'The French Model' and its 'Crisis': Ambitions, Ambiguities and Challenges of a Cultural Policy*

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ABSTRACT

French cultural policy is often regarded as a model. However, in France, the crisis of national cultural policy has been endlessly discussed since the 1980s. This disillusionment is partly due to over-estimation of the model's consistency from the outset. This paper looks at the foundations of French cultural policy, showing that the present difficulties stem from the model's foundational ambiguities and contradictions. We thus offer a critical view of the legacy of a policy that has been vigorously pursued over the last fifty years and analyse the difficulties it currently faces and their roots. The paper concludes with proposals for new ways of approaching these issues.

Keywords: *cultural policy*, *cultural field*, *French model*, *cultural democratisation*, *centralism*, *State*, *France*

INTRODUCTION: A MODEL IN CRISIS?

When it comes to cultural policy, France has long been seen as a model to follow. As with the 'Scandinavian Model' for welfare, the 'German Model' for vocational training, the 'American Model' for higher education and research, the 'French Model' is a safe, common-sense option if one compares it with cultural policies at the international level. It is, as it were, 'The Gold Standard'. The State's commitment to Art goes back a long way, together with high public spending, a large number of prestigious institutions that are ever-present in political debate, that command broad support and whose representatives, such as André Malraux[1] and Jack Lang[2] are national icons. Although polemicists sometimes scorn French 'arrogance'

1 First Minister, charged with Cultural Affairs during Charles de Gaulle's presidency, from 1959 to 1969.

2 Minister of Culture under François Mitterrand's presidency, from 1981 to 1986 and later from 1988 to 1993.

or compare the country's cultural policy with that of totalitarian regimes, it usually has positive connotations. Since the 1980s, the experience of France's Ministry of Culture and its efforts to structure a national cultural policy have inspired (albeit superficially) some European governments such as Greece, Spain, and Italy. This is because the virtues of the French model have been hyped (especially through UNESCO, the Council of Europe, and meetings of European Ministers of Culture at the EU level) as something that can easily be adopted by other countries. Indeed, France's Ministry of Culture even has a programme for disseminating its model, organisation and know-how worldwide.[3] Also when it comes to French government involvement in international negotiations on cultural issues (whether on the 'cultural exception'[4] principle in the 1993 Trade Agreements or, more recently, in affirming the principle of cultural diversity), stress is laid on the unique nature of the country's culture and France's firm political commitment to keeping it that way.[5]

The apparent international success of 'The French Model' contrasts starkly with the disillusionment and questioning it has faced at home since the late 1980s. Indeed, the belief that there is a 'crisis' in France's cultural policy is widely shared by various sectors, ranging from culture professionals to experts, artists, and opposition politicians. Yet there is less agreement when it comes to what the problems and their causes are, and even less regarding what solutions are needed. The analyses and criticisms reflect a broad spectrum of standpoints and approaches. In addition, they are often accompanied by calls for a root-and-branch reform of cultural policy. In the late 1980s, these debates were articulated around the need to 'soft-pedal' Lang's policy (begun in the early 1980s) and then took up the criticisms made by right-wing

and conservative circles. Subsequent budget limitations, clashes and controversy over the merits of successive Culture Ministers, and a lack of broad political support turned the idea of a 'crisis' into something that was taken for granted. The 'gaps and failures' of France's cultural policy were revealed in President Sarkozy's 2007 letter setting out the targets to be met by the Culture Minister and calling for "a new impetus".[6] Yet a Commission had been set up in 1993 charged precisely with the same kind of overhaul almost a decade and a half later. Management of government cultural initiatives seemed to be based on acknowledging the problems of the model they had inherited yet trying to maintain its legacy. The five years of François Hollande's government are no exception to the rule and the Culture Ministry's budget has been slashed. This flies in the face of the left-wing mantra that spending on culture is justified by its 'economic impact' and partly contradicts the foundational guidelines for France's cultural policy.

Two issues underlie the belief that France's cultural policy is in crisis. Above all, public policy in this field had failed to democratise culture; yet, it was precisely to achieve this aim that the policy was instituted in the late 1950s. The policy had also failed to keep French culture in the international limelight for want of effective ways to subsidise the creation of contemporary art and disseminating its works. To these two main flaws, one must add a host of other complaints about: (1) over-spending on Paris and under-spending in the rest of France; (2) shortcomings in the protection of artistic heritage; (3) failure to respond to cultural changes caused by widespread adoption of ICT [Information and Communication Technology]; (4) funding problems in the performing arts and the audiovisual sector (two key sectors in the government's cultural policy following the 2003 crisis in the 'tide-over' benefits paid to those working in these sectors).[7]

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3 The so-called *Rencontres Malraux* [Malraux Gatherings], begun in 1994.

4 **Translator's Note:** An explanation of the concept can be found at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_exception

5 Due to lack of space, we cannot include comparisons which could set French specificities into perspective. See Dubois, 2015a.

6 The *lettre de mission* or statement of objectives sent by President Sarkozy to Christine Albanel, Minister of Culture (1st August 2007).

7 These 'tide-over' benefits for sporadic workers in these sectors [in French: *intermittents du spectacle*] covered periods of unemployment between shows, plays, productions, etc., giving such workers steadier incomes.

In these respects, 'The French Model' is 'in crisis'. Recent studies state this *ad nauseam*, warning of: "the death of a myth" (Dijan, 2005); "a system whose days are numbered" (Abirached, 2005); a system plagued with "irregularities"; "a model that is choking to death" (Benhamou, 2006); "culture glut" (Brossat, 2008). Some even went so far as to look to the United States (a model the French had shunned hitherto) as a source of inspiration for a new cultural model (Martel, 2006). Such views are not baseless. Even so, could it be that the virulence and persistence of such criticisms stems from over-confidence in the model? Does it collapse have such an impact because so much faith was placed in its resilience and consistency?[8] Does it really make sense to talk of 'crisis' to describe a situation that has now been going on for nearly three decades? Could it be that the rhetoric of 'crisis' and all the harking back to a supposedly 'Golden Age' overlooks structural problems — a kind of Original Sin — that can be traced back to the inception of France's cultural policy? These questions are the starting point for a brief presentation on the French culture policy system and the challenges it faces.

