

2

Encapsulating EU Cultural Policy into the EU's Growth and Competitiveness Agenda: Explaining the Success of a Paradigmatic Shift in Brussels

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Introduction

A new discourse, in which cultural policy is increasingly integrated into a policy agenda dealing with the promotion of creativity, innovation policy, and the fostering of growth and economic competitiveness more generally, has recently gained ground in Brussels. In December 2013, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union (Council) adopted the new Creative Europe programme (European Parliament and Council, 2013a). The European Commission (Commission) explained that the programme will enable the cultural and creative sectors, described as 'a major source of jobs and growth', 'to reach their potential so that they can contribute to the Europe 2020 goals for sustainable growth, jobs and social cohesion' (European Commission, 2014a). The new agenda differs quite radically from former European Union (EU) discourses on cultural policy, which laid the emphasis on culture as a key element in the definition process of regional, national and European identities. With the launch of the 'creativity frame', a clear paradigmatic change took place and economic concerns became the core of the justification for the EU's cultural policy. This chapter explains the drive behind this paradigmatic shift. It argues that the Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) initiated and promoted this policy agenda in an attempt to gain control over policy. The discourse DG EAC promoted was able to gain

ground owing to a convergence of factors. DG EAC was able, first, to articulate a convincing link between economic ‘problems’ in the EU and culture as a potential ‘solution’. This resonated well with a broader discursive framework, dominant in academic and policy circles, which upheld the knowledge economy and creativity as the cornerstones of all economic competitiveness strategies. Also, the characteristics of the ‘creativity frame’, sufficiently vague to appeal to diverging interests, made it an efficient tool of mobilisation of interests that were formerly opposed. Finally, the tenets of the discourse resonated well with the EU political and institutional context, in which market concerns and competitiveness strategies are key.

Agenda-setting and framing

Elucidating how certain policy issues get to the top of political agendas – defined here as the set of issues that receive serious attention in a polity (Kingdon, 1995: 3) – has been the object of considerable scholarly attention. Agenda-setting processes are indeed crucial, since they determine *which issues* are to be dealt with and *in what terms*. Dynamics of agenda-setting have usually been explained in terms of conflict expansion. New issues can make it onto political agendas when the proponents of a given policy frame act as ‘advocates’ (Baumgartner, 2007) and succeed in extending the conflict to a wider circle of actors, so as to redefine the line between the proponents and opponents of the proposal. In studies of agenda-setting, conflict expansion strategies have usually been understood as an attempt to expand conflict from a narrow circle of experts to the public at large (Schattschneider, 1960: 3).

The key element in conflict expansion processes is the way an issue is defined. The process of framing is therefore central to much of the agenda-setting literature. Whether authors refer to the ability of a frame to create a convincing link between ‘problem’ and ‘solution’ (Kingdon, 1995), or to the necessity for the frame to refer to a familiar and tried strategy, or to the heuristics of the frame itself (Kohler-Koch, 2000: 521), the *nature of the discourse* is taken to matter. Scholars’ interest for issue definition is based on the simple assumption that depending on how policy problems are portrayed, or on the qualities of a given ‘policy frame’ (Schön and Rein, 1994), certain actors get empowered, while others lose control over policy. From the framing perspective, frames ‘affect which interests play a role during policy drafting and deliberation and what type of political conflicts and coalitions are likely to emerge as a result’ (Daviter, 2007: 654). Studies on framing also point that for new frames to gain ground on political agendas, they need to refer to

‘meta-cultural frames’ which operate at a broader level (Schön and Rein, 1994). The influence of specific ideas is related to their resonance with broader values, whether they are termed as ‘worldviews’ (Goldstein, 1993), ‘public moods’ (Jacobsen, 1995) or ‘wider societal concerns’ (Rhinard, 2010). Besides the definition of policy issues, agenda-setting studies have also looked at conflict expansion in relation to institutional factors. The institutional and political framework within which polities operate has been conceived as favouring the consideration for some issues while discouraging consideration for others (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962; Schattschneider, 1960). In the EU context, Baumgartner has argued that, ‘because of the history of “market integration” as a driving force, terminology associated with harmonisation and free exchange may more often find its way in the policy process’ (2007: 485–486). Thus, the rise of issues on political agendas also depends on the availability of institutionally favourable conditions within the political system.

