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The need for regional cultural identity

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Summary:

A strong sense of regional cultural identity can provide people a valuable reference point to cope with globalisation.

The report shows how strong regional identities can provide the answers to some of the problems that people encounter in modern life. In particular the fragmentation of our multicultural societies could be counterbalanced by the influence of a strong regional identity.

For the Congress, regional cultural identity is an important component of Europe's cultural diversity. The Congress supports initiatives to develop structures that reinforce regional identity.

Regional cultural identity develops through the connections that citizens form with their immediate surroundings, giving them a sense of belonging to the places that they live in. For the Congress, this is a natural and necessary part of the process of integration, especially in a context where culture and the economy are becoming increasingly global in nature.

According to the Rapporteur, States should ensure that regions have the means and the necessary legal and political instruments to establish and maintain dynamic regional cultural identities.

R : Chamber of Regions / L : Chamber of Local Authorities
ILDG : Independent and Liberal Democrat Group of the Congress
EPP/CD : Group European People's Party – Christian Democrats of the Congress
SOC : Socialist Group of the Congress
NR : Member not belonging to a Political Group of the Congress



1 The importance of regional cultural identity

Regions today are at the forefront of development. Rather than being overtaken by globalisation, they are well-placed to become successful and dynamic actors on the global stage. Strong regional identities also offer an answer to some of the most pressing of modern issues and dilemmas: social fragmentation and alienation. Rather than being inward looking, successful and strong regions can and should be open to other cultures and can offer solutions to the intercultural issues that are currently highlighted by the 2008 European Year for Intercultural Dialogue.

The Congress has always advocated the benefits of developing regional identity. The commitment of the Congress to improving the lives of Europe's citizens at the local and regional level carries with it the conviction that the diverse cultures of Europe's regions constitute a wealth and strength has enormous potential for enriching the lives of all its citizens. The Congress maintains that regional identity offers a countertrend to globalisation and worldwide standardisation, as well as being a natural response to people's desire for uncomplicated, safe and secure lives and a sense of place. It offers the opportunity of reconciling the past and the future, the old and the new, and thereby also opening up potential for development, best summed up in Bavaria's slogan of "laptop und lederhosen". It can also act as a vital resource for social and economic development.

Council of Europe states have a fundamental interest in promoting regional cultural identity, as this is the bedrock of Europe's cultural diversity. The growing importance of regional structures in Europe is partly due to the recognition that strong regional structures and regional identity can be effective in creating strong democratic political stability. It is important to note that the issue of cultural identity has a special importance in regions with minorities and frontier regions.

In face of an increasing growing malaise and tension European societies, resulting from globalisation, rapid development and the increasing momentum of cultural and technological change, spurred by the revolution in communication technologies, there is a clear need for national instruments and policies which will ensure the development of healthy and dynamic regional identities, which are compatible with each other and with the states of which they are part. But before states will act, they need to understand the mechanics of identity and be convinced of its advantages at the regional level.

Context of the present report

The Congress, and more particularly its Chamber of Regions, has for many years been examining the issues relating to the organisation and identity of regions, for example - with its Resolution 67 (1970) on the problems of regionalisation, the 1987 Conference in Florence on "Culture and regions: cultural action in the regional context" and the 1993 Conference in Geneva on "Regionalisation in Europe: evaluation and perspectives". It believes that regions are best placed to express the cultural, religious, political and religious rights of minority communities. The Council of Europe has been at the forefront of creating legal instruments to protect minorities, with the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Work on the present report began in 2004 with a hearing in on regional cultural identity (30 September 2004, Saratov, Russian Federation). This report draws on the theories elaborated by Alexander Grasse in his work "The region as a factor of modernisation"¹. It also uses material provided by Peter Schmitt-Egner².

2 Defining regional cultural identity

Which region?

¹ Alexander Grasse: Modernisierungsfaktor Region. Subnationale Politik und Föderalisierung in Italien, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden 2005

² Peter Schmitt-Egner: The Concept of 'Region': Theoretical and Methodological Notes on its Reconstruction. - In: Journal of European Integration, Volume

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713393849~db=all~tab=issueslist~branches=24 - v24>, Issue 3 2002 , pages 179 - 200

A region, for the purpose of this report, is an intermediate geographical unit which is part of a larger unit (the state), and which is itself sub-divided into smaller parts (the local government level). It has its own institutions and responsibilities. It is recognised that there are wide differences in size between states, and not all States will have three levels of territorial organisation. This is reflected in the composition of the Council of Europe's Chamber of Regions. A number of states in Europe are so small that they only include one city and the issue of grouping local authorities into regions does not arise. On the other hand, as the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly has recently pointed out, there are also States in Europe which "still appear apprehensive to any form of regionalisation"³, and do not yet have regional structures appropriate to their geographical size.

Which regional cultural identity?

What makes for a specific regional cultural identity? A collective regional identity includes both positive differentiation (internal, standardisation, assimilation) and negative differentiation (external, separation, demarcation). Regional identity does not just exist, it develops. A sense of regional identity develops in a particular region over a particular period of time as a result of internal and external factors. A crucial aspect here is that people believe that they share common features (whether such actually exist is of secondary importance). Accordingly, the development of regional identities can be controlled and planned at political level. Contrary to what was previously believed, extremely long periods of time are not necessarily required.

