



ASEM workshop on Enhancing ASEM Visibility through Cultural Activities (*Ha Long City, Viet Nam, 28th – 29th April 2010*)

Summary of discussions

The Workshop was opened by **the Vice- Chairman of the People's Committee of Quang Ninh province**, who welcomed the delegates to Halong Bay, an important UNESCO World Heritage Site in Vietnam. **H.E. Ambassador Otto Rona**, Director General and ASEM SOM leader of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, stressed the importance that culture plays in cultural relations and **Ambassador Girard (ASEF)** gave a framework to this event in the total of ASEF activities and stressed the importance of culture exchange between Asia and Europe. The introductory session was finalised by **Mr Phan Sanh Chau** (Vietnam) who stressed the importance of awareness in the different ASEM member countries about ASEM as the first step to gain more visibility.

The Workshop was divided in 4 sessions taking place over 1.5 days covering the following subjects:

Session 1: Cultural diplomacy in ASEM framework

Steve Green (UK), the moderator of this session, opened with a remark that great changes that would take place in the next decade in the field of cultural diplomacy.

Gu Hong Xing (China) introduced case studies of concrete ASEM initiatives in the field of culture by China, such as the ASEM Cultural Festival. He believed that this initiative should be continued. **Dr Balogh (Hungary)** reminded the public of the importance of culture in overcoming prejudice. He urged European countries in general to become more active in the ASEM process and Eastern European countries to revive their contacts with their Asian partners. He mentioned that Asia-Europe Meeting should be changed into a real Partnership and that culture has the most profound and durable impact in international relations. He stressed that visibility of ASEM can only be achieved if what is produced is relevant to the public and creates the interest of the media. Common values need to be communicated through cultural activities. He mentioned that governments should play an important role in Asia-Europe cultural relations and that the NGO's 'cannot solve the problems alone'.

The Pakistan Ambassador Shahid Kiani made an unexpected presentation where he highlighted historic interactions between Asia and Europe and the consequential migration aspects, which is creating a major impact in cultural relations. **Amb. Helena Dmosek-Zorko (Slovenia)** explained how civil society and governments are working together in Slovenia in shaping common strategies in the cultural sector. This also happens at the European level. She saw major paradigm shifts in cultural diplomacy in Europe where The Agenda for Culture assures a role of culture in transversal way, also in the field of foreign relations. Slovenia has majorly contributed to this. Amb. Zorko mentioned the importance of ASEF in visibility for ASEM. ASEM as the political framework should enable the framework for ASEF and discuss realistic objectives of ASEF, leave it to do its work and give it more financial support. **Mrs Chulamane Chatsuwana (Thailand)** agreed that there is a clear change in cultural diplomacy approaches, as she concluded

out of her recent study on cultural diplomacy. She stressed on the importance of Track 2 diplomacy in finding innovative ways for cooperation and the necessary shift from self promotion to value promotion. The importance of relevance to the audience rather than to the producer was highlighted in her speech.

Mr Phan Sanh Chau (Vietnam) explained the cultural diplomacy strategy of Vietnam where the key words are: pioneering, facilitation, promotion, cooperation and reception. He underlined in his speech the importance of education, youth and local authorities as clear target groups for raising awareness of ASEM. He stressed on the necessity for inter-ministerial cooperation and the potential of cooperation with the private sector to promote ASEM.

The session was followed with an animated question and answer session. The main comments were on the following topics:

- A parallel was made by the head of the EU delegation in Hanoi on the problems with creating awareness about the EU in Europe. Generating interest from the population needs good innovative ideas to be well communicated. He was wondering which good ideas ASEM can bring forward.
- The need for identifying common interests and values was underlined by an Indonesian government representative. Fresh ideas are necessary to interest the Media.
- Journalist Dani Madrid remarked that ASEM can disregard traditional media and use new media to be effectively communicating its messages.
- Curiosity needs to be developed; especially towards youth reaching them with the appropriate tools in media was commented by Amb. Zorko
- Amb. Girard mentioned that the challenge of visibility for ASEM is big as ASEM is not promoting interests of specific governments but promoting general dialogue.