A paradigmatic shift: Emergence of the ‘creativity frame’

The ‘creativity frame’ focuses on the potential of culture to promote European competitiveness. If this discourse is not new, its dominance of the EU agenda and the strength with which it is asserted are unprecedented. DG EAC has traditionally upheld a dual rationale to justify the existence and the promotion of EU-level cultural policies. In the absence of a treaty competence for culture before the Maastricht Treaty, finding justification for EU intervention in the field had always been a tricky endeavour. Even after the Maastricht Treaty, the setback persisted because safeguards for national autonomy were provided via a strict application of the principle of subsidiarity. In this context, EU institutions first presented the developing of EU cultural activity as a political imperative. If the EU was to succeed as an entity, European citizens should be made aware of their belonging to a common culture. The 1985 *Adonnino reports on a people’s Europe* contained specific sections devoted to culture, suggesting the introduction of concrete ‘European’ symbols to which citizens could relate – such as the European flag and the European anthem (Adonnino, 1985b). At the core of the notion of a people’s Europe was the idea that the integration project should not be only concerned with market-making, but also with a more ‘fundamental’ project of community building, fostering a sense of European identity.

Second, the Commission placed emphasis on the economic and social potential of the cultural sector. In the 1977 *Communication on Community action in the cultural sector*, the cultural sector was defined

as ‘the persons and undertakings involved in the production and distribution of cultural goods and services’ (European Commission, 1977: 5), with the main objective to ensure free trade. In the 1987 Communication, *A fresh boost for culture in the European Community*, the Commission asserted that ‘increased cultural activity [was]... a political as well as a social and economic necessity, given the twin goals of completing the internal market by 1992 and progressing from a People’s Europe to European Union’ (European Commission, 1987: 6). Thus, EU intervention in the field of culture always oscillated between applying general free-trade principles and promoting a cultural policy in its own name, justified by the need to make European citizens aware of the existence of a common identity. With the launch of the ‘creativity frame’, however, the economic nature of the EU’s discourse on culture took a new dimension.

The take-off of the ‘creativity frame’ came about with the 2006 study *The economy of culture in Europe* carried out by KEA European Affairs, a Brussels-based consultancy which specialises in the cultural, media and entertainment sectors, for the Commission (KEA et al., 2006: 31). The study provided the Commission services with the data, discursive arguments and programmatic solutions that were necessary to frame culture as a source of competitiveness and a key axis of the then Lisbon Strategy (European Council, 2000). The *European agenda for culture in a globalizing world* (the Cultural Agenda) institutionalised and gave visibility to the ‘creativity frame’ (European Commission, 2007a). Invoking the KEA study, the Commission pointed that ‘the cultural sector contributed around 2.6 percent to the EU GDP in 2003’ (ibid.: 9). Culture was presented as a direct source of creativity, and creativity was defined in terms of its potential for social and technological innovation, and thus as an ‘important driver of growth, competitiveness and jobs’ (ibid.). DG EAC, in fact, articulated a conceptual link between the cultural sector and broader economic concerns such as growth, employment and social cohesion, through the fashioning of an ad hoc conception of creativity. The terms culture, creativity and innovation were used in an artificially articulated triadic relationship between: (a) culture as a source of creativity; (b) creativity as a necessary factor for technological innovation; and (c) technological innovation as an essential component of growth and competitiveness.