First, we shall go over the foundations of this system, without forgetting their accompanying contradictions. We shall then see how transformations in relationships between the cultural and political fields[9] made such contradictions the basis for questioning a cultural policy whose success had been based on its provisional nature.

THE BUILDING OF A CULTURAL POLICY SYSTEM AND ITS CONTRADICTIONS AND WATERSHEDS

French cultural policy has never had the consistency of a 'model' (that is to say, something that was methodically designed as a coherent set of principles,

objectives, and organisational means and modes).[10] Nevertheless, its formation was accompanied by the development of a system of sorts (often in a halting, erratic manner) in the sense that a whole came into being whose component relationships were fairly well-balanced, inter-dependent, and mutually reinforcing. We shall sketch the main elements of the system, paying special attention to both its ambiguities and its evolutionary trends.

The origins

It is often considered that French cultural policy can be traced back to the secular legacy of absolute Monarchy. Indeed, from the 16th century onwards, strong links were forged between the State and fields of cultural production. The monarchy, together with the aristocracy and the Church, were patrons of the Arts. Moreover, the conflict-ridden process of forming a modern State (in which the King imposed his primacy over feudal lords and later the Church) led to big spending on Art, managed by the Superintendancy of Royal Buildings, an organisation set up in 1535. This competitive dynamic led to institutions springing up that, in addition to bolstering the monarchy's prestige, provided a framework for long-term support of scientific, literary and artistic endeavours in France. Some examples are: the *Collège Royal* (today *Collège de France*), founded in 1530; the *Comédie Française*, founded in 1680. The *Académie Française* (1635) and the *Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture* (1648) were created by the State and maintained under royal patronage. These institutions were one of the first cases of setting out special rules for literary and artistic activities and paved the way for boosting certain fields of cultural production (Bourdieu, 1993).

Identification with these remote beginnings seemed to grow stronger in later stages of the formation of a Nation-State, giving free rein to public intervention and having a lasting impact on the cultural scene.

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8 While endless talk of a cultural 'crisis' and moaning about the state of affairs is not a purely French vice, the debate is particularly intense in France. There are two reasons why this is so: (1) the great expectations raised by France's cultural policy; (2) the central place accorded culture in French public debates. This points the way to a comparative analysis of the public stances taken on cultural policies.

9 Here, we use the notion of 'field' in the sense meant in Pierre Bourdieu's sociology (1993).

10 Except maybe — following Urfalino (1996) — when cultural policy initiatives were consolidated in *Maisons de la Culture* (cultural centres) between 1959 and 1963, and which created both a symbol and an instrument.

Here, one can cite the creation of the *Archives Nationales* (1799) *Musée du Louvre* (1793) at the beginning of The French Revolution, or Education Acts (1881 and 1882) and legislation for the protection of national monuments (1913) [*Loi du 31 décembre 1913 sur les monuments historiques*] during The French Third Republic.[11]

This brief look at the past reveals that the creation of a national culture in France and the genesis of elements for organising the cultural sphere are both strongly linked to the historical formation of the State. Indeed, the State not only contributed to institutional infrastructure and cultural development. Rather, the organisation of the State and of culture went hand-in-hand in a process of nation-building and unification — something that is very clear-cut when it comes to language.

This early historical articulation between State, culture, and the nation was intense and perhaps explains the many singular features of French cultural policy. Nevertheless, should we consider Francis I of France, Louis XIV, Colbert or Richelieu as the inventors of this policy, or even go back *ad infinitum* to discover the roots of the modern Nation-State in the mists of time? Such a quest is fraught with perils. One of the rules of the historical method is to be wary of anachronistic interpretations. It is all too easy to take modern cultural policy and read it in an unhistorical way, seeing it foreshadowed at every twist and turn in the past. In other words, there is a risk of reading the past through modern glasses. Taking Norbert Elias' metaphor, it is as if we were to see a house built in the modern style but made from old materials as a true testimonial to the past. Second, the genesis of contemporary cultural policy is not a linear story. Hence we should not be blinded by a discourse that stresses continuity.

The term 'cultural policy' and its manifestation in the form of special institutional structures, and of

political and administrative functions can be dated back to 1959. This is when France set up a Ministry for Cultural Affairs. The step was especially significant when set against a long history of achievements on the one hand and on the other, structural limitations, lost opportunities and failures.[12] The event was a watershed and while it did not occur in a historical vacuum, it should not be read as inevitable and/or stemming from a pre-existing cultural policy.

Here, it is worth briefly looking at the background to the creation of the Ministry for Cultural Affairs (later renamed Ministry of Culture) as the flagship of French cultural policy. The setting up of the Ministry was basically due to a combination of one-off events. One was General de Gaulle's return to power in the middle of the Algerian War following the declaration of the French Fifth Republic, whose Constitution was ratified in October 1958. Along with General de Gaulle came a political team, some of whose members were new. One of 'the new boys' was André Malraux, a famed author described by de Gaulle as a «faithful friend». Malraux was highly-regarded by the left because of his support for the Republican cause in The Spanish Civil War. Yet he was also a tireless propagandist for the Gaullist Party [*Rassemblement du Peuple Français* — RPF). The change of government ushered in a period of intense reforms and modernisation and hence the roll-out of new policies. The Ministry of Cultural Affairs and the cultural policy that it gave rise to were the result of the conjunction of both factors. Without falling for the idea of 'The Great Man' theory of History, one should nevertheless recognise the key role played by André Malraux in these new policies. Malraux was made Minister without portfolio for Cultural Affairs in June 1958. He had no clear duties and apart from dealing with matters such as 'Youth' and Scientific Research, also acted as the President's spokesman in Council. Max Weber (Weber, 1971) noted that Malraux's charisma made him stand out. Despite his political usefulness, Malraux could not remain

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11 There are numerous historical syntheses on the issue. We especially recommend the one by Poirrier (2000).

12 We refer to our studies on these questions (Dubois, 2001; Dubois, 2012).

without portfolio indefinitely. Work was therefore begun on an administrative re-organisation whose main purpose was to carve out a Ministry for him. The Ministry of Cultural Affairs emerged from this re-organisation in July 1959 and basically focused on beefing up administration of the Arts and Literature, which until then have been the poor relations of the Ministry of National Education. The new Ministry incorporated cinema, which had hitherto been under the aegis of the Ministry for Industry and Trade.

