



European Economic and Social Committee

SOC/191
The social dimension of
culture

Brussels, 15 March 2006

OPINION
of the
European Economic and Social Committee
on
The social dimension of culture
(Additional opinion)

On 16 September 2004, the European Economic and Social Committee, acting under Rule 29 of the Implementing Provisions of the Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an additional opinion on

The social dimension of culture
(additional opinion).

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 22 February 2006. The rapporteur was Mr Le Scornet.

At its 425th plenary session, held on 15 and 16 March 2006 (meeting of 15 March 2006), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 137 votes to 3 with 6 abstentions.

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1. **Summary**

- 1.1 The objective of this additional opinion is to propose various operational follow-ups and tools for the opinion on *the social dimension of culture* adopted by the EESC on 31 March 2004.
- 1.2 It endeavours to define the concept of a social dimension of culture, with reference to three key words. These key words – familiar to our Committee which studies them in depth on an ongoing basis – are "knowledge-based economy", "economic globalisation" and "civil society".
- 1.3 It does not pursue the ideas put forward in the first opinion concerning the setting up of new structures such as observatories, laboratories and task forces.
- 1.4 However, it does call on the Commission to specify the qualitative and quantitative indicators justifying its assertion that the current range of Community tools suffice to measure:
 - changes in cultural and artistic employment within the EU, the qualitative and quantitative effects of those changes on employment in general, growth and social cohesion, as well as recognition and participation for everyone, including in particular those social groups and categories that appear to be most deprived;
 - the extent to which intercultural dialogue has developed, not just in mechanical terms (number of exchanges, initiatives of all kinds), but also in a more substantive way, given the Committee's concern about the rise of the phenomena of exclusion, racism (even in countries such as the Netherlands or France where it seemed that policies aimed at

inclusion and/or multiculturalism had created stable models), decoupling of individual and general interests, and fragmentation rather than convergence.

- 1.5 The opinion suggests that the Commission should present a very detailed report on this phenomenon and this objective, not least since 2008 has been designated the year of intercultural dialogue. The EESC is willing to play a very active role in the drafting of such a report.
- 1.6 The opinion therefore proposes launching a new cultural debate on culture, particularly since the current debate still appears to be excessively fixated on issues of patrimony and on conserving heritage rather than on creativity, ongoing processes, and new departures of the imagination; nor does the debate yet reflect the cultural ferment characteristic of social, economic and environmental developments.
- 1.7 The opinion expresses the hope that the work of the Dublin Foundation will be brought more forcefully to bear in these areas. It proposes that, whenever the EESC deals with subjects where there is an implied need for "cultural revolutions", "changes of mindset" or "shifting away from inherited paradigms", there should be at least one paragraph devoted to specific analysis of these ideas.
- 1.8 The opinion emphasises the extent to which the method of good or best practice could, if not used in a merely rhetorical way - as is often the case - be a major tool for dialogue, exchange and transfer of knowledge and culture.

2. **Introduction**

On 31 March 2004, the Committee, acting on a referral from the European Parliament, adopted an opinion on *the social dimension of culture*.

- 2.1 This opinion put forward a number of ideas:
- 2.2 to affirm the **EESC's cultural role**, despite the lack of formal competences conferred on our institution in this field to date;
 - 2.2.1 to work towards gradually setting up a **European observatory of cultural cooperation**, which, together with the European Parliament, could draw up its own annual report;
 - 2.2.2 to achieve **closer cooperation between the European Parliament and the EESC** which, in addition to facilitating the establishment of the above-mentioned observatory, could also make it possible to set "an annual objective of promoting at least one truly shared cultural value";
 - 2.2.3 to launch a **laboratory of cultural change** in the social, economic and environmental fields;

- 2.2.4 to set up a European "**task force**" to encourage cultural and artistic exchange in areas of conflict.
- 2.3 The present additional opinion is warranted by the fact that the earlier opinion had to be drafted quickly. Towards the end of its term of office, the European Parliament had asked us to launch a process and an EESC-EP partnership. Our Committee's enthusiasm for continuing its work has been heightened by the fact the very conception of the cultural dimension within the EU institutions seems to have given a twin boost.
- 2.3.1 Initial statements by Commission president José Manuel Barroso to the effect that the "moment of culture" was at hand, that "in the hierarchy of values, the cultural ones range above the economic ones"¹, were very encouraging and marked a vital turning point. For us, this was the first boost.
- 2.3.2 The second boost has come from our very own Committee, following its unanimous adoption of the programme presented by its president, Ms Anne Marie Sigmund, who has made this subject a central priority of her term of office.
- 2.3.3 However, these efforts remain tentative, since the programme presented by the new Commission does not actually translate this turning point into practice. It does not even explicitly refer to the new emphasis on culture! In accordance with standard procedures, the 2007-2013 programme for culture presented by the Commission has not been referred to our organisation for an opinion. It is not therefore the task of this opinion to comment on it other than to point out that the programme does not take spontaneous account of the "social dimension of culture", and that the programme's funding is well below what the European Parliament would like to have seen allocated. Even in terms of the place of culture among the priorities of the EESC's programme, it would be an exaggeration to claim that specific action has already been taken.
- 2.3.4 Moreover, the role of culture and its social dimension in particular in the regeneration of the European Union remains ill-defined in the current context of the reflection period decided on by the Council following the rejection of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe in France and the Netherlands (a treaty which included culture as one of the objectives of the European Union [(Article.I-3.3)], envisaged modifying decision-making processes in the field of culture and in many areas would have overcome the paralysis imposed by the unanimity requirement [(Articles I-17 and III-280)], and given the modest scale of the compromise which was reached on the financial perspective.