The ‘creativity frame’ promoted by DG EAC obtained recognition at the highest political level. In his speech at the European Manifesto for Creativity and Innovation, in November 2009, Commission President José Manuel Barroso explained that it is important ‘to link participants

from science to art and culture [...] and put innovation and creativity at the heart of tomorrow's policies' (Barroso, 2009). The discourse fostered by DG EAC was also adopted at the intergovernmental level. In 2007, the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council issued its *Conclusions on the contribution of the cultural and creative sectors to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives*, in which the agenda developed by the Commission was fully endorsed (Council, 2007a). A few months later, heads of government within the European Council acknowledged the potential of the 'cultural and creative industries' to contribute to the aims of the Lisbon Agenda, giving culture full horizontal recognition (European Council, 2008). Thus, DG EAC succeeded in imposing the 'creativity frame' within the Commission, which then promoted it as a workable programmatic solution at the intergovernmental level.

The knowledge economy as a meta-frame

The propagation of the 'creativity frame' was made easier by the presence of a broader discursive context. On the one hand, the background was one of perceived failure, by policy-makers at national and EU level, of past solutions dealing with unemployment, slow growth and low investment levels. On the other, and as a response to the former, a paradigmatic shift had already taken place both in academia and policy circles, from a discourse in which the goals of an economy consisted in producing at the lowest possible cost, to one in which the main objective was to produce more 'qualitatively'. Quoting the words of an official from DG EAC, 'there is... a perception that we are switching to an economy in which the differentiation of products and all the "soft" elements integrated in the concept become more important than the functionality of the product itself' (Littoz-Monnet, 2009). This reasoning echoes the rationale which lies at the heart of the concept of knowledge economy: in a post-industrialised economy, knowledge, know-how, and other investments in intangibles, are at least as important as other economic resources.

It is within this broader discursive shift that a more specific reframing process took place, by which the concept of 'cultural industries' was progressively replaced by that of 'creative industries'. 'Cultural industries' was a term put forward in the 1980s in order to designate the commercial industry sectors,¹ such as film, television, book publishing and music, which also delivered fundamental popular culture to a national population. Despite continuities between cultural and creative industries, the creative industries concept is 'trying to chart a historical

shift from subsidised “public arts” and broadcast era media, towards new and broader applications of creativity’ (Cunningham, 2002: 6). Howkins has defined the creative industries as encompassing any industry where ‘brain power is preponderant and where the outcome is intellectual property’ (2002: 2). Some academics and policy analysts, acting as frame entrepreneurs, articulated and propagated this discourse. In *The rise of the creative class*, Richard Florida (2002) disseminated this discourse in policy circles in ways unprecedented. The KEA study was straightforwardly inspired from Florida’s thinking, explaining that ‘the immaterial dimension generated by creative people, skills, ideas and processes; in other terms, creativity’ is a specific competitive parameter (KEA et al., 2006: 38). Thus, several frame entrepreneurs invested the discourse on creative industries of multifaceted positive undertones, evoking, in particular, possibilities for a liberating form of work and lifestyle. Portraying culture as a potential solution to economic challenges was just ‘one rhetorical step away’ in this broader discursive context.

The knowledge economy rhetoric, promoted by DG EAC was a discourse that benefited from a high level of institutionalisation at the EU level. The ‘knowledge-based economy’ was the watchword of the Lisbon strategy and the basic conceptual lens through which the future model of development for the EU was conceived (Daly, 2006). All policies included in the Lisbon strategy had been envisaged with regard to their potential for reaching competitiveness objectives. But whereas education, for instance, had made its way into the Lisbon strategy, culture was a laggard. As explained by an official from DG EAC,

the Lisbon strategy [was] the central axis upon which everyone trie[d] to encroach something [...] since the link [could not] be made artificially, [DG EAC’s] capacity to demonstrate that certain investments in culture [could] have an effect in terms of job creation, reinforcing European competitiveness or in terms of social cohesion [was] key.

(Littoz-Monnet, 2009)

Hence, the Lisbon strategy was both the paradigmatic framework within which programmatic ideas at the EU level were conceived, and the instrument through which DG EAC’s issue redefinition strategy could be institutionalised.

