



The future of cultural policy – a future for the EU?

Representatives from the cultural sector, whether working for NGOs, public institutions or creative and cultural industries are commonly interested in the potential of culture to contribute to cross cultural understanding, to a new economic dynamic, to socially responsible societies which value imagination and creativity. These objectives reflect pressing contemporary issues including the impact of globalization, technological development, migration, ethnic prejudices and environmental concerns.

But are these objectives reflected in cultural policies?

Cultural policies remain essentially national in their scope. However they share common aims of promoting artistic excellence, democratizing access to culture, securing funding for the arts and safeguarding national heritage and local cultural industries (including crafts).

Nevertheless, in some national contexts culture is given a broader remit. Cultural policy is increasingly perceived as a means to engender a more innovative and sustainable economy.

Nordic European countries and the UK have endorsed this version of a cultural policy by supporting the development of the 'experience economy' in which the intangible value of goods is deemed as important as manufacturing (through aesthetic, design, branding) and in which the influence of creative industries on other sectors of the economy (notably ICT) is recognized. In southern European countries emphasis is placed on the role of culture in developing tourism, a key economic resource.

This policy shift represents an acknowledgment of the potential of culture beyond its fundamental education, spiritual and integration values.

The reappraisal of the scope of cultural policy is an opportunity to put culture at the heart of EU policy development. However, national cultural activities still lack a European dimension, which is out of kilter with globalization trends and the digital revolution. As a consequence the EU, an entity with strong shared cultural values and traditions, is still struggling to implement a worthwhile cultural agenda across its policy fields.

We are convinced that culture is a fundamental element in the implementation of EU policy objectives. For instance overcoming cultural barriers is an effective way to address market fragmentation which hinders the establishment of an internal market for numerous goods, services and brands. Likewise supporting creativity and individual talents at international level is a powerful means to promote freedom of expression and the intercultural dialogue. It also contributes to brand Europe as an attractive place because rich in creative excellence.

The EU 2020 strategy represents an opportunity to realize the potential of culture as a key driver of EU integration, values and prosperity (both material and spiritual). Such an acknowledgment would bring representatives from culture, the arts and creative industries closer to their vision on the potential of culture to improve the economy and society in a plural world. ■



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