



Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation

BSSSC Position Paper on Culture

Adopted by the BSSSC Board on 23 May 2018

Add culture to the heart of regional and European politics

The European unification has contributed to 60 years of peace and stability in Europe, it helped to overcome the division of Europe and contributes to increasing economic prosperity and to narrowing the prosperity gap within Europe. Culture helps promoting a European order based on peace, the rule of law, freedom of expression, mutual understanding and respect for fundamental values. One of the most important European values is the equality of all people.

At the same time, Euro-scepticism is growing, tendencies towards more nationalisation, with the Brexit as a peak, rising populist and anti-democratic movements also in the Baltic Sea Region are warning signals encouraging us to better advertise and argue for the European project. If the European project is to survive, it must be more than an economic and monetary union. It should convince with a common vision and a set of values shared and supported by its citizens.

This is where culture can make the difference. Culture has the power to integrate; culture builds bridges across borders and across social and political differences. Culture opens up a vivid access to the youth, forming the basis and future of the Europe project. The EU Commission and the European Council have recognized this potential through the European Agenda for Culture and initiatives like the EU Strategy for international cultural relations and the European Cultural Year 2018. The BSSSC regions – EU and non-EU regions - urge the EU institutions to better exploit this identified potential.

EUROPE AFTER 2020

BSSSC calls for a more comprehensive understanding of culture - relating to cultural, cohesion and innovation policies. The recognition and support of a vivid and attractive cultural life in European

regions should have high priority and should be highlighted in all EU-policies. Among others, this should be integrated into the EU's funding policy after 2020, e.g.:

- Promoting culture and creative industries should become an inherent goal of the European Structural Funds policy.
- Preserving and promoting culture should become a thematic priority of the Structural Funds Programmes 2021-2027 and a possible topic of Smart Specialisation Strategies (provides maintenance of the current programming structure).
- Culture is one the 13 Policy Areas of the EU Baltic Sea Strategy, but without sufficient financing possibilities; cultural projects should become eligible within all ETC (European Territorial Cooperation) programmes 2021-2027.
- Facilitate the funding of small scale projects in the fields of culture, intercultural exchange and the promotion of democracy and tolerance suitable to strengthen European identity and solidarity in the ETC programmes.
- Facilitate access to the centrally managed EU programmes (e.g. Creative Europe) for Macro-regional strategy projects (flagship projects).

THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE WITH REGARD TO EUROPEAN PRIORITIES

Identity:

Cultural heritage is an important manifestation of cultural diversity that needs to be protected. Cultural heritage is at the core of the EU's cultural strategy in 2018, when we celebrate the European Year of Cultural Heritage. "Our cultural heritage is more than the memory of our past; it is the key to our future." says Tibor Navracsics, European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport. Culture and the cultural heritage point to what unites us in Europe, herewith strengthening the sense of togetherness and belonging to a community of shared values. Rehabilitating and promoting cultural heritage also attracts tourism and boosts economic growth. Knowledge of the regional culture and history is a precondition for regional identity. Regional and European awareness increase the commitment to one's home region and to the European project.

BSSSC underlines that preserving and displaying cultural heritage and looking at our common history foster mutual understanding and boost the "we-feeling" in the region - an important prerequisite for jointly tackling today challenges in Europe and in the Baltic Sea Region. Regional identity matters!

Growth and jobs:

Culture and creative industries are a central element in the new economy driven by creativity, innovation, digital dimension and access to knowledge. Culture and creative industries represent a

booming economic sector: The European cultural and creative industries sectors represent up to 4.5 % of European GDP and account for some 3.8 % of the EU work force. The sector records positive growth rates. Culture is well-suited to present a region as an attractive and open-minded place to live. Quality-of-life factors are “soft location factors”, increasingly influencing a region’s positioning in the competition for firms, jobs and the best minds and talents.

Cultural tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing global tourism markets. Culture is an increasingly important element in marketing tourist destinations as it creates distinctiveness and attracts with cultural and historic assets forming the unique regional image and identity

BSSSC stresses that culture and creative industries can help respond to various challenges and to deliver important social and economic benefits both within and outside the EU.

Innovation:

Culture and creative industries have a remarkable potential for innovation, not only in itself. They also function as a catalyst for technological innovations and knowledge-based growth in various sectors of the economy.

Culture can spur social innovation. Our society is faced with a raft of challenges of such magnitude and complexity that conventional problem-solving strategies no longer lead to the desired outcomes. New ways of thinking and innovative approaches are needed in many areas of life, be it in managing scarcer resources, climate change or in dealing with rising social and political tensions. Cultural interventions can offer new attention to old problems.

BSSSC acknowledges that culture-based creativity has the capacity to break conventions, the usual way of thinking, and allows new visions, ideas or products to emerge. A creative environment fosters cutting-edge innovation and helps us solve even complex societal problems.

Integration & Social Cohesion:

European integration, just like integration in the Baltic Sea Region, will not work based on contracts and agreements alone. It is only possible to convince people of European integration if we are not only successful in reaching people’s minds but also in affecting people’s hearts and emotions. This is where culture can make the difference. Its integrating power works in the community, in different groupings and the like, but also within nations and between nations. Participation in cultural activities is an essential tool for individuals and groups to communicate even without knowing the local language. It allows isolated or marginalised people to get involved and acquire self-confidence and self-esteem. Inter-cultural dialogue can contribute to defuse social conflicts and to respond to challenges such as the integration of migrants and refugees.

BSSSC emphasises that inter-cultural dialogue is a key tool in promoting the building of fair, peaceful and inclusive societies as well as the value of cultural diversity and respect for human rights.

External relations and neighbourhood policy:

In recognition of the crucial role of culture when it comes to external relations, the EU Commission adopted an EU strategy for international cultural relations in June 2016. EU High Representative and Vice-President Federica Mogherini said: *"Culture has to be part and parcel of our foreign policy. Culture is a powerful tool to build bridges between people, notably the young, and reinforce mutual understanding. It can also be an engine for economic and social development. As we face common challenges, culture can help all of us, in Europe, Africa, Middle East, Asia, stand together to fight radicalisation and build an alliance of civilisations against those trying to divide us. This is why cultural diplomacy must be at the core of our relationship with today's world"*.

BSSSC believes that to be able to deliver on these goals we need a strong and strategic approach on how we utilize the potentials of culture in external relations and neighbourhood policy. Likewise, we need good examples and the best and next practices of how to use culture as a tool for defusing conflicts and tension and bring stability.