What are the main elements involved in forming regional identity? Grasse identifies two key factors: time and concentration. Only part of the past, that which is most suited to the construction of an identity, is drawn on for the development of regional identity. Concentration means that the more different types of "content" there are, the stronger the regional identity will be. Content includes, for instance, language and/or dialect, customs, traditions and habits, as well as institutions and the relationship with supra-regional bodies or other regions or authorities at the same level. It is important to note that the collective patterns of identity singled out here do not, and must not, compete or conflict with individual identity.

Schmitt-Egner proposes a framework for conceiving regional identity as the combination of three processes: "identifying the region", "being identified with the region" and "identifying with the region".

Identifying the region

Borders serve as markers that define the inside and outside of a territory and reveal its form and content, scope and scale. This includes several factors:

- a) the geographical dimension: what does the mental map of the regional population look like?
- b) the perception of systemic borders: how are the regional system, its elements, goals and means cognitively indicated from the inside and the outside?
- c) the political form and awareness of collective unity: are the region and its limits perceived by its population as a partial territorial unit and how does this perception contribute to a collective identity of a political unit (e.g. a territorial authority)?
- d) the socio-economic dimension: who produces the socio-economic potentials of the regional system?
- e) the cultural dimension: who creates the cultural values and patterns, traits and language, collective memory and behaviour within the region and what role does the latter play in the process of identifying?

Being identified with the region

These abstract considerations are made more concrete by the second process, which concerns whether and how the regional population is attributed social-collective and cultural identities, norms, values or behaviour from the outside. There are several facets to this.

- a) To what extent is the region perceived as a territorial identity from the outside?
- b) Is the region (and its borders) perceived from the outside as a distinctive unit and/or area?
- c) Are the borders of the area predominantly determined by the attribution of a collective or/and cultural identity?
- d) Are the perceived borders of the area are dominated by formal (legal-political), or material (socio-economic), or symbolic attributes?
- e) What qualities and characteristics, traits (such as language), values, behaviour and features for identifying the regional population are attributed from the outside?

3 Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly: Regionalisation in Europe, Doc.11373, 2007

f) What perceptions predominate in this process of attribution from the outside? Are they more traditional or prospective, inclusive or exclusive, positive or negative?

The perceptions from the outside can be horizontal (interregional-transnational) or vertical (national or European). The horizontal and vertical perceptions do not always match, and they do not always reflect the self-perception of the inside (population) of the region. They can be "static" in the sense of stereotypes or "dynamic" in the sense of transnational learning.

Identifying with the region

The third process is the active perception from inside the region. It includes the interaction of personal, social, collective and cultural identities with respect to the territory. It is the core process of identification, determining the "reality of regional identity" by revealing the central process and core elements of identifying. Like the other two steps, it begins with the geographical dimension: What are the geographical limits in perception of the region? To what extent does the regional population identify with the natural landscape? These indicators constitute the framework for a personal dimension whereby the region becomes a common space of emotional and cognitive experience: To what extent is the region perceived by its inhabitants as a facilitator and place of personal experience, an emotional and cognitive context which cannot be exchanged or replaced?

The step from the personal to the societal dimension focuses on whether the social behaviour, everyday practices and events of social groups constitute a social identity and contribute to a regional "we". The complementary nature of social and collective identity can be established by asking: Are these activities fixed and generalised by certain codes, symbols and norms and by political and historical institutions to shape a collective "we" as distinct from "the others"? The cultural dimension summarises all the levels by focusing them within a frame of values and behaviour: To what extent is regional awareness determined by a regional language and history, patterns of behaviour and values with regard to the previous dimensions? Does it accentuate or lessen the difference between "own" and "foreign"? Is this awareness more inclusive or more exclusive?

3 Regional cultural identity: a passport for positive globalisation

Rather than being threatened and sidelined by globalisation, regional cultural identity offers regions new possibilities to be effective and successful players in the new global order. By counter-balancing the negative effects of globalisation, a strong identity has an important psychosocial role, replacing fears, anxieties and a sense of alienation with confidence and a sense of belonging and well-being.

1945 is often seen as the turning point for the supremacy of the nation state, with its assumption that people living within a given territory should assimilate its culture. Globalisation is widely portrayed as spelling the death of local, regional and national cultures. T.S. Eliot, writing shortly after the Second World War, warned against the dangers of a creeping "uniformity of culture", the risks of it leading to a degeneration and loss of identity, the trend towards shallowness. He advocated the need for culture to be rooted in local experience:

"We have not given enough attention to the ecology of cultures. It is probable, I think, that complete uniformity of culture throughout these islands would bring about a lower degree of culture altogether. [...] For a national culture, if it is to flourish, should be a constellation of cultures, the constituents of which, benefiting each other, benefit the whole."⁴

More recently, George Ritzer coined the term "The McDonaldization of Society" to describe the blandness and numbness and loss of identity caused by the sweeping global cultural and economic integration.⁵ Powerful economic forces, aiming at greatest efficiency and rationalisation, have a natural tendency to eliminate creativity and have an essentially dehumanising influence on people:

"the fundamental problem with McDonaldised systems is that it's other people in the system structuring our lives for us, rather than us structuring our lives for ourselves. [...] You don't want a creative person clerk at the counter - that's why they are scripted. [...] Humanity is essentially creative and if you develop these systems that are constraining and controlling people they can't be creative, they can't be human."⁶

⁴ T.S. Eliot: Notes Towards a Definition of Culture, Faber & Faber, 1948.

