Report – International Seminar on "International Artistic Mobility and Territorial Diplomacy" - Thursday 24th May 2012 at Vila Flor Cultural Centre, Guimarães, Portugal

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Introduction

This seminar grouped together 50 professionals from the cultural sector – policymakers, researchers, cultural operators, artists, institutional representatives and consultants from both sides of the Mediterranean (20 countries including 8 countries from the South –, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Netherlands, Palestine, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Kingdom).

At a time when artistic and cultural activities in Portugal are suffering from severe cuts back in funding that will clearly have a negative impact on culture and the arts in the years to come, the internationalisation of cultural agents is no longer seen as a priority by the Portuguese government despite the fact that it is a source of renewal of partnerships, exchanges and models of cooperation that the current crisis could clearly benefit from. A recent study commissioned by the Portuguese government in 2010 had underlined the importance of international travel and discussions on this topic had been organised by the GPEARI – the Cabinet of Planning, strategy building and international relations of the Portuguese Ministry of Culture - and the Camoes Institute in 2010 and 2011 to make progress in this area… but all this has been set aside for more urgent measures of "austerity".

Despite this, the City of Guimarães warmly welcomed our event. Guimarães's Deputy-Mayor for Culture, Francesca Abreu and Paolo Cruz, member of the Municipal Council clearly underlined at the opening session that the strategic concept for Guimarães as European capital of Culture this year was to focus on meetings, exchanges and residencies for local and international artists and cultural operators. The concept of a cultural city is one of dialogue of people from different origins. Culture is meant to strengthen our skills and the territory. Beyond major events and festivals, international meetings and exchanges between peoples of different cultures are seen as the cement of effective cultural actions today. This is why the RCF seminar was important to them. RCF can help local and regional authorities to see why international artistic mobility is a valuable strategy and help them to plan quality mobility (well-prepared travel leading to concrete sustainable projects). Mobility is an old subject but old subjects have to be dealt with in new perspectives.

The current context in international relations has witnessed major paradigm shifts through free-trade agreements and the effects the financial crisis is having on governance models. If we want cultures to maintain their diversity and arts to play a role in our modern societies then we must support the international travel of local artists and cultural operators in the four corners of the globe. This will ease understanding between cultures and directly impact local development, European cohesion, and international stability.

The importance of local and regional cultural policy building should not be underestimated in this regard. The title of the seminar proposed the concept of "territorial diplomacy". Ferdinand Richard, President of RCF, explained that this concept, which could also be called "diplomacy of local governments", is based on the shift in sovereignty to territories alongside nation states. This shift is linked to the development of Europe and globalisation. The political impact of regional development funds, for example, has strengthened the autonomy of local and regional authorities. Local cultural identity is being consolidated by touristic attractivity for the better or for the worst. A local politician will have to imagine the common future of his or her local inhabitants with the good quality creative talents that his/her territory deserves. Elected leaders could become mediators between local cultural actors and public spending, so as to define their territorial assignment on the long-term. International contacts are being developed to extend attractivity elsewhere. In this context it is no surprise that a timely local cultural policy framework has developed, the Agenda 21 for Culture, produced by a worldwide network of local governance, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). The indisputable effect of the European Capital of Culture phenomenon has lead to a transfer of cultural interests and aims to local authorities and this shift is upheld by international treaties such as the UNESCO Convention of 2005 on the promotion and protection of the diversity of cultural expressions.

Are local administrations ready for this? During this seminar, the questions focused on what a local cultural policy provided for artistic mobility and if this policy was motivated by a sense of competition and/or interdependence between other local and regional authorities elsewhere in Europe, the Mediterranean or beyond.

Is this policy aimed to address the challenges at stake for cultures and the arts in our societies and protect and promote artistic expression within our common global agenda? In this case, perhaps being competitive as well as acknowledging our interdependence work in parallel. Do local and regional authorities in European countries agree on common strategies for cultural mobility and dialogue in Europe and beyond? How about local and regional authorities in the South countries; what is their position on this question? Is a policy for cultural mobility dictated by a top down system or a bottom up system or both?

