

Yann Couronneaud: European Culture, a Late Discovery

"Europe is a culture or it is not." Denis de Rougemont

The education system intends to give European students the competence to succeed in their professional and personal life (Eg. foreign languages, computer skills). But in order to use this power wisely, they will need a robust framework. Culture is a crucial element to build this framework, and help students become responsible professionals and citizens.

If you think of the key foundations of the EU: peace, democracy, freedom of speech, human rights... One should not forget about culture.

Long before Europe was united in an economic or political level, it was culture that united all the countries of Europe: the arts, literature and music. The foundations of European identity lie in its culture. Europeans share a common cultural heritage, which is the result of centuries of creativity, migratory flows and exchanges. These foundations are essential to Europe's future citizens and leaders.

We often speak about soft power in the context of foreign policy. We cannot deny the strength and the efficiency of soft power in inspiring democracy for instance. But have we thought about domestic use of soft power, inward cultural promotion? When Josef Nye used the term soft power in 1990, he believed there were 3 dimensions:

- Political values
- Foreign policy
- Culture

The diversity and richness of European cultures has been underused. We need to recognize our diversity and similarities. This common understanding (through cultural exchange and dialogue) is necessary to guarantee peace and prosperity.

Did you know that cultural heritage has only been included in treaties in 1992? Where does this anomaly come from? Maybe because culture was everywhere, it was taken for granted.

While the European Council passed the European Cultural Convention as early as 1954, the European Union did not adopt culture into its treaties until Maastricht in 1992. Due to this late integration of culture into the European Union's treaties and agreements, Article 167 merely refers to "cooperation" with the European Council. Therefore the majority of promotion takes place separately, country by country.



The European Union has launched and funded several successful initiatives, such as the European Cultural Month, the Media Programme, the European Union Youth Orchestra or the European Capital of Culture programme. But because of this late start, there is a significant potential, especially in the field of education.

So what can we do about it?

I think everyone agrees on the benefits of school exchange programmes such as Erasmus. But did you know that only 4% of European students participate? This number needs to increase significantly.

Teaching more art history at school would be helpful to allow students to understand our European cultural heritage. Digitalisation can be of great help here, to discover museums and works of arts from all over Europe.

Other initiatives could include:

- Supporting mobility of art collections throughout Europe
- Developing a smart web TV for young generations
- Improving circulation of European films
- Creating online cultural relations tool
- Increasing city-to-city cooperation programmes

Promoting cultural diversity is essential for strengthening democratic values in Europe and contributing to economic and social cohesion. The purpose of this seminar is to find ideas to give young generations the best education so that they can build a better world. What they need foremost to shape a better future is to grasp our European cultural heritage. Smart power intends to inspire hope and optimism. This is all we need to bring European awareness and citizenship to the next level.