EUROPEAN
POLICYBRIEF

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2018, EUROPEAN YEAR OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

JULY 2017

INTRODUCTION

Since the second half of the last century, culture has experienced a profound mutation, through which its position and role in social dynamics have been transformed to constitute an essential basis of today's society. Cultural digitization and globalization have radically altered the cultural ecosystem and intensified the relationship between cultural identity, cultural heritage and cultural expression. This transformation has occurred both within the professional cultural sector as well as in society as a whole.

The **CulturalBase. Social Platform on Cultural Heritage and European Identities** project, funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme, aims to identify and analyse the main current debates and controversies as regards culture, in particular in relation to cultural heritage and European identities from a double standpoint, namely, an analytical

as well as a public policy perspective. To carry out this work, three axes have been prioritised: cultural memory, cultural inclusion and cultural creativity.

During the implementation of CulturalBase, the European Commission proposed 2018 as the European Year of Cultural Heritage (EYCH). This **policy brief** aims at making **connections between the challenges, trends, and the priority areas for action identified by CulturalBase and those identified by the EYCH.** This policy brief is based on the analysis and the recommendations drawn from studies, debates and synthetic documents within the CulturalBase project that relate to the aims and projected achievements of the Year.

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EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

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Conceptual context

CulturalBase achieved its main objective through a double process of, on the one hand, inquiry promoted by the consortium partners and, on the other, of dialogue and debate with all the stakeholders of the social platform. Each was divided into three phases: (1) Revision of the research literature and related policies in six fundamental thematic fields to identify the most relevant thematic areas for research and policy development; (2) elaboration and discussion with stakeholders of general overviews on the thematic areas, their main challenges and key issues for research and policy intervention; and (3) development of a shared view within the social platform on the best way to address such issues and the elaboration of corresponding research agendas and roadmaps for action.

Dialogue between the members of the platform dealt with the following questions:

1. Cultural memory: how to deal with a troubled past; how to elaborate uses of the past to understand the present and plan the future; how to negotiate heritage rights.

2. Cultural inclusion: how culture is intertwined with feelings of belonging; how cultural heritage has been instrumentalized in the political realm to include or exclude specific groups in society; what are the existing tensions, and who are those "left behind" or "outside" of dominant conceptions of identity and culture.

3. Cultural creativity: how can culture be a basis for citizen expression, participation as well as economic activity; how does the Digital Single Market affect cultural heritage and collective identities; what are the most conducive frameworks for creativity and cultural hybridization.

With respect to **cultural memory** several points emerged from the process: the problematization of transnational memories and the necessity to also perceive the past from the perspective of the defeated; and, to encounter Europe's dark heritage. In addition, there is a need to embrace cultural memory in relation to inmigration and the inclusion of minorities.

Culture unites and divides. There is a need for a vision of European cultural heritage that empowers different groups to insert themselves in society and explain their counter-memories. For this to happen, heritage should cease to be a cultural comfort zone in which Europe just celebrates its achievements.

Regarding **cultural inclusion**, some of the main questions that have arisen from the process are related to European identity, unity and diversity.

There is no essence of a European identity that has always existed and that stays immutable. Today European identity is principally cultural in character, the cultural connotation that makes European identity compatible with national identities.

Dominant European identity narratives convert diversity into a characteristic feature of European identity. Nevertheless, if European identity becomes too thin to matter there is a risk that it becomes an empty shell.

Usually European identity has been understood as a device for social or political ends. What is the kind of diversity that can be incorporated into European identity? Our review of relevant academic and policy literature posed this question because there are groups and communities that have a hard time identifying as Europeans or being accepted as such.

Thirdly and relating to **cultural creativity**, the dominant approach to understanding culture and creativity in the EU focuses on its economic aspects. The result has been a concept of creativity as market-driven and developed through economic innovation processes. Such a concept of creativity suffers from social, political, and territorial limitations. The answer to tackle these limitations is not divorcing cultural practice from the economy but exploring alternative visions of creativity that suit cultural values, and enable sustainable development and social inclusion.

A crucial dimension of social inclusion concerns immigrants and ethnically diverse social groups. Their involvement in creative practices and their participation in the professional cultural sector are important both for reinforcing the social integration of those groups and fostering creativity in society at large.

