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STEERING COMMITTEE FOR CULTURE, HERITAGE AND LANDSCAPE
(CDCPP)

COUNCIL OF EUROPE ART EXHIBITIONS
TOWARD A NEW CONCEPT AND INITIATIVE:

“WE, THE OTHERS”

For information and action

Secretariat Memorandum
prepared by the
Directorate of Democratic Governance
Democratic Institutions and Governance Department

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"By art alone we are able to get outside ourselves,
to know what another sees of this universe which for him is not ours,
the landscapes of which would remain as unknown to us as those of the moon."

(M. Proust, *Time Regained*)

Background

In November 2015 the Bureau of the CDCPP discussed a first reflection paper "Rethinking Council of Europe Art Exhibitions: Towards a revised concept" and underlined its wish not to suppress, but rather to see Art Exhibitions redefined, to make full use of their potential to promote Council of Europe values. The Bureau asked the Secretariat to consult with a small group of experts to pursue reflections and prepare proposals on the follow-up to Council of Europe Art Exhibitions, for consideration in time for the forthcoming session of the Bureau of the CDCPP, in spring 2016. An expert meeting was held on 18 December 2015 at the Council of Europe Office in Brussels and the findings of the meeting were reported to the CDCPP Bureau meeting on 21-22 April 2016. The Bureau of the CDCPP endorsed the general approach suggested in this paper¹ as well as the proposal for a second expert discussion to concretise ideas for future action, for discussion by the CDCPP plenary.

Progress

The second expert meeting took place on 2 May 2016 at the Council of Europe with five professionals from the arts/cultural sector and the CDCPP Vice-Chair² to suggest Art Exhibitions/cultural events as tools for communicating Council of Europe values in response to current political and societal challenges. In addition to intolerance, hate, xenophobia, populism, chauvinism, extremism and radicalization, a main challenge was seen in the increasing anxiety about the future - due to economic, social, cultural insecurity - and the growing loosening of the social fabric. Experts underlined that culture was at the basis of Human Rights and there were no Human Rights without culture.

Ambition and objectives

The ambition and objectives of a new initiative were consequently established as:

- To empower Europeans - native Europeans and newcomers to the region - and enhance their mutual understanding through arts and culture
- To re-set the tone towards a positive vision and narrative.

¹ See document CDCPP-Bu(2016)6. The general approach is based on expert agreement that themes ought to be political themes, artists should be actively involved, but the ambition should clearly go beyond the art world's horizons and any events should address the public at large. An explicit outreach policy should be followed including towards the young and minority groups and extensive use made of social media.

² The member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe who had been invited to attend declined the invitation at the last moment.

To create and offer moments and opportunities of confidence as a means to a renewed European humanistic narrative and in view of the above challenges, the title for the new initiative has been agreed by the experts as:

- “We, the Others”.

Principles

Modalities for arts exhibitions/cultural event were explored and the basic principles formulated in the first expert meeting were endorsed, namely:

- Employing contemporary formats in order to engage contemporary audiences,
- Avoiding emphasis on national cultures,
- Avoiding concentration of events in culturally already well-served cities.

Principles for “We, the Others” would also include: reconciling bottom-up and top-down approaches in conceptualisation; putting the focus on participation, sharing, networking (artistic, museum, cultural networks); bridging producers’ and consumers’ roles and blurring lines between amateur and professional interventions as well as using competition as a selection tool for themes/ activities, as fit.

Action

Experts suggested two basic action lines for “We, the Others”:

1. A genuine exhibition on “otherness”³ using inter alia museums as “trusted spaces” and showing relevant art works and historical artefacts also from the perspective of CoE core values (HR, Democracy). The exhibition could:

- be travelling, or replicated and shown at the same time in different places
- use different means – pictures, video, cinema, music, artefacts and online/ digital artistic initiatives, interactive installations⁴ or games
- include a focus on an “exhibition of ideas” (discourse and philosophically oriented)
- combine arts/science/technology elements
- include participatory formats, e.g. be accompanied by discussions and online community building performances .

³ Cf. bibliographical source for novel discussions e.g.: www.otherness.dk/journal.

⁴ Cf. 1. The Spanish based project by BeAnotherLAB working with Oculus Rift: “We believe that the understanding of the *self* is related to the understanding of the *Other* and that more than individuals, we are part of a broader system called humanity. Under this perspective, we search for innovative possibilities on the concepts of embodied interaction, extended body and extended mind by mixing low-budget digital technology with social relations, Web and neuroscience methodologies.” (<http://www.themachinetobeanother.org/> and <https://vimeo.com/89556173>) 2. Hybrid street and video game »Solar Pink Pong« that uses interactive media and daylight as medium (<https://player.vimeo.com/video/138126896?autoplay=1>); 3. German based project SIMULACRA, an opto-physical experimental arrangement (<http://www.smigla-bobinski.com/english/works/SIMULACRA/>) as metaphor for experiencing otherness.

2. Associating ongoing or planned events in member states to the “We, the others” initiative to make it a longer-term and impactful process (see suggestions in the Appendix). This would imply building synergies, creating a network of like-minded institutions (“coalition of the willing”) and inspiring co-creation.

Spaces

Possible spaces of action were outlined as physical and virtual. Physical spaces would include:

- Cultural institutions, in addition to, but beyond large and small museums
- Schools; education spaces; youth spaces
- Any public space including streets: the example of JR as a powerful public intervention was highlighted (<https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/JR> (artiste)).

Virtual spaces would include:

- Online platforms (incl. for exhibited artworks or interactive dialogues) and Social Media campaigns,
- Educational applications and interactive performative online tools for community building and sharing values.

