

REPORT of the 4th WorldCP-Asia Authors and Partners Meeting 11 November 2015, Wroclaw, Poland

WorldCP-Asia¹, an integral part of the WorldCP – *International Database of Cultural Policy* project², focuses on documenting the arts and cultural policies of Asian countries through national profiles. Since 2011, six profiles have been commissioned in Asia³. The project also aims to create platforms for dialogue and networking among Asian and European authors and experts involved in the Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe⁴ (on which the WorldCP project is modelled after).

The Poland meeting is the 4th to have taken place among WorldCP-Asia participants, and is particularly notable because it is the 1st such meeting to have been hosted in Europe alongside the 14th *Assembly of Experts of the Council of Europe / ERICarts Compendium of Cultural Policies & Trends in Europe* (Wroclaw, 12-13 November 2015). Participants from Asia thus had the opportunity to dialogue with their European Compendium counterparts and learn from their extensive experience in managing what has now become a highly-regarded and long-standing regional database of cultural policies.

The Poland meeting highlighted that WorldCP-Asia must continue to be **future-oriented** and let long-term considerations shape its decisions on content, processes, and users. In particular, participants recognised that the project must remain **agile** in how it deals with the dynamic nature of cultural policies, the diverse sensitivities and realities presented by stakeholders in the cultural arena, and the changing face of user behaviour especially in the digital space.

We summarise the many ideas raised during the meeting in terms of 3 key areas: **content, process, and users**.

1) CONTENT

The importance of the executive summaries and introductory sections of the country profiles was affirmed by several participants, who not only recognised the **inherent value of context-setting** but also the **practical utility of concise backgrounders** for non-experts and non-practitioners.

The need for authors to distance themselves from the content was also affirmed in that authors should – as far as possible – refrain from embedding their personal views within their writing. Rather, country profiles should be drafted based on **verifiable facts and objective reading** of views and interpretations as they emerge from various players in the field of study, with the author merely an observer of said views.

The **tension between concision and comprehensiveness** remains a perennial one. It can perhaps best be resolved through the skillful application of already available **technology**, e.g.

1 <http://www.worldcp.org/world-cp-asia.php>

2 WorldCP is a central, web-based and continuously updated database of country-specific profiles of cultural policies. It is publicly accessible at <http://www.worldcp.org/>. WorldCP is an initiative of the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA), the global network of arts councils and Ministries of Culture. IFACCA works with international and regional partners to oversee the development of WorldCP.

3 WorldCP-ASIA published and commissioned profiles: India (Published in 2013); South Korea (Published in 2013), Viet Nam (Published in 2013). Country profiles commissioned for 2016-2017: Mongolia, Philippines, and Singapore.

4 The Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe (<http://culturalpolicies.net/>) is established by the Council of Europe and the ERICarts Institute.

summary paragraphs with accompanying **option to expand** further for detail, ability to add **short notes** or comments in real-time or as and when necessary, and a **comments system** or **community section** for audiences to play an active role in the knowledge-building process. Proper **indexing** and **tagging** (for search engine optimisation) and use of **links and references** can also help reduce unnecessary clutter, while allowing the profiles to remain comprehensive and give due weight to diverse and/or contesting views. The Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe has already started to actively implement some of these.

Supporting efforts post-publication must be **needs-driven**. In India, for example, audiences (especially culture professionals and civil society) appear more interested in tracking cultural debates and their outcomes, i.e. what has been discussed to-date, what constructive decisions have been taken, and how much of them have actually been implemented. In such a context, a community for information-sharing and progress-monitoring might be useful for sustaining and building legitimacy around the work done for the profiles.

Finally, one participant raised the view that, in the context of development, as rural and dispersed cultures become increasingly remote from policymaking, it may be prudent for the profiles to give greater attention and voice to **marginalised communities** that would otherwise struggle to be seen or heard.

2) PROCESS

As regards the drafting process, authors felt that **closer interaction** with an experienced mentor (in this case the Regional Editor) before and during the writing phases would certainly have been more useful than a mere vetting arrangement upon completion of each draft. The project team from the Philippines, in particular, expressed appreciation at having had the opportunity to meet with the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) team at the start of, as well as teleconference with the Regional Editor during, the process.

There exists some uncertainty over **update cycles**, i.e. what an acceptable time frame for “recency” is and how frequently the profiles should be updated. Particularly, political changes and national events can result in significant directional shifts that could render existing profiles outdated. In Asia, the process is still undefined; in Europe, informal reviews take place on an annual basis. Some participants expressed a preference for on-demand updating as opposed to making a suite of amendments at one go, provided resources permit.