Unlike in other cases, the Ministry had to come up with a mission to justify its existence. The institutional *bricolage* from which the Ministry sprang created a cultural policy that its promoters saw as new and a radical break with the legacy of the 19th century. The Ministry was to further an ambitious project that established the State's role in organising society and preparing its future. In these respects, it epitomised the style of government of the French Fifth Republic.

The fact is that French cultural policy is neither the simple continuation of a secular legacy nor the result of rational decision-making. Rather it is a spin-off from the long history of the links between culture and State and a short history of institutional accords being cobbled together in the midst of political and cultural changes. Yet the main historical enigma lies not so much in cultural policy intervention but rather its institutionalisation. Its most puzzling aspects are the social need adduced for such a policy and the political and bureaucratic legitimacy with which it was invested. These aspects make it hard to question such a policy (and whose aims were still far from being achieved in the early 1970s). We shall now see how the policy system emerged and evolved from these heterogeneous beginnings.

Specifying the culture

One of the main distinctive features of the French cultural policy system is that in France, the construction of 'Culture' (with a capital 'C') as a domain on its own for public action probably emerged earlier and with greater force than elsewhere. This policy category is inextricably linked with the consolidation of

public cultural bodies and with an officially-inspired definition of 'culture'.

Let us return for a moment to both the Ministry's consolidation and the government's cultural policy at the beginning of the 1960s. The first problem was to organise the administration of a remit, which though not entirely new, was intended to break with and be free from the political and institutional organisation of culture that had prevailed hitherto. In other words, the idea was basically to create a Ministry of Cultural Affairs independent from the powerful Ministry of Education from which it sprang. The new Ministry did not merely emerge after grappling with the challenges of the organisation chart but involved building a cultural policy by drawing a distinction between its mission and that of education policy. Indeed, the Ministry's promoters dwelt so much on this differentiation that they risked turning their new creation into a fringe body with a narrow remit. Similarly, Malraux and his first senior civil servants worked hard to dissociate the Ministry and its policy from institutions and spheres that in principle were closely allied — for example leisure organisation, entertainment, and public education. In the first place, the Ministry's mission was consolidated by delimiting its bounds, defining its cultural policy in an indirect way, and by stating what it was not about (to wit, it did not complement education or leisure management). This marks a major difference with the approach taken in other countries, where mental schemes and practical considerations lead to the forging of links between culture and other sectors (for instance: tourism, education, sport).

This way of consolidating the institution and the State's cultural mission led to a definition of 'Culture' that was initially highly restrictive (Dubois, 2003a). In fact, although the discourses reveal vaunting ambition and could easily be interpreted to refer to rising to the challenges of civilisation, initially the Ministry's cultural policy was confined to the classical heritage beloved by art historians and the contemporary cultural creation endorsed by erudite critics. In other words, cultural policy concerned the

culture of the elites. Everything else — the output of culture industries, folk traditions and the like — were left to fend for themselves, generally without any institutional support.

This cultural legitimisation by the State — still strongly marked today — was clearly shown in the formulation of cultural democratisation, which is a key mission in public cultural policies. Cultural democratisation is not framed in terms of the diversification of cultural forms, of majority expression, or of fostering creativity. Rather, it is intended to provide access to and to disseminate scarce cultural resources. The Decree setting up the Ministry defines 'democratisation' as "ensuring that works of Art are accessible" but only refers to putting them on public display and says nothing about disseminating art. Thus 'democratisation' differs little from proselytism and conversion, attempting to convince more people to join the elite's culture cult. In practice, this mainly led to displaying cultural offerings in museums, libraries and other cultural centres. This greatly boosted the number of cultural products available and whose quality was guaranteed by specialists. The idea was that boosting supply would automatically boost demand.

Although the policies currently adopted are still based on this 'supply and demand' rationale, institutional cultural offerings are much broader today than they were in the early 1970s (Dubois, 2003a). Local polices were drawn up in the wake of a spate of cultural controversies in the late 1970s. The decade saw the promotion of less institutional, less bourgeois cultural offerings in venues that sought to "get closer to the everyday lives of citizens". Later, cultural forms that had hitherto been dismissed as of minor value began to enjoy public support after the Left came to power in 1981 and especially after Jack Lang became Minister of Culture. Strategies for spreading 'Culture' would continue but now they were to be combined with more realistic approaches based on cultural renewal (promoting 'cultures'). By fostering more diverse sources of cultural creation, the Ministry sought to take an active part in consecrating the social production of 'culture'. This new symbolic function was applied

to things that fell outside the charmed circle of 'High Culture' (rock music, comics, photography, fashion, industrial heritage, and later hip-hop and so on). The aim was renovation and to confer prestige on fields that had previously been ignored. Yet there were limits to this change of heart. Without delving into the results of these new (sometimes contradictory) policies, one should note that governmental cultural policy has hardly taken 'fringe' cultures on board and that most of the money available continues to be spent on institutionally acceptable culture.

A centralised system?

The issue of defining what culture the policy should foster is linked to centralisation insofar as 'legitimate' French culture stems from national institutions that are mainly based in Paris. Even so, the centralism of French cultural policy is neither so straightforward nor so widespread as might seem at first sight.

First, one should stress that it is not just about a carve-up of powers between Central Government and local entities. In fact, "Parisian hegemony" (Menger, 1993) is due in equal measure to three factors: (1) strong centralisation of political and economic power; (2) the concentration of most of the major institutions of the cultural field (publishing houses, the media, main, national theatres, museums, libraries galleries, leading universities, and so on) in the capital; (3) the fact that many artists live there (in the performing arts, the vast majority of them). These three forms of concentration are mutually reinforcing. Thus, decentralising political and administrative power from central government to local entities is not enough to strike a new balance between the capital and the provinces.

