# AJITeR through *culture*!

## 2021

# Advocacy

## Analysis and proposals for Culture, Rural Life and Youth

Change the representations: of culture, rural life and youth contributions

Collective actions: accompany; create, co-operate, jointly develop

The work that has been undertaken over a period of several years by UFISC (FEDELIMA, FAMDT, THEMAA, CITI, FRAAP…) has led the steering committee of the "AJITeR through Culture" to question the relevant categories that should be taken into consideration to fine-tune our analyses and proposals from the outset.  At the same time, the health crisis, far from being a side effect, supports our observations and highlights pre-existing social and societal issues. This speaks to the need to rethink the development models of our society. In artistic and cultural circles, we have already been reflecting on these issues for a long time; this implies changing the representation we have of our rural territories and those of the inhabitants, of the arts and of culture in general. The systemic crises cannot be lastingly resolved by merely tweaking existing policies. We need to rethink our way of perceiving, thinking and conceiving activities and artistic, cultural, political, economic and social practices….

The work carried out in shared public meetings and working groups as well as other steering committees has allowed us to question the narrow definitions and limited visions, evidence and clichés about rural life, and those who live in rural areas as well as of culture, in order to avoid multiple pitfalls. It has brought us to question and deconstruct the perimeters and affiliations, to try to achieve a fresh understanding of what is at stake, and what evolutions are possible. This includes identifying the critical points in the current model and the initiatives that aim to create the necessary distance to accompany the hoped for change that is underway. In order to achieve this, it appears important to us to adopt a very open definition of the concept of innovation, if we are to observe the indigenous territorial needs and processes, to overcome the vision of a dead territorial backdrop and move towards the concept of territories as fulfilling, constantly changing places to live.  This has led the collective to consider the subject through approaches based on diversity and their specific nature, taking people, their capacities and multiple interactions with others and with their territories into account.  The collective was thus able to imagine how to "develop" the territories in terms of the contributions, solidarities and Commons that could be created. These dynamics imply overcoming the idea of vertical public policies of an approach that is centralised and in silos, and to build a perspective of public actors as facilitators and support, to create the conditions that enable experimental initiatives to emerge and develop, together with energies and local wealth. It implies the creation and promotion of innovative, experimental processes and public frameworks that allow people to actively engage in social solidarity-based sustainable transitions for territories. Artistic and cultural initiatives have their rightful place alongside other fields of activities, in a renewed dialogue with public decision-makers.

# I. Shaking up our representations…

## of rural life…

The concept of territory is one that needs to be understood in all of its many dimensions: physical, geographical, administrative, history and heritage as well as a place where people live and symbolic representations (1), a living cultural factory, an ecosystem for living things, both human and non-human, indeed in all its aspects.

The many meetings and work (2) that has been dedicated to this for several years by artistic and cultural structures illustrate how rural territories are living and evolving entities. These territories cover a wide diversity and are well perceived by the many actors who write about them as well as being the objects of considerable change; they constitute a place of great wealth. These actors are committed to redefining territories at both socio-economic and cultural levels in spaces in what can be considered as new systemic logics, networks, ecological and social transitions, and empowerment of their resources. It is thus necessary to overcome the approach of the perception of a poor, deprived agricultural territory, all too often considered as dependant on urban centres where all the means and services are concentrated.

Rural areas as contributive spaces and initiatives are a fact. Many different territories identify as places of innovation and alternative solutions in terms of public services, agricultural development, mobility, technologies and numerical use or resource management. They adopt a so-called "frugal" (3) "culture of innovation", "jugaad" (4) or "low tech" and claim to be experimental "risk-taking" cultures with "the right to get things wrong" (5).

