

**EUROPEAN
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(EENC)**

***Culture, a smart investment
for European regions?***

by Pascal Brunet

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The EENC was set up in 2010 at the initiative of Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission (DG EAC), with the aim of contributing to the improvement of policy development in Europe. It provides advice and support to DG EAC in the analysis of cultural policies and their implications at national, regional and European levels. The EENC involves 17 independent experts and is coordinated by Interarts and Culture Action Europe.

¹ Director, Relais Culture Europe. The paper has been prepared on behalf of the European Expert Network on Culture (EENC), a group of experts that provides advice to the European Commission in the field of cultural policy. The EENC is coordinated by Interarts and Culture Action Europe.

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Context

The current global context calls for regions to comprehensively review their overall development policies, as well as their European roles. Since the 1980s, the European Union has strongly supported a regional logic, by proposing strategic guidelines which provide a framework for structural policies that are aimed at strengthening economic and social cohesion (Single European Act, 1986) as well as territorial cohesion (Treaty of Lisbon, 2007). In applying a solidarity principle, the EU considers the local level a fundamental space to build cohesion across Europe.

In the context of crisis and transformation which we are currently experiencing, the need to make more coherent European and regional choices has become more urgent. Thus it is necessary to strengthen the 'integration' (complementarity) of the axes of development (economic and social, and increasingly environmental and societal) which Europe and each region need. The analysis of globalisation shows that isolating economic interactions from cultural and social interrelations has become impossible. It is in this complex, interactive world that defining our future, and our European model, has become imperative.

The European Union finds itself today **not in the centre anymore, but rather within a globalised world space**. It has thus become necessary to consider in depth the interactions between all agents (local / national / regional, or economic / social / cultural / etc., or political / civic, etc.). These complex interactions are themselves based on tensions linked to global changes, the most relevant of which can be highlighted as follows:

- an increased interdependence between world regions, as well as a growing interaction between the local and the global by way of transnational processes (interdependence of economic powers, migration, segmentation of urban spaces, etc.);
- the emergence of new big economic, political or cultural powers, which entails the multi-polarisation of the world and the shift of the centre of gravity towards Asia (displacement of economic forces, imbalanced cultural exchanges, etc.);
- increasingly strong lines of tension, from the local to the global level: tension between modes of consumption and the availability of resources (towards a new 'culture' of nature?), between interdependence and differentiation (towards a new 'culture' of relations?), between cultural proximity and distance (towards a new 'culture' of difference?).

The European Union faces today an economic and financial crisis **which raises questions about the European means to respond to this global framework and to engage with it**. Going beyond the discussion on the revision of public budgets for culture – which frequently involves heavy funding cuts – it has become necessary to examine the interdependence between different phenomena.

- The economic and financial crisis interacts with a social crisis (increase in inequality, break-up of social ties, etc.), and both in turn interact with a democratic crisis (inward-looking identities, withdrawal of communities into themselves, difficulty to understand diversity, etc.).
- In this moment of transition and shifting models, it is crucial to think creatively around the interaction between the economic dimensions and the choice of societal model.

The local level is one of the spaces where all these challenges are played out. Incidentally, at an operational level, it is interesting to observe that many local communities or regions have decided to reflect on their models and strategies for development. For them, it is important to combine:

- A systemic approach involving the whole spectrum of local agents (economic agents, civil society and political agents), supported by an open, transparent governance;

- The coherent, simultaneous development (systemic or integrated) of many aspects, including those in the social sphere (quality of education and training), the economic field (opening and accessibility), environmental factors (quality of the living context, cultural life), urban aspects, etc.

It is worth noting that these local and regional authorities integrate a strong cultural axis as a springboard in their development models. Working together within several networks (smart cities, smart regions, etc.), these authorities are now starting to produce studies and to present results which deserve consideration.

On the other hand, the European Commission has particularly focused on the challenges linked to regions' research and innovation potential. It aims to foster the implementation of Europe 2020 through the design of 'smart specialisation' strategies within individual regions, in order to develop the conditions for complementarity among European regions:

- by stressing their diversity, thus avoiding investment in similar or competing sectors;
- by making public investment more effective, through the pooling of human and financial resources on a limited number of development or economic sectors (only 27 European regions invest 3% or more of their GDP in research and innovation);
- by favouring an 'entrepreneurial' approach which involves all stakeholders in the region.

In order to better define their strategic options, regions will now be able to take advantage of the S3 Platform set up by the European Commission, which brings together experts, universities, research centres, regional authorities and companies. It should be noted that involving cultural agents in this support platform would be a major step forward for the cultural sector, so as to assert the fundamental contribution of the cultural dimension in regional strategies which should be 'forward-looking, well-designed and integrated... to further boost innovation, Europe's key driver for competitiveness' (Johannes Hahn, European Commissioner for Regional Policy).

