Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — Culture in a Union that strives for more: the role of regions and cities

(2020/C 141/09)

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. considers it necessary to put in place a broad understanding of culture and Europe's cultural diversity that goes beyond solely the conservation and protection of tangible heritage and helps to understand the social and cultural changes taking place across European society;

2. is aware of the role that cities and regions can play, with a pluralistic and innovative vision of culture, involving the citizens more actively in cultural growth processes and providing them with the tools to play an active part. Underlines to this effect the need to safeguard the freedom of artistic expression, which is a prerequisite for democracy, and the right of all citizens to have access to diverse cultural expressions, which is essential for the wellbeing of society ([1]). In awareness of this, takes the view that actions in the field of culture need to boost the ability of art and culture to be a free and independent force in society; calls on all levels of government and the European institutions to support efforts to boost the ability of artists to respond to the threats and hatred that they risk facing in the public sphere;

3. calls on the Commission to include culture as one of the political priorities to be pursued in the new term, and on the Council to support within the framework of the next MFF the allocation of adequate resources devoted to fostering regional and local promotion, management, use and development of cultural heritage;

4. calls on the Commission to capitalise on and promote the use of cultural resources, particularly by young people, with a view to securing developments in society, the economy and jobs;

Context: the EU's commitment to promoting culture at local and regional level

5. stresses that the Treaties enshrine the EU's commitment to respecting 'its rich cultural and linguistic diversity' and commit the EU to encouraging cooperation between Member States, supplementing their action in 'improvement of the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples, conservation and … artistic and literary creation, including in the audiovisual sector', and giving the EU the powers to support Member States' action in the areas of culture, tourism, education, vocational training, youth and sport, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity;

6. welcomes the Commission's decision to continue the current Creative Europe programme as a stand-alone programme, providing an independent financial framework in the field of culture to ensure that the results from the 2014-2020 period are ongoing;

7. stresses that the new European Agenda for Culture supplements and strengthens European identity by acknowledging the diversity of European cultures, reinforcing the European cultural and creative sectors and their relations with partners beyond Europe;

8. underlines that the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 has achieved substantial participation on the ground, with thousands of activities taking place across Europe, encouraging sharing and appreciation of Europe's cultural heritage as a shared resource, raising awareness of history and common European values, reinforcing a European identity and a sense of belonging to a common European space, promoting inclusion;

9. considers that, in line with the European Landscape Convention and the New European Agenda for Culture, the general objectives for the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 could be enhanced by including a substantial territorial development component in the form of regional and local cultural strategies that involve the promotion of sustainable cultural tourism;

([1]) https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/artistic_freedom_pdf_web.pdf

10. welcomes the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage presented in December 2018, which includes five strands intended to bring about a real change in the way we appreciate, preserve and promote European cultural heritage;

11. notes that, in addition to the previous Culture and MEDIA programmes, the Commission has supported the cultural sector through cohesion policy funding, the COSME programme and the Horizon 2020 programme, and that further support instruments are included in 'Erasmus +', the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund;

12. calls on the Commission to ensure that the principle of mainstreaming investments in culture into the different EU policies is also applied in the programming of European funds, so that culture is not seen as just a sector-specific policy and its role in relation to all dimensions of cohesion (economic, social and territorial) is recognised. Underlines to this effect the importance of strengthening synergies between culture and other policies such as tourism, regional policy, education, youth and R&D;

13. calls on the Commission and on the Member States and their managing authorities to increase, in the new programming of European funds for areas which are lagging behind, investment in culture, including support for measures to 'restore to the public' extensive heritage through not-for-profit public-private partnerships and by building up basic cultural facilities (in particular public library services);

14. considers it important to step up investment in culture as already planned for the Creative Europe and Erasmus+ programmes. We need to shine a spotlight on the key role played by the regions and cities in integration processes by supporting non-profit public/private partnerships, with a view to encouraging good management practices;

15. notes that the negotiation of post-2020 cohesion policy is a clear and unambiguous starting point for putting together a useful strategy for achieving ambitious goals, providing for duplication of major European programmes that have a direct impact on cultural policies such as Creative Europe and Erasmus;

The role of regional and local authorities

16. stresses that each EU Member State contains areas which have been recognised as World Heritage Sites by Unesco — sites of unique exceptional cultural and natural importance — and that, overall, there are 381 World Heritage Sites in the 27 EU Member States, out of a total of 1 121 sites worldwide;

17. stresses that the cultural heritage in the Member States is widely-spread and in many cases difficult to access, with significant difficulties when it comes to preserving and making use of it;