The centre's pre-eminence in French cultural policy occurs at various levels and reflects diverse rationales. Here, we shall highlight the three most important ones. The first is the relationship between political and institutional forces. At the outset, the centralisation of cultural policy was not inevitable. Municipalities had a fair amount of experience in the field and this point was repeatedly made in the debates on how a national

cultural policy should be drawn up (Comité d'histoire, 1997; Dubois *et al.*, 2012). Yet political considerations (many municipalities representatives advocating for a non-centralised cultural policy at the time were communists) and the institutional strategy for strengthening the still weak authority of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs meant that the approach taken was mainly a centralised one. Later, the institutional consolidation of the Ministry of Culture and growth in the 1980s were accompanied by marked presence of national administration throughout the country. The Regional Offices for Cultural Affairs [*Directions Régionales des Affaires Culturelles — DRAC*) — a kind of cultural prefecture operating under the Ministry's authority — did a lot to disseminate centrally-drawn up directives. Their experience, the requirement to consult them on cultural matters and their control over funding[13] enabled them to maintain local leadership in their field.

Beyond these institutional matters, the centre's leading role was established at the same time at both the symbolic and the cultural level. The Ministry of Culture built up financial reserves, experience and forged networks of contacts in the cultural sphere. It consolidated a hegemonic position in defining culture and cultural quality. Proselytisation in the shape of 'cultural democratisation' was from the centre to the periphery. Despite the twists and turns along the way, one must acknowledge that the cultural policies (including decentralisation in the 1980s) favoured a national culture over local cultural diversity or the emergence of counter-balancing cultural poles in the provinces.

Last, one should recall that cultural concentration in the capital was also rooted in political options, or at the very least, stemmed from tendencies that successive governments had done very little to correct. In fact, cultural policy leads to an international projection which — going beyond a presence abroad (as we will see later in this paper) — stresses the

delights and prestige of Paris. This exacerbates the imbalance between Paris and the rest of the country. These policy options are clear for all to see in the concentration of great cultural works in Paris, the Louvre, the *Musée du Quai Branly, Opéra Bastille, Cité de la Musique*. This concentration reinforces the budgetary imbalance in favour of Paris — a city stuffed with cultural centres.[14] This concentration is not solely the result of an authoritarian dictat. It also stems from the concentration of cultural media in the capital, which offers the 'haves' ever more and also ensures the viability of new investments. Hence the building of an expensive new library in Paris when the libraries of France's university cities are in a sorry state. The cruel logic is that Paris is where such a facility will get most visitors.

French cultural policy is nevertheless not only about centralisation. Local, municipal, departmental [a *Department* being a kind of 'county'] and regional entities are involved in the cultural sphere and, taken as a whole, spend more than the Ministry of Culture. The municipalities are the first chronologically and in order of importance is this field. From the end of the 19th Century, the legislation gave them free rein to undertake cultural initiatives. This led to the creation of many theatres, museums and libraries. Ever since, culture (little-regulated in legal terms, and charged with symbolism) has been an innovative sphere for local leaders, many of them left-wingers. This is the case of 'Municipal Socialism' in the early 20th Century, and in Paris' 'red belt' during the inter-War period, and from the 1950s onwards. It was also true in other cities run by left-wing politicians (many with backgrounds in co-operative movements). In the 1970s, these cities strove hard to introduce 'participatory democracy' and meet the aspirations of 'the new middle classes' (teachers, social workers and other graduates, often with working-class origins). French cities had thus begun development

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13 This leadership is currently being greatly questioned, as will be seen later.

14 Spending is currently split almost evenly between the Paris Region [Île-de-France] and the rest of France. That said, up until early 2000, the split was heavily weighted in favour of Paris and the Île-de-France. Source: *Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication.*

of cultural policies long before the 1982 and 1983 decentralisation legislation (which basically ratified the *status quo*) (Saez, 2003). For some time (and contrary to common belief), public cultural funding has mainly been in the hands of regional bodies. Their spending on culture rose to €7.6 million in 2010 (in comparison, the Ministry of Culture's budget in 2016 is €3.4 million in 2016, including subsidies for the audio-visual sector and press). Other Ministries have their own cultural budgets (for 2016, these total close on €4 million for conserving buildings, international cultural exchanges (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and even art education and cultural initiatives (Ministry of Education) (Ministry of Culture and Communication, 2016: 81–104).

These developments gave municipal governments a great deal more autonomy as they competed to attract tourism and to burnish their 'image' (and hence culture). Decentralisation helped nurture local cultural policies because it took place at a moment when the national government was spending more than ever in this field. Cultural policy, it seemed, was advancing by leaps and bounds. There was much cause for rejoicing: the development of national and local initiatives (which satisfied all parties for the time being); cultural democratisation still seemed achievable; the impact of cultural hierarchies was softened (but not questioned); a host of festivals and new facilities, providing lots of photo opportunities for tape-cutting local politicians and the cultural agents backing the initiatives. This was to be a decisive moment in the organisation of France's cultural policy yet it was also to give rise to some of today's problems.

Artists, intellectuals and the State: alliances and competitions

One of the features of the new cultural policy was a shift away from a direct relationship between artist and authority (Elias, 1991), and lack of specialised State administration. In its place there is a much more complex system of relationships among inter-dependent agents. The new system leads to the intervention of intermediaries between culture-producers and policy managers. As I cannot pinpoint these new configurations and the changes they have brought about, I shall confine discussion to the trends in five main categories of agents.

Paradoxically, artists played virtually no role in drawing up the initial cultural policy. This was largely due to the fact that the new Ministry feared the influence still wielded by the Academies in the early sixties. It also considered them responsible for making 'The Fine Arts System' increasingly hidebound during the French Third Republic. On the other hand, many artists openly distrusted a policy in which the stress was on 'culture' rather than on 'the Arts'[15] and an institution that was bureaucratic and, in Eugène Ionesco's words, should limit itself to being a 'Supply Ministry' for artists.[16] In general, one should not overestimate the support of artists in the beginning for a policy run by a State that had traditionally been the butt for their criticism. Thus academicism and subversion were the two poles of a structural tension in the relationships between artist and cultural policies. Academicism was scathingly dismissed as 'Official Art' and as little more than a fad. A return to 'academicism' was regularly denounced, conditioning relationships and debates. It was something to be shunned at all costs by 'real artists' if they wanted their *oeuvre* to be recognised by their colleagues. At the same time, those who opposed the cultural policy argued that one of the unavoidable evils of such public meddling in culture would be the imposition of an official aesthetic, with 'the powers that be' setting up 'court' with 'their' artists. Here, one should note that historically speaking, many artists had seen themselves as 'subversive' insofar as they were against the *status quo* (and by extension, against the State itself). The issue concerned the political role that artists could play in conjunction with official political agents. It also bore in a more general way on the key issue of the policies to be pursued and the nature of artistic legitimacy. Could an artist base his

15 For instance, Jean Dubuffet in his essay *Asphyxiante culture* (1968).

16 Eugène Ionesco in *Le Figaro*, 3rd August 1974.

or her reputation on institutions that were answerable to the State? From these tensions, one can deduce artists' attitudes towards government policy. Artists were at the same time the main clients of the State but also its severest critics, they were both beneficiaries and forever unhappy with their lot even if it was only because cultural policy had spurred growth in funding requests that could not be met.

