**Did Someone Say European Cultural Responsability?**

Cécile Bourne-Farrell

I remember my visit to the Seville World Fair in '92. Ever since, I have felt a pressing need to distance myself when I hear references to the notion of so-called “cultural” events, so shocked was I by the absence of anything of the sort at the fair. In 2005, Iaspis published an excellent overview of the scenarios for the future of contemporary art in Europe, in a small book titled *European Cultural Policies 2015.*[[1]](#footnote-1) The publication anticipated the porosity of the border between the public and the private, and expressed that “the possible viability of a Cultural Europe would be its capacity to operate within a network and be self-critical about the actions performed,” as stated by Raimund Minichbauer, who edited the work jointly with Maria Lind.

There is a gap between the idea of Europe as it was ratified in the Maastricht Treaty referendum[[2]](#footnote-2) and what it is today. Twenty-two years ago; the purpose was to share common interests in order to face emerging markets; now it would seem as though any cultural events were reduced to the notion of profit and no longer strove to create cultural spaces that could be promoted here and beyond our small Europe. And lastly, how could it be that such a promising area had not been properly anticipated? Why not give better consideration to this area of excellence, as stated by the Commission in the European Parliament, in the Council of Europe, in the European Economic and Social Committee, and in the Committee of the Regions?[[3]](#footnote-3): *The economic performance of the cultural and creative sectors is recognised: in the EU they account for 3.3% of GDP and employ 6.7 million people (3 % of total employment). These industries account for 3% of the EU GDP each and employ respectively 5 and 1 million people.* However, the report shows that *the contribution that cultural and creative sectors can bring to social and economic development in the EU is still not fully recognised.*

After the signing of the Schengen Treaty,[[4]](#footnote-4) the idea was to consider this European space in a different way, clearly with a stronger collective sense, much though in the early 1990s cultural institutions continued to have a primarily national approach. Structures such as *Relais Culture[[5]](#footnote-5)* laid the groundwork for reflection about complex notions of identity and exchange. Our elders dreamed that the idea of Europe meant more than just changing over to a new currency in a future where it seemed as though everything was possible, coming out of those thirty years of prosperity (1945-1975) known in France as the *Trente Glorieuses*–that it also represented a space of cultural, social, and political co-responsibility. The problem is that since then, the disappointments have been huge, and communitarisms have hence been reinforced in reaction to a growing sense of injustice. The work by Antoni Muntadas,*CEE Project*, produced in 1989–1998, which reproduces the flag of the European Union with its twelve respective national currencies in the form of a starred circle, is representative of the view that this major artist had of Europe's entrenchment in its convictions. That was his reason for installing the piece in indoor public spaces throughout the first twelve Member States of the European Economic Community, challenging the notion of our responsibility as agents in this changing Europe.

Today, instead of joint efforts to develop cultural projects, we often come across bureaucratic policies involving administrators who fail to fully grasp what is actually going on out there (or a more global perspective, for that matter). Consequently, we are faced with a technocracy that is incapable of perceiving the added value that culture can provide for Europe and for the rest of the world, which may envy us at times, but more realistically, as Renée Jones-Bos suggests here,[[6]](#footnote-6) *“Europe still has a lot to offer in today’s global marketplace. This brings us back to where we started: Europe cannot force its values on anyone. Europe will only succeed in spreading our values if the rest of the world sees the benefits that our values can bring. Setting preconditions is not always the best approach in this multi-polar world.”*

The success of events such as *European Capitals, White Nights* or other European biennials is often overlooked. Managers launch projects in response to an “interventionist policy” proposed by Brussels. Any potentially critical, opposing voices also participate in this synergy: even before an event opens, it is already being covered by the media. Request for proposal submissions are regulated, and culture is no longer an exception, as Zygmunt Bauman points out: “our daily lives have become a constant battle against a bureaucracy that would make Kafka weak at the knees. There are regulations about everything, from the salt content of bread to urban poultry-keeping. There are constant laments about the so-called loss of norms and values in our culture. Yet our norms and values make up an integral and essential part of our identity. So they cannot be lost, only changed. And that is precisely what has happened: a changed economy reflects changed ethics and brings about changed identity.” In order for this to happen, we would have to have the courage to face these facts in order to hold the commissioning organizations responsible and not make the same mistakes all over again.

Meanwhile, the changes or even the unresolved European political issues are what affects and modifies the paradigms of culture as it actually exists on the ground if we are incapable of dealing with these new, constantly changing facts. That was the case of *Manifesta6* in Cyprus. Although Manifesta was conceived as a cultural interface for changing European society–particularly by challenging its limits and borders, as well as its relationship to contemporary art associated to theory and politics–according to Yiannis Toumazis[[7]](#footnote-7) it would appear as though this organization was not truly aware of the sociopolitical setting that was supposed to host it in Cyprus. “This created frictions that had serious consequences at the local level, much though the initial intentions may have been fair”…Isn't it about time that we started changing the way we develop projects, and taking the time we need to consider the contexts in which they are set?

