

The Buda Castle Retreat on Cultural Observatories in Europe

Buda Castle, Budapest, November 24-25, 2006

Report by Péter Inkei¹

Cultural observatories in Europe – for some, the phenomenon is more than familiar. Mark Schuster spoke of their „dramatic proliferation” already in 2002.² On the other hand, even today, one often meets people – not just laymen but also from the cultural sector – who feel unsure about the term. In fact, both of these conditions justified the string of conferences and workshops in 2006, all of them aiming to come to grips with the phenomenon.³ Once there are so many cultural observatories, we should find out at last what exactly they are (and what they are not). On the other hand, since even the oldest cultural observatories are quite young (in many parts of Europe still nonexistent), one should not wonder why the uninitiated majority requires explanation about the institution.

The Buda Castle Retreat was not preceded by a specific mapping of cultural observatories in Europe. Participants were referred to the numerous lists and the few reviews of (European) observatories. Several of the earlier reviews of cultural observatories were available for consultation during the workshop: among others, the *Bilbao Reader* and papers to the Belfast workshop, as well as a few publications in other than English (see the Annex at the end).

Note on the retreat formula

The format of the workshop was suggested by Lidia Varbanova, editor in chief and website manager of the LabforCulture. Lidia defined a retreat as a meeting with open, relaxed, creative atmosphere allowing maximum innovative ideas, sharing and suggesting creative strategies and tools. This is facilitated by a limited number of participants who spend all of the time together, including meals and one or two short outings. The Buda Castle Retreat was supposed to be one of the pilot occasions to prove that this kind of event fits to the mission of the LabforCulture: a laboratory where progressive ideas are created.

The main starting point for the discussion was the *Outline* of the retreat, annexed to this report, which is basically a set of structured questions. Very similar to the list of research questions with which Mark Schuster starts the above mentioned book. Mark did not attend the retreat and cultural observatories represent a smaller part of his book anyway. A copy of the

1 Based on notes prepared by Lidia Varbanova and Sándor Striker, complete in January 2007. This report is [available](#) on the Budapest Observatory website.

2 Schuster: *Informing Cultural Policy* (see *Resources* at the end of this report) p.29.

3 Belfast, March 7, 2006: A think tank meeting to explore the issues in depth and the opportunities for a cultural observatory in Northern Ireland. Bilbao, March 23-24, 2006: An ENCATC workshop: Analysis of methodologies used by cultural observatories and statistical centres. Bologna, October 18-19, 2006: International conference of cultural observatories.

volume, however, was brandished (and opened) at some moments during the discussion. For this, and for the very relevant observations to the theme, this report will refer to Schuster's *Informing Cultural Policy* several times.

Genesis

The retreat did not dwell long on the early history of cultural observatories. On this point I refer to the literature. Schuster assumes it "to be a French innovation. There are lengthy lists of „*observatoires*” operating in a wide range of societal sectors in France, and the two observatories that are most often cited as the archetypes for cultural observatories – the *Observatoire des politiques culturelles* in Grenoble and the *European Audiovisual Observatory* in Strasbourg – are both in France.”⁴

Schuster regards the *Zentrum für Kulturforschung* as an early forerunner of this kind of institution, which was established too early (in 1972) to consider being named an observatory. The same applies to *ERICArts*, born in 1993.

Following the recommendation of the *Stockholm Action Plan*, decided by the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development in Stockholm 1998, Unesco promoted the idea of cultural observatories in the next several years. The report to the European Parliament on cultural cooperation in the European Union (generally known as the *Ruffolo Report*) in 2001 included a proposal to set up a European cultural observatory. Although this has not taken place, the motion may also have added to the branding the type of institution (and, indirectly, led to the creation of the *Laboratory of European Cultural Cooperation* (the Lab).

The past several years have seen the acceleration of the creation of cultural observatories at all levels on the one hand, and the thinking, writing and discussing about the phenomenon on the other.