Frame proponents, frame opponents

A coalition of actors, led by DG EAC, at the EU level, the UK, benefiting from the support of most northern EU states, at the intergovernmental

level, and representatives of the cultural industries, upheld the 'creativity frame'. DG EAC, to begin with, clearly perceived the paradigmatic shift as a way of attracting financial resources (Littoz-Monnet, 2009). The Commission placed emphasis on the aim of 'developing creative partnerships between the cultural sector and other sectors with a view to reinforcing the social and economic impact of investments in culture and creativity' (European Commission, 2007a: 10). DG EAC also perceived the redefinition of the agenda as a tool for extending its institutional capacity. The competences of DG EAC had always been 'thin' and limited to the promotion of programmes providing financial support to the cultural sector. Seizing on the potential of cultural and creative industries, in which several Commission DGs had an interest (Littoz-Monnet, 2010a), was therefore an opportunity not to be missed.

At the national level, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in the UK was an active proponent of the 'creativity frame'. It took the lead in Europe in promoting a policy agenda which portrayed the arts and the formerly named cultural industries as part of a broader coalescence of interests encompassing content-rich service industries such as education, publishing, design, communications devices, and e-commerce (Cunningham, 2002). Most analysts agree that it was with the election of 'New Labour' in the UK in 1997 that the decisive shift in terminology occurred (O'Connor, 1999). In 1998, the Creative Industries Task Force was set up within DCMS. In 1998 and 2001, the DCMS published the *Creative industries mapping documents*, aimed at emphasising the economic significance of the creative industries in the UK (DCMS, 1998, 2001). The UK approach found support in northern EU member states, which also tend to perceive culture from an economic and instrumental logic.

On the other end of the spectrum, the French Ministry of Culture (FMC) most vividly opposes such views. According to the KEA 2009 study *The impact of culture on creativity*, 'France's focus on culture is a resistance to an exclusively economic vision and illustrates French policy makers' belief that such an approach would have a negative impact on identities and "true" creation' (KEA, 2009: 142). French political actors support the view that a so-called 'cultural specificity' justifies the exemption of the cultural sector from market mechanisms (Littoz-Monnet, 2007). The assumption is that cultural policy is meant to ensure a space for different types of cultural expressions, including local, regional and national cultural identities, and that such cultural expressions may not play to a global market. Thus, officials from the FMC perceive the encapsulation of cultural activities within the creative

industries discourse as detrimental to fulfilling this vital cultural policy objective.

Although with certain nuances in their respective discourses, France, certain southern European states and the arts sector form a coalition which has opposed the view that culture should be subdued into an economic agenda. Until the mid-2000s, art professionals, concerned that culture would become fully instrumentalised, opposed the ‘creativity frame’. In his speech on the cultural industries, Yudhishthir Raj Isar, former President of Culture Action Europe, asked:

Should all types of cultural production be justified in terms of economic gain? We may find it tactically useful to use these arguments in our own rhetoric because it is the language policy-makers want to hear. The problem though is that this paradigm obliges us to adopt an essentially neo-liberal worldview.

(Isar, 2014)

Generally speaking, the art sector feared that EU-level policies in the field of culture would become industrial policies, which would not capture the necessities of creative environments and would essentially serve the interests of the cultural industries (Littoz-Monnet, 2010b). Thus, two different conceptions of cultural policy existed, and DG EAC had, traditionally, been a natural ally for the tenants of the ‘specificity of culture’ approach. When DG EAC decided to change its approach, it was extremely successful, as will be discussed below, in devising a rhetorical strategy that could appeal to stakeholders formerly reluctant to such proposals.

