



European Economic and Social Committee

EESC info

European Economic and Social Committee

A bridge between Europe and organised civil Society

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Editorial



EESC honours champions of EU values

Dear readers,

The awarding of the civil society each year is an important moment not only for the European Economic and Social Committee, which hands out the award, but also for all of the civil society organisations which, through their work, contribute to enhancing community spirit in Europe. Indeed, the award sees European civil society in all its diversity and richness symbolically called on to the stage and into the spotlight.

So it was that the 2018 prize, devoted to the European Year of Cultural Heritage, saw some 150 entries from 27 countries, with the initiatives covering a range of areas and taking very different approaches. We have been greatly encouraged by this, as it is a fine testament to the vitality of our voluntary sector.

We chose to define the notion of cultural heritage in the broad sense of the term, including not only works of art, but also intangible heritage and European values, particularly those of sharing, solidarity, work and tolerance. It was those values in particular that the EESC wished to focus on.

As you will see in this special edition, those values play a key role in the work of our prizewinners.

This is evident in the activities of the Aria Nuova/Ecomuseum cooperative, which strives to make works of art in its native region of Italy accessible to people with severe disabilities, so that by experiencing and sharing the beauty of that art their quality of life is enhanced.

It is also evident in the activities of Taste of Danube, which forges links between people of all ages from a diverse range of countries and with very different backgrounds through the sharing of what is most fundamental and democratic in our food culture: bread.

And those values also underpin the Swans initiative, which enables talented but disadvantaged young women to access high-level education so as to enable them to take up roles that fulfil their potential; without this helping hand, without this gesture of social solidarity, such jobs might be out of their reach.

Balkans without Borders, for its part, harnesses cinema – a European invention that fuels a major industry – as a way of conveying messages of peace to young people in a region scarred by war. In this pooling of cultural resources, we have seen a fine example of the European principle in action.

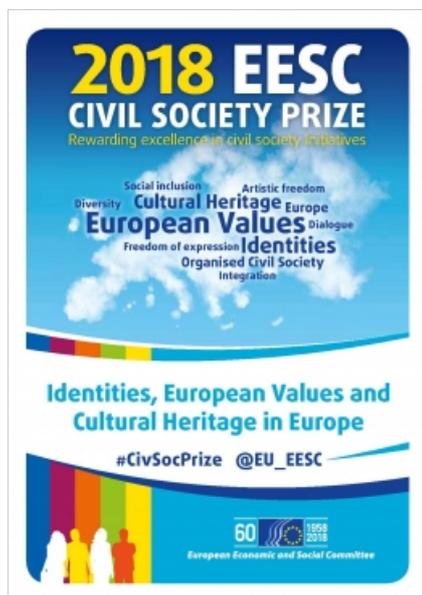
And finally, a brief word on Safe Passage. With this prize, we wanted to reward the outstanding work being done by this organisation to combat the scourge of people smugglers and offer safe and legal routes to people fleeing devastating situations. Europe needs people like them. In awarding them this prize, we want to underline the fact that, even after Brexit, the EESC will maintain and continue to develop its links with British civil society.

Isabel Caño Aguilar

Vice-president for communication

New publications

[Civil Society Prize brochure](#)



The EESC has published a brochure showcasing the five winning projects and providing background information about the Civil Society Prize in general.

It can be downloaded at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/qe-06-18-295-en-n.pdf>

EESC News

[German organisation Danube-Networkers for Europe crowned winner of EESC Civil Society Prize 2018](#)



The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) awarded on 13 December five civil society organisations for their outstanding projects that reassert European values, celebrate the diversity of Europe's many identities and promote cultural heritage as a way of bringing Europeans together again.

German project "**Tastes of Danube - Bread Connects**", run by the non-profit organisation **Danube-Networkers for Europe (DANET)**, took home the first prize of EUR 14 000. The other four initiatives, **SWANS** from Germany, **Eco Museum** from Italy, **Safe Passage** from the UK and **Balkans Beyond Borders** from Greece each received EUR 9 000.

"During the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, the EESC hopes that this prize will raise awareness of Europe's cultural wealth and of the multiplicity and richness of European identities. It wants to promote projects that strengthen a common sense of belonging and meaning through and with diversity. It wants to increase the visibility of the many projects all over Europe promoting European values such as respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law. Last but not least, it wants to thank those individuals and organisations who fight on a daily basis for a Europe based on these values," said the **EESC president Luca Jahier** at the award ceremony in Brussels.

The idea behind DANET's winning project "**Tastes of Danube - Bread Connects**" is to have people experience bread as a form of intangible cultural heritage that they all share and that unites them in their diversity. As part of the project, bread-baking activities and festivals were organised in different Danube countries, bringing together people of different ages, ethnicities and social backgrounds.

