
Franco-German-Polish Position Paper **Bolstering Culture in Rural Areas!**

Background:

Societal transformative processes and their ensuing structural shifts have engendered immense societal and economic pressures for change in many rural areas; these changes have affected every aspect of society and raise multiple questions concerning their social impact. Given the highly heterogeneous nature of rural areas, there are no simple solutions and easy-to-follow strategies to confront these challenges. What rural areas do have in common, however, are lower densities of population, of housing stock, of infrastructure and also of cultural institutions and amenities where people can meet.

Under the auspices the Genshagen Foundation, located close to the German capital Berlin, a Franco-German-Polish Working Group, alongside representatives from the fields of culture, politics, administration and civil society, came together in September 2022 in order to discuss how to bolster culture in rural areas and how it could further contribute to improving the overall quality of life there. Three spokespersons from each of the Weimar Triangle nations, representing different levels of administrative responsibility for culture and cultural policy, participated in this get-together focussed on the role of culture throughout rural areas.

The Franco-German-Polish Working-Group has deliberated and recommends:

1. Culture is both systematically relevant and underpins democracy, especially in rural areas!

Recommendations:

- Strengthen the advancement of democracy and community participation as objectives for cultural policy;
- Value and encourage inter-generational voluntary work, and support such voluntary activities through a permanent workforce;
- Expand cultural activities in such a way as to encourage participation and involvement by local communities, taking diversity and inclusion into consideration;
- Engage with young people and promote the arts and cultural education.

2. Support for cultural activities and projects involving local communities in rural areas should be further developed, adopting a triple-pronged approach: greater participation, needs-based and process-oriented!

Recommendations:

- Greater appreciation for the value of culture and the arts in rural areas;
- Consider cultural activities in terms of their overall contribution toward equivalent living conditions between urban and rural areas;
- Expand funding modalities and enable process funding in order to guarantee the right to experiment;
- Readapt the evaluative process to the specific nature of cultural activities and the diversity of individual cultural actors in rural areas, and define the goals of any measures to be implemented.

3. In order to sustainably foster culture in rural areas, alliances must be formed across various sectors and agencies and the value of the additional benefits to be derived from cross-border cooperation must be recognised!

Recommendations:

- Forge alliances, create networks, pool resources (also between rural and urban areas in a bid to foster “interterritoriality”);
- Recognise and promote cross-border cooperation as an additional benefit;
- Enable and avail of the cross-border transfer of knowledge and experience.

1 Culture is both systematically relevant and underpins democracy, especially in rural areas!

The multinational Working Group agrees on the need to recognise **culture** as an indispensable component in the provision of local public services and as a **vital economic factor** for rural regions. It also concurs that bolstering cultural initiatives not only has an identity-building impact, but is also of **paramount importance** in fostering **democracy** and **education**. **Rural areas' potential** and assets must be brought to the attention of society, cultural actors and the political class. Culture contributes greatly to enhancing the self-confidence and awareness of local communities; **cultural venues are spaces for meeting others** and **community building**. Cultural initiatives and projects offer both the space and ample opportunities for creativity, experimentation and the development of important skills necessary in other spheres of life. Voluntary structures for culture, especially in rural areas, are indispensable; **civic engagement** should be particularly encouraged and put into practise; preserving a vibrant and diverse cultural landscape is also a way of supporting democracy.

Engaging with young people is necessary given how they will shape the future. They should be granted responsibilities, entrusted with financial resources for specific projects, and their initiatives should be professionally supported. The **arts and cultural education activities** are also vital: not just as a societal space of opportunity in which to awaken interest and awareness, but also to enable rural communities to experience self-efficacy and their full potential. It is of paramount importance not only to identify issues that will emerge in the future but also practices that can draw on local traditions and heritage, thus interlinking past with future perspectives.

