

Cultural policy from Amsterdam to Žilina

_____ The project which took place from October 2004 – December 2008 was divided into three stages: a research phase, a methodological phase and an implementation phase – with the specific aim of devising a new model of regional cultural policy for Žilina.

_____ The project was the catalyst behind the initiation of a comprehensive process of development and implementation of the principles of cultural strategy to provide the citizens of the Žilina region with a range of diverse and high quality cultural activities. In this way the project serves as a pilot project and as an example for other Slovak regions to follow.

_____ The objectives of the project were to monitor the current state of cultural infrastructure in the Žilina region, to draw up a plan of cultural development, to improve the management of different types of institutions, and to establish relationships between the government, regional and local authorities and members of the artistic community. The project was particularly focused on systemic changes in cultural policy in Slovakia generally, with a long-term vision for the region of Žilina.

_____ The project addressed regional and local organisations in Žilina which, in cooperation with cultural institutions, Slovak and foreign experts and professionals from the region, analysed, initiated and implemented the processes related to the development of regional/local cultural policy.

_____ The cultural organisations in the region were invited to cooperate with one another and with the public administrative bodies to prepare the new concept of cultural policy.

_____ In order to achieve a better multiplying effect, individual institutions agreed to share financial and human resources when developing common projects to be submitted to funding agencies and other potential donors and when planning joint marketing activities with various target groups in mind.

_____ The project provided other activities for managers of cultural institutions and representatives of local governments such as:

- _____ training courses and seminars in the field of cultural management, EU cooperation and others;
- _____ workshops, conferences and seminars touching on current concerns in the field of cultural policy;
- _____ a study trip to the Netherlands;
- _____ the creation of a grant programme to support cooperation projects.

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Cultural policy from Amsterdam to Žilina

Case study

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Cultural policy A * Žilina
Amsterdam

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Annex

DVD 'Cultural Policy from Amsterdam to Žilina' includes:

1. The electronic version of the book: 'From Cultural Values to the Value of Culture – The Strategy of Culture Development in Žilina Self-governing Region'
2. The electronic version of the book: 'Cultural policy from Amsterdam to Žilina: Case study'
3. The documentary: 'Innovative Cultural Projects in Žilina Region'
4. The detailed results of the research carried out within the 'Cultural Policy from Amsterdam to Žilina' project
5. A selection of the conference texts: 'Cultural Policy and Regions in Slovakia', 24 – 25 October, 2006, Žilina
6. A selection of conference texts: 'Regional Cultural Policy – Initiatives & approaches to its Creation' 25 October, 2007, Žilina
7. A selection of texts, lectures and speeches given by different experts
8. Bibliography
9. A list of contacts and web pages

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Foreword

_____ It was in the spring of 2003 when a number of representatives of the ‘new generation’ of arts managers from Slovakia contacted the European Cultural Foundation (ECF)¹ to find out more about the foundation’s work in the field of local cultural policy-making in transitional Eastern Europe. Given their demanding central undertaking of setting up the renowned cultural centre Stanica in Žilina² and their work for the Center for Contemporary Arts in Bratislava³, it was not immediately obvious that these emerging proponents of independent and alternative artistic production would wish to become involved in the lengthy and often tiresome task of cultural policy reform in their country. Nevertheless, the ongoing engagement of these arts managers in developing innovative and new forms of cultural provision in their Slovak working environments had presented them with a challenge which the ECF had already been addressing for a number of years with its Policies for Culture programme for South East Europe.⁴ While newly created art initiatives and NGOs started to flourish there and to attract new young audiences (as well as foreign partners, collaborators and donors), the still distant, semi-Olympian transitional public administrations often failed to provide much room for these emerging cultural players and activists. This problem also involved public-funded cultural institutions, which continued to consume most of the funds available while newly emerging players in the independent scene often failed to attract a share of the ever-diminishing public budgets for culture. It became necessary to establish an open dialogue in which all affected stakeholders could discuss these issues. Such a dialogue, if successfully established and sustained at all the political, professional and civic levels concerned, would ultimately ensure better working conditions for the independent cultural scene. At the same time public institutions (and administrations) would benefit from the fresh artistic energy, organizational skills and European contacts brought to this dialogue by newly emerging cultural activists in their cities and regions. The Policies for Culture programme facilitated these new dynamics across South East Europe, especially at the level of city and local administration. Action projects supported in this framework ultimately should have resulted in the official parliamentary adoption of a new local cultural policy document embracing the shared

_____ www.eurocult.org
 _____ www.stanica.sk
 _____ www.ncsu.sk
 _____ www.policiesforculture.org

ideas, needs and visions of all players in the field of local culture (cities, municipalities, regions): in other words, ‘consultative’ or ‘participatory policymaking’.

_____ The Žilina initiative described in this case study had exactly such plans, but in a slightly different environment. Involvement in a local cultural policy-making process in Slovakia was a new endeavour for the European Cultural Foundation in many senses:

_____ It was the first long-term local cultural policymaking project the European Cultural Foundation had undertaken outside of South East Europe and in a transitional country which had only just joined the European Union when the project started. This had a profound impact on the overall development of the external project environment. At the project’s inception in 2004, many areas of the Žilina region were still considered somewhat remote and predominantly rural, outside the economic boom zone around the capital Bratislava. Since then large foreign investments around the region’s capital city Žilina and the economic progress experienced by the main towns in other parts of the region have provided an increasingly dynamic backdrop to the project and facilitated greater openness to change in the cultural field. This is all the more the case as the cultural and natural assets of the Žilina landscape also offer alternative local potential that can be tapped into by developing cultural tourism. Such plans, however, required first and foremost the development of a joint strategic approach and reforms in the existing regional policy set-up for culture. Again the project also benefitted in this respect from coinciding with Slovakia’s first years within the European Union. The long period of negotiations and preparation for membership had already created a favourable atmosphere for reflecting on a radical overhaul of policy systems and the introduction of up-to-date forms of public administration, not least in the field of culture.

_____ The transformation processes initiated by the local project partners in Žilina and Bratislava were also greatly facilitated by another novelty in the organizational project set-up on behalf of the European Cultural Foundation. It was the first time that the foundation carried out one of its local cultural policymaking projects in a multi-annual private-public partnership with an external governmental funding programme. The support of the Social Transformation Programme (MATRA) of the Netherlands’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs was essential not only in terms of financial input but also as regards its content orientation on post-socialist transformation processes.

Its governmental status also provided the Žilina initiative with an important ‘foreign policy’ back-up from another EU country.

_____ ‘Cultural Policy from Amsterdam to Žilina’ was the first project in Slovakia to try to engage all stakeholders of a self-governing region in a participatory process of creating and adopting a completely new cultural policy framework. At the outset of the project it was not at all clear that the initiative would reach its ultimate goal of jointly developing a shared new vision of cultural development and administration in the regions and officially passing a reform-oriented policy document through the regional parliament. The aim of the project was not to produce a document compiled by professional policy writers, which at worst would end up in some public administration filing cabinet and never be consulted. It was rather to establish a local working group comprising representatives of the key cultural organisations in the region (both from the public-funded and the independent/private sector) and the local administrations responsible for culture (Žilina regional self-government and municipalities) which would then jointly discuss priorities to be addressed by the new policy document and subsequently draft the various chapters themselves. In the transitional realities of Central and Eastern Europe where the different professional levels concerned are not yet accustomed to interacting and working together, this objective represented the principal challenge for the project. A first step in successfully addressing this challenge was the sustainable re-establishment of personal contacts among cultural managers of the key cultural organisations in the region. Providing new opportunities to meet in a professional context (workshops) and facilitating discussion with colleagues in the field over the years gave rise to a powerful platform of professionals. This platform more than once survived political turmoil and changes in the public administration (e.g. after local elections) in the course of the project, and ensured that the process continued towards its ultimate goal.

