

Inclusive Europe

Budapest, 17-19 November, 2005

You can see the programme and the resources of the conference, or you can also see the official conference site.

At the international cultural conference A Soul for Europe, held in Berlin last December, State Secretary András Benedek announced the arrangement of a similar event next November in Budapest. With the organisation of this meeting, the Hungarian Ministry of Cultural Heritage wanted to maintain the momentum created by the Berlin conference, and kept alive at the Comédie Française in Paris, during the following European cultural conference in May; Inclusive Europe? Horizon 2020 was another stage in the way towards firmly establishing the role of culture in the construction of the new Europe. By its historical and geographical position, Budapest is well suited for the active involvement of those eastern and south-eastern countries and cultures that are actually not about to join the EU.

Inclusive
Europe: Cultural democratisation
and cultural democracy

The deliberations on the main topic of the conference constituted the annual conference of the European Forum for the Arts and Heritage (EFAH). Debate focused on the questions of access, equity, participation and voice these challenges presented. There was special emphasis on the issues raised by different types and dimensions of cultural difference particularly salient in Central and Eastern Europe. The discussions targeted the role of governmental policy and, given the nature of the EFAH, the role of artists and cultural operators in addressing these issues. (more...)

Horizon
2020

The conference also provided a platform for prospective visions. The past few years have posed many challenges to high level administrators: tensions on the global arena, draft European constitution, eastern enlargement, planning 2007-2013, and last but not least: the rejections at two national referenda. The aim was to elevate participants of the Budapest conference - including cultural ministers and high officials of the European Commission - from their condensed agenda, and to divert attention towards the not-too-distant, though not-yet-imminent visions of European culture in 2020.

Eminent intellectuals and political thinkers were invited to look at the future of European culture on the horizon of 2020 from various angles, one of these being, of course, the prospects of cultural democracy. Speakers explored other

- anthropological, demographic, technological, economic, security etc. - factors, as well as the internal dynamics of the arts. This attempt at gazing into the future enabled decision makers and cultural actors to see day-to-day issues in a more lucid perspective.

Organisation

The conference was held in Budapest from 17 Thursday to 19 Saturday, November. The opening took place in the House of Parliament, the remaining part was held in the new Palace of Arts, both on the bank of the Danube. The conference was held in English, with French and Hungarian translation at the plenary sessions.

The Hungarian Ministry of Cultural Heritage extended invitations to culture ministers in Europe and to high international officials in culture. It played host to the invited speakers, too. Upon the experience of earlier EFAH conferences, 200-250 delegates were expected to attend at their own expense. Participants were be offered varied cultural programmes.

Organisers:

Hungarian Ministry of Cultural Heritage

European Forum for the Arts and Heritage

The Budapest Cultural Observatory

KultúrPont

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The conference

assessed the various discourses through which, beginning in the 1960s, the welfare states of Western Europe and Communist regimes elsewhere sought to 'democratise' access to and participation in the arts and heritage. This 'cultural democratisation' approach has appeared elitist in the end, since it tended to imply the sharing with 'the masses' of a cultural canon determined on high. It has not been entirely successful. The pre-existing unequal distribution of cultural capital in society has continued to have a preponderant influence on cultural access. Also, the intended beneficiaries have, for the most part, not benefitted from these unsolicited policies, often resisting them for their perceived paternalistic nature. Another obstacle to subsidised cultural provision by the public authorities has been the growing presence of market-driven culture industries: the transition to the free market has produced new disparities and dimensions of inequality. And yet, the promotion of broader access and participation has also encountered a number of successes and is an enduring policy priority for most European governments.

The conference also debated interpretations of the notion of 'cultural democracy' that has come to the fore recently as an alternative to democratisation strategies. This orientation promotes the goal of increasing and diversifying access to the means of cultural production and distribution instead of merely broadening access to cultural consumption. These questions were addressed on a European and on a global scale, since both European integration and globalisation make it necessary to look beyond the purely national level to identify the forces and flows that are changing the 'grammar' of local, national and global cultures. The interactions between communities (none of which are, or can be, uninfluenced by other cultures of other communities) create a constantly changing, complexifying, and intermingling cultural landscape. What patterns and forces in the cultural landscape create forms of exclusion at the levels of cultural creation, of access to culture, and to the interpretation that people construct of the cultural creations that they experience? What is the impact of new theories and practices, such as the notion of the 'cultural commons' and 'cultural commons'? How might they be deployed by governments and cultural actors, as well as by the European Union?

The relations

between social inequality and cultural difference also needed to be examined in a fresh light. Policies of 'multiculturalism' based on the assumption of distinct cultural 'identities' have tended to freeze the latter into fixed categories, not perceiving that all communities evolve, receiving and projecting cultural influences. Also, the definition of cultural 'identities' are usually divorced from social and economic stratification with some approaches 'culturalising' inequality. Cultural and economic exclusion are often interdependent, as has been the case particularly with the Roma population in Europe and with many immigrant groups.

In this perspective, the concern is not merely with cultural democracy for 'minorities' but rather with the nature of society as a whole. And hence the need to rethink the role both governments and the cultural sector can play. What freedom of action do these cultural actors actually

have under the prevailing socio-economic conditions? Which practices of intercultural communication, cooperation and policy-making help attain the targeted goals? What are our goals, and how do we define them? It should be noted that many voices have not been heard and have, through different mechanisms, actually been excluded. How can their input be facilitated and their cultural rights be respected? How can we create a process of cultural empowerment and voice to all with equal rights and with differences (individual and group)? Enabling all the groups that henceforth constitute national communities to assume ownership of the cultural landscape within each nation as well as across borders remains a major challenge for society, and therefore for cultural policy-makers.

As the political scientist Bhikhu Parekh has put it, "we" cannot integrate "them" as long as "we" remain "we"; "we" must open-up to create a new common space in which "they" can express their differences as well as their similarities (as individuals and as members of various groups), in which we can also recognise our differences and our similarities, and together create a new "us". This was the shared challenge we must have addressed during this conference.

Programme

Resources