⁵ George Ritzer : The McDonaldization of Society: An Investigation into the Changing Character of Contemporary Social Life, Pine Forge Press, Revised edition, 1995

⁶ George Ritzer, interviewed in 1997 by One-Off Productions for their TV documentary, "McLibel: Two Worlds Collide".

Part of this process involves what has come to be known as "deterritorialization", the dislocation of culture from a geographic context. This is not only the result of communications and media technologies, but also the increase of social mobility which began with the post-war waves of immigration and has accelerated with the increased mobility afforded by the processes of European integration.

There is also evidence that globalization is being accompanied by what is called the "hybridization of cultures": the same cultural channels and communications technologies that are responsible for integration and banalization also offer increased possibilities to the counter-trends, facilitating the expression of small and diverse communities. Hybridization focuses on cultural exchange and the incorporation of cultural elements from a variety of sources within particular cultural practices.

However, far from being fatally damaged by globalisation, regions with strong identities in Europe are demonstrating that they have a competitive edge in the new economic and cultural order. Grasse demonstrates that a strong and healthy cultural identity has important economic implications for enterprises and entrepreneurship. Territorial authorities have an important role in creating a sense of shared identity for their citizens and disseminating it on a massive scale. Studies have shown how authorities can disseminate this identity through regional investment and development policies and use it to channel and energise economic resources and capital. A clear identity has the effect of a catalyst on regional development, generating powerful integrating forces that attract more resources to an area and create a virtuous cycle.

4 Regional cultural identity: a passport for integration

One of the advantages that regions have in the formation of identity is proximity. Social and political participation is essentially a bottom-up process. Identity has an important emotional aspect. People need to identify with the area in which they are living. If this is not the case, there will be an experience of alienation. The more that people are involved in activities and networks, the more they will identify with the territory of which they are part. Similarly, citizens often find it easier to identify with politicians and leaders who are present and accessible, rather than leaders who reside in a distant capital.

Regional authorities have greater opportunities than ever before to play a part on shaping the identity of their territories. Some authorities are already realising the political benefits for forging a strong collective identity, aware of the importance of regional identity for their own legitimation. They realise the importance of creating strong symbols in order to gain the collective support of their populations. Successful regional authorities are taking inspiration from big corporations and marketing themselves with a strong corporate identity.

The use of myths and symbols that Anthony Smith described as being essential for the creation of national identity⁷ are also valid for regions. They include features of "inclusion" (fostering internal cohesion) and "exclusion" (defining a territory in relation to its neighbours). Smith identifies six key factors: a clear collective name, a myth of common descent, shared memories, a distinctive language and culture, a sense of a territorial homeland and a sense of solidarity with a significant proportion of the inhabitants. A strong regional identity serves as a magnet and will attract people from outside of the region. This influx has a positive effect on a community, since those who are attracted by the identity will interact with it, make their own contribution, which will ensure that it continues to develop and evolve. In the course of time they will identify with the region and be integrated with it. It is a process which goes through several stages, beginning with the granting of rights such as the right to vote and leading progressively to a complete acceptance. It creates a positive cycle of integration which is the opposite of the ghettoisation processes which result when a community reacts defensively.

Regions are in a favourable position to give expression to local differences and diversity and reflect the cultural needs of the population. Regional policies must take this diversity into account in order to maximise the feeling of belonging of the region's inhabitants. A regional authority needs to be aware of the demography of its territory, so that it can best tailor its policies to cover the needs of its various groups.

⁷ Smith, Anthony D.: *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Blackwell, 1986

Once a regional authority has a clear idea of the cultural identity that it wishes to use as the basis for its programmes and policies, this identity should be "mainstreamed", that is, care should be taken that all policy sectors are shaped by this identity. This is most easily seen in terms of a region's "corporate image", but also involves the way it works with different ethnic, linguistic and religious groups, grants that are made to associations and businesses, planning, health and education policies.

At the state level, governments need to recognise the importance for regions to be able to develop strong cohesive identities for their communities. The state is responsible for defining the amount of subsidiarity that operates within its territory. It should ensure that the competences of regions are clearly defined and that they have sufficient autonomy to develop an identity that is appropriate for the local population.

The work of the Congress on regionalisation (Florence and Geneva conferences) has demonstrated that regional development and increasing decentralisation, far from being a threat to national autonomy, is a crucial building block for a state and should be made a priority of national policy.

The Council of Europe has long been at the forefront of arguing and demonstrating the benefits and advantages of regional development, conscious of the fact that international and supra-national institutions have an important role in standard-setting. There need to be clear recommendations and a clear legislative framework for regions. In this respect the project for a regional instrument to match the European Charter for Local Self-Government is an important initiative. The Congress has a role to play in experience sharing and dissemination of best practice.