_____ On October 30, 2007 the policy document, which had been prepared by the local working group over a period of almost two years, was finally adopted in the parliamentary assembly of the Žilina regional self-government amply supported by a sizeable majority of all the parties represented. The 160 pages of the adopted policy paper now provide a legally binding basis for all future cultural development measures in the region and propose a number of ground-breaking reforms in the public administration of culture in Žilina, such as the establishment of a Council for Culture and the introduction of an independently awarded grants programme. Žilina is the first

region in Slovakia to adopt a cultural development strategy which has been drawn up and endorsed by both the cultural sector and the politicians. This has meant that the ultimate goal of the project has been reached. Its most important legacy in the region, however, will probably be to have re-united and strengthened the professionals that make up Žilina's creative sector – and to have engaged them with policy-making at the local level. It is also the cultural managers and creative professionals living and operating in the region who will be ultimately responsible for the challenging implementation of all the policy measures proposed in the adopted document. The adoption of the policy document provides the sector with essential technical back-up for their work. Ultimately, however, it is the sector itself which in close cooperation with the local administrations now has to bring alive the strategic priorities set there. The project's successful recreation of communication and working links between all the local players concerned will certainly help to safeguard and cement initial successes.

_____ The adoption of a thoroughly participatory, elaborated local cultural policy for the Žilina region has already attracted a lot of attention not only in Slovakia but also in cities and regions of the neighbouring countries that are facing similar transitional challenges. The case study presented here – intended for the other self-governing regions of Slovakia, future local cultural policy development projects in Eastern Europe, and the European expert readership – introduces the most important project steps which have shaped this process.

Philipp Dietachmair

Senior Programme Officer, European Cultural Foundation

Introduction

Žilina – the colour of European Slovakia

_____ Today's Slovakia is a multi-ethnic country made up of distinct geographical regions displaying significant economic differences. The Žilina region lies in North-West Slovakia and consists of five smaller zones each with its own history, natural beauty and socio-economic condition. At present the region is still underdeveloped and has a high rate of unemployment. However, it occupies a strategic position vis-à-vis the recent enlargement of the European Union, as it lies where Slovakia borders Poland and the Czech Republic. Žilina is thus a natural 'Euro region' with great cultural potential.

Cultural Policy from Amsterdam to Žilina – The Project and its Aim

_____ The project Cultural Policy from Amsterdam to Žilina was launched immediately after the entry of Slovakia into the European Union (2004). It was conceived as a three-year project beginning with an analysis of the cultural sector and the existing cultural assets in the Žilina region (2004 - 2005). This was followed by a training programme for local key stakeholders and the elaboration of a concrete local plan for cultural development (2006 - 2007). The final outcome was the political endorsement of the plan within a new cultural policy for the Žilina region (2007).

_____ The three-year project was a joint enterprise of the Slovak Foundation – Center for Contemporary Art and the European Cultural Foundation in Amsterdam. It was carried out in cooperation with the Department of Culture at the Office of the Žilina self-governing region (SGR)³, with the financial support of the Social Transformation Programme (MATRA) of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

_____ The project was based on experience of the European Cultural Foundation's Policies for Culture programme in South East Europe and included policy experts and capacity trainers from the programme's international network. The region of Žilina is the first case where the Policies for Culture programme principle of civic participation in the development of local cultural policy was tested in the context of the enlarged European Union.

_____ ³ Žilina SGR - Žilina Self-governing Region, www.zask.sk

_____ The main aim of the Cultural Policy from Amsterdam to Žilina project was to initiate a comprehensive process related to the development and implementation of the principles of strategic planning in cultural policy-making so as to provide the citizens of the region of Žilina with diversity, quality and availability of cultural activities.

The phases of the project

_____ The project consisted of three phases: research, methodology and implementation. At each phase it addressed all regional and local organisations in the region of Žilina and analysed, initiated and implemented the processes related to the development of regional/local cultural policy. The work was carried out as a joint enterprise of Slovak and international experts.

_____ The new participative approach that governed the project involved cultural organisations in the region with different legal forms (public funded institutions, NGOs, private cultural enterprises) and statements of mission (e.g. theatres, museums, cultural heritage sites, public libraries, contemporary art centres, youth culture centres, etc.); everyone was invited to cooperate with the respective bodies of the regional government administration, and was expected to take part in the preparation of the new concept of cultural policy and its subsequent implementation.

_____ The project also offered a number of other activities. Managers of cultural institutions and decision-making bodies of the Žilina region were invited to take part in further training sessions, including workshops, debates and conferences, a study trip to the Netherlands as well as a local grant scheme for financing pilot projects supporting the new regional development strategy.

Outputs of the Project

_____ The project focused on changes in the system of cultural policy-making in the region of Žilina with three main outputs:

_____ An outline of the concept of cultural policy for the Žilina self-governing region;

_____ A functioning cultural network of top representatives of the public administration, organisations and individuals (artists and professionals). The network provides access

to information, cooperation and participation in the form of a dialogue and activities;

A strategic cultural policy document

Thus, on 30 October 2007, a large majority of deputies from all political parties represented in the Regional Assembly of the Self-Governing Region of Žilina in North West Slovakia voted in favour of a new cultural development strategy for the entire region. The new long-term strategy was presented in the policy document Strategy for cultural development in the Žilina self-governing region: From cultural values to the value of culture and triggered a fundamental reform in cultural policy-making in Žilina. The policy document now serves as a reference point for similar projects on cultural development in the remaining seven administrative regions of Slovakia.

The project team

The project team was made up of an international body of policy experts, capacity trainers, consultants on cultural issues, programme directors and cultural activists. Principally:

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Mgr. Kristína Paulenová

The European Cultural Foundation, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

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Mgr. Martin Bausová, sociologist, Prague, the Czech Republic

Peter M. Schreiber, consultant, the Netherlands

Dr. Cas Smithuijsen, Boekman Foundation, the Netherlands

Prof. Dr. Giep Hagoort, University of Utrecht, the Netherlands

Dr. Andrea Zlatař, University of Zagreb, Croatia

Corina Suteu, Romania

The project's implementation

Preparation

_____ The project began with the team of experts dividing up the areas of art to cover the material or tangible cultural heritage such as buildings and monuments and the immaterial or intangible cultural heritage such as traditional and contemporary living culture and arts. The team also included a sociologist, since the preparation of the concept required extensive background research in the area of the project and subsequent analysis of results.

_____ By way of preparation, research team experts developed an overview of cultural policies of different European countries. To a selection of the countries they applied the criterion of 'similar systems' and took into account the possibilities of the implementation of some tools of cultural policy used in other countries. The experts also developed a study of the socio-cultural potential of the region of Žilina (demographic development of the region, ethnic structure, religious affiliation, economic potential, unemployment, and educational structure of inhabitants of the region).

