



The 7th ASEM Culture Ministers' Meeting (ASEM CMM7): 5 Significant Observations

The recently concluded 7th ASEM Culture Ministers' Meeting (ASEM CMM7) was held in the city of Gwangju, Republic of Korea on 22-24 June 2016 and its outcomes are far from insignificant.

ASEM CMM7 comes in the 20th year of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), an informal process of dialogue and cooperation bringing together the 28 European Union member states, 2 other European countries, and the European Union with 21 Asian countries and the ASEAN Secretariat.

We help you keep track of 5 key observations we believe will shape Asia-Europe culture policy efforts in the coming years.

Previous CMMs dealt with heritage and creative industries separately, but this is the first time Culture Ministers discussed both areas in conjunction with each other.

Since 2003, ASEM Culture Ministers have met biennially in Beijing, Paris, Kuala Lumpur, Poznan, Yogyakarta, and Rotterdam to discuss issues of common interest for Asia and Europe.

Recent CMMs hosted by Poland (ASEM CMM4, 2010) and Indonesia (ASEM CMM5, 2012) focused particularly on the preservation and promotion of culture and heritage, while the most recent (ASEM CMM6, 2014) hosted by the Netherlands shifted the discussion toward the creative industries, particularly creative skills, creative entrepreneurs, and creative cities.

ASEM CMM7 marked a deliberate and important attempt to reconcile and balance the conversation between conservation and development, as well as identify areas where heritage resources and creative industries can be mutually reinforcing.

Numerous positive examples of national-level developments were shared during the plenaries and workshops, in addition to actionable inputs presented during the [ASEF Policy Panel](#) with cultural experts (22 June 2016). How governments learn from and apply best practices regionally and cross-regionally in the coming years through their policies and programmes will serve as a clear indication of their readiness to fund and support Asia-Europe cultural cooperation is concerned. Within Europe, this position is strongly echoed in the European Commission's **Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council**, titled "*Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations*" (2016).

For now, there continues to be an observable shift toward development of the creative economy, as opposed to support for the arts.

The weight of the discussions on culture and heritage at ASEM CMM7 continue to remain largely driven by economic considerations. As one Culture Minister expressed at ASEM CMM7, creativity is not the monopoly of the creative and cultural industries. Rather, it has economic value in all sectors of industry. Even countries whose traditional priority areas remain culture and heritage conservation, are increasingly compelled to think about commercialisation of heritage for key industries such as tourism.

Consistently raised themes for supporting the development of the creative economy include the mutually reinforcing relationships between public and private players, city networks, and the need for networking, training, policy and financial support. Examples of bilateral arts and culture initiatives with notable economic impact include the International Bruckner Festival Linz (Austria), Busan International Short Film Festival (Korea), Business of Design Week Hong Kong, and Shanghai International Film Festival (China).



This is despite broad consensus on the need to protect and promote diversity of both traditional and contemporary cultural expressions.

In its recent *Global Monitoring Report (Reshaping Cultural Policies)*, UNESCO highlights the need for a more balanced flow of cultural goods such as films, as well as international policies for sustainable development. The **Action Plan of Culture Ministers** pursued at ASEM CMM2 (2005, Paris) also outlined countries' intent to recognise the importance of cultural diversity and promote greater understanding among ASEM partners' cultures, especially among the younger generation.

More than 10 years on, there appears to remain clear affirmation among Culture Ministers that there is intrinsic value in protecting and promoting the rich diversity of cultural heritage beyond its economic value, be it for reasons of strengthening identity, for nation-building, or for fostering creativity. ASEM CMM7 saw little dispute over this matter, even with the advent of information and communications technologies (ICTs) that are dramatically changing the consumption patterns of peoples all over the world. The Europeana Collections project, managed by the Europeana Foundation, provides a positive example of multiple partners working together and harnessing ICTs to preserve cultural expressions both traditional and contemporary.

Approaches to supporting creative economy appear diverse in nature – this diversity looks set to continue as an operating reality for international cultural cooperation.

The extensive range of best practices and learning points presented at ASEM CMM7 reveal that while broad approaches to better supporting the creative economy exist (such as facilitating people-to-people and knowledge exchanges, enhancing artists' mobility, and ensuring equitability of partnerships), the need for highly customised policies (not only cross-regionally but also at the regional and national levels) was also strongly reaffirmed.

However, as identified in the Asia-Europe Foundation's **ASEF Outlook Report 2016/2017**, markets alone are insufficient for supporting culture and creativity. Policy interventions are necessary to open doors to opportunities. An example presented at ASEM CMM7 was how Lithuania sees bilateral co-production agreements as a good instrument for international cooperation, and therefore mandated that 70-80% of film funding be channelled to co-productions with over 30 countries. This intervention has resulted in Lithuanian films capturing a 14% (and steadily growing) market share among films screened locally.

In addition to customisation, governments also acknowledged the need to incorporate some degree of flexibility and adaptability within their policymaking, in order to better reflect the spirit of the times and more effectively respond to disruptions and unanticipated developments. Romania, for example, through its Creative Romania fund for start-ups, recognises that funding systems must take into account the unique peculiarities of the creative industries, and can no longer be structured the way regular cultural grants have in the past.

The sentiment in Asia and Europe closely reflects what is being felt in the rest of the world.

It is notable that Asia and Europe are not alone in their quest to make sense of and resolve this tension between heritage and development. Views shared at ASEM CMM7 mirror those raised in authoritative global literature such as UNESCO's recent *Global Monitoring Report (Reshaping Cultural Policies)* which lists the integration of culture in sustainable development frameworks as one of its four implementation goals and cites various examples outside of Asia and Europe (e.g. South America, North America, and Africa) where policymakers and administrators continue to grapple with this challenge.

This presents significant opportunities for mutual understanding, learning, and cooperation to pool resources and seek diverse solutions to humanity's shared problems.