

TEMA

VOICES OF CULTURE. EUROPEAN DIALOGUES

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In 2007, the European Agenda for Culture, adopted by the Commission, defined three strategic objectives:

- *the promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue;*
- *culture as a catalyst for creativity;*
- *culture as a vital element in the European Union's international relations.*

That document also introduced two instruments for cooperation in this field: the Open Method of Coordination (OPM) with EU Member States and the Structured Dialogue (SD) with civil society.

Under the Open Method of Coordination, Member States exchange information on how policies and funding programmes are developed through meetings between experts from national ministries of culture and cultural institutions, who meet five or six times over an eighteen-month period to share good practices and produce manuals and other supporting tools.

Through the Structured Dialogue, the Commission entertains a regular dialogue with civil society, which allows different stakeholders – non-profit organisations, companies, associations, study and research centres, etc. – to share ideas and messages with OMC experts. From 2008 to 2013, structured dialogue took place through the European Cultural Forums and the Civil Society Cultural Platforms. As from 2015, the dialogue with civil society took another form with the launch of Voices of Culture, implemented by the Goethe Institut.

The Voices of Culture process starts with the launch of a Theme through an open call, based on a document prepared by an expert, addressed to cultural organisations active in the EU. The European Commission, with a

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Theme expert, selects participants (from 30 to more than 50), who meet in a brainstorming session lasting a day and a half (in presence, with a few exceptions due to the pandemic), and who, on the basis of the common reflections and work that continues remotely for a couple of months, prepare a Report, which is presented to and discussed with the European Commission.

From 2015 to the end of 2022, there were 14 topics on which the voice of the cultural sectors was solicited. Voices of Culture topics are developed within the overarching framework of the Council's Workplans for Culture tailored to respond to major issues that cut across European society.

In 2015, the «Participatory governance of cultural heritage» and «Audience development through digital media» were discussed. In 2016, the sectors were consulted three times, on «Developing the entrepreneurial and innovation potential of CCS»; «Inclusion of refugees and migrants through culture»; «Culture of intercultural dialogue in shared public spaces». The 2017 Theme was «Skills, training and knowledge transfer in the cultural heritage sector», and the 2018 one was «Partnership with other sectors for social inclusion». The last convocation before the pandemic was dedicated to «Gender Equality and Gender Balance in the Cultural and Creative Sectors» and «The Role of Culture in Non-Urban Areas of the European Union». In the latter of part of 2020. In 2020, Voices of Culture remotely consulted civil society on «Challenges and Opportunities related to the Role of Culture in the Sustainable Development Goals». The Themes of 2021 are influenced by the terrible experience of Covid-19 and propose to reflect on the «Status and working conditions of artists and cultural and creative professionals»; and to «(Re)-engage digital audiences in the cultural sectors - Improving audience data». In 2022, around forty operators and representatives from the world of culture, selected by the Commission, without an open call for proposals, discussed international cultural relations. Also in 2022, in response to a growing crisis of global dimensions, the theme of Voices of Culture was «Youth, Mental Health and Culture».

This sequence of topics, on which background documents and choral reports have been produced, not only represents a valuable repository of experiences and reflections of cultural operators from many countries but can also be read as a signpost of what the EU institutions think about culture and the role they believe it can and should play.

*It is for this reason that, we wanted to host in this issue of *Economia della Cultura* some contributions that seemed to us of particular significance.*

We have selected the brainstorming report on «The role of culture in promoting inclusion in the context of migration», from September 2016, due to the topicality of the topic. It is an extensive text, which, in the original version – accessible online, like the others: references are in the footnotes to each article – is rich in multimedia documents, videos, photos, and poems. Besides, we have chosen documents drafted by experts like Sylvia Amann: «Future-proof cultural policies outside urban areas»; Gijs De Vries: «Culture and the sustainable development goals: challenges and opportunities»; Joost Heinsius: «Status and working conditions of artists and cultural and creative professio-

nals» and Anne-Sophie Radermecker: « (Re)-engaging digital audiences in the cultural sectors – Improving audience data». A document drafted by the Annalisa Cicerchia – «The role of cultural and creative sectors in improving mental health of the youth» – closes the thematic section of the dossier.

We felt that this dynamic and thematic reading of the Voices of Culture itinerary, although conditioned by space constraints that did not allow us to reproduce the entire collection of documents produced, allows the readers to reconstruct and share a lofty and rich story in which community institutions, cultural practitioners, artists, scholars, researchers managed to find a space and time conducive to valorising the always important, sometimes irreplaceable, contribution of culture to our society.

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