"Governance of Culture – Promoting Access to Culture"

Background Paper by Elena Di Federico, researcher Zsuzsa Hunyadi, sociologist, and Péter Inkei, director of the Budapest Observatory

Table of contents

About the Authors

Elena Di Federico has been working as a researcher and project manager since 2006 on issues related to cultural participation, audience development, and the international mobility of artists and cultural operators. Since 2012 she has been responsible for communication and advocacy for the international network On the Move.

Zsuzsanna Hunyadi is a sociologist. She has done research in media consumption, cultural habits and local community culture and is at present working at the Central Statistical Office of Hungary.

Péter Inkei is the director of the Budapest Observatory: Regional Observatory on Financing Culture in East-Central Europe. He is also a cultural policy consultant , among other things for the Council of Europe and the European Commission, and a speaker at international conferences. He was previously, a Hungarian civil servant, including deputy state secretary for culture (1996-1998). He has also worked in publishing, currently with CEU Press.

"Culture is a discourse that enables democratic expression and the negotiation of competing interests. It is democracy's lifeblood because it allows things to be said that find no place in politics. It gives voice to those on the margins and to minorities. All this connects European culture to the protection of basic human rights and democracy without which there is no freedom to create culture"[1].

Introduction

At the 2005 **Warsaw Summit**, the political leaders of European states declared that all activities of the Council of Europe must contribute to the fundamental objectives of democracy and human rights. The standard-setting potential of the Council of Europe suggested that member states' cultural policies would also reflect the organisation's core values, including the active involvement of citizens and civil society.

This commitment was confirmed in the same year by the **Faro Declaration** of Ministers of Culture. Lines of action were established concerning the role of culture in enhancing democracy in European societies. The **Faro Convention**, which was adopted on the same occasion, referred to social responsibilities for the cultural heritage and emphasised access and democratic participation in the field of culture.

In 2005, the heads of state and government undertook to create sustainable communities where people want to live and work. The global crisis did not nullify this desire. Neither is the objective to promote good governance at all levels an obsolete aim. What has been achieved in this regard in the field of culture? Which of the principles declared in Warsaw and Faro have been translated into measures and actions to bring about a more humane and inclusive Europe? In what ways has participation in culture enhanced democracy? The next few pages seek answers to these questions with reference to the relevant studies and key texts. Moreover, attempts are made to identify key areas where culture can best contribute to the promotion of effective democracy in today's Europe.

1 The impact of culture on democracy

There is a strong consensus about the relationship between cultural participation and democracy. Political documents, conference conclusions and academic papers treat this as **an axiom**, a postulate that requires little reasoning or proof.

The top-level declarations of the Council of Europe echo the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and treat participation in culture as **a basic human right**. Statements by the organisation are authoritative with regard to the obligations of democracies to observe Europeans' cultural rights. "Cultural rights are also pillars of the principle of 'living together' within society, thanks to common cultural and artistic references that provide access to all the humanist values handed down in democratic, liberal societies[2]". The right to culture implies **equal access**, regardless of gender, ethnic and other cultural differences, and requires special attention to the needs of the young, the excluded, the disadvantaged and the disabled.

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[1] Reformation and Reaffirmation. CultureWatchEurope, Bled, 2011.
[2] Recommendation 1990 (2012) on the right of everyone to take part in cultural life, adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly in January 2012.

Increased participation in culture has an indirect impact on effective, democratic societies in a number of ways. There is an increasing body of evidence that culture contributes to building a solid **economy** with growth potential and abundant opportunities for employment (this discourse used to be dominated by cultural tourism and has recently been taken over by the cultural and creative industries). Various researches prove that culture can contribute to the efficiency of the **education** and **health** systems, and the same applies to the use of culture for promoting the causes of the **environment**. Culture also plays important roles in **regional development** and **urban regeneration**. For **young** people, increased participation in culture has been shown to reduce truancy and improve classroom behaviour. It may reduce youth offending and drug use and can improve future prospects.

The fight against **social exclusion** is at the centre of democratic agendas. Social exclusion can only be reversed by conscious and proactive efforts to bring about mentality change. Culture provides opportunities to deepen people's knowledge of others and improve mutual understanding through positive encounters.

Acknowledging its important functions in society, discourses have nevertheless lately moved from a focus on culture's instrumental role vis-à-vis other sectors towards a more general conception of the **public value of culture**. Besides communicating aesthetic and cognitive values, cultural participation benefits citizens in many ways: it builds self-confidence, self-esteem, pride and dignity, which are essential for democratic citizenship. Citizen participation, collective identities and engagement, conflict recognition and management, personal creativity, intercultural affinity, etc. are fostered.

For some, even such a loose conception of the social function (or public value) of culture goes against the nature of culture (especially the arts). Enjoyment of culture, psychological wellbeing and living richer and more expressive lives are identified as important and legitimate goals in themselves.

Such a shift in the focus of attention implies a compromise between the instrumental and the intrinsic value of culture. For society, increasing access to culture is an instrument to promote prosperous democracy while for individuals **culture is a value in itself**.

When thinking about increasing access to and participation in culture, it must be borne in mind that people cannot be treated as a passive mass exposed to cultural opportunities. Such an approach would be particularly mistaken in an age when one-dimension value hierarchies and limited channels of opinion are a thing of the past. Even in less mobile societies, citizens have increasing opportunities to interact and communicate beyond their immediate physical and social environment. People enjoy easy access to multiple, diverse and interwoven cultures, and increasingly define themselves by their cultural preferences. These developments democratise culture independently of, and parallel to, the endeavours of cultural policies.