_____ The contributions of Dutch experts served as a basis for the activities carried out within the project, notably within its methodological section. These included:

_____ An overview of training needs in the countries of Eastern Europe carried out on the basis of long-standing experience (especially the definition of needs for skills and knowledge).

_____ An analysis of the process of creation of the Dutch model of cultural policy (focused on the people involved, and the positive and negative aspects of the model).

_____ The team of experts analysed individual models of cultural policy and basing themselves on the study of the region of Žilina, indicated possible directions for the future. The relevant materials are available on a DVD accompanying this project presentation, together with the complete policy document adopted and the present case study.

Research

_____ One of the greatest problems faced by the researchers was the absence of any databases of cultural organisations (of different legal form), cultural activities or leading figures in the field of culture. The experts therefore began by defining the distinct areas making up the region. They opted to stick to the existing five regions: Horné Považie, Turiec, Kysuce, Orava, and Liptov. The preliminary sociological study indicated that there are not only deep economic disparities among the regions but also different cultural developments. This is best demonstrated by the non-governmental non-profit organisations (NGOs) established as independent initiatives: NGOs are highly concentrated in Horné Považie and Liptov, while in Kysuce their number is very limited. Of equal importance to the field of culture is the discovery that 'living culture' is concentrated mostly in the centres of individual regions (Žilina, Dolný Kubín, Čadca, Liptovský Mikuláš, Martin), whilst the same cannot be said of 'material culture', i.e. the tangible cultural heritage.

'Cultural events, cultural activities, cultural people, cultural heritage, cultural country, all of this is a potential which can be used for the further operation and development of culture in the region of Žilina. There is a potential for the establishment of new non-governmental and voluntary organisations which could focus on the issue of the protection and active presentation of the historical environment and cultural monuments of the region of Žilina. Currently there are only few of them...'

M. Chalupová (project expert / Executive Director of the National Trust, Bratislava)

_____ The project team drew on a variety of sources to compile a database of the existing cultural organisations, activities and leaders. This was crucial for ensuring the future of the project as it provided the necessary base for the application of the 'bottom-up' principle.

_____ The database was created on the basis of information from the following sources:

Department of Culture at the Office of the Žilina SGR:
databases of public funded organisations in the field
of culture operating in the region of Žilina;

- ████████ Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic: selection from among the recent grantees of the Ministry in the Žilina region;
- ████████ Foreign cultural institutes and centres: selection from among the grantees;
- ████████ Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic: selection from among the recipients of the 2% tax assignment;
- ████████ Trust programme: selection from among the grantees;
- ████████ Centres of public education: cultural activities of each region, lists of amateur artists;
- ████████ Self-government of towns in the region: lists of cultural activities and organisations promoted by self-government;
- ████████ Truc Sphérique, Liptov Community Foundation: databases of non-profit cultural organisations in the region;
- ████████ Folkloric Union of Slovakia: database of folkloric ensembles in the region;
- ████████ Personal connections.

_____ The monitoring of the region indicated the areas where already ongoing isolated cultural activities could potentially benefit from more cooperation. What became apparent was the need for more activities across the borders of individual regions and for further collaboration in shared projects.

_____ After the creation of a regional cultural database, the experts prepared the research methodology and identified the aims of the research part of the project, namely the collection of data which will provide information on the cultural potential of the five individual regions. The team divided the research project into three main stages:

- ████████ Structured interviews
- ████████ SWOT analysis
- ████████ Audience survey

Structured interviews

_____ The initial stage included the collection of data through in-depth **structured interviews**. The experts from the research team interviewed 47 respondents from 44 organisations. The interviews were based on a questionnaire developed by the experts. The sample was first selected according to the following very general criteria:

- _____ Organisations focused on culture
- _____ Organisations operating in the region of Žilina

_____ Based on previous professional contacts and personal experience, a number of organisations in the region of Žilina were selected according to their modes of operation, orientation, target groups, as well as the commonly shared problems. The sample therefore includes a wide range of various types of cultural organisations: galleries, museums, dance groups, theatres, libraries, as well as municipal authorities, foundations, civil associations, centres of public education, etc.

All the experts made their own selection whilst aiming to preserve the diversity of:

- _____ The type of establishing authority (state, funded by public allowance, private, independent)
- _____ The hierarchy (national, regional, local)
- _____ Art professionalism (professional, amateur)
- _____ The status of interviewees (managers, decision-makers, experts, activists)

_____ Given the complexity of conducting interviews according to a set questionnaire, in some cases the experts had to adapt the structure and the formulation of some of the questions to suit the respondents. The consistency of individual answers has also been influenced by the different approach adapted to individual respondents. Despite the fact that sometimes the team did not receive a clear answer to the set questions, the material provides a lot of interesting and valuable data. In many cases the interviews (sometimes lasting for four or five hours) assumed the character of expert consultancy and came up with ideas for the direction that educational activities need to take in the future.

_____ The questionnaire consisted of eight basic topics:

- _____ Current state of the cultural sector
- _____ Legislative / regulatory framework (environment)
- _____ Current state of strategic thinking
- _____ Current state of funding
- _____ Professional approaches
- _____ Audience development
- _____ Possibilities of further education
- _____ Partnerships

_____ The topic of funding included most sub-categories (e.g. general evaluation, forms of support, diversification of income, business activities etc.). Since the funding of culture is one of the most serious issues, the team of experts needed to gather as much information and data as possible on this particular topic.

SWOT analyses

_____ Alongside the interviews, a **SWOT analysis** was used to map the region. The analysis was carried out by individual members of the team of experts on the basis of their experience from the region (interviews, visits to cultural events, activities, organisations, etc.).

_____ The interviewed entities according to the establishing authority were as follows:

- _____ The organisational unit of a national institution promoted by the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic (KPÚ¹ Žilina)
- _____ Institutions promoted by the Žilina SGR
- _____ Institutions promoted by the town (municipality)
- _____ Civil associations and other forms of NGOs with legal status
- _____ Informal associations and entities without legal status
- _____ Local self-governing authorities
- _____ Private companies and facilities
- _____ Individuals (individual artists)

_____ KPÚ – Regional Cultural Heritage Office

_____ The interviewed entities in terms of content of their cultural input were as follows:

- _____ Cultural Heritage Office – organisational unit (1 entity)
- _____ NGOs (5 entities) + private company (1 entity)
in the field of cultural heritage
- _____ Theatre companies (7 entities)
- _____ Folk ensembles (3 entities)
- _____ Museums, galleries, artistic activities (12 entities)
- _____ Libraries (1 entity)
- _____ Self-governments, local authorities (5 entities)
- _____ Local cultural centres and centres of public education
(3 entities)
- _____ Church choir (1 entity)
- _____ Other NGOs, foundations, individuals (5 entities)

_____ The summary of the partial SWOT analyses (carried out by individual experts) showed a considerable predominance of common attributes (profiled attributes) and a smaller number of specific attributes for individual areas. The prevailing common weaknesses indicated the areas addressed by the project where there is a clear need for further training.

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1.2.3

Audience survey

_____ The third instrument in the research phase of the project was the **audience survey**. The survey was conducted by the FOCUS agency, Bratislava based on a questionnaire composed by a team of experts within the framework of a regular omnibus survey on a sample of 132 respondents from the region of Žilina. The sample was representative in terms of gender, age, education, income, and municipality size. The respondents were asked two questions as follows:⁷

- _____ Read the list of popular leisure time activities and arrange them in order of preference: i.e. put your favourite activity first, then your second, third and so on.

