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| **SEDEC-VII/041** |
| **158th plenary session, 29-30 November 2023** |

**OPINION**

**Promoting cultural policies in rural areas within the framework of development and territorial cohesion strategies and the 2030 Agenda**

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| THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS* puts forward the idea of launching a European Year of Rural Europe, focusing on the cultural and creative value of rural areas;
* states that in strengthening the resilience of rural areas, and in rural development in general, there should be a focus on the cultural and creative sectors and industries (CCSIs) in terms of future planning and support, as the CCSIs bring together local rural culture and creativity;
* underscores that rural culture plays an important role in maintaining and managing cultural landscapes, biodiversity and traditional values, and that some rural areas with high natural values form specific biocultural areas where the environment and the local economy coexist in a sustainable way, as embedded in the culture and tradition of these communities;
* stresses that generational agricultural renewal remains urgent, and that, therefore, support for the inclusion of youth and rural women in agriculture and farm ownership is important; therefore, agrees with the Commission that special attention should be paid to the needs of young people and women, in order to encourage them to stay in rural areas;
* strongly advocates giving a central place to LRAs – as institutions closest to the citizens and local areas – in the implementation of cultural policies, and favours the construction of integrated management systems based on territorial networks and systems;
* suggests that investment and public support and financing should be "rural-proofed" so that when any relevant new means of funding are designed, the possibility is examined of including support for the ongoing contribution of family farms, and employees in agriculture and rural CCSIs, for NGOs representing individual creators, as well as folk groups, LAGs, and farmers' associations.
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| RapporteurCsaba Borboly (RO/EPP), President of Harghita County Council, Romania |

**Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – Promoting cultural policies in rural areas within the framework of development and territorial cohesion strategies and the 2030 Agenda**

1. **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

# puts forward the idea of launching a European Year of Rural Europe, focusing on the cultural and creative value of rural areas;

# holds the opinion that the specific traditions of rural areas maintain the strong connection between land, landscape, economy and environment, mainly in remote rural or mountainous areas, and in this respect maintains that their ethnic diversity should also be recognised and supported, such as in the case of the indigenous and other linguistic or national minorities;

# underlines that minorities and different ethnic groups living in rural areas are crucial to the sustainability of these areas, while their culture, tradition, heritage and lifestyle contribute not only to the diversity of Europe, but also to the landscape, biodiversity, economy, culture and social cohesion of Europe;

# firmly believes that cultural activities and cultural heritage are drivers of social cohesion and quality of life in rural areas, providing opportunities for sustainable development, job creation and synergies with other activities, particularly in areas facing specific challenges. Such areas include outermost regions and other remote areas, mountainous areas and areas threatened by depopulation;

# states that in strengthening the resilience of rural areas, and in rural development in general, there should be a focus on the cultural and creative sectors and industries (CCSIs) in terms of future planning and support, as the CCSIs bring together local rural culture and creativity;

# regrets that despite the success of the European Citizens’ Initiative of the Minority Safepack, the European Commission refused to put the issue of indigenous national minorities on the agenda and initiate legislation;

# underlines that the level and volume of cultural activities is highly connected to and has an unquestionable strong influence on the understanding and acceptance of civic values and the development of European identity in all regions, and this fact calls for more conscious support for the CCSIs in rural areas;

# identifies the need to collect culture-specific data in Europe, presented at NUTS 3 level, in order to help local decision-making and planning, and to measure the multidimensional effects of cultural policies supporting rural areas, because a lack of these specific data may lead to a questioning of the efforts made in line with the new European rural cultural policy;

# reiterates that all rural intervention, at all levels of governance, should be evidence-based, and that this evidence, given the specificity of the field, should include qualitative data and analysis, in addition to quantitative data collection and analysis;

# confirms that LRAs play a crucial role in organising, financing and supporting culture in rural areas. In some areas they represent the last chance for these activities, in the context of economic decline and crisis in rural areas, mostly where local communities are not well off. LRAs should therefore be supported in their efforts, with sufficient funding from EU funds and national budgets, avoiding any cuts in this respect;

# underscores that rural culture plays an important role in maintaining and managing cultural landscapes, biodiversity and traditional values, and that some rural areas with high natural values form specific biocultural areas where the environment and the local economy coexist in a sustainable way, as embedded in the culture and tradition of these communities;

# underlines that enhanced cooperation between rural areas should exceed the limits of agriculture, economy and rural governance, in order to realise the potential in culture-driven rural development, so that rural LRAs and other players can have access to European best practice and make the most out of their opportunities;

# hopes that through rural development driven by cultural values, strengthening the local economy by means of the CCSIs and building rural identity and pride, the new European rural cultural policy might help combat the demographic decline of rural areas, so that these areas are attractive both for local and urban youth as a place to live and work;

