

A "Voice of Culture" in Brussels

The renewed structured dialogue of the European Commission with the cultural sector

Interview of Christine Wingert with Andreas Joh. Wiesand

In 2007, following the Adoption of "European cultural agenda", the European Union introduced the so-called 'Structured Dialogue' in the cultural area. Since the cultural sector is varied in Europe and the actors represent very different, even contradictory interests, depending on their background or branch, thematic platforms had been created to enable a cultural policy exchange of the European Commission with civil society actors in the cultural area. Between 2008 and 2014, this structured dialogue took place in two rounds. Starting in 2015, a new procedure has been introduced whereby the conceptual and organisational duties were transferred to a mediator in the form of an international consortium. In February 2015, Christine Wingert spoke for KuMi with Prof. Andreas Joh. Wiesand, Executive Director of the European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research (ERICarts) and co-editor of the "Compendium of Cultural Policies & Trends in Europe" (www.culturalpolicies.net).

KuMi: Mr. Wiesand, you are involved in the new procedure to organise a structured dialogue of the EU Commission with the cultural sector in Europe, as speaker of a team of independent experts. Who are the members of the consortium and the experts?

AJW: First a reservation: Because the "structured dialogue" with cultural representatives of the civil society has indeed experienced a reorganisation, many things are still in a state of flux. At this point, I can inform only about first plans and my own views of this development – binding statements are not yet possible. Nevertheless: The monster term *Renewed Structured Dialogue* has already been modified, now the dialogue process figures under: *The Voice of Culture – European Structured Dialogue*.

Regarding your question: As a result of the EU's public tender in April 2014, a consortium led by the Goethe Institute Brussels is now charged with organising the dialogue; the other partners are ELIA (European association of major arts education institutions and universities, located in Amsterdam) and Flagey (a cultural event centre in Brussels). So-called key experts are Rod Fisher, Ulrich Fuchs, Oliver Scheytt and Chrissie Tiller; I act as the team leader. Other experts from different parts of Europe will be called upon for specific themes.

KuMi: How can cultural actors participate, who talks in this dialogue when and with whom? Which are the most important dialogue instruments?

AJW: We distinguish three main steps:

1. About 40 civil society representatives from member states of the EU discuss special themes in 5 preparatory *brainstorming sessions*. The two in 2015 are already known: *Audience Development via Digital Means* and *Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage*. This step will serve, first of all, to finding common ground among the different cultural actors;
2. The main ideas and recommendations of these meetings are condensed in a *policy paper*;
3. In a *dialogue meeting*, these results are then discussed with the EU Commission – taking into account additional contributions of experts as well as contributions that will be available on the project's Internet site www.voiceofculture.eu.

In parallel with these steps, themes, results and proposals can be followed up on this website, where you can also apply for participation. As well, some additional *policy papers* without events can be expected.

KuMi: Who will be the actors from the cultural area? Are only representatives of European networks expected as participants or also other organisation and individuals? And how are the participants of the Structured Dialogue going to be selected?

AJW: The first two public *brainstorming sessions* – on the 18th and 19th of June in Amsterdam as well as on the 2nd and 3rd of July in Florence – are currently being prepared. We agree with the EU Commission that the composition of the meetings should reflect diversity and, therefore, should go beyond representatives of e.g. European networks or other "usual suspects". We want to achieve this goal by informing all stakeholders via professional media in the EU member states and by inviting them to apply for participation. As regards the selection, criteria such as professionalism, geographic origin or the field of work will surely play a role, as well as the ability to work as a multiplier.

KuMi: What's your view regarding the question of the legitimacy of representation, which could possibly arise with the choice of an actor? Are you afraid of a debate, as soon as the participants have been selected?

AJW: An understandable but also slightly mean question! If I were not sure that, in principle, everybody can take part in the dialogue process via the Internet site, I could, perhaps, have a problem with the answer... However, what kind of "legitimacy" could we really achieve with just 40 participants? And this issue of "representation": Should it cover the whole of Europe, a professional field, and what have you?

No, this is all about very specific subjects. Clearly, the quality and substance of the dialogue are most important in this case – and in the cultural domain, individual experiences and creativity can be seen as a driver to success. As far as I'm concerned, even the language used for reaching agreements at the meetings or during the exchanges with the EU commission could differ from the usual political small-talk. "Serving preconceived opinions is the enemy of art" – that's what I just read in an interview with British violinist Nigel Kennedy (*Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 7 February 2015), where he demanded more courage, more readiness to take risks. Let's see whether we can live up to this...

Obviously, selecting the right partners for the dialogue processes is of utmost importance. Maybe we must acknowledge, during the next months, that we still have to learn, in that respect.

However, one should not forget that the Structured Dialogue is not the only exchange between civil society and the EU. At different occasions, e.g. in the course of strategic planning, the Commission has already tried out an enlarged feedback via online consultations. Besides, associations and experts have regularly been invited, every autumn during the last years, to the *European Culture Forum*. The European Expert Network on Culture (EENC) often tries to get into contact with the cultural scene when preparing statements – for example, in 2012 with an overview paper on *audience building*. And, finally, individual experts or representatives of the previous SD platforms have frequently been invited to "Open Method of Coordination" (OMC) sessions – i.e. the exchanges between responsible ministries of the member states and the Commission in policy fields where the EU has only limited competencies (next to culture e.g. in youth and social affairs).

KuMi: The OMC groups of experts dealt with similar subjects like the platforms of the Structured Dialogue. During the years from 2008 to 2014, it was not always easy to connect the lines of discourse in the OMC groups and in the platforms or to mutually utilise results. How to guarantee interfaces between these discourse levels in the future?

AJW: Indeed, we brought up this issue during our conversation with the EU commission. Both the OMC work and the Structured Dialogue with civil society refer primarily to the priorities set by the Council (Ministers of Culture) at the end of last year in their "Work Plan for Culture". During the years from 2015 to 2018, four themes will take centre stage: *accessible culture; cultural heritage; creative economy and innovation*; as well as *cultural diversity, including culture in EU external relations*. In addition, there are two transversal priorities, namely the *digital shift* and *cultural statistics*.

KuMi: Can participants introduce other subjects they consider important?

AJW: There will such a possibility: Complementing the events addressing the four main topics of the EU Work Plan for Culture, there will be a fifth round whose theme can be determined by the users of the website www.voiceofculture.eu. I hope for active participation!

KuMi: How can the results of the Structured Dialogue become integrated into policy making processes of the EU? Can concerns of cultural actors be met that, at the end, such events will show few concrete results?

AJW: It would not be realistic to assume that all proposals of the Structured Dialogue can be implemented 1:1. The EU member states have the main responsibility in this domain. As well, other bodies, above all the European Parliament, usually want to join in the debate.

On the other hand, during the last decades a change of paradigm in the direction of citizens' participation took place in the EU, in spite of some still existing deficits: Today the views of professionals and, more generally, of civil society stakeholders have a stronger impact. On some occasions this has already affected the cultural sector, e.g. as regards intellectual property rights enforcement: Just remember the spectacular failure of ACTA (*Anti-counterfeiting Trade agreement*) three years ago!

Further information:

<http://www.voiceofculture.eu>

http://ec.europa.eu/culture/policy/strategic-framework/stakeholder-dialogue_en.htm

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