RCF considers that the mobility issue has to be placed at the centre of the political and artistic debate.

Nawel Skandrani, member of the Board of Directors of RCF, underlined the difficulty of travelling in the Arab world insisting on the fact that this situation has not improved since the uprisings despite the fact that mobility of mind and body are essential for individual liberty. Private or public sector representatives should be finding out why they should support the international travel of artists and cultural operators.

As Antonio Pinto Ribeiro, Board member of RCF, said, the biggest risk for Portugal at the moment would be to be isolated again. Mobility is not guaranteed even though historical. We need to take care of it, to make it a political responsibility, to have it funded by private or public sources. We should have north-to-other-directions exchanges because mobility is connected to migration, to human rights in general and cultural rights in particular.

Different mindsets should be adopted in which cultural policy is a response to needs of arts professionals bringing mutual benefits in terms of cooperation and innovation. Transnational cultural and artistic mobility should not be considered as a European or Western concept but as a variant adopting different forms depending on its function and utility in the various parts of the world.

Analytical framework

Local cultural policy and international mobility of artists

As an introduction to this debate, it is important to remember that local, regional or national cultural policymaking depends on the way it is perceived in each country, the tradition of cultural policy making, the dynamism of local actors and the financial resources available. Very often competences in cultural policy are not so clearly defined between the different levels of local or regional governance and this often leads to a juxtaposition of policies related to culture in most cases even if complementarities and coordination are possible.

Sooner or later the European project will lead its member-states to consider a territorial re-structuring where different levels of government (local, intermediary or regional) can take on new competencies or redefine them. This is one of the consequences of the impact of regional development funds as well as being linked to the impact the Treaty of Lisbon is having when it calls for the strengthening of alliances between local governments.

Clearly the process of globalisation tends to reinforce the need at local level to reassert the singularity of a city or region. "Pools of creativity" are appearing grouping together entrepreneurs as well as creative thinkers (academics, artists) in order to transfer new ideas. Will they have a positive (mutualisation) or negative (cultural desertification) effect? Could mobility be seen as a simple and effective way of improving the international capacities of creative locals to enhance effective policies and actions in our new globalised environments be they geographical or virtual? Territorial cultural policymaking must work on several fronts: offer cultural services, set up cultural standards and actions that highlight specificities, correct inequalities and structure new dynamics in the economic framework of the international competitive and free market. International cultural policy is not only about valuing ones own cultural assets it is also about communicating with cultures elsewhere. Mobility is thus a determining factor.

The round table discussion that took place in Guimarães in the morning of 25th May allowed representatives of current or future capitals of culture as well as other municipalities and regions to

present their cultural policy and their position regarding international mobility of artists. Cities such as Helsinki, Lisbon, Pilsen (ECOC 2015) San Sebastian (ECOC 2016), Las Palmas de Gran Canarias and the Region of the Nord Pas de Calais were present as well as Guimarães 2012.

Focus was immediately given to cultural policies that provide production spaces or residencies for local or foreign artists. Examples centred on renovating old factories for this purpose (Pilsen, San Sebastian, Guimarães). The Cities of Lisbon and Helsinki indicated that long-term exchange programmes existed (very often on the initiative of local arts organisations themselves). These exchange programmes take place between arts organisations in Europe but sometimes elsewhere in the world such as in Japan or America. They are often interdisciplinary and residency based, insist on training, new artistic trends and the emerging scene. Workshops are organised for locals to meet foreign artists and learn from them. Street arts and new urban installations are also developing a new relationship between citizens and the arts. Artistic collectives are forming that include foreign artists. Inhabitants are showing a growing interest in foreign cultures and Pilsen for example has focused on supporting an Arab culture Festival every year. So it is clear that the international ingredient in cultural policy enables the city or region to highlight its cultural and artistic assets (talent, cultural heritage or activism).

