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Agenda 21 for culture

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Strategic and Programme Development of Municipal Cultural Policy. How Agenda 21 for culture has driven culture in Dortmund and the Ruhr metropolitan area

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Article published in the 5th report of Agenda 21 for culture:

Cities, cultures and developments

A report that marks the fifth anniversary of Agenda 21 for culture



Ajuntament de Barcelona
Barcelona Cultura



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Strategic and Programme Development of Municipal Cultural Policy

How Agenda 21 for culture has driven culture in Dortmund and the Ruhr metropolitan area

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14 May 2009

The Agenda 21 for culture was approved in 2004. Given the dynamics of cultural development, the relatively short period of five years is certainly not sufficient to give a final evaluation of the outcome of putting the Agenda into practice. That is because the implementation of the Agenda 21 for culture is a long and diverse route both in the world as a whole and in each individual town. This is especially so in Germany, where the text of the Agenda has only been widely publicised since 2006.

Something very different has taken place with the 'big sister' of cultural agendas, the Rio de Janeiro Environment Agenda. This United Nations development and environmental action programme, generally referred to as 'Agenda 21', was agreed back in 1992. The programme, run by governments and non-governmental organisations, is today seen as the main guideline for public action on environmental policies. 'Think globally and act locally' is the slogan that explicitly underscores the role of local government in the implementation of Agenda 21. As a result, it has been mostly cities and local councils which have undertaken Agenda 21 initiatives. In Germany alone, there are currently over 2,600 towns which have shaped the success of Agenda 21 and adopted what are called 'Local Agendas'.

However, and this is something that has been criticized from the start, the Agenda 21 programme is short on statements about the cultural sector and hence on a sustainable development dimension which is essential for a comprehensive environmental policy, not only for cultural politicians but also from the perspective of educational, social and integration policies.

The Agenda 21 for culture redresses this shortfall by giving fresh impetus to the overall Agenda process, expanding its range of themes and fostering its dissemination in society.

The messages of Agenda 21 for culture are not new but they are highly topical. This is good because they facilitate the link between the thesis of the Agenda and the issues shaping cultural-political debate in Germany, especially in the cities. In this respect, the

Agenda 21 for culture expands the view of global cultural development issues and these in turn are reflected in local microcosms.

What is it that makes Agenda 21 for culture different from other international statements of cultural and political principles which UNESCO, for instance, has submitted to the Council of Europe or to intergovernmental conferences since the 1970s, and which have had such a major impact on cultural-political discourse in Germany? The content of this Agenda for culture is geared towards the premises of a so-called ‘new’ cultural policy related to social developments. This paradigm plays an important role in the German debate because until a few decades ago, cultural policy was largely defined as an arts policy, and this overemphasized the importance of the autonomous status of art. Hence the Agenda contains many aspects which are now undisputed: from a ‘broad’ concept of culture that goes beyond, say, more than artistic disciplines and cultural traditions to embrace the social obligations of cultural work in migration and integration policy and also includes cultural modernisation strategies, the creative economy and digital art.

The Agenda 21 for culture refers explicitly to the UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) and the corresponding intergovernmental agreement or Convention (2005).

One new feature, and something which sets the Agenda 21 for culture apart from other declarations, is the way in which its demands and fields of action are clearly geared towards cities and local councils which define cultural-political potentials, problems and possible actions. The central message is that culture and cultural policy must be placed at the heart of municipal urban development strategies and municipal policy. In this respect, the Agenda functions as a ‘catalyst’ for cultural development in cities, whilst taking global dependencies and opportunities into account. On this basis, sustainable cultural policy models should then be developed in situ by local players. In this sense, the Agenda 21 for culture is both a code and an option for community engagement with ‘its own identity.’

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The *Deutsche Städtetag*, the umbrella organisation of the major German municipal local authorities, placed the Agenda 21 for culture on the agenda of its cultural committee in December 2006. The German translation of the Agenda text was produced by the Cultural Department of the City of Dortmund. National and regional associations and city and local government networks, as operational instruments for cities when implementing the Agenda, together with local cultural partnerships and the inclusion of cultural research and development work were seen as important for the culture sector when it came to putting the Agenda in place in cities.

The Agenda 21 for culture should also be considered in Germany as a chance for a new dialogue on the perspectives of cultural policy in the light of the profound social changes taking place in the country. This is so precisely because many of the ideas and demands of the Agenda are not in fact new but stress the obligation to map out innovative cultural strategies and programmes. German cities are more receptive to the key messages of the Agenda 21 for culture because these correspond to a shift in cultural-political paradigms in local cultural policy. There is a growing recognition that a cultural policy geared towards one-off projects or events cannot lead to sustainable development; in contrast, it is structure-building concepts and strategies which embed culture in social relationships.

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The central themes affecting both the Agenda and the cultural-political debate in German cities are:

- urban development issues and the consideration of cultural framework conditions (public spaces, decentralization of cultural activities, cultural heritage);
- safeguarding and developing cultural diversity (expansion of the cultural audience, immigrant cultures, public support for culture, a democratic cultural discourse);
- strategic linkage between cultural policies and the cultural economy and digital media (job creation, new communication technologies as a channel for cultural knowledge, freedom and financial security for cultural creation).

Apart from the Deutscher Städtetag, other organisations to have dealt with Agenda 21 for culture issues include the 51st Loccumer Cultural-Political Colloquium ('Community Cultural Policy in Europe – a partnership for learning') run by the renowned cultural-political association in October 2006, as well as a national German conference in Dortmund ('Diversity unites – arts and intercultural dialogue in European cities') in September 2008.

One of the major lessons we have learnt in the communication of Agenda 21 for culture in Germany is that its effectiveness is much greater when its specific themes and demands are linked with current activities and plans. This can be shown through one or two examples.