The concept of **cultural democracy** with the emphasis on involvement, equality and diversity has been gaining ground over top-down cultural democratisation strategies.

Greater autonomy of citizens in defining their cultural priorities and habits represents an incentive for the authorities to involve them in policy decisions. **Giving people a say** in matters of public culture is an important training ground for democratic participation. Democracy gains with the improvement in citizens' responsive critical thinking. The arts are particularly appropriate for boosting divergent and critical thinking.

Local communities are key arenas of cultural democracy. Greater involvement in cultural activities builds social trust and helps tackle concerns like crime.

Many statements and pledges have been made regarding culture's role in democracy but there is little **convincing proof** of this (see section 3). The historical analysis by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu still stands out in demonstrating the correlation of social inequality – a central issue of democracy – with cultural behaviour patterns.

The scarcity of empirical evidence is all the more disturbing given the earlier successes of robust campaigns to democratise culture in places with virtually no democracy (as the term is understood by the Council of Europe). Moreover, conditions where more culture does not lead to more democracy ("wars begin in the minds of men" – UNESCO) deserve more attention in research and in the preparation of cultural measures. Strong arguments matter: in tough times like the present, it is particularly important to seek strong clues about where to concentrate public resources or what cultural support should be saved from austerity constraints.

2. The excluded in focus

Debates on cultural policy and cultural participation surveys focus on what *exists* (cultural participation), usually treating *non-participation* as a statistical leftover. Here, it is worth taking a look at the latest Eurostat statistics, and Figure **1** below is a typical illustration.
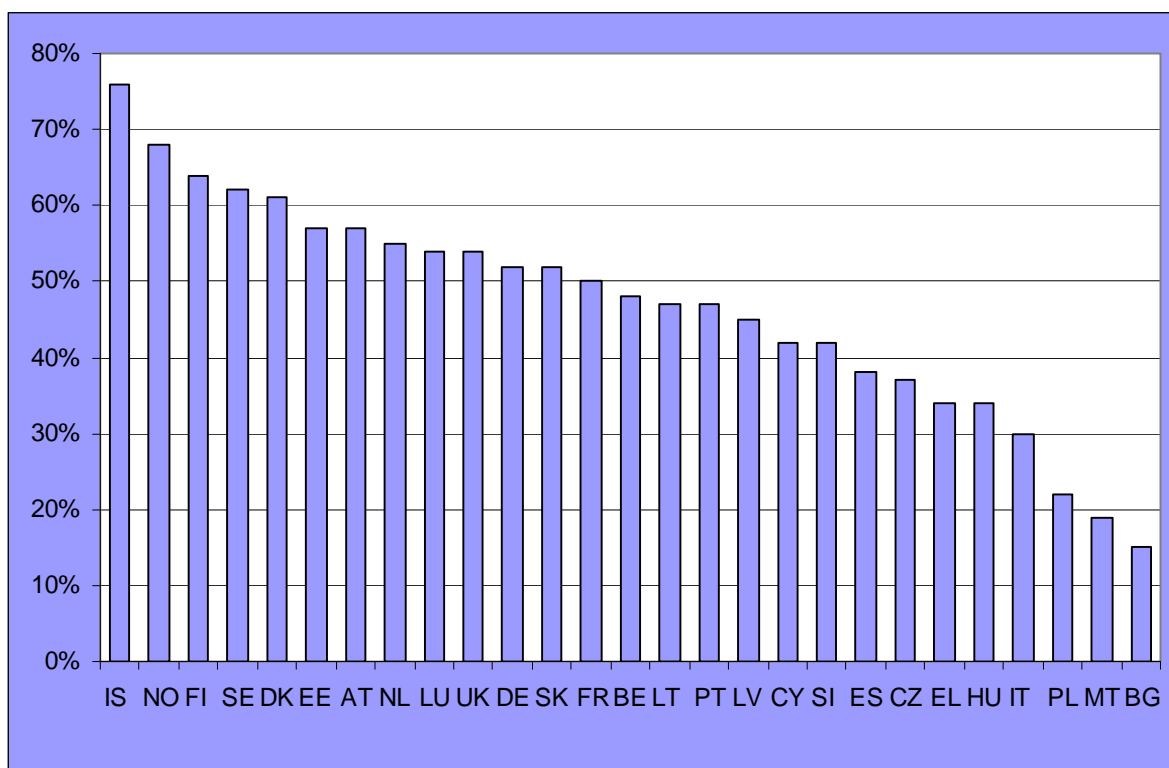

Figure 1. Percentage of persons who have attended a live performance at least once in the last twelve months. EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) 2007. Source: Cultural Statistics Pocketbook 2011.

