



**European Committee
of the Regions**

SEDEC/VI-035

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OPINION

Cultural Heritage as a strategic resource for more cohesive and sustainable regions in the EU

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- notes that cultural heritage in its diverse forms is a major asset for Europe: it is a resource with the potential to become a key lever for more cohesive and sustainable regions in the EU that can help strengthen identity in a region as well as in Europe as a whole, and particularly embodies the EU's motto of "United in diversity";
- highlights the fact that digitalisation – both of cultural heritage and of the means of disseminating it – presents immense potential for the future: it can create new forms of access, particularly for young people, and can also disseminate knowledge about cultural diversity across borders, throughout Europe;
- stresses that the creative engagement of artists with the cultural heritage has a special and innovative potential in terms of learning from history to benefit society's future;
- calls on regions who see their cultural heritage as a particularly strong asset to also take this on board in their RIS3 strategy;
- is concerned to note that the European Commission's capping of the ERDF investment budget for cultural infrastructure at EUR 5 million in the current programming period of the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund is an obstacle to the development of larger cultural infrastructure projects;
- therefore calls on the European Commission to rescind this arbitrary ceiling and to base the programmes on substantive criteria and the goals to be achieved, especially European added value;
- insists that culture and cultural heritage be better incorporated into the priorities of the next MFF both through mainstreaming and setting a budgetary target of over EUR 2 bn. for the programme succeeding "Creative Europe";
- stresses that local and regional authorities have important competences when it comes to promoting intercultural dialogue, in particular through their coordination of multi-dimensional local and regional cultural networks involving all the key stakeholders.

Rapporteur

Babette Winter (DE/PES), State Secretary for Europe and Culture in the Thuringia State Chancellery

Reference(s)

Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – Cultural Heritage as a strategic resource for more cohesive and sustainable regions in the EU

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Cultural diversity and common European heritage

1. notes that cultural heritage in its diverse forms is a major asset for Europe: it is a resource with the potential to become a key lever for more cohesive and sustainable regions in the EU that can help strengthen identity in a region as well as in Europe as a whole, and particularly embodies the EU's motto of "United in diversity" and complements the European Union's commitment to respecting cultural diversity, as enshrined in Article 22 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights;
2. has based this opinion on documents from the European Commission^{1,2}, the European Council³ and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR)⁴ on the future of Europe and on strengthening European identity through education and culture;
3. stresses the importance of the values of the EU contemplated in the Charter of Fundamental Rights – dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity – in order to achieve the common good, and therefore calls for stronger respect for these in promoting cultural heritage;
4. stresses that cultural heritage and cultural identity are an important tool for fostering people's knowledge and awareness of Europe's common cultural, spiritual and religious roots – marked by the values of the Enlightenment – in all their diversity. Cultural heritage and cultural identity can improve understanding of changes in and the history of society, and can increase tolerance and acceptance of differences in response to Euroscepticism and growing anti-European divisions;
5. stresses that it is precisely our knowledge of the centuries-old interconnections within Europe that allows us to recognise and have mutual respect for the diversity and differences, and that these differences absolutely must not be used as a pretext for isolation or insularity; is therefore opposed to any attempt to abuse cultural heritage to create divisions within or outside Europe;
6. notes that, while the Eurobarometer survey⁵ shows that EU citizens consider culture to be the strongest glue binding the European Union together – above European values and the rule of

¹ White Paper on the Future of Europe. Reflections and scenarios for the EU27 by 2025, COM(2017) 2025 final.

² Communication on "Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture", for the informal meeting of heads of state or government in Gothenburg (Sweden) on 17 November 2017, COM(2017) 673 final.

³ "Leaders' Agenda: Education and culture": available at http://www.european-council.europa.eu/media/31544/en_leaders-agenda-note-on-education-and-culture.pdf.

⁴ RESOL-VI/014, CdR 4785/2016 fin.

