



rEUnaissance
A cultural vision for Europe
31 October 2019



European Economic
and Social Committee

A foreword by EESC President Luca Jahier

Culture and the arts are key drivers for the future of Europe. I am therefore pleased to propose a short publication on culture and civil society, summarising the *rEUnaissance – A cultural vision for Europe* panel, which took place on 31 October 2019, during the EESC plenary session.

It is clear that what we need is a new renaissance for Europe, supported by a dynamic and open cultural narrative. This is one of the reasons why I made “culture” one of the priorities of my presidency.



The EU is facing more and new challenges, to which we need to find innovative solutions. Not the kind of solutions which merely attempt to patch over the cracks, but a genuinely new, long-term and daring vision.

Creativity and culture can help us create a genuine and sustainable winning agenda for the Europe of tomorrow. This is crucial as the future of Europe also depends on our creative and cultural vision.

Our continent was a cultural space before it was a political idea. When I speak of a “European cultural space”, I am not implying a homogenous cultural space, but a continent thriving on variation and movement.

The Renaissance, to take one example, varied from country to country, developed by local cultural influences. Europe has always been a continent of diversity and has integrated influences from beyond our geographical borders. Even our founding myth, **the story of the rapt of the Phoenician princess Europa, is a story of migration**, in this case showing the influence of the culture of what is now the Middle East on our civilisation.

To quote the Polish author Olga Tokarczuk, who won the 2019 Nobel Prize for Literature: “(..) *staring into the current, I realised that – in spite of all the risks involved – a thing in motion will always be better than a thing at rest; that change will always be a nobler thing than permanence; that that which is static will degenerate and decay, turn to ash, while that which is in motion is able to last for all eternity.*”

What is rEUnaissance?

Luca Jahier coined the slogan in April 2018 when he became the 32nd president of the EESC, convinced that Europe needs a new Renaissance. The historical Renaissance was a powerful and vast humanistic revolution, which re-established the real dimension of culture in its concrete relation to science, the art of government and the organisation of economic and social life. It also provided the foundation for the modern transformation of Europe. Renaissance humanism encouraged people to become the authors of their own destinies, creating and changing their environments.

Culture and the arts will indeed be a driving force to keep us in motion, looking ahead with hope and determination.

And the arts teach us that in order to step forward in our European vision, we must be bold and daring, as the British education specialist Ken Robinson rightly pointed out: *"If you're not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original."*

While Ken Robinson is a contemporary researcher, we can of course also learn the same lesson from the quintessential Renaissance artist and thinker, Leonardo da Vinci, whose 500th anniversary we recently celebrated.

Many of da Vinci's famous inventions did not work, but they inspired future generations to search for new solutions. **What we see as challenges are only steps in a successful way forward.**

During the October 2019 plenary session we heard from eminent speakers that culture and the arts have such a cross-cutting impact that it is a real challenge to single out specific focus topics – and the omission of a certain topic is not to be understood as a reflection of its value.

André Wilkens, Director of the European Cultural Foundation in Amsterdam, emphasised the impact of culture on a multitude of challenges our societies are facing.



The economic impact was presented by Prof. Pier Luigi Sacco, who stressed the fact that cultural and creative industries represent around 3.5% of all EU products and services annually, and employ 6.7 million people, or 3% of the European workforce.

Furthermore, in a globally interconnected world, where we face joint challenges due to climate change, social and economic inequalities and the resulting tensions, it would be a mistake not to look at the global picture and the role the arts and culture play in international relations, a view developed by Elke Kaschl-Mohni, Director of the Goethe Institute in Brussels.

Last but not least, is the issue of culture and participation, as I firmly believe that the future depends on our capacity to raise the voices of all citizens, reinforcing inclusion and participation. This engagement and cultural understanding is something which should be enabled all throughout our lives, irrespective of our social and cultural background.



Let us then support the launch of a European Culture Pass for Young People, as tested in Italy and France. Or alternatively a pass to allow people from disadvantaged backgrounds to attend arts events, such as the Hunger for Arts and Culture Pass in Austria.

Let us also encourage an open yet common narrative in our teachings of culture and history, as understanding our diverse and often conflicting history is a powerful tool for combating simplistic narratives and driving a common European idea.

The debate with the members of the EESC was indeed very rich and, for that reason, I am strongly convinced that in the coming years our house of civil society has to step up its work and engagement on culture in all its dimensions:

1. **by boosting networking** with civil society organisations and the initiatives of the sector;
2. by having **representatives of the cultural sector in the incoming renewal of the EESC**, in compliance with Article 300 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union¹;
3. **by establishing a working group in the EESC** that will be in charge of culture as already proposed by some members.

