

## **Summary of the Agenda for Culture**

*In the summer of 2014, the Council for Culture published 'The Cultural Survey'. In that survey, the Council outlines trends and developments in the Dutch cultural sector, and concludes that cultural policy is facing a number of fundamental challenges. On the basis of the conclusions drawn in 'The Cultural Survey', the current 'Agenda for Culture' advises the Minister of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) on salient points of cultural policy. Besides looking at the government term 2017-2020, the Council also looks further ahead.*

### **Urban regions**

The Council wants to give urban regions a central position in cultural policy, since that is where cultural activities naturally intersect. Urban regions can take their own identity into account and respond to the needs of their people – whether it is a growing multicultural population or a contracting region. This allows for more custom solutions and differentiation.

The government continues to be an important partner and source of financial support, but the initiative for implementation is shifting to urban regions. The Council makes a number of proposals to facilitate this shift in the years to come. It suggests, for example, taking the plans of urban regions into consideration in the division of funds. It advises producing a renewed, clear description of the purpose of the national basic infrastructure and funding, bearing in mind local cultural policies. The Council further suggests dismissing rules that thwart collaboration between institutions in urban regions. This paves the way for relevant local discussion on the meaning, coherence, and contents of regional cultural offerings.

### **Cultural education, job market and talent development**

The Council examines this process from the first point of contact with culture to the training of professional artists, viewing cultural education as a part of the formative function that future education will have. It makes proposals to further improve cultural education within and outside of educational institutions: by developing continuous learning courses, strengthening the expertise and professional skill of teachers, and having the Inspectorate of Education assess the quality of cultural education. On a local level schools are in need of support in terms of synchronizing supply and demand of cultural activities for students. The Council offers recommendations on how to respond to that need.

The Council discusses the consequences of the changing job market for creators and artists, with the understanding that many self-employed professionals often receive a relatively low income within this sector. The Council feels that the cultural sector should establish ground rules regarding reasonable fees for artists' work. It also strongly suggests the continuation of regulation focused on stimulating entrepreneurship, such as microloans, coaching, and supplementary training.

The Council recommends funding a limited number of central locations for artistic development. In particular, the visual and performing arts sectors require physical spaces for presentation, development, research and reflection. The Council believes that temporary stimulus measures regarding talent development should become structural. Within this budget, cultural funding could continue to support talented artists through programmes with specific purposes.

### **Audience**

Culture cannot thrive without an audience. However, the behaviour, taste, and composition of the audience are undergoing drastic changes. The Council expects that traditional forms of culture – the disciplines currently receiving the most attention from government policy – will see their audience stagnate and decrease. Unlike in the past, new generations remain focused on cultural forms they already felt drawn to in their younger years. At the same time, young audiences and an increasing group of cultural participants with non-western backgrounds are not necessarily connecting with these traditional forms of culture. The Council sees that an audience needs to be found for every cultural activity, whether experimental, specialized, traditional, or innovative. This is not so much a concern for artists or creators as it is for venues, such as theatres, concert halls, festivals, or museums.

Those looking for new audiences have their own recognizable programmes, conduct audience research, actively engage the audience in activities, explore alternative locations and new (digital) ways of presentation, and form alliances with partners, including those outside their own sector. The government can also help to expand public outreach and increase the scope of potential audiences. The Council suggests that cultural subsidies should award more genres outside of the traditional canon. Regarding the division of funding subsidies, it also suggests allowing more leeway for festivals and institutions that experiment with new forms of presentation in order to draw in a larger audience.

### **Profile**

Cultural institutions need more flexibility to be able to respond to these developments. The Council believes that these institutions should be given the tools to develop a recognizable profile that fits their particular artistic signatures, ambitions, and environments. Through such distinctive profiles they become attractive partners for other forms of sponsorship. This involves simplifying the assessment criteria for cultural institutions. Therefore, the Council proposes several changes in those criteria, bearing in mind the profile of the institution while also granting the Minister the possibility to act on her responsibility to the system as a whole.

### **Gaps**

Gaps exist in the current basic cultural infrastructure as well as in funding for certain jobs or sectors, where the Council perceives that, for various reasons, not enough attention and financial support is being received. Besides the previously mentioned structural facilities for talent development, the Council observes that interdisciplinary artists and institutions –especially those focused on digital production and the dissemination of culture (including e-culture) – require more financial support. The Council also notices a gap concerning insufficient options in terms of facilitating cultural debate, reflection and criticism. Moreover, it recommends giving more financial leeway to festivals, since they are accessible platforms for innovative, international, and interdisciplinary forms of culture.

In its advisory statement, the Council responds to the Minister's questions on various sectors and a number of challenges in the system: from museum to film, music to visual arts, and monuments to children's theatre. It calls for the strengthening of two sector-wide institutions in the basic cultural infrastructure: a knowledge centre responsible for collecting, analyzing and disclosing data, and an institution that supports digitization. The Council would like to see funds granting four-year institutional subsidies, allowing more room for continuity.

### **Funding**

The cultural sector has endured many spending cuts in recent years, from all levels of government. The Council does, however, see some encouraging signs. The Minister has made an effort to relieve a number of acute problems, but these measures often do not receive structural coverage in the cultural budget. This concerns programme and project subsidies funded from leftover transition funds, development reserves, or other incidental means. Moreover, subsidized institutions have received little or no compensation regarding costs and salary in the current government term.

This corrosion of the government budget is a cause for concern to the Council; institutions are consuming their own capital while cultural funding bodies are calling on their reserves in order to maintain regulations. The Council urges that the funding of the cultural sector be sustained.

In this Agenda for Culture, the Council makes several suggestions for changes in policy. Although not always cost-neutral, these are necessary measures that respond to the challenges the cultural sector is facing; the government cannot simply expect the private sector to assume their financial role as cultural supporters. An investment agenda has been included which outlines the realistic financial consequences of our recommendations, and indicates a necessary annual investment of approximately 29,5 million euros.