

Report to the Flemish Parliament

The Court examined how cultural heritage stakeholders are subsidized

The cultural heritage domain is still in full development. The Flemish authorities' cultural heritage policy dates back to the previous decade and most archive and documentation centers, museums and municipalities have introduced their second generation policy plans very recently. Cultural heritage stakeholders and administrative authorities also devoted much effort to draw up commitments as well as planning and supporting documents. The Court found evidence of signs of a developing learning process, but it also noted that such instruments are not yet sufficiently used to activate cultural heritage stakeholders and ensure an adequate monitoring of the policy implementation.

Introduction

The Court examined how the implementation of the cultural heritage policy is supervised by the subsidized cultural heritage stakeholders, namely the archive and documentation centers, museums and municipalities (covenant partners). These entities are subsidized through a budget allocation calculated on the basis of policy plans, annual supporting evidence and assessments of the implementation of the policy plans and covenants. The Court checked whether the regulations provide a consistent legal framework, whether supervisory action was taken in accordance with the regulations and whether quality assessments were performed. It also examined whether supervising results were used to monitor and evaluate the objective achievement.

Legal context

Regulations do not provide a complete consistent legal framework so that the administration and the assessment committee were obliged to work out pragmatic solutions. They had to modify the assessment timing or ensure subsidization on the basis of deficient policy plans. The regulatory provisions do not allow for any slight adjustment of the administrative penalties.

Planning and supporting documents

The administration cares more and more about the quality of the policy plans, but does not sufficiently spur heritage stakeholders to act on these plans in their planning and accountability methodology. It accepts sharp differences in the policy plans and accountability documents. As a result most documents show deficiencies that hinder a follow-up and an assessment. Policy plans, management contracts, covenants, annual action plans and annual reports are not sufficiently interrelated so that they do not allow to gain insight into the objective achievement and policy plan or covenant implementation. Financial reporting does not allow either to link the resources used and the objective achievement.

Assessments

The administration works out its assessment practice in a systematic way, but rarely checks whether the objectives have been reached. It also provides too little explanatory information regarding bottlenecks and omits mentioning adequate examples. Organizations and the administration cannot make much out of it to adjust their functioning. The administration's adjustment scope is also restricted because organizations enjoy autonomy to decide on their functioning and because of a lack of adequate penalties.

Subsidy policy

Subsidy policy's goals are fairly clear, but cannot be sufficiently checked. Moreover the planning and accountability documents of the cultural heritage stakeholders and the administration's assessment results are not such that they allow conclusions to be drawn as to whether the stakeholders have achieved the objectives. As a result the Flemish Parliament gets little information on the results and effects of the subsidy policy itself.

The minister's reply

In her reply the Flemish minister for Culture mentioned that the ongoing learning and developing process in the cultural heritage domain may explain and put into perspective some of the Court's findings. She promised to implement the Court's recommendations as soon as possible, among others as part of the assessment of the cultural heritage decree.