It is no accident that regional movements are sometimes associated with ethnic conflict and division and violence. As Grasse points out, regional movements take on their own momentum and evolve a life and energy of their own. If they are not properly channelled and regulated, there may be undesirable consequences. Identity is essentially dialectic, groups and communities define themselves by what they are not and every border that is created will have the effect of excluding those who are beyond it. In every society group there will those who do not belong, the "others", those who are perceived as different and foreign, whether these desire to be included or not. It is a fundamental test of a healthy region that it has the ability to coexist with and welcome the strangers in its midst. In this respect it is worth underlining the importance of the instruments that the Council of Europe has developed to deal with such issues, notably the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Convention of the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level.

The media are the prime instruments for territorial authorities in forging their identities. This can take many forms, including using the Internet, regional television and radio. The Congress 2008 report on E-tools highlights some of the potential of the new information technologies for territorial authorities. National and regional media legislation and policies should ensure that regional media make adequate provision for minority cultures and languages.

Regional authorities have many cultural resources at their disposal. They should be aware of the potential of such resources for shaping the identities of their populations. Identities are given form by identifying, collecting and recording the local cultures, and recording and promoting the different strands that make up the cultural landscape of a region. This includes memory, the oral history of the inhabitants, and also the participation of local associations in mounting cultural and historical productions, exhibitions and festivals.

Education for democratic citizenship is essential in order to ensure and develop an open and tolerant society. It should be included in both formal and non-formal education systems. It should aim at making people aware of the specificity of the local culture and historical context, engendering a sense of cultural diversity and pluralism. Education enables people to acquire the skills and capacity for self-critical reflection that is necessary for them to live as citizens in pluralistic cultural societies.

Local and regional authorities have a role in enhancing the participation of all cultural groups, recognising the diversity within their territories and especially by involving young people. The Revised European Charter on The Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life is an important instrument in this respect. There is also a need for a political education that ensures that local and regional politicians have the requisite skills for developing territorial institutions that will foster a vibrant and inclusive cultural identity.

5 Regional cultural identity and openness to other cultures

Although they appear to be static, regional cultural identities, like waterfalls, are in constant movement. Identities have to evolve to avoid stagnation. For this they need the ability to integrate new elements. Healthy regional identities are able to accept integrate new contributions from both its traditional members and new arrivals.

Strong regional identities in Europe have come under a lot of suspicion and criticism for their supposed identification with ethnic polarisation. They have been associated with a number of recent conflict situations. They are seen as accentuating and favouring monocultural situations.

Today, the time factor in the creation of regional identities is declining, due the increasing power and influence of communications technologies. Regional identities, which used to take centuries to develop, are now emerging in a matter of a few years. Territorial authorities now have more than ever the possibility to stimulate the development of regional identity. There has been a sharp rise in the use of the media by territorial authorities to influence and create new regional identities. This has important implications for policy-makers, since they can now play a much more active role in identity formation.

They have substantial responsibility in this respect and they need to use this in an intelligent and enlightened way. They need policies which respect minorities and which encourage creativity; which give rein to regional expression and help to develop regional traditions, without being hostile to outside influences and other cultures.

Regional identity can also involve inter-regional cooperation in areas such as minority issues, since many minority groups cross political barriers. Since political frontiers are subject to change, there are often historical connections between adjoining regions. Therefore regional identity formation will often include a transfrontier element. This will require legal and political instruments for cooperating with neighbouring regions.

A strong territorial identity should not preclude the modern or resist change, although attachment to physical landmarks is often accompanied by resistance to innovation. Tradition is by nature constantly changing and evolving. Therefore, any sense of identity will include a constant readjustment to new developments, a process of "reflecting" on and developing a relationship with the local traditions, generating new styles and forms of expression. This can be seen in the realm of architecture and planning, where over-regulation can lead to stifling of innovation and a conservative and sterile artistic environment. Sensitive and flexible policies are required to avoid the "dumbing down" of artistic styles and the imposition of a dull uniformity. Regional continuity can be expressed in the choice of building materials; the use of local materials, reference to local styles and local use of colour can transmit a sense of tradition and continuity; intelligent design can provide a regional artistic language, support a level of creativity and artistic expression which allows the old and the new to co-exist and interact.

In its (draft) White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, the Council of Europe points to the growing trend for individuals to adopt different cultural affiliations, and stresses the importance of intercultural dialogue for managing such multiple cultural affiliations. Since freedom to choose one's own culture is a fundamental right, the favouring of cultural creativity in a local and regional context should not be viewed as an attempt to defend one particular cultural tradition against perceived threats from the outside or to defend "traditional" against "modern", "native" against "immigrant", the majority against minority. It should be realised and accepted that a region's identity will encompass the sum of the different individuals and groups in a territory and that many of these individuals and groups will have affiliations outside of the territory.

The positive effect of the contribution of recent immigrants to the cultural and economic vitality of a region was already highlighted by the Congress in the 1987 Florence Declaration, which also underlined that the European heritage owed much of its wealth to the constant mixing of peoples.