As far as the Arab countries are concerned, some would say that there is no such thing as cultural policy in the Arab world[1]. However there are examples of regions and cities that provide support to festivals and other cultural or artistic activities such as the Oriental Region in Morocco that supports some 50 festivals a year. One of the participants from Lebanon, Khadije Laakis, spoke about her initiative to set up a Forum of Festivals. For this she received only private investment funding. The Ministry of Culture did not provide moral or financial support. RCF has taken the initiative to contact local and regional authorities in the Arab world. Discussions have for example already begun with the City of Amman. The Arab Education Forum based there is actively involved in their city project called "Amman a learning city".

Serene Huleileh, RCF Board member, spoke of the "jeeras" meaning neighbourhoods that are developing in Amman as an incentive to hospitality. It's important to encourage learning initiatives, develop policies of constant learning, build the basis of support to people, improve transportation. There are many refugees in Amman. Nobody is from Amman so it is important to develop feelings of belonging in the city. Mobility starts within the city. What do you want to learn, to share?

Esra Aysun, RCF Board member from Turkey, explained that after the 1990s, what revived Istanbul was individual artists' mobility funded by their own resources. Individual cultural entrepreneurship started as a civic initiative. Contemporary art is produced by civil society and has lead to the international recognition of the creativity of Istanbul, thanks to individual mobility.

Defining an international artistic mobility strategy at local or regional level

There is a clear need to define a more substantial mobility policy related to local artists and cultural operators as well as welcoming foreign artists. It is necessary to clarify that the mobility of "cooperation" that RCF deals with, is related to the travel of artists and cultural operators to train, to take part in residencies (human development), to attend seminars or to prepare projects and partnerships (social or cultural development). The mobility of works (touring, exhibitions, concerts) is supported by local and regional authorities through funding of distribution or production costs of live arts companies and other arts organisations.

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[1] pg 227 « Opening horizons » by Milena Dragicevic Sesic, « Cultural policies in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia. An Introduction », Boekmanstudies. 2010.

Local and regional authorities that have already positioned themselves on the question of international cultural and artistic cooperation, welcomed the RCF initiative because it gives them the chance **to develop a conceptual framework that matches the current global challenges and enables them to identify models and strategies to develop a more coherent policy** rather than one-off short term projects that do not address a long term challenge.

International artistic mobility is a priority of the EU's culture programme. It is therefore a central "cultural" question for national governments in Europe as well as for major European regions and cities. Member states of the EU recently approved a series of mobility information standards (MIS[2]) to define a framework for easier access to information when you want to be mobile in the EU. Moreover, the OMC group (Open Method of Coordination), a structured dialogue platform between the European Commission and member states, has set up a working group on the question of artistic and cultural mobility. This working group has recently drafted a report that defines five priorities[3] concerning transnational mobility.

Our debate bought to the fore five themes:

1) Mobility and Periphery
A mobility strategy questions how to position your territory in the "global arena". If you are "peripheral" as is the case for Las Palmas de Gran Canarias for example mobility is key to making you more visible. The City of San Sebastian is peripheral but inside Europe, because far away from decision-making centres. Wales is a small nation but has the capacity and confidence to work with other smaller nations in a European context marked by "devolution" or "decentralisation"[4]. Mobility is essential for both. In the case of the Nord-Pas de Calais mobility is a way of reaching out to other regions in Europe and beyond that have similar histories and that deal with the same problems (how to transform a former industrial region and renew its economy).