⁵ Standard Eurobarometer 88.

law – at the same time more than 50% of respondents say that there is no common European culture⁶;

7. takes the view that these results are only superficially contradictory: rather, they express the idea that Europe has common cultural roots and interconnections that intersect in varying ways at regional level, reflecting the model of an EU that is "united in diversity";
8. notes that, as a result, regional administrations have a particular responsibility to promote culture as an important thread binding society together – both with regard to the specific culture of their region and via links and exchanges within Europe and beyond the European Union's current borders – making the EU the linchpin of the continent of Europe;
9. therefore encourages the Union to add its own identity and shared values to existing regional and national notions of belonging in order to promote a multilevel citizenship, as it is provided in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and in Article 2 of the Lisbon Treaty;
10. draws attention to the national reports on the implementation of the UNESCO Convention⁷, to which many – though not all – EU Member States are party;
11. endorses the European Commission's observation⁸ that competences for education and culture lie primarily with Member States at national, regional and local level. As Articles 6 and 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union define the EU competence in the field of culture only as that of supporting, coordinating or supplementing actions of the Member States, the CoR supports EU initiatives within this remit, which highlight the important cross-national and European dimensions in this policy field;
12. welcomes the fact that the informal meeting of culture ministers under the motto "Culture – inclusive value of the EU" and the Council conclusions on a Work Plan for Culture⁹ highlight the importance of access to culture, preserving cultural heritage, mobility for artists, and greater public support;

Cultural heritage and cultural activities for identification, social cohesion and social development

13. stresses that cultural heritage can strengthen people's perceptions of a common identity within a region and its links with their own traditions and history, and can support the development of intra-regional cooperation effects. This can kick-start new cultural and educational initiatives and intercultural dialogue, and thus boost social activity;

⁶ Special Eurobarometer 466.

⁷ Convention concerning the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage, Adopted by the General Conference at its seventeenth session Paris, 16 November 1972.

⁸ COM(2017) 673 final.

⁹ Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on a Work Plan for Culture (2015-2018), [OJ C 463, 23.12.2014, p. 4](#).

14. stresses that local and regional authorities have important competences when it comes to promoting intercultural dialogue, in particular through their coordination of multi-dimensional local and regional cultural networks involving all the key stakeholders. It is important in this context to strengthen public-private partnerships;
15. welcomes the EU leaders' recognition of education, culture and policies geared towards young people in the Rome Declaration¹⁰, and endorses the assessment that "education [...] and culture are important not only for competitiveness but also for the inclusiveness and the cohesion of our societies";
16. highlights the importance of the *European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018* (EYCH 2018) as a significant initiative, and welcomes the fact that the European Commission has already announced an evaluation; stresses in this connection that the positive effects of the EYCH 2018 must be further amplified by follow-up measures in the coming years. This must also be reflected in the various support programmes in the next MFF to aid in disseminating European cultural heritage beyond 2018;
17. points out that the mobility of artists – facilitated *inter alia* by Creative Europe – contributes to the success story of European integration, and therefore considers it necessary to continue and expand the Creative Europe programme;
18. is convinced that cultural heritage contributes to social cohesion and quality of life. Because of its inherent historical links to specific locations, which are not just in currently favoured, much visited places but also in places and regions that are currently facing particular challenges, it can offer development opportunities, not least through its enormous potential for creating jobs. This applies in particular to regions affected by demographic change and depopulation and to the outermost regions, as well as to urban areas with specific integration challenges;
19. underlines that participatory approaches in local and regional authorities may be a good way of establishing a broad social base for cultural development concepts and of gaining more backing for and identification with cultural investment. This will lead to a sustainable boost to social interaction and to society's responsibility for local cultural heritage;
20. encourages local and regional authorities to evaluate their experiences with this kind of participatory approach and to share them with one another;
21. calls for more exchanges between the various stakeholders with regard to possible ideas for developing libraries, museums and other cultural sites as agoras or "third places" for exchange and participation in discussions on the future of our cities and regions. In this regard, attention is drawn to the option of using the European Union's general information networks, such as Europe Direct;

¹⁰ https://europa.eu/european-union/eu60_en.