To emphasise active participation, **Figure 2** shows the percentage of citizens who have actually *performed* in about the same period. Differences between countries are even more striking.
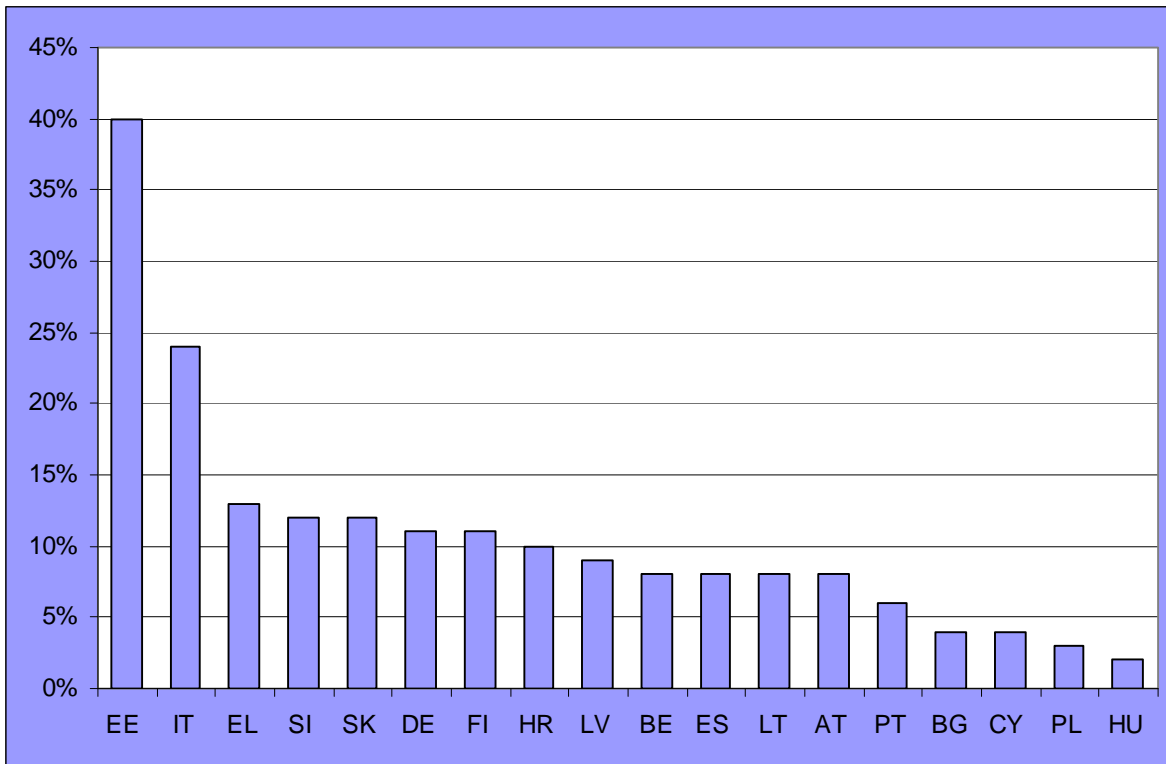
Figure 2. Percentage of persons who have taken part in a public performance (singing, dancing, acting or music) in the last 12 months. Adult Education Survey. Source: Cultural Statistics Pocketbook 2011.

Behind each column there are different national dynamics. In countries affected by regime change there was a recovery after the 1990s but attendance figures usually still lag behind those for the 1980s. Taking Europe as a whole, a slow increase in participation can be recorded over the decades, but this increase mostly coincides with changes in the structure of society, with the expansion of the middle class and the increased cultural consumption of the active population. The cultural habits of those who live in poverty and exclusion do not appear to have fundamentally changed.

Visiting heritage sites is another important way of accessing culture, as shown in the next diagram. **Figure 3** shows how participation is further divided up according to its "degree of intensity", while non-participation is just the rest of the bar.
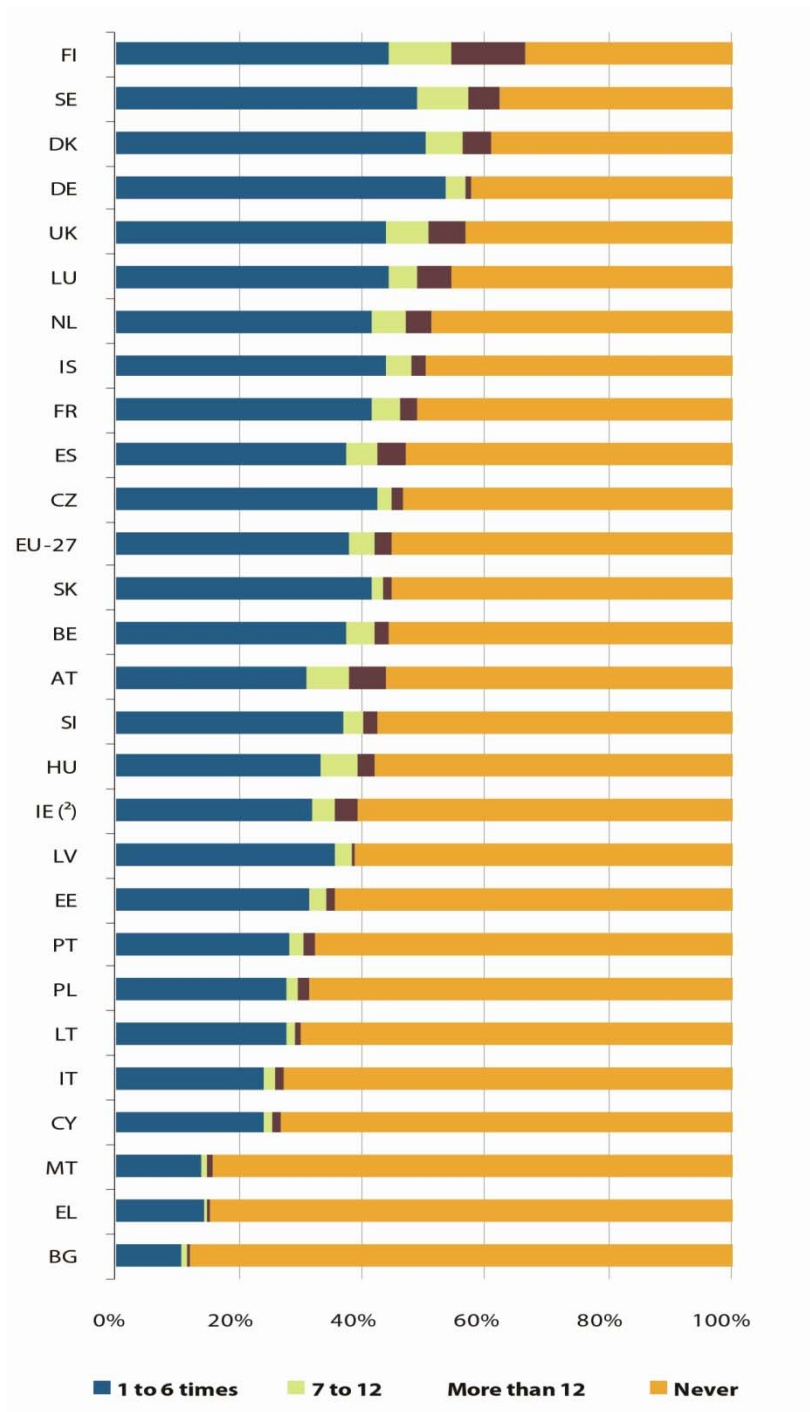