The same ambivalence could be seen among intellectuals, who were trapped between experience and criticism. Intellectuals had long played an important role in French politics in the 'literary politics' tradition described by Tocqueville in *The Old Regime and the Revolution* (1865) — that is to say, in the name of universal principles and values, and through a well-constructed discourse full of references. Without wholly abandoning this critical stance, intellectuals played an auxiliary role in the cultural policy. They carried out sociological studies, theorising and legitimating 'cultural democratisation'; took part in commissions; produced literature accompanying and fostering public initiatives or at any event, highlighting them (Dubois, 2011). Nevertheless, they encountered hurdles, as the quick failure to set up a great debate on cultural options showed. The State's policy hampered intellectuals in playing a political role. Thus at the start of the 1980s, the left-wing government in power bewailed "the silence of the intellectuals", that is to say, their lukewarm public support for the government's policy. Later on, as we shall see, cultural policy became a happy hunting ground for a new intellectual sector that used the policy as a butt for criticism.

One should note that in France, intellectuals hardly occupy important political posts, even though they often play an important political role. At the national level, most politicians come from France's elite schools teaching Economics and Public Administration, such as the *École Nationale d'Administration* (ENA). This trend has become ever stronger since the foundation of The Fifth Republic. The consequence is that those running the country are becoming distanced from the media and their cultural concerns. This trend is exacerbated by the fact that today's politicians are poorly schooled in the humanities and literature — something that was not true of their (illustrious) forerunners. While the legacy of Malraux and Lang is ever-present, both were exceptions to the rule. In addition, one of the difficulties encountered by all Ministers of Culture is how to give form to a policy in a highly sensitive sector in which they have little or no expertise. Appointing Ministers (from 2000 onwards) with a background in cultural administration[17] has not wholly solved the problem. Unlike in other public sectors, culture rarely offers careers with scope for specialisation. Yet this does not prevent post-holders gaining policy-making experience in the field — something that is particularly true among politicians in France's big cities. The important point to highlight here is that the institutionalisation of cultural policies had made many question crude forms of cultural censorship and manipulation by political agents. This is not to say that such risks had vanished but from then on they would take more sophisticated forms — which in part protected artists and cultural players. That said, the development of this system of institutionalised relationships posed a major challenge to freedom of art and culture.

The cultural intermediaries and administrators in this system played the role of middlemen, which often gave them a central position. In fact, the institutionalisation of cultural policy had involved the specialisation and professionalisation of these cultural administrators. This is what happened to the Ministry of Culture's central administration, in local cultural services, and in what were termed 'cultural projects' whether fostered by institutions or by associations/private bodies. The development of cultural policies was accompanied by cultural management training. Such training was seen

17 Catherine Tasca (2000-2002), a senior Civil Servant in the French Ministry of Culture from the end of the 1970s and whose career was wholly in the culture field. Jean-Jacques Aillagon (2002-2004), was, among other things, former President of the Georges-Pompidou National Centre for Art and Culture [*Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges-Pompidou*]. Audrey Azoulay, Minister of Culture since 2014, has spent much of his career as a senior civil servant, mainly dealing with cinema.

by managers as a guarantee of cultural quality and of organisational competence, doing away with the amateurishness of volunteers and the like. Others saw a danger of culture being bureaucratised, homogenised and vanishing behind the new 'admin' jobs. These positive and aspects were not incompatible. In any case, the new middlemen played a key role in the management of cultural policies precisely because they occupied a strategic position between culture producers and politicians.

This overview would not be complete without referring to the role played by the media, which in many respects are decisive in the interwoven system of relationships and legitimations. We shall return to some of the aforementioned tensions further on. What is traditionally termed 'political instrumentalisation of culture' now refers to the expectations of the media impact of publicly-supported cultural initiatives. Although the media act as 'censors' insofar as they select what they consider worthy of attention, they also denounce acts of political censorship that do not accord with their view of artistic freedom. In short, apart from a few extreme examples, the relations between art and politics are mediatised in both senses of the term. This is because the media play an intermediary role in these relations. The concentration of the media in Paris is yet another factor exacerbating cultural centralism. Going beyond the media's comments on cultural policy (in which prestige and symbolism play a key role), the cultural press (and the press in general) are part and parcel of the cultural policy system.

UNRESOLVED FOUNDATIONAL CONTRADICTIONS
At this juncture, it is worth looking at some of the main elements underpinning French cultural policy and thus the rationale behind its historic organisation. One can only grasp today's policy problems and challenges by taking these elements into account. This is so because the present situation may call this legacy into question and because the issues now facing us are clearly the result of long-standing contradictions.

Going beyond superficial differences, the weakening of the 'fundamentals' of a cultural policy refers to a form of de-specification — that is to say, the questioning of its constitution as a sphere separate from public action and with its own rationale. The main elements called into question are cultural policy's forms, organistion and even its *raison d'être*. This de-specification centres on a basic problem: the imposition of non-cultural rationales in dealing with cultural matters.

The questioning of a foundational principle: the failure of cultural democratisation
'Cultural democratisation' was the first foundational principle to be challenged. It had served as a legitimising principle of public cultural policy and was a shared belief (or at the least, a common reference) among administrators, politicians and culture professionals. One can say that 'cultural democratisation' is a kind of catch-all principle: a political reference to democracy and equality, properly-approved public programmes, artists' mission in serving the people and so on. The failure of cultural democratisation can be seen as both the questioning of a shared belief and a *modus vivendi* among agents in the cultural policy field. This shaken belief and falling out stems from citizens' deep disappointment with the results of the policy carried out in their name. The belief was also questioned for other reasons — for instance, to foster transformation in the intellectual field and in the role played by intellectuals in cultural policy. In a nutshell, during the first period of cultural policy, most intellectuals supported the cultural democratisation project but the gradual rise of conservative intellectuals has changed the situation. In fact, the latter centred debates on cultural policy from the end of the 1980s onwards, imposing their thesis that the initial democratic idea has been lost due to 'relativistic' shifts in cultural policy. They argued that the project's vacuousness threatened real culture[18] by demystifying it.