Defining cultural observatory missions

(Versions of definition)

Here is how Miralles defined cultural observatories in the *Bilbao Reader*: “Observatories, as specialised structures, seek to find a place at some fundamental crossroads: between action and reflection, between the arts and the territory, between institutions and society.”⁵ Eduard finished his paper by delineating the road to follow by observatories quoting Colin Mercer's “value chain”⁶: from *data* (statistics) towards *information* (indicators), *knowledge* (benchmarking) and *wisdom* (politics)⁷.

4 Schuster, p.33.

5 *Bilbao Reader*, Part.III p.9.

6 Mercer, C., *From Data to Wisdom: building the knowledge base for cultural policy*, 2004.
<http://www.policiesforculture.org/issue.php?id=24&t=a>

7 In my intervention at the Bologna meeting, by referring to a remark made by Michele Trimarchi, to the string of *data*, *information*, *knowledge* and *wisdom* I added *inspiration* as a necessary condition to successful decisions

Another Eduard, Delgado wrote in 1999: “The idea of an „*observatory*” is indebted to astronomy and feeds back on the assumption that regular movements in a complex system can only be appraised by disciplined registry of trends and changes.”⁸

This is how Schuster himself wrote about the “dramatic proliferation of institutions appearing under the rubric „*cultural observatories*”. Generally speaking, these institutions have come into being to serve as mediators in the process of bringing policy-relevant data and information to the attention of the field.”⁹

The definition given by the Lab site: “Cultural observatories not only observe phenomena, they also identify trends and tendencies in the cultural sector. They monitor and disseminate the results of their observations, reporting back to the sector by developing strategies that reflect on past cultural trends and predict future developments. Observatories operate at different levels: internationally, nationally, regionally, sub-regionally and locally. For European decision-makers, cultural observatories will play an increasingly important role in the development of future policies.”

The observatory in Grenoble focuses on local and regional communities, and defines its mission as the promotion of knowledge, evaluation and prospective analysis of local and regional cultural activities and compare them at a national and international levels.

The web site of the Portuguese cultural observatory sets its tasks “to produce and disseminate information, in a systematic and regular manner, on current trends in the field of cultural activities with emphasis on audience researches, cultural events and their impact, cultural policies, cultural agents and studies on cultural institutions.”

From the web site of the Piedmont observatory: “The arts and the cultural heritage, museums and the creative industries are closely monitored ... The aim is to evaluate the impact of cultural policies to particular areas forms a precise line of research which is enhanced by comparison with Italian and foreign Observatories and researchers.” (What a pity one cannot read Luca dal Pozzolo’s ruminations about the functions of observatories, with which he fascinated the audiences in Bilbao and Bologna.)

(The passionate variant)

The retreat in Buda Castle agreed that the main mission is to contribute to the improvement of professionalism in the field of culture. However, the prevailing atmosphere was definitely characterised by a partisan spirit. Participants held the view that observatories should by no means stop at producing data and indicators: they should come up with provocative new ideas¹⁰. Cultural observatories should explore the interaction between the artistic, cultural, social and political areas in various environments. They should aggregate content, enabling a

(in cultural policy). Although harder to acquire and plan than the other constituents, innovative, inquisitive, divergent thinking can also be developed.

8 Quoted by Schuster, p.32.

9 Schuster, p.29.

10 This report is aimed at recording the general outcome of the retreat and does not serve as proceedings or minutes. Quotations are identified to individuals in exceptional cases only.

knowledge-based approach towards progressive action, and not simply creating a library of resources. This mediatory, catalytic role between knowledge and action distinguished cultural observatories from other institutions.

The most determined speakers defined that the primary aim of observatories is to provoke discussions with professionals; to elaborate remedies to cultural policy shortcomings and to assist operators and administrators.