6 Conclusions

The formation of regional cultural identity is a natural and necessary reaction to worldwide economic and cultural integration. It is important because it gives people a sense of place and belonging to a community; it is important for social cohesion, development and social and political engagement. People need to be able to identify with the collective and to see themselves reflected in it, to see that they are part of in and represented in it.

Regional identity is not a negation of globalisation, but in many ways it is stimulated by globalisation and enables people to reassert their sense of place and the specificity of their communities. It relates not only to language and culture in the narrower sense, but also to aspects of the landscape and the cultural heritage. The regional identity of the present day is, at least partly, made up of events of the past.

Identity must not only be continuously promoted and developed at the regional level, but should also be a constant object of regional self-analysis. Many regions have a strong, historically based and lively regional identity. Others have a weaker identity, because those same elements are lacking. Political instruments of control must be used to create a balance between inclusion and exclusion. The regions themselves bear the main responsibility for preserving a sufficiently high degree of openness. The promotion of identity affects numerous areas on which politics has an influence: the promotion of regional cultural players and backers, of regional history museums, of regional media, of landscapes and of tourism.

To achieve a Europe where the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law are fully respected, there must be solid foundations in the form of thriving and stable territorial communities. This requires strong regional affiliations, based on shared identities. States, which have a responsibility to ensure the health and vitality of their regions, need to ensure that these have the necessary space and instruments to form and maintain such identities.

Appendix Practical examples

The German-speaking community in Belgium

Belgium consists of three linguistic and cultural groups. When it became clear in the 1960s that a unitary state was no longer suited to the co-existence of the two main communities, the Flemings and the Walloons, Belgium was gradually transformed into a federal state.

The German-speaking community in Belgium takes on a very particular role in this context: firstly, because the German-speaking region has only been part of Belgium since the Treaty of Versailles (see below) and, secondly, because the German speakers would not form a federate entity or a region with legislative powers and would not have their own institutions and powers if the above-mentioned transformation of Belgium had not taken place.

The region occupied by the German-speaking community with a current population of around 73 000 has been a borderland for as long as people can remember. The last two centuries have seen frequent changes of nationality for its population. After the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the region became part of the Prussian Rhine province. Under the Treaty of Versailles after World War I, it was assigned to the Kingdom of Belgium. Although a plebiscite called for by the League of Nations on the change of state did go ahead, it can with hindsight only be described as a “farce”, given the circumstances in which it was conducted. In the 1930s, the revisionist section of the population came under the influence of the National Socialists. Election results showed that around half the population wanted to be reunited with Germany, while the other half had come to terms with the transfer to Belgium. During World War II, the region was annexed by Germany, while the remainder of Belgian territory was occupied. Of the approximately 8 700 men from the German-speaking region of Belgium who were conscripted into the German army, 3 400 did not return. Following liberation and the end of the war, the population were subjected to repressive and doubtless unfair treatment (“purges”) by the Belgian authorities. Use of the German language was largely driven into the private sphere.

The particular situation of the German speakers in Belgium was first recognised in the new language legislation in 1963, which divided the country into four linguistic regions. With the growing regionalisation of the country, the region acquired cultural autonomy, while the process of federalisation ultimately transformed the German-speaking community into a component entity of the Belgian federal state which now has its own territory, own institutions, own symbols and own powers and responsibilities.

The question of the identity of the German-speaking Belgians is hard to answer and has not to date been the subject of broad discussion or of comprehensive, thorough analysis. There is empirical evidence that the German speakers have multiple identities: in a survey, two-thirds of respondents said they felt allegiance to their region, just under 60% to Belgium and half to Europe⁸. There is also empirical evidence that young German speakers have strong prejudices against their two big neighbours, the Walloons in Belgium and the Germans⁹.

Although no empirical evidence can be provided here, it can be said that strong prejudices regarding the two big neighbours exist among all age groups, not only young people. The prejudices regarding Germany and the strong sense of allegiance to Belgium, which has repeatedly been expressed in the past in particular, are probably mainly the result of World War II and people’s desire to distance themselves from Germany. The prejudices against the Walloons are, in part, the result of the suppression of German in Belgium during the 1950s and 1960s. At the same time, there is wide-ranging interaction with the two neighbours in all areas (business, work, universities, leisure, personal contacts).

It could be said that the identity of the German-speaking Belgians is marked by a strong sense of distinctiveness or separateness in relation to the outside world. This is despite the fact that there is a whole range of potential internal identity-generating criteria. The German-speaking community is, for

⁸ Stangherlin, Georg ; Jacquemain, Marc 2005 : Eine kurze soziologische Betrachtung der deutschsprachigen Belgier, in : Stangherlin, Katrin (Hrsg.) : La Communauté germanophone de Belgique – Die Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft Belgiens, Brüssel, S. 57ff.

⁹ Cremer, Freddy u.a. 1998 : Jugend 98. In guter Gesellschaft ? Meinungsbilder aus der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, Büllingen, S. 21.

instance, in the relatively rare position of simultaneously being a national minority, a border region and the smallest region with legislative powers in the European Union.