While its registered office is in Germany, DANET is an umbrella organisation of various non-profit educational organisations and experts from Danube countries such as Austria, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Hungary. As a non-profit association promoting innovative learning and social participation of all citizens, DANET hopes its project will raise awareness about the common cultural roots in the Danube Region and in Europe, sparking dialogue and strengthening the bonds between Europe's different generations and cultures.

Accepting the prize, DANET's president **Carmen Stadelhofer** said: *"Bread has always been a symbol of community and sharing. With our project, we want to break down barriers and do something for a solidarity-based, peaceful Europe. We work from the grassroots and try to involve everyone. We bring together different ethnic groups that otherwise may not meet. We bring together elderly and young people and include those that may have difficulties in finding their place in society. This prize is a huge recognition and honour for many organisations and people involved in this project."*

Watch the video detailing the winning projects here.

Another winning entry is the [SWANS initiative](#), the first of its kind in Germany. It is run by a group of female volunteers who organise career and leadership seminars for high-potential female university students from immigrant families and for women of colour, with the aim of helping them get the job they deserve and to end discrimination against them on the job market.

The prize winning project from Italy, [Eco Museum](#), is run by the social cooperative Aria Nuova. It helps mental health patients from residential units to experience art and culture first hand, asserting that the right to culture is universal.

The cultural campaign "80 years on, child refugees still need Safe Passage", by the UK organisation [Safe Passage](#), strives to win stronger public support for today's youngest refugees, by comparing the present day situation with *Kindertransport*, a mass rescue operation during World War Two, in which British citizens took in children fleeing Nazi persecution. Safe Passage has so far helped over 1 500 children to reach sanctuary via safe and legal routes.

The Greek winner is a short film festival run by the organisation [Balkans Beyond Borders](#). The festival takes place each year in a different Balkan city, featuring work by filmmakers from the Balkans and beyond and using art as an empowering force for overcoming differences rooted in the region's turbulent past.

The EESC Civil Society Prize, which is in its landmark 10th edition this year, attracted 150 candidates from no fewer than 27 EU Member States, testifying to the huge enthusiasm of civil society from all corners of the EU to promote European values and cultural heritage. With the prize, the EESC hopes to boost the community-oriented work of the organisations and individuals given awards.

The prize is awarded for "excellence in civil society initiatives" and a different theme is chosen each year, covering an important area of the EESC's work. The 2017 Prize was dedicated to "innovative entrepreneurship championing labour market integration of disadvantaged groups".

[Tastes of Danube - Breaking bread to break barriers](#)



If you wish to bring European people closer to the idea of a united and peaceful Europe, you need to involve ordinary people, says Eva Hrabal from the winning organisation.

EESC Info: What does this prize mean for you and your organisation?

Tastes of Danube: The prize is a huge recognition of the efforts we have made to bring together people of all ages, ethnicities and social backgrounds in all Danube countries, to unite them around the topic of bread, and make them aware of our common cultural roots in the Danube area and in Europe. It is a great appreciation and honour for the many organizations and people involved in this project, especially the volunteers. It will provide strong impetus to expand European cooperation and to build a cultural "bread route" across

Europe. The prize will strengthen our intercultural friendship along the Danube, encourage others to join our activities and help us spread the idea in the Danube region and all over Europe, thus connecting even more people.

What advice would you give to other organisations in terms of achieving results with such activities and programmes?



If you have a vision of bringing European people closer to the idea of a united and peaceful Europe, you need to involve ordinary people, and most of all, you must believe in your vision. Look for partners who share this vision, as well as organizations and partners to provide financial support. Look for an idea that will help to overcome language barriers through a common activity. Involve volunteers from the beginning as equals. Use the chances digital media offers for communication and cooperation. Start small and prove yourself, then it will have a snowball effect.

How will you use this specific funding to provide further help in the community?

It will be a mix of structural funding and support for events in order to include more partners in the cultural "bread route". We hope the prize helps us find further sponsors - because big projects need big funding.

In your view, what is the best way to ensure that each country preserves and is proud of its cultural heritage, while at the same time making the most of the cultural diversity Europe has to offer?

Make the diversity of cultural traditions and languages visible and seen as a value that enriches our shared House of Europe. Make people realize that we all have lot in common in our everyday life - in our history and culture. Promote communication and cooperation between people in western, eastern and south-eastern countries through shared activities, in order to reduce prejudice and foster European awareness. Bring European values to life by working together with innovative methods. Create a budget for small-scale transnational cultural projects and opportunities to bring together small but active civil society organisations. Make people feel at home in Europe!

