EU’s Structural Funds as a promoter of cultural sustainability: Development of cultural infrastructure, heritage and environment through the ERDF programmes in Finland

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The paper will explore the relationship between regional development policies and cultural policies from the point of sustainable development. The paper will focus on the impact of EU’s regional and cohesion policies and ERDF-funding on cultural projects and their sustainability in Finland during the fund period of 2007–2013 that is now coming to an end.

The main research question was to find out how many ERDF-funded cultural projects there were and how successful they were from the point of view of both regional policy and cultural policy objectives but also from the point of view of their sustainability. The new EU programmes for 2014-2020 lay an emphasis on three objectives: smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The 2007-2013 projects will thus be analysed from this perspective as well.

The EU structural funds have been used to cultural infrastructure and heritage projects in different regions of Finland since the country joined in the EU 1995. For example the northernmost indigenous people of the EU, the Sami community, have used the EU structural funding to foster their culture, cultural identity and self-government since the very beginning of this funding in Finland. Lasting infrastructure has been built or renovated through these funds for cultural and heritage institutions all over the country and new types of relationships and cultural ecosystems have been created to make this funding more sustainable.

During the ERDF fund period 2007 – 2013 in Finland over 23 million euro of public funding was allocated to cultural infrastructure projects and approximately 16 million euro for protecting and developing cultural heritage and environment. The combined public funding of the ERDF cultural projects was almost 140 million euro.

The research material consisted of data collected from the public structural fund database, reports and information of individual projects and interviews of persons in charge.

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