Cultural activities in rural areas are successful whenever they focus on **local participation, cooperation and a co-creative** approach. When it comes to participation, mobility plays a key

role in rural areas, impacting not just local communities or audiences, but also on those cultural actors concerned. Moreover, a shift in perspective and the innovative potential the arts represent should not be overlooked; **local issues, practices and actors should be integrated into the process**. Local cultural policy must take into consideration society's heterogeneous nature; art and culture can thus greatly contribute toward integration and inclusion.

2 Support for cultural activities and projects involving local communities in rural areas should be further developed, adopting a triple-pronged approach: greater participation, needs-based and process-oriented!

Greater appreciation of culture and cultural initiatives is required in rural areas. Fresh perspectives are needed to modify the at times backward-looking image of rural regions as well as to enable the exchange of skills and responsibilities on an equal footing **between rural and urban areas**. Such a shift is feasible when addressing key issues such as community building and neighbourhoods, resource management, and a better visibility for local crafts and industries and related activities. Closer cooperation between scientific research and academic institutions with institutions in rural areas can assist in raising awareness of the prevailing cultural practices throughout the regions. State support for culture, whether logistical or financial, should not only target urban institutions and flagship projects, for such an approach would contradict the fore-mentioned principle of equivalence of living conditions between urban and rural areas. Funding programmes must also be sufficiently available for rural areas.

Project funding should focus more on the processes underpinning cultural activities and projects involving local communities in rural areas and not exclusively the output or

end-result of artistic processes. It is of paramount importance both to enhance existing formats and to develop new ones. Up-and-running examples of open funding programmes already exist and actively engage with several societal sectors such as sport, the churches, social affairs, as well as with the cultural sphere.

How can quality be evaluated in process-oriented productions and projects? Closely linked to this question is which evaluative tools to deploy aside from quantitatively measurable numbers. The Working Group thus recommends the development of a methodology for measuring impact and sustainability which equally takes into consideration the specificities of cultural activities and the presence of the arts across rural areas. Conducting a joint evaluation with local actors can contribute to the projects' success and ensure that they ultimately gain a foothold within rural communities.

3 In order to sustainably foster culture in rural areas, alliances must be formed across various sectors and agencies and the value of the additional benefits to be derived from cross-border cooperation must be recognised!

In addition to the early involvement of local political operatives, the **forging of broad alliances** and partnerships with the local education, social, health and environmental sectors as well as those agencies operating in sport, tourism and the local economy is indispensable in order to ensure the success of cultural activities and projects involving local communities throughout rural regions. Such cross-sectoral collaborations enable the pooling of resources, which is one of the most all-important aspects in ensuring their long-term success. Mutual trust also plays a key role in building sustainable structures, as for instance between local decision-makers and artists. We also suggest to consider installing regional offices which would support collaborative efforts and effective networking.

Thinking about new models for relationships between urban zones and the countryside is equally of paramount importance. "Interterritoriality", i.e. the notion of horizontal collaboration organised according to the strengths and needs of the individual regions represents a concrete example of coordination in action between various local entities with developmental potential.

Another possibility for further development consists of knowledge transfer and exchanges between those responsible for funded projects: they could visit each other and exchange ideas on the respective project's operational aspects, tried-and-tested strategies and methods.

The **additional benefits to be derived from cross-border cooperation** need to be communicated more effectively. While cross-border initiatives do require more effort and organisation, they nonetheless hold great potential for enhancing life in rural areas. Moreover, with the help of the appropriate concepts and targeted approaches, local communities can also become involved; they could thus benefit from acquiring fresh incentives and a broadening of their horizons, particularly through international festivals or artist residencies. Existing networks incorporating partnerships between regions from other countries can contribute to cooperation in the artistic and cultural fields. Venues and spaces that enable the sharing of **knowledge, practices and cross-border experiences** need to be created. Mutual cross-border learning is indispensable, because it enables the individual parties to discover innovative and sustainable funding practices and models for cultural activities, to check whether they are transferable or applicable to their specific circumstances and, in the best case scenarios, to implement them.

