



The European Forum
for the Arts and Heritage
Le Forum Européen
pour les Arts et le Patrimoine

Conference Report

rapporteur: Simon Mundy

All pictures by Agnieszka Wlazel

In the following paragraphs Simon Mundy, cultural consultant and former president of our organisation, gives a brief overview of the intellectual story line of the conference, and some of the comments and reflections that marked the event. From the point of view of Culture Action Europe itself, the discussion is the core of the conference's value - the astonishing rich interchange of ideas and thoughts make the stress and complexity of organising such an event entirely worthwhile!

The following remarks of course only cover the formal and public statements that peppered the event. There were a myriad of smaller, less high profile conversations, behind the scenes as it were, around glasses of wine and over coffee that also served to build towards the increasingly 'coherent' voice of Culture Action Europe. Note that the relevant term is *coherent*, as Culture Action Europe has never sought to imply that there is a single cultural voice in Europe, and the conference was also marked by significant moments of disagreement - on policy, practice and principles. Good.



We are proud in Culture Action Europe to be able to contain within our ranks a huge variety of organisations, concerns and beliefs; all of which relevant to the longer term aim of building a culturally sustainable Europe. Once again, however, the conference did underline one common theme: all of our work and all of our concerns are grounded in some very basic and shared European principles: respect, equality, and belief in the distinctive contribution of culture to the European project. Simon's words will serve as a useful and timely reminder of how that process is currently developing. Enjoy.

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'For artists to talk about dialogue and interculturality is easy,' said Ahmed el Attar, the Artistic Director of Temple Theatre Company in Cairo, 'because that is automatically what they do. However dialogue implies a conversation between two equal partners and between the European and African shores that does not happen. How many people from the north want to live in the desert?'



So, much of the debate was really about equality: equality between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, between the majority and minority cultures within Europe, between artists and bureaucracies, between rich and poor (whether countries or people), between industries and individuals, between the famous and the talented but obscure, between regions and nations – most of all, angrily and dominantly, between those who are free to move as they wish without official obstruction, and those who are not.



It is clear that it is still impossible to discuss cultural freedoms within the neighbourhood of the European Union without dealing with its ever more repressive visa policy. There are still severe constraints on freedom of work for people who are European citizens, mainly from most recent entrant countries. For those from the Western Balkans, Turkey and Eastern Member countries of the Council of Europe the process of coming to the European Union is usually frustrating and humiliating. One of the speakers, Ozlem Alkis, a distinguished choreographer and festival director from Turkey, related how she had been refused a visa to take part in a

two week residency in Belgium.

Visas are being used by governments to reassure electorates that they are 'safe' from foreigners, in a xenophobic attempt to retain the logic of nationalism. For those in cultural activity, who see the world as a continuing opportunity for interchange, such protectionism is nonsensical. There were renewed calls for freedom of movement for those involved in cultural activity – whether they are engaged in creating, administrating or networking it.

Cultural friction is a world phenomenon but it is also a metaphor for the fear of the outsider that artists constantly work to negate. *'It's time policies caught up with the de facto reality of dialogue'*, said Ahmed el Attar. *'Artists work together if they want to. They do not ask first "where are you from!"'* However mobility is not just about the right of artists to move. As Nevenka Koprivsek said, *'it is about the right of audiences to experience the widest variety of work.'* There is a real worry in the cultural community that the national governments will react to recession by closing up their borders even more.



There was criticism of the Southern and Eastern countries outside the EU too, however, especially of those countries where corruption still infects the process of dealing with public institutions, and where governments are reluctant to adopt cultural programmes that will encourage the development of free (and therefore critical of authoritarian attitudes) civil society.

There is a considerable problem emerging because of the different aims pursued by national governments and by other cultural players: an *'opposition between cultural diplomacy and cultural exchange'*, as Fabien Janelle from the ONDA said. Philippe Le Moine, from the Avignon Festival, backed up this point by asserting that the cultural purpose was not national affirmation, but creating the space for encounters, and exploring the confrontation between the artist's work and the audiences' response. The result, Janelle pointed out, of the mismatch of national and cultural goals is almost

catastrophic, with an enormous division between political declarations and available resources.

As Alain Hayot, Vice-President of the conference's host Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, put it, *'the nation states are responsible for blocking the development of a proper European cultural policy for which the regional and local authorities see the need.'*



Michel Quévit, Professor of Regional Development at Louvain-le-Neuve University, identified that, of the two hundred or more regional governments within the current EU, those that were most successful had a winning formula that included five distinctive policies: learning and inventiveness, social justice, intercultural integration, sustainable policies in housing and transport etc., and open governance.



Former Culture Action Europe President Ferdinand Richard urged Europe's political and cultural forces to look their fears in the eye.

He warned us not to fear integration, and to look beyond a Union based on national prestige to one founded on the multilateral exchange of individual cultural rights. He warned against the cynicism of the rich towards the poor, asking us to shed cultural diplomacy and demand a fair exchange with the same values that we would expect from our own institutions. And he advocated opposing the disappearance of funding from *'a European administrative culture which is ethically suspect.'*

This moved the debate in Marseille onto a different ground, discussing how to strengthen the role of civil society in shaping European cultural policy making. Chris Torch, Culture Action Europe Vice-President, outlined some of the reasons why governmental and European institutions find that cultural operators do not fit conveniently into the neat envelopes where officials wish to place them. We are receptive but uncontrolled, and do not take our mission from a defined industrial or political source. The EU would like the cultural sector to speak with one voice, but except in a general philosophical sense, that may not be possible across such a diffuse sector. And in a sector fighting for financial stability, even our own cultural institutions are inadequate for our expressive and professional requirements.