Some authors shared that the **lack of reliable data** presents difficulties in their specific national contexts. The question of “where does one find culture?” remains unresolved and will therefore continue to hinder the search for reliable and representative statistics. In some cases, data is available but limited to a single source (e.g. government). This calls for more **diverse representation** in the drafting process, not only by sectors but also by various levels within the field of culture. At the same time, the European Compendium experience reveals that resources may not permit the involvement of so many contributors; neither can it be realistic to accommodate requests for updates and amendments all the time.

Finally, some authors raised concerns about how **funding sources** may implicitly **influence** the profile drafting process. The European Compendium experience offers two useful ideas for resolving these concerns: 1) public-private partnerships to **co-author** the profiles (an arrangement also adopted by the Mongolian team), and 2) taking a **longer-term perspective** in managing relationships with governments. As regards the latter, the European experience of working with the Belarusian government suggests that it is sometimes necessary to bite the bullet and cooperate with the state in the initial stages in order to create opportunities for refinement (of both the content and the process) in the future.

3) USERS

The Regional Editor Mr Anmol VELLANI shared that WorldCP-Asia started off with culture policy researchers in mind, but in the process of observing how its content was being used discovered that **audiences were accessing it for a variety of reasons** and from a variety of sources beyond those that had initially and consciously been targeted. Journalists, for one, appeared to utilise the profiles because of certain needs or demands that the compendium itself had not originally set out to meet.

In Europe, it has been observed that the main users of the compendium are students and teachers. Government officials also rely on the compendium but mainly for comparative studies, while journalists seek more critical perspectives and in-depth analyses. Asia will need to track its own **user behaviours, preferences, and needs**.

At the same time, while consumption by greater numbers and varieties of audiences can be seen as a positive development, such a development also creates **conflicting demands** on the authors and on the process. Some degree of **control and clarity** – at least on core target audiences – needs to remain in order to guide and inform the writing process.

Beyond the current target groups (which include policymakers, cultural practitioners, as well as students and researchers), at least two participants echoed the view that the country profiles can be a tremendously useful tool for **advocacy groups** seeking to present their policy arguments to policymakers or other stakeholders, particularly where there is a need to offer comparative data.

Other use cases that emerged during the discussion include the national profiles serving as material for country and policy briefs in **diplomatic contexts**, as well as preparatory material for the **civil service**, specifically civil servants entering the culture and diplomatic fields who need to develop a sound awareness of international best practices. In this vein, diplomatic agencies, human resource departments of various government agencies, and civil service training institutes could all be **potential target audiences**.

Another participant shared that there exists an untapped audience in those involved in policy and delivery in **international development** and **international trade**, who traditionally may have been far detached from the field of culture. Participants from Europe also shared how a new model in Europe has emerged that taps on the angle of **capacity-building**, i.e. **peer exchange forums** where policymakers, practitioners and researchers can engage in comparative discussions and receive issue briefs that in turn inform their solutions to regional challenges.

Finally, the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA) representatives shared that the organisation has increasingly been working with regional **cultural networks** to encourage the use of European profiles by artists and arts administrators, and that Asia could likely do the same.

OTHER IDEAS MOVING FORWARD

The European Compendium experience has shown that the country report drafting process has opened doors for authors and project team members to be more active in the arts and culture community. Hence, beyond the country report drafting process, **networking and exchanges** to inspire new views and learn from experts in other related subject areas (e.g. technology, media) are a win-win scenario for all.

At the working level, should resources permit, the **project team model** appears to be largely favoured over the single author model for reasons of diversity, expertise, and sustainability. The creation of **Communities of Practice** around the country profiles (comprising not only of the

authors and project managers, but also the subjects and audiences of the published material) is also another way to build on the profiles and generate sustained conversation on the issues raised. In Europe, Communities of Practice have even inspired projects beyond the country reports themselves.

Meeting participants affirmed the need to **raise the profile** of the WorldCP-Asia project, so as to strengthen its proposition as an authoritative resource and policymaking reference. This may be done in two ways: 1) **profile launches** in conjunction with regional and international gatherings where authors and the project team can introduce the profiles to delegates and the media, and 2) having prominent experts, practitioners and cultural leaders congregate (either physically or digitally) to discuss the profiles and their implications, thereby functioning as **champions and ambassadors** for the project.

Finally, there was a call to reverse the process to allow the desired use cases to influence the drafting and updating process. This requires ongoing effort to develop greater **sensitivity** towards the needs of particular audience groups within each national context (through constant dialogue, relationship-building, etc.), as well as the **foresight** to ascertain user scenarios beyond those currently imaginable.

This report was commissioned by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) and written by Daniel HO Sheng.

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