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Participants in the Franco-German-Polish Working Group



In order to represent different perspectives and ensure diversity, members of the multi-national Working Group are drawn from a broad spectrum of societal actors: the political sphere, (cultural) administration, funding sources and cultural initiatives, as well as from various interest groups representing civil society:

Germany:

Samo Darian, Programme Director for the Federal Programme TRAFO - Models for Culture in Transition, the German Federal Cultural Foundation;
Brigitte Faber-Schmidt, Head of the Department of Culture, Ministry of Science, Research and Culture, State of Brandenburg;
Uwe Lübking, Councillor for Culture and Education, various positions at the German Association of Towns and Municipalities (DStGB).

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France:

Pierre-Marie Georges, Head of Strategy and Media, Association of Rural Mayors in France (AMRF);
Colette Gravier, Head of the Book and Reading Department and Cross-Border Officer, Regional Directorate for Cultural Affairs (DRAC), Grand Est Region, French Ministry of Culture;
Ivan Lubraneski, Mayor of Les Molières, Vice-President of the Association of Rural Mayors in France (AMRF), responsible for culture, democracy, international relations and communications;
Laurent Vieille, Director House of Burgundy, Department of Europe and International Affairs, Bourgogne-Franche-Comté Region.

Poland:

Olga Chrebor, Director, Department of Culture, Marshal's Office Lower Silesia Voivodeship;
Adam Krzysztoń, District Administrator of Łańcut and Vice-Chairman of the Board, Association of Polish Rural Regions;
Agata Roman, Consultant, Mazowiecki Cultural Observatory, *Mazowiecki Instytut Kultury* (Institute of Culture in Mazowieckie Voivodeship).

Funding Modalities for Culture in France, Poland and Germany

France

In France, responsibility for cultural policy is shared between several administrative levels and actors, each with its own specific cultural budget. Nationwide, contribution to the overall culture budget is as follows: 22% from the French Ministry of Culture; 8% from other governmental ministries; 6% from the thirteen administrative regions; 10% from ninety-three départements; 12% from the 1600 inter-communal associations, 42% from the 35000 municipalities and communes. These funding sources figures represent a varying proportion of the total budget for each respective level: a little over 1% at the national level; under 3% of regional budgets; just under 2% of départemental budgets; 6.5% of the inter-communal alliances, and just under 8% of the municipal budgets, which, in percentage terms, represents the largest contribution.

The French state boasts of a centralised Ministry of Culture, whose priorities are, inter alia, the provision of basic cultural services throughout the length and breadth of France and its overseas départements, the democratisation of culture, as well as underpinning the idea of France as a nation state and its impact beyond its borders. In organisational terms, the French Ministry of Culture is structured on a top-down basis, whereby large institutions in major cities receive priority funding. Regional cultural budgets are burgeoning, as for example within the framework of local economic promotion, from which the tourist sector also benefits. The départemental level serves as a link to local communities. Thanks to their guidance and support for project leaders, they function as a pivotal point of contact between all concerned parties.

A growing number of so-called municipality mergers (CDC) are in operation throughout France. Such mergers are beneficial for the cultural sector in rural areas if the needs of the municipalities concerned are similar in nature and their respective forces can be combined; the downside of such mergers is that they frequently tend to serve the interests of the larger municipalities. The French Ministry of Culture's Regional Directorates for Cultural Affairs (DRAC) are the ministry's regional administrative units installed throughout the regions. They not only administer budgets to promote cultural initiatives across rural France, but also play an advisory role in their support for cultural actors. Funding is provided either on a project basis or through partnerships or agreement procedures concluded between authorities and cultural institutions or structures, as for example with theatre companies. Funding is thereby enabled for a period of up to six years. Of note is that a prerequisite for receiving support is that recipients ensure that measures fostering arts and culture education be implemented.

Poland

In Poland, the allocation of responsibilities for fostering cultural activities is regulated by law. At a national level, there is the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (*Ministerstwo Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego*), where the sitting minister takes the lead on cultural affairs. Nationwide, the Ministry is responsible for sixty-four cultural institutions, including those whose function is advisory and whose remit is to promote cultural activities throughout Poland.

