



IETM REPORT

www.ietm.org



HEY (E).U.!

Report from the IETM Brussels Plenary Meeting, 23 – 26 November 2017

by Elena Polivtseva



The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



Hey (E).U. !

What do art and culture mean for Europe today and what could they mean in the future? What degree of recognition and support are the European institutions willing to ensure for culture, and what sort of policy framework can it result in? And, as art community, what can we do to strengthen our case?

IETM Brussels session “Hey E.(U.)!” was an attempt to cast aside all the doubts, disbelief and frustrations regarding the EU’s cultural policy, and to take a courageous look into the further, deeper future. Panelists and participants allowed themselves to dream and envisage what should be the right place, role and resources for culture and the arts within the European project. This brave and idealistic approach made all the more sense since all four speakers and the moderator have had a vast experience in the subject matter, thus being perfectly aware what might be the reasons for optimism and disappointment.

The departure points for the discussion were the admission that the European project has been driven into a grip of crisis, and the common conviction that culture and the arts are vital for its survival.

Why culture?

Hilde Teuchies, the first Secretary General of IETM, one of the founders of Culture Action Europe and ex-International Relations Officer at Kunstenpunt (Flanders Arts Institute), attempted to zoom out on a broader picture, ignoring short-term feasibility and political pragmatism. An essential part of her intervention was based on the findings of Pascal Gielen’s book ‘No Culture, No Europe’. According to the study, Europe’s lack of attention for culture is the most important cause of its political and economic failure. Hilde referred to Gielen and his colleagues, claiming that “culture has a socialising, qualifying and subjectivising effect. It makes sure we have a shared frame of reference. It gives meaning to the lives of



© Jana Gellinck

Moderator:

Chrissie Faniadis, International Resource Officer at Trans Europe Halles and founder of EUNIA

Speakers:

Hilde Teuchies, ex- International Relations Officer, Performing Arts, The Flanders Arts Institute

Barbara Gessler, Head of Unit - Creative Europe, European Commission - Directorate General Education and Culture

Julie Ward, MEP, European Parliament

Nan Van Houte, Secretary General, IETM

people.” If we define politics broadly as ‘the configuration of actions that give shape to a society’, then these actions cannot exist without interpreting – and giving meaning to – the social reality, and that is what culture does, functioning as a maker and a carrier of meaning. ‘So, politics must build on culture, if it is to be politics at all.’

Hilde stressed that a range of ambitious measures must be taken in order to reinforce culture and the arts in the European project, primarily because “without culture there is no community”. And only as a last resort, culture’s instrumental benefits should be considered: for innovation, jobs, social cohesion, health, humanitarian values and so on.

Nan van Houte, IETM’s Secretary General, attempted to figure out what can be the way out for Europe today. She questioned the current overall strong focus on jobs and growth, which, according to her, does not restore the trust in the European project. Nowadays, in times of technological developments and globalisation, which aggravate inequality and make many jobs disappear, we have to focus on overcoming the polarisation in our communities and designing a truly equal Europe.

In his book, Gielen stated that the arts “create spaces in which we question dominant meanings or existing social relations.” Nan stressed the special role of the independent arts in this process

of challenging the dominant realities. According to her, there is no surprise that in some countries, where the right-wing forces are taking over, the independent arts sector is a target: "Best theatre and festival directors in Hungary and Poland lost their jobs and got replaced by Fidesz and PiS party members, the actors in Romania get their salaries doubled or tripled by a government that wants to silence them that way." Nan underlined that artists are powerful and vital for society, because they engage directly with people, convey the basic values of the community and help to build critical and empathetic citizens.

Nowadays, Europe is seeking to reinforce its identity, defend its values, and strengthen the feeling of solidarity among its member states and citizens. "Use artists if you are serious", Nan concluded. Moreover, when it comes to creating jobs and cultural diplomacy, which are the buzzwords of the current EU discourse, performing arts sector may not be ignored: it is the biggest employer of all art sectors, and it is one of the most mobile art fields.