Figure 3. Cultural sites: historical monuments, museums, art galleries and achaeological sites. Frequency of visits to cultural sites in the last twelve months. (EU-SILC). Source: Cultural Statistics Pocketbook 2011.

Inequalities inside countries also prevail, often at a disturbing level. **Figure 4** was generated from a national survey of cultural habits in 2003:
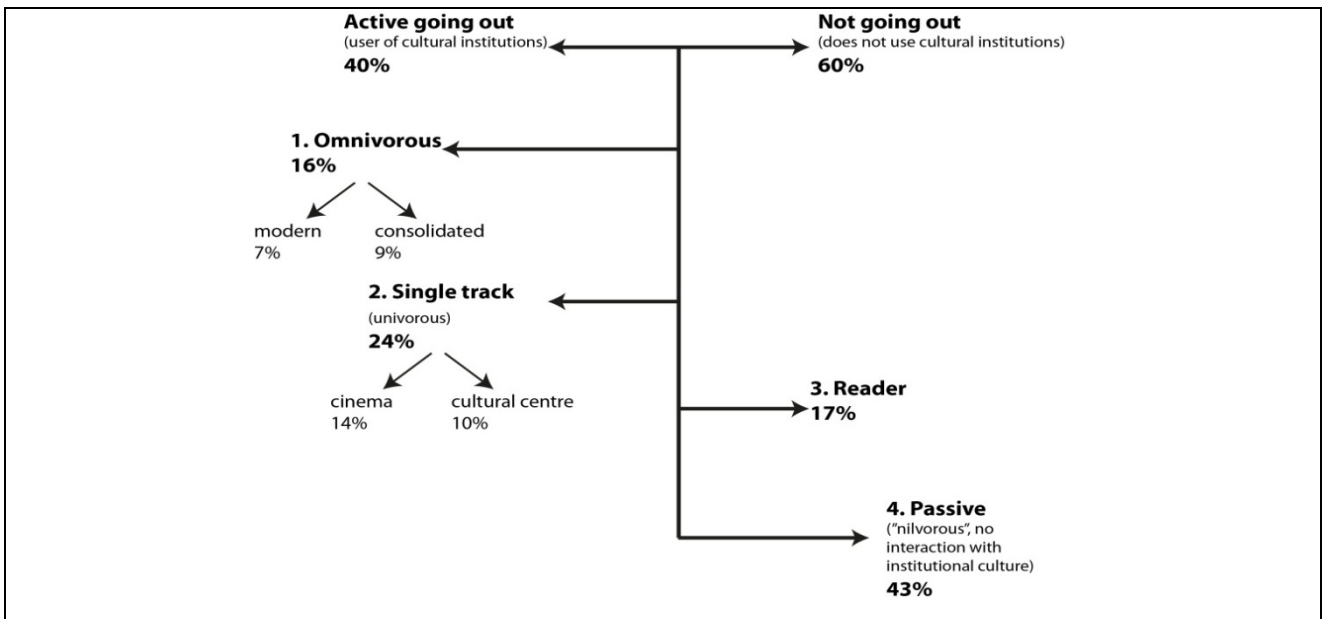
Figure 4. Hunyadi Zsuzsa: Kulturálódási és szabadidő eltöltési szokások, életmód csoportok. Magyar Művelődési Intézet, Budapest, 2005.

