



# 26<sup>th</sup> ENCATC Congress

**Beyond EYCH2018. What is the cultural horizon?**

**Opening up perspectives to face ongoing transformations**

26-29 September 2018 in Bucharest, Romania

## CONCEPT NOTE

Under the main theme 'Beyond EYCH2018. What is the cultural horizon? Opening up perspectives to face ongoing transformations', the ENCATC 26th Congress on Cultural Management and Policy (26-29 September, Bucharest, Romania) aims to thoroughly explore the ongoing cultural transformations that are shaking the very foundations of our understanding and practice of culture. Among these changes, Jean-Louis Fabiani points at the following moves occurred in Europe and the world in the past 30 years: digitization, the development of the knowledge society, the rise of NGOs and the shrinking of the nation-state, marketization and commodification, the emergence of new powers, and the collapse of socialism in Europe. While responding to global trends and phenomena, cultural transformations express also locally. Considering therefore "essential to examine our own professional and educational context, strongly influenced by the cultural history and the institutional framework of our countries", as pointed out by Claire Giraud-Labalte, the debate will be enriched by the contributions on the impacts of these transformations across Europe and beyond.

### **What cultural horizon for Europeans?**

As expressed by Jean-Louis Fabiani, in Europe globalization has brought about "the emergence of neo-nationalisms, and revamped populisms seem to be a more powerful agent of European homogenization than the very modest attempts to delineate common cultural interests". Europeans move today between the optimistic view that "technological change will bring about the equalization of conditions through a form of electronic horizontality and that the electronic peace will be perpetual, (...) [and the] fear that the decline of the welfare state will foster the destruction of our lifestyles, particularly when it comes to cultural habits". Based on the notion of a 'cultural public sphere' coined by Jim McGuigan, Fabiani advocates for what McGuigan calls 'critical interventions' – as opposed to and in between uncritical populism and radical subversion. While in uncritical populism consumers are considered "active citizens and their consumption is a way of voting for different cultural and political offers, (...) radical subversion considers that the mass-produced world of infotainment (...) prevents rather than shapes democracy". Halfway in the spectrum, critical interventions, Fabiani argues, could be considered "'prototypes' of a democracy to come".

What is the role of cultural policy in tackling emerging challenges such as the rise of populism and isolationism? Johan Kolsteeg explains that, "while global problems are unmistakably addressed in local cultural production, they are hardly addressed in national cultural policy discourse". In cultural policy, as argued by Kolsteeg for the case of the Netherlands, "the societal issues that are mentioned are for local use only and concern internal topics such as changes in financing, taste and audience





behaviour, demographic changes and the position of cities and regions in cultural policy development. These issues can hardly be said to reflect serious societal and political challenges such as (cultural) identity, (performative) democracy, (real) participation, solidarity, migration, populism, (cultural) glocalisation and (true) integration. (...) Attempts to connect global and local discourses are found in the work of network organisations such as ENCATC, the European Cultural Foundation, Trans Europe Halles and the biennial Forum on European Culture in Amsterdam. They provide the transnational agora (...) for agonistic debates between West, East, North and South (both global and inside Europe) (...). They contribute to a shared vocabulary for making sense of our situation, and for reflecting and imagining possible futures. The European globalist/idealist agenda, though not without its flaws and pitfalls, offers a platform for local cultural action on global issues. It calls for cultural institutions and entrepreneurs to connect to transnational issues and to contribute to a space for imagining the future. But the European agenda also provides national governments with the opportunity to keep their cultural policy out of poignant discussions on global challenges and the role of culture".

When looking at European cultural horizon, special caution is required when dealing with concepts such as 'upheavals' and '(European) values'. As claimed by Tuuli Lähdesmäki, most of what are usually qualified as 'upheavals' are "rhetorical and discursive constructions that do not hardly affect daily routines of 'a European man in the street' – but that are, however, politically performative. This means that they produce and enable diverse political strivings in which politicians and other 'concerned people' seek to 'take into account', 'care' and 'tackle' the expected or imagined implications of these 'upheavals'. Particularly problematic are those political attempts that seek to defend so-called European values as these attempts rarely explicate what and whose European values they deal with. European values are not essentialist and static but dynamic, and understood and interpreted in diverse way both in Europe and beyond it. (...) The idea of shared European values is commonly used in political discourses around Europe – particularly when the speaker is concerned of something that he/she identifies as non-European. Thus, the idea of European values creates also distinctions and discursive borders between 'us' and 'them' and produces both inclusion as well as exclusion", Lähdesmäki explains.

But these certainly troubled times are also times of opportunity. According to Virgil Nițulescu, "Europeans have at present the chance to have the most diverse cultural horizon in the world and in their history". Furthermore, "access to the 'high culture' (...) is today more democratic than ever". Nițulescu further argues that people just need the intellectual tools to make the best choice among the wide offer. Along the same lines, Alis Vasile expresses that "we live unprecedented access to education and culture and the contemporary social imperatives call for accelerated innovation; so, we have choices, we have opportunities and infinite possibilities in the professionalized world of culture and, to some extent, at individual and social group level".