Julie Ward, Member of the European Parliament, from the UK Labor Party boldly noted: "I don't see any other solution than culture and education!" She claimed that culture is key for democracy, which she defined as a framework powered by people working together on the ground of equality, respect and responsibility. She referred to an example of an international project, which brought together artists from different ethnic, geographical and religious backgrounds, speaking different languages, but not being challenged and disoriented by their multiple identities: Europeans, natives of their countries, etc. For Julie, this type of working framework represents democracy: "The practice of high quality art with really extraordinary artists arrived at the stated above definition of democracy".

Inconclusive change of discourse or a window of opportunity?

The debate did not bypass the recent Communication of the European Commission "Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture". This paper was issued for the special meeting of the European leaders, who gathered over lunch to discuss culture and education, as part of the European Summit for fair jobs and growth in Gothenburg, 17 November 2017. The document lays out the Commission's vision on the role of culture and education in the future of the EU and contains few policy suggestions to the EU leaders.

Referring to the communication, Nan shared her observation that alongside with jobs and growth, "European values", "European identity" and "cultural diplomacy" seem to be the new mission for culture in the near future. "Will it help create the framework within which a pan-European culture programme can flourish?", Nan wondered, pointing out that, regardless the ambitious spirit of the Communication, no increase of the EU financial allocation for culture is suggested (unlike the funds for education: the Commission has proposed to double the budget of the Erasmus+ programme).

Julie has also highlighted the discrepancy between the current political rhetoric and the actual financial outcomes. It is disappointing to read the Communication,

which recognises the importance of culture for the future of Europe, and to arrive to the final bullet points, which do not recommend anything more tangible than strengthening the "Guarantee Facility Instrument" (a financial mechanism acting as insurance to financial intermediaries (e.g. banks) offering financing to cultural and creative sector initiatives). Julie expressed her doubts that this is the right way to support culture and the arts, if they are really to be the drivers of the European project and the ground for strengthening the European values. "If we want that art organisations are sustainable, we should not push them more into borrowing money", Julie stressed, "Grassroots and small organisations, new young artists, who have just completed their studies, need to take risks; these people cannot be in any more debt! We absolutely have to give them the means to practice what they are excellent at, what they are passionate about."

Barbara Gessler, Head of Unit - Creative Europe, European Commission, argued that the reality is not as bleak as it has been for a long time, and there is finally a positive momentum for culture within the EU policies. Referring to the Communication, she reminded that the occasion - the EU leaders' meeting, dedicated to culture and education - was an unprecedented event. It has been a while since culture has been put on such a high-level agenda. Admitting that the biggest part of the Communication is concentrated on education, Barbara called to stay realistic: "Who would argue that education is very important?"



© Jana Gellinck

Without education, even culture is nothing.” Barbara agreed with Hilde that the instrumental values of culture should not be the sole focus, however, it is also due to those benefits, culture has recently got a more prominent place within the EU political debate. She shared her observation that it is for the first time since a long time now that policy makers are talking about the role of culture in community building, social, cohesion and citizenship. Thus, we should not be blind to this window of opportunity and use this positive momentum for putting forward a stronger case for culture and the arts.

European values & identities

As the Commission’s Communication circles around the importance of culture for strengthening the European identity and values, the panel did not evade the challenging discussion on what those values and identity(-ies) are, how culture is being perceived and exploited by various groups, and where, amidst all those differences, contradictions and even tensions, a common ground can be found.

“Who is nowadays defining those European values and the European identity?” Nan wondered, “as I witness, we are far from a consensus on what Europe is or should be.” She shared her understanding of the European values – respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law – and noted with regret that a growing group of member states, as well as regions, put more effort into nourishing their national and regional identities, trying to separate themselves from the European identity.

Barbara spoke about those differences too, being certain that the multiple communities populating Europe do not share the same values as “the majority in this room”; their values might be rooted in national, regional and local peculiarities and grounded on different ideas about artistic expression, freedom, sexual identities and so on. “This is also Europe”. Barbara’s appeal was to try being as broad-minded as possible while dealing with this variety of perceptions and standpoints. It is not only in the essence of democracy, but also the only way to come

to a compromise, which is badly needed for moving forward. Nan also called on the art community to do away with their “moral superiority” and start listening to other groups of society.