18 Finkielkraut (1987) and Fumaroli (1991) furnish the main examples of these conservative criticisms. For such discussions, see Dubois (2012).

These critics have been emboldened by the figures showing the paltry results of democratisation policies. Since the end of the 1980s, French cultural statistics have backfired on officialdom. Instead of legitimising cultural policies, they have undermined them (Dubois, 2015b). Here, I mainly refer to the questionnaires on 'French citizens' cultural practices' — surveys carried out at the Ministry of Culture's behest (Donnat, 1998). Above all, these surveys revealed the very limited changes in the social distribution of cultural practices. Put another way, cultural democratisation had failed because the gap between social classes had not narrowed in the slightest: the 'have-nots' continued to lack access to culture. By contrast, the policy had spurred greater consumption of culture by the 'haves' (the middle and upper classes). These results are all the more disappointing considering that over the period, the average duration of education had lengthened and that greater access to higher education would make one hope for both growth in and a more equitable social distribution of cultural practices. Moreover, the expansion of public library networks had not halted the decline in reading — the cultural practice *par excellence*. There had been a fall in the number of books read a year. At the same time, the consumption of television and music in various formats had grown greatly but these were cultural practices that fell beyond the scope of public policy and were dismissed as 'commercial'.

Lack of space precludes an analysis of these figures here since one would need to delve into the data-gathering methods and other aspects.[19] Nevertheless, one can highlight two points. The first is that the statistical evidence undermined the foundational belief in cultural democratisation time and again, deepening the nagging doubts about the cultural policy's tenets and legitimacy. In fact, the issue had been raised to seek an alternative aim rather than to suggest another way of achieving democratisation.[20]

This fruitless quest, which has already lasted twenty years, contributes greatly to the disillusionment characterising contemporary cultural policies. Furthermore, the cultural policy's weak impact on the democratisation of cultural practices is hardly surprising in light of the planks of this policy. A combination of professional and political interests have spawned cultural offerings that hardly influence citizens' choices on whether to visit museums or go to the theatre. No doubt the rationale underlying the Ministry of Culture's foundation (specialisation in policy and culture, either without the Ministry of National Education's involvement or opposed to it) arose from historical need. Yet this rationale had long-term structural consequences. This institutional division led to sociological aberrations that can be traced back to the Ministry's origins. How can one separate culture and education? How can one hope to reduce social inequalities in accessing art and culture without taking into account the importance of schooling (the first sociological studies revealed the decisive link between education and culture)?[21] Drawing up a cultural policy to make schools a path to cultural democratisation was broached quite some time ago. It was proposed to use art teaching and awareness programmes to this end. Yet this long-standing demand in French cultural policy has fallen on deaf ears. While there is no strong opposition to the idea, there are no strong advocates either. So far, the idea has come to naught.

Similar considerations apply regarding another legacy of setting the bounds to cultural policy: the absence of television. In the beginning, this was explained by political issues (in the 1960s, French television was still subject to direct political control) and at the same time, certain ideas of what culture was (the classic, legitimist view that made it hard to see television as a cultural medium). Later developments did nothing to remedy this oversight. Indeed, in this field culture policy has actually made things worse, given that the

19 For a summary, see Wallach (2006).

20 In this respect, the projects under way on partial free entry to museums are singularly unpromising.

21 See Bourdieu (1966); for an update. For an in-depth examination, see Coulangeon (2003).

'cultural' programming on TV (art films, programmes on books, music and artists, broadcasting of plays and concerts) has shrunk.[22]

A critical situation in key sectors

The questioning of the general belief in democratisation is accompanied by problems of a more sectoral nature. Here, I shall mention two examples that in many respects are key to French cultural policy: heritage and the performing arts.

Heritage is the oldest and least controversial part of State intervention in the cultural field. The policy has resulted in many more places receiving protection, while museums and other ways of conserving and re-evaluating the past have sprung up. Yet there is concern that many historical monuments are in a sorry state. A ministerial report states that one in five monuments are in danger. The size of spending on France's heritage at a time of public spending cuts leads the State to broaden funding sources. Having to seek private sponsorship and giving private firms the job of managing historic sites heightens fears that commercial consideration will be given priority over heritage-related criteria. A new wave of decentralisation begun in 2003 went so far as to consider transferring certain national monuments to local administrations in order to ensure proper management. Quite apart from the symbolism of the State 'ditching' parts of the national heritage, these transfers beg many questions. Even if local authorities are capable of expert evaluation of heritage sites, there is the risk that historic and artistic criteria will be dumped in favour of ones based on sites as a draw for tourism. There are also doubts about local authorities' long-term financial resources to meet such commitments, in which case decentralisation would turn out to simply be a sneaky form of privatisation.

Let us now look at a second example of difficulties in a given sector, in this case, employment in the performing arts. This sector has traditionally been a key part of French cultural policy. There are three reasons for this: (1) the links between the history of theatre and the birth of cultural policy (especially on the issue of democratisation); (2) its share of the Ministry's budget; (3) the fact that theatre professionals are very active and in the public eye. Cultural employment is a main plank in the political discourse and has sometimes been used to justify public spending because of the scope for creating new jobs in the sector. However, managing employment in the performing arts became a problem in the early 1980s. Unlike in Germany (a country in which actors and ancillary staff have fixed jobs), in France those in the sector are usually taken on for short engagements. In between contracts, actors and other staff are covered by unemployment benefits paid for out of employers' contributions and social security funds. The system takes account of the sporadic nature of jobs in the sector and accepts that the risks stemming from precarious employment are not covered by cultural institutions but by the social security system. This system sparked fierce criticism when unemployment soared (as did the cost of paying benefits to would-be actors and ancillary staff). This rise was not accompanied by a proportional rise in the number of jobs on offer (Menger, 2005). This led to a spectacular rise in the number of actors and ancillary staff on the dole[23] (excluding an army of uneligible applicants for benefits). Two reasons for this sharp rise were more public cultural offerings and widespread use of sporadic contracts by private audio-visual firms.[24] This engendered the following paradox: because the employment regime of performing arts workers and ancillary staff was not covered by cultural bodies, the problem was left in the hands of firms with a greater interest in saving money than in culture. In 2003, the terms under which workers in the performing

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22 The establishment of the *Arte* Franco-German TV network carries little weight in an audio-visual field that has been open to private competition since 1984 and which is increasingly shaped by the 'entertainment' model and the audience-rating war.