### **Maintaining cultural continuity or disrupting it?**

"In human history", Virgil Nițulescu argues, "there was never a total cultural rupture, between generations or epochs. Transformation was gradually induced in different social layers. However, in the last century, the speed of these movements was tremendously increased and cultural expressions have lost much of their coherence. The time for 'burning' each cultural item is shorter than ever and cultural consumers are very quickly passing from a favourite to another". In Nițulescu's



opinion, "we cannot talk about cultural discontinuity, but rather about cultural incoherence and lack of sustainability".

Alis Vasile further reflects on the binary continuity-disruption, which together are inherent to cultural heritage. "Human civilization", Vasile explains, "is thoroughly based on continuity, on passing over to new generations, on adding on, building on the past, and, ultimately, on heritage – be it family inheritance, mother tongue, writing, knowledge, technology or all of them and beyond – our cultural heritage. Disruption, on the other hand, is only temporary or at least episodic, and its destiny is to be integrated into the continuous flow of human culture (...). It can bring change, improvement, adjustment, regress, regret, delay, but it will be used and inevitably overcome through assimilation. Overcome disruptions become continuity and so do successful revolutions. Every piece of cultural heritage bears witness of our transformational continuity. The mere concept of cultural heritage is a reflection of this fundamental process".

Establishing a parallelism between fashion marketing and Europe's branding – in the sense of creating an Anderson's 'imagined community' and providing it with meaning, Marco R. H. Mossinkoff suggests to "use the 'old order' to create new icons, imbue these with (new) meaning by using them in the context of every upheaval affecting our countries".

Finally, in some specific cultural subsectors, continuity might not even be desirable. Bernadette Lynch explains it for the case of museums: "The world is changing all around museums. (...)The point surely is not to ignore these changes but to become a safe space where people can come together from different backgrounds, to explore identities and together, try to make sense of these changes in light of the past. The museum must, more than ever, become a forum for dialogue and debate, to use the past to help understand the present and collectively plan for a future. We must disrupt museum precedent if it gets in the way of facilitating such an important role".

### **The role of cultural management and policy education**

Amidst this changing (and sometimes turbulent) cultural panorama, cultural management and policy education play a major role which is both reactive and proactive, as indicated by Miiikka Pyykkönen. "On the one hand, education tries to understand the changes (...), offering conceptualizations and definitions of/for the transformations, (...) and linking the transformative policy discourses and practices to the wider societal changes (...). "On the other hand, education also raises new visions and tendencies in the fields of culture", being proactive in defining and shaping new areas of knowledge such as cultural entrepreneurship, as explained for the case of Finland by Pyykkönen.

It is also educational institutions and stakeholders' role to provide room for experimentation towards the development of true cross-sectoral approaches. With transformations and their effects overspilling from other – economic, social, environmental, etc. – areas of life into the cultural sector and vice versa, cross-sectoral approaches seem the most – if not the only – reasonable path to face present and future challenges, "integrating outwardly diverse perspectives from stakeholders without diluting the critical and reflexive thinking", as suggested by Hsiao-Ling Chung. However, "the rationalist thought developed in Europe over centuries has resulted in a very elaborate system of classification and specialization of knowledge, as well as in an over-partitioning of the domains", Claire Giraud-Labelte notes. "This segmentation has favored a disjunctive thought, which separates what is actually linked and erases the complexity of the world", Giraud-Labelte adds. Beyond the sometimes pompous inter-disciplinary and cross-sectoral rhetoric, education is responsible for providing spaces



for students to go out their comfort zones and engage in effective collaboration with others across cultural domains – but not only cultural.

Education and training implications are also to be found in workplaces, as explained by Hsiao-Ling Chung. "Firstly, while digital competencies will define the foundation of future job skills, 36% of all jobs across all industries will require 'complex problem-solving', 'critical thinking' and 'creativity' as the top three core skills by 2020. Secondly, it is the 'human or soft skills', such as emotional intelligence or cognitive flexibility, that will help workers embracing the rapid and radical changes, and future-proofing themselves with resilience from upheavals. (...) Therefore, in order to confront the rapidly evolving and transforming world, organizations need to have a system in place to adapt with and accommodate the ongoing internal and external transformations, and such a system has to foster a continuous lifelong learning culture. The implication is that policy-makers, decision-makers, educators, researchers and practitioners in the field of cultural policy and management need to understand what conditions could foster and facilitate the continuous learning environment", Hsiao-Ling Chung concludes.

#### Editor's Note:

We thank our Congress Scientific Committee and Steering Committee members and ENCATC members who contributed their valuable insight to the narrative of the 2018 ENCATC Congress:

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