial sector's unfamiliarity with cultural sector specifics (European Commission, 2024).

The significance of cultural enterprises for the economy should not be underestimated - in 2022, the cultural sector in the EU comprised 2.0 million entities, accounting for 6.3% of all enterprises. In Poland, this share was considerably lower at 4.3%. This vital role is further supported by OECD (2022) estimates, which indicate that, in 2018, cultural entities constituted on average 7% of enterprises in OECD countries.

Analysis of trade in cultural goods has shown a positive trade balance for Poland, driven by intensive exports, which should be viewed favourably compared to other EU countries. However, there is also a more dynamic increase in the share of cultural goods imports in total imports than that of exports. Notably, in countries such as Romania and Ireland, the growth rate of both exports and imports was higher, which may reflect local policies stimulating sector internationalisation or the exploitation of niche competencies. This raises questions about the effectiveness of export strategies among Polish cultural enterprises.

One cause of this situation may be the low demand for cultural goods and services, which also extends to the quality of demand. Polish society participates minimally in cultural events, and the prevailing low affluence translates into limited interest in acquiring goods from the domain of so-called high culture (Szultka, 2014). This situation is particularly relevant to young people, who cite the lack of relevance of cultural content and forms of transmission to their needs and interests, as well as unaffordable ticket prices, as major reasons for limited participation (Mazurkiewicz, Szara, 2024).

Analysis of the relationship between the share of cultural sector employment and GDP per capita points to a positive correlation between prosperity and the development of the cultural sector, prompting in-depth research into support mechanisms and structural conditions for the sector's development in developing countries.

5. Conclusions

The cultural sector is internally very diverse, which affects the ability of individual activities to generate economic and financial results. The fields that make up the "core" are characterized by different peculiarities from the cultural industries, which are at the same time different from the creative industries.

The study confirms that the cultural sector has the potential to generate socio-economic effects, promote development in many areas. It creates jobs and boosts the value of exports and value added. Its impact on the economic situation is also manifested in increased innovation in the economy, both directly and as a result of stimulating innovation in other areas.

This study focuses on the quantitative approach to the economic aspect of the cultural sector. The comparison of the results for EU countries shows great variation between the countries. Compared to other countries, Poland ranks well below the EU average. This result concerns the share of people employed in the cultural sector in total employment, the share of enterprises in this sector in total enterprises, the share of value added generated by the cultural sector in industry, construction and market services, as well as value added per capita. Although the share of exports and imports of cultural goods in total exports and imports compares favourably with the EU average, its changes since 2014 show the increased importance of imports compared to exports. Despite these changes, Poland continues to generate a positive trade balance, a positive result compared to other Member States.

The results obtained suggest that the potential of the cultural sector in Poland remains underutilized. Considering that employees in this sector are predominantly individuals with higher education, it is essential to make fuller use of their potential, especially their knowledge and creative skills. To achieve this, it is necessary to establish legal conditions that more comprehensively regulate their employment (Jurkiewicz, 2022), particularly in relation to individuals employed under civil law contracts or working on an honorary basis. A greater degree of formalization in employment would represent a desirable solution.

The analysis conducted also underscores the need to address economic conditions which involve cooperation between culture and business (European Commission, 2010), as well as with the research sector and public administration. This requires not only the development of soft skills such as trust and a willingness to pursue shared goals, but also the organization of events that serve as venues for meetings and the exchange of experiences (Szultka, 2014).

As a solution to stimulate demand for cultural goods and services, enhancing their accessibility through widely used online channels and platforms can be recommended, as this would reduce most of the identified barriers and provide access to a broader audience. However, such a solution requires investment in new technologies, training of cultural sector personnel, and changes to copyright laws. Organizational changes in the form of incentives to expand cultural activities, particularly in the virtual sphere, are also necessary.

It also appears important to take into account in legal regulations the specific nature of various types of cultural institutions, as their cost structures and business models differ significantly, which affects the way their activities are accounted for. In this context, attention should be paid to the need to modify the evaluation of these activities. This is currently carried out primarily on the basis of quantitative indicators: financial data, the number of premieres, performances or spectators, while substantive criteria such as the impact of the institution's activities on the region (Ilczuk, 2020) are not taken into consideration. The introduction of

additional evaluation criteria would strengthen the status of culture as an economic field and better highlight its economic aspect.

Another issue that should be addressed is the financing of public and local government cultural institutions. The subsidies provided by the organizing body are, on the one hand, insufficient, and on the other hand, offer a sense of security, which may result in a decline in efficiency. Therefore, the use of external capital is justified. However, traditional sources of financing are difficult to access, primarily due to the specific nature of the cultural sector - the intangible and often unique character of many of its assets. Thus, the sector's competitiveness and development require a focus on obtaining funds from venture capital, crowdfunding, or business angels. This approach also necessitates organizational changes and the introduction of incentives for seeking alternative sources of financing (Nocoń, 2023). At the same time, the level of private financing for cultural institutions is low, primarily due to the fragmentation of the cultural sector, which is made up of entities employing relatively few people, as well as a lack of awareness regarding the importance of culture for individuals and regions. Broad support for the cultural sector has therefore become important, as it may become a driving force for development in the future.

An effective solution appears to be placing greater emphasis on cultural education, which would increase awareness of the importance of culture for social and economic development among the younger generation, the future audience of cultural content. The actions undertaken will help improve access to cultural goods and services and generate higher added value. They are also necessary for shaping the adaptation and innovation skills that young people need to adjust to rapidly changing labor markets and employment patterns.

The results obtained suggest that the potential of the cultural sector in Poland is underutilised. As the people employed in it are primarily employees with higher education, it is necessary to make full use of their potential, especially their knowledge and creative skills. To this end, however, it is necessary to create legal conditions regulating the employment of these employees to a greater extent (Jurkiewicz, 2022), as well as economic conditions fostering cooperation between culture and business (European Commission, 2010). Measures designed to stimulate creativity and foster innovation will translate into the economic and financial performance of regions and the country. An economy based on culture will enable the production of more complex and innovative technologies and goods (Kaczmarek, 2019). As modern society lives in a world in which text and image, and sound and symbols play an important role, the cultural sector has great potential for development, and the development of culture is conducive to economic development.

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