22. at the same time, urges the EU to do more to promote the exchange of experience between local and regional authorities and between representatives of cultural institutions in different regions and Member States;
23. notes in this context that language barriers are a particular hurdle for local stakeholders and that there is a need for European-level support for overcoming them;
24. also supports the continued inclusion, in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), of support for cultural heritage infrastructure, with a particular focus on socio-cultural cohesion. In addition, production chains involving the sustainable management of cultural heritage should be strengthened, and cross-sectoral cooperation projects – e.g. between cultural heritage and education – should be supported;
25. stresses that culture is a shared responsibility for all stakeholders in society – local and regional authorities and the Member States – but also requires specific private-sector funding and voluntary/civil society activity;
26. highlights the fact that digitalisation – both of cultural heritage and of the means of disseminating it – presents immense potential for the future: it can create new forms of access, particularly for young people, and can also disseminate knowledge about cultural diversity across borders, throughout Europe. Digitalisation is also inherently transnational, and is a very useful tool for developing a form of tourism that is both diversified and sustainable;
27. therefore calls on all levels of government to strongly support Europeana as a public digital space for our heritage;
28. supports the call by Culture Action Europe¹¹ to ensure that at least 1% of the next MFF is allocated to culture across policy fields and funding programmes;

The impact of cultural heritage on tourism and regional economic development

29. highlights the value of cultural heritage for economic development in the regions, mainly through the tourism sector – given that 26% of all EU travellers¹² name culture as a key factor when choosing their holiday destinations – but also as a soft location factor for boosting the attractiveness of jobs;
30. notes that the cultural and creative industries, accounting for more than 3% of GDP and roughly the same percentage of employment in the EU¹³, are also becoming an increasingly important part of the economy, especially in metropolitan areas;

¹¹ <https://cultureactioneurope.org/files/2018/03/CAE-Reflection-paper-Agenda-for-Culture-2018.pdf>.

¹² Preferences of Europeans towards Tourism – Flash Eurobarometer Report 432 (March 2016):
<http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/FLASH/surveyKy/2065>.

¹³ https://ec.europa.eu/culture/policy/cultural-creative-industries_en.

31. points out that local and regional authorities have successfully incorporated the cultural and creative industries into their development strategies and that this has helped to boost local economies, including by fostering the start-up of new businesses providing professional multi-sectoral services. In order to make still greater use of the creative potential of the regions, expanded funding scenarios that cut across economies and cultures would be desirable;
32. notes that, in addition to the priority given to the restoration and preservation of monuments, the management and outreach work of cultural institutions is also crucial and is what decides whether cultural monuments are able to fully develop their cultural tourism, economic and social impact;
33. stresses that the creative engagement of artists with the cultural heritage has a special and innovative potential in terms of learning from history to benefit society's future;
34. observes that not just the lack of financial resources for, but also the inadequate visibility of and lack of political awareness about, cultural assets are also an obstacle to cultural heritage being developed as a region's strategic resource;
35. welcomes, in this connection, the introduction of the European Heritage Label and calls on the Commission to take measures to raise its profile;
36. stresses that culture – after public services and infrastructure such as housing, public transport and schooling for children – plays a crucial role in how attractive places are. Given what is currently happening in terms of migration, intra-regional and extra-regional mobility and demography, this is increasingly important for local and regional development strategies with respect to improving retention of labour in disadvantaged regions and striking the right balance in metropolitan areas;
37. notes that cultural heritage, together with an attractive offering of contemporary culture, must be a sustainable factor in – especially regional – tourism. This is no less the case for high-profile destinations such as UNESCO World Heritage Sites or sites that have a European Heritage Label than it is for the varied local cultural heritage sites;
38. points out that the geographically wide dispersal of cultural heritage offers an opportunity – through a more diversified range of tourist attractions – to redirect and better distribute the impact of cultural tourism. The burden can thus be taken off destinations where tourist numbers are at breaking point and where any further increase would damage the cultural heritage points out that promoting the tourism potential of cultural heritage that is less well known would be an effective way of diversifying tourism and driving the sustainable development of marginal areas, especially if the individual tourism development projects are consistent with wider regional development plans and integrated into the system of local services. This is especially the case regarding sustainable mobility. This needs to be seen particularly in the light of the fact that cultural tourism in Europe is growing and in particular creating local jobs;