# calls for a supporting and promoting framework for the European rural area of culture, using the experience from the European capital of culture initiative;

# calls, with due regard to complementarity, subsidiarity and the place-based principle, for the Member States to step up their action, carrying out, supporting and coordinating measures in order to frame a strategic European approach to the cultural policies in rural areas;

# reiterates its support for the "Long-term vision for the EU's rural areas 2040" (LTVRA), which will support territorial cohesion and create new opportunities to attract innovative cultural and creative industries, ensure access to artistic and cultural activities, promote the restoration of cultural landscapes, ensure better cultural infrastructure and services and make the most of the cultural and economic strengths of rural areas;

# calls on the Commission, acting in a harmonised way with the Member States and LRAs, to guarantee that the initiative on the long-term vision for rural areas includes feasible solutions and means of support to deal with the challenges that the CCSIs face in rural areas;

# given their potential to curb depopulation and create social and economic opportunities linked to the Green Deal, the CoR is of the view that social and cultural vitality, as well as innovation in social and cultural services of general interest are among the most strategic areas in which local and regional cooperation should be developed under the Rural Pact;

# stresses that national, regional, rural and local strategies that incorporate culture, creativity and the arts contribute significantly to a better quality of life in regions and cities by fostering a sense of community and belonging, cultural diversity, democracy, participation and intercultural dialogue;

# draws attention to the European Cultural Routes, which run both within countries and across borders and, with the involvement of the public and all relevant stakeholders, make an appreciable contribution to spreading local and regional cultural expressions, as well as promote lesser-known regions, support employment, job creation and business operations in rural areas;

# reaffirms the strategic role that the CoR can play in the proposal and drafting of measures that increasingly strengthen support for cultural policies in rural areas and asks its representatives to make a useful effort to determine a CoR position that reaffirms the centrality of these policies for the socio-economic development of the EU;

# in this regard, reiterates that the future of rural areas is dependent on retaining young people in rural areas, and attracting other young people to those areas, to pursue their life goals there; in seeking solutions to the challenges faced by rural areas it is therefore vital to actively engage young people, develop forums and promote youth councils where they can share their ideas, and support youth initiatives in rural areas;

# emphasises the foundational role of rural families in preserving traditions, imparting values, and ensuring the continued vitality of life rural areas, recognising that the stability and growth of these areas significantly depend on the well-being and sustainability of family units, thus, underlines the urgent need to help strengthen rural families through inclusive dialogue, support of relevant associations, and targeted policy, including family friendly policies to foster a robust and sustainable rural population;

# stresses that generational agricultural renewal remains urgent, and that, therefore, support for the inclusion of youth and rural women in agriculture and farm ownership is important; therefore, agrees with the Commission that special attention should be paid to the needs of young people and women, in order to encourage them to stay in rural areas;

# points out that forests and the European forestry sector play a key role in shaping and maintaining landscapes and make a fundamental contribution to conserving biodiversity and other ecosystem services, and, in line with the Forest Strategy for 2030, recognises the central role of forests, foresters and the entire forest-based value chain in achieving the objectives of the European Green Deal and cultural policies. Forest fires and other disturbances, such as windstorms and pests, are a serious threat to rural areas and need to be tackled resolutely by promoting resilient landscapes and forestry economic activity;

Governance

# stresses the value and importance of multilevel governance, which facilitates inter alia the spread of best practices in cultural policies in rural areas, the development of participatory democracy, mutual learning, the emergence of new forms of partnership and dialogue, and the effectiveness and consistency of sectoral policies in relation to culture and cultural heritage;

# reiterates that the involvement of local and regional players in this governance structure will be key to adapting actions to the needs and requirements of rural areas, with particular regard to those that are depopulated or facing demographic or environmental related risks;

# welcomes the increased support for bottom-up initiatives such as CLLD – which defines the role of LAGs – and "smart villages", and encourages further use of the lessons learned from these programmes and approaches;

# suggests launching a European initiative, similar to "smart villages", resulting in the focused support of rural CCSIs and the revitalisation of cultural heritage, while safeguarding support from EU funds by means of CLLD, so that no rural area might lack the support for private and community initiatives in this field;

# points out that monuments and built heritage in general are not always protected and that their conservation and restoration might benefit both rural communities and local economies, while also reducing the carbon footprint, so rural development and strategic planning needs to be designed to focus also on heritage;

# emphasises that cultural policies in rural areas should become an integral part of cohesion policy and create synergies with existing tools, such as CLLD; in this work, governments and institutions at all levels should include LAGs in their programming in a meaningful way;

# underlines that the participatory approach in local communities is the best way of ensuring that the development work and cultural investment undertaken are firmly rooted in local needs and priorities;