(The skeptic stance)

Augustin Girard, one of the founding fathers of the institution in focus used to describe “the deliberate choice of the word „*observatoire*” as a „shy” choice. The intended message was quite clear: This new institution was not being created to rule or control; rather, it would observe, monitor, and provide information passively. In his words, ‘We cannot agree on a Centre, but we can have an Observatory. It is a pleasant name. An Observatory is a place of negotiation, of interactivity. It does not deliver judgments.’”¹¹

Schuster is no less skeptical in his own words: “Introducing the question of advocacy into a discussion of cultural policy research is problematic”, and greets the choice of the Amsterdam based *Boekmanstichting* to move “away from the more controversial realm of advocacy-inspired research”¹².

Scope of observation

Participants of the retreat identified the areas that their observation covers. The arts, above all, dominate the attention, followed obviously by heritage.

The Buda Castle is in the middle of a country where the cultural sector traditionally covers three main zones: *arts*, *heritage* and *community culture*. Although this latter has an uncertain status in most countries in the west, the Nordic representatives at the retreat saw to it that the issue deserved due attention. It was mentioned that in many communities in the north and East of Europe this field represents the largest part of public expenditure on culture. Identifying the area is rarely easy between people from various countries¹³. The usual struggle for common comprehension took place at the retreat, too. After a number of approximative terms we resorted to those in the native tongues: *folkbildning* and *közművelődés*. Anyhow, for some observatories this is a significant part of the scope of observation.

Still at the local, community level two areas were singled out (as distinguished objects of observation): *public libraries* and *art education*.

To nobody’s surprise, creative or *cultural industries* were emphasised as fields of increasing importance. Honestly, participants failed to come forward with specific and vivid illustrations about how cultural observatories watch these industries. There was an agreement though that

11 Quoted by Schuster, p.33.

12 Schuster, p.27.

13 The Budapest Observatory has dedicated special projects to this matter: <http://www.budobs.org/socio-cultural-institutions/socio-cultural-institutions/socio-cultural-activities-and-their-institutions-in-europe.html>

publishing, music recording and various media branches are included in the observatory remit, and that special attention needs to be paid to *small businesses* (in culture).

The *media* are of course more than just part of the creative industries. Therefore examining and evaluating them needs special knowledge and determination. And yet, some of the observatories present have had a record of observing the media, including *new technologies*.

Education is a sector where some observatories regularly do explorations (beyond the already mentioned art education) and examine education and training in all its dimensions, especially the concept of “life-long learning”. The most enterprising of the observatories represented at the Buda Castle district reported work on *new frontiers* like tourism, languages, culture and health, culture and sustainable environment, culture and latest technologies etc.

Besides cultural fields as objects of inspection, the scope of observatories has two more dimensions. One is the *geographical* or *administrative* level that divides cultural observatories in a natural manner. Some focus on the local and regional level (specific and widely known features of Interarts in Barcelona and the Grenoble Observatory), others have much wider remits, like ERICArts, which always covers the whole of Europe (similarly to OCPA¹⁴ in Africa). In between are the national cultural observatories, which level was the main target of the retreat at the outset. Already during the preparation, however, it became clear that the distinction by geographic scope has little relevance. The approaches, structures, activities and methodologies of observatories are very similar and they relate very little to whether their main focus is on urban or global cultural policies.

It is often overlooked (especially by the general public) that the main weight of cultural policies and public resources continues to shift from the central government to the regions and cities. It became clear during the meeting that cultural observatories are conscious about the significance of these developments, and their role in bringing it home with their clients. This is reflected in the choice of scope of most observatories.

A third dimension of the scope of observation tells about the triade of *state*, *private* and *third sectors* of society (not wanting to complicate the case with further sectors at present). The main focus of most observatories is on the public sector, as the primary object usually is public cultural policies. What is more, if (rarely) cultural businesses or (fairly often) non-governmental culture are examined, this usually happens with regard to the relation of public policies to the observed issue.

The retreat did not go deeper into further dimensions of the scope of subjects for research and intervention. Various aspects of culture were mentioned, certainly *diversity* and *interculturalism*, as well as *sponsorship* and others. The actual facet of cultural activities that observatories choose to examine is not a matter of discussion.