Exclusion (and self-exclusion) represents a broad scale across Europe. **Figure 5** shows huge differences in the percentages of inactive respondents:
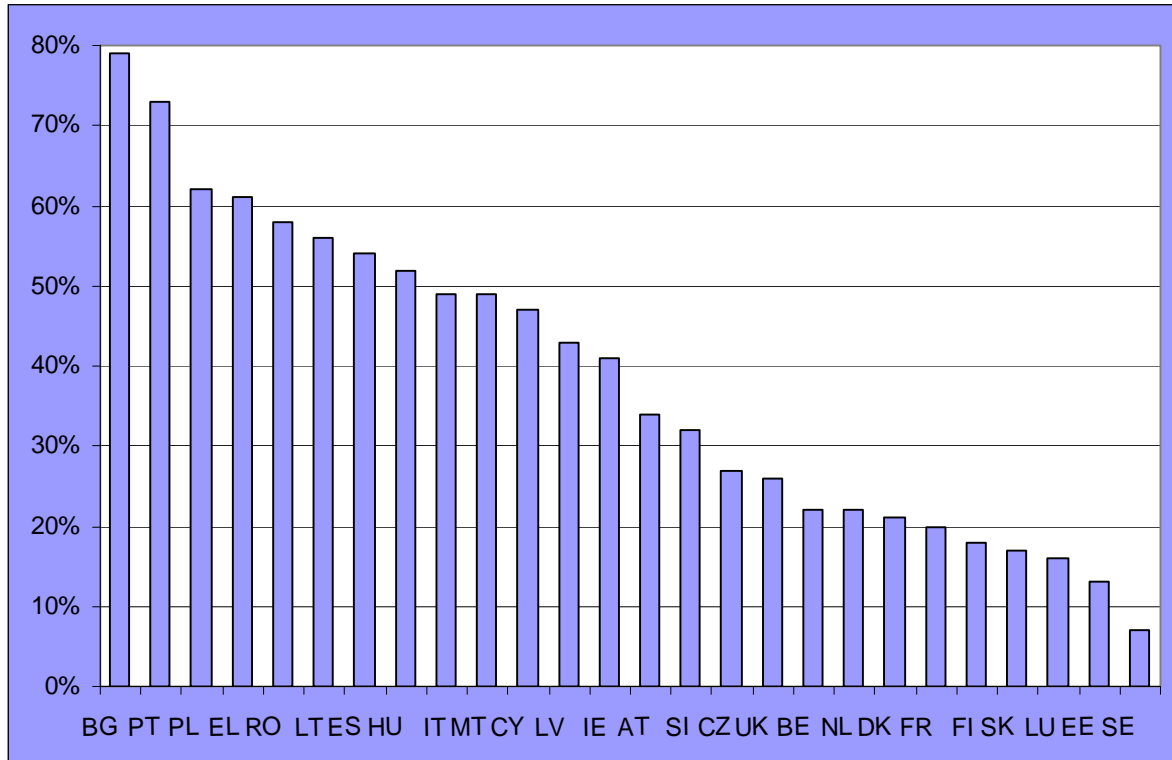

Figure 5. Percentage of persons who have not engaged in any cultural activity in the past twelve months. Special Eurobarometer report 278. European cultural values, 2007.

There are important regional peculiarities: in Western Europe, non-participation is particularly acute among the urban migrant population, while in the Eastern member states cultural exclusion is primarily a rural and post-industrial phenomenon. In some countries, the problem is increasingly and acutely concentrated in the Roma communities.

Increasing access is therefore not enough. **Understanding non-participation** is crucial, especially as it does not mean a lack of interest or indifference (in fact, people express "non-use value", i.e. an appreciation for places they rarely if ever visit or activities they do not currently engage in). **Figure 6** shows the results of one survey on reasons for non-participation.
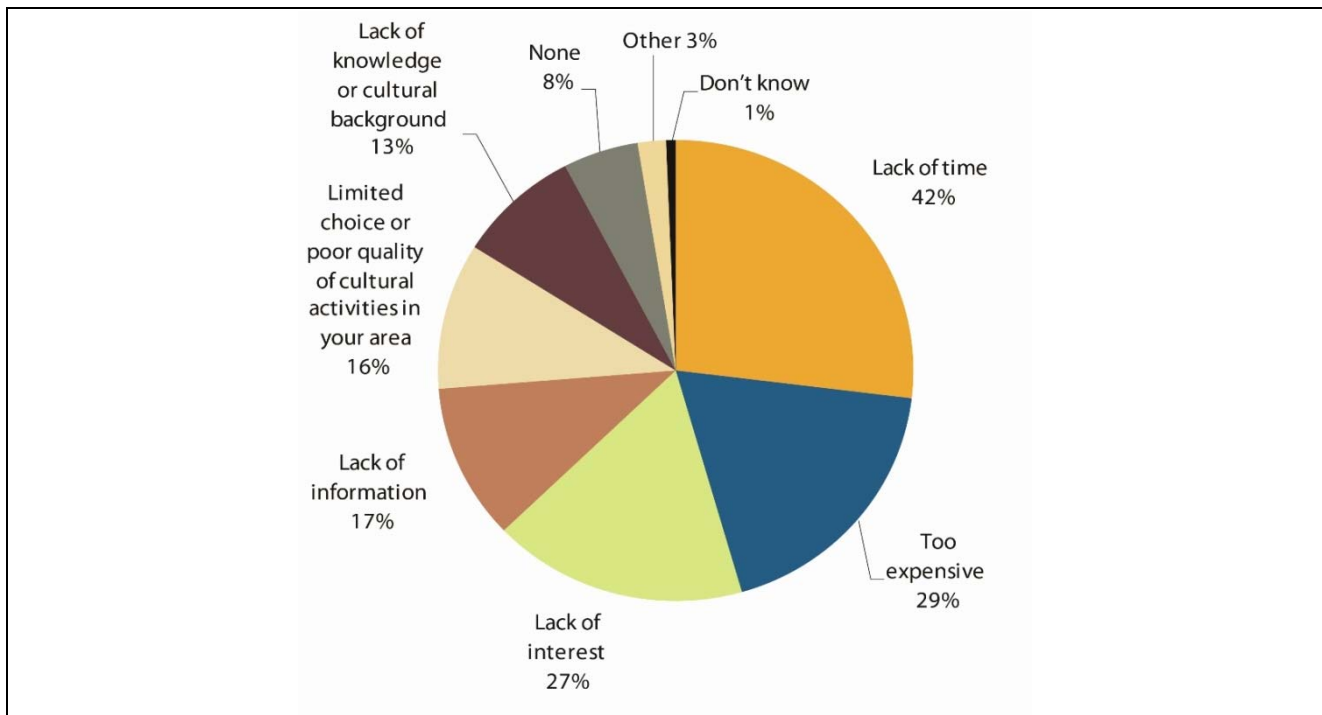

Figure 6. Barriers in access to culture. Eurobarometer 67.1, 2007). Source: Cultural Statistics Pocketbook 2011.