Additionally, another idea considers new emergent forms of artistic production and cultural participation, which promote a new form of cultural governance. They adopt a bottom-up logic and promote cultural creativity in terms of cultural exchange and community engagement.

Policy context: The European Year of Cultural Heritage

Heritage enjoys high priority in the European Union. The privileged position of heritage is reflected in a series of relevant EU documents, from the 2007 European Agenda for Culture to all successive European Council Work Plans for Culture, including the current plan for the period 2015-2018. Furthermore, in 2014 three top level EU documents dealt with cultural heritage from various angles: *Council conclusions on cultural heritage as a strategic resource for a sustainable Europe*, *Council conclusions on participatory governance of cultural heritage*, and a Communication from the European Commission about an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe.

Primarily, despite the standard designation of a European Year that focuses on cultural heritage (i.e. of humanity at large), it seems this will in fact be a year dedicated to European history, values and identity, and 2018 will be used to highlight symbolic events for Europe's history. To what extent "European" is limited to the EU, and also how the heritage of "third countries" in Europe is going to be treated, are all questions tackled during the different phases of preparation and implementation.

With regard to the content of cultural heritage, one of the main aims of the initiative is to broaden its realm from the classical core of protection and restoration of monuments, and to go beyond the collections of tangible objects (including intangible and digital heritage), to ultimately encompass resources from the past in a variety of forms and aspects. These comprise traditions, as well as transmitted knowledge and expressions of human creativity. A mapping displayed on the Commission site reveals the breadth and scope of the concept.

The recurring summary of the rationale behind the Year assumes that the contribution of cultural heritage to economic growth and social cohesion in Europe is insufficiently known and often undervalued.

Beyond its instrumental power, the initiative focuses on the symbolic values of cultural heritage. This begins with recalling the hundredth anniversary of the end of World War One. By highlighting and celebrating the thousand faces of European cultural heritage the Year hopes to bolster pride in our common legacy and contribute to shaping a shared European identity.

In a more proactive manner, the Year is expected to promote cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and social cohesion; to highlight and strengthen cultural heritage's economic role and its contribution to local and regional development.

Tourism and external relations are key areas to further explore and unleash the potential in European cultural heritage. The former is little specified, other than connecting to UNESCO's World Heritage sites and routes (it would be a mistake to forget the cultural routes of the Council of Europe), while the latter—the use of cultural heritage in EU external relations—pins its hope on managing conflict prevention and post-conflict reconciliation.

Indeed, current challenges facing European cultural heritage are also taken into account in the planning of the Year. These include: "decreasing public budgets; declining participation in traditional cultural activities; increasing environmental and physical pressures on heritage sites; transforming value chains and expectations as a result of the digital shift; and the illegal trafficking of cultural artefacts".[1]

Programming

The Year will be coordinated by the European Commission, to support and complement the respective efforts of Member States. Active participation of civil society is envisaged, which hopefully will not be limited to the sector, to cultural heritage organisations including transnational networks.

Reaching beyond the sector is considered a fundamental condition also inside the EU institutions. Several directorate-generals of the Commission are reported to be involved in this project, which will contribute with their expertise, points of view, special interests and resources.

The bulk of the programme is likely to be the oral exchanges of ideas: conferences, information and promotion campaigns, and related events. Also, a variety of other projects may get financial support in the framework of Creative Europe. The Cultural Heritage Days, one of the best established European cultural initiatives, lend themselves to become the climax of the programme of the Year.

It is to be hoped that the events in the programme will also deliver: they will contribute to improved or additional legislation, launch new programmes or catalyse lagging proceedings. Among the latter, the upgrading of statistics for heritage can be mentioned, with Eurostat in the centre.

Challenges and risks

The greatest risk is if the Year is hijacked by national agendas of memory politics. It would be hugely counterproductive if the initiative fuelled the current centrifugal tendencies in Europe. It will require determination, diplomatic skills and tactics on the part of the Commission, to prevent that under the guise of subsidiarity the Year is misused for populist nationalism.

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[1] data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11856-2016-INIT/en/pdf

The wave of retrograde populism should be countered with similarly effective means. Efforts to foster a new European narrative have in the eyes of the majority of citizens been no match against nationalist or other kind of populist rhetoric. Do we now need successful pro-European populists,[2] able to proudly communicate Europeanism with a loud and clear voice?