18. calls on the Commission and on the Member States and their managing authorities to support the protection and physical safeguarding of cultural heritage, in particular in order to actively preserve the extensive heritage located in inner or outlying regions which is difficult to access;

19. stresses the importance of cultural tourism, which promotes the intrinsic value of culture while broadly contributing to territorial development. Points to this effect to the need for an integrated approach to cultural tourism, also as part of smart specialisation strategies, in order to rationalise its impact on local areas and ensure it remains sustainable. To this end, the CoR points to the European Commission's European Tourism Indicators System (ETIS), which can help measure the performance of cultural tourism destinations in relation to sustainability, and it calls for its regular update;

20. welcomes the growing interest and efforts of local and regional authorities across Europe in promoting shared visions and actions in the Member States. Hopes that similar initiatives to those implemented under the Charter of Agrigento, signed by hundreds of mayors and by presidents of Italian regions and supported by particularly representative associations, can be reproduced in other countries;

21. is aware of the need to give Europeans a bigger role in cultural growth by providing them with the tools they need to be active participants. The Committee is also aware of the contribution that culture and cultural diversity can make to sustainable development, as recognised in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ([2]), and undertakes to work to make them key enablers for such development at local and regional level;

([2]) ***https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld***

Priority objectives of regional and local authorities

22. invites regions and cities in Europe, as well as regional cultural heritage organisations and networks, to draw inspiration from the Framework in developing wide-reaching and effective actions and strategic plans on promoting and capitalising on cultural heritage;

23. points out that local and regional authorities are the levels of government appropriate for launching initiatives to familiarise both school-age people and adults with European cultural heritage, including those planning to settle in an EU Member State;

24. regards the knowledge and use of European cultural heritage, seen as a blend of the multiple cultural, social and creative expressions, heritage and legacies of the generations that preceded us, and of the traditions and customs of the peoples of Europe, as a means of consolidating European citizenship and its capacity to drive forward integration and social inclusion;

25. considers it necessary, at European level, to strengthen initiatives fostering knowledge of and access to Europe's cultural heritage, as an essential part of consolidating European citizenship and promoting individuals' sense of belonging to Europe;

26. highlights the contribution that town-twinning, peer-learning and networks of cities can make as regards promoting and raising awareness of issues of citizenship, as means of participation in civic life and of integration, especially in relation to the new Member States;

27. calls for increased investment in culture and in plans to bring aspects of cultural heritage, including those which have been neglected or abandoned, into use, under interactive and sustainable management within the new 2030 Urban Agenda. This will entail capitalising on innovative initiatives promoted by the municipalities and cooperation initiatives promoted by regional stakeholders;

28. proposes further strengthening references to the key role of local and regional authorities in promoting and capitalising on the artistic and cultural life of their communities and calls for regional and local authorities to be more involved in the programme. In this context, it stresses the need for the right balance to be struck between allocation of resources for large-scale projects and local and regional funding measures and activities, including by SMEs;

29. calls on the Commission to give Europeans easier access to culture and places of remembrance by encouraging cultural consumerism, particularly among the younger generations, developing integrated lifelong education and training policies and encouraging local communities to take part in cultural initiatives;

30. considers that support should be given to the cultural and creative industries, particularly initiatives related to the knowledge and use of heritage that can produce results in terms of quality, employment, digital innovation and social inclusion, and those relating to development, in a European dimension, of the visual and performing arts;

31. is aware of the importance of capitalising on digital opportunities to promote culture in an interactive way and attract all groups of society, especially young people, as the future custodians and promoters of cultural heritage;

32. calls on the Commission to support the development of cultural relations between the Mediterranean countries, including with regard to cultural diplomacy initiatives;

33. points to the importance of cross-border and inter-regional cooperation in the field of culture since cultural heritage goes beyond borders ([3]). The CoR highlights to this effect the key role of local and regional authorities, also in the implementation of the cultural component of macro-regional strategies;

34. stresses, with a view to facilitating knowledge and use of European cultural heritage, the need to improve the exchange of data and information between public administrations operating in the EU countries, along with their communication with the public;

35. calls on the Commission to take specific measures to promote effective participation and use by European citizens of the extensive cultural heritage across the Member States, in particular by facilitating full access to information as a pre-requisite for their active participation and supporting the setting-up of a specific information platform;

([3]) For example the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, (https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/about) or the Unesco World Heritage Journeys — Europe (https://visitworldheritage.com/en/eu)

36. commits European cities and regions, in their administrative capacity, to taking the lead in exploring culture-driven models of social and economic innovation and promoting initiatives open to civil society and associations, involving Europeans in the development of culture and the safeguarding and promotion of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

Brussels, 12 February 2020.

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions

Apostolos TZITZIKOSTAS