¹ Speech at the *Europe and culture* conference, Berlin, on 26 November 2004.

3. **We must continue to explore the concept of the social dimension of culture, and establish key points which could be incorporated into all European policies.**
- 3.1 The EESC opinion on *the social dimension of culture* initially approached the subject from three main angles:
- a new "culture" of interactions between economic, social and environmental practices;
 - the effects of changes in the world of work on the structure of society and cultural values;
 - a new culture of democracy.
- 3.2 This additional opinion aims to help find the essential points, the "key words" capable of meshing these initial reflections as simply as possible into current Community policies.
- 3.3 *The first key word is the "knowledge-based society".*
- 3.3.1 As was noted in our opinion on *the social dimension of culture*, the universal tendency to intellectualise all the aspects of work, including the "work" of consumption, and the increased role played in this context by relational, stylistic and creative criteria, are and will continue to be at the heart of the differentials of competitiveness, attractiveness, mutual respect and entrepreneurship between the various geo-cultural regions of the planet. Europe must – and is in a position to – take the "creative economy" as a reference point.
- 3.3.2 That is why the EESC opinion highlights, among other things, the issue of work and employment in the fields of culture and the arts, and of a culture-based economy, and it is in these areas that the Committee would like to see better use being made of the work of the Dublin Foundation. It would be useful to analyse how the forms assumed by cultural and artistic work are given shape by a more creative assessment of work as a whole and reflect the knowledge-based economy.
- 3.3.3 Our Committee does not resignedly accept the gulf between "high culture" and the cultural dimension of technical, economic, social, health and environmental matters - areas which are still much too far removed from one another. Through its ongoing work, among other things, on lifelong learning and the shaping of a "learning" society, our Committee is resolutely striving to help bridge that gulf.
- 3.3.4 The enormous need for activity and employment which is both secure and flexible in the fields of communication, mediation, knowledge, art and representation in all its various forms, and knowledge about knowledge, runs into the problem of employment models which, paradoxically, can accentuate inflexibility and insecurity.

- 3.3.5 The rigidity of traditional hierarchies of recognition accorded to various occupations may also impede the emergence of new occupations. More generally, it should be noted that there is a failure to genuinely translate intangibles into economic results, and insufficient mobility of artists and other cultural practitioners – and their works – across Europe. The shortcomings in terms of compiling and exchanging cultural innovations, which would save continually having to reinvent the wheel, should also be noted.
- 3.3.6 The success of the Erasmus and *Television without Frontiers* programmes, the European contribution to regenerating devastated areas, the revival of major urban centres thanks to artistic activity, and the lasting gains experienced by the European Capitals of Culture are already an initial indication of what is meant by the "social dimension of culture". Although the EU's remit is limited to backing up national policies, it is nevertheless often a key player in helping facilitate numerous cultural events and activities; thus, its role is that of a catalyst. Ongoing input of information into a "knowledge" database could have a considerable multiplier effect.
- 3.3.7 Equally, the losses in terms of earnings and networking activity sustained across the entire social and economic fabric when festivals and cultural events are discontinued, even temporarily, demonstrate the holistic contribution which artistic, cultural and mediation activity and employment – and the free movement and cross-fertilisation thereof – make to sustainable development.
- 3.4 *The second key word is "economic globalisation".*
- 3.4.1 In the EESC's view, the mediocre results of the Lisbon strategy relative to its ambitious objectives have mainly to do with neglect of the human, cultural and participatory factor. In a "globalised economy", promotion of a European culture which no longer separates or prioritises economic, social and environmental factors is the only way for Europe to halt or even reverse the detrimental development lag between it and most other areas of the world.
- 3.4.2 In many European countries, and also in other parts of the world, there can no longer be any doubts concerning the economic weight of cultural and creative sectors, confirmed by numerous reports, studies and quantitative assessments. Many businesses and hence jobs have been created in these sectors over the last few years. One cannot overlook the trend here for the creation of small, micro- and one-person businesses, a development which has complex social implications.

