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ON DUTCH CULTURAL POLICY

As an introduction to my three colleagues, who will treat more specific subjects I will try to inform you on a few general characteristics of cultural policy in the Netherlands. How interesting it would be to consider the different fields of Dutch cultural policy I will restrict myself to the field of the plastic arts.

An introductory remark on the division of the responsibility of the three strata of public authority / central government - provincial government and local authority is necessary. There is no clear-cut political or cultural philosophy on the base of the division of responsibilities - mostly they are of a historical nature. There are e.g. state-museums, but many other museums of which some of the most important are financed by the local authorities only. In matter of cultural policy central government and local authorities are most important. The provincial government has certain, and perhaps growing influence, but is not of a real weight. A further remarkt is that the development of a formal and formulated cultural policy is of a rather recent date. For several reasons. As long as the social status of the visual arts as represented in monuments was clear and the amount of public founding was restricted there was no need for a formal cultural policy other than on that aimed on the conservation of those. Most publications on policy before the war were in fact pamphlets for more money for conservation. A real interest in a development of modern art or in the social status of the artist did not appear in cultural policy.

It will be perfectly clear that a cultural policy has no great political appeal. As far I know no cabinet has been overthrown on matters of culture. In the local community where things are nearer to the citizen the political issue is perhaps even greater than for the central government. So the similars to develop and formulate a cultural policy came perhaps more out of the cultural field than that it originated from the responsible authorities. Artist and cultural institutions insisted on the development of such a policy.

In the same post-war years the social system began to change and with increasing speed. The social security grew, the national budget grew and with it the dependance of ever greater numbers of citizens and activities on the

public funds. Why shouldn't artists and cultural institutions benefit also of these new altitude in the relations between citizen and the state.

To a certain extent these expectations were honoured. Art became more and more object of official care - a council for the arts was installed - budgets were increased - a social scheme for visual artist came in to begin, but all these measures were more or less incidents, the results of a steady grow of wealth of society as a whole.

Not without hesitation the ministry of culture undertook to formulate an adequate cultural policy. Not earlier than 1972 was edited a first paper that aroused many discussions. The second, final paper appeared in 1976, followed by a note on museum-policy in the same year. In these papers the responsibility of the state for an effective cultural policy is fully acknowledged. The motivation for it is given by analysing the functions that art can have in society. As the most important aims for cultural policy are described - to preserve and develop the arts - to place art at the disposal of the greatest number of people - to create proper conditions for people to learn and exercise the art as amateurs.

These motivations for the arts as merit goods worth to be sustained by the community as a whole tried to place the arts on an equal base with other public activities so as to be able to ask more political interest and greater financial support. Thereby the care for the arts was brought into the political circuit: political interest was asked - political interference became possible.

Thus the great dilemma of a cultural policy based on the financial dependence of the state and other authorities appears: how to give freedom and artistic independence to the artist on the one hand and to provide for the public performance of the arts on the other hand. In the preservation of historical matters is no other dilemma than a financial one, in the stimulating of new art appears also the dilemma of the divergency of the artistic supply and public demand. In which measure can authorities interfere with the artistic creation on behalf of a better social and geografic distribution of the goods. The questions are largely discussed in this note on cultural policy - for many problems is no decisive solution. And some of the statements have aroused new discussions.

To conclude I will give some details on measures that are taken to provide for a greater public participation in the visual arts apart from the activities of the many museums.

I name the "Nederlandse Kunststichting" a service for the distribution of exhibitions of Dutch modern art all over the country. These exhibitions are mostly composed out of works bought by the state on behalf of these exhibitions.

Further I name a scheme for subsidizing the lending of works of art to private persons and institutions, comparable with a library-system. An other scheme subsidizes the private acquisition of works of living artists in galleries and museums - 20 % of the price is thus subsidized to a maximum of 240 guilders.

In recent years a research-programm has been installed to investigate the effects and the results of those schemes - subsidizing of acquisition and of lending. In both cases it came out that only certain strata of the public - the already initiated - made use of these possibilities. Only a rather

small number of new clients came in sight, though it appears that the lending system has a greater appeal to the public than the buying system. For this reason the Dutch council of the arts has suggested that all financial means available, by priority should go to the lending system. No decision has been made but it illustrates one of the typical dilemma's of cultural policy.