Character of observatory activities

What actually observatories do is of course only partly chosen by themselves. Usually the greater part of tasks is determined from outside: whether prescribed by the “owners”, or

14 OCPA is the Observatory of Cultural Policies in Africa <http://www.ocpanet.org/> .

dictated by the necessity of survival. Cultural observatories, too, depend on the market. They do proposals for grants, and collect revenue by selling their products.

The retreat revealed considerable variance in the composition of activities pursued by the observatories. Fortunately, we encountered no case when an observatory was stricken by orders from the funders (from the administration or the market of grants or business commissions) to such a degree, which disabled them from fulfilling activities to keep the status of an observatory.

Monitoring cultural policies and cultural realities requires a minimum of stability and continuity, the periodical re-visiting of issues. “Chronological series and diachronic analyses are precious instruments for the understanding of the trajectories of cultural policies and their impacts.”¹⁵ This need for continuity is the main feature that distinguishes observatories from other kinds of organisations that do research on culture (at universities, attached to public administration or in the frame of cultural counselling businesses). These other institutions can better afford existing on the stepping stones of distinct projects and assignments.

Being governed by outside jobs is not necessarily an obstacle or hindrance in fulfilling the observatory mission. The need for discovering and exploiting new opportunities can open avenues that enrich and improve the capacities to understand and interpret the full complexity of cultural realities.

Types of observatory activities

Observatories *collect data* and other forms of information, build up collections of resources on paper and in digital files. It was stressed that parallel to the primary (geographic) area, trends in other countries and regions need to be followed to enable comparison.

Processing and analysing data is the essence of the observatory work: bring to light essential facts, make comparisons, identify or highlight trends; draw conclusions and formulate recommendations relevant to policy options and decisions.

Cultural observatories are regularly asked for ad hoc information, brief report or pointed advice that is based on simple forms of gathering from existing sources: printed documents, the Internet. Observatories often obtain information by consulting peers through networking devices. The greater part of collecting and processing information, however, takes the form of projects that meet the requirements of academic research. Undertaking *research* constitutes the core activity of many cultural observatories.

Besides performing the above described policy counselling and information providing activities as institutions, the retreat took note of the services done by observatory members as individual *experts*. In addition to being utilised as speakers on cultural policy issues, key personalities as well as junior observatory members constitute a pool for specialists to be selected to advisory, monitoring, preparatory, editorial, selection and similar kinds of boards. As these are often honorary commissions, cultural observatories in effect fulfil the hidden agenda of acting as breeding grounds and training fields for individual experts.

15 Miralles, p.8.

Observatories also act as bulletin boards and inform about cultural occasions, targeted towards professionals and focusing on conferences, tenders, policy news, publications etc. Some observatories collect and disseminate information on artistic and other cultural events also.

Cultural *indicators* are the Holy Grail in the discipline – was remarked at the retreat – an evergreen issue. Nevertheless the need for developing indicators is not yet sufficiently exploited by observatories: not to speak of internationally consolidated and harmonised markers. (This recognition seemed to encourage participants at the retreat for increased efforts.)

The retreat revealed that some of the best known cultural observatories in Europe are very active in *teaching* and training. The offer ranges from one day seminars (including heavy-weight issues like upgrading lawyers on copyright) to full fledged accredited semesters for cultural managers, administrators and research workers.

The most dynamic observatories go far beyond what the name suggests and broker co-operation with and between government offices, local administration, legislation, academia, cultural operations, civil society and other communities. They catalyse think tanks and are progress agents in many other forms.

Products of cultural observatories

The products of cultural observatories belong to two large classes, corresponding to the two groups of activities. Some are born out of the regular monitoring activities, while other products are the fruit of ad hoc projects.

The most important observatories have a significant amount of regular output of printed publications, books, bulletins and journals. The content covers a wide range that includes research reports, methodological and policy guides, statistical presentations, proceedings of conferences etc. The publications are listed with availability: on line and sent by mail on order, indicating full or discounted price, or free access. Some publications sell by the thousand!

Several observatories of smaller dimension also consider the publishing of books as the main kind of product resulting from past and future research activities.