Julie’s experience at the European Parliament is a picturesque example of dealing with the diverse range of values, convictions and opinions. She shared her frustration with the fact that some political groups in the Parliament regard European culture as a fixed concept, which came into existence centuries ago and has not been affected by the multiplicity of other cultures, with which it has been interacting throughout the history. For Julie, culture is a dynamic, fluid, “messy” notion, which is in a constant evolution. She reminded that even if we used to think that culture is being more valued by the political left, she still has to fight hard to convince even the leftists to take culture seriously.

Once the contradictions between different political wings were touched upon, the panel raised the dangers of carving culture to suit either left or right politics and asserted once again that culture and the arts should not be appropriated by either.

The way forward

The speakers tabled some concrete ideas on how to reinforce the place of culture and the arts within the European project.

Member-states’ engagement

Hilde shared her belief that the real impetus for change should come from the member-states. “How can you defend the importance of culture at the European level if you don’t do it on the national level?”

Today, a large number of European countries pursue a cultural policy that recognises the value of cross-border art and culture practices. At the same time, Hilde noted, many member states continue to weigh the level of support for cross-border co-operation against the extent to which it contributes to the national culture. Moreover, drastic reductions in cultural budgets on the national level have gravely impaired cross-border arts practices and limited the capacities of arts practitioners to participate in EU cultural programmes. Hilde stressed that the European member states should drastically strengthen their own support for international, cross-border artistic collaboration. At the same time, she argued, the member states should give the EU more freedom to address culture, holding back their timorousness when it comes to letting Europe take action in the field of culture.

Challenging the principle of subsidiarity

The second Hilde’s appeal was to fight for a new place for culture in the official EU policy. The goal should be to establish a



© Jana Gellinck

European model for a cultural policy that streamlines and acts as a guiding principle across all levels of governance: a model for positive civic values, social justice, solidarity, citizenship through culture, access to culture, cultural participation and artistic creation.

Quoting Vanya Rodriguez, one of the contributors of the publication "[Beyond Visions](#)" that was produced by the European Festivals Association and the European House of Culture, among others, Hilde pinpointed the following questions one needs to ask addressing the EU level:

- Can we agree on the fundamental importance of a Ministry of Culture in every EU member-state government?
- Can we discuss an obligatory minimum budgetary allocation for Culture in each Member State?
- What about a minimum budgetary allocation for Culture on EU level, say at least 1%?
- How to address the issue of the precarious labour force that sustains the cultural sector? How can we address issues of inequality among artists working in or across Europe in terms of access to health care, social security, etc.?
- How can we go even further in terms of mobility opportunities for artists, cultural operators and arts managers?
- How can we make sure mobility funding does not replace structural funding that is dramatically insufficient in so many European countries?
- What are the implications of leaving the worn-out 'impacts agenda' or the 'economic driver agenda' behind? Or, better said, how can we devise models that encompass proud public funding for the arts, with minimum political interference on artistic content?

Hilde admitted that advocating for a strong EU cultural policy means daring to question the principle of subsidiarity, as it

is applied now. She believes it has become necessary as the reality has changed since the principle was introduced: European societies are much more interconnected, and cultural practices are more fluid and intertwined across national borders.

Chrissie Faniadis, International Resource Officer at Trans Europe Halles and founder of EUNIA, the moderator of the session, referred to the campaign "[We are more](#)", which was a collective action undertaken by the cultural sector in the run-up of the preparation of the EU programme for culture for 2014-2020, which resulted in Creative Europe. According to Chrissie, this advocacy exercise has shown clearly that member-states play crucial role in some important stages of the decision-making, and a real change can only happen if some things are lifted to the EU level.

Barbara urged to remain optimistic: "Thirty years ago we had even less power related to culture, and now we are trying to enlarge it". One of the signs of progress is the recommendation made by the Commission in the previously mentioned Communication to "revamp and strengthen the European Agenda for Culture by 2025". Furthermore, Barbara attempted to inspire some realistic thinking: "Some member-states don't feel the necessity to transfer more competencies to the EU, because they are afraid of what comes back from the European level."