Understanding non-participation has two sides:

a) **The reasons for non-participation** – the *barriers* experienced or perceived by different segments of the population:

— *Physical barriers*, i.e. the difficulty in accessing cultural infrastructure for geographical reasons or problems in reaching a place independently or in using standard facilities (in particular by elderly people and people with physical and mental disabilities);

— *Psychological barriers* related to the content of artistic works, positive and negative stereotypes;

- *Economic barriers* related to the total price of a cultural experience (transport costs, entry fees, eating out, etc.), particularly for low-income individuals and families;

- *Social barriers* related to opening hours or performance times that do not suit people's lifestyles or family patterns, or to feelings of being unable to identify with mainstream ideas of art and culture.

b) **The alternative**, – what people do *instead* of the culture as conceived by cultural policies. If the pastimes that people pursue do not correspond to the conventional notion of access to culture, the following need to be explored:

- What activities can be considered *informal* access to culture (e.g., content consumed via television, radio or the internet);

- What activities belong to a *broader* anthropological conception of culture (e.g., conversation, community work, games, sports);

- What *other* occupations qualify as cultural on closer inspection or from a different angle (e.g., religious practices).

Understanding the alternatives can ultimately redefine cultural policy objectives.

Access to culture – whatever the definition – **is always unequal** as it depends on the necessarily unequal distribution of cultural opportunities (institutions, venues, facilities) and personal "resources" (skills, schooling, interests, income, information, leisure time, and household facilities). However, as culture is dynamic and evolving the tools to access it and participate – and the barriers to participation – change over time. Understanding non-participation by naming barriers and alternatives, and understanding the influence of socio-demographic variables, can help identify where public policies and cultural institutions can intervene, in pursuit of the key aim of ensuring everyone's right to access culture.

3 The challenges of measuring the impact of culture on democracy

Over the years, national statistical services have accumulated a huge pool of data on the performance of cultural institutions and on citizens' cultural behaviour. The regular provision of statistical data is complemented by recurrent surveys, including polls about citizens' attitudes to culture. In this connection, the Eurobarometer surveys are the best known, although they do not cover the entire continent. Sophisticated time-budget and household surveys are also instrumental in detecting the population's cultural practices. However, there is a lack of comprehensive statistics, even within the European Union (data for certain kinds of practices included in the Eurostat publication are not available for all countries). Efforts by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics to bridge the gap are still limited to a theoretical overall framework for measuring cultural participation for which there is as yet no widespread application.

The Council of Europe's **CultureWatchEurope** has come up with the proposal to select a set of key indicators to be applied by all member states:

1. Visits to performing arts, music and popular culture at least once in the last 12 months
2. Visits to cultural heritage sites at least once in the last 12 months
3. Practising arts for leisure twice a month or more often
4. Reading books for leisure at least once in the last 12 months
5. Watching television on a weekday (with a distinction between commercial and public broadcasting)
6. Internet use during the last three months

Being able to make a more exact comparison of the level of cultural participation in Europe will bring us closer to answering questions on the impact of culture on democracy.

Quantifying the **economic return** of cultural investments has produced good results and met with general acceptance. Moreover, research has shown that there are many different measureable effects of culture on regional development.

Measuring the impact of culture on democracy is part of the assessment of its **social impact**, on which a considerable amount of work has been done. Nevertheless, ways of proving whether and how culture – especially increased access to culture – contributes to the efficient functioning of democracy are in their infancy.

In order to assess the impact of culture, we must know *on what*. Democracy is a complex concept that needs to be deconstructed, and the impact of culture must be analysed with regard to specific constituents. A number of sophisticated measuring tools exist for the fundamental dimensions of democracy, especially **equality**, **social cohesion**, the **quality of life,** and **diversity**. Most of

these tools, however, are still disputed by specialists and are far from being universally applied. Nevertheless, each of these aspects is closely related to cultural participation, which calls for closer co-operation between cultural research and policy on the one hand and mainstream statisticians on the other, in the search for measuring **sustainable development.**

The success of any empirical research requires unambiguous questions and the proper operationalisation of the phenomenon to be measured (that is applying it to items that can be "counted" and truly relate to the issue). When measuring the impact of culture, the *quality* of cultural participation, in addition to mere volume, also matters. The *intensity* of access is the next challenge: where are the borderlines between passive exposure and active engagement with culture, and what are the degrees in between?

Some of the problems can be dealt with by the compromise of adjusting measurements to available data or to current priorities. However, several **underlying challenges** connected with the specifics of culture will remain:

• The effects of culture take time, i.e. years and often decades, and longitudinal research over such periods is extremely complicated and expensive. In the intervening long intervals both individuals and the social environment change significantly, which makes it nearly impossible to identify the impact of culture itself.

• Comparison is also an issue. For this, the effects measured need to be checked not only in one setting: think of comparing the impact of a certain cultural phenomenon or policy measure on various cities. Or countries. When groups of individuals (e.g., a local community) are observed, the task of identifying proper "control groups" is not much simpler.