Methodological considerations

Experts pointed to the following essentials for utmost impact of a new initiative:

- Strive for an innovative, topical and visible follow-up to previous Council of Europe Art Exhibitions and build on existing initiatives at the same time
- Fully use opportunities for synergies with like-minded institutions and initiatives
- Take inspiration from successful projects with a similar complex (political/ artistic/ pedagogical) ambition such as ZKM’s “Globale” project (<http://zkm.de/globale>)
- Link big names from the world of the arts and politics to the new “We, the others” initiative
- Fully co-operate with the EU and other European key players
- Strive at community building for “We, the others”.

Funding sources

Possible sources of funding of “We, the Others” were identified to include:

- EU funding schemes
- Voluntary contributions by Member states
- Contributions from cultural partner institutions and initiatives
- Support by Foundations and European grant donors for specific exhibitions/ activities in Member states and beyond⁵
- Allocations from the Council of Europe Ordinary Budget for 2017/18 to prepare for the project implementation (i.e. secure ad hoc expertise as required and network with key partners where this cannot be done electronically)

Next steps towards implementation

- An exchange with the European Union’s relevant services shall be held as well as with major European grant donors on possible co-operation on the “We, the Others” exhibition project
- Further planning with the expert group of concrete activities - i.e. the genuine exhibition project and selection of associated events - shall be undertaken, the plans refined and possibly, a blog set up as a working tool
- The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe shall be consulted in view of programming/budgeting decisions for 2018/19
- The “We, the Others” initiative may be linked to the Council of Europe’s ongoing Action Plan on “Building Inclusive Societies”
- Preparations for “We, the others” could start in 2017, if political decisions, resources and co-operation agreements allow.

Action required

The CDCPP is invited to:

- Take note of the results of experts deliberations on the follow-up to Council of Europe Art Exhibitions in the form of the new “We, the Others” initiative and endorse the proposal;
- ask the Secretariat to finalise the concept paper in line with the debate held at the Committee with data or proposals as to the budget, advisory bodies and human resources necessary for its implementation;
- recommend that the proposed “We, the Others” initiative be considered for inclusion in the programme and budget for the next biennium;
- request the Secretariat to explore funding opportunities with member States, interested Organisations and institutions.

⁵ E.g. Norway Grants, the Allianz Kulturstiftung or Kulturstiftung des Bundes (for Germany), the Inbev Baillet Latour fund (supporting the Next Generation Please project of BOZAR in Belgian schools).

APPENDIX

Experts' suggestions for relevant projects that could be associated to the "We, the Others" initiative

1. *New Narrative for Europe*: This is an on-going European commission project with a fundamental ambition similar to the credo of discussions held by the expert group and also tackling questions related to 'otherness'. As part of this project, BOZAR has developed two complementary actions:
 - o *Imagine Europe – In Search of New Narratives*: a series of 12 labs with artists, young people, students, to share their visions on Europe at BOZAR until end September 2016.
<http://www.bozar.be/en/activities/107619-imagine-europe>
 - o *Next Generation Please*: a Bozar pilot project gathering artists and young people from Belgian schools to discuss and re-create Europe with top policy-makers. The 12 schools will open their exhibition at BOZAR in May 2016.
<http://www.bozar.be/en/activities/81410-next-generation-please>
2. *'Europe Europe'*: An exhibition show-casing young European artists and alternative arts spaces. It will open in Brussels, Lyon and possibly Moscow simultaneously in the Summer 2017. BOZAR plans to submit an application to Creative Europe in October 2016. (The exhibition was initially developed by Hans Ulrich Obrist and the Astrup Museum in Oslo).
<http://www.afmuseet.no/en/utstillinger/2014/europe-europe>
3. *'Journées de Bruxelles'* – Octobre 2016: A 3-days forum on Europe with top European leaders discussing the future of Europe.
4. *Art in Europe 1945–1968. Facing the Future*: joint exhibition project of BOZAR, Pushkin Museum, and ZKM in 2016–2017.
<http://www.bozar.be/en/activities/106177-facing-the-future>
5. Relevant *follow-up initiatives to the 30th Council of Europe Art Exhibition "Desire for Freedom. Art in Europe since 1945"* (Berlin, Tallinn, Milan, Cracow, 2012-2014) to be identified with the support of the curators of the exhibition.
6. *Back to the Sandbox: Art and Radical Pedagogy*: The project explores the intersection of art, democracy, and education. It includes exhibitions, research, workshops, digital application developments. The exhibition travels in Europe, encouraging contributions and further developments at each venue. The first venue was the Reykjavik Art Museum in Iceland which hosted the project from January to April 2016. Organizations in the following cities have expressed an interest in the project: Stavanger, Wroclaw, Krakow, Barcelona, Madrid, Lleida, Rome, Lecce, Dublin, Aarhus, Amsterdam. <http://www.whatson.is/event/twitter-back-sandbox-art-radical-pedagogy/>

7. Exhibition projects and symposia on art and philosophy that are based on the European humanist tradition (e.g. curated by French philosopher Bruno Latour – *Iconoclash* 2002, *Making Things Public* 2005, *Reset Modernity!* 2016) as well as a continuing exhibition series on philosophers and the arts (e.g. Foucault 2002, Baudrillard 2004) at ZKM. <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/fr/node/668>
8. *Transdisciplinary Serendipity Research Program*: This activity aims at creating transdisciplinary communities on local and international levels. The project is using the Agosto Foundation festival *vs. Interpretation* as a springboard for creating a broader platform for transdisciplinary encounters and collaborations. <http://www.agosto-foundation.org/-vs-Interpretation->