A quarter devoted to the cultural industries (Sheffield, UK)

The Cultural Industries Quarter (CIQ) in Sheffield (North-West Region, United Kingdom) has attracted more than a hundred mainly cultural and new-media businesses, ranging from film and video production firms to graphic design offices, recording studios, record companies and ancillary service firms. According to local authority figures, the CIQ's cultural activities employ 750 people.

In 1988, the site was a run-down, underused urban wasteland. Thanks to close co-operation between the public and private sectors, it is now a flourishing development whose main areas are occupied by the Audio-Visual Enterprise Centre, the Workstation, the Science Park and Yorkshire Art Space. This infrastructure is backed up by a range of media skills training courses given by Sheffield Independent Film Ltd, the City Council's Red Tape Studios and Sheffield Hallam University's Northern Media School. The CIQ is also trying to attract visitors, the numbers of which keep growing. Services on offer to the public include the Site Gallery, the Leadmill meeting centre, the Media Centre Showroom and the National Centre for Popular Music. Between 1995 and 1997, the EU contributed funding to culture-related measures in around 700 firms in the North-West.

Evaluation: good but not best practice.

The core problem in this example is that a regional culture did not originally exist. But this case also shows how people can construct a regional identity by fostering regional development. Such development is brought about not by regional culture, but by cultural industries.

Where business meets culture (Champagne-Ardenne-Aube, France)

Taking advantage of the major communication routes close by and their region's special position, the Champagne-Ardenne authorities and the department of Aube have put their faith in short-stay tourism. With ERDF assistance they have invested in Troyes' "Pôle Argence" to attract business travellers and lovers of culture alike. The Argence centre is set to become the modern heart of Troyes. Built on the site of a former secondary school, it was ready to open in 1999, just in time to usher in the new millennium. Culture: the new regional conservatory opens its doors to 1,200 music students and houses an exhibition devoted to traditional and contemporary techniques of book production. The school's old chapel has been converted into a 300-seat auditorium. The close proximity of the Champagne and Madeleine theatres enhances the city's cultural appeal.

Communication is catered for by a library-cum-media resources complex of modern design, with exhibition and activity areas. Making up for Troyes' shortcomings in this area, Argence provides space and facilities for conventions, seminars and trade shows. With the A5 motorway just a stone's throw from Troyes, the city can accommodate national and international events. Lastly, in furtherance of its regional industrial role, Argence now offers an information centre for small firms. New technologies serving the historic heritage.

Evaluation: between bad and good practice

The cause and motivation of this project are not primarily based on regional culture, but on business. Culture serves only as a means to perform certain economic development strategies and is not a basis of regional identity.

Catania and Lecce (Italy)

In southern Italy, the universities of Lecce and Catania are counting on the information and communication technologies to restore a very rich cultural heritage. New skills are being developed in the artistic restoration sector, new jobs are being created, and local tourism is receiving a welcome boost. The towns of Catania (Sicily) and Lecce (Apulia) lie in the Mezzogiorno, in southern Italy, a region that has long lagged behind in economic development. Yet these disadvantaged areas also have some advantages: Catania and Lecce have a rich cultural heritage that bears witness to cultural roots stretching back centuries. This heritage is inefficiently exploited, however, and consequently too little known.

To restore the cultural sites in the two towns, in 1997 the universities of Catania and of Lecce decided to pool their efforts in a common project based on the use of advanced information and communication technologies. The Sicilian University, for example, restored a number of old buildings for conversion into local museums. A high-speed computer network was also set up between the university and these museums – eight in all – to ensure a better circulation of information on the pieces and collections exhibited (110 000 computerised references). CD-Roms have also been produced for educational purposes and pictures of the monuments and works of art digitised and stored as high-resolution computer images. Finally, there is a “virtual theatre” enabling some of these museums to be visited online, complete with animations and 3-D illustrations.

The University of Lecce launched similar initiatives, with the emphasis on a number of its scientific specialities, such as radiocarbon dating techniques and its internationally renowned papyrus study centre that is now fully computerised.

These projects, based on advanced information and communication technologies, are benefiting many people in Lecce and Catania, starting with researchers, students and teachers. But this restoration of the artistic heritage is also having a positive impact on the local economy, by stimulating tourism. New jobs are being created in art and restoration and the town centres are becoming more attractive. In other words, future technologies are being used to exploit the past for a better present.

Evaluation: between good and best practice

This example is based on the regional heritage and shows how bridges between past, present and future can be built with effects on regional development and capacity. This experience can be compared with that of other regions if the regional culture is based on a historic heritage of national or international importance. It can be transferred if regional players are ready and able to preserve and use their own regional culture within a strategy of regional development.

Strongholds to keep history alive, London-Lille-Bruges

In the London-Lille-Bruges triangle, numerous towns testify to a tormented history that goes back to the Middle Ages. They are now meeting places of a totally different kind, connected by a network of 17 historical sites set up with INTERREG support by the regions of Kent (United Kingdom), Nord-Pas-de-Calais (France) and West Flanders (Belgium) to take advantage of this common heritage. By creating this new tourist product, the partners have sought to increase the number of visitors and overnight stays in the three regions and to encourage development and employment around the sites concerned while stimulating cultural exchanges. Overall co-ordination is ensured by the Joint Association of the Côte d'Opale, the Province of West Flanders and Kent County Council.

