



# Cultural Base

Social Platform  
on Cultural Heritage  
and European Identities

## The European Migration Cultural Heritage

Vision Document  
(cultural inclusion axis)

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**Challenge 1 : Do public policies on culture allow for the existence of migration cultural heritage? Consequently, should the necessity to take the migration cultural heritage into account lead us to a drastic change in public policies?**

In the last sixty years, culture has been to some extent a constitutive element of the welfare state in the West. It has provided a lot of new facilities to the citizens: museums, libraries, theatres and festivals have blossomed. In spite of the strong inequalities of access to cultural goods, these institutions have become common features of the cityscapes. They are considered as an index of what a good life can be, notwithstanding the educational benefits attached to their regular use. In the socialist countries, culture was ideologically central too on somewhat different grounds and played a very important role in public life. After the fall of the Berlin wall, the communist cultural world brutally fell apart and had to be reshaped along new policy lines. Thus, culture is undoubtedly a central feature of the contemporary public sphere and has even, as nicely shown by Jim McGuigan, become a cultural public sphere of its own (McGuigan 2004, McGuigan 2011). In all countries, cultural institutions have been oriented by public funding and public policy. Cultural public policies have two major dimensions: the first one is the public support to the arts and to the democratization of access to cultural goods. The second is the regulatory aspect of the governmental activities and deals mainly with the control of cultural industries. Thus the shrinking of state and cities budgets as a whole has had a direct and immediate impact on cultural life, since it depends so heavily on public expenditures. Luis Bonet and Fabio Donato think that the former socialist countries have an edge in this respect. "Nowadays, this is paradoxically an advantage for them, since they know how to face processes of radical change better than Western European countries. They are more aware of how to deal with instability and how to move to a very different political, social and economic system" (Bonet and Donato 2011). Can this statement be assessed five years after it was released with respect to the current crisis?



Less money implies drastic political choices, and is very likely to lead to the shrinking or even the closing of some institutions. A sort of cultural rust belt might even appear. This is not pure speculation. Three years ago in Germany some people expressed the wish to significantly reduce the number of cultural institutions in the country. There seem to be no possible relief from the private sector, for three reasons: the private sector can handle a few prestigious endeavors and cultural flagships but is not able to handle the democratizing aspect of public policy; the crisis has an impact on the funding capacity of the firms; the public-private partnership has not always been very efficient. One can consider that households must now pick up the bills for cultural bounties if they want to benefit from them. But it is very dubious that average households can replace the traditional philanthropists.

Thus, two situations can coexist: the survival of the fittest, the talented, the connected, and so on and so forth, and the "artistization" of the multitude. But the impoverishment of the sector can lead to aesthetic changes too: smaller budgets can lead to new forms of "poor art" and to seeking new forms of relationships to the public. Should we give a privilege, for political or ethical reasons, to the disadvantaged, as they might express the most vivid dimensions of popular culture?

There are two Scenarios:

1° Either neo-nationalism and the fear of the Other take over and "Fortress Europe", itself subdivided into smaller fiefs or strongholds goes back to frozen cultural expressions. In France, the National Front, where it is in power, has developed a kind of neo-folklore that recycles old regional images, particularly in Provence. Europe becomes a kind of culturally closed society.

2° Or the necessity to account for the multiple and mobile source of Europe leads to a less tense coexistence. This means that genuine European minority cultures can develop apart from (or relatively autonomous from)



the countries of origin. This is clearly the case for Muslims in Europe, who are most of the time “represented” by foreign mediators, each country competing for a form of monopoly.

Against a form of cultural pessimism that is likely to occur when one thinks of the dangers ahead, it is possible to adopt a more positive tone: since the neoliberal turn, the deepest meanings of the idea of a cultural policy have been lost. Absurdly believing that a Bilbao Guggenheim could be easily planted in every declining seaport of the world and bring reputation to the city was the most salient effect of the so-called cultural turn: the MUCEM (Museum of the Civilizations of Europe and the Mediterranean) in Marseilles is a case in point (Biass and Fabiani 2011). The controversies that have arisen in this city about the public funding of the Cultural Capital of Europe in 2013 are extremely interesting, because they show the structural contradictions of cultural policy: either allocating funds to local initiatives or contribute to city-branding. Again, these disputes are not new and they have accompanied the development of the Guggenheim in Bilbao, but the shortage of funding will redefine the terms of the debate.

Who can define the public interest in culture?

Is culture equipped with emancipatory properties?

How can they be reassessed in the light of the current situation?

How can a new cultural public sphere be consolidated?