DG EAC’s reach-out strategy

Along with the redefinition of its policy agenda, DG EAC set in place a ‘reach-out’ strategy, directed at other Commission services, the cultural sector broadly defined and ‘civil society’. First of all, DG EAC initiated a bilateral dialogue with other DGs within the Commission. The Cultural Agenda had defined the mainstreaming of culture in all relevant policies as a key objective. To this end, an inter-service cultural group was created to allow for a better dialogue between the different DGs. For DG EAC, the challenge consisted in pointing to the presence of cultural elements in other, formerly seen as unrelated, policy areas (Littoz-Monnet, 2009). For instance, DG EAC established a joint action plan with DG Regional Policy (DG Regio). To this end, it sought to demonstrate the

interconnection between culture, regional development and cohesion policy by ordering a study on the contribution of culture to regional development, specifically produced to justify greater cooperation with DG Regio (Center for Strategy and Evaluation Services and ERICarts, 2010). Given the weight of DG Regio's budget, the partnership certainly represented an opportunity to access funds via the 'development' door. But it was also a means for DG EAC to influence modes of thinking within other Commission services. To illustrate, for the first time in 2009, DG EAC was invited as a participant to 'open days', jointly organised by the Committee of the Regions and DG Regio. For DG EAC, this represented a chance to 'reach a new public' (Littoz-Monnet, 2009). The 'filtering in' strategy was not as easily set in place with DG Internal Market and DG Competition. However, the 2009 European Year of Creativity and Innovation (EYCI) institutionalised the link between culture and broader economic objectives: DG EAC and DG Enterprise and Industry were responsible for the implementation of the EYCI.

The Cultural Agenda also provided for 'Structured Dialogue' with the cultural sector and civil society as a key operational objective. Three platforms were set in place: the 'Intercultural Dialogue', the 'Access to Culture' and the 'Potential of Cultural and Creative Industries' platforms (European Commission, 2014b). The traditional interlocutors of DG EAC had been those cultural actors which benefited from the Culture programme (Littoz-Monnet, 2007). The platforms allowed for the involvement of organisations which 'represent if possible a whole sector... have a certain reach' and are located beyond DG EAC's 'comfort zone' (Littoz-Monnet, 2009). Thus, the Structured Dialogue represented an excellent tool for DG EAC's reach-out strategy, aimed at developing a coalition of interests between the traditional cultural sector, essentially grouping musicians, artists and authors, and the cultural industries. It should be noted, however, that the participation of civil society in the process was narrowly restricted to structured interests in the sector, that is, professional associations and a handful of powerful private lobby actors. DG EAC used the flag of civil society participation even when it actually fostered interactions with economic interest groups representing a strong support constituency for its new agenda. Conflict expansion was therefore a key element in the agenda-setting tactics of DG EAC.

Converging interests around the 'creativity frame'

The formulation of the 'creativity frame' and its all-encompassing rhetoric made it a strong tool of mobilisation of what used to be an

antagonistic coalition of interests. Societal actors in the cultural sector had a lot to gain by forming coalitions with formerly distant interests. Within the 'Creative and Cultural Industries' platform, for instance, representatives of the audiovisual and publishing sectors and copyright societies were brought together. If divergences exist between copyright societies, which defend a very strict application of copyright legislation, and representatives of the cultural industries, which favour greater flexibility for digital content, all actors have a strong interest in forming an advocacy alliance. First, by building a coalition, they can far more efficiently demonstrate the economic weight of the cultural industries. This is perceived as crucial, insofar as the 'Creative and Cultural Industries' platform develops its lobbying strategy not only towards DG EAC, but also towards DG Enterprise and Industry, and DG Internal Market. Second, a degree of interest convergence exists since all sectoral interests favour the promotion of a regulatory environment more propitious to the development of the cultural industries (Littoz-Monnet, 2009).

The traditional arts sector represented, for its part, within the 'Access to Culture' platform feels more ambiguous about the programmatic priorities set out by DG EAC. First, representatives of the field are of the opinion that some priorities are missing from the Cultural Agenda, in particular the role of culture as a key component of European community building. Second, they are not optimistic about being able to reach a common position together with representatives of the cultural industries, who are also represented within the same platform. To them, the cultural industries are too closely connected with the interests of intermediaries transmitting cultural content, rather than the interests of artists (Littoz-Monnet, 2010b). Generally speaking, art professionals are critical of the functioning of the Structured Dialogue, which they do not perceive as a genuine means of influencing policy formulation at the EU level. Convergence is thus not fully taking place, with the cultural sector expressing a certain degree of resistance to the 'creativity frame'.

