



Citizen-oriented Cohesion Policy with a prominent place for culture

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The European Union has been going through challenging times marked by growing euro-sceptic sentiments, long-lasting consequences of the financial crisis and migration-related societal challenges; in addition, new technologies and digital communication has been transforming societies drastically. As the critical period is far from being over, the disparities between European regions and settlements risk to widen and become ever more acute.

The EU's Cohesion Policy has the potential to bring Member States closer together, bridge their diverse regional and local realities, and underpin solidarity among people. Thus, it must remain a principle pillar of the Union's future priorities. Moreover, in order to enable people to benefit from the European project, **the Cohesion Policy must adopt a citizen-oriented approach** as an overall principle, aimed at supporting community-led development and fostering active citizenship. This would potentially nurture the sense of involvement and ownership by communities and individuals.

Culture strongly relates to the various elements of a human dimension of the economic and social development: shared values, creativity-based skills, social bonds, intercultural dialogue, collective learning and engagement, among others. Cultural and creative sectors play an essential role in the development of human capacities, open minds and help adapt to challenging transformations. In this sense, **culture is of great value for most of the Policy Objectives of the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Social Fund Plus** outlined in the European Commission's proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2021-2027):

a) *a smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation:*

- Cultural and creative sectors contribute greatly to economy and job creation: they are responsible for around 3.5% of all EU products and services annually, and employ 6.7 million people, or 3% of the European workforce¹;
- Cultural engagement stimulates one's creative and innovation potential, and artistic creation can inspire innovative vectors in economic and social development. Cultural and creative sectors can serve as a ground for exploring new forms of organisation and management structures².

b) *a greener, low-carbon Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate adaptation and risk prevention and management:*

- Creating awareness and inspiring people through culture on environmental issues has the potential to open minds to creative solutions, and encourage individual and collective action; cultural and creative sectors itself are increasingly active in adopting sustainable practices and serves as an example for other sectors and the society at large;
- Culture and creativity have the potential to inspire a critical view, revealing limitations of current approaches to sustainability, and transforming individual perceptions, values, behavioral patterns and attitudes towards environment.

c) *a more social Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights:*

- Cultural and creative engagement empowers the groups at risk of exclusion, such as economically disadvantaged, ageing, disabled people, and minority ethnic groups to become an active part of society;
- Access to and participation in culture and creativity foster essential soft skills and results in better performance of participation in the labour market.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/culture/policy/strategic-framework/growth-jobs_en

² European research partnership on cultural and creative spillovers in Europe:
https://ccspillovers.weebly.com/uploads/1/1/8/4/118427712/2017_spillover_conclusion.pdf

d) a Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural and coastal areas and local initiatives

- Culture contributes greatly to regeneration of rural and other off-centre areas and communities, nurturing their self-identification and enabling citizens to address in a collaborative way their concerns and aspirations.
- Culture is identified as an essential factor of attractiveness in cities and regions. Culture-led regeneration can help “brand” cities and regions to bring tourists and attract “brains”, companies and investors, or to retain local talents³.

Overall, culture, creativity and the arts, as vectors of critical thinking and awareness-raising, are crucial for a healthy democracy, fostering social empowerment, civic engagement and participation, and acceptance of pluralism and diversity - the values which help to bring citizens closer to the European project’s essence.

The European Institutions and Member States have repeatedly recognised the essential value of culture for the future of Europe and expressed their commitment to underpin culture in the EU strategies. Following up on the Leaders’ agenda on education and culture, the Council Conclusions adopted on 14 December 2017 recall that “Education and culture are key to building inclusive and cohesive societies, and to sustaining our competitiveness. In Gothenburg we expressed a willingness to do more in these areas, in which the EU plays an important supplementing and supporting role.” In November 2017, it was stated in the Commission Communication on Strengthening European Identity through education and culture: “It is in the shared interest of all Member States to harness the full potential of education and culture as drivers for jobs, social fairness, active citizenship as well as a means to experience European identity in all its diversity”.

Nevertheless, we notice with concern that the European Commission has only included cultural heritage, but not **culture as a whole**, in its proposals for the Regulations on the European Regional Development Fund, on the Cohesion Fund and on the European Social Fund Plus. We encourage the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council in all next steps not to miss the opportunity to benefit from the potential of culture for shaping a truly impactful and effective Cohesion Policy.

³ KEA European Affairs: Use of Structural Funds for Cultural Projects, 2012: <http://www.keanet.eu/docs/structuralfundsstudy.pdf>

Concretely, we call on the European Institutions to:

1. Include culture through all investment priorities. Acknowledge the intrinsic value of culture, arts and cultural heritage, alongside with their significant contribution to sustainable development, social cohesion, economic progress, and advancement of the European integration.
2. Adopt a citizen-centred approach to the EU's Cohesion Policy, implying a proper integration of culture, in the Policy Objectives of the future European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Social Fund Plus.
3. Encourage Member States to embed culture in their Operational Programmes, and provide Managing Authorities with clear recommendations in this respect. Recommendations must be designed in a close collaboration with cultural and creative sectors.
4. Simplify access for cultural actors to Regional Development and Cohesion Funds; produce practical guidance for the cultural and creative sectors on how to develop projects in the Funds' framework. DG EAC should take the lead in developing such guidance, in a close dialogue with national and regional authorities, as well as stakeholders from the cultural sector.
5. Explore and deepen synergies between the Cohesion Policy Funds and the Creative Europe programme, both Culture and MEDIA strands.

The European Alliance for Culture and the Arts calls for an open and multi-stakeholder debate on how to design a citizen-centred, truly effective and forward-looking Cohesion Policy, aimed at ensuring a prosperous and sustainable future for the European Union and each European citizen. Cultural and creative sectors must be recognised as substantial contributors to the shaping and implementation of such a policy.