Steps needed to develop and exploit the potential of cultural heritage

39. criticises the fact that the Europe 2020 strategy on the EU's further development took no account of culture;
40. calls, therefore, given its proven importance for EU cohesion and socio-economic development in many regions, for culture – with its institutions and sites – to be regarded as a strategic area in the successor strategy and in policy planning;
41. insists that culture and cultural heritage be better incorporated into the priorities of the next MFF both through mainstreaming and setting a budgetary target of over EUR 2 bn. for the programme succeeding "Creative Europe";
42. stresses that cultural partnerships are being built across all Member States and, with this in mind, urges more vigorous promotion of themed cultural routes that transcend Member State borders, including under the INTERREG programme;
43. calls for support for cultural heritage resources for regional development to be made an important element of cohesion policy after 2020. The allocation of funding for cultural heritage – broadly defined – should be increased and must on no account be reduced. "Thematic concentration" – provided this is maintained as a rule after 2020 – should include cultural issues;
44. emphasises that it is important for the European Union to launch a genuine strategy for cultural diplomacy. To this end, it is vital to promote artistic and cultural communication and exchanges between the regions of the EU - especially the outermost regions - and third countries, including with measures to make it easier for artists and their works to travel to third countries and vice-versa; in this connection reiterates its call on the European Commission to prioritise the further development of cultural diplomacy with a view to introducing it into the EU's foreign policy¹⁴;
45. is concerned to note that the European Commission's capping of the ERDF investment budget for cultural infrastructure at EUR 5 million in the current programming period of the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund is an obstacle to the development of larger cultural infrastructure projects;
46. therefore calls on the European Commission to rescind this arbitrary ceiling and to base the programmes on substantive criteria and the goals to be achieved, especially European added value;
47. again urges the parties negotiating the UK withdrawal agreement to take into account the possible effect of Brexit on the EU's educational, cultural and youth programmes and calls on them to find suitable ways of enabling non-EU countries to be involved;

¹⁴ COR-2016-05110.

48. thinks that the Council needs to continue and further develop its Work Plan for Culture (2015-2018)¹⁵;
49. backs the European Commission's aim of setting up a long-term EU Action Plan for Cultural Heritage¹⁶ which will put the initiatives in EYCH 2018 on a permanent footing;
50. calls on the European Commission and the Council to involve regional representatives – with their direct experience – appropriately and far more closely in the conferences and peer-learning initiatives established in the Council Conclusions on a Work Plan for Culture;
51. endorses boosting funding of the Guarantee Facility for the cultural and creative sectors and insists that its scope be expanded and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) covered, since this accurately reflects the cultural and creative sectors;
52. calls on the Member States to also more vigorously promote cultural infrastructure, education, vocational retraining, innovation and cooperation projects under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF);
53. encourages local and regional authorities, including in LEADER working groups, to recognise cultural infrastructure in rural areas as an important factor in social cohesion, and to provide forms of sustainable mobility that enable visitors to enjoy the countryside but have the lowest possible environmental impact, such as cycle routes, walking routes and inland waterways;
54. calls on entrepreneurs from the cultural and creative sectors to also work actively for the development of the community and society, including by replicating across the EU successful models for the organisation of networks between businesses, helping SMEs in the sector to harness the historical and cultural wealth of their region;
55. calls for close collaboration with the European Festivals Association (EFA) in developing – under the umbrella of the European Solidarity Corps – exchange schemes and voluntary initiatives in the field of culture and cultural heritage in connection with EYCH 2018 and beyond;
56. recommends that the EU, in its capacity as subsidiary promoter, increase the focus on notions of culture, especially at regional and interregional level;
57. is critical of the fact that comparative assessments are lacking on a European scale and therefore calls on the Member States and the Commission to instigate regular evaluations and studies to enable a comparison across Europe and to feed the findings into the political debates at all levels;

¹⁵ [OJ C 463, 23.12.2014, p. 4.](#)

¹⁶ This could be the legacy of the 2018 European Year for Cultural Heritage and be decided at the "Assises du Patrimoine".