• Owing to the singular nature of any cultural phenomenon, and in the absence of direct parallels, it is virtually impossible to prove that a cultural intervention is the most direct and cost-effective way of achieving a particular social aim, even if the intervention works.

Nevertheless, in the face of all these difficulties it is absolutely vital to measure the impact of culture and improve the methods employed.

Participation in cultural activities exerts an impact both on individuals and communities, and it is on that level that positive effects to be attained can be best identified for measurement. **Table 1** summarises what impacts cultural participation may have.

Table 1. Elements of the impact of culture on society and democracy

WHO	THROUGH WHAT	ON WHAT (positive outcome)			
		Individual level		Community level	Societal level
		Direct effect	Indirect effect		
Individuals	Participation in cultural activities.	Developing skills, creativity, connectivity, cohesion, self-expression, self-esteem, self-assurance.	Employment opportunities, career security, social capital, physical and psychological well-being, tolerance, co-operation skills, innovation, openness, way of living.	Stronger communities, increased activeness, civic responsibility, empowerment, co-operation in other fields, strong local identity, shared responsibility in planning and strategy making.	Spiritual / psychological effect: more happiness, solidarity, greater social inclusion, less cultural poverty, more fraternity, equality, freedom; more soft power; Declining social anomy: fewer suicides, drugs, alcohol; Economic effect: decreasing social welfare costs.
Community	Running or jointly attending events, festivities, festivals.				

4 The chances of democratic governance in culture

As stressed by the Parliamentary Assembly recommendation, cultural policies should encourage cultural and artistic expression which, through a critical view on political, social, economic and cultural conditions of today's society, contributes to reinforcing **democratic citizenship**. The **guidelines** accompanying Recommendation 1990 (2012) provide directives for democratic cultural governance.

"Culture" – despite its importance in the national identity and the growing recognition of its role as an economic driver – is, however, seldom high on the political agenda. The role of cultural participation in tackling social exclusion is generally overlooked. Exclusion is mostly associated with employment and related socio-economic factors. The importance of good practices is misunderstood when the "efficiency" of organisations and projects is evaluated by public funders only on the basis of crude quantitative monitoring (number of visitors, etc.) without any attention to more qualitative aspects (e.g., the participation of disadvantaged population groups).

All this leads to a substantial scarcity of dedicated programmes to foster cultural participation, and challenges have become more acute in the current economic situation, in which cultural policies often appear weak. The argument given to explain horizontal cuts to public budgets for culture is that, due to the lack of resources and the need to reduce costs, "more urgent" measures (like health care, social security, etc.) are prioritised.

A first step towards the democratic governance of culture would be to analyse if cultural diversity, cultural participation and inclusion in their broader sense occupy **a proper place in documents and strategies**, and to check whether objectives are clearly defined –not in exclusively quantitative terms. As European societies are increasingly diverse, **a commitment to diversity** is crucial – diversity in all its forms (age, religion, culture, sexuality, disability, socio-economic background). This implies respect for pluralism and human rights, avoiding the establishment of a cultural policy conceptualised as mainly an identity policy. Overall, **freedom of expression** must be ensured and international exchanges (touring, co-productions, residencies etc.) are vital for the enrichment of both artists and audiences.

Once the objectives are clarified, **appropriate strategies** can be put in place. Policies can ensure the promotion of wider access to cultural services and venues, including both actual and virtual heritage sites; support for participation in community based cultural activities; support for projects that seek to widen employment opportunities; support for and the development of cultural activities in schools; support for cultural activities that embrace and enhance diversity aspects and for activities that enable minorities and migrants to express and maintain their own cultures and encounter the mainstream culture; fostering the access and participation of people with disabilities.

While funding remains crucial, **other tools for support** exist. Legislation, positive discrimination measures, tax laws, training and capacity building for cultural professionals, education, better marketing and audience development strategies can enhance the appeal of the cultural offering and the participation of different social strata.

All this can be achieved only if cultural policy is understood as a comprehensive social policy. This requires a **multi-stakeholder approach towards a shared governance of culture,** with the "vertical" harmonisation of the different priorities and agendas of the levels involved (national, regional and local government, private sector and civil society), and with the "horizontal" adjustment of cultural policies with policies related to other aspects of society.

The proven impact of cultural education on a variety of competences calls for the linking of cultural and **education policies**. The psychological and social barriers to participation and the imbalances in accessing culture call for effective **social policies** and audience development strategies by cultural organisations; the physical and geographical barriers call for a dialogue with the fields of **architecture** and **urban planning**. The positive role of cultural activities for improving the integration of asylum seekers and immigrants calls for their integration with social and **immigration policies**. **Fostering cultural participation can be the common denominator** around which a constructive dialogue can develop among different stakeholders, through the certainly

difficult but nonetheless crucial harmonisation of agendas, roles and competences. A clear political will at the national level is essential **to put the public administration of culture into the broader political, cultural and societal context**.

From the perspective of public authorities, an urgent concern should be to ensure that public funding can reach as wide a segment of the population as possible. As most subsidised "high culture" benefits audiences with a higher socio-economic status, public resources are redistributed towards those who are already the most privileged. Accordingly, increasing cultural participation also means tackling inequalities in the distribution of resources.

Reaching and mobilising the culturally inactive are special challenges for cultural governance. The s**egmentation of non-participation along socio-demographic lines** is crucial to highlight certain specificities and develop relevant cultural policies for inclusion and participation.

