Structural and financial barriers in the access to culture

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The Committee on Culture and Education adopted an own-initiative report by Bogdan Andrzej ZDROJEWSKI (EPP, PL) on structural and financial barriers in the access to culture.
This report provides a cross-sectoral analysis of **existing obstacles to cultural access and participation**. It concerns not only structural and financial barriers to access, but also social and digital barriers, and by far the most important problem of educational barriers.
Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises participation in cultural life as one of the fundamental human rights. This right is enshrined in the Faro Convention which recognises the right to participate in cultural life. Around **8.4 million people** are employed in the EU's cultural sector (accounting for 3.7 % of the total workforce).
Access to and participation in culture: while recalling the vital role of an active and accessible cultural sector for the development of an inclusive democratic society, the report stressed that promoting and improving access to culture was **one of the main political priorities**. Member States and the European Union are called on, within the sphere of their competences, to develop and implement the specific measures in order to **guarantee access to and participation in cultural life**.
Members recalled the importance of the EU's role in promoting and facilitating better coordination of cultural policies at all levels with a view to developing a comprehensive and effective policy to promote access to and participation in culture, and to frame culture as an **essential element of the European integration project**.

They stressed the importance of coordinating cultural policy with **other policy areas** such as education, social, economic, regional, foreign, digital and media policies. They also recommended that Member States develop a cultural action strategy aimed at children and young people.

Financial barriers: Members considered that **public funding** plays a fundamental role in ensuring a vibrant cultural scene and remains an indispensable instrument for supporting cultural activities in the EU. They, therefore, called on the Commission and the Member States, within their respective spheres of competence, to devote an appropriate part of their budgets to public support for culture and to strengthen synergies with the ERDF and other cultural support funds, including programmes facilitating research and innovation.

The private sector plays a key role that is complementary to public investment. Member States should consider implementing legislative measures that provide for a **tax credit** for contributions of money by private entities to support culture. Tax incentives for private sponsorship may reduce the financing gap in the cultural industries.

The report recommended that Member States and regions take measures to target specific audiences, including students, large families and the elderly, in order to remove financial barriers to access to culture. It also stressed that the introduction of reduced VAT rates cannot replace direct subsidies and called for **better coordination of national cultural policies and the VAT rates applied** as a tool for stimulating participation in culture.

Educational barriers and challenges: the report stressed that **educational level** is one of the most important factors having a significant impact on the level of participation in culture. The lack of interest is one of the most frequently mentioned barriers to cultural participation among respondents to Eurostat and Eurobarometer surveys. Members stressed, in this context, that **supporting demand**, understood as

building interest and understanding of culture through formal, non-formal and informal education, should be a priority task in terms of increasing access to and participation in culture.

Member States are called on to take steps towards the greater integration of cultural and artistic education into school curricula, in both formal and informal education.

Moreover, the Commission and the Member States to adopt measures to ensure more widespread access to cultural institutions and to develop a **comprehensive European strategy** concerning access to public spaces, particularly relating to culture in the urban built environment, as in the cases of museums, theatres, cinemas, libraries, concert halls, etc.

Members recommended the mainstreaming of the **European Student Card** and that free access to EU cultural institutions should be added to its benefits.

Structural barriers: drawing attention to the often lower cultural participation rates among the **rural population**, the report highlighted the role of small local cultural centres, transport infrastructure and support for sustainable cultural tourism in facilitating access to cultural institutions.

Members called for increased efforts and investments in order to develop a sustainable and long-term **cultural tourism** policy, as well as greater investment in access to culture for the outermost, mountain and remote regions, in order to create decentralised cultural opportunities.

They called on Member States and the cultural institutions that depend on them to ensure a cultural offer that is **accessible to everyone**, with specific measures for certain population groups, such as children and young people, the elderly, disabled people or migrants, among others and stressed the need for greater investment in the implementation of the universal touch reading and writing code (the Braille system).

Digital barriers and challenges: convinced that digital tools can help to overcome barriers to access to culture caused by factors including unfavourable geographical location, disability, social background, language and lack of time or financial resources, the report suggested that **digital education** should form part of the learning process from an early age, so as to develop adequate knowledge and skills.

Members recommended that the Commission draw up a consistent digital strategy aimed at cultural infrastructures and activities in order to strengthen their capacities.

Lastly, the digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material in Europe should be implemented on a basis of full respect for **creators and intellectual property rights**. Members considered that intellectual property rights should not hamper the general public goal of increasing access to, and favouring the dissemination of, creative content, information and knowledge. They also insisted further on the urgent need to settle a secure digital environment enabling artists and creators to be duly remunerated for their work, and to ensure a fair remuneration for cross-border access.