Session 2: Role of Associations and NGO's in ASEM cultural dialogue and cooperation

Anmol Vellani (India) moderated this session and invited the speakers to comment on the previous session and to introduce their ideas on how civil society can play a role in Asia-Europe Dialogue.

Airan Berg (Austria) explained his principles on visibility through the example of projects he organized during the Linz Cultural capital of Europe. Firstly, he commented, governments create frameworks for cultural cooperation, NGO's provide the know-how. They should not be afraid from each other. Secondly, it is important not to treat culture as ornamentation. Creating quality projects is important. Culture is a bridge between the past and the future. Heritage is important but a notion of contemporary-ness too. Arts can serve as critical reflection. Third, the connections between art and community can be important in connecting community arts projects in the 2 continents. Youth and education are key and local partners know how to connect with the local context. Fourth, visibility does not come at once; it's a lengthy process of continuous efforts. Relying on local actors is key as they work in the community. Fifth, no action no visibility. Turning the 2005 Action plan from the ASEM CMM in action is a priority.

Peter Inkei (Hungary) followed Airan's ideas that quality of action is important and the necessary know-how for doing so. He explained how cultural networks are important in sharing know how and how transnational cultural cooperation has been formed by structured trans-border networks in Europe. He mentioned how instrumental networks and organizations such as ECF (Labforculture), EFA, IFFACA, Europa Nostra, Budapest Observatory and many others have been. He mentioned how ASEF is instrumental in linking networks from Asia and Europe, referring also to the Anna-Lindt Foundation as a similar type of organization which has linked over 1500 networks in 6 years. Networks have the know-how to reach the public and give about visibility to ASEM's mission in bridging Asia and Europe.

Pooja Sood (India) continued on the topic of networking mentioning that in Asia similar networks do not exist or are different in nature and carried more by individuals than by organizations. Lack of support frameworks by governments is a reason. She believes that stronger networks in Asia will lead to more equal cooperation between Asia and Europe. On the topic of visibility, Pooja Sood commented that visibility of ASEM would need to come through ASEF, as ASEF gives a face to ASEM by facilitating the connections between 43 governments and civil society and can be directly approached. She urged ASEF to think strategically in working with other sectors and cross-disciplinary so as to get visibility in cultural and other fields. Cross-fertilization will bring about interesting programmes and visibility in different fields, not just the cultural field.

Tomasz Wendland (Poland) observed the topic of this seminar from his perspective as an artist, who is also the curator and initiator of the Mediations Biennale, which will take place along the ASEM Cultural Ministers Meeting in Poland in September 2010. Concrete actions such as Biennale Platforms can lead to stronger visibility. A prerequisite for this is mobility of artists and support towards this by governments. Creating strategies for developing curiosity is necessary in order to create better dialogue and understanding on a more profound level. The ASEF network can certainly help to facilitate these partnerships.

Mr. To Ngoc Thanh (Vietnam) from the Traditional Cultural Association of Viet Nam was stressing the importance of festivals. He was especially pleading for more authenticity in presenting work at an international level. He regarded it as a failure that in international cultural exchange too many work is presented in a way which makes things easy to the audience. He believes that work should not be distorted or contemporized for the sake of easy digestion.

Mr Viengkeo Souksavatdy (Cambodia) from the Laos National Heritage Department stressed the importance of heritage and exchanges between museums in the Asia-Europe Framework. He commented on the benefits of the ASEMUS network, set up by ASEF in 2000. The 'Passage to Asia' exhibition, set up by BOZAR (Belgium) along the ASEM 8 Summit, is a good result of how beneficial a network such as ASEMUS can be. He believes that this kind of initiative definitely contributes to the visibility of ASEM. The Laos National Museum is also part of the Virtual Collection of Masterpieces (VCM- an ASEMUS initiative), an important initiative to make the collections of Asia more visible and to create a tool for learning on Asian heritage.

Andreas Wiesand (Germany) explained what his pan-European cultural research organization, the ERICarts-Institute, has been doing in relation to benchmarking cultural policies in Europe through the "Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe" (www.culturalpolicies.net). This information system is run in partnership with the Council of Europe and a good example of how governments and civil society can work together on a long-term project making cultural policies more accessible to society.