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1. Augustin (J.-P.), Lefebvre (A.) (dir.) – *Culture en région – Perspectives territoriales pour la culture*, Norois, 198 | 2006, 81-82

2. This is a pluridiscipinary and multi-partnership working group initiatied by FEDELIMA, working on issues and specificities of cultural and artistic projects in rural areas. There is a dedicated website that lists resources on this question - www.ruralite.fedelima.org. Additional publications linked to the AJITeR and resources on culture/rural questions/youth are available at www.ajiterculture.org

3. **Frugal innovation** is an approach that consists of meeting needs in the simplest way possible, often summarised by high quality low cost solutions or greater innovation with fewer means (Wikipedia)

4. **Jugaad** (also called Juggaar ou Jugar) is slang in Hindi, Bengali or Penjabi; whose meaning can change according to context. It literally means "to get around" in Tamul, and can refer to an ingenious way of repairing or simply fixing something to a disruptive solution, or repurposing. It is also synonymous with creativity: improve or do something equally well with fewer resources. Jugaad is increasingly used as a management technique, and is internationally recognised as a form of frugal design (Wikipedia)

5. L'innovation dans les territoires périurbains ou ruraux Innovation in peri-urban or rural areas? Pour un changement de paradigme ! Raphaël Besson, Julien Brouillard | "Nectart"

FEDELIMA, through the experimental workshops they held for their contemporary music members, have observed that rural territories are dynamic and that they nourish urban areas. The existence of solidarity structures is also emerging as an example of input from the rural areas. Itinerant approaches and artistic inputs are reinventing possibilities. Rural lifestyles have thus risen above the division between urban and rural in a long-term transition.

Territories are changing in a context of the evolution of political and administrative norms. They are renewing the way they deliver services and networks, exploring the ways in which they develop their relationships and cooperation. Villages and towns are sensitive spaces of life and citizenship, as well as specific levels of administrative organisation. They have a major role to play in favour of consultation and cooperation if they are to avoid the effects of concentration and the ripping apart of the territorial fabric. Furthermore, there is a recurrent affirmation that rural spaces do not exist as a separate space from the rest of the world, but are often directly connected. This is visible both in the desire that is so often expressed by people, to act local and think global as in the way in which European funding is made available to local territorial projects.

## and of people...

Many sociological studies (6) have shown that generally speaking, the urban/rural opposition needs to be revisited, and that the cultural differences between urban and rural inhabitants are tending to disappear (access to information, to goods and services and to artistic productions, especially via Internet), even if certain differences remain, such as in the way people relate to cities or to nature.

Lifestyle renewal caused by generational change means we have to think about how cultural identities are shared, about exchanges and hybrids born from diversity, the dynamics of local socio-economic, political and cultural fabric... The process of cultural identification and construction of pathways are linked to the individual, and are unique and singular in nature; they cannot be reduced to categories based on statistical logic or public policy frameworks. We need to take the complexity that results from this diversity of "being part of the world", into consideration.

As far as cultural structures are concerned, people need to be guided towards greater freedom and responsibility that enables them to grow their abilities, while recognising and showcasing the forms of resources and relations that they weave in their territories. It is essential to become fully aware of their ability to contribute actively to rural areas.

6. Coquard B., Que sait-on des jeunes ruraux ? Revue de littérature, rapport d'étude, INJEP, mars 2015 )
+ Accueillir les jeunes en milieu rural – Pour des territoires solidaires – MRJC – Injep – cahier de l'action n°10
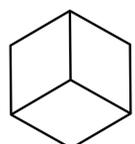
Furthermore, their experience enables them to contribute actively to social and societal change. By thus considering or reconsidering people in a different light in terms of their territory, this implies questioning their place in that given territory. This question underpins all age groups and invites us to include questions on youth in a broader objective of the emancipation of people and territories.

In line with this, accompanying people on the path towards greater freedom, equality and fraternity implies respecting their human rights, ranging from their civil and political rights to their social economic and cultural rights (7) "Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of their personality." (8)

This human rights-based approach imposes a guarantee of both living conditions and income that will enable people to fulfil their emancipation. This is the prerequisite condition for true participation in artistic, social, economic and political life in a territory, where their cultural resources are taken into account and lead to unveiling of the initiatives they can develop.

## and cultures.

Actors underline the importance of defining culture in the broadest possible sense, in a process that closely knits people and the environments in which they live. All people are recognised as part of culture, and that they develop a sense of cultural identification throughout their lives by sharing their cultural resources, participating in and contributing to cultural life. Culture should therefore be understood in a way that reaches beyond the habitual understanding of so-called cultural policies and the artistic field to question the ways in which we jointly build our life-styles, our organisations and our relationships.