_____ When selecting leisure time activities, we deliberately used various types of activities including watching TV, listening to the radio, going to dances, parties, fairs and festivals, etc. This variability made it possible to point out those cultural activities (offered by the organisations in the region) which are not among the most available and most interesting to the public. In the case of the second question we opted for answers given on the scale of 1 to 6 to avoid the predominance of 'I don't know' as an answer.

██████████ To what extent are you satisfied with the range of cultural activities available in your area?

_____ The survey revealed many interesting responses. Out of the top five leisure time activities the favourite is watching TV with 80% of respondents having listed this among their favourites; this was followed by 59% of respondents enjoying reading books more than any other activity; 41% of respondents put 'being creative' in their top five favourites, followed by going to entertainments, to pubs and parties, sightseeing, being active in a club or an association, going to the cinema, to fairs and festivals, and surfing the web. Less common were activities offering culture of higher value, such as going to the theatre (11% of respondents), going to concerts (10%), going to museums (7%) and going to art galleries (5%). Of course, the state of affairs is partially influenced by the fact that watching TV and listening to the radio are by far the most common activities.

_____ The top five leisure time activities of people living in towns include reading books, surfing the web, being active in a club, visits to the theatre, to concerts, attending courses, and sightseeing. Respondents living in the country usually mentioned watching TV, going to dances and parties, going to entertainments, going to the cinema and pubs, and participating in church activities. This result reflects the fact that respondents living in towns have more opportunities to participate in cultural activities than respondents living in smaller municipalities and more rural areas.

_____ The top five leisure time activities most often mentioned by women included reading books, listening to the radio, visiting entertainments, going to the theatre and to the cinema, going to fairs, and taking part in competitions. The men most commonly mentioned activities in clubs, surfing the web, sightseeing and going to the pub.

_____ Younger respondents most frequently stated going to dances and parties and surfing the web as their favourite leisure time activities. Compared to the other age groups, the middle-aged generation most frequently chose engaging in their own creativity and reading books as their favourite activities. The older generation preferred watching TV and listening to the radio.

_____ The respondents living in households with a monthly income of up to 14,000 SKK stated their main leisure time occupation as listening

to the radio and watching TV (this group is predominantly made up of the older generation and pensioners). The respondents living in households with monthly incomes exceeding 20,000 SKK most frequently mentioned surfing the web and reading books as their preferred activity.

_____ In total, as many as 34% of respondents were rather dissatisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the range of cultural activities available in their area. The category 'rather dissatisfied' includes men, respondents from the younger and middle-aged generations and respondents from households with a monthly income exceeding 14,000 SKK.

_____ The findings disclosed the potential of future audiences and 'consumers' of culture and may be useful for designing more interesting, attractive and high-quality cultural activities for all citizens in the region of Žilina. More detailed results of the survey are available on the DVD attached to this study.

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1.3

Participation

_____ In order to apply the principle of participation it was important to involve as many entities as possible in the process of creating a new model of cultural policy. The group, therefore, proceeded to organise discussions in each of the five individual regions. The following were invited to take part:

- _____ Representatives of cultural organisations (public financed, non-profit and private organisations);
- _____ Members of regional and local self-governments;
- _____ Mayors of towns and municipalities;
- _____ Employees of the Department of Culture in the Žilina SGR;
- _____ Independent cultural activists;
- _____ Representatives of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic;
- _____ Administrative officers of the Department of Culture at the Office of Žilina SGR;
- _____ Organisations and initiatives operating in other regions with a close relation to culture (e.g. art schools, leisure centres, regional development agencies);
- _____ Representatives of the media.

_____ The discussions aimed at collecting data from the whole region and analysing the general opportunities and problems for cultural development that arose. At the same time, all participants were invited to cooperate in the creation of a common document which would set out and compare the characteristics of specific regions (inherent problems, people involved, and existing solutions).

_____ The discussions addressed all the main areas for future development and helped to identify potential members of a team engaged in the creation of a new cultural policy for the region. People felt motivated to participate in the educational part of the project and also enriched it by supplying information on already existing or prepared concepts of cultural development from their own towns and municipalities. As with the structured interview, the focus of the discussions was on the following topics:⁸

1. The place of culture in the region (What is the place of culture in society? Is culture given its due in the regional strategy for future development?) To answer these questions the research group examined the degree of integration of culture, as well as the perception of the importance of strategy for culture, into the plans of regional development.

2. Public interest in cultural events in the region (Are people interested in culture? What percentage attends cultural events? Which activities are most attractive for the audience? Are these activities necessary and meaningful to the public? What is the best policy for attracting viewers/visitors?) The research group examined the level of the audience and cultural potential of the region, the programming of activities, and the level of PR and marketing of organisations.

3. Cooperation in the field of culture in the region (Has your experience of cooperation/co-organisation of cultural activities been positive? Has your experience of international cooperation been positive?) The group examined the interconnection between individual activities, the increasing importance of openness to cooperation, and the willingness to join together activities sharing the same focus and objective.

_____ The succession of individual topics for the discussion was selected deliberately. The issue of funding for culture was placed at the end to avoid the discussion being focused exclusively on the lack of funds in culture, which is by no means the only problem and is often related to a lack of initiative on the part of the organisations themselves, especially in the area of work with the audience, presentation, cooperation, etc.

4. Funding of culture in the region (How is your organisation supported financially? What do you think would help you to improve, preserve or solve your financial difficulties?) The group took a close look at the variety of funds available and potential sources of funding – all ideas were put on the table: the realistic ones and the optimistic ones. They also shared their experiences of formulating funding proposals.

_____ With the help of the database prepared at the outset of the project, the research group was able to post invitations to a significant number of institutions, organisations and individuals. As the list of potential participants grew, more were also invited by phone: and to every new participant a member of the group presented the aims and the importance of the newly proposed common platform on cultural policy.

_____ Feedback from the participants in the discussions clearly highlighted the importance of the undertaking. The event provided a forum for organisations in the region of different legal status to meet together for the first time in a common endeavour. All participants felt inspired by the unique contributions that were made to the topics of discussion and by the different experiences that each individual organisation was able to share with the others. This encouraged the leaders in the field of culture to take part in the process of creating a model of cultural policy for the Žilina SGR. A proposal to set up a series of meetings for ‘organisers’ of cultural events and regional activities and for ‘decision-makers’ was met with approval. Subsequently, such meetings took place with the cooperation of all the local self-governing authorities. The level of the contributions to these meetings indicated how much the parties involved felt the interest of local self-governments in using the ‘bottom-up’ approach for the creation of new cultural strategies.

_____ The conclusions of the discussions were similar to the outputs of the SWOT analysis and the structured interviews. The issues of public interest and cooperation brought new areas of reflection which facilitated the specification of the educational part of the project and indicated the necessary steps to take for the preparation of a new document on cultural policy. The discussions highlighted the need to create new activities which would include all types of institutions. To this end, a new grant system opened to different types of entities was frequently mentioned as a suitable tool. The participants also commented on the need to disseminate more ‘positive examples’, so as to apply collective pressure on decision-makers, and facilitate mutual cooperation.

‘The programme also increased the awareness of NGOs operating in the region and participating in culture. The Žilina SGR and institutions promoted by the Žilina SGR started openly discussing the issue of increasing the effectiveness of work in culture.

