

“Creative Museums”

Response to European Commission’s proposal for Creative Europe

NEMO – the Network of European Museum Organisations – was founded in 1992 as an independent and informal network of museums organisations representing the museum community of Europe. NEMO has members in 32 countries who represent over 30.000 museums in Europe. The network ensures museums are an integral part of European life by promoting their work and value to policy makers and by providing museums with information, networking and opportunities for co-operation.

NEMO welcomes the EU Commission’s proposal on the new framework programme for culture “Creative Europe”, to begin in 2014. It is a strong statement for culture in challenging economic times and, as the title says, the framework focuses on creativity, a key aspect of culture.

The EU sees good sense in promoting creativity. Within its 2020 strategy the EU wants to promote smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe. And all policies should contribute to this. Ever since the Commission published the Green Paper on Creative Industries under the title “Unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries”, it’s become clear that much good is expected from creativeness and the creative industries.

However, NEMO wants to ensure museums are central to the focus of future culture policy, despite the fact that museums are *not* explicitly mentioned once in the new EU framework programme for culture. This is surprising, considering that museums as part of cultural heritage constitute one of the largest and more widespread cultural industries in Europe; museums have long proved their role as catalysts for urban regeneration and local economic development (e.g. Bilbao, Liverpool) and museums are one of the main reasons for choosing Europe as a destination for tourism and the settlement of multinationals. Those are fundamental arguments behind decisions for massive investment in museums in emerging powers like China and Abu Dhabi.

But measuring cultural heritage only by its direct economic impact is a shortcoming. It is much more than a means of economic growth: It contributes to society in terms of education, wellbeing, communities and inspiration. All things society can’t do without if it wants to be creative, innovative and attractive. NEMO encourages the Commission to take these factors into consideration when designing the new programme.

One of the strong points of the current Culture programme is the support for European networks. It recognises the networks’ contribution to European cooperation and the exchange of knowledge and experience. NEMO is a good example. The framework of the new programme puts an end to the modest funding of operational costs of networks. It seems the Commission has lost touch with the good work of networks and the support they provide for the European Union in the context of policy making and dialogue with civil society. Most of the networks work without sufficient financial support; cutting the funding for operational costs will lead to de-professionalisation of their work.

The Commission is to be congratulated on bringing forward a major new programme and underlining the importance of culture. But it should be remembered that it is the dedication and energy of people and networks all over Europe that drives culture on and, while economic impact is a key benefit of museums and cultural heritage, to suggest that it is only benefit diminished us all.