There are observatories that have sophisticated on-line services with amazing amount of page visits. In fact, there is a considerable overlap between cultural observatories and cultural web portals.

In some cases complex reports, with figures and analyses about the cultural policy and life of a given territory, are the eminent products of the observatory function: the annual reports on culture in Piedmont are a characteristic example of the genre.

For whom

The roll call of potential users of cultural observatories created little excitement at the retreat. There was a great amount of agreement about groups of clients, notwithstanding the considerable variance between the actual target groups of the observatories present in Buda. The main categories of users are as follows:

- Policy-makers, including those at the city (and small town) level
- Cultural administrators, from international organisations down to the above mentioned local levels
- Cultural managers and intermediaries
- Academia: students, universities, librarians, researchers
- General public, as well as journalists, who are supposed to inform the wider audience.

The retreat heard with surprise that at least in one country children and teenaged pupils, too, have proved to be interested users of some cultural observatory web site content.

Training, as we could see, is attached in almost every case to the functions of cultural observatories. Participants of training courses are direct users of the observatory output, appearing in very varied shapes.

Status, affiliation, structure and governance

“In a strictly taxonomic sense, [cultural] observatories do not constitute a separate pure type. Instead, they combine a variety of hybrids of the different models under a common rubric.” This comment by Schuster¹⁶ can be extended the most features of legal status, founders and sponsors, structural adherence and governance of cultural observatories, and not only in Europe. Which is corroborated by Delgado’s observation: “Existing monitoring devices in Europe differ from each other to such an extent that no taxonomy is viable.”¹⁷

The retreat fully confirmed the great variance in the observatory setup. The diversity applies to their *legal status*, too, which includes public administration, non-governmental organisations, universities as well as private firms. The question naturally arose, whether one or other of these affiliations constitutes a setback to the observatory functions, or even worse: whether one or other is considered incompatible with these. The retreat, however, could find pros and cons in a fairly even manner. It was established, for example, that a university environment has a number of advantages (especially the access to the eager minds of PhD students) that counterbalance the risk of academic isolation.

Many, probably even the majority, of cultural observatories are virtual, in the sense that they have no legal (moral) personality of their own. These observatories may have a great amount of tangible results and reputable accomplishment to their name, yet do not constitute independent legal entities. Illustrative examples:

16 Schuster, p.9.

17 Eduard Delgado quoted by Schuster, p.32.

- Culturelink has been a decade-old world-wide project of IMO, an academic institute; the absence of a separate legal status does not seem to harm the prestige of this “network of networks” in culture;
- The observatory of Piedmont was created as a thoroughly prepared joint operation of many distinguished bodies – as we will see: in its performance, however, it is in effect a project of the Fitzcarraldo Foundation;
- The newly established PACT has started its cultural observatory activity as an initiative of an organisation whose main function is to act as Cultural Contact Point of Romania.

Which amounts to the conclusion that the essence of a cultural observatory is the performing of a set of functions, and not a strictly defined type of institution, not even the use of the ‘observatory’ label.

The retreat nevertheless identified two characteristic types: the singles and the consortium-type of observatories. The previous were founded and (or) are owned by one organisation, sometimes one person, while the latter were conceived and are supervised and funded by several systems. Here are some of the characteristic consortia:

- Cupore, Helsinki, has been jointly founded by the University of Jyväskylä and the Finnish Cultural Foundation;
- The Observatory of Cultural Activities in Portugal is a non-profit association whose founding members are the culture ministry, the Social Sciences Institute of the University of Lisbon as well as the National Statistical Institute.
- The Piedmont Observatory is a joint undertaking of the Piedmont region, the province and the city of Torino, the Compagnia di San Paolo bank, the Fitzcarraldo Foundation and a couple of other cultural associations.

Probably the most complex of all, the observatory of Québec was not represented at the retreat. The Observatory of culture and communication of Québec is a department in the state administration, a unit of the Statistical Institute of Québec. (In this latter respect it resembles the DEPS, the unit of the French culture ministry that fulfils much of the functions of a national observatory.) On the other hand, the Québec observatory fulfils its activities as an operation under the aegis of four public bodies (one being the culture ministry), governed by ten permanent and a number of ad hoc committees.