Culture and the arts have an enormous untapped potential to become a unifying and mobilising force for Europe, as also underlined by the new president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, in her speech before the European Parliament on 27 November. **“Culture and education are what link our history with our future. This is what makes us unique. Our soul, our culture, our heritage,”** she said. Culture can indeed help us overcome the current systemic, political and identity crisis in Europe and help us dream and create new visions.

To quote the second 2019 Nobel Prize winner for literature, Austrian Peter Handke: *“If a nation loses its storytellers, it loses its childhood.”*

And indeed: if Europe loses its artists and creative individuals, it loses the flexibility and innovative power we need for the European idea to flourish. For culture can bring hope and a second Renaissance to Europe!



Luca Jahier,
EESC President



1 Article 300(2) TFEU: “The Economic and Social Committee shall consist of representatives of organisations of employers, of the employed, and of other parties representative of civil society, notably in socio-economic, civic, professional and cultural areas”.

European citizens and a common identity

"I try to imagine what the European Union would look like if it hadn't emerged out of the Coal and Steel Community, but instead out of the European Cultural Foundation. It is an interesting thought experiment."



André Wilkens, Director of the European Cultural Foundation, highlighted the importance of culture in the founding of the European Union. Indeed, Robert Schuman was one of the founders of the European Coal and Steel Community, but he also founded the European Cultural Foundation.

Since its creation in 1954, the mission of the foundation has been to promote a European identity – a sense of purpose and belonging. This should also be our mission today.

Three ways were proposed in which the European Union could promote and renew this sense of European identity:

1. Creating European experiences through culture. This also means investing strongly in people-to-people experiences, and continuing to reach out to the United Kingdom, regardless of Brexit.
2. Imagining Europe. We have to be better at storytelling, especially when reaching out to the younger generation. In this sense, artists are good narrators and influencers. We have to craft and tell the future stories of Europe.
3. Contributing to the creation of a European public space, surpassing national filters. The key word is "to share".

"Europe is at a crucial point: After 1989, which was a defining moment (for me), 2019 and the years to come are probably as defining as 1989 was."

"We need to continue investing in people-to-people experiences. We need more Erasmus at all levels. We need more initiatives to reach out to everybody."

"A renewed sense of European belonging is exactly what we need today, because with such a sentiment, Europe can go a long way, but without it Europe is vulnerable to regression and set back."

“We need to tell the story of Europe much better than ever. [...] We have to be better at telling the story to the younger people. [...] We can’t always only tell the economic story.”

“The European story is not only the story of the past. [...] We have to also tell the future story of Europe.”

“We need an Airbus for European public space. It is all about identity, democracy and communication.”



Culture – a driver for our economics



Prof. Pier Luigi Sacco, special advisor to Tibor Navracsics, former Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, stressed the impact of the cultural industries on our economy.

Mr Sacco highlighted the importance of the new European Agenda for Culture, the most advanced policy document of its type, based on social, economic and external dimensions. In this sense, he underlined the link between culture and innovation as a driver for the development of creative and cultural industries. Nowadays, several companies in Europe have introduced

artistic and creative practices in their workspace, and the tendency is growing. Culture helps to make people less afraid of the unknown, leading to greater openness and creative thinking.

Furthermore, he highlighted the importance of culture in projects related to social cohesion. Cultural participation has been proven to facilitate the (re)development of a sense of self-worth, leading for example to a greater openness towards cultural differences, an important asset in dealing constructively with migration and culturally diverse societies.

Another angle of the necessity of behavioural change is certainly to be seen in the context of climate change and the imperative of finding concrete solutions to limit environmental damage. For example, it has been shown that the willingness of people to recycle depends more on their level of cultural participation than on their level of education or income – another clear asset of culture for driving a sustainable future.

Mr Sacco therefore suggests that the main focus of the next EU policy cycle in arts and culture should be to increase the level of cultural participation of European citizens and communities.

“Today in Europe culture is like the Cinderella of policies.”

“European cultural creative industries have a remarkable impact on our economy.”

“Culture makes people less scared of the unknown. [...] Culture familiarises people with new ideas in extremely powerful ways.”



“Social and economic values can go hand in hand. And culture can make a difference in this respect.”

“Culture is an extremely powerful driver of behavioural change.”

“Greek theatre was a platform of public deliberation. [...] This tradition shows how culture has been extremely powerful in fostering certain types of behavioural change since Ancient Greece. [...] This is where Europe can make the difference at global level.”



“Cultural participation can help people regain a sense of self-worth.”

“If we are able to foster a higher level of cultural participation, people have the mental and emotional space to take advantage of all the opportunities of behavioural change of culture.”

“It is extremely important to have a new kind of cultural policy not only for metropolitan areas, but also for marginal, rural areas which may feel neglected.”

