European Parliament Resolution on Barriers to Access to Culture
Arguments to use in library advocacy

IFLA Briefing, 10 July 2018

- **The European Parliament has passed a motion on barriers to access to culture**
- **It underlines the barriers can be financial, educational and structural, and notes the social, economic and political costs**
- **The motion offers some key arguments about the importance of libraries that can be used in library advocacy**

[The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) Article 27a](#) states that "**everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits"**. This is a principle also held up by the [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union Article 22 and 25](#).

In the light of this, and on the occasion of the [European Year of Cultural Heritage,](#) the European Parliament has passed a resolution on analysis on access to culture in the European Union: *[Structural and financial barriers in the access to culture.](#)* This is based on a proposal from the Culture and Education Committee, itself the product of extensive discussions within and between European Parliament committees[1], including the High-level conference '[Cultural heritage in Europe: linking past and future'](#), and a European [Parliament Research Service report](#).

This briefing offers a number of key quotes and arguments from both the report and event which libraries and library associations can use in their advocacy around the importance of libraries in overcoming barriers to access to culture.

Cultural access and participation

> *"inclusive and meaningful access to culture should be one of the main priorities on the political agenda"* **(Article 8)**

The report argues that culture has a strong impact on the promotion, understanding and development of solidarity between European and trans-European communities. As stated in the report "***any kind of barriers that obstructs access and full participation for individuals or communities in cultural processes and cultural ecosystems inhibit the development of truly democratic and inclusive societies***".

The report emphasises that culture gives European citizens greater opportunities to develop personal, social, creative and intercultural skills, and recognises that "***inclusive and meaningful access to culture should be one of the main priorities on the political agenda***", and calls for the "***mainstreaming of accessibility and cultural participation aspects into other policy areas, as this will not only make a positive contribution to those areas, but will also have an impact on cross-sectoral and synergize in the spirit of [Article 167 TFEU](#)***."

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[1] The original version of the report can be found here: [2017 draft report](#).

Financial barriers

Pressures to reduce public budgets all over Europe have affected libraries and many institutions have experienced large budget cuts, as economic downturns often result in cuts in public spending on culture. In the Report **the European Parliament calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that public funding of culture is not reduced**, regardless of possible future economic difficulties that a Member State might be facing.

The Report stresses the **importance of continued public funding** as it plays a fundamental role in ensuring and supporting cultural activities. **Policy makers should be cautious when cutting public spending on culture, especially from cultural-type entities such as libraries**.

Moreover, it also argues that Member States should "**devote an appropriate part of their budgets to public support for culture and to strengthen synergies with the ERDF and other cultural support funds, including programmes facilitating research and innovation and the available cohesion policy tools**".

Educational barriers and challenges

Educational level has a significant impact on participation in cultural activities. In order to overcome this, and ensure that it is not just the most highly educated who engage, the report underlines the "**role of local cultural institutions, including cultural centres and libraries, as key actors in overcoming barriers to accessing and participating in culture: calls therefore, on the Member States to actively support such cultural institutions.**" By this the EU recognises the role of library as one of the main actors in access to culture.

The Motion furthermore "**calls for a greater appreciation and understanding of the social role of public libraries [...] particularly in rural or remote regions, not only through increasing public funding, but also through forming partnerships and providing them with the adequate ICT and human resources with access to training, thus turning them into institutions that can improve people's lives and encourage local development**".

It is furthermore stated that **libraries**, being often the sole access point for information and culture, particularly in rural and remote areas, are **often the most frequently visited institution**. Libraries have a great influence its surrounding community and can therefor take a leading role, when in giving access to culture.

The report also implies support for school libraries, when it notes that "**culture should accordingly be given more space on school curricula and that more human resources and materials should be made available in order to reach this objective**".

Finally, it calls "**on the Commission and the Member States [...] to develop a comprehensive European strategy concerning access to public spaces, particularly relating to culture in the urban built environment, as in the cases of museums, theatres, cinemas, libraries, concert halls, etc.**"

Structural barriers

European cultural heritage is unique in the world for its diversity and richness. It can foster social cohesion and inclusion. The report asks the Member States to: "**ensure a cultural offer that is accessible to everyone**" by having respect for cultural diversity.

> *"... calls on the Commission and the Member States [...] to develop a comprehensive European strategy concerning access to public spaces, particularly relating to culture in the urban built environment, as in the case of [...] libraries...",* (Article 47)

This argument can be used to support libraries, given that they have for centuries been working to make collections accessible for all citizens, and many libraries are making extra effort to reach groups such as children and young people, the elderly, disables people or migrants, among others.

Digital barriers and challenges

Digital tools can help to overcome barriers to access to culture caused by factors such as geographical location, disability, social background or language. Digital tools can also be a means of overcoming social or mental barriers, and the EU calls on the Member Sates to: "**take audience development into account in their cultural and digital strategies, and to support the use of digital technologies in order to facilitate access to cultural content**".

While noting that copyright should be respected, the report also notes that it should not stand in the way of access. **Digital libraries such as the Europeana platform are cited as promoting public access to digital cultural heritage**, and many other libraries can justly claim to be helping to achieve this objective.