RUHR.2010

In 2010, the Ruhr metropolitan area will be the European Capital of Culture. RUHR.2010 is the name of the regional network of 53 towns which will jointly run the Capital of Culture year. This network is setting up structural programmes for sustainable cultural development that will remain in place to boost cultural development in the region after the European Capital of Culture year.

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- Prior to 2010, the Ruhr metropolitan area is aiming to become a model region for cultural education. One of the leading measures to achieve this is the new 'A Musical Instrument for Every Child' programme where all primary school children are to be given the opportunity to learn how to play a musical instrument regardless of their social status or their families' economic situation. Up until now music has not been a compulsory subject in state schools in Germany; instead it has been offered on a voluntary basis in music schools. Today the music schools are the main partners involved in the new programme and are making their expertise and resources available to all children. Due to the success achieved by the programme so far, other German states have started initiatives to transfer this model music education project for all children to their own schools.
- Another RUHR.2010 programme for sustainable cultural development lies in the cultural and creative industries which are to be structurally developed in this region as a result of the European Capital of Culture year. This will include the setting up of new cultural centres or commission centres for a range of creative disciplines (design, music, the media) intended to remain active and foster communication structures and innovation beyond 2010.



Logo of RUHR.2010 – European Capital of Culture

Dortmund

With a population of nearly 600,000 Dortmund is the largest city in the Ruhr metropolitan area. Dortmund City Council has been taking part in the Agenda's global process since the late 1990s and has drawn up its own local agenda. In previous years, the cultural sector was not integrated in Agenda processes. For the first time in 2007, the Dortmund Cultural Department joined the community discourse with a clear reference to Agenda 21 for culture. The contribution from this department focuses on intercultural work and culture education.

Dortmund's 'Intercultural Action Concept' seeks to strengthen the cultural participation of people with an immigrant background.

- Dortmund's 'Intercultural Action Concept' seeks to strengthen the cultural participation of people with an immigrant background. Dortmund City Council approved the action concept mapped out by the Cultural Department in 2006, including a '10-step programme for the improvement of intercultural work in Dortmund'. It provides for specific and verifiable measures and steps to enhance access to cultural programmes and support in Dortmund for people with an immigrant background, in particular for artists and cultural workers. It is addressed to all cultural organisations and institutions. The main feature of the Dortmund model is the development of a sustainable and verifiable global approach that is not restricted to individual city districts or projects.¹

As part of the 'Intercultural Action Plan', Dortmund was the first city in Germany to carry out a pilot survey which systematically compiled the cultural interests and habits of people with an immigrant history by means of more than 1,000 interviews. Its results have provided important information for improving immigrants' access to cultural services and this is also relevant to other big cities with large immigrant populations.

The 'Intercultural Action Concept' is also part of Dortmund's 'Integration Master Plan'. The Cultural Department is a member of the respective municipal coordination groups.

In 2009, Dortmund's culture organisations reviewed the work done to date with the 'Intercultural Action Concept' and submitted their report to the City Council, the Immigrant Advisory Board and public opinion in general.

- The 'Municipal Masterplan for Cultural Education in Dortmund' seeks to foster comprehensive structures for the cultural education of children and teenagers and link facilities, approaches and projects in this field. Cultural education in Dortmund needs to cut across city services and in particular culture, schools and young people. Children and teenagers need to become actively involved in the development of new initiatives and services. The 'Cultural Education Contact Office' was opened in the Cultural Department in 2008 and, in addition to promoting a range of programmes, it mostly fosters partnerships between public and private organisations in the supply of cultural education.²

The 'Municipal Masterplan for Cultural Education' is due to be implemented by 2010, when the Ruhr metropolitan area will be the European Capital of Culture, and as part of RUHR.2010 will make an important contribution to creating a model region for cultural education.

1 http://kulturbuero.dortmund.de/upload/binarydata_do4ud4cms/31/25/19/00/00/00/192531/handlungskonzept_interkultur.pdf.

2 http://www.kulturbuero.dortmund.de/upload/binarydata_do4ud4cms/20/84/16/00/00/00/168420/urban_strategic_actionplan.pdf.

In addition, as part of the European Capital of Culture year in 2010, a new arts and creativity economy centre is to be set up in a disused brewery called the 'Dortmund U'. The status of cultural education achieved through the 'Municipal Masterplan for Cultural Education' is reinforced by the fact that at this new cultural facility, which is to house the municipal modern art museum as well as media art exhibitions, university institutions and a cinema, an entire floor which is dedicated to cultural education. The Dortmund U is expected to attract interest far beyond the immediate region and this will thus be inextricably connected with comprehensive cultural education work.



"The Dortmund U"

Since 2007, the annual interim report of the local Agenda in Dortmund has highly valued the work of the city's cultural organisations and the concepts of interculturalism and cultural education which they promote.

As the examples above show, the Agenda 21 for culture is a programmatic guide for modern, sustainable models of municipal cultural development. People's right to their cultural identity, diversity and participation as advocated by the Agenda is the foundation of modern cultural policy and a compass for new cultural-political projects.

Even though five years is too short a period to make any conclusive assessment of its effect on people's everyday lives, it does seem clear that the requirements of the Agenda 21 for culture will remain on the agenda. It may be that success cannot yet be reproduced through a system of cultural indicators, but the cultural-political discourse triggered by the Agenda 21 for culture and its implementation is just as valuable.

- The article and the full report are available on-line at <http://www.cities-localgovernments.org> and <http://www.agenda21culture.net>. They can be reproduced for free as long as UCLG and Barcelona City Council are cited as sources.
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- ISBN of the full report: 978-84-692-6503-1

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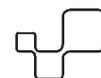
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