

Preface

The main duty of the Mayor of Wrocław – as probably of any Mayor around the world – is to help secure and, hopefully, improve the wellbeing of the city's inhabitants. This task has material as well as spiritual or intellectual dimensions.

As regards the latter, I recently attended an interesting lecture of Luigi Sacco in Brussels. Based on empirical studies, this Italian researcher claims that the feeling of satisfaction with life increases as the participation in cultural life grows. In our cultural environment, this includes taking part in cultural events, such as going to concerts or visiting theatre performances, both with a strong correlation to citizens' feeling of satisfaction with life – in other regions, different cultural practices or habits might come into play, and not all of them have necessarily the same effects. For example, an earlier German survey underlined a definite link between cultural participation and civic engagement, including the readiness to criticise conditions giving cause for concern.

While these and other motivations should already prompt us to give more attention to, and create better opportunities for our fellow citizens' participation in cultural life, the same must also be said as concerns the material dimensions of wellbeing.

In economic terms, a number of factors could be mentioned, such as the money circulating within a city or region as well as the number of available jobs, average wages, productivity and the quality of goods. Whatever parameter you choose with the aim to improve economic conditions or social growth, the importance of innovation will come into the picture.

Once again studies have clarified the strong links between culture and the climate for innovation or, to be more precise, the correlation between expenditure for culture and the level of innovation. Both in the 'old' European Union (EU-15) and in the now enlarged one (EU-28, or 27 after the Brexit), the volume of expenditure for culture remains strongly correlated with innovativeness: Where the expenditure is high, innovativeness grows, and where the spending is low, the chances for economic innovation also remain low. In this sense, spending on culture – with its direct or indirect effects on e.g. design and architecture or on a more informed consumer behaviour – could be seen as a specific form of investment into the future of a city, that will become profitable over time.

For culture to flourish in a central European meeting place like Wrocław, our manifold traditions as well as the imagination and innovative impulses of both citizens and artists or intellectuals must be of prime concern. This has been our policy since many years and we could highlight it again during 2016 with a great number of *European Capital of Culture* activities.

In case you are wondering: Why does he start his opening remarks to the *Wrocław Commentaries* project and handbook with these thoughts? Indeed, it is my firm belief that we need to be constantly aware of the social and economic environment in which cultural life develops – or declines. And the same could actually be said about a 'Culture of Human Rights' which, as this book clearly demonstrates, is by no means static; rather it can, and needs to be, shaped and further developed.

As regards laws and policies, important inputs to further debates and actual reforms can be expected from the new Handbook; they will surely reach far beyond the city's limits. I'm proud that the first initiatives our city and the National Centre for Culture have taken in 2013 resulted in a publication and interactive web platform that will further spread the name of Wrocław across Europe and the world. The editorial team of ARCult Media led by Professor Andreas Wiesand, the Scientific Committee led by Professor Yvonne Donders, and the many contributing experts can be congratulated for realising this critical compendium of culture-related human rights instruments and case-law, for the first time in history.

In a sense, the *Wrocław Commentaries* also delineate the status of what we have originally called a 'right to culture'. My interpretation of such a universal human right is that it should

enable free individual intellectual and spiritual growth as well as shaping interpersonal relations leading to innovation, social cohesion and welfare, facilitated through mutual respect. Does this right still need to be achieved? Is it already, at least partly, being guaranteed? Or is this just a 'European problem' as the notion is not sufficiently reflected in either the European Convention on Human Rights or in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights? From what I have learned about the content of the handbook, all of these viewpoints could be seen as co-existing, at present, depending also on the degree to which provisions in current legal instruments are respected and implemented.

However, compared with other rights of access and individual or collective guarantees that we have become accustomed to, at least in the Western world, such as rights to education or social and health protection, there seems to be still some way to go until a right to culture has turned into reality.

Let me close with two remarks directed to opponents of the notion of a right to culture:

First, trivial critics of this proposal raise the argument that there can also be crime-filled cultural expressions. That's why you should not be using the general notion of a 'right to culture' without specifying the forms or nature of what needs to be protected – and what not. These critics do not understand how language works, on a subconscious level. For example, when we refer to the right to education, we mean good, solid education, not failed efforts. Again, when we speak of a right to culture we are, of course, referring not to harmful cultural practices. Therefore, this simple notion needs no strengthening with any additional descriptions.

Secondly, when we speak of a 'right to culture' we refer to the ambitious goal of complementing one of the European 'constitutions', the European Convention on Human Rights. That goal is certainly bold, possibly even far-fetched. There is no way of knowing whether and when it can be fulfilled. However, quite often the thrill of the chase is already more important than the final catch.

The dialogue on how to best secure or improve culture-related human rights is important in its own right. And, as can be seen in the *Wrocław Commentaries*, it has already brought many a good thing.

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