With its innovative concept, the Network of Strongholds is meeting the current trends in demand for weekend tourism and organised tours. It is making the three regions more attractive and enabling them to achieve a more even flow of tourists between the most popular sites, which are generally overcrowded, and the lesser-known places. The widespread introduction of multilingual explanations is encouraging sightseers to visit all the sites and, for this purpose, the partners also plan to step up the activities of the cross-border transport companies. At the cultural level, historians and archaeologists are working with tourist professionals to make visitors and inhabitants aware of the rich common heritage of the three regions and to encourage exchanges.

In concrete terms, the network is organising actions like the creation of discovery tours (walks in and around each town), a travelling exhibition for tourist fairs, publishing a trilingual promotional brochure to present the network, a cultural and tourist brochure in three versions (English, French and Dutch) and running advertising campaigns in the media. Actions specific to each town – restoration of architectural sites, exhibitions, audiovisual products, publications, etc – are also being implemented.

Evaluation: good practice

This “Network of Strongholds” depends on a comparable regional and local heritage. It fosters regional development through external co-operation based on a common strategy of tourism and the restoration of its monuments. It strengthens regional culture by a reassessment of its heritage and extends the multilingual capacity of the participants. Finally, it affects internal economic development by supporting the tourism industry and creating employment in services.

Learning to live side by side: cross-cultural co-operation between Ballymacarret (Northern Ireland) and Ballybofey (Ireland)

The PEACE programme for Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland. Besides the economic and religious issues, the Northern Ireland conflict has also opened up a deep cultural divide between Protestants and Catholics. As a result, each community has maintained its own culture, folklore, songs, sports and so on. By presenting new opportunities for interaction between the two communities, co-operation projects between young Protestants from Belfast and young Catholics from the border counties of Ireland aim to lay the foundations for lasting peace. Ballymacarret, a Protestant working-class district in east Belfast, is a Unionist bastion and it would be an understatement to say that relations with the neighbouring Catholic community are not naturally close, and even less so with Catholics south of the border. Founded in 1996, originally to promote a Protestant culture of peace, the Ballymacarret Arts and Cultural Society received EUR 45,000 in PEACE I funding in 1999 for a drama co-operation project with Catholic counterpart organisations in the Border Counties of Ireland.

Its chosen partner was the Balor Development Group from Ballybofey in the county of Donegal, which also believes that cultural differences are partly to blame for misunderstandings between the Protestant and Catholic communities. The Belfast association started by staging two plays in the Republic of Ireland to explore the culture, values and aspirations of the Protestant working class. To strengthen and further this cross-border, and especially cross-community, co-operation, the two partner associations went on to develop their "Cultural Pathways Project" to enable young Protestants from Belfast and young Catholics from Ballybofey to come together to explore, compare and enjoy their cultural differences. With funding of EUR 150,000 from PEACE II, the project consisted of setting up six "Cultural Learning Partnerships" involving young people from the two communities - the Protestant community of Ballymacarret and the Catholic community of Ballybofey.

Each partnership developed modules around key themes to enable the participants to get to know one another better and learn to find common ground and celebrate their differences.

The "Social Interaction" module takes the form of enjoyable activities including visits to both areas to take part in sports, drama workshops, dances, quizzes, etc.

The "Trust and Confidence Building" module gives each group the opportunity to participate in the activities of the other group. In the sporting field, for example, the young Catholics attend Glentoran FC soccer matches, while the young Protestants attend Gaelic football matches. The "Cultural Understanding" module enables the young people to learn more about one another's cultural background. This involves dance, drama and Gaelic language workshops, as well as joint participation in events that are highly symbolic to the two communities, such as the July parades for Protestants and Saint Patrick's Day for Catholics. The final unit, the "Political Awareness" module, is designed to encourage the young people to gain a better understanding of the impact politics can have on their day-to-day lives and the lives of their communities. The participants have an opportunity to visit the seats of political power (e.g. the Irish Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly, Belfast and Dublin city councils, etc.) and to meet the people who have been elected to represent them.

This cross-cultural co-operation between Ballymacarret and Ballybofey is exemplary on two counts. Firstly, by relying on the initiative of its young participants, it reflects the PEACE programme's bottom-up philosophy. Secondly, these young people, Catholic and Protestant alike, return to their home communities with a better understanding and less prejudicial view of the other side in the conflict.

Evaluation: best practice model of conflict resolution based on regional culture

This example encompasses all the criteria mentioned above. Based on core issues of regional identity, this cross-cultural co-operation opens pathways to conflict resolution and peace-making by fostering a common cultural understanding and by using the common cultural heritage as a window of opportunity for prospective regional development. The comparability of this experience can be used for all bi- and multinational conflicts, where border regions can play a bridging role based on a common historical identity and features of a common regional culture.