Structures that wish to promote this vision of culture have therefore chosen to implement cultural rights that are part of the indivisible whole and inter-dependent universal human rights as well as the Notre and LCAP laws (9). Cultural rights can be defined as rights and freedom to participate in, access and contribute to the resources required for the process of cultural identification that is developed throughout peoples' lives, individually or in groups. It responds to the responsibility targeted by the human rights of social justice and lasting peace as well as "Building Humanity" together by working to develop peoples' freedoms, responsibilities and capacities.

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7. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (OHCHR) **and the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights** (ICESC) complete and strengthen the Universal Declaration of Hunam Rights of 1948.
8. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 22
9. NOTRe and LCAP laws

They are directly linked to cultural diversity defined as "the common heritage of humanity" (10). They are grounded as much in the identities of networks and capacities of people as in the historical heritage resources, know-how and popular use; cultural diversity helps to deconstruct frozen representations and imagine how to open a territory to a variety of references. They jointly contribute to creating dynamic territories.

There are many deep worries abut the future: the observed loss of biodiversity, the energy crisis, reductions in public services, difficulties in accessing employment, inequalities between men and women etc. This is leading actors to ring an alarm bell about the risk of becoming overly inward looking as well as those of conservatism and the refusal to acknowledge differences. In this ambiguous context, they are expressing their desire to put humanist, ecological values to the forefront through access to spaces where people can be socialised and share life, the pragmatism of socio-economic solutions, and the proposal to build new imaginaries, and respect cultural diversity.

Culture should thus be considered as a pillar of living together, and social and territorial cohesion; artistic and cultural initiatives are the levers. In rural areas, the fact that cultural rights and their implementation have recently been taken into account in the joint design, partnerships and cooperation with the associations and inhabitants as well as Local Authorities and the State. This all creates an essential work dynamic.

The issue of cultural rights linked to human rights also meets the objectives of sustainable development and solidarity and thus forms a relevant framework to evaluate and support the progress of public policies.

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10. UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity 2001

# II. A collective approach: accompany, undertake, cooperate, jointly design

Our analyses and approaches to the different subjects mentioned has led us to emphasize the key structural actions needed in order to reconsider our way of doing things, and more specifically how we support territories, initiatives and projects and artistic and cultural expression, to move towards an approach based on social solidarity economy, practices that are anchored in co-operation, citizens' participation and joint design of public policies.

## The starting point is people and the wealth of their diversity: the pathways and relationships

Cultural diversity is closely interwoven with cultural rights, and speaks to fundamental issues for all human beings, especially that of the recognition of creativity and expression linked to cultures and traditions and specific practices that contribute to "intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence that provides greater satisfaction to all" (10), that of the right of all to access the necessary resources to achieve their personal and social development, linked to the duty of exchange and understanding between them and others.

One essential aspect is the need for complentarity between cultural diversity and cultural rights: people are the first factor of diversity, and this underpins their rights. Cultural diversity needs to be anchored in a dynamic relationship between societies and where they live.
Cultural rights should thus define a political vision and ethical framework that can be constantly revisited throughout the practice and organisational frameworks of our societies if they are to fully include the objective of people's emancipation in their lives. The development of a political and ethical framework allows for a collective approach to contemporary challenges.

The use of this approach based on cultural and human rights provides a dynamic framework for exchange, and allows people to develop new ways of thinking as well as democratic logics, citizens' involvement and active participatory development approaches. Firstly, given the forms of social withdrawal and rejection that currently exist, we now need to reconsider our relations to others more than ever before, as well as our acceptance of differences, and encourage dialogue, as well as dedicating time to collective reflection. In this debate between belonging and feelings of identity "the rhizome identity" as described by Edouard Glissant invites us to consider the precise singularity and diversity of pathways that enable us to build new territories. This constitutes a decisive approach to building the public policies of tomorrow.
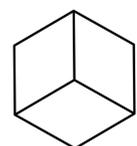
> ### **Principles: The diversity of pathways and imaginaries**
>
> ■ Deconstruct pre-conceived ideas by:
> > Establishing relationships based on dignity through listening and reciprocity;
> > Involving people to gain a better understanding of what they want and the challenges they are facing, their desires and their resources;
> > Supporting their participation in designing practices and activities such as neighbourhood committees, project centres, participatory budgeting…
> > Supporting the diversity of cultural spaces
>
> ■ Ensure greater effectiveness of inter-related rights by:
> > Designing and building within a framework of sustainable development that takes environmental, social and cultural issues into account;
> > Ensuring joined-up public actions that move beyond a silo approach and type-cast roles.