23 A rise of almost 150% in the period 1997-2003. The number of beneficiaries in the latter year reached close on 100,000 people.

24 These private companies also work with public TV networks.

arts and the audio-visual industry were eligible for unemployment benefits were drastically tightened up without the Ministry of Culture having any say in the negotiations. This led to a wave of protest, forcing the closure of numerous festivals, including the iconic Avignon Festival in 2003. The protesters not only demanded that the rights of workers in the performing arts be upheld but also highlighted the government's shaky cultural policy and failure to get to grips with a major problem (Sinigaglia, 2008). The unemployment benefits crisis for workers in the performing arts served yet again to highlight "the crisis in French cultural policy". The problems that spawned today's crisis go back a long way. The brutal exposure of the system's financial ambiguities helped to discredit a policy whose shortcomings were already known. From 2000 onwards, Ministers of Culture came and went without tackling employment practices in the performing arts, even though they directly affected a strategic sector of cultural policy. Yet in all fairness, it must be said that it was something over which they had little control. In fact, the employment and benefit regime was being managed by 'social agents' (employers and trade unions) and the Ministry of Employment. Nevertheless, an agreement reached in Spring 2016 may partially solve the problem for the meantime — something that will yield a more positive cultural balance after five years of François Hollande's government.

Could cultural policies be replaced by cultural management?

As noted in the cases of heritage conservation and the performing arts, cultural policies are plagued by problems of organisation, management, and funding whose technical aspects should not blind us to the major political and cultural challenges.

First of all, the 'boom' years mentioned earlier and the vast growth in cultural facilities mean that the lion's share of the public cultural budget goes to the upkeep of what has already been created. This is why public budgets in support of new projects are very thin on the ground and there is greater stress on finding private funding. Eight large institutions gobble up almost 20% of the Ministry of Culture's budget and all of them

are located in Paris.[25] Another revealing figure is that the Ministry's staff and running costs make up over a quarter of the total culture budget. This carve-up also affects a large number of French cities, starving them of funds and leading to tougher institutional cultural policies and scuppering new projects, which until now are what gave policies a more dynamic, innovative air. The financial straitjacket means that what we term 'cultural *policy*' is becoming little more than *management* of what already exists. This in turn leads to bad blood between cultural policy representatives (who have little room for manoeuvre), artists and other culture professionals. The latter find themselves split between those defending the funding they have already secured and those seeking scarce funding for new projects that are unlikely to come to fruition. We therefore deduce that the cultural policy 'crisis' does not stem so much from an organised dismantling of the system[26] but rather its poor maintenance during a period of stagnation and financial austerity, leading to widespread frustration.

The second problem, seemingly of a technical nature and that bears on great political and cultural challenges, concerns the distribution of powers among various tiers of government and public bodies. Decentralisation did not give rise to a clear division of powers regarding cultural matters but instead favoured duplication and complicated the management of cultural projects. State, municipalities, 'departments' and regions have jurisdictions that largely overlap. In the beginning, the so-called cross-funding system should have had an advantage, namely, allowing joint support by various administrative tiers while ensuring cultural operators enjoyed greater independence. In principle, this system should have made artists less beholden to their patrons by ensuring beneficiaries were not dependent on just one source of funds.

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25 *Bibliothèque nationale de France* [BnF], *Ópera, Centre Georges-Pompidou, La Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie, Grande Halle de la Vilette, Cité de la Musique, Musée de la Musique, Musée du Louvre, La Comédie-Française.*

26 Unlike what happens (for example) in the welfare field.

These were reasonable concerns but the system proved to have three serious limitations. First, instead of achieving balanced support, the funding provided by each tier (cities, regions, State) was often dependent on the other two. In practice, this often meant that no tier was able to allocate money without the involvement of the other two. Second, this situation gave cultural policies a lower profile, even for cultural agents themselves. Third, the system had been drawn up when public cultural funding was on the rise and it was poorly equipped to deal with austerity and cut-backs.

This complex cultural support system, which brought together the State and local administrations, has changed a great deal over the last few decades. The arbitration role of the Ministry of Culture, especially through the Regional Offices for Culture [DRACs] has been weakened. There are two reasons for this. The first is that the Ministry is strapped for cash and thus finds it hard to fund new initiatives. The second is that local administrations have built up expertise in the cultural field and are no longer financially dependent on the State. As a result, the Ministry has less clout. Here lies another of the key elements in 'the crisis of the French Model': the State is no longer the helmsman — a role it either traditionally played or claimed as its own. Under this new configuration, cultural life is much more dependent on local representatives, who often act in ways that they consider most beneficial for cultural agents. To a large extent (and regardless of party politics) local representatives face a set of limitations that may be linked to their cultural orientations. First, limited regional development, which is currently the main criterion for evaluating management, means that cultural support tends to be seen merely as a way of attracting companies and/or tourists. The danger is that culture takes a back seat to boosting the local economy. The limited scope of local politics may also mean that support is given to the culture voters crave, to the detriment of more ambitious cultural options. It is also easy for cultural producers to wound local feelings or simply be out of touch with local tastes. In

a more general way, various issues have arisen on the cultural scene as a result of inopportune intervention by local representatives in local offerings and clashes with artists and/or other culture professionals, who hope that the State will arbitrate in the dispute. For the reasons given above, such arbitration seems increasingly unlikely.