Approval of the document will open new possibilities for the funding of culture for NGOs.’

J. Jakubčíaková (project participant, Executive Director of Liptov Community Foundation)

‘I think that the project organisers succeeded in involving the most significant institutions, organisations and individuals in the region of Žilina, those which create culture, participate in culture, protect culture, are responsible for culture, live on culture, simply anyone and everyone who has something to do with culture. They managed to get hold of the ‘right’ people... It is important that the participants of the project share their experience with others.’

M. Chalupová (project expert / Executive Director of the National Trust, Bratislava)

Education

- Training courses
- Seminars
- Conferences
- Study visit

_____ After the research, the next step in the implementation phase of the project was to design an educational programme. The findings of the research served as the basis for the development of the educational models included in the programme. The models reflected the personal experience of participants as well as the results of the discussions in the regions. One theme that resonated throughout the entire educational cycle was the need for further training in cultural management for all leaders of cultural institutions. The educational cycle was divided into training courses, seminars, conferences and study visits.

Trainings

_____ The team of experts opted for beginning the educational programme with practice-oriented workshop sessions. This was considered to



be the most suitable form of interactive education offering each participant the possibility of working on their own project. The sessions were intended for all organisations operating in the field of culture in the region of Žilina. Experts in various fields of cultural management from Slovakia, Hungary and the Netherlands were invited to lead the sessions. There were two target groups involved: directors of cultural organisations and key managers of cultural organisations. The sessions for directors focused mainly on the areas of management necessary for any leader of an institution: governance, communication, strategic thinking, financial strategies, cultural policy, regional development, and cooperation within the EU. The sessions for managers dealt with strategic planning, financial management, communication skills, fundraising, and audience development.

_____ All participants in the training cycle learned how to create their own corporate strategy, and acquired further knowledge and skills for the effective management of their own cultural institutions. They received first-hand experience and were inspired by the trainers' focus on international cooperation, which is so important for regional development in Žilina. Of particular value for all participants was the comparison of theory and practice, the condensation of practice-oriented knowledge, the exchange of experience and the constructive conflict of opinions. Since the focus of the



training process was interactive, participants also exercised their communication, presentation and group work skills. The high number of real-life examples presented facilitated the translation of taught theory into practical implementation.

‘The project revealed unknown treasures which clearly needed to be displayed for the enjoyment of the public; it brought together people who, sharing the same profession, did not know one another, and revealed hidden cultural activities and interesting places. I think that participants were surprised to discover what actually happens in their own area, what interesting cultural activities are organised by their ‘neighbours’. All this came to the surface during the creation of the cultural profile of the region. It turned out that the diversity of cultural activities already happening presented by the participants surprised almost everybody!’ Anonymous trainee.

‘In general I can evaluate the training sessions very positively. I acquired a great deal of new knowledge which I can use in my work. I am looking forward to the next meeting.’

Anonymous trainee

‘The training enriched me, and broadened my horizons; I mainly appreciated the work in groups, the creative work.’

Anonymous trainee

‘The training course was of a high standard, the knowledge acquired there can be used in the work of any cultural organisation to improve its operation.’

Anonymous trainee

‘A lot of new information in a short period of time.’

Anonymous trainee

‘What I missed was better cooperation between the Slovak team and the Dutch experts. I would have liked more regular meetings especially with the experts in the field of cultural heritage.’

Anonymous trainee

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1.4.2

Seminars

_____ Alongside the workshop sessions, the educational programme included classical training seminars on issues indicated by the preliminary research as requiring further opportunities for the exchange of ideas, discussion and debate. Among these the most important were **fundraising** and **audience development**. The invitation to the seminars extended to everyone involved in the artistic field and in the field of culture in general.

1.4.3

Conference

_____ The **‘Cultural Policy and the Regions in Slovakia’** conference organised after the first project year was conceived as a unifying platform for cultural organisations, cultural administrators and decision-making bodies. The aim was to initiate a discussion on the importance of cultural policy and on the necessity to apply this policy on all levels (national, regional, local). The international participation in the conference raised awareness of the existence of the project. The contributions reflected on pressing issues relating to the creation and implementation of the new cultural policy on national, regional and local levels, as well as on the interconnections between individual levels of cultural policy.

_____ Another aspect of the conference was the presentation of a variety of interesting models of cultural and artistic activity from the region of Žilina and the European countries which participated in the event. The focus



of reflection was put on the current social situation and on the needs of the general public, and the two were presented in a highly innovative manner.

_____ The most debated issues at the conference included:

- _____ The different visions of state cultural policy, in particular in the area of legislation, functional and transparent models of funding;
- _____ The necessity of synchronising national, regional and local cultural policy;
- _____ The need for communication between individual fields of art and culture as well as for opportunities for dialogue among cultural organisations and politicians, representatives of individual levels of self-government.

_____ The presentations of innovative solutions in the field of art and culture served as an inspiration for many individual cultural and art institutions. Innovative solutions were seen as initiating a higher participation of the public in cultural activities and in the improvement of the position of culture within social and economic development, within towns, municipalities or regions.



_____ A video documentation outlining ten already existing innovative activities in the field of culture in the region of Žilina was also presented at the conference and is now available on the DVD accompanying this study.

‘We need both, the sophisticated cultural policies and a high culture of politics, because effective cultural policy may only be created in an atmosphere of trust and interaction, which creates mutual respect for the specific requirements and development ideas of the cultural sector and the political arena.’
‘Culture will survive all politicians and politics will survive without culture, but together they may improve the life of each other.’

M. Šmatlák (Expert, The Academy of Dramatic Arts and Music, Bratislava.

_____ The first project conference introduced the final part of the project, namely the preparation of a new concept of cultural policy for the Žilina self-governing region. The most interesting contributions presented at the conference are available on the DVD attached to this study.

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1.4.4

Study visit

_____ In addition to the afore-mentioned activities, the project included a **study visit** to the Netherlands. Thirty participants were selected from all



areas of the Žilina region: cultural leaders, decision-makers and representatives of the Office of Žilina SGR. The overall participant list comprised directors and managers of regional and local NGOs, of cultural organisations in the performing arts (visual arts, local cultural centres, libraries, media), and members of the Žilina parliament and cultural committee, headed by the director of the the Office of Žilina SGR.

_____ Visiting various Dutch cultural organisations, the Slovak participants were able to gain first-hand knowledge of Dutch management, organisation and decision-making practices in the field of arts and culture. Local and regional cultural policies inspired and motivated the Slovak guests to think of ways of improving the cultural management in their own organisations. Moreover, sharing Dutch know-how and experience had a positive impact on the Slovak representatives inspiring them to create and implement a common cultural policy for the Žilina region. At the same time, the Slovak representatives acquired new contacts for future cooperation with their hosts in Holland.

_____ The five-day visit was well organised to cater for the interests of the Žilina cultural leaders and decision-makers. The group visited different types of organisations (NGOs, local and regional organisations, a city hall, libraries and private organisations) active in different areas of culture



especially in the field of performing and visual arts. In total, the representatives visited 12 institutions and listened to 20 presentations by members of organisations and projects about cultural policy on the local, regional and state level and day-to-day management of Dutch cultural organisations. The majority of the presentations were from organisations outside of the big cities in the Netherlands so the size, the position and the (partly rural) background of the organisations were similar in profile and capacity to those of the Žilina region.