Multi-speed Europe

"What if we allow some countries, those who want it, to integrate further and transfer some competencies to the supranational level?", Chrissie wondered, alluding to the third scenario suggested by Junker's [White Paper](#) ("those who want more do more"). In this case, would it be possible to gain more freedom of maneuver for culture at the EU level, even though only for a few member-states?

Hilde reacted to this deliberation with skepticism: such scenario may cause misbalances in cross-border collaborations within Europe. "Does it mean we will get more money just because we work only with Germans, Dutch and French?

This is completely contradictory to how the art world works", she claimed.

Barbara did not exclude that it might be a "beautiful idea"; nowadays, some large-scale Creative Europe cooperation projects resemble such a multi-speed collaboration among few partners from different countries. Nonetheless, she expressed some doubts it can ever be discussed at a political level. The matter concerns voluntary agreements persuasions, "more or less cooperation", and does not imply any legal rights and obligations.

European commons

The third proposition for action put forward by Hilde and supported by the rest of the panel was about creating a European commons for co-operation, collaboration and exchange. Such commons is meant to exist in parallel with and outside the established institutions. This space would become an active testing grounds for new ideas on societal models and breeding grounds for new EU priorities.

Hilde explained her idea: "When we want to shape a different Europe, one where other values dominate besides market obsession, competition and unlimited growth, we, the arts sector, need to invest in the growing practice of commoning. We need to create communal spaces on local and European level where multiple voices can be heard and where interaction is created between different trends, social ideas and models – formulated by a broad and diversified group of cultural players. Together they will not so much generate a harmonious whole with clearly delineated proposals, but rather a rich breeding ground for alternative and sustainable models for living together."

EU programme for culture beyond 2020

The panel has also touched upon the future of the Creative Europe programme.

Hilde's proposal for a "European Arts Programme", as she formulated it, was to concentrate on only two strands:

1) support commoning practices in the arts by giving support to and invest in cultural networks and long-term arts cooperation projects. Small scale cross-border artistic cooperation would be supported by the member-states, and Europe concentrates on large scale and longer-term cooperation.

2) focus on the bottom-up preparatory policy work for the 'European model for cultural policy' (mentioned above). This part of the programme would then support reflection and advisory projects that address all aspects of creating the necessary policy framework for arts and culture within Europe. This will allow the EU to tap into the wealth of experiences and proposals that arise from the commons-practices and will give a voice to artists, as well cultural and policy experts.

Nan, envisaging the future programme, referred to [IETM's position paper](#) issued on the occasion of the mid-term evaluation of Creative Europe. One of the most prominent recommendations featured in it is to support small, grassroots organisations, which are highly committed, innovative and research-oriented, not seldom strongly rooted in their communities and easily connecting with new-comers or those in need. These organisations often have very limited resources to handle time-consuming and labour-demanding applications; thus, special measures to facilitate their access to the EU funding are sorely needed.

A stronger case for culture and the arts

The entire panel has certainly agreed with the necessity to allocate more money for culture and the arts at the EU level. Barbara has reminded that today, when the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework is being negotiated, is a crucial moment for making and putting forward a strong case for culture and the arts. Once we convince policy-makers to design a decent budget for culture, we will have the time and opportunity to fine-tune the content of the future programme: its guiding values, priorities, criteria, etc.



© Jana Gellinck

The necessity of collecting data and tangible evidence unavoidably came up as one of the vital components of such a case for culture. Barbara agreed that collecting figures and measuring impacts might be not the most favorite activity of the sector; however, this will be what the high-lever decision-makers will look at. "The questions are not only how much money would you like, but also what you need it for, and what is in it for the European taxpayer."

"How bad we are in recording our outcomes!" Nan agreed. She admitted that the art professionals often want to step into the next project, and there is always a lack of time; consequently, they lose the battle for funding, as other sectors are better in reinforcing their credibility with figures and data. She is convinced that we need to find new, efficient ways of documenting our practices and their impacts, and preferably, there must be some internationalised models for that. Moreover, she stated that, not only figures, but also stories and case studies can make a real difference in convincing policy-makers of the values of culture and the arts.

Hilde underlined the important role of member states in it: as professional data collection and impact research are very

time- and energy-consuming practices, national governments must invest in specialised institutions and experts; and the European Commission must stimulate and support them in this process.