# believes that the ability to act and make a difference depends on having a well-rounded understanding of the challenges facing rural areas and a sense of shared ownership and trust in addressing them;

# strongly advocates giving a central place to LRAs – as institutions closest to the citizens and local areas – in the implementation of cultural policies, and favours the construction of integrated management systems based on territorial networks and systems;

CCSIs in rural areas

# stresses the need to make cultural assets and services accessible to all, by reducing inequalities of opportunity between urban and rural, rich and poor, young and old, minority and marginalised groups and disabled people and immigrant and refugee communities;

# calls for cultural services to be decentralised, interconnected and organised so that people can benefit from them close to where they live;

# calls for culture to be accessible to all ages, both physically on-site and through remote access, for example through the development of community centres with a range of accessible and inclusive services from libraries to social and volunteer work;

# believes that cultural activities lead to the improvement of the living conditions of marginalised groups of the population in rural areas and to improved life prospects for the children and youth concerned;

# considers that, in the spirit of "leaving no one behind", specific tools are needed to develop "cultural innovation ecosystems" in rural areas that offer opportunities for entrepreneurs and rural micro-enterprises and SMEs, boosting these small rural businesses in the CCSIs;

# stresses the importance of expanding digital infrastructure in order to enable artists and other cultural workers to live and work in rural areas;

Opportunities and challenges for LRAs

# proposes further strengthening the reference to the key role of LRAs in promoting and celebrating the artistic and cultural life of rural communities and calls for the participation of LRAs in the relevant programmes to be enhanced;

# encourages LRAs to recognise cultural infrastructure in rural areas as an important factor in social cohesion and sustainable development, and to provide forms of sustainable mobility that enable visitors to access culture in the countryside but have the lowest possible environmental impact, such as public transport, cycle routes, walking routes and inland waterways;

# recommends that LRAs should be systematically consulted in the conception, implementation and governance of the measures designed to provide financing for the cultural and creative sectors across Europe with particular attention given to rural areas;

# urges the Commission to provide LRAs with financial and technical support to raise awareness of the potential benefits of the CCSIs, including in connection with the social economy, for regional and local development;

# calls for LRAs and cultural operators to be included in the infrastructure and spatial planning process, which will ensure that art and culture are a part of the dialogue about infrastructure and the organisation of the territory;

# calls for consideration to be given to sufficient technical support for capacity-building for LRAs in rural areas, which are in a weaker position in terms of their planning competences – particularly with regard to long-term strategies – and the accessing and spending of EU funds;

# stresses the need to strengthen awareness and empower LRAs to protect, rehabilitate, utilise and revitalise their environment, landscapes, tangible and intangible cultural assets and other unique cultural and arts resources;

# in this regard, suggests that support be given to stakeholders who encourage arts and culture to be nurtured creatively in empty buildings, which can become revitalised local public meeting places and infrastructure, and enhance the quality of everyday life;

# suggests that the creation of cultural opportunities in rural areas should be widely encouraged, including through the promotion of cultural events and the protection of rural historical and religious buildings (churches, castles, etc.);

# reiterates that the CCSIs mostly involve micro-enterprises, small and medium-sized businesses and enterprises of self-employed workers, which require initiative and organisation at local level; this feature of localisation is a positive aspect for rural areas because it boosts local economies and the social fabric, but also helps retain talent and the corresponding jobs at local level;

Rural-proofing approach

# welcomes the Commission's ambition of mainstreaming the rural perspective and enhancing the "do no harm to cohesion" principle in all EU policies by using the Territorial Impact Assessment toolbox and rural-proofing;

# calls on the Member States and LRAs to apply the rural-proofing approach to their strategies and investments under the current programming period 2021-2027, for their national strategic plans, and also in regional development and CLLD local strategies;

# suggests that investment and public support and financing should be "rural-proofed" so that when any relevant new means of funding are designed, the possibility is examined of including support for the ongoing contribution of family farms, and employees in agriculture and rural CCSIs, for NGOs representing individual creators, as well as folk groups, LAGs, and farmers' associations;

Funding and support

# points out that the magnitude of the challenges requires a strong concentration of financial resources and all activities in rural areas, including mobilising local assets and financial support in the form of local investments, co-financing and cultural and arts-related patronage;

# suggests that all EU funds should increasingly see culture as being of cross-cutting value, and should support cultural projects, including those protecting, promoting and enhancing biodiversity, cultural landscapes and biocultural areas;

# calls for explicit prioritisation of interventions designed to harness the potential of culture in rural areas;

# would like to see the launching of EU calls for proposals that, among other things, provide more support for projects promoting the social role of culture, experimentation, and innovation in contemporary visual arts, aimed at the regeneration of rural areas;