We must take stock of the following: in Europe as in many other parts of the world, we are witnessing the "golden cultural triangles" syndrome in which circulation between major cities (Berlin/Brussels/Amsterdam or Copenhagen/Stockholm/Oslo or again Vienna/Prague/Zurich..) defines a territorial favouritism that is detrimental to other areas in economic and cultural terms. The areas that are not part of the triangles tend to be considered as "reserves of raw material" and suffer from artistic and cultural "brain-drain". Areas excluded from the "golden triangles" will not be considered as generators for innovation, trends, specificities, thereby increasing geographical imbalance and going against the ideal of the European project. Geographical imbalances are the lot of policymakers as well as active citizens. Elected leaders should be taking stock of this situation. The methods they/we define in the content of Europe are also applicable or transferable to the relationship that Europe has with its neighbouring regions. By supporting mobility, do we increase this centralising factor for the benefit of these "golden triangles" and the loss of local development or do we understand the mechanisms that are operating and try to counterbalance them in favour of cultural development at local level everywhere?

The Nord-Pas de Calais region that is peripheral to central administration in France and at the heart of one of the golden cultural triangles in Europe (Paris/Brussels/London), has nonetheless been developing an exemplary international cultural cooperation policy for the last twenty years. This policy has set up interregional relations with neighbours. Today, through deliberately supporting

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[2] http://on-the-move.org/librarynew/policyandadvocacy/article/14550/information-standards-for-the-mobility-of-artists/?category=87

[3] http://on-the-move.org/librarynew/policyandadvocacy/article/15045/report-on-building-a-strong-framework-for-artists/

[4] These terms vary depending on the political and administrative frameworks of each European country.

mobility, regions such as Brazil have become partners basing their partnership on historic similarities and affinities (such as a common need to transform and regenerate the economy of former industrial regions).

2) Mobility, exchange and capacity-building
In the case of Lisbon and Helsinki mobility has established long-term partnerships based on exchange and training at grassroots level, but mobility can also be as in the case of European Capitals of Culture a temporary issue, but strengthening capacity-building in the same way. The participants clearly indicated that mobility builds new art forms and trends because emerging artists will travel to places where their art projects will be supported and enriched. Being identified as a "global facilitator of the arts" could be a politically, economically and socially interesting move for a local governing body. At the same time, mobility is a learning process that brings back knowledge, inspiration to the home base.

3) Mobility and globalisation
Let's be cautious in this day and age where cultural and social interests are often twisted and abused for gains in market shares in the battle of the survival of the fittest. Society may produce cultural goods and services priced within a competitive global market but it also educates humans through culture and arts providing the building blocks of our society. It's a central, non-negotiable, "unpricable" obligation for society since it allows for the expression of "one's humanity and the meaning one gives to one's existence and development"[5]. As cultural actors our major concern in the public arena is to uphold human dignity, safeguard cultural diversity and defend cultural rights.

The current economic crisis is a case for mobility as it provides an opportunity for a change in focus of local policies that could guarantee a wider access to cultural life for all and upholding cultural rights. With this in mind and within a global agenda, local governments should be looking at the "return on investment" for their cities or regions not only for the individual but also as a collective dynamic. Cultural activists and producers could also consider the "relevance" of their own projects and their political responsibility in the global scenario.

How do cultural actors in the Arab and Mediterranean regions evaluate or relate to this reality? To answer this question we can for example pinpoint the fact that cultural project leaders of **transnational projects** are rarely from the South, which invariably implies that most partnerships are lead and therefore influenced by operators form the North, even if they do so with the best intentions. Training and the setting up of artistic teams and facilities in the South is therefore urgent in order to consolidate the arts sector but the reality also reveals that legitimacy of project building should make a distinction between "the way they do it in the North" and "the way they do it in the South".

The importance of **cultural mobility** in peace keeping, a messenger of cultural diversity, a facilitator of dialogue has been underlined on countless occasions by the professionals working in the sector, but still does not appear to be seen as an effective contributor by political decision makers. They are still to be convinced of the importance of the cultural factor in the emergence of conflict and in its resolution.

Finally, **hospitality**, residencies should be considered as a shared investment rather than a charitable act in order to contribute not only to a real economy of scale but also to mutual respect. Hospitality is a path to knowledge, to personal enrichment.