Women who fly with the SWANS



The organisation that helps disadvantaged women of talent access high-quality education to improve their chances of having a fulfilling career will use the prize money to reach out to more potentially high-flying women, says SWANS' Martha Dudzinski.

EESC Info: What does this prize mean for you and your organisation?

SWANS: Having what we do recognised by such a prestigious award as the EESC Civil Society Prize sends an immensely valuable signal to all women from immigrant families, but particularly those who participate in our seminars, making them feel supported and valued and encouraging them to follow their chosen paths.

What advice would you give to other organisations in terms of achieving results with such activities and programs?

When it comes to contributing to civil society, true passion and motivation are the factors most crucial to success. You need to feel strongly about your cause, since - unlike in the private sector, for example - there are no other factors such as money that can drive you. The authenticity that comes with your belief in the cause will spread your enthusiasm and help you successfully pursue your goals.



How will you use this specific funding to provide further help in the community?

The prize money will enable us to organise additional seminars and maybe even a bigger networking event for the young women in our community to exchange ideas and experiences and bond and connect.

As an organisation working towards the integration of migrants, if you had a chance to enact one specific legal provision at European level, what would it be?

Numerous scientific studies clearly show that our current job markets positively discriminate white men at the expense of women, people of colour and other minorities. In order to remedy this situation and create an even playing field, legal measures can provide temporary support for this process. Blind application processes and quotas can force employers to make the effort to find the candidate who is genuinely the best qualified. They will learn how to attract and win over employees from diverse backgrounds whom they have so long ignored. However, these measures, along with positive discrimination, always face a legitimization issue: nobody wants to have their qualifications dismissed and be called a "quota woman/migrant/etc". But we can only overcome this mindset of accusing minorities of being unqualified if we start admitting that the current job market is not primarily based on qualification, but on the reproduction of existing white-male-dominated structures. The sooner employers decide to overcome their unconscious biases, the sooner everyone can believe that their hard work and qualifications will pay off.

Aria Nuova: cultural heritage for social inclusion



Through its Ecomuseo project, the cooperative Aria Nuova helps people with mental disabilities to experience cultural heritage, asserting that the right to culture is universal. By enabling them to access heritage sites and later to express their aesthetic experiences in participatory laboratories, the initiative reduces their sense of isolation. The prize sends a meaningful signal of inclusion and solidarity, both to civil society in general and to the world of disability in particular, says Aria Nuova's Vincenzo Griffo.

EESC Info: What does this prize mean for you and your organisation?

Aria Nuova: This prize represents the pinnacle of a process in which we have had deep faith, one which has allowed us to try out innovative forms of rehabilitation for users of psychiatric services, ensuring that they have access to and can participate in cultural and aesthetic activities, which are vital experiences for each individual's personal development.

What advice would you give to other organisations in terms of achieving results with such activities and programmes?



My advice to other organisations would be to encourage any kind of project that seeks to raise public awareness so that everyone can appreciate the value of a cultural heritage that is fully inclusive.

How will you use this specific funding to provide further help in the community?

We are proud of the recognition conferred on us and will use the funding to increase the number of projects and initiatives connected with the Ecomuseo project. We intend to get more psychiatric rehabilitation centres on board, the ultimate aim being to ensure that the entire public is aware of the importance of making cultural heritage more accessible.

In Italy, social protection for the disabled has been cut by EUR 10 million over two years (2018-2019) and the "When we are gone" ("Dopo di noi") law, which provides for social protection to step in once the family is no longer there to take care of them, seems to be operational in only four regions. Against this background, what does this prize mean to you?

The recognition we have received through the EESC prize takes on even greater significance if we look at the Italian legal framework, which is still insufficiently attentive to the needs of people with a disability and leaves a lot to be desired when it comes to protecting them. A regulatory "vacuum" of this kind is all the more unacceptable given the current social situation - particularly in recent years - which is crying out for the institutions to pay closer attention to needs that can be clearly defined as fundamental human rights, as enshrined in the Italian constitution and highlighted in European legislation.

The fact that this is such a prestigious prize is an indication of growing awareness of an area - that of mental health difficulties - that is still heavily stigmatised, and sends a meaningful signal of inclusion and solidarity, both to civil society in general and to the world of disability in particular. By acting as a catalyst for us to persevere with pioneering activities aimed at including other forms of assistance, the prize projects an image of a country that champions solidarity and inclusion and is a clear endorsement of the values of the European Union.

Balkans Beyond Borders: unleashing the power of youth creativity to heal the wounds of war



By bringing together young people from across the Balkans to share in each other's cultures through its film festival, Balkans Beyond Borders is looking to overcome the region's turbulent past. For if something is going to change, it will be changed by - and for the benefit of - youth, says BBB's Veroniki Krikoni.