For example, networks have to be put in place, given that tasks often have to be pooled due to the small size of the companies concerned. This means that the players concerned need communication, negotiation and presentation skills, as well as expertise on contract law, licensing rules, etc.

Small companies often face major challenges, due to a partial or sometimes total lack of such skills and knowledge, which are essential for all modern businesses; at the same time, they frequently lack the financial capacity to seek professional support, although other small and medium enterprises have become highly effective in these areas.

As for social policy, it must find solutions for social protection issues (for example, sickness, pensions and unemployment insurance) arising from new business structures and new forms of employment.

- 3.4.3 Another social dimension arises from the fact that businesses in "new" economic sectors such as the creative industries are often isolated, given that they operate in fields which are still characterised by a total or partial lack of reference values, model contracts, sectoral indicators, etc. This aspect too is important for the future development of the creative industry and it should be reflected in an appropriate way, especially given that, due to increasing globalisation and the need to face up to international competition, such basic information is vital for economic progress.
- 3.4.4 Given that the European Union must itself redefine its goals, it is all the better placed to understand how economic globalisation is influencing and will continue to influence the emergence of new global cultural values. This also reflects the fact that the European Union is no longer, and can no longer be, a club, a restricted federation of "advanced" countries with a relatively high degree of economic, cultural and spiritual homogeneity. The EU has fully opened itself up to Protestant, Orthodox, and Muslim cultures, is launching negotiations on Turkish accession – an enlargement, which if it actually happens, will be wholly unprecedented – and is placing its relations with its immediate neighbours on a systematic footing. It is now also having to re-think its place and its particular role in a globalisation process which has also seen the rules of the game change at a rapid pace².
- 3.4.5 A "cultural Europe" born of nation states that were past champions at waging war, colonising and empire-building is now perhaps the most appropriate expression of Europe as a "great power" with the capacity to export, disseminate and "professionalise" a "culture of peace", civility and excellence. This represents a return to the very idea that was the driving force behind the European venture – the desire to spread the values and practices of peace, interaction and exchange, rather than domination and hierarchy across the world.

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Not only has there been a rapid rise of "continent states" such as China, India, Russia and Brazil (a process which was expected, even though one could hardly have imagined the pace at which it is happening), but the nature of this process is different to what was expected (overturning the traditional global division of labour with manufacturing industry located outside the "advanced" European economies), and there is also a disturbing rise in environmental "risks" and cultural clashes.

3.5 *The third key word is "civil society".*

3.5.1 The fact that the EESC, whose formal remit has not been explicitly expanded to include culture has, at its president's instigation, adopted an overall action plan that gives **priority to culture**³, is a key political statement.

3.5.2 This could even be seen as a kind of affirmation of culture, in defiance of the hegemony of a way of thinking which sees everything strictly in terms of economic benefits or output, or even of social and environmental issues. This affirmation is all the more valuable for having been initiated by European social and economic actors, representing organised civil society across the board, in the fields of production, consumption and redistribution.

3.5.3 This evolving European culture, which the current historic enlargement process is re-uniting, is the product of a remarkable history and a unique form of development⁴. It is all the more important to be aware of its potential to overcome a phenomenon which cannot be concealed or under-estimated: the fact that "the public in the Member States shows little interest or curiosity, or is simply indifferent, to the cultures of other EU countries"⁵. Incentive policies (EU "cultural" programmes) can of course have a significant impact on this state of affairs, but only a holistic vision of culture and full recognition of its social dimension will suffice to fully remedy the problem.

3.5.4 The wide range of issues involved in the task of devising a true social and cultural democracy would merit thorough discussion with social movements, cultural networks and the social partners – not just between institutions. One of the major challenges to be met is undoubtedly that of establishing a cooperation ethic and technology among all the partners concerned, in order to work constructively towards a global set of cultural values founded on non-violence.

3.5.5 Our societies can no longer afford not to recognise and involve all their actors and all their environments. It has been made clear both by the European Year of Disabled People and EESC opinions and initiatives on this subject - and also on all other subjects linked to various forms of discrimination and severe poverty - that they will be judged on the place and role they give to the most disadvantaged and marginalised members of society. The aim is not only to give everyone their due place, but also to ensure that the cultural impact of their fight against poverty infuses humanity and provides an opportunity to revamp modern humanism. Should not the traditional models of hierarchical command and "assisted dependence" (cf. the

³ Programme adopted by the EESC at its plenary session on 15 and 16 December 2004.

