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# EUROPEAM 1992

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**C O N F E R E N C E P A P E R**

**Forum discussion**  
**"Regional museums in Europe, 1992: a boundless challenge?"**



**Organization**

The Province of Gelderland in association with the Arnhem Municipal Museum.

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**Practical information**

Date of forum: December 12 1992  
Time: 1.30 - 3.30 p.m.  
Place: Arnhem Municipal Museum ("Gemeentemuseum")  
Forum members: Dr. E. Beaucamp (Frankfurter Allgemeine)  
P. Mulder (head of the Department of  
Multilateral Relations, Ministry of Welfare,  
Health and Culture)  
Dr. M. Stockenbrandt (Kölnischer Kunstverein)  
G. van Tuyl (Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg)  
Working language: English

**Provincie Gelderland**

Dienst Welzijn, Economie en Bestuurlijke Verhoudingen  
Afdeling Cultuur en Educatie

## **Introduction**

This autumn, at the initiative of the Province of Gelderland, museums in the Province and in the German federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia have participated in a Dutch-German exchange of their collections.

The purpose of the project was to underline the importance of cultural integration in Europe. The concrete result was a series of eleven exhibitions in eleven museums in Gelderland and North Rhine-Westphalia.

On December 12 the last exhibition in the series, "Art Nouveau and Art Deco Glass", will open in the Arnhem Municipal Museum. To mark the occasion a forum will examine the theoretical, practical and policy aspects of this cross-border regional project within the framework of Europa 1992.

### **The purpose of the forum**

To exchange views on the theoretical, practical and policy aspects of internationalization in regional museums.

### **Target group**

Museum directors, curators, representatives of cultural and government institutions, students, press and other interested parties.

### **Internationalization**

The phenomenon of internationalization is not new. Nations have always collaborated in one form or another and have always influenced each other's cultures.

However, increased mobility and technological developments have speeded up the process of internationalization. This has certain consequences. To quote the new note on cultural policy issued by the Dutch Ministry of Welfare, Health and Culture: "The internationalization process clearly involves a 'generalization' of culture". Standards, values and distinguishing features of different lands or regions are becoming increasingly similar. Critics fear that this development is affecting the quality of culture.

That is not the only possible effect of generalization, though. "At the same time there is a counter-movement: differentiation. A reassessment of authentic local and regional traditions - often

as a reaction to the alleged levelling effect of internationalization - can be observed." (Note on cultural policy 1993-1996)

### **A cultural paragraph?**

European unification - as a concrete example of ongoing internationalization - is fanning the discussion on cultural identity. Are we moving towards an international cultural policy; should specific guidelines on cultural policy be integrated into the new European agreement in order to safeguard Dutch cultural policy? Or can international culture actually influence the individual character of our own culture? In short, what effect will the Maastricht Treaty have on the cultural identity of the various countries?

Opinions are divided. Not until the Maastricht Treaty is signed by all member states will the cultural paragraph in the 1991 European Charter come into effect.

Those in favour of the cultural paragraph see it as a guarantee for the preservation of national cultural identity. The paragraph will lead, they say, to the recognition of an individual, not market-bound, character of cultural objects and services and the pluriformity of European culture.

Those opposing the paragraph feel that it assigns culture-political power to the EC, thereby endangering the pluriformity of European culture.

### **Cross-border exchanges**

After World War Two a foreign cultural policy was shaped in the Netherlands. Within the framework of postwar reconstruction the government embarked on a policy of active cultural cooperation, notably with member states of the European Community. Over the past forty years cultural agreements have been signed with thirty-three countries worldwide. Many exchanges have taken place outside these agreements too.

Exchanges in the field of art have taken place with great regularity. The government, for instance, has initiated exchanges within the framework of its foreign cultural policy, sending representatives to the Venice and Sao Paulo Biennials and to World's Fairs. Cultural institutions with varying degrees of independence also participate in exchange projects, a case in point being the Documenta in Kassel. Our major museums take exchanges for granted. The cross-border exchange of collections

is a familiar phenomenon.

It is more difficult for smaller, regional museums to determine their position in the internationalization process. Exchanges are hampered by practical and financial obstacles.

There are however advantages to small-scale exchange on a regional level. It does not take long for results to be seen. Dr. A.M. Bevers points out that reactions are quicker in a small context: "... The wider the range of the context, the harder it is to reach agreement. It is easier for two parties to arrange an effective partnership than a large number of instances....".

Regional exhibitions of 'international art' can be important. It is not always convenient for people to travel to the country's major museums. Regional museums are often nearer, both literally and metaphorically, and can therefore play a part in the propagation of internationalization. In their local museums visitors can see what is happening in the international world of the arts and perhaps determine their own position with regard to it.

However, internalization on a regional level makes (new) demands on the museums, for instance with respect to cooperation and combining forces. A number of basic conditions for cross-border cooperation will be discussed in the forum.

### **Theory and practice**

The foregoing outline shows that in practice there is a lively cross-border exchange on a national level and less so on a regional level. The project "Europa 1992" initiated by the Province of Gelderland is an example of regional exchange.

At the same time the internationalization process and the cultural paragraph trigger a theoretical discussion (what does cultural identity mean, how can we safeguard it?). The discussion will touch on the role and function of the region.

Exchange practice is not always based on a theoretical structure. By the same token, theory does not always keep pace with existing practice.

The discussion on December 12 should therefore not be confined to the practical aspects and consequences of European integration for regional museums. Theory is also a factor in the advantages and drawbacks to international exchange in the various regions. Theory can help to develop a vision for possible concrete exchange projects in future.

## PROPOSITIONS AND QUESTIONS

"Regional museums must push back today's borders in the internationalization process."

### General

- is internationalization leading to a development in which quantity is more important than quality?

### Theoretical aspects

- will removing borders lead to levelling and a loss of identity on a regional level (with Gelderland and North Rhine-Westphalia as a touchstone)?; or
- is the removal of borders beneficial to a sense of identity on a regional level?

### Practical aspects

- is European cultural integration important on a regional level?
- what are the consequences (practical advantages and disadvantages/importance) of internationalization for the position of regional museums with respect to:
  - a. a regional museum's task/role;
  - b. a regional museum's collections;
  - c. the contact networks of regional museum directors;
  - d. a regional museum's public.In other words, can smaller regional museums cope with the internationalization process as they currently function?
- should regional exchanges (like the "Europe 1992" project) be incidental or structural?
- what level of policy and government is appropriate for cultural exchanges in Europe (European, National, Regional (= Provincial), Local)?

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