The complex look of the governance systems imply sophisticated decision-making processes. The majority of the observatories represented at the retreat, however, did not report about instances of excessive or too close interventions into the planning and execution of the observatory activities.

The open approach to the institutional characteristics of cultural observatories that prevailed at the retreat was further extended by quoting a few cases of *quasi observatories* in the post-Soviet region:

- The centre for cultural policy, set up by the Soros Foundation in Kazakhstan;
- A centre for cultural policy in Moldova, still in the making;

- The Arts Council of Mongolia, which is a non-governmental organisation involved in policy issues

Furthermore, 19 Soros Centres of Contemporary Arts were created in 17 countries, which are active primarily in the field of media, publishing, visual arts, to a lesser extent performing arts. Some of them play the role of meeting spaces between cultural actors, policy makers, researchers and the media, thus fulfilling some of the observatory functions.

Who work in the observatories?

The issue of observatory personnel created little attention and no excitement during the retreat. We went through the issues of permanent staff, part timers, free helpers and occasional contracted contributors. After the monotony of listing obvious categories of human resources the retreat got livelier when talking about the involvement of students, the role of interns and the possibilities of outsourcing parts of the work to (European) countries with lower wages.

The variance in the sizes of observatories was a surprise even if we had been aware about differences. The smallest observatories occupy three or four desks, while at the upper end there are agencies with dozens of people involved fully or partly into observing culture.

The retreat failed, however, to discuss the ideal psychotypes for leaders or key members of a cultural observatory. An opportunity was thus missed of defining the ideal composition in the staff (or in the personal files and egos of the key members) of prior experiences as well as dispositions. Based on the general mind-set of the retreat, the dominant requirements are to be fairly curious and deeply dedicated to culture.

Finances

Funding was a recurrent theme during the discussions of the retreat. Information about the great variety of budget schemes was shared and confirmed. We had known, however, that while some observatories are practically fully financed from public coffers, there are some without any guaranteed structural funding. The debate, however, did not produce divergent opinions: we took note of the realities of different financial backgrounds, as well as the good and bad sides of each situation.

We learned that even observatories that are entrenched in the public sphere often generate up to half of their annual budget from other sources: selling publications or advice, collecting fees for courses, winning grants etc. Probably the most creative partnership is with an airline that inserts articles of one of the observatories into its board magazine.

P.S. A recipe

No area on earth has full comfort without a cultural observatory. It takes less to prepare one than you would think in advance.

Take a vessel, old or new, big or small, of almost any shape; it need not be yours, can be someone else's property. Needed: one part curiosity, two parts devotion; also one part loyalty and two parts divergent thinking, seasoned with pinches of skepticism and revolt. The main ingredients are individuals, preferably a blend with records in academia and culture. Rinsing with financial gravy at regular intervals prevents your observatory from drying or collecting unsolicited tastes.

You may decorate it with the name of an observatory. You will find satisfaction once your observatory is served and serves you.

Annex 1

Participants at the Buda Castle Retreat

Svante **Beckman** (Linköping University)

Geoffrey **Brown** (Manchester, Euclid)

Katalin **Dudás** (Budapest, Hungarian Institute for Culture)

Judit **Friss** (Budapest, The Budapest Observatory)

Aimee **Fullman** (Washington, former Center for Arts and Culture)

Magdalena **Hillström** (Linköping University)

Zsuzsa **Hunyadi** (Budapest, Hungarian Institute for Culture)

Péter **Inkei** (Budapest, The Budapest Observatory)

Orsolya **Kőrösi** (Budapest, Hungarian Institute for Public Administration)

Ritva **Mitchell** (Helsinki, Cupore)

Iuliana **Nistor** (Bucharest, Pact)

Veronika **Ratzenböck** (Vienna, Kulturdokumentation)