This civil society initiative is of great importance to governments as it gives a mechanism to compare policies and to monitor the progress related to international conventions (i.e. like cultural diversity). There is a growing interest for this initiative outside Europe. Mongolia did its own translation of the Compendium and Australia is starting a compendium profile, as well as 8 Arab countries with the support of the European Cultural Foundation. This initiative gives visibility on the internet to cultural policy and could in an ASEM framework be important to expand to Asia.

Session 3: ASEF's role and contribution to the enhancement of ASEM visibility through cultural dialogue and activities.

Sabina Santarossa (director cultural exchange ASEF) introduced the context of the Cultural Exchange activities in ASEF. She stressed the visibility of governments through the Culture360.org site and mentioned a recent research ASEF commissioned on the bilateral and multilateral relations between Asia and European ASEM governments. Valentina Riccardi (Culture360.org coordinator ASEF) gave an update status of the culture360.org project and introduced the features of the newly designed site.

The participants complemented ASEF on the culture360.org project and several remarks were made related to the potential of content driven social media to enlarge visibility and to create stronger engagement between communities in Asia and Europe. Several organizations offered partnership with ASEF (UNESCO Culturlink Korea & Labforculture) stressing the importance of partnerships and linking to reach out.

Closing Session: Towards enhancing the visibility of ASEM through cultural activities: comments and recommendations

Ugo Bacchella (Italy) and **Chulamane Chartsuwan (Thailand)** rounded up the sessions by mentioning that visibility of multilateral initiatives is a challenge, and not just an ASEM challenge. Investing in visibility through culture has however a most lasting effect and impact.

The 2 rapporteurs summed up the discussed topics concentrating on the questions of visibility of what: how and through which activities to reach the visibility; who are the key stakeholders in it; with which resources and to whom does ASEM want to be visibility. They concluded that ASEM/ASEF cannot become 'household' name and that relevance will bring about visibility. This can happen through quality activities with real added values. Inclusiveness of different actors and stakeholders is important. – Governments cannot monopolise cross border interactions. It was added that visibility and sustainability for ASEM is interconnected and that financial commitments of governments are therefore very important.

On the question of **what type of visibility** they noted the reflection in the previous sessions on the paradigm shift from cultural diplomacy to cultural cooperation. The participants noted the necessity for a shift from self promotion to promotion of values in cultural diplomacy. Cultural cooperation and exchanges should happen on the basis of cultural diversity. Both contemporary arts practices and tangible & intangible heritage are important in the exchange between Asia and Europe. Cross-sectorial and interdisciplinary exchanges should be encouraged.

On **how and through which activities** visibility can be reached, they noted that on the political level the will has to be there to be serious about ASEM visibility as well as the will to legitimize ASEM's role. On the operational level ASEM is a reference platform for series of activities and typology of projects that can best pursue ASEM visibility through people to people exchange. This can be done through multilateral and process oriented participatory projects connecting communities, support to cooperative networks and clusters, mapping of good practices and information sharing through interactive new media.

On the question about **stakeholders**, in ASEM it would be important that Ministries of Foreign Affairs work closer together with Ministries of Culture, that ASEM governments should play a stronger role in connecting their governments with ASEM and that a stronger cooperation with Agencies in cultural cooperation can be set up (e.g. With EUNIC). In the non-governmental sector it's important to not only involve organization in the cultural domain but also those active outside of the cultural field. Involvement of stakeholders such as local and regional authorities, cultural industries is also important.

Resources should come from ASEM governments but that would not exclude Foundations, Business sponsors and local/regional authorities and public agencies.

On the question of visibility **to whom and how**, they commented that activities should aim at the key stakeholders, to influence those who already are active in Asia-Europe cooperation convince those who are indifferent. A good communication should turn indifference into support. New Media can indeed effectively communicate the messages and involve stakeholders directly. Reliance on the local partners and national governments for communication is important. Promoting ASEM at targeted highly visible events will certainly contribute to the visibility of ASEM.

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Recommendations resulting from the 3 previous sessions were distributed to the participants and the public was invited for final comments.

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