

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

REPORT ON THE ROLE OF PUBLIC ARTS AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE PROMOTION OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

OPEN METHOD OF COORDINATION (OMC)
WORKING GROUP OF EU MEMBER STATES' EXPERTS
ON CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

1 | Introduction

The challenging times that most EU Member States are experiencing may lead to a rise of extremism and xenophobia. Public institutions have a responsibility to respond by actively contributing to social cohesion. This responsibility belongs to cultural and arts institutions as well. In fact, the issues at stake are not only social and economic, but also, and often above all, symbolic and cultural.

By deepening the understanding of different cultures and providing room for encounters, cultural institutions may play a pivotal role in building a more cohesive and open society.

Cultural institutions may have to extensively revise their operations if they are to rise to this challenge. They must address the needs of a society that is culturally more diverse than the one they were established for.

A strong belief that cultural diversity is an asset for European societies has permeated the work of the expert group. European cultural institutions now have a key opportunity to embrace the wealth of talent and potential talent brought by different individuals and communities, and to allow hybridisation and innovation in artistic creation.

2 | Context of the report

This report is the outcome of the work undertaken by a group of 25 experts representing EU Member States. The Working Group was launched in December 2012 under the Council Work Plan for Culture 2011-2014, which implements the European Agenda for Culture. The work built upon the results of a previous group, which focused more broadly on how public arts and cultural institutions may improve access and increase participation in culture.

The group worked using the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), voluntary cooperation between EU Member States that aims at improving policymaking by exchanging examples of initiatives and lessons learnt.



3 | Who is this report for?

This report responds to a request made by national authorities under the Council Work Plan for Culture; therefore it addresses first of all policymakers, by underlining policy principles that they might want to adopt. Because, in the end, real change can only be brought about by institutions themselves, the report also aims to be a tool and source of inspiration for cultural managers. Finally, the report also lists some recommendations for action that might be adopted at EU level in order to promote further reflection and concrete initiatives.

4 | What's in the report?

The report analyses examples of **policies** and **practices by institutions** which endeavoured to address and cater for a more diverse audience through their programmes. It addresses key challenges and analyses **success factors**. Finally, it provides some **concrete recommendations**.

5 | Policy measures

The initial interest of the group was to identify public policy measures. The idea, in fact, was that initiatives by cultural institutions would be much more effective if supported by clear policy guidance and evaluation by the funding authorities. However, the analysis showed that only a small number of such policy measures exist across Europe. In most cases, the national strategies for the implementation of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue have not been translated into long-term policy.

A key issue is of course **political will**, given the current political context of several Member States. Such political will needs not only to exist, but to **be strong enough to overcome inertia** and resistance in order to give way to action.

Besides, a major stumbling block to developing intercultural strategies for the arts is defining **who is in charge**. Intercultural strategies require a sharing of responsibility across sectors, institutions and government offices – this may make it more difficult to recognise **ownership** and to identify the engine which can initiate the process and move things forward.

A related dilemma is whether intercultural strategies should be specific and separate policy frameworks, or if intercultural dialogue should be mainstreamed into the overarching policy frameworks for the arts. Both approaches involve risks and advantages, and the report presents examples and discusses them.

6 | Practices by institutions: four interlinking aspects

To better cater for a diverse audience, cultural institutions may need to extensively revise their operations. The group identified four closely interlinking aspects that should be taken into account in such revision process:

- **Programming:** how is the content of the activities of the institution (repertoire, collections and their interpretation) relevant to people with different social and cultural backgrounds? How can it be made relevant for a wider audience?

- **Staffing:** how can diversity be better represented at the decision-making level and in the staff of cultural institutions? What could be the incentives for change? How could staff be equipped with the knowledge and skills to manage intercultural dialogue and develop intercultural competences?
- **Reaching out to new audiences:** even if financial and physical obstacles to access are removed, many people are prevented from accessing culture by a lack of information on, and familiarity with the institution. How can interest be raised?
- **Creating spaces for encounters:** how can neutral spaces be created where everybody will feel welcome, safe and comfortable?

The group analysed several examples of how these aspects have been tackled by cultural institutions in Member States, and extracted some success factors and recommendations.

7 | Success factors

A key precondition for the success of initiatives by cultural institutions aiming to better cater for diversity, is that the effort is explicitly stated and shared by all who are involved in it.

Some important factors to keep in mind are the need to **understand the requirements of the existing and potential audience** in order to define the programmes; to **consider all different stages** of the value chain that forms the cultural initiative; the interest of **working with the audiences rather than simply for them**, therefore focusing on participation and co-creation; the involvement of cultural mediators; the **collaboration between institutions and other actors**, such as NGOs; a focus on **training staff**; the **communication policy** of institutions; **planning for the long term, but in distinct small steps**; **evaluation**; and a wide **dissemination of information** about the achievements.

8 | Recommendations

The group outlined some recommendations. They are first of all addressed to **cultural institutions**, as change takes place inside the organisations. They include:

- **Declare commitment.** Change will be more effective if based on an explicit strategy.
- **Programme quality art for all**, rather than targeting specific groups as an additional activity on the margins of the institutions' mission.
- **Take into consideration the non-users** through surveys, contacts with communities and NGOs. A clearer understanding of their needs and issues may help adapt strategies in such a way as to attract them – while keeping traditional audiences.
- **Act locally**, by working with local community centres and community ambassadors.
- Focus on **children and the young** – they are the depositaries of the common cultural heritage of the future.
- **Equip staff with the expertise and skills** to manage cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue by setting up training and discussions in partnerships with other organisations.
- **Assess and improve the recruitment processes** by advertising jobs through different channels and by ensuring transparency in procedures.
- **Think outside the box, act outside the walls** by reaching wider audiences through an innovative use of the institutional space for co-creation and participatory art and by working outside the institution's building, and also through virtual spaces.

The group also warned that the process may be slow and it requires perseverance; planning in steps may help keep the motivation.

The group also issued a set of recommendations **to policymakers (funding authorities at national or regional/level)**. In fact, enhancing the role of cultural institutions as agents for social progress is in the public interest, and initiatives to publicly fund institutions will be far more effective if backed by policy guidance. Some key recommendations are:

- **Make clear who does what** for the promotion of intercultural dialogue; identify and recognise roles and responsibilities for different actors in different competent services.
- **Plan for the long term, supporting funding and management over time**; consider also that better catering for diversity may not require additional financing, but rather a revision of current use of funds.
- Consider introducing a **criterion related to the promotion of cultural diversity** and intercultural dialogue among criteria for financial support to cultural institutions.
- Promote cooperation and develop **platforms for collaboration** between major and smaller, local cultural institutions.
- Consider **continuous evaluation** as a way of improving strategies and achieving concrete results.

While the promotion and support of cultural policies is primarily a responsibility for Member States, **the EU may have a key role** to play in supporting exchanges of practices and promoting the agenda of intercultural dialogue across its territory. This could be done through:

- Supporting **the development of benchmarks for diversity management in cultural institutions**, as a reference and guidance for cultural institutions and funding authorities.
- **Promoting a European intercultural label for cultural institutions**, awarded in a peer-to-peer manner by civil society and cultural organisation.
- **Supporting the exchange of experiences and peer learning** for cultural institutions within the Creative Europe programme.

Please find the full report here:

http://ec.europa.eu/culture/library/index_en.htm

http://ec.europa.eu/culture/library/reports/201405-omc-diversity-dialogue_en.pdf

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