Cultural heritage: Community action programme 1997-2000, Raphaël

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The Raphael Programme was developed and devised in response to Article 128 of the Treaty of Maastricht. This Article, (later changed to Article 151 following the adoption of the Amsterdam Treaty) gave culture its own rightful place within the EU context. Cultural co-operation became an officially recognised objective of the European Union. The aim of the Raphael programme (1997-2000) was to support and supplement cultural heritage of European importance. The overall programme was awarded EUR 30 million and between 1997-1999 some 222 projects benefited from Raphael funding. In addition the programme sponsored 18 "European Heritage Laboratories". The later related to technically complex operations on monuments or sites of exceptional interest. There were six specific objectives enshrined in the Decision establishing the Raphael programme. They were: - encouraging the conservation and restoration of sites with a cultural and historic significance; - encouraging the exchange of know-how and experience for the preservation of cultural and historically sensitive sites; - improving public access to heritage sites and improving public participation in safeguarding Europe's cultural heritage; - encouraging technical co-operation in preserving traditional cultural heritage trades and techniques; - taking account of heritage when devising EU programmes; - encouraging co-operation with third countries and international organisations. These objectives were then divided into four action lines intended to implement the objectives outlined above. The Commission, in accordance with mandatory procedures, announced the calls for proposals in the Official Journals as well as announcing them through press releases. The selection, monitoring and dissemination procedure were applied uniformly to all of the projects receiving Raphael funding. At the end of the Raphael programme's life the European Commission asked external evaluators to examine and report on how effective the programme was in achieving its stated objectives. In preparing this task the evaluators took account of the following points: The relevance of the programme; its coherence, efficiency and its effectiveness. In terms of its relevance the authors deemed it to be entirely relevant, even though some operators of the programme regretted that it showed no real European ambition in the cultural field. In terms of efficiency and effectiveness of the programme the evaluators voiced very little criticism, finding that the results obtained were proportional to the resources committed, i.e they were effective but not commensurate with the more ambitious expectations formulated in the Decisions establishing the programme. Concerning promotional activities the evaluators expressed some concern that the Commission was providing far too little information to cultural operators. The Commission, however, begs to disagree pointing out that not only are all the programmes published in the Official Journals it has also set up the "Culture 2000" Internet site as well as cultural contact points. Since 2002 anyone requesting it can receive a free monthly newsletter. Finally, a cultural portal was created in March 2002 on the Internet to present all EU cultural related activities. On the question of monitoring the Commission's response to the evaluator's criticism that more should be done by the Commissionto visit projects on the ground, is rejected. The Commission points out that, whilst it continues to monitor and assess projects, the lack of human resources makes it impossible to visit every project. Each Commission project manager, for example, is responsible for between forty and ninety projects. The evaluators point out that combining the old programmes into the Culture 2000 framework programme has helped to make the Community's contribution more effective and more visible. Combining the previously existing cultural programmes into one specific unit has helped make the exercise not only cheaper but also more effective. To conclude the cultural programmes, including the Raphael programme, were a useful springboard for the creation of the Culture 2000 programme. In spite of some shortcomings Raphael worked well. Along with the Kaleidoscope and Ariane programme Raphael represented a first, essential step towards the attainment of the objective set out in Article 151 of the Treaty.