In any case, let us not forget that the first agents of culture are often artists, who know how to turn situations around and are capable of inventing new modi operandi. As an example, I would like to mention a project that I believe succeeded in proposing an innovative contemporary work that addresses socio-cultural and environmental issues proposed by *Marseille, European Capital of Culture 2013.* I am referring to a commission made to a team of two photographers, Geoffroy Mathieu & Bertrand Stofleth, to portray the *Paysages usagés* (well-worn landscapes) of the Marseille area. They set up a photographic observation system with regular periodic updates, thus challenging the notion of the art commission and reversing the roles of commissioning body/commissioned artist. The photographs taken since 2012 introduce a new style into the GR2013[[8]](#footnote-8) itinerary. Invited by the photographers, a steering committee made up of artists from the Cercle des Marcheurs group, geographers, and urban planners worked with them as they got to know and understand the local area. In addition, a participative component encourages the public to "adopt" 70 of the 100 photos, to ensure the update shots are taken over the next ten years. The 30 remaining photos are updated annually by the two photographers.

This commission was unique in its timing and appropriateness for being included in a complex cultural event–*Marseille, European Capital of Culture 2013*–and succeeded in engaging people's receptiveness by casting aside the typical photo formats and commercial image of the Mediterranean region, associated with cultural conventions that were turned upside down by this project.

Lastly, the cultural challenges of these emerging times consist of inventing new ways to create bonds by weaving stories between people and places if there is an initial desire for a cultural project. The concern is that the cultural consumption machinery often moves ahead of the actual cultural needs and desires; everything must be ready when these major events occur, without there being a cohesive vision behind them. There are many who, like Berthold Franke,[[9]](#footnote-9) realize that “Capitalism and democracy are also European inventions. If we are experiencing in the EU today a continuous move away from democratisation in our societies through the effects of capitalism, then Europe has the task of finding new ways through its tradition of ‘constant unrest and culture of questioning’ (Julia Kristeva). This critical culture is nowhere more evident than in its application to itself, as Henning Ritter writes, looking back on the past epoch of European hegemony: ‘The critical questioning of the Eurocentric world picture became the basis of the dominant role of European culture in the world. Self-doubt and the relativisation of its own position created the superiority they wanted to bury.’ If Europe can draw on this tradition and progressively shape the unavoidable process of its downsizing, already well under way, then a smaller Europe – let us venture the claim – will not only find its place in the world as befits its new format, but will also soon recognise in this story its new narrative and be able to offer it as a paradigm to others.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

1. Maria Lind, Raimund Minichbauer (ed.), *European Cultural Policies, 2015*. London, Stockholm, Vienna, 2005. Available at <http://eipcp.net/publications/ecp2015> [Retrieved: 26 November, 2014] [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A 51.04% vote on 7 February ,1992. <http://www.france-politique.fr/referendum-1992.htm> [Retrieved: 26 November 2014] [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. p. 5, European Commission Communication [MAGDA CANVIAR ENLLAÇ A http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF]: ["Europe 2020. Une stratégie pour une croissance intelligente, durable et inclusive"](http://documents.relais-culture-europe.eu/europe-2020-fr-pdf.pdf) [Retrieved: 26 November 2014] [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. On 14 June 1985, France, the German Federal Republic, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands signed the agreement, without the other five countries that were members of the Community at the time (Great Britain, Ireland, Greece, Italy, and Denmark). It concerned the gradual introduction of free circulation of citizens within the Schengen Area [CHANGE LINK@] "l’[espace Schengen](http://www.vie-publique.fr/th/glossaire/espace-schengen.html)", eliminating internal border controls within this space. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <http://www.relais-culture-europe.eu/> [Retrieved: 26 November 2014] [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Renée Jones-Bos has served as Secretary-General of the Dutch Ministry ofForeign Affairs since 2012. From 2008 to 2012, she was Ambassador of theKingdom of the Netherlands to the USA. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Yiannis Toumazis, *Manifesta6, the case of the cancelled Biennial*. Nicosia 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <http://www.mp2013.fr/gr2013/> and <http://www.chooseone.org/spip.php?article199> [Retrieved: 26 November 2014] [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Berthold Franke joined the Goethe-Institut in 1990 and since then has held posts in Warsaw, Dakar, Munich, Stockholm, and Paris. He was Regional Director for Southwest Europe, Director of the Brussels Institute and Goethe-Institut delegate for European affairs. He is the current Director of the Goethe-Institut in Prague and Regional Director for Central Eastern Europe. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Berthold Franke, *The Dwarfing of Europe? A dialogue between Brazil, India, China and Europe, European Cultural Foundation*. Amsterdam: 2014, p. 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)