# considers that farm open days, school rural visits, shows, craft and other fairs and cultural festivals help urban citizens to better understand and appreciate rural areas, and that such events deserve public funding support, as do measures to build bridges between rural and urban citizens through cultural projects;

# underlines that there is a need for specific, tailored research in the field of rural CCSIs and culture-based rural development, including in the context of Horizon Europe and ESPON, such as the RURITAGE Heritage for Rural Regeneration project;

Cultural synergies

# sees that it is now vitally important to create synergies between sustainable tourism strategies and local and regional cultural and creative industries, so as to support economic growth and job creation and facilitate access to culture, whilst promoting sustainable development;

# believes that cultural heritage is an important starting point for local and regional development for the whole of the rural population, and creates significant tangible assets thanks to the promotion of sustainable, responsible, high-quality cultural tourism, the development of which is based on the tangible and intangible heritage of rural communities;

# highlights the value of cultural heritage for economic development in rural areas, mainly through the tourism sector – given that 26% of all EU travellers name culture as a key factor when choosing their holiday destinations – but also as a soft location factor for boosting the attractiveness of jobs;

# points out that the geographically wide dispersal of cultural heritage offers an opportunity – through a more diversified range of tourist attractions – to redirect and better distribute the positive impact of cultural tourism, contributing to the sustainable development of marginal or remote areas;

# in terms of opportunities, considers that there is insufficient mention of and only an indirect reference to sectors such as cultural activities and sustainable rural tourism and leisure, despite the fact that they play a very important role in building diversified strong and sustainable rural economies;

# in this regard, points out that there are many potential additional activities linked to rural areas other than the agricultural sector, such as forestry and livestock activities, cycling tourism, hunting, hiking, wellness, religious and spiritual tourism, gastronomy, community-based arts and art workshops, exhibition centres, etc., and highlights the role of agroforestry systems in shaping the future European landscape;

# strongly suggests that the marketing of rural cultural produce, including gastronomic heritage, should be promoted and geographically-branded status protected, giving assurance on quality and traceability to citizens;

# supports the use of models of landscape conservation and governance to promote circular territorial ecosystems in historic rural landscapes, such as traditional land and soil management, traditional methods of irrigation, and through synergies between territorial players for the efficient use of water, energy, waste and materials, for example promoting waste-to-energy, organic fertilisers, and the recovery of heating from production processes. Traditional knowledge is part of intangible cultural heritage and a resource in biodiversity conservation efforts in line with the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

Brussels, 29 November 2023

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| The Presidentof the European Committee of the RegionsVasco Alves Cordeiro |  |
|  | The Secretary-Generalof the European Committee of the RegionsPetr Blížkovský |

1. **PROCEDURE**

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| **Title** | Promoting cultural policies in rural areas within the framework of development and territorial cohesion strategies and the 2030 Agenda |
| **Reference(s)**  | N/A |
| **Legal basis** | Council presidency referral, Art. 307 TFEU (optional) |
| **Procedural basis** | Rule 41(b)(i) |
| **Date of Council/EP referral/Date of Commission letter** | N/A |
| **Date of Bureau/President's decision** | 30/05/2023 |
| **Commission responsible** | SEDEC-VII - 7th term of office - Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC) |
| **Rapporteur** | Csaba BORBOLY (RO/EPP), President of Harghita County Council |
| **Discussed in commission**  | 02/10/2023 |
| **Date adopted by commission**  | 02/10/2023 |
| **Result of the vote in commission****(majority, unanimity)** | Majority |
| **Date adopted in plenary**  | 29/11/2023 |
| **Previous Committee opinions**  | * [Restart of Cultural and Creative Sectors](https://cor.europa.eu/EN/our-work/Pages/OpinionTimeline.aspx?opid=CDR-4616-2020)
* [Creative Europe and a New European Agenda for Culture](https://cor.europa.eu/EN/our-work/Pages/OpinionTimeline.aspx?opid=CDR-3890-2018)
* [Cultural Heritage as a strategic resource for more cohesive and sustainable regions in the EU](https://cor.europa.eu/EN/our-work/Pages/OpinionTimeline.aspx?opid=CDR-185-2018)
* [Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture](https://cor.europa.eu/EN/our-work/Pages/OpinionTimeline.aspx?opid=CDR-6048-2017)
* [The Future of Cohesion Policy beyond 2020](https://cor.europa.eu/EN/our-work/Pages/OpinionTimeline.aspx?opid=CDR-1814-2016)
* [Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe](https://cor.europa.eu/EN/our-work/Pages/OpinionTimeline.aspx?opid=CDR-5515-2014)
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| **Subsidiarity reference** | N/A |

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