Against this background, the previously uncommon practice of seeking private funds through sponsorship is on the rise. This is a third aspect of cultural funding and organisation and has major implications. Those advocating sponsorship argue that private funding is more flexible than the public kind and that additional sources of money always benefit culture. The detractors of sponsorship say that such funding is only showered on outdated offerings and makes it hard to approach culture from a non-ideological standpoint. To foster reflection on this point, one needs to get away from the idea that sponsorship is good or bad for culture *per se* and instead try to determine what role it may play in a given cultural situation. Here, it is worth taking several things into account. The first is that in France, to date, a big slice of private sponsorship has come from public companies or those with strong links to the State, which puts arguments about different kinds of funding in a different light (Rozier, 2003).[27] Second, political choices also affect sponsorship (especially in relation to tax deductions for those making charitable donations). Last but not least, it is likely that such tax deductions will have zero net effect on cultural funding given that lower tax revenue will be reflected in smaller public budgets for culture. In this respect, sponsorship does not make for a bigger kitty for culture. Rather it simply shifts cultural offerings from the public sector to private companies. This takes us back to the ideological question — is such sponsorship good or bad? Again, one needs to put things in context. France does not have a tradition of philanthropy by millionaires, foundations and companies, unlike other countries. While wholly disinterested philanthropy may not exist, in France one can reasonably assume that sponsorship

27 Nevertheless, there has been a wave of privatisation in these public companies over the last few years.

is mainly undertaken to burnish the donor's image and thus benefits big institutions and high-profile cultural events. In other words, it gives more to the 'haves' and thus reproduces the defects of French cultural policy instead of correcting them.

International challenges

To round off this analysis, I shall briefly refer to some international dimensions and the problems French cultural policy currently faces.

An article published in *Time* magazine (Morrisson, 2007) bemoaned the decline in French influence in the world, but this complaint goes back a long way. In fact 'loss of influence' and 'decline', together with the 'invasion' of American culture among the masses have been recurrent gripes since the end of the Second World War. This disillusionment bears a direct relation with the belief from which it springs, namely that France has a mission to 'civilise' the rest of the world.

Yet the problem goes deeper. Contrary to the common view, which sees French governments as strongly (and sometimes rather pompously) promoting culture, France has been quite weak and ineffective in spreading the word abroad for quite some time now. Let us look again at the institutions with which France began cultural policy at the outset. The Ministry of Culture never had much say on international matters. Traditionally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is charged with disseminating French culture abroad, on which it could have dedicated a large slice of its budget and staff. On the other hand, the competitive division of competences is a problem, if only because placing 'the French cultural network abroad' in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs does not help forge links with culture at home. This is a recurring problem and has been denounced for over twenty years. Despite being well-funded, the dissemination of French culture abroad is based more on nostalgia for the splendour of yesteryear than on forging links with contemporary culture. The cultural envoy, Xavier North, among others, highlighted the problem in 1997: "If the State has the right to earmark a lot of resources to push French culture abroad, maybe its smugness is inversely proportional to the results it gets. When the

organisation is a big one and it costs a fortune, the bigger the sense of decline. Never has more been spoken about 'splendour' yet France's 'message' is more muted than ever." (North, 1997). Although the problem is not limited to resources, these have steadily shrunk since the mid-1990s, forcing the closure of many cultural centres abroad (Lombard, 2003; Djian, 2004). To this one should add a general trend: international cultural relations are seldom an end in themselves and this is probably now truer than ever. They are used to begin and foster trade. There was a specialised agency, the French Association for Artistic Initiatives [*Association Française d'Action Artistique* (AFAA)], which in 2006 became CulturesFrance in a re-organisation that took the British Council as its model, replaced by the Institut Français in 2011. Under the joint aegis of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (providing 75% of the funding) and the Ministry of Culture (furnishing the remaining 25%), CulturesFrance had an annual budget of €30 million. The AFAA had faced major problems both in its relations with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and those stemming from its internal management (in fact, the AFAA was questioned on several occasions by the Court of Auditors [*Cour des Comptes*] on its use of public funds. Taking a broader view, the consistency and scope of the AFAA's activities has often been questioned both in the cultural sphere and in parliamentary reports. Although it is still too early to say how the re-organised AFAA (now CulturesFrance) will fare after years of controversy, cultural and budgetary constraints give few grounds for optimism.

Whatever the institution organisation adopted, it is hard to see what public initiative can do in the context of a 'globalised' world. Here, we use 'globalisation' to refer to diverse processes, albeit ones that are interlinked. They are: intensification of international flows of cultural goods; the concentration of cultural industries (publishing houses, record companies, film companies) under the wing of international financial groups; new technologies (ICT, the Internet, downloading of content), which have revolutionised the dissemination and distribution of cultural products (Mattelart, 2005). Successive French governments have spent more on multilateral diplomacy that on international cultural

policy (whether through the classical 'cultural splendour' approach or by guiding and fostering exchanges). Part of the reason for this failure to pursue a true international cultural policy was a pervasive 'non-interventionist' ideology and the limitations imposed by European 'Free Competition' policy. In fact, we know of French lobbying during the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) negotiations in 1993 and 1994 in favour of a 'cultural exception' being made. The EU defined its line on 'cultural diversity' in 1999, and later on, its role in UNESCO in concert with other countries (especially Canada). This in turn led to a statement on cultural diversity in 2001 and to the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression in October 2005. In the home political and cultural context, the battle for the 'cultural exception' has forged a common front among artists, intellectuals and politicians, giving the chance to renew faith in the virtues of 'The French Model'. By comparison, although 'cultural diversity' also mobilises organisations and agents in the cultural sphere,[28] at best it is seen as the result of tough negotiations (in which the government

takes the leading part) and at worst a step backwards (Regourd, 2002).

CONCLUSIONS

While French cultural policy is currently very shaky, there has probably never been a greater need for one. Indeed, it is vital to maintain a degree of autonomy in the cultural sphere. It may also be needed to counteract the economism that pervades all aspects of social life. This is why State intervention is more strongly demanded by French cultural agents than ever before while in other countries State involvement in being gradually dismantled. The refounding of a cultural policy must draw on France's historical legacy. Such a refoundation should not be an excuse for wallowing in nostalgia but rather a golden opportunity to identify contradictions. The critique and proposals made in this paper are neither yet another attack on the shortcomings of public intervention nor a call to return to an imagined 'Golden Age'. On the contrary, they are intended to help outside observers contribute to the debate on realistic, desirable options for today.

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28 Especially in the French Coalition for Cultural Diversity [CFDC] (http: //www.coalitionfrancaise.org/).

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