Iván **Rónai** (Budapest, Ministry of Education and Culture)

Jean-Pierre **Saez** (Grenoble, Observatoire des politiques culturelles)

Vladimir **Skok** (Gatineau, Canadian Cultural Observatory)

Sándor **Striker** (Budapest, Budapest Eötvös University)

János Z. **Szabó** (Budapest, The Budapest Observatory)

Aleksandra **Uzelac** (Zagreb, Culturelink)

Lidia **Varbanova** (Amsterdam, LabforCulture)

Annex 2

Preliminary Outline of the Working Retreat on Cultural Observatories

Buda Castle, Budapest, November 24-25, 2006

The changes in this outline, originally formulated in spring 2006, reflect recent relevant developments, including amongst others the conference organised in Bologna on 18-19 October as well as the initiative taken by OECD to contribute to the field of monitoring cultural output.

Cultural observatories, founded in the 1990s, have responded to the challenge to collect, analyse and provide information about various aspects of culture. In the light of varying circumstances and expectations, different approaches can be identified.

The Budapest Observatory, with the support of the European Cultural Foundation, and in co-operation with the LabforCulture, organised a working retreat on the main features of European cultural observatories - primarily but not exclusively focusing on national observatories.

Besides managing the organisational aspects, the Budapest Observatory prepared the content, in the light of correspondence with the invited participants.

Purpose of the meeting:

- share ideas about the mission and tools of cultural observatories;
- create new directions and visions on the management of cultural observatories;
- identify innovative approaches towards the online dissemination of information and intelligence on culture;
- provide assistance to observatories which are in development;
- identify potential areas for co-ordinated "observation", research and advocacy.

Participants:

One or two persons from seven to nine countries, where cultural observatories, or institutions with similar function operate or are about to operate. Hungary, the host country can be represented by 4-5 persons.

Proposed outline of the deliberations:

The following paragraphs outline the proposed structure of the discussions which in fact was followed at the retreat. Relevant literature was recommended and/or distributed at the meeting.

1. The observatory phenomenon

Cultural observatories respond to the need for information (data, knowledge, intelligence) about culture. This need has always existed, but there were no cultural observatories before the 1990s. Why now (and not before) ? Why this kind of institution (as opposed to any other structures)? What are the main reasons for the observatory phenomenon?

2. Features of cultural observatories

a) Mission

Improve the level of knowledge, intelligence and wisdom about the cultural sector, especially with regard to assisting in the policy decision-making process.

b) Functions

Secure, analyse and process information: highlight essential facts, make comparisons, identify or highlight trends and so on. Disseminate information. Draw conclusions and recommendations relevant to policy options and decisions.

To these ends, collect and store data, documents and other resources. Undertake research, leading to the production of new data and documents. Develop indicators.

Is there an established minimum or core set of functions that are shared by all observatories?

Are there more than one such set (covering different models, types, standards)? Where are the dividing lines between observatories on the one hand, and statistical services, research institutions and think tanks on the other? How do the observatory functions relate to monitoring and auditing?

c) Output

(In its observatory role:) Material for the profession, the politicians, the public: in print, online or in digital format. Advice and guidance, retrievable intelligence on culture and cultural policies.

Is there an optimum division between regular outputs and on-demand ad-hoc products?

d) Scope

Culture is a province that has changing boundaries, with large domains being included or left out. (Cinema, media, creative industries, arts education, architecture, archaeology, sports...)

Is there an established minimum or a basic core set of domains (branches, sub-sectors) that are a must for all cultural observatories?

To what extent are observatories able or willing to identify and observe the more indirect involvement and impact (social, economic or political) of culture?

e) Governance

How are all the questions raised above answered? Who identifies what output to produce through what mechanisms and under what parameters (e.g. finance, depth, etc.)? What is the relation of observatories to public authorities? Who else is a stakeholder? Issues of neutrality, impartiality and advocacy.

f) Structure

What legal statutes exist? Public, non-governmental, private, academic? What aspects of an observatory's structure have formal significance only, and which are an essential part of effective functioning?

g) Finances

Options appear to include: long term agreement-based financing; ad hoc support; specific grants for projects.