_____ The questions most frequently asked by the Slovak guests concerned the financing of cultural policy in the Netherlands and the everyday management of organisations (including applications for grants and fundraising in general). Other themes touched upon during the discussions included: audience development, cultural partnerships, and educational and organisational sustainability.

_____ Crucial in developing the concept of cultural policy in Žilina is the fact that the decision-makers and representatives of the Office of Žilina SGR have now seen how Dutch cultural policy progresses in practice. This will help the future formation, decision-making process and implementation of the policy in the Žilina region.

_____ Feedback from the study visit was very positive. Participants commented on the inspiration they received from the case studies presented in the Netherlands as well as from the possibility of continuing the exchange of ideas and contact with other colleagues in the field. The direct impact of the visit was that some of the Dutch ideas inspired Slovak cultural leaders to cooperate more closely in their respective regions and to take a more active role in designing new cultural projects. One example of this was the submission of joint project applications to the main project's 'grant programme for cooperation' in the implementation phase that followed.

Cooperation

_____ The 'grant programme for cooperation' was probably the most important tool of the whole project and the catalyst to motivate organisations to create common projects and to initiate long-term cooperation with each other. The launching of the 'grant programme for cooperation' came after the completion of the educational part of the project and the study visit to the Netherlands. The timing of this was by no means accidental; on the contrary, it first needed relevant knowledge and skills to be acquired (project management), personal experience, inspiration (gained by the visit to the Netherlands), as well as the establishment of personal contacts (workshop sessions) in order to be effective and successful in achieving its objective.

_____ Its success was clearly visible from the number of grant applications first received and by the high quality of projects which eventually received financial support (11 projects in total).

'During the three-year programme, the participants established firm partnerships and they are now beginning to implement many common projects.' J. Jakubčíaková (project participant, Executive Director of Liptov Community Foundation).

_____ Rather disappointingly, however, no international or cross-border cooperation projects applied for funding, even though the programme was deliberately focused on supporting the preparation of projects with an outreach to the European neighbourhood. The seeming lack of interest in international projects may be the result of residual fears over responsibility for large projects, the inability to prepare the required documentation, the lack of language skills or simply insufficient contacts abroad and these issues have to be further tackled in the future.

Evaluation

_____ The structure and focus of each individual project activity were complementary but different and the outcome of each was distinct. Individual project activities were designed to meet a number of smaller project objectives and at the same time to contribute to the overall goal and success of the project – the adoption of a new cultural policy document in the regional parliament. All the activities that took place over the three years of the duration of the project fulfilled their specific aim, although the implementation phase was often hampered by external problems which for example could only be solved with the help of additional data such as could be provided by the database of cultural organisations – especially the identification of non-governmental organisations operating in the region and of new potential leaders to get involved in local policy development processes.

_____ The placement of the educational part of the project (training sessions, seminars and the study visit to the Netherlands) before the launching of the grant programme, turned out to be very effective. The grant programme thus demonstrated the success of the educational part of the project. The projects submitted for consideration for funding directly reflected the ‘Dutch’ inspiration. However, their form and content was an indication of the successful outcome of the strictly local educational process (e.g. in the area of project management).

_____ The launching of the more intensive intersectoral cooperation across the region can be considered a further area of significant success. It was made visible on many levels by:

- _____ Direct mutual inspiration (through positive examples);
- _____ The willingness to promote shared cultural interests on the level of self-governments (regional and local);
- _____ The new tools put forward in the policy document outlining the new strategic concept of cultural administration in the region

_____ Due to this succession of activities the project team was able to constitute a functional working group whose members promoted the interests of individual areas of culture and the legal status of organisations in the creation of the concept of cultural policy for the Žilina SGR.

‘The experience acquired during the implementation of this project and during the preparation of the document is priceless and applied in practice it moved our work forward.’

J. Jakubčíaková (project participant, Executive Director of Liptov Community Foundation).

2. The cultural policy document

2.1

Preparation

‘Though many cultural managers are often wrapped-up in their own problems and less aware of the broader context, during the implementation of the project it became evident that it is actually more efficient to resolve common problems in cooperation with colleagues working in the various other fields of culture.’

M. Chalupová (project expert / Executive Director of the National Trust, Bratislava).

_____ The new concept of cultural policy of the region of Žilina was drawn up by a working group comprising representatives of different types of cultural organisations in cooperation with a team of experts, administrative officers of the Department of Culture at the Office of Žilina SGR and of members of the Commission on Culture of the Žilina SGR. Their work was based on information and material:

- _____ Acquired through the research phase of the project;
- _____ Provided by the department of culture;
- _____ Provided by local self-governments;
- _____ From other relevant sources.

_____ The process also included two workshops attended by the members of the Dutch project team. The aim of the workshops was to find the right set of tools to translate the vision of cultural policy acquired become a reality. The practical experience provided by the Dutch experience was particularly helpful in the implementation process in the following ways:

- _____ Restructuring of state administration in the field of culture;
- _____ Egalitarian approach towards cultural institutions and independent initiatives;
- _____ Possibilities of funding of cultural organisations;
- _____ Self-regulation of the cultural sector;
- _____ Effectiveness and impact assessment, evaluation;
- _____ Creative industry;
- _____ Responsibility and role of the government in culture;



_____ The final project activity concluding the stakeholder working group's preparation phase for the new cultural policy document but also concluding the main project phase as well, was a further conference in the building of the Žilina SRG. The aim of the 'Regional Cultural Policy – Initiatives & Approaches to its Creation' conference held on 25 October 2007 was to present the newly compiled cultural policy document (and the whole participatory process that led to its creation) to local decision-makers, colleagues and the public but also to introduce the strategy paper to representatives of other regions in Slovakia as a possible means for initiating culture-based regional development in their hometowns and municipalities. The conference also discussed possible links between regional and municipal strategies, using the tools proposed in the strategy document.

The strategic document

_____ As the final result of months of extensive cooperation between all individual members of the regional stakeholder working group an extensive cultural policy document entitled Strategy for cultural development in the Žilina self-governing region: From cultural values to the value of culture was adopted by the parliamentary assembly of the Žilina regional self-gover-

nment on 30 October 2007. The strategic contents of this policy document are strictly based on the survey analysing the conditions and the potential of culture in the region of Žilina realised at the beginning of the project. The adopted policy paper includes strategic development measures which cover the following topics in relation to cultural life and administration in Žilina:

- Historical, cultural and geographic specifics;
- Cultural heritage;
- Cultural activities of regional importance;
- Socio-cultural potential of the Žilina SGR;
- Results of surveys – state of culture in the Žilina SGR;
- The most significant advantages and disadvantages of the relationship between the Žilina SGR as an establishing authority and its cultural organisations;
- Conceptual tools of cultural policy in the Žilina SGR;
- Culture from the point of view of effecting self-governance and managing activities of the Žilina SGR;
- An overview of the generally binding legal regulations at the level of the Žilina SGR related to the field of culture;
- The most serious problems faced by artists and promoters of culture;
- Financial sources for cultural activities;
- An overview and brief evaluation of the effectiveness of the current tools of cultural policy applied on the level of the Žilina SGR;
- Cooperation of the Žilina SGR with towns and municipalities in the field of culture;
- Financing of culture in the Žilina SGR;
- Financing of organisations promoted by the Žilina SGR;
- Financing of other cultural activities and projects from the budget of the Žilina SGR;
- Financing of cultural activities from the budget of towns and municipalities.