This said, DG EAC has been successful in ensuring that the cultural sector would not openly oppose its agenda. Whilst the creativity discourse does not match cultural actors' objectives, the latter have understood that developing this rhetoric was the only way for DG EAC to extend its remit and influence within the Commission, and, by doing so, obtain greater recognition for the interests of the cultural sector. Apart from obtaining better resources, the sector also aims at acquiring recognition, from the part of the member states, that cultural policy-making must have a European dimension, in particular concerning artists' mobility and artists' rights. In the context of the enlargement

of the EU eastwards, representatives of the arts sector expect that artists would benefit from the existence of EU-level minimal standards (Littoz-Monnet, 2010b). Thus, the cultural sector is not in a position to oppose the agenda defended by DG EAC, insofar as it is the only agenda which can succeed in giving culture a higher profile in the EU institutional and political context. Of course, opponents to the 'creativity frame' may still fight back and recapture the agenda, in the long run. Art sector professionals complain about the difficulties they have encountered in working together with cultural industry representatives and bringing actual weight to bear on the policy formulation process. It is, however, unlikely that they will succeed in imposing an alternative frame as a workable solution in the existing EU political and institutional context. Thus, the success of DG EAC in obtaining horizontal recognition of its new agenda is double-edged. On the one hand it could propagate its policy agenda very successfully, but on the other the discourse was framed within the contours allowed by the political and institutional context in which it operated. This could, in fact, give a higher profile to culture, but not on its own terms.

Conclusion

The developments discussed here clearly demonstrate the role of DG EAC as an 'advocate', trying to push public policy in one specific direction (Baumgartner, 2007). But more interesting is the identification of the factors which enabled a DG considered small and little influential to reframe culture as a key factor of economic competitiveness, and impose this programmatic solution both within the Commission and at the inter-governmental level. In this case, the properties of the 'creativity frame' itself were key. First, the 'creativity frame' successfully established a connection between certain policy problems, such as lack of economic competitiveness and slow growth in the EU, and the potential of culture, encompassed within a discourse on the role of creativity, as a successful policy solution. EU officials legitimised the idea that culture could be a solution to broader challenges by making use of a diverse range of resources: ordering of expert studies, use of statistics and appeal to well-established themes such as the knowledge society and the power of creativity, which were already associated with positive undertones.

Second, the properties of the 'creativity frame' fitted in with the broader EU political context. As predicted by agenda-setting studies, the choice of rhetoric in advocates' strategies to influence public policy is crucial to determining whether they can success in overturning existing

understandings of a given policy issue. As argued by Baumgartner (2007: 485–486), the cultural policy case demonstrates that rhetoric of an economic nature more often makes its way in the EU policy process.

Third, the properties of the ‘creativity frame’ made it a strong tool of mobilisation of formerly opposed interests. Because the rhetoric of the frame was vague, in terms of concrete policy objectives, it could appeal to representatives of the arts sector and the cultural industries alike. While different interest groups certainly did not see the advantages to be gained from the new agenda in the same way, they could all perceive potential benefits in supporting the programmatic shift. Art professionals also acknowledged that focusing on the instrumentality of culture was the most efficient path for obtaining more funds for the sector. In the absence of a genuine European ‘public sphere’, EU policy-makers do not extend conflicts to the ‘public at large’ in order to change the balance of support in favour of their preferred agenda (Princen, 2007). They can, however, mobilise organised interests in a policy sector. Conflict expansion is, arguably, a very efficient tool of policy control, insofar as it is a *targeted* process towards specific interests. DG EAC was able to structure the organisation of communication platforms with societal interests, both by structuring the gathering of participants and by shaping the contours of policy debates along its favoured frames.

Note

1. The term was coined for the first time by Adorno and Horkheimer (1979), in their endeavour to highlight what they saw as a paradoxical linkage between culture and industry.