Les Rencontres

Les Rencontres is an open forum for debate and action, grouping together elected members from all levels of local and regional government throughout Europe in order to actively take part in the setting up of European cultural policies. The aims of Rencontres are to:

- favour links throughout the European continent from Cork to Odessa, from the Midi-Pyrénées region in France to the region of Istria in Croatia, and encourage contacts and co-operation with local and regional authorities outside Europe, for example in the Mediterranean region or in the Americas
- encourage recognition of the role played by local and regional authorities in developing the creative and cultural industries, favour cultural policies in the following areas: artistic education and the relationship between education and culture, urbanism, heritage, defending artists and their rights, etc, and encourage local governing bodies to co-operate within the current decentralisation process, developing access to culture and citizens' participation.

Events include:

- an annual General Assembly and Conference in the European capital of culture on a theme in keeping with the cultural capital's programme
- national meetings every 6 months in the countries holding the Presidency of the EU
- thematic meetings on current cultural policies such as books and reading, photography, visual arts, contemporary dance, operas, cinema, etc. Approximately 500 to 600 professionals take part in the 7 to 8 meetings organised every year and a regional or bilateral meeting once a year.

Action is considered essential in order for local and regional cultural policy and the role of the elected member in charge of culture/arts to be recognised within the Council at a local level;

for a constructive dialogue to be developed and maintained with national governing bodies such as Ministries of Culture so that cultural policymaking can be fully recognised and receive appropriate funds and support; and for actions to be initiated that evolve from elected members' awareness that culture is a secure building block for Europe's future.

Over the years a network was established grouping together over 300 local and regional authorities from 25 to 30 countries in Europe.

Rencontres consists of a network of elected officials in charge of culture in cities and regions throughout the European continent – policymakers in charge of culture, leaders of arts committees, arts officers, arts councillors from counties, provinces, etc; as well as those working for culture and the arts in local authorities – directors of cultural departments, heads of arts and leisure services, etc.

The participants wish to further and intensify dialogue with the European Council, the Commission and the European Parliament while underlining the European added value of cultural policies for all levels of local government (cities, counties, provinces, regions...). More specific aims are to:

- encourage meetings between all those who take part at a local and regional level in arts, educational and social projects to examine European perspectives;
- analyse how elected officials and local government can improve the status of the artist in Europe;
- set up an internet forum to favour contacts between local and regional authorities and provide examples of best practices in cultural development and co-operation;
- create a European forum for emerging authors and literature festivals;
- promote candidate cities for European capitals of culture and cultural capital projects and initiatives; ↯
- encourage a constructive dialogue between policymakers and cultural workers from Europe, the Americas and the Mediterranean.

Evaluation: between good and best practice

In terms of its scope and scale, Rencontres is one of the biggest networks for promoting regional and local culture by transnational networking throughout Europe. But broad scope and a big scale are not always a guarantee of best practice, because it is very difficult to determine the criteria of success. On the other hand, all core issues of local and regional culture are addressed from a very broad perspective, together with the necessary tools, regulations and institutions. The network also builds ties to non-European cultures and provides areas of transnational learning. So regional identity not only depends on roots, but can expand and develop its capacity through intercultural communication.

Cultural co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region

Regarding the cultural aspect, the Baltic Sea is not constituted and dominated by a single culture as the Mediterranean was by the Roman Empire. Since the beginning of human settlement it has displayed a cultural diversity which is paradigmatic of European culture. Taking language and religion as two core indicators of culture, and excluding the Romance languages, we can draw a map of European languages: the Slavic of the Poles and Russians, the Germanic of the Scandinavian and Germans, Baltic as an old Indo-Germanic branch, and finally Finnish and Estonian as non-Indo-Germanic languages. With respect to religion, all the major European churches – Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox - are represented. On the other hand, as well as exploring, national options the inhabitants of coastal areas tend increasingly to use the Baltic Sea as a transnational space of living, communication and identity.

The European impetus for cultural co-operation in the BSR was mainly provided by the Council of Europe in the 80s and early 90s, while the EU sought mainly to promote economic development within the pre-accession process. Although the network was provided with an intergovernmental framework by the Ministers for Cultural Affairs of the BSR in the early 90s, the core initiatives of cultural co-operation emerged “from the bottom”.

Ars Baltica is a forum for multilateral cultural co-operation with an emphasis on common projects within the Baltic Sea Region. It gives priority to art, culture and cultural history. The key factor is to achieve quality and a very special level of activities. The intention is to enhance cultural identity in the Baltic Sea Region and also to realise projects of European significance. Its goal is to implement common projects which, in terms of structure and concept, are more than the traditional form of bilateral cultural exchange and also to help these projects to become like existing networks of individuals and organisations.

While BALCON focuses on the preservation of cultural heritage by promoting traditional arts and crafts, taking account also of the effects on the regional labour market, the aim of Network Baltic is to use art to break down barriers. About 400 Swedish artists and 40 from other countries around the BSR are members of the Network.

Evaluation: between good and best practice

The Network encompasses all core issues of regional culture based on a bottom-up approach by cultural players by making use of the rich sub-European diversity in the Baltic Sea Region. Regional cultures are expanded internally and contribute to an external identity on the sub-European level. This can provide an example of best practice with regard to the creation and use of the relationship between regional and European identity.