Culture and international relations

Elke Kaschl-Mohni, Director of the Goethe Institute and responsible also for South-West Europe, focused in her speech on the perspective of culture in external relations. She explained that a paradigm shift was taking place in the field of culture. The approach had moved from the concept of cultural diplomacy to one of cultural relations.

Today, the aim is to strengthen trust and understanding, in order to understand current challenges. Cultural relations focus on civil society, people-to-people, and equality; they mean mutual learning and participatory spaces.

She highlighted six key strategic areas of work for culture in external relations, with a specific focus on Africa and the MENA region:

- cultural and creative entrepreneurship as prospects for young people in Sub-Saharan Africa;
- cultural heritage as a way to re-think African-European relations;
- social cohesion as an instrument of creative approaches to resilience-building for children in the context of the Syrian crisis;
- social cohesion for artists as social impact agents in the context of the Syrian crisis;
- mutual learning;
- the development of safe spaces for free expression and creation in the MENA region.



“The aim of cultural relations is to strengthen trust and understanding.”

“To positively dream about the future is not a given for the majority of young people in Sub-Saharan Africa.”

“We have to be aware of existing hierarchies of knowledge, power and budget, to question such hierarchies and allow for alternative agencies and narratives.”

“Artists play a key role as social impact agents. Through their art, they give a voice, foster identity and nurture self-expression, self-efficacy, critical thinking, ability to dialogue and an appreciation of cultural diversity.”

Culture is participatory and inclusive

Airan Berg, Artistic Director of the Festival of the Regions (Austria), uses art as a tool in order to transform the culture of how we live together. Art is thus also about the transformation of culture.

For Mr Berg, the future of culture in Europe is thus collaborative, participatory and inclusive. Culture and art can take people out of their comfort zone, driving innovation and change and inciting openness towards differences.

Drawing upon his personal experience of artistic collaboration, he pointed to examples of cultural events in Linz in 2009, the then European Capital of Culture, or in Lecce, candidate for the European Capital of Culture in 2019, where more than 13 000 citizens collaborated to create a vision for the region.

He then emphasised that inclusion was the tool to break down economic, social and health barriers, whereas exclusion leads to frustration, which in turn can lead to extremism and nationalism.



Here again, the arts play a leading role, a fact Mr Berg highlighted, drawing on examples of inclusion projects from his work where people from all walks of life were invited to participate: "I like to Move it Move it!"; a creativity and learning project led by students supported by teachers and artists in Linz, and a 2009 environmental project in Linz, which created synergies between students, bankers and unemployed people.

He suggested that the EESC could be renamed the European Economic, Social and Cultural Committee (EESCC).

"Culture can move people out of their comfort zone and change only happens when we all move out of our comfort zone."

The future of culture in Europe is collaborative, participatory and inclusive."

"Inclusion is more than just making things accessible for a public. It is also about breaking down all barriers: economic, social, health barriers."

"We give people tools for critical thinking and tools for action design."



The ensuing debate was lively and enthusiastic, reflecting the interest of the EESC members in this topic and their understanding of the potential of culture and the arts.

Funding and artists' income

While the importance of the arts is at the core of our European project, we should not shut our eyes to the fact that artists often live in precarious situations with very low incomes, said **Tatjana Babrauskiene** (LT-II), who deplored the fact that artists were not sufficiently supported at national level.

This need was also echoed by **Tom Jones** (UK-III), who called for an increase in the available resources and facilities. **Jacek Krawczyk** (PL-I) called for the Creative Europe programme to be further expanded, and **Adam Rogalewski's** (PL-II) underlined the importance of public investment, supported by **Pier Luigi Sacco**, with **Airan Berg** explaining that some of his projects would not have been feasible without the support of the Creative Europe programme. In his view, the future of economic and social culture could lie in universal basic income schemes. **André Wilkens** pointed out that culture represented a tiny proportion of the EU budget. He called for a massive increase in the Erasmus+ budget.

Arts, participation and social change

Maria Nikolopoulou (ES-II) stressed the importance of increasing participation in arts and culture in order to promote societal change. **Elke Kaschl-Mohni** responded, underlining the importance of equal access of all citizens to culture.

Pier Luigi Sacco explained that culture could indeed have a strong social and economic impact, and that this aspect could be an argument to strengthen the role of culture in our society and to respond to the concern about financial resources in the field of culture. He stressed that, with stronger participation of citizens, the creative and cultural industries could bring about societal changes.

Freedom of expression

Jacek Krawczyk (PL-I) added that it was crucial to defend artistic freedom of expression.

Cultural heritage

Tom Jones (UK-III) stressed the need to support governments so that they could create measures to safeguard cultural heritage.