In response Philippe Kern, of consultants KEA European Affairs, urged a much closer identification with the industrial interests at the heart of the EU, pointing out that most of those working in the cultural sector are actually individual independent entrepreneurs or small and medium enterprises (SMEs). He saw the biggest question facing cultural operators as how to gain access to retail markets (whether selling objects or tickets) without being squeezed out by big companies. He urged a greater engagement with competition policy – and making common interest with scientists, in taking advantage of programmes in the EU that concentrate on innovation.



Yvette Vaughan Jones, Director of the UK's Visiting Arts agency, felt that there are issues which are particularly appropriate for European debate, in which the cultural sector can make a real difference. These included young people and mobility, training, the international dialogue, and helping the economy. The real challenge was to have policy that was led by good practice. A diversity of voices requires a diversity of responses and solutions.

An important caveat was raised by Emina Visnic of Clubture Network Croatia, who warned against allowing the cultural argument to be used *'as a charade by politicians who talk about culture's benefits but are not prepared to invest in real social programmes'*, who instead use the improved atmosphere around arts venues to raise rents, so damaging further precisely the people the cultural sector tries to reach.



'While it is good to be part of the economic reasoning', Gerhard Emischer, of the Archaeological Spesart Project, said, *'we have so much more to offer.'* Despite all the things that citizens have gained from the EU, it has lost their support. *'We have the strength to help the EU with this.'* That was tempered, however, by Andreas Kampf who, since he represented the Bundesvereinigung Soziokultureller Zentrum, took a surprisingly more sector centric stance. *'Of course we have to be present and take part in EU processes'*, he said, *'but we need to formulate our own positions, transforming the discussions at the national level.'*



Uta Staiger, from Urban Dialogues, pointed out, though, that the relationship between citizenship and culture is turning into an issue about participa-

tion at all levels, and that the aim of helping people to participate is one of the strongest arguments in the cultural sector's favour.

On the other hand we were warned not to be too complacent in our assertions. Zora Jurova, Artistic Director of Kosice European Cultural Capital 2013, wondered whether the contemporary arts in Europe are really as innovative at the moment as they say they are. Other sectors, she suggested, may be just as, if not more, creative. Quality is crucial to us being able to put forward a convincing message. The content and the values at the centre of the debate have to be consistent and based on real achievement. Alessandro Stillo, from the Mediterranean Youth Biennale (BJEM), emphasised that it was too easy to spend money on culture by adopting criteria that promote political satisfaction but do little to reflect cultural creativity or rights. And the critic and artist Jonathon Brown urged the avoidance of *'an exercise in diverting art into a process of creating bad propaganda'*.



In terms of setting the agenda over the next two or three years, Xavier Troussard, the Head of Cultural Policy and Intercultural Dialogue at the European Commission, said that the EU has *'opened the political space; now we have to make sure it's sustainably inhabited.'* He felt that there is *'a new narrative'* required if culture is to win the battle to have its needs recognised across the policy spectrum. This would take a message that is sufficiently high-powered and that demonstrates the role and function of culture in moving towards a *'creative ecology'* in economic and social development. It also requires a clear set of tools for dealing with the EU's dominant concerns about demography and migration.



Several of the subsequent speakers stressed the need for credibility in the sector's message - not promising more than could be achieved but not underestimating, either, the contribution the right cultural message can make to political and economic development, whether internally to the EU or with the rest of the world.



Translation, whether of ideas or terms, is seen as important because of the danger of the phrase 'intercultural dialogue' inferring a dualistic tension between 'us and them'. For this reason Steve Green, from the British Council, cautioned against the divisive use of heritage, which he described as 'profoundly anti-intercultural'. *'It's personal and national, so it is uncomfortable'* to deal with. However we term it, whether it is 'combating racism' or 'tackling the actively and passively intolerant', the necessity to meet the challenge of protectionist heritage will not go away.



This is particularly true of the media where, as Bernard Focroulle, the Director of the Aix-en-Provence Festival, put it, *'there is resistance to a subject that is seen as too politically correct and which calls into question the media's own assumptions.'* He called on the cultural sector to use the economic and political crisis in the EU as an opportunity to promote reform and to 'articulate a metaphor between the individual and the political institutions'. This would give us cause to *'build the capacity for change.'*

Robert Palmer, Director of Culture and Natural Environment at the Council of Europe, was concerned about defining the campaigning cause and the 'fuzziness' of terminology. He pointed out that civil society represented the political right as well as the left, and that political institutions are *'not shaped to be accountable or responsive to outside actors.'* To move matters forward positively, the institutions and cultural advocates would have to be *'willing, able and ready'*, and he was not convinced that any of them currently are. He felt that the reluctance on the part of the political establishment is partly explained by the feeling that it is not clear what the specific cultural cause is, compared to those of the environment or human rights. Former Culture Action Europe President Simon Mundy suggested that the cause to be fought for is *'human expression; ensuring that each person is able to express themselves freely, fully and equally.'*



The task was summed up by Culture Action Europe's outgoing President, Yudhisthir Raj Isar, in a list of qualities that advocacy needs to show: reflexivity, articulation, amplitude, autonomy, audacity, adaptability and anticipation.

After four years as President his position has been taken by Mercedes Giovinazzo, Director of Interarts in Barcelona. She recognised all the difficulties, not least that of achieving a common denominator (other than the need for more money) between such diverse interests and motivations of those that constitute the cultural sector. Bringing the message, once it had been articulated, to the equally diverse nation states and the often unsympathetic structures of European and international organisations continues to be challenging. *'But'*, she said, *'we have been invited to dance. We should do it.'*