⁴ A survey by the Dublin-based European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions revealed that 80% of Europeans (in the 15 Member States at the time of the survey) were satisfied with their lives, a finding which helps to confirm the hypothesis that a coherent and qualitative European way of thinking and a specific European way of life do in fact exist.

⁵ Study on the Mobility and Free Movement of People and Products in the Cultural Sector. Olivier Audiard, April 2002, Paris X University.

various forms of welfare state) now give way to a model involving the active participation of each person, i.e. "empowerment" of all the economic, social, family and cultural players? This means that, in the new democratic mindset required and facilitated by a globalised economy, "civil society" can, despite not having any direct claim to power, no longer be presented as a subordinate factor or counteracting influence. To ensure a stable future and protect itself from arbitrary developments, civil society must promote its values of solidarity and preserve the capacity and guarantee for "thinking collectively".

4. Working towards proposals and further exploration of the concept of the social dimension of culture

4.1 The EESC notes that, for the time being at least, its institutional partners (European Commission, Parliament) and to some extent the Committee itself view the establishment of new structures such as "observatories", "laboratories", and "task forces" as either useless, premature, or unrealistic.

4.2 For the European Commission and, it seems, the Parliament, the networking of structures such as the various existing observatories could yield real results in terms of European cultural cooperation without requiring new instruments to be devised.

4.3 However, the EESC would ask the Commission to formulate quantitative and qualitative indicators, and to clarify existing indicators, thus enabling objectives for the advancement of intercultural dialogue, for the mobility of artists and artworks, and for the transfer of knowledge and ideas between hitherto highly compartmentalised fields, to be discussed, shaped and evaluated.

4.4 For the EESC, this is not just a matter of ex-post monitoring of quantitative progress towards such objectives. Indeed, the proliferation of intercultural contacts and events in an enlarged Europe and in a more developed single market, particularly in terms of services, can only intensify.

It is also important to know whether measurable growth in cultural consumption and tourism exchanges automatically translates into gains in terms of enhanced knowledge, more outward-looking attitudes and culture. It would be well not only to quantify and describe, but also to seek to understand the proliferation of phenomena such as exclusion, racism (even in countries such as the Netherlands or France where it seemed that long-term policies aimed at integration and/or multiculturalism had created stable models), decoupling of individual and general interests, and fragmentation rather than convergence.

4.5 Moreover, everyone is aware that many national cultural policies, even those which benefited from determined and coherent management over decades by EU Member States, have had very little impact on inherited social class systems.

- 4.6 That is why the EESC is so strongly in favour of the European Union becoming a forum for reflection and discussion on the cultural policies of each Member State – a forum for a new process of cultural reflection on culture. Preparations for the year of intercultural dialogue (2008) should be an opportunity for the Commission to present a very detailed document on the actual breadth of such dialogue, the persistent or new obstacles which it encounters, and new ideas which could help genuinely deepen it. The EESC is willing to play a role in the drafting of such a report, for example from the perspective of the social dimension of culture, and also from that of the cultural dimension of social issues, for example in terms of intergenerational relations.
- 4.7 This additional opinion also proposes the following:
- 4.7.1 sustained "cultural hygiene" on the part of our Committee: whenever an opinion deals with subjects where the cultural aspect is of key importance, a section of the opinion could explicitly discuss this aspect. Rather than referring in abstract terms to the necessity for cultural revolutions, changes of mindset and shifts away from inherited paradigms which have since become obsolete, the conditions required for cultural transformations of this sort should be discussed in as specific terms as possible.
- 4.7.2 closer attention to the open method of coordination and the use of "best practice". Should not concepts and procedures be "tightened up" so that they can acquire a much more specific operational capacity? This would help to ensure that identification and transfer of knowledge and cultural changes lead to more efficient, cost-effective and convergent reforms which can be clearly explained, thus enabling their appropriation and replication.
- 4.7.3 determination on the part of the European Economic and Social Committee – which is an ideal forum for encounters between national, professional, social and societal cultures – to launch a search in specific sectors for areas of activity where there is scope for exchange of practices, for example between the healthcare and educational sectors; these are sectors where there are close parallels between cultural changes – both those which are already underway and those which are desirable. Such changes could help to establish new ways of controlling complex systems, and offer scope for more encounters, exchanges and sharing. For example, promoting multidisciplinary team work can help to create common ground between various professions, which by nature are isolated from one another. Such interaction could help to overcome compartmentalised and blinkered attitudes in individual disciplines. It could also enable progress in one field to benefit other areas of activity more rapidly and extensively

than is usually the case. Finally, it would establish a systemic culture, in which economic, social and environmental aspects are no longer divorced from one another, as a cultural unity for Europe is in its diversity and in improving the living conditions of its peoples.

Brussels, 15 March 2006.

The President
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

The Secretary-General
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

Anne-Marie Sigmund

Patrick Venturini