EESC Info: What does this prize mean for you and your organisation?



BBB: Balkans

Beyond Borders will celebrate its 10th anniversary in 2019 and this prize, apart from being a substantial boost to our work, will also have a symbolic character. Being among the winners of the EESC prize is a reward for our ten years' work. The prize will give to the Festival the boost it needs to expand its work and mission and enhance its visibility to more audiences in more places in Europe, both physically, through cultural events, and electronically, through our web platform, fostering dialogue through art. Also, it will allow us to integrate the BBB community, offer special masterclasses on innovative topics and techniques, and provide a tangible platform which can contribute to the creation of a European public space sharing common European values, identities and heritage.

What advice would you give to other organisations in terms of achieving results with such activities and programmes?

Our advice would be twofold: on the one hand persist, insist and work methodically, while openness is the key ingredient. Together we are stronger. Try to find the right partners who fit your vision and mission and could offer complementary skills and help you perfect your craft.

How will you use this specific funding to provide further help in the community?

Our organisation focuses on the idea of sharing, as does this year's festival theme. Sharing ideas, sharing cultures, sharing our resources with anyone in need. So this funding will allow us to be more effective in sharing with more people our dream of a better Europe, focusing even more on the younger generations. Because let us not forget, if something is going to change, it will be changed by (and for the benefit of) young people.

Balkans Beyond Borders' focus is on youth, but what about older generations where the wounds of the war have left deeper scars? Do you think this approach would work with them?

This is a challenge we have to accept. Young people are the future of Europe, while older generations have suffered the wounds of the war. Yet, giving space to the younger generations to make their voices heard, feel free to create and re-conceptualise their past can be of added value for the older generations as well. The motto of the European Year of Cultural Heritage is "when the past meets the future": this is exactly what we are trying to do by bridging the gap between different eras and targeting the older generations through the power of youth.

Safe Passage: keeping the culture of human rights alive



The British organisation fighting to offer child refugees safe and legal routes to the UK will use its prize money to help achieve its objective of resettling 10 000 children over 10 years, explains Charlotte Morris, the organisation's head of communications and development, to EESC Info.

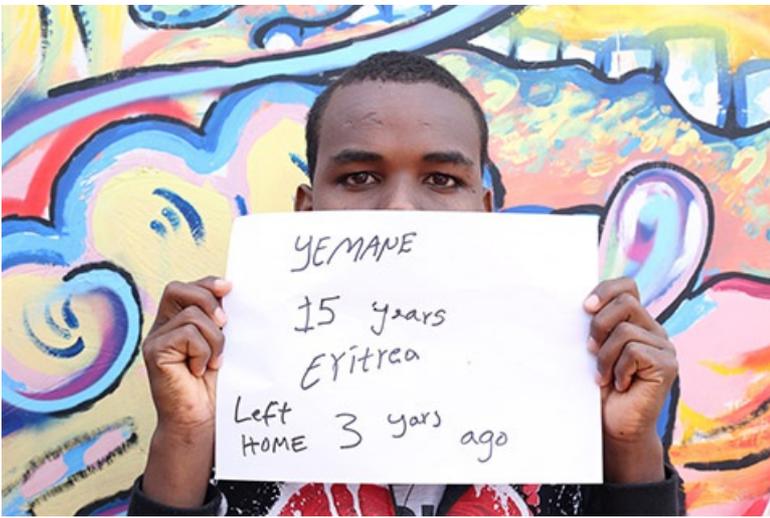
EESC Info: What does this prize mean for you and your organisation?

Safe Passage: The award represents our strong determination to place human dignity and human rights at the heart of our work. These are values that we know are shared by people across Europe and, despite the uncertainties of the future, these values will remain constant.

What advice would you give to other organisations in terms of achieving results with such activities and programmes?

At Safe Passage we are determined to open safe and legal routes for refugees. Our team and partners have a "just do it" attitude; being a small organisation helps with this too.

How will you use this specific funding to provide further help in the community?



This award will help us continue our campaign to give more

child refugees access to safe passage, in particular:

FIRST, to defend the right of refugee children in Europe to family reunification in the UK now and post Brexit.

SECOND, to continue our campaign to secure a commitment from the UK government to resettle 10 000 child refugees over the next 10 years.

and THIRD, to campaign to create a positive shift in public attitudes towards Britain offering protection to refugees, and attitudes more broadly across Europe.

How will Brexit affect your work?

We have plans in place to ensure that it will not affect our operations. We have secured an amendment to the Brexit Withdrawal Bill to enable child refugees to continue to be reunited with their families in Britain following Brexit. We will also continue to reunite refugees with their families across Europe.

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