58. rejects as too bureaucratic, however, a regular, comprehensive data collection operation and reporting requirements;
59. points out to the European Commission that considerably more regions than is reflected in the Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3) recognise cultural heritage and work in culture as being key to regional development;
60. calls, therefore, for support for research in this connection – including beyond the narrow focus on Smart Specialisation Strategies – to be made easier;
61. calls on regions who see their cultural heritage as a particularly strong asset to also take this on board in their RIS3 strategy;
62. in the same line, is disappointed that the access to art and culture, which are key for social cohesion and inclusiveness, is not enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights¹⁷;
63. calls for the Europeana virtual library to be further and more strongly promoted through the amalgamation of national digitisation schemes. The library's tenth anniversary in 2018 provides a perfect opportunity to take it to the next stage of development;
64. calls on the European Commission to extend the range of prizes and awards and for these not to be limited to projects that have received EU funding. Awards for innovative projects bring greater recognition beyond the region and Member State concerned, promote exchanges within Europe and encourage those in other regions of Europe to follow suit;
65. reiterates its strong support to the European Capitals of Culture (2020-2033) and calls for the continuation of the initiative beyond 2033, which should reflect even more the full diversity of Europe's cultural richness and promote the long-term development of a common European cultural area based on public participation. Regrets against this background that the European Commission has decided to exclude the UK from the 2023 edition. Indeed, the common European cultural area goes beyond the borders of the European Union;
66. recommends that this own-initiative opinion serve as input into the meeting of culture ministers on 22-23 May 2018, which will be about "the future of the EU through a long-term vision for European cultural content" and the need to incorporate the European cultural heritage into all directives;
67. suggests that the CoR members themselves initiate a regular exchange of information on projects and experience relating to their cultural heritage sites.

Brussels, 17 May 2018

¹⁷ CDR 3141/2017.

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions

Karl-Heinz Lambertz

The Secretary-General
of the European Committee of the Regions

Jiří Buriánek

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Cultural Heritage as a strategic resource for more cohesive and sustainable regions in the EU
Reference document	Letter from the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council, Prime Minister, 11 December 2017 (A/1847)
Legal basis	Article 167 TFEU
Procedural basis	Own-initiative opinion (Rule 41(b)i RP)
Date of Council/EP referral/Date of Commission letter	20 December 2017
Date of Bureau/President's decision	31 January 2018
Commission responsible	Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC)
Rapporteur	Babette Winter (DE/PES)
Analysis	7 March 2018
Discussed in commission	./.
Date adopted by commission	./.
Result of the vote in commission (majority, unanimity)	./.
Date of adoption in plenary	17 May 2018
Previous Committee opinions	<p>Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations¹⁸</p> <p>The future of Cohesion Policy beyond 2020¹⁹</p> <p>Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe²⁰</p> <p>European Strategy for Coastal and Maritime Tourism²¹</p> <p>Cultural and creative sectors for growth and jobs²²</p> <p>The European Capitals of Culture (2020-2033)²³</p> <p>Creative Europe²⁴</p> <p>The future of the European Capital of Culture²⁵</p> <p>Local authorities: actors for development²⁶</p>

18 CDR 5110/2016.

19 CDR 1814/2016.

20 CDR 5515/2014.

21 CDR 2645/2014.

22 CDR 2391/2012.

23 CDR 2077/2012.

24 CDR 401/2011.

25 CDR 191/2011.

26 CDR 312/2008.

Date of Subsidiarity Monitoring consultation	./.
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