Diversity as a value of the European Union

Jacek Krawczyk (PL-I) emphasised that our European identity was built on diversity, and that respect for diversity was the only way forward. **Tommaso Di Fazio** (IT-III) stressed the importance of giving space to culture, explaining that culture was a pathway and a factor for integration. Similarly, **Arno Metzler** (DE-III) saw the future of Europe and cultural diversity as going hand in hand. He stressed the crucial role that artists played in our European identity, with **Adam Rogalewski** (PL-II) emphasising that it was crucial that culture not be misappropriated by those who use it for identity politics.

Culture and peace

Antonello Pezzini (IT-I) referred to the great culture of peace that had prevailed at the end of the Second World War. He cited the European Solidarity Corps as a positive manifestation of solidarity, and stressed that we should put more funding into these areas as well.

Jane Morrice (UK-III) referred to Columbanus as the patron saint of European unity, bearing in his name the very symbol of peace, the dove, and called for support for an Erasmus institute and the White Dove Way, as developed in a recent EESC opinion.

Culture and women

Maria Nikolopoulou (ES-II) talked about the role of women in culture. She underlined that men dominated many artistic areas. This argument was taken up by **Airan Berg**, who also stressed the importance of women and gender issues in culture.

Culture, creative industries and economic development

Tellervo Kylä-Harakka-Ruonala (FI-I) emphasised the importance of the creative industries as an economic driver. She explained that we need an open business environment to encourage entrepreneurs in these areas. She further underlined the importance of promoting education and innovation, and stressed the role of artificial intelligence, especially in the digital arts and industries.

Tom Jones (UK-III) also highlighted the importance of adopting culture as a means to create jobs.

Culture as a transversal element across different policies

Jacek Krawczyk (PL-I) emphasised the importance of STEAM (STEM and arts), with **Adam Rogalewski** (PL-II) calling for an intersectional approach to culture. Similarly, panellist **Elke Kaschl-Mohni** called for an inclusive and wide understanding of the arts as a cross-cutting issue.

Culture and the United Kingdom

Brexit and the potential impact on culture were addressed by **Jane Morrice** (UK-I) and **André Wilkens**, stressing that the UK, regardless of its departure from the European Union, would still be a part of the European cultural community. Efforts would have to be made to nurture mutual friendship between citizens and keep this European cultural community alive.

Closing remarks



In his closing remarks, **Mr Jahier** reasserted that if there was **a way to make Renaissance a strategy, it would be to re-invent EUtopia**.

Mr Jahier underlined that **culture should have become the fourth pillar of the sustainable development agenda, alongside the economic, social and environmental pillars**, as had been reflected at the 2016 EESC event at Bozar entitled *A hope for Europe! Culture, cities and new narratives and put forward by international cultural CSOs*.

As noted by the former chair of the European Parliament's Culture Committee, Silvia Costa, it is **culture that has the capacity to create a narrative between these pillars**. This idea should be continuously promoted.

Concluding the debate, the president highlighted four specific recommendations for the EESC.

Culture at the EESC in recent years

Recent opinions

2019/C 62/25 *Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A New European Agenda for Culture'*, rapporteur Antonello Pezzini, Group I.

2019/C 110/17 *Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Creative Europe programme (2021 to 2027) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1295/2013*, rapporteur: Emmanuelle Butaud-Stubbs, Group I, co-rapporteur: Zbigniew Kotowski.

2018/C 440/04 *Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'The contribution of Europe's rural areas to the 2018 Year of Cultural Heritage ensuring sustainability and urban/rural cohesion' (own-initiative opinion) (2018/C 440/04)*, rapporteur: Tom Jones, Group III.

2017/C 288/17 *Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the European Parliament and the Council: Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations'*, rapporteur: Luca Jahier, Group III.

Other publications

2016, *Culture, Cities and Identity in Europe*, produced for the EESC by Culture Action Europe and Agenda 21 for Culture.

EESC events- selection

Public hearing on *An EU strategy for Tourism and Culture for a new European Renaissance – Towards the promotion of cultural heritage as a driver for sustainable economic development* in collaboration with Borsa Mediterranea del Turismo Archeologico, **November 2019**.

Culture workshop and panel participation at the EESC event *Civil Society for rEUnaissance*, **February 2019**.

World War I Centennial Commemoration in the House of European History, **December 2018**.

Leonardo: rEUnaissance today project, launched in **November 2018** in Rome, Italy.

Your Europe – Your Say! **2018** *United in diversity: a younger future for European culture*.

EESC Civil Society Prize **2018** *Identities, European values and cultural heritage in Europe*.

60th Anniversary Cultural event *Songs of Longing*, **May 2018**.

In addition, regular cultural and artistic events organised by the EESC Communications department took place.



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