



Cultural Co-operation - Contribution to the consideration on the subject of a single European Union Programme for Culture

EBLIDA functions as the umbrella association for library, information, documentation and archive associations and all kinds of libraries throughout Europe. The organisation was founded in 1992 and has established itself as a vital link between the European institutions and library and information professionals. At the moment EBLIDA represents over 95.000 libraries throughout Europe. On behalf of the European library community EBLIDA would like to make the following contribution:

EBLIDA welcomes this initiative to set up an integrated framework for cultural programmes. The present programmes are rather limited in their approach and do not achieve the impact they should and could have. Action on European level must not only safeguard the great diversity in European cultures but must also respect the principle of subsidiary, probably even more than in other areas. At the same time it is of utmost importance for the future of the European Community to strengthen the knowledge of common European cultural patterns and to find ways for action with regards to cultural issues of pan-European importance and consequence.

1. Broad concept of culture

Different national cultural backgrounds lead to a different understanding of basic terms like "culture" or "heritage". Therefore we advocate a definition of "culture" that is as broad as possible to embrace all cultural expressions in Europe (be it artistically, institutional or functional) and which have their roots in the daily life of people. Culture, as we see it, are sets of common values that unite different groups of people. The awareness of the different ways of living in different European countries will enhance a better mutual understanding.

2. Common platform of basic and shared European values

It seems necessary that the European Community adopts an elaborated platform of common values in the cultural field, before it defines a limited number of areas for action. To set up such a platform, more emphasis has to be put on cultural research as a basis for further development of cooperation programmes. Even before the start of a common programme or at least as one of its first actions, research in cultural science, museology and related fields as well as studies on present practice in the Member States have to be undertaken to enable the development of a platform that is precise, generally understood and accepted.

The following list contains some examples of values for the platform:
Each citizen and group within the European Community shall have

- the right of freedom of expression and the practical means to exercise this right;
- the right to freely access and provide information in all fields of choice;
- the right to personal development, education and studies, independent of the country of origin;
- the right to live with the own language, cultural identity and historical heritage.

3. General recommendations for actions

Next to common European values there are common European problems which have to be identified and tackled in European programmes. Below are some examples of areas for action:

- In general, to enable the continued contribution to the diverse and valuable cultural

heritage of Europe, public access to all cultural expressions must be ensured. Only by preserving the balance between the protection of the rightholder and the access to information for the general public enables the cultural development of society. A European programme must also tackle the problem of how to offer protection against the overdominant control of new media by a small number of multinational distributors.

- A number of cultural minorities lives within the European Union, many of them with a language of their own but not accepted as official language. These does not only apply to local and regional groups but also to groups which are living in all parts of Europe like for example Roma and Sinti. These European citizens must be given equal rights and opportunities, and action must be taken to promote the preservation of minority language and culture.
- Immigrants are another large group of people living in Europe, be it by own decision or not, and who face problems connected to discrimination which are the same all over Europe.
- Physical and natural landscape, including townscapes, are rapidly decaying under the pressure of bad architecture, industry, transportation systems and others.
- Globalisation of culture can lead to a loss of identity - local, regional and national culture becomes increasingly important and must be supported and safeguarded.
- Community action in the cultural field should be specifically aiming at combating illiteracy, stimulating reading, preserving and conserving the printed word.

3.1. Actions to improve the cooperation within the book sector

- EU programmes should stimulate cooperation within the book sector between libraries, publishers and booksellers by means of joint projects. Joint ventures between publishers and the small publishing houses within the library associations should be stimulated, in order to co-produce publications of little commercial interest. This applies especially for minority groups like handicapped people and people with reading difficulties (e.g. large print), for second language teaching (e.g. bilingual editions) and so on. The specific needs of people with disabilities and minority groups must also be recognised by integrating their needs in existing programmes and not by creating new programmes which will broaden the gap between different groups of population.

3.2. Actions for vocational training and exchange of experience

- With the emergence of new technologies in the knowledge society, library professionals need further training in order to keep up-to-date with the demands of the library user. The exchange of experience with professionals from other countries is of vital importance. Grants and scholarships for librarians and library student exchanges are needed.
- The European book sector should also be encouraged to cooperate and to exchange experience on a cultural level with other countries outside the EU.

3.3. Actions to improve cultural access to books

- Foreign literature in the original language and in translated or bilingual form should be available in public libraries to demonstrate the diversity of the cultures in Europe, to promote language learning and to preserve and foster the lesser used languages.
- A specific programme for personal library networking (not only in the technical sense) and cultural events should be initiated along the lines of the [Ariane Programme](#), which would include special conditions to encourage cooperation through the European library infrastructure. The itinerancy of cultural exhibitions and other book-related events should be promoted in libraries within all member states.

3.4. Actions for the social accessibility of books and cultural heritage

- To combat illiteracy, the promotion of reading should be directed at children. It is

essential to start as early as possible. Story telling, children's book promotions and festivals are excellent examples for promotion. Cooperation between parents, schools and public libraries is necessary. The European Theatre Reading Day and the Hans Christian Andersen Day are good examples of multidisciplinary cooperation in a European setting. Such programmes should continue and require EU support.

- To promote reading among the most disadvantaged people in society, an Easy-to-Read database should be set up to monitor and encourage the production of appropriate reading and audio-visual materials accessible to persons with reading difficulties. This database should be made available in all Member States as appropriate.

3.5. Actions for the physical accessibility of books and other media

- The need of a good public library infrastructure with branch libraries and mobile libraries, with a view to putting people in touch with books and with new technologies, must be recognised. Especially in areas where library facilities are non-existent or inadequate, in rural or isolated areas and in areas with low reading levels there is need for immediate action. The nature of the stock should be relevant to the social and cultural profile of the areas concerned.
- A wide selection of books and non-book materials (e.g. talking books, multimedia and videos) should be readily available to all EU citizens through the assistance of public libraries in every possible environment: at school, at work, at home, in the hospital.

3.6. Actions for libraries as supporters of education

- The importance of libraries as supporters of education on all levels is growing due to new ways of learning, in which access to and gathering of information is an integrated part of the process. Media competence is needed at a still broader level and adult independent learners are growing in number all over Europe. To increase Europeans' awareness to continually acquire new skills and professional qualifications, last year had been declared the European 'Year of Life Long Learning'. Programmes supporting the libraries' role in this field are needed.

3.7. Actions for the library as cultural institution

- Libraries are key links in the information chain in support of educational, cultural, technical, scientific and economic developments, but they are also cultural institutions, sometimes the only ones in a specific region. Research should also be undertaken into the internal culture of such institutions and on the library added value within the emerging Information Society.

4. Types of action

- network building
- cooperation activities
- exchange programmes
- research and studies regarding cultural politics in Europe: practices, method, terms, institutional and organisational conditions
- cross-sectorial studies and contacts

Whatever action is taken, it is crucial for the library sector that the co-operation between the Libraries Programme in DG XIII for predominantly technical development and the cultural programmes in DG X relevant for the promoting of books and reading is very strongly encouraged.

The Hague, 27 November 1997