The **implications of the digital era**, namely how cultural habits and demands change and how the new technologies can serve the aims of cultural democracy, are key.

An additional challenge is to apply an **international dimension** to addressing the above set of issues, which, although not legally binding or mandatory, seems crucial in today's globalised world. Again, fostering cultural participation could be the key message around which a common European agenda could develop, making sure that policies and actions pursue a common goal based on shared principles and values, with full respect for national and regional specificities. It would be desirable to achieve a **consensual minimum of shared European standards** in terms of

- The nature and degree of access to culture,

- indicators of access and participation,

- desired effects expected from improved and increased access,

- basic criteria of the democratic governance of culture.

In conclusion, a study of recent trends in cultural policy practices in Europe reveals that democratisation and cultural democracy figure among the cultural policy priorities throughout the continent. Nevertheless, cultural policy documents are rarely explicit about the impact of culture on democratic values like equality, human rights, social justice, freedom of speech, social cohesion and inclusion, etc.

In the spirit of **cultural democracy**, efforts are being made across Europe to address cultural exclusion. The forms and intensity of such policies and measures are on a broad scale, ranging from peripheral significance to places where inclusion and diversity are primary guiding principles of cultural governance. It is against this background that the focal points of the relevant international co-operation should be defined. Common thinking and exchanges of experience must aim at tangible results. The examples of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Social Cohesion (2010) and the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 may serve as models for an eventual **Council of Europe Action Plan for Cultural Democracy**.

5 Commendable practices

Diversity is not only a proudly acknowledged feature of Europe but at the same time a condition that resists uniform answers to similar challenges. This call for caution particularly applies to the field of culture, where local traditions, habits and sensitivities affect the outcome of every public policy intervention. With this in mind, some practices are listed here that promise success in enhancing cultural democracy in very diverse European contexts.

Several of the interventions follow the model of the systematic combination of local initiatives and central government promotion. Calls for support (mainly but not only financial) define the policy aims and frameworks, leaving scope for adaptation to local conditions. In the best cases, the initial thrust comes from below: central (typically national but also regional or municipal) authorities appreciate a successful local project and find it appropriate to reproduce it on a larger scale. Existing good practices happen mostly at the local level and are hardly known outside the geographical area in which they are operating.

Inducing cultural **co-operation between specific groups of society** is probably the most obvious means of cultural democracy. Programmes across Europe have aimed at involving various excluded groups in artistic collaboration with representatives of the broader community. Joint actions connect minorities (religious, ethnic, sexual orientation, etc.) with the rest, the poor with the better-off, the homeless with those with a home, the unemployed with those in work, etc. Creating common art products is the immediate goal: performances (theatre, songs, musicals, etc.), stories, graffiti, sculptures, street or public art, films, photographs, etc. the underlying purpose being knowing, accepting and appreciating one another and building cohesion.

Reaching young people is of utmost importance. Forming music groups of their own still has an appeal for young Europeans – and is also an appropriate way to attract them to culture in general and get them to divert their energies from less constructive pastimes. Projects may help them overcome the miseries of rehearsing and any problems with instruments, performing venues, stage equipment, digital recording and first releases. Exchanging youth groups by contributing to performance costs across borders has proved to have positive effects. A key to success is speaking their language: the use of new technologies and social media is a must for projects targeting the young, while at the same time it is of increasing importance to enhance young people's ability to filter and critically assess content made available on the internet.

Educational theatre has gained ground all over Europe. With relatively small amounts of public support, professional and non-professional groups reach young audiences in classrooms, school gymnasiums and the like, addressing current issues, often by adapting classical plays. Where educational drama is included in the curriculum, it has had a measurable impact on key skills and learning performance, as has been proven by sophisticated comparative research.

Programmes to broaden and deepen cultural participation in **non-cultural institutions** (prisons, hospitals, elderly care homes, etc.) have produced promising results. Here, professionals and non-professionals carry out specific socio-cultural and social-artistic projects. Activities that take place **outside traditional cultural settings** (churches, public spaces, railway stations, etc.) are increasingly recognised as fully "cultural" and worth supporting and are included in research on cultural participation – the notion of "cultural activities" thus embracing practices that are often more popular among social strata underrepresented in established cultural institutions.

Reaching remote or economically depressed **rural communities** is a particular challenge for cultural policies. Recalling collective memories by various cultural means, e.g. recording, dramatising and visualising oral history and the intangible heritage, adds to self-respect, cohesion, mutual understanding and confidence in the future. Cultural centres are instrumental in mapping local values, reviving local skills and seeking ways of capitalising from them. These projects have achieved particular sustainability when combined with up-to-date skills and technologies.

Local **cultural community centres** (houses of culture) present a heterogeneous picture in Europe. In several countries, they used to be forced into a uniform political regime and are still searching for new identities. Given the strategic potential of these networks (including in urban environments), co-ordinated programmes geared to the principles of cultural democracy are of great importance. Supporting transnational networking can be very effective (also economically) in order to provide specific answers to

common challenges and share experience – experience gained in different contexts but based on similar underlying needs, such as the ability to support oneself, building trust in the community, etc.

Dedicated individuals are key in community development. Shortages of such people in the civil service can be remedied by providing in-service training and partial employment to those non-professionals who have excelled in building community through cultural activities.

For a rich pool of principles of cultural development for democracy the reader is referred to the Appendix of **Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1990 (2012) on the right of everyone to take part in cultural life**.

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[3] We have extensively exploited most of the sources in this list. Observing the strict rigour of academic references, however, would have produced a list of notes to the detriment of the function of the paper.

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