

Culture, Europe and the Regions 2007-2013: the new political framework and what is at stake

Background note prepared by Relais Culture Europe

I – The European Union focus on knowledge and sustainable development

Carrying on from the reaffirmation of the Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies, the EU has chosen to concentrate for 2007 – 2013 on themes relevant to the knowledge society (Lisbon) and sustainable development (Gothenburg).

II – A central role for culture to achieve these aims

Working to deepen the links between Culture and Europe also implies positioning culture as a cohesive factor for these themes over the entire period.

In a context where innovation, education and training have become key factors for global competitiveness (and where the Union has given itself a specific strategy)¹, it is important to grasp the links between culture and the knowledge society. Culture can in fact be a vehicle for economic innovation particularly with regard to creativity, the actualising of human and social capital and the development of an innovating and learning society.

Beyond the first objective, it is also worthwhile studying the links between culture and sustainable development at a moment when the Union's strategies² in this area are becoming more and more important. Culture is at the very heart of the definition of sustainable development in its economic, social and environmental dimensions and more so with regard to issues such as social equity, cohesion and respect for the environment. We are talking here about issues such as the protection of the built heritage, cultural diversity or, in a more social perspective, the sensitisation of each of us to what is at stake in creating a fairer society and aware sense of citizenship.

III – The Region – the key space to link, culture, knowledge and sustainable development.

The Regions are key environments to put into practice these new strategies, and, in fact, the regional dimension is clearly going to be one of the main dimensions of the application of these strategies.

The link between Europe, culture and Regions is particularly important at a moment when the EU, in

¹ Lisbon Strategy adopted at the Extraordinary European Council meeting in Lisbon 23 et 24 march 2000, revised at the Brussels council of 23-25 march 2005.

² New European Union Strategy in favour of sustainable development adopted by the Council on the 15 and 16 June 2006.

its regional agenda, has decided to make territorial cohesion a separate objective as part of the Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies³. Although little exploited as such, culture remains a real trump card to be played in order to create a convergence of local development or the development of a knowledge society, around objectives such as the creativity of local business/actors, the encouragement of entrepreneurial spirit or creative education⁴. Similarly, culture has a role to play in sustainable development through its links to social solidarity, regional solidarity (i.e. relationships between city-countryside, disadvantaged urban areas, isolated environments) or sustainable environmental issues (quality of life, participation, sustainable life styles and the management and protection of heritage etc).

IV –Responsibilities and reinforced roles for local authorities

Local authorities have an important role to play in this, and they need to integrate these thoughts in their strategic planning as they support local players in their European positioning.

In strategic terms, local decisions makers now need to build this transversal vision of culture into their thinking and consider culture as an essential element of an integrated local development policy.

Appropriate governance mechanisms

When it comes to supporting local actors, decision makers need to understand that these issues imply important changes in professional practice. Professionals will need in the future to develop their projects in the larger framework of European and global identity while anchored in the local or regional society, as well as integrated into sustainability strategies. This also implies that projects should be thought through in a global approach, anchored in partnerships and focused on building the required new capacities (such as skills in intercultural engineering or intercultural competences).

The final implication is of course that professionals need to know how to position themselves and indeed invest in the existing spaces of conversation and communal thinking. In terms of our European position, there is a need to participate in the European thinking currently underway at all levels of political action.

³ Regional Agenda of the European Union – Towards a more competitive and sustainable Europe with diverse regions – accepted at the informal ministerial meeting of the 24/25 May 2007 in Leipzig.

⁴ Qu'évit Michel, *ibidem*.