_____ The specific tools recommended for cultural policy in the Žilina SGR were not proposed based on the existing state of cultural policy in the region; on the contrary, they emerged gradually out of the process of jointly

arriving at a vision of cultural policy in the region with the many stakeholders involved in the project.

The most fundamental strategic change introduced in the framework of all individual policy measures adopted with the new document is a perhaps simple but nevertheless essential proposal of how to re-arrange the overall perception and future administration of culture by the Žilina SGR: ‘The most important thing to do now is to restore professional relationships between all cultural managers of the institutions promoted by the Žilina SGR and to start treating culture in the region en bloc.’⁹

_____ Further significant working recommendations and proposals for overall structural changes included in the new policy document address the following areas under the responsibility of the Žilina SGR.

- _____ The contractual funding of public organisations;
- _____ The creation of an independent grant programme;
- _____ The establishment of a Council for Culture as a common professional platform;
- _____ Increasing proficiency in the area of human resources within the cultural sector;
- _____ Supporting partnerships, cooperation and dialogue between organisations.

_____ The adoption of the document submitted to the bodies of the Žilina SGR and the implementation of the principles presented in the document can also serve as a model and inspiration for the development and approval of similar concepts in other self-governing regions of Slovakia. With respect to a gradual transfer of decision-making powers and part of public funds from the level of state administration to the level of regional and local self-governments, the adoption of the document is also important in terms of the further development of culture in the Slovak Republic. Since most cultural activities are being carried out on regional/local levels, it is necessary to adopt and implement such systemic measures and solutions on these levels as they will enable the creation of a coordinated system of cultural policy in the Slovak Republic, preserving regional and local individuality.

_____ Document: Strategy of Cultural Development in the Žilina Self-governing Region: From cultural values to the value of culture.

_____ However, the process of creation and establishment of such a system is to begin 'from below', i.e. from the environment in which the cultural activities are created. When coordinating the principles, tools and activities of cultural policy-making between the central, regional and local levels of public administration, it is the level of the self-governing region which can effectively initiate the process of coordination. The Self-governing Region acts as a platform between 'big' and local culture or as a room on the borderline of central and local decision-making on the administration of public domain.

'I believe that the cultural situation in the region of Žilina will be much favourable in ten years' time when the results of the Matra project will be seen in practice. The document outlining the concept of cultural policy and especially the network of cooperating institutions, which will coordinate their activities and provide each another with information and assistance, may significantly improve the conditions of culture in this region.'

'The availability of culture and its diversity can be increased through the improvement of socio-economic conditions in the region of Žilina and through the more effective cooperation of existing and newly established entities, systematic institutional changes and more professional and motivated people working in the field of culture. Similar projects could be implemented in all regions of Slovakia!'

M. Chalupová (project expert / Executive Director of the National Trust, Bratislava).

Project results

Presentation of project outputs

_____ By the completion of the Cultural policy from Amsterdam to Žilina project:

- _____ A strategic document outlining a new concept of cultural policy for the region of Žilina had been produced and officially adopted by the parliamentary assembly of the Žilina SGR;
- _____ A functioning cultural network of stakeholders made up of top representatives from public administration, cultural organisations and individuals (artists/professionals) in the region was in existence;
- _____ A range of methodological material (case study) was available as a resource and example for other regions in Slovakia

_____ At different stages in the process that led to the above-mentioned outputs, a series of smaller scale results were produced which were presented by a range of communication channels addressing different local, regional, national and European target groups and recipients:

- _____ Local media (TV, radio, newspapers);
- _____ Web pages of the organisers and partners;
- _____ Conferences, seminars, training sessions;
- _____ Hearings and public consultations;
- _____ Working groups;
- _____ Individual mailings, phone calls.

_____ At the beginning of each phase of the project there was an overall summing-up of the procedures to date, of the aims and of the results already achieved. During the whole process the local media kept the audience (mainly the inhabitants of the region) well informed of what was happening.

_____ The **initial promotion** was aimed to:

- _____ Encourage the co-operation of F-CCA, ECF with the Office of Žilina Self-governing Region and other partners;

- ██████████ Explain the aims and objectives of the project;
- ██████████ Emphasise the role and significance of the participatory approach;
- ██████████ Explain the importance and uniqueness of the project.

_____ In this phase, the organisers mainly used local media (TV, radio and newspapers), occasional presentations, individual meetings and personal phone calls. The public hearings and consultations in the centres of the sub-region were also important for spreading the word.

_____ The **research phase** brought to light the huge cultural potential that exists within the region. The results of the mapping of the cultural potential became the basis for preparing the educational phase and the platform for developing the strategy document. In this phase the communication and promotion of the educational part of the project was carried out by invitations to training sessions, seminars and conferences. The invitations were made by e-mail and phone calls, putting to use the newly-established comprehensive database of organisations and actors operating in the cultural field of the Žilina region. The database comprises:

- ██████████ Contact details of cultural institutions founded by the Žilina regional authorities (23 entries)
- ██████████ Contact details of cultural institutions founded by the municipalities in the region (30 entries)
- ██████████ Information about all regular cultural events in the region (annual calendar)
- ██████████ Contact details of non-professional/'amateur' associations and their activities (120 entries)

_____ The first project conference on 'Cultural policy and the Region in Slovakia' held in the building of the Žilina SGR in 2006 was the first of its kind. It brought together 60 participants from across Slovakia with nine representatives of six other Slovakian regions. The international team of 17 speakers touched on many issues relevant to the cultural sector from policy creation to cultural administration. The conference was a strategic presentation tool as it brought the results of the research and the educational part of the project into the general discussion. It also highlighted the critical importance of cultural policy on all levels. During the conference, representatives of the municipalities took an active part in the process of strategy creation. The conference also profited from a lot of local media coverage.

_____ The **educational part** of the project gathered together a number of cultural leaders and decision-makers from the region for training sessions. The results of the training sessions, seminars, and the study visit were reflected in the form of:

- _____ Individual experiences expressed through articles in local newspapers;
- _____ General information about the outcomes in local TV and radio broadcasting;
- _____ A presentation and evaluation of the whole process to the cultural committee of Žilina SGR;
- _____ A number of presentations made in regional municipalities (for mayors and the heads of the departments of culture)

_____ The ‘grant programme for cooperation’ was especially promoted, as it was (together with the visit to the Netherlands) the most important activity for encouraging co-operation. The grant programme was announced through local media, on the web pages of F-CCA, the Žilina SGR and by all other organisations functioning as umbrella institutions.

_____ The **final outcomes** of the project were covered not only by the local media (TV, radio, newspapers) but also by the regional and national media (radio, TV) as well as by other initiatives. Representatives of Žilina SRG, leaders in the field of culture and partner organisations played a very active role in the dissemination of the final outcomes.

_____ The ‘Regional Cultural Policy – Initiatives & Approaches to its Creation’ conference of October 2007 was the last project event before the adoption of the new policy document by the Parliament of the Žilina SGR. This conference acted as a forum for the presentation of the proposed regional strategy for all members of the regional assembly, and representatives from the municipalities in Žilina and from other regions in Slovakia.

_____ Finally, a special presentation of the entire initiative was introduced as a brief project case study to the publication ‘Proposal for development of regional culture in the Slovak Republic’, recently prepared by the national Ministry of Culture.