## A different way of supporting through reciprocity

Accompanying and supporting people implies working with them and not doing things in their place. This implies not creating a policy that enables access, but rather a position and posture of support that recognises all people as legitimate actors in their own right and equals in their participation in cultural life. This is where the artistic and cultural structures should be situated. People should be able to tell their stories, and share their world vision, discuss things, provide critical input, act and create…. These are some of the ways that illustrate the never-ending growth in vitality of associative life. Different ways of acting and doing thing in artistic projects, openness to time dedicated to creativity, access to shared spaces and practices (which should be intermediary and independent structures), support for the professional pathways involved in these challenges, and recognition for the cultural references that are and will become increasingly hybrid, are all essential.

This approach and these spaces provide alternative models for people who have lost faith in the system, or who would like to develop new ways of thinking and doing and living differently, and whose values are anchored in solidarity through social solidarity economy or popular education. This leads to a posture whereby support is considered as a "relationship of co-operation", apprenticeship (especially between artistic teams), a relationship of equals grounded in reciprocity and based on the people involved, their desires, and "capabilities", and where the person who accompanies is given a place and a space without imposing themselves and not the opposite. And although the forms of support proposed by these cultural and artistic structures is sometimes informal and spontaneous and difficult to quantify, and not often highlighted, the way in which they meet expectations and raise them with institutional partners clearly shows that they play a major and growing social role in those territories where they are present.

## Recommendations: Design support

■ Strengthen territorial design by:
> Rolling out adapted funding;
> Mobilising skills (recruit and train professionals in rural areas...);
> Recognising the skills that exist within associations and co-operatives, especially those of a cultural nature and involve them in processes of local development;
> Providing additional material support to the current approach that only funds projects (buildings, offices...).

## Proposals

■ Develop territorial spaces or actions dedicated to different forms of support:
> Develop support structures such as "Project hubs"...
> Accompany the emergence of experimental spaces that are open to experimentation such as intermediary spaces

■ Develop support for voluntary work and co-operation

# SSE and a different way of working

Artistic and cultural actors can provide a new way of working within a framework of social solidarity economy, by linking the question of cultural rights to an artistic approach as well as new ways of living and doing that are alternative, ecological, that fight inequalities and discrimination and are anchored in gender equality... This should take place at both territorial level and within structures. People who are constrained by an excessively normative way of working or professions, question the meaning of their work, their activities and their jobs... which is a reminder that social and economic aspects are cultural constructs and should be integrated into the environment in which they are developed and thus become meaningful. This therefore involves the need to work with open forms of governance that are transparent, horizontal and participatory and with the values of popular education.

There is a growing trend whereby public operators are becoming increasingly privatised and prefer to support and fund innovative initiatives that are often grounded in a "technological" approach, the SSE structures at territorial level in rural areas are calling for co-operative practice and processes that meet long-term needs and territorial specificities.

Given this desire to create and work differently, the loss of job seekers supports, especially for youth that were a major accelerator for projects and pathways for thousands of young people, underlines the way in which the networks for youth-led and local initiatives have been undermined.

**Recommendations: Encourage job creation**

■ Roll out employment support grants that are adapted to the professional realities of both structures and the objectives of permanent job creation;

■ Accompany social work inclusion and creators of social solidarity economy jobs such as CAE and SSE incubators;

■ Recognise and consolidate forms of popular education and transmission between peers;

■ Support funding for professional Life Long Education;

■ Encourage co-working spaces, citizens' and professional activity centres that support the development of new cultural spaces.

