

## “Cultural heritage in relations between Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean.”



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Two regions such as Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean share a major artistic and cultural heritage, as well as numerous cultural references. Indeed, five centuries of intense human, economic and political relations result in an endless number of legacies expressed in both tangible and intangible heritage. Any stroll through our worlds of the urban environment, architecture, literature, theatre, museums or archives reveals to us a past and a present of reciprocal influence. Influences are not only limited to the New and Old worlds, as they also interlink with other continents, but they undoubtedly acquire their greatest intensity on either side of the Atlantic Ocean.

Within this context of natural interchange, is there any need to reinforce artistic collaboration and protect and promote the cultural heritage with public resources and strategies for international cooperation? Other experiences show that cultural exchanges yield better results when there is a joint strategy, based on mutual and beneficial understanding between cultural and political institutions on both sides. Of course, not all artistic expressions require such specific support. Music, folklore and gastronomy, with their roots and hybridisations, perhaps therefore need less explicit policy on support, given their long history of mutual interchange and learning. On the other hand, other cultural sectors derive particular benefit when there are bilateral and multilateral cooperation frameworks and agreements in place. These help reduce barriers to the trade of cultural goods and services, or develop funded programmes to facilitate joint productions and cultural and educational interchange. The existence of recognised legal frameworks on both sides, in matters such as copyright, the recognition of academic qualifications and protecting heritage from plundering or destruction, is extremely effective. The work of foreign cultural centres is also a source of relevant interchange and cultural dissemination, and is almost indispensable in some places.

Against this background, four years ago the European Union decided to finance, using funds from the Horizon 2020 programme for the support of scientific cooperation, some studies that would set in context the European strategy for strengthening relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean, in particular in the area of cultural and heritage cooperation. One of these projects, named EULAC Museums, focusses on a comparative analysis of small and medium rural museums, with the aim of generating historical and theoretical knowledge of how their respective communities have developed. The consortium responsible for this project was made up of academics,

museum professionals and political actors committed to community museums in Scotland, Portugal, Spain, France, Peru, Chile, Costa Rica and the West Indies. Their action plan focussed on technology and innovation for bi-regional integration, analysing the role of museums in inclusion and social cohesion, ways of promoting sustainable community museums and expository strategies on matters of migration and gender.

The other major project financed by the Horizon 2020 programme was EULAC Focus. Its field of activity was wider as it dealt not only with the cultural dimension of bi-regional relations, but also the scientific and social aspects. It involved a consortium made up of nineteen institutions from both sides of the Atlantic, and was coordinated by the University of Barcelona. Its mission was to shed light and propose ambitious and viable strategies to strengthen relations and cultural cooperation between the two regions. Starting from an analysis of the literature (repository accessible at <http://eulac-focus.net/publications--repository/repository/>), and of the previous and current state of cultural relations at bi-regional level, a large-scale Delphi exercise was carried out, together with other research designed to obtain expert opinion on the diagnosis and on future strategies to strengthen bi-regional relations. One of the tangible results of the project was the publication of a book in Spanish and English *The Challenges of Cultural Relations between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean* (openly accessible at <http://eulac-focus.net/publications--repository/key-publications/>).

The other major contribution is the proposal of an action plan to support reinforcing cultural cooperation in the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean. This is divided into four main sections. In the first, a set of diplomatic instruments is proposed to reinforce the institutional framework of cultural relations at bi-regional level, with implications and actors affected in both regions at various different institutional levels, both public and private. In the second, strategies and specific actions are proposed in response to four transversal challenges: the mobility of artists and professionals, safeguarding cultural diversity, improving sustainability and the fight against inequality. The third section focusses on the sectoral area, with proposals to develop and exchange cultural heritage and on the reciprocal promotion of the cultural and creative industries. Finally, the fourth section includes relevant transversal strategies for cultural relations, such as education, cultural training and technological challenges.

The relationship between Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean in the area of culture and cultural heritage now therefore has new analytical instruments that can reinforce strategies for cooperation. The diagnosis exists and as recently agreed at the highest level by the EU-LAC Foundation, so does the political will to strengthen the bi-regional dialogue. It is the responsibility of all of us to make this possible.