Challenges

In this context, taking into consideration the cultural dimension within regional development should be envisaged as a necessary, essential contribution to a **European move towards a new model of development and global engagement**. As a possible result of the EU 2020 strategy, this European 'way' should be expressed as a unique value in the world and offer to European citizens a more intelligent, cohesive and sustainable approach, by way of the following:

✦ A European move based on **balanced strategies for competitiveness, cooperation and solidarity**. Europe's competitiveness will rest on its capacity for innovation and creativity, as well as its capacity to be strengthened through cooperation among all agents (economic, social, political... and cultural). The reduction in public funding for culture severely affects a large portion of actors in culture and the arts. The redesign of economic models cannot be carried out without public (political and civic) arbitration between market effects, the building of new cooperation models (pooling of resources, cooperative societies, etc.) and the maintenance or redesign of European, national, local or professional models of solidarity. It is thus important to extend the ongoing reflections by way of a stronger integration of cooperative approaches (cross-sectorial, cross-national, cross-disciplinary) and particularly with regard to the following aspects:

- strengthening 'creative environments' (i.e. the emerging conceptualisation of the 'creative ecology');

- the promotion of links between cultural and artistic actors (heritage, cultural institutions and services) and those in the cultural and creative industries.

✦ A European strategy based on a **strong articulation between development, social cohesion and territorial cohesion**. Complexity and interaction between different phenomena thus call for a 'systemic' approach which should enable to better reflect on European development:

- through strong links between economic and societal challenges (and, particularly, sustainability and inclusion);
- by taking into account this sustainable and inclusive dimension at European level, with balanced relationships between European regions;
- by ensuring that this balanced approach is critical to guarantee a better global integration.

For many actors, the present context provides the opportunity to test new ways of operating, open to cooperation with different partners (cultural and non-cultural), from within one's own area or from elsewhere, working towards a set of cultural and broader societal objectives. For them, it is time to work with this socio-environmental direction towards which European society needs to steer.

✦ A strategy based on the positive consideration of **the issue of diversity as a European asset**. Europe's capacity to accept its cultural diversity is a major asset in the formulation of distinctive policies and strategies that enable:

- to transform the range of different stages of development, the potential and specificities of Europe into a culture of capacity for innovation (wealth of situations of understanding, multiplication of abilities for interpretation, stimulation of creative cognitive situations, etc.);
- to build European development, on the many different levels of global interaction, taking part in the flexible, open, diversified networking processes of European regions.

The EU 2020 strategy should reinforce this essential, intercultural approach. The current crisis vividly reminds us that mutual understanding is required when complex responses need to be found. It could be said that this has emerged as a current condition for rebuilding the European project.

Key Questions

Cultural policy is basically an investment policy, which involves investing in the reactive and creative capacities of a society or a territory and, more generally, investing in the human. **This cultural policy of investment** involves several consistent dimensions:

✦ A cultural policy of economic and social investment:

- Cultural policies help to forge broad political spaces, based on a logic of competitiveness but also one of social transformation operating at regional level;
- Cultural policies contribute to the emergence of a plural economy, based not only on industry and consumption, but respectful of human resources and allowing a move towards the redesign of the European economy, more closely related to social wealth and welfare;

✦ A cultural policy of people-centred investment:

- Culture is a social resource, which allows all those involved to develop individual and social capacities of adaptation, resilience, openness, connectedness and dynamism;
- Culture allows us to rethink individual paths, from a societal perspective (**inclusive**), but also regarding time (**lifelong**) as well as on the basis of one's particularities, individuality and diversity (**intercultural**).
- Culture addresses individuals in all their capacities (personal, professional and social, etc.).

✦ A cultural policy of investment based on new public policy tools. The implementation of a policy of this kind may allow regions to offer citizens a renewed public approach, whereby communities can rethink themselves:

- as 'testers', with a collective, forward-looking vision of the transformations underway, accepting uncertainty as the necessary redefinition of the policy implementation models;
- as 'entrepreneurs' of new forms of action and new forms of governance and evaluation, which take into account the plurality of agents, processes and scales of action;

In an open, circulating world, a cultural policy of investment arises as the condition for European integration, reaffirming its human and political choices and accepting its global role.

Experimenting in cultural fields:

- How to ensure the dynamic and effective complementarity of actions designed within the 2020 strategy, through the highlighting of relevant experiences?
- How can region-based experiences be better supported?

Sharing knowledge and influence:

The prevailing European cultural debate still places limited emphasis on human development:

- Which roles should be given to civil society networks (with a cultural or a social focus) in the exchange of experiences and the promotion of a public debate on the European project?
- Which roles should be adopted by cultural agents in the structures aimed at designing regional strategies, both at European level (S3 Platform) and at local level (regional governance structures)?
- A professional lobby is necessary. Which conditions should enable it to find a stronger role in the context of a broader reflection on the transformation of the European society?

Designing models for public policy:

- What should be the role of the cultural sector in the redesign of the current frameworks of public policies for culture?
- Which conditions are needed to reinforce integrated approaches within regions, which strongly include the cultural dimension (an 'intelligent and cultural specialisation')?
- Which conditions are needed for the emergence of a reinforced dialogue between politicians, civil society agents and economic actors?

Cooperation and solidarity:

- What should be the role of the cultural sector in the promotion of a public and professional debate on European integration and the need to reinforce the mechanisms of cooperation and solidarity?
- A range of programmes supporting cultural cooperation can be mobilised – how could they be made more accessible?