The attention that Cultural Base pays to minority and migrant cultures should be understood as a way of developing a new kind of public debate about those issues. What kind of innovative institutions should be developed to produce the new conditions of a common culture? Could you give examples, comforting or contesting the Marseilles case?



**Challenge 2 : What is the role of migration museums? What type of attention should we pay to the growing part of the non-migrant population that fears any display of a multicultural reality? What should be the new cultural commons?**

Recent migration museums have changed the point of view on the nation-building process in a direction more sympathetic to the immigrant. This position has clearly been easier to defend in the “new world” where immigration was inbuilt in the national narrative. It has been less simple in Europe, particularly in France: we have more difficulties imagining ourselves as the product of successive migratory waves, although we are too.

G rard Noiriel’s pioneering work has brought back the migrant in French history, as a major component of the industrial working class, where Italians, Polish and more recently Arabs have been so important (Noiriel 1996). The relative failure of the *Cit  de l’immigration* in Paris, that President Sarkozy refused to inaugurate, is an excellent example of this reluctance, close to a form of psychoanalytic repression and censorship. Here the discourse of assimilation presupposes the negation of the migratory process, as integrated citizens must forget their past in order to become true French people.

New Museums that deal with the Other, such as the *Mus e du Quai Branly* in Paris or the *Mucem* (Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations) in Marseilles are characterized by a strong aesthetic focus, that has been fiercely contested by many anthropologists, who would prefer a discourse centered on domination and social conflicts. Other European countries, where colonialism was not as central in political life, have succeeded in opening new spaces for the migratory fact.

Claire Sutherland’s analysis of the Museu d’Historia de Catalunya sheds light on this process: “The exhibition features the theme of migration throughout; it emphasizes Catalonia’s Mediterranean and to a lesser extent, European context; it presents Catalonia in contrast to a range of Others; it



acknowledges Catalonia's cultural expansionism...These features serve to highlight the changing, porous nature of territorial borders and the impact of immigration, trade and conquest throughout history..." (Sutherland 2014:122). In the museum narrative, Catalonia is constantly oriented toward the sea and very seldom towards Spain.

Thus migrants flow are considered as "constituents components of Catalan national identity" (Sutherland 2014: 123). The acknowledgement of migration as a key-part of Catalan history is undoubtedly commanded by the new national narrative that tends to ignore Spain and to stress the peripheral elements in the construction of a new country. This example shows how the dynamics of neo-nationalism in Europe can make some room for multicultural components.

However, it should not be considered as a general rule: in other cases, for instance in Corsica, the reality of migration is not acknowledged and the Other does not play any significant part in the narrative, since the main goal of the *Museu di a Corsica* is to sustain a genuine Corsican discourse, leaving aside the continuous waves of immigration from Italy first, then from Northern Africa since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It is too early to come to conclusions concerning the effects of migration and minority museums on the development of a polyphonic narrative about populations.

The Jewish museums that may be the most successful examples of minority museums remain an exceptional case. One can say that the migration or indigenous institutions have known a greater development in the new world, for two reasons: first, the process is never a hidden part of the "imagined community" (Anderson 1983) but a strong component of the founding myth of a nation; second, the indigenous people are no longer a significant actor onstage, and it is much easier to deal with what de Certeau, Julia and Revel called "the beauty of the dead".

In Europe, things are most difficult since the migratory dimension is seldom a component of the national founding myth. On the contrary, the process of



unification presupposes a form of ethnic homogeneity, even when it is defined at a very abstract level. Second, the issues related to post WW2 immigration, are still very hot and one of the main resources of the neo-nationalist far right movements that prosper in Europe now.

Questions that we would like to debate with stakeholders:

What is the place for migration museums and other cultural institutions linked to migration?

What is their public?

Should they address mainly the concerned minorities or should aim to present the lay public with some spectacular achievements of others' cultures?

According to Jozefien de Boeck, a project in the city museum of Cologne e.g., in cooperation with the German migration research institute DOMiD, asked immigrant newcomers in the city to go through the museum's permanent exhibition and tell their own stories about the objects on display there. How do newcomers and their descendants interpret the cultural canon they are confronted with at school, in the public space, in cultural heritage institutions, etc.,?

New museology is a very interesting sub-discipline, but it lacks the dimension of reception studies on a broad scale: not much can be said concerning the symbolic and political effects of these new cultural institutions, at least for the time being. What can the stake-holders bring to this ongoing debate?

Is the museum the most appropriate form in order to allow the recognition of minorities?



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## European Migration Heritage

Knowing that cultural practices are socially stratified, would public events be a more efficient way of bringing people together through a mutual process of recognition?

Can you give examples of felicitous institutions or happenings?