

Access to Culture

An effective instrument towards European citizenship



Photos © H. Zwietausch / Landesmuseum Württemberg
C. Musiol / Deutsches Technikmuseum

In times of economic difficulties and the social problems that these bring, access to culture can function as an effective instrument to bring Europe and Europeans back to the forefront in the process for sustainable development. It can also strengthen the sense of citizenship and of social cohesion. Indeed, access to culture is an essential right of all citizens but becomes fundamental in the case of those with economic and social challenges such as young people and the elderly, people with disabilities and different minority groups.

In June 2008, the DG for Education and Culture launched, in the framework of the European Agenda of Culture and the structured dialogue with the cultural sector, three thematic platforms to cover the following areas: cultural and creative industries, intercultural dialogue and access to culture.

“ **Access to culture can strengthen the sense of citizenship and of social cohesion.**

Like the other two platforms, the Platform on Access to Culture has a mandate to propose recommendations for policies that can foster the access of all to cultural life in its different dimensions. It also aims to represent the needs of the sector and identify suitable action in the different stages of policy formation.

In order to cover as many aspects as possible, the platform has chosen three areas of access that have been examined in respective working groups. The Working Group on Education and Learning explores the benefits of the interaction and synergy between education, learning and culture and the role that access and cultural participation play in different educational levels. The Working Group on Creation and Creativity advocates for the best conditions for artistic creation, to ensure access to the creative process for all. Finally, the Working Group on Audience Participation advocates the importance of taking audience participation into account in all levels of policy making based on the added value that a participative audience brings to the cultural sector and to society as a whole.

“ **There is still a notable gap and a lack of political and public debate.**

Although access to culture is not mentioned explicitly in the European Agenda for Culture, setting up a Platform that specifically addresses this issue clearly reflects an interest by the European Commission to include this issue in its working agenda. If other objectives such as cultural diversity, interculturality or creativity are to be pursued by all political and civil actors at European level, strengthening access to culture – within education, cultural production and participation – should be indeed mainstreamed in public policies at all levels, be it on a European, national or sub-national level.

Supranational institutions such as the European Union as well as its Member States have come a long way towards incorporating strong cultural normative practices and principles in their policy-making. However, there is still a notable gap and a lack of political and public debate on and between commitments and principles, and everyday practice of fostering access to culture.

By | **Mercedes Giovinazzo**