What do budgets relate to? Size and wealth of country (region) observed? Specific output expectations? Potential and aspirations?

h) Personnel

How do the composition of the staff and the functions (the "character") of the observatory mutually interrelate? Just as the institution, the core members of the staff also typically represent links between academia, practice and policy making. In what proportions?

What is the importance and role of co-operating partners? Half timers, occasional contributors, advisory boards, networks of comrades...

3. The observatory essentials

The retreat hopes managed to arrive at certain consensual points with regard to the 'standard' (established, typical, optimal, required) conditions for institutions bearing this name or fulfilling this function, whether existing, or to be created in the future.

4. Co-operation between observatories

How can this best happen both on and off-line. What is the added value in co-ordinated, consolidated functioning?

Are there basic preconditions: harmonised terminology and methods; shared information sources?

Which issues and structures lend themselves to sustainable, realistic co-operation between observatories? What is the potential of the Lab in this respect? And other gateways?

Format of the meeting:

Retreat: open, relaxed, creative atmosphere allowing maximum innovative ideas, sharing and suggesting creative strategies and tools.

The 18-22 participants stayed together from Friday evening till Sunday breakfast. The building of the Foundation of Hungarian Culture on Buda Castle Hill offered ideal conditions for this (<http://www.mka.hu/>). Expenses were borne by the project.

Annex 3

Selected publications

(The Bilbao Reader:) *Analysis of methodologies used by cultural observatories and statistical centres. Guidelines for trainers and researchers.* Reader ENCATC Workshop. Bilbao: 23 - 24 March 2006.

KISIŁOWSKA, Małgorzata. *Obserwatorium kultury jako ośrodek zarządzania wiedzą.* In: Raporty Analizy Opinii (Zina Jarmoszuk, Anna Wiczorek). Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2005.

MCILROY, Andrew. *Observing Culture: How Might an observatory Contribute to a Professional, Confident, Outward Looking Cultural Environment in the Region?* A Policy Paper by Andrew McIlroy in consultation with Nollaig Ó Fiongháile to guide the debate on relevancies of a Cultural Observatory for N. Ireland, Belfast, 2006.

MERCER, Colin. *From Data to Wisdom: building the knowledge base for cultural policy,* paper prepared for the Cultural Policy Research in the Countries of South Eastern Europe seminar, Belgrade: October, 2004.

MIRALLES, Eduard. *Evaluation Creates Value.* Eurocult 21, Spanish National Workshop, Barcelona, October 2004 (Included into the Bilbao Reader).

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Annex 4

Web sites of institutions represented at the retreat and of selected observatories

The Budapest Observatory – www.budobs.org

Cultural Observatory of Lombardy – www.lombardiacultura.it/osservatorio

Culturelink – www.culturelink.org

CUPORE (Foundation for Cultural Policy Research) – www.cupore.fi

ERICArts Insitute – www.ericarts.org

EUCLID - www.euclid.info/

European Cultural Foundation – www.eurocult.hu

European Audiovisual Observatory - <http://www.obs.coe.int/>

Hungarian Institute for Culture – www.mmi.hu

LabforCulture - www.labforculture.org

Linköping University - www.liu.se/en

Observatoire des Politiques Culturelles - www.observatoire-culture.net

Observatório das Actividades Culturais / Observatory of Cultural Activities -
http://www.oac.pt/observatorio_ing.htm

L'Osservatorio Culturale del Piemonte - <http://www.fitzcarraldo.it/en/research/>

Österreichische Kulturdokumentation / Internationales Archiv für Kulturanalysen -
www.kulturdokumentation.org/eversion/indexframe.html

Pact (a South-East Europe Cultural Cooperation Observatory) - www.pact-online.ro/en/mainen.htm

Quebec Observatory of Culture and Communication / Observatoire de la culture et des communications du Québec - <http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/observatoire>.

Zentrum für Kulturforschung – www.kulturforschung.de