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[5] Article 2, « Cultural Rights. Fribourg Declaration », pg5

4) Responsible and Sustainable Mobility
A responsible and sustainable form of transnational mobility should extend partnerships, contribute to stability, bring in innovation and contribute to sustainable cross-border modes of cooperation. Such mobility should respect the working conditions of artists and operators and requires a responsible attitude towards the impact that mobility has on the environment. The cultural mobility information network "On the Move" is currently drafting a charter for a responsible and sustainable mobility, which will go online beginning of 2013.

For national ministries such as the Culture Ministry of Croatia, mobility of artists enables the setting up of international partnerships. These partnerships can develop thanks to international or European funding which has an indirect, positive impact for culture in Croatia. At a regional level, the French Institute for example, created a programme to help local operators to work in collaboration with regional entities. This has been a real political shift that strengthens local priorities.

5) Mobility and conflict
In an era of globalised conflicts that often stem from cultural issues, regional neighbours (cross-border regions for example) need to discuss how the mobility of their cultural operators and artists can unlock tricky, longstanding divides. Could this be the definition of the term "local government diplomacy" that this seminar highlights in its title? Of course diplomacy is a synonym for many of the term "influence" - political, economic or cultural influence which could have very negative undertones. But diplomacy also means unravelling complex cultural, political and economical differences between nations through negotiations rather than violence. Negotiation means dialogue between diverse individuals, consultation, resolution to meet common challenges through a "fair-trade" attitude to culture; a "fair-culture" attitude.

Acknowledging that stability and sustainability are key policy concepts[6], could it not be possible to see that international mobility is a key contributor to these two notions? This demands some sort of evaluation on the impact that mobility has at local level on social cohesion and the prevention of conflict. Cultural indicators could be devised to help understand how mobility contributes to the dynamism of local arts and culture.

For regions and municipalities in the South, a cultural policy that includes the international mobility of citizens would contribute to rebalancing the unequal flow of professionals in the arts world.

Proposals and actions to work on

- Examine and develop the political meaning of mobility and its impact on a territory (the artist being the link between two or more territories).

- Develop cultural indicators on the impact that mobility has on local development including factors such as the dynamism of local artistic production, the development of local activism, the consolidation of sustainable cultural and artistic eco-systems, the enrichment of common remembrance, the new ways we communicate our cultures, the change in nature and diversity of cultural and artistic products or offers. All of these could be measured both qualitatively and quantitatively and help us to analyse the impact mobility really has.

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[6] Sustainability as a policy is indicated in article 61 of the Agenda 21 for Culture. Stability as a policy is mentioned on page 2 of the European Agenda for Culture and in divers policy documents of the Council of Europe.

- Initiate mobility strategies with countries outside of the European borders, not only in North Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans but also with Russia and in the Caucasian region (Eastern Partnership programme of the EU).

- Acknowledge and facilitate access to information on the rights of artists when they are mobile including rights to proper working conditions abroad and so on. This helps to lay the basis for defining the social benefits of mobility.

- Increasing the quality of mobility by clearly defining the positive impact mobility has (understanding between peoples and cultures, a chain of individual and collective benefits in a context of increasing exchange in a globalised world, a contribution to sustainable models of international cultural and artistic eco-systems or clusters, a facilitator of dialogue, a messenger of cultural diversity, a factor that contributes to linking and extending artistic partnerships from the local level).

- Acknowledge the negative impact that mobility can have on the environment and take measures to reduce this impact as much as possible (such as planning one trip for several meetings and objectives, using ecologically friendly means of travel where possible, etc.)

- Evaluate the effects of the current financial crisis and budget cuts to the arts in Europe (that also affects funding to third countries), coupled with the increase in budgets for the arts in certain emerging countries such as China (particularly for international relations). Analyse the challenges for mobility and suggest concrete proposals based on already existing best practices.