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Towards a "European Cultural Vitality Index"?

Executive Summary of the FEASIBILITY STUDY

**Prepared for the European Cultural Foundation (ECF)
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based on:

a Conceptual Framework paper,
a preliminary Indicator Mapping,
Seminars organised by the ECF with Boekmanstichting and
an Experts' Survey conducted for this study.

NOTE: The original intention of this study has been, first of all, to check the feasibility of the concept of a European Cultural Vitality Index (ECUVIX), including its ca. 55 potential indicators covering both the dynamics and the sustainability of cultural systems. Due to the results of some of the assessments and of the Experts' Survey, this concept has been enlarged and the study now covers – especially in its section D and E – additional indexing approaches, some of which have already been discussed in the Conceptual Framework paper.

The analyses presented as well as the conclusions and proposals derived from them are those of the author and do not necessarily represent positions of the European Cultural Foundation.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Exploratory meetings held 2013 and 2014 in Amsterdam revealed: A European cultural index that is to develop into a – regularly updated – reference and orientation tool would mean *entering new territory*. Functioning models don't exist yet and most of the indicators of national indexes (e.g. in the NL, USA) cannot simply be adopted in other European countries due to missing or inconsistent data resources.

A Conceptual Framework paper prepared by the ERICarts Institute for the European Cultural Foundation led to an agreement, that the main issue (or "dimension") of a new Index could be to monitor and compare "*Cultural Vitality*" in Europe. The concept of a European Cultural Vitality Index (ECUVIX) included ca. 55 potential indicators covering both the *dynamics* and the *sustainability* of cultural systems.

Potential stakeholders suggested, in the exploratory meetings, different indexing objectives, such as:

- fostering "*evidence-based*" (cultural) policy making;
- strengthening *multi-stakeholder democratic governance practice*, with strong civil society participation;
- running an "*awareness-raising tool*" (e.g. for advocacy); or
- maintaining an "*Early Warning System*" (EWS) with monitoring, predicting and response functions.

However, a *special Experts' Survey* (part of this study) revealed that all of these and even additional functions could be relevant. While the Survey found most of the 18 participating countries ready to provide necessary data resources for an Index, some of the proposed indicators and methods were considered ambiguous. As well, a number of alternative approaches found the approval of many experts.

As a consequence, this study tests, in addition to the original ECUVIX concept, also some other indicator-based models or tools. The following overview provides the main results (scores) of the exercise:

FEASIBILITY FACTOR	MODELS / SCENARIOS						
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII / VIII
	Euro-DUTCH	COMP 18	TEST 5	SATELLITE	SURVEYS	C-TRENDS	INDICATORS
1. European 'political' relevance	F	P	P	F	F	F	P / P
2. 'Cultural vitality' context validity	P	P	N	P	F	F	P / P
3. Usability & impact probability	P	F	P	F	F	P	P / P
4. Data resources feasibility/reliability	N	P	P	F	F	F	F / P
5. Human resources & partnership f.	P	F	F	F	P	P	F / P
6. Methodological and technical f.	N	P	F	F	F	P	P / P
7. Financial viability	N	P	F	F	N	P	F / P
8. Operational f. / Sustainability	N	P	F	F	P	F	F / P
9. Schedule f. (2014/15)	N	P	F	P	N	P	F / P
SCORE (F = 2 points P = 1 p.; N = 0 p.)	6	11	13	16	12	13	14 / 9

ABBREVIATIONS: **F** = Feasible, relevant, manageable (within a reasonable time frame and resources allocation);
P = Potentially or partly feasible etc.; **N** = Not feasible etc.

- I. **Euro-DUTCH:** Applying the ca. 80 "Dutch Arts Index" indicators in main countries or the whole of Europe;
- II. **COMP 18:** Implementing the ECUVIX indicator framework in 18 countries participating in the Council of Europe / ERICarts "Compendium of Cultural Policies & Trends in Europe" (www.culturalpolicies.net);
- III. **TEST 5:** As above, but testing cultural vitality with less indicators and only in 5 countries;
- IV. **SATELLITE:** Adopting the US model of an "Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account" to European needs;
- V. **SURVEYS:** Index based on regular representative European surveys (enhanced EuroBarometer);
- VI. **C-TRENDS:** Comparative trends index (to be developed), based on relatively flexible national data/indicators;
- VII. and VIII. **INDICATORS-A or -B:** No indexes, but status and trend overviews in the form of comparative and monitoring tables (VII) or more complex "Indicator Suites" (VIII).

Even if some of the tested models/scenarios reached scores that are not far apart from each other, the detailed feasibility assessment summarised in this study permits some clear conclusions:

- First of all, the *ECUVIX model* ("COMP 18"), for which an indicator mapping and other important preparatory work had already been conducted during the pilot phase of the project, cannot fully live up to original expectations. In particular, doubts exist as regards the range and validity of some indicators of this model, the relevance of its "European dimension" as well as the financial, operational or schedule feasibility. Such concerns suggest the departure from a "one tool fits all" approach and, instead, further exploring other complementary data resources and statistical instruments (that could eventually be combined);
- In contrast, an adoption of the *US model of "Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Accounts"* ("SATELLITE") – most probably with a few modifications to better match European realities and statistical classifications – seems to be a feasible solution for an index, which could become operational in some EU/OECD countries already in 2015. However, such accounts would include mainly economic indicators and thus cover only parts of the "European cultural vitality" concept and of the societal impacts of arts and media-related activities, in general. This suggests that SATELLITE (or a similar initiative of Eurostat) should be seen mainly as a complementary element in a broader index or indicator suite. It would require an active role of official European and national agencies, which could probably also provide most of the resources for this exercise;
- The "cultural vitality" concept may be served best with a combination of two other indexing models explored so far: If the plan of a relatively "data-neutral" *trend recording instrument with more flexible indicators* ("C-TRENDS") could be realised – i.e. a software used so far in the environmental sphere be successfully adapted to the needs of the arts, media, heritage and socio-cultural activities – it could be implemented by means of *restricted trial versions* ("TEST 5"). This index tool is to compare only medium and longer-term trends instead of absolute figures. Clearly, methodological groundwork will still be needed for its realisation;
- The success of the organisers of the development strategy for the *"Dutch Arts Index"* is largely due to their ability to attract many stakeholders and a wide range of public and private data providers, whose very specific information and trend figures serve as indicators for this instrument. In principle, such strategies could also be employed in other countries aiming at *national* cultural indexes. However, using this method successfully in the construction of a comparable European index ("Euro-DUTCH") would appear almost as a miracle.

For the European Cultural Foundation – the initiator of the reflection process about problems and opportunities connected with a Europe-wide index in the domain of culture – and potentially for other stakeholders, these conclusions could suggest three next steps in the Index project:

1. *Enlarge stakeholder partnerships* for a potential European Cultural Vitality Index, including especially the Council of Europe, Eurostat, UNESCO and / or OECD, foundations, etc., some of which currently follow their own agendas regarding indicator-based information tools;
2. *Convene, together with partners, an Experts' Task Force* to further develop conceptual and methodological issues of the Index project, with preference for the C-TRENDS model. One of the first tasks of that group could be the preparation of a tender in one of the EU programmes;
3. *Begin negotiations for a European "Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account"* (or other concepts based on official statistics) with Eurostat, OECD, national statistical offices and other potential facilitators.

Following organisational, financial and legal preparations and intensive research and development work, the official inauguration/launch of a composite European Index or indicator suite based on the above considerations could be envisaged to take place after ca. 18 months.