

Introduction

The EU is shaping a new policy agenda for culture in its own right, acknowledging the role culture plays in promoting cultural diversity while forging a common European identity, and the key role of culture in European economies. In this context, it is also striving to integrate culture and its related issues into the wider policy framework so that due consideration to cultural issues is given in all its actions.

In May 2007 the Commission proposed a European agenda for culture in a globalising world founded on three common sets of objectives:

1. cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue;
2. culture as a catalyst for creativity; and
3. culture as a key component in international relations.

This agenda was endorsed by the Council (in its resolution of November 2007) and by the European Council (in its conclusions of December 2007).

In order to implement these three objectives, new working methods and partnerships with various stakeholders were introduced.

Five priority areas, articulated around the three objectives outlined above, were set by the Council as suitable for the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) framework. These areas effectively provide the basis for the Council work plan for Culture 2008-2010, through which the Agenda for culture becomes operational.

One of these five priorities is 'Promoting Access to Culture' which includes greater mobility of collections.

In October 2008 at the first meeting of the Mobility of Collections expert group, five themes were identified and five subgroups created to work on them. One of these was the 'Mobility of Museum Professionals and Exchange of Expertise'.

The subgroups were charged to reach a set of interim results by mid-2009, and final recommendations in mid-2010. Together with the other four subgroups, the 'Mobility of Museum Professionals and Exchange of Expertise' subgroup was asked to carry the sub-theme of raising standards and the benchmarking of best practice through all its plans.

This is the final report of the subgroup and it will be consolidated within the final report of the expert group of the 'Mobility of Collections'.

Summary

Mobility is the lifeblood of artistic and cultural activity. The exchange of ideas and techniques between people from different backgrounds has been central to the flowering of culture within Europe, and also to the development of understanding between peoples. For certain individuals the ability to move freely across Europe has been central to their careers and their artistic endeavours. In some cases mobility has changed the course of artistic history.

Knowledge Systems for Cultural Mobility, ECOTEC,
http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-ocuments/doc/cultural_mobility_executive_summary.pdf

Moving art works safely requires specialist input from curators, conservators, registrars, art handlers and packers, and fine art transport companies. So moving museum collections in itself creates movements of people: not least of the museum professional who accompanies the piece to its new temporary home and oversees its safe installation. But does the travel of collections staff – attending conferences, visiting collections, collaborating with counterparts in other institutions on exhibitions or publications – also lead to increased movements of art works?

Any museum director or curator would immediately respond that it does: it is through travel that they expand their knowledge and their circle of contacts, and over dinner and informal chats that the best exhibition ideas are often hatched. The museum's professional, administrative and support staff – the conservators, registrars and exhibition administrators – also benefit by sharing their experiences, and listening to others, and in this way best practices can be exchanged and new standards created and spread internationally. In short, building relationships with other museums is the best way to create trust and confidence, and to create opportunities to share not just ideas but collections.

The subgroup created to study the 'Mobility of Professionals and Exchange of Expertise' began by acknowledging that such mobility is an integral part of museum activity: indeed if mobility is the 'lifeblood of artistic and cultural activity' (as quoted above), then, to continue the metaphor, the sharing of experiences and knowledge among museums can be said to lie at the very heart of museum life. The subgroup therefore had to ask itself how it could best contribute to the Expert Group's task to promote and support Collection Mobility; and the answer in brief is that if the EU wants to increase the mobility of collections, one clear and direct way is to focus on *facilitating* and *supporting* the mobility of museum professionals.

Two consistent messages were repeated from the beginning, in the plenary sessions, and in the subgroup's own meetings. The first was that particular attention needs to be paid to smaller, regional museums that do not necessarily have access to the kind of funds that the larger institutions enjoy. So, any plans to generate increased sharing of collections must be inclusive.

Already during the German EU-presidency a conference in Bremen on 6/7 May 2007 one of the six key strands of the Action Plan for the EU Promotion of Museum Collections' Mobility and Loan Standards (which was endorsed by the Education, Youth and Culture Council in November 2006) was "Building up Trust and

Networking” to encourage the exchange of museum objects and means to explore measures in order to enhance the mobility of collections. The experts at that conference declared:

It is a key task in each European member state to recognise at the political level that the larger European museums have already developed extensive co-operation in a number of activities. These large museums are now called upon to increase their cooperation with smaller institutions within the museum community. Small and medium sized museums should also now be strongly encouraged to participate in the important activity of sharing collections between member states and making them available to all European citizens.

A second central tenet is that ‘newer’ Member States want to build relationships with ‘older’ Member States, and it is surely no coincidence that so many of the newer Member States are represented on the ‘Mobility of Professionals’ sub-group joined the EU since 2004.

The key question that this subgroup posed therefore was: how can we facilitate and promote a more inclusive system of mobility for museum professionals at EU level in such a way that smaller museums can collaborate more with one another and with the larger museums; and that ‘older’ member states can benefit from building relationships with colleagues in central and eastern Europe who they may not have collaborated with before?

The questionnaire that was sent out in March 2009 yielded some interesting findings of formal programmes to promote mobility of museum professionals; these are generally limited in nature, however, and supported at a national level. Informally, most museums indicated that they have numerous *fora* whereby they exchange ideas and projects with their colleagues in other institutions (for example, in relation to long term loans, or collaborations on conservation projects).

A formal programme developed and funded at EU level specifically to facilitate mobility of museum professionals would raise the process to a new level. Many of the national museums in the ‘older’ Member States enjoy access to an informal, but well-developed, network in which – over several decades – they have collaborated on exhibitions and related activities. An exclusive EU source of funding earmarked to promote the ‘mobility of museum professionals and exchange of expertise’ would provide opportunities for smaller museums, and those in ‘newer’ member states, to access this existing network, as well as to create and develop new schemes.

By its very nature this subgroup is has been addressing ‘softer’ issues than the other subgroups and it is worthwhile noting at the outset that the findings are therefore not only less fact based, but that objectives such as the building of relationships and trust between individuals and institutions take time to achieve results. That said, they can have important and valuable long-term benefits.