Epilogue

Looking back from Amsterdam to Žilina

A letter by project expert Cas Smithuijsen
 Director of the Boekman Foundation
 Amsterdam NL

Introduction

_____ In 2004 the Boekman Foundation, a Netherlands study centre on the arts, culture and related policies in Amsterdam, came to the end of a large project in South East Europe it had undertaken in cooperation with the European Cultural Foundation (ECF). The project concluded with the publication of a book describing the cultural policy transformation processes in a number of countries in that region.¹⁰ A little later, we were asked again by the ECF to join another project. This was entitled **Cultural Policy from Amsterdam to Žilina** and was mainly financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Of course we were interested in cooperating again, not least after the fresh experiences we had had with the decentralisation of cultural policy in SEE, and with the development of interactivity in the sphere of cultural policy-making as it was gradually taking shape there.

_____ This letter contains three sections. The first describes the nature of the contribution of the Boekman Foundation to the project; the second reveals our evaluation of the process and outcome of the project and the third deals with the relevance of the project for Europe as a whole. Some conclusions are drawn at the end.

Contribution of the Boekman Foundation

_____ Our contribution to the Amsterdam-Žilina project encompassed the following five elements:

_____ To share our experiences at the international level of policy-making with the people in Slovakia. Most of that experience, apart from the international travel

_____ Hanneoes Weeda, Corina Şuteu and Cas Smithuijsen (eds.), *The arts, politics and change. Participative cultural policy making in South East Europe*, 2005.

and dialogue opportunities we enjoyed over the years, derives from our commitment to the production and updating of data to be entered in the European database on national cultural policies, edited by the cultural policy research institute Ericarts in Bonn, under the auspices of the Council of Europe;

██████████ To act as a partner in discussing and developing objectives (ends) and logistics (means) in the Slovak cultural policy system on the basis of the description of the Dutch situation in this field.¹¹ A special emphasis was put on the so-called Dutch model: the periodic evaluation (every four years) of all subsidies given to cultural institutes and initiatives by the three layers of Dutch government: state, provinces and municipalities;

██████████ To assist in the development of a data system on cultural policy documents. In the course of the project, the library of the Boekman Foundation gathered a selection of documents, mostly e-documents, to serve as a source of literature for the project (available on the project DVD accompanying this text).

██████████ To provide the Slovak project people with as much information as possible on different aspects and sectors of the cultural system in the Netherlands. Special attention was given to the Dutch public library system, through two Dutch contributions at the annual meeting of Slovak librarians, 29 March 2007, hosted by the public library in Žilina.

██████████ To reflect more scientifically on scenarios regarding the reframing of national cultural policy in Slovakia in the light of the upcoming regionalisation.

Process of the project and its results

_____ All the gatherings we witnessed in the course of the project were thoroughly prepared and professionally presented. Those attending were involved and eager to exchange experiences and visions as well as open to suggestions for innovation, new forms of collaboration and change where

_____ For basic information about the Dutch cultural system, see Hanneloes Weeda & Cas Smithuijsen (eds.), *Cultural Policy in the Netherlands*, 2006.

inevitable. Of course there was the language problem, but the interpreters did a fine job and it was clear that most of the participants had at least a passive knowledge of English. Another occasional problem was the balance between specific and discipline- or sector-bound information on the one hand and more general information on broad cultural policy processes on the other. Of course, the debate had to confine itself to general issues and procedures, but it would be wise to develop methods of supplying additional, easily accessible information that would support, or even illustrate, issues and procedures.¹²

_____ All stages of action were put in a logical order and in an effective time-frame. People were kept very involved right from the beginning of the project and this continued to the end. Essential elements in the agenda were: (1) mapping the existing situation, (2) research and fact-finding, and (3) the collective determination of policy objectives and the means to realise them. In the course of the project, the centre of gravity gradually shifted from mere organisational management and fundraising topics in the direction of more urgent cultural policy issues. These can be listed as follows: (a) increasing audience participation, (b) making artistic treasures and cultural potential visible, (c) assessing the elements of regional identity, (d) creating strong societal and political involvement with art and culture, and (e) trying to secure financial means. As the Slovak Parliament voted in favour of a regionalised cultural system and policy at the end of 2007, this is undoubtedly to be seen as the result of the thorough preparation and planning involved in the project.

Relevance of the project in a European context

_____ The project organisers may see the results of the mission as favourable for their national political and cultural situation. But the results of the research presented in the final paper Cultural Policy from Amsterdam to Žilina are also of interest to the international community of cultural researchers, policy-makers and practitioners. For instance, the research report shows a split between the countryside and the cities when it comes to cultural participation and lifestyle, and this seems to be a feature of Europe as a whole. Moreover, attendance rates in Slovakia should be added to those of the rest of Europe, enriching them and simultaneously giving the Eurostat

_____ Policy problems related to public libraries of course differ substantially from those related to museums, orchestras, or individual painters. A short overview of basic features of all cultural sectors should feature in the toolkit of every cultural policy expert.

figures a wider range. The research report also opens up the possibility of exchanging facts, figures and visions in the international community of cultural policy researchers.

_____ The positive interaction of region-building and cultural policy innovation not only created a new situation in the Žilina region, it also encouraged other parts of Slovakia to consider following its example. The new situation has international importance, just because the Žilina region is developing as an EU-region as well. The question is whether this EU-region profile will profit, also in an art and culture perspective, from the situation by gaining more political independence. Will there be more social and political commitment in all parts of the region now the scenario of cultural regional self government has become reality? It is obvious that Europe will soon start profiting from knowledge and experiences recently built up in Slovakia. For that reason it is important that information will continue to flow over the borders of the region. It would be advisable that relevant documentation and figures will be available, preferably in a documentation centre (for instance as part of a university), able to communicate with relevant actors throughout the country and abroad.

Conclusion

_____ From earlier projects initiated by the European Cultural Foundation we learned that decentralisation can definitely open up new perspectives in national cultural policy systems. A revised division of labour and responsibilities between national governments, regions and municipalities, not only enhances the quality of public governance, it also gives opportunities to art institutes and cultural entrepreneurs to blossom perhaps more than they had done previously. It was proved in South East Europe that the redesign of public administration came about with more interaction between politicians and cultural officials. We again saw similar changes in arts and politics in Slovakia.

_____ We also experienced a well-balanced ambience for our expert activities. The professional standards surrounding the project, in combination with the relaxed and friendly atmosphere created by those involved, meant that we never had the feeling that we were intruding, or that our presence was distorting processes of change and innovation that were already gathering momentum. Right from the start, the role we were to play was clear to us. It was to make a series of essential additions to what was already

taking shape in the (open) minds of the Slovak organisers. It was indeed a case of considered additions rather than drastic corrections, but additions nonetheless that were felt by everyone as essential for the development of visions and tools.

_____ With the successful closure of the project already behind us, we must ensure that the newly-created situation in the Žilina region is sustained. Sustainability will only be guaranteed if the efforts made during the project are continued in the years to come. All the parties concerned have to conserve the partnerships and team spirit they have built up. Of course each party is keen to pursue its own interests, but it has to be kept in mind that the various separate interests of politicians, policy makers and cultural officials are all deeply connected in mutual dependency. The new cultural region of Žilina is entirely built on mutual trust. It will collapse if that fact is forgotten.

Amsterdam, 13 March 2008