The programme of the Year threatens to become uneven by inserting partial or ad hoc issues at the expense of the overarching agenda. For instance, the doubtless vital challenge of the illegal trade of cultural artefacts needs to be formulated in a broader context. That broader context is one where heritage has to face its many problematic and negative associations; Europe has dark legacies running throughout its pasts, from slavery, religious wars, ethnic cleansing, the atrocities committed by totalitarian regimes, and huge class inequalities. Working on these together will be difficult, but is one way to avoid nationalistic simplifications of shared dark pasts.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Less PR, more facts and novel communication

Memories of earlier thematic years often evoke deep unease because of the disjuncture between rhetoric and reality. Celebrating common heritage is a legitimate objective of the Year, but talking business, accumulating and sharing evidence and knowledge are at least as important. The European Year offers an opportunity to counter the wave of nationalist populism and bolster European pride with similarly effective means. Efforts to exploit our cultural heritage to produce powerful appeal to citizens should build on the successes of earlier attempts whilst remaining wary of their possible misappropriation.

We recommend that beyond the celebratory aspects of the Year impact should be sought through concrete actions and by brave and innovative means of communicating European values. Such actions might include funding risky but potentially high gain projects by actors normally marginalised from institutional funding.

2. Integration of immigrant heritages in practices of contemporary creation

The European Year of Cultural Heritage will promote the role of European cultural heritage as a pivotal component of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. In an increasingly diverse Europe which confronts a crucial challenge of integrating immigrant populations, the incorporation of immigrant heritages in contemporary creative practices is a good way to promote intercultural dialogue and a cosmopolitan cultural integration of those populations. The European Year of Cultural Heritage could also offer suitable opportunities involving origin and destination countries involved in transnational heritage fairs and exchanges.

We recommend developing an exchange programme for experiences and good practices at the local level that promote the integration of immigrant heritages in practices of contemporary creation.

3. Protect against commercial and ideological exploitation

Traditional heritage institutions like museums, monuments, buildings and archives still dominate representations of the past in Europe. In many cases these also reflect the narratives of the

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[2] neweurope.eu/article/the-sixth-scenario/

majority cultures in each member state, perpetuating ideas of cultural homogeneity that reduce the complexities of Europe's pasts. Gentrification and the uncontrolled commercial exploitation of heritage perpetuates inequalities and enables exclusionary ideologies. Priority should be given to protecting forgotten or repressed heritages from commercial and ideological exploitation.

We recommend that special care be taken to equally protect tangible and intangible heritage that is endangered by economic development and ideological exploitation, and to make heritage a tool of empowerment for communities in need of recognition, for example in museums of migration, sites of consciousness, and centres of interpretation.

4. Participatory governance of cultural heritage

With its Council conclusion the EU made a strong statement about the participatory governance of cultural heritage. A related structured dialogue action has served as a form of follow-up. This momentum should be carried on both at the conceptual level and in the practice of shared participatory governance in the field.

We recommend to continue developing the concept of the participatory governance of cultural heritage and to identify, study and highlight exemplary practices.

5. Researcher–stakeholder collaboration

One of the aims of the European Year of Cultural Heritage is to promote research and innovation on cultural heritage and, at the same time, to facilitate the uptake and exploitation of research and innovation results by stakeholders. There is a need to foster collaboration between research and stakeholders in this field, to pool expertise and resources to provide evidence, complementarities, and to widen audiences.

We recommend organizing a conference fostering researcher-stakeholder collaboration in the field of cultural heritage sometime during the Year.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

CulturalBase documents used for this Policy brief include:

Cultural Base Consortium, A ROADMAP FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE AND EUROPEAN IDENTITIES THROUGH CULTURAL MEMORY, CULTURAL INCLUSION AND CULTURAL CREATIVITY, May 2017

The literature and on-line resources quoted in the brief.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME   CulturalBase. Social Platform on Cultural Heritage and European Identities.

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FURTHER READING	CulturalBase documents used for this Policy brief include: Cultural Base Consortium, A ROADMAP FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE AND EUROPEAN IDENTITIES THROUGH CULTURAL MEMORY, CULTURAL INCLUSION AND CULTURAL CREATIVITY, May 2017 The literature and on-line resources quoted in the brief.