## Innovative cross-cutting co-operation

Actors in rural areas developed their ability to co-operate a long time ago. In areas of low-density population, the low numbers of inhabitants is a favourable milieu - both through desire and needs - to working together and developing interdisciplinary and cross-sectorial projects and building projects of general interest. However this strong desire to build cross-sectorial projects faces significant challenges in terms of political understanding.

The territorial redesign appears all too often to demonstrate a loss of local design. This is sometimes compensated for by frameworks and ways of working that are poorly adapted and that make it difficult to develop. Meanwhile the structures complain about how slow the various institutions are to work together, and the low level of co-operation between actors and the territorial authorities on projects where they should work together in consultative and co-operative manner. Therefore cross-cutting between these various actors and networking needs to increase in order to build these new dynamics.

The capacity to act locally can only become effective if there is a political will on the part of elected representatives to support cultural and associative life.

This then enables synergies to be created that mobilise people, valorise them in their actions and invent diversified ways of co-operating. We therefore need to work together, with improved communication, challenge mobility, link policies and develop joint funding...

## Joint design of a different kind of public policy

Territorial policies, from local to regional level are multiple, and lie at the heart of change. They face the challenges of contemporary change and territorial reorganisation and are thus destined to change and reinvent themselves. The cultural dimension forces people to think in terms of shared responsibilities and political desire to invest in the future, inasmuch as the cultural dimension needs to be taken into consideration in collective existence.

It therefore appears essential that elected representatives position themselves as facilitators of actions, and adopt a cross-cutting approach to genuinely rebuilding territories collectively, and thus encourage the greatest possible number of inhabitants to participate in the design of cultural policies and territorial projects; this is the way forward to guaranteeing peoples' participation in public decision-making. There also needs to be a change in attitude so that cultural actors consider donors and institutions as partners and not as trustees.

Finally, as previously mentioned, culture needs to be considered in all its dimensions and not merely those limited to "artistic" activities; nor should it be studied through the prism of economy. It is both a contributor and a prerequisite for territorial projects, and now more than ever before, should encourage us to shift from speeches on attractiveness to acts of hospitality.

## Principles / posture

■ Experiment with new ways of creating local public policies: joint design and calls for expression of interest

■ Rethink the time-lines of projects and move beyond short-term thinking

## Recommendations

■ In order to consolidate the joint design at territorial lever three methodologies can be considered:
↘ Open up the areas of territorial project design to actors and local inhabitants and inter-township and/or inter-community level. Imagine a "Cultural" Territorial Coherence Plan (SCoT)
↘ Develop framework guidelines for arts and culture such as SOLIMA (Framework guidelines for present-day music venues) SODAREP (Framework guidelines for the Development of Street Arts and in Public Spaces) SODAM (Framework guidelines for the Territorial Development of Puppet Arts) etc.
↘ Current reflections within the Ministry for Culture on the decentralised approach of shared auditing and analyses of territories that take the work of cultural centres in Belgium that is based on cultural rights and popular education into account.

■ Create time and space for appropriation and sharing and even training on territorial project to enable elected officials as well as other actors and citizens to train together.

## Conclusion

There are many existing initiatives and co-operations around territorial projects, and they demonstrate the interest and relevance of these approaches. They need to be recognised and encouraged. So let's trust them!

This involves consultative working together and paying great attention to the stakes and emerging issues at territorial level and supporting the diversity of proposals made by local actors who are the bearers of cultural resources of any given territory, and whose emancipatory vision is that of citizens considered as bearers of culture and their capacity to act.

It is also important to support Local and Territorial Authorities' capacities to help actions to progress through improved interaction between actors, especially through collective approaches (networks, local methodologies... and support actions of sharing knowledge and training. Collective networks such as AMRF (The Association of Rural Mayors of France), Living Arts and Counties of the FNCC (National Federation of Territorial Authorities for Culture), RTES (Network of Territorial Authorities for Solidarity Economy) are existing spaces where training and exchange of practice already takes place for elected officials (practical index cards, training...) and they should be considered as essential partners.

>>>> "AJITeR through culture!": www.ajiterculture.org