Local self-administration comprises the following levels: Voivodeships (areas administered by a regional governor), rural administrative districts and municipalities. Each of these administrative levels has been mandated to create cultural institutions and to provide for their needs. The local self-administrations allocate approximately 80% of their cultural budget to their own cultural institutions. The administration primarily finances infrastructural and personnel costs; additional sources of funding have often to be sought for the programmes themselves. At a ministerial level, a funding system operates for the programmes and for the various tasks and projects instigated by the institutions. One downside to such an approach is that these are time-limited project grants, lasting from one to three-years. Budgets from other national ministries are also used to fund cultural activities. The Ministry of Education, for example, administers and oversees the Cultural Education Institutions (*Ośrodki Edukacji Kulturalnej*).

At the most basic level, the local or municipal library and the so-called House of Culture (*dom kultury*) are frequently the sole operative cultural institutions. The House of Culture is the most prominent cultural institution for which special financial and support programmes are available at national and other levels, e.g. the "Dom Kultury+" programme. In some municipalities and regional districts, the budget for sports, tourism promotion and culture has been pooled and individual initiatives are financed from this integrated fund. Moreover, communal institutions and services such as volunteer fire brigades are bankrolled by the municipalities and they can also apply for project funding from the Ministry of Culture. This possibility exists in those areas lacking a local library or a House of Culture. *Koła Gospodyń Wiejskich* (rural women's organisations) also play a vital role; they are exceptionally proactive and apply for funding from various administrative levels.

Additionally, as in other jurisdictions, private funding can be sought from corporate foundations who designate part of their budgets to culture and sponsorship.

Germany

Given Germany's federal structure, the nation's cultural policy is predicated upon the principles of decentralisation, subsidiarity and plurality and organised on three distinct administrative levels: federal, state (*Länder*), and municipal – which includes cities, villages and regional districts (*Landkreise*). Unlike France or Poland, Germany does not have a centralised Ministry of Culture: primary responsibility for legislation and administration in the cultural sphere lies with the sixteen *Länder* (cultural sovereignty); there are usually ministries of culture at the individual state level, whose objectives include providing financial support to regional cultural institutions, determining political priorities and supporting regional projects. In light of this federal structure, significant disparities are to be found between the individual *Länder* in terms of orientation and how cultural activities are funded.

Jointly with the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media (BKM), Germany has a federal authority which, for example, oversees the legal framework and compliance for the whole of Germany, supports cultural institutions of national importance, and represents Germany's cultural and media policy interests in various international bodies. The budget share assigned for culture on the three administrative levels is as follows: 15% from the federal government (including other ministries such as the Federal Ministry of the Interior and the Federal Ministry of Agriculture); 40% from the individual *Länder*, and 45% from the municipalities.

The Constitutions of the individual *Länder* set out, with varying degrees of emphasis, the paramount role of culture for the Federal State in question. Concurrently, the *Grundgesetz* (Basic Constitutional Law) protects the arts in a special way. Culture, especially at a municipal level, competes with other optional objectives, such as education, social affairs or sport (keyword: communal swimming pools). According to the principle of subsidiarity, public powers in Germany are regulated as close to the citizenry as possible, i.e. initially at the political level of civil society and by local authorities. Local administrative autonomy throughout Germany is anchored in the Constitution.

In Germany, the large and highly organised cultural federations and cultural funding programs play a key role in subsidising, offering guidance and creating awareness. The same could be said of the foundations and, at a municipal level, those organisations promoting cultural activities. The practice of project funding, however, has been criticised on account of so-called projectitis, for under certain circumstances such a project-focussed approach can hinder the project's long-term feasibility. Currently, however, there are new funding programmes at the federal, state and municipal levels which will ensure multi-year funding and thus specifically support structural development, especially among actors in rural areas.

Over recent years, the arts and cultural education have been playing a key role. Nationwide, rural areas have benefitted from greater attention as a cross-cutting theme at the various funding levels and in the relevant ministries and agencies.

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