Our culture and environment are key factors in enjoying a good quality of life, and if they deteriorate, our quality of life gets worse as a result.

**A EUROPEAN CULTURE?**

Culture is present in all aspects of our lives – it is how we express what we value as human beings, and how we express our individuality. A “European cultural identity” might seem like an odd thing to talk about, given how different the many cultures in Europe are. The point of making this connection is not to say that the cultures are more alike, but to celebrate their differences and find strength in their diversity.

> www.coe.int/culture

**THE OFFICIAL STUFF...**

The member states of the Council of Europe created the European Cultural Convention in 1955, which aims to make it easier for them to understand each other and share their cultures, as well as allowing them to develop through study and activities.

> www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Co-operation/

The Convention was responsible for creating the European Youth Centres (see sheet 4) and the Centre for Modern Languages in Graz (see sheet 5), as well as many other projects, some of which are listed below:

**LIGHTS! CAMERA! ACTION!**

Eurimages is the Council of Europe Fund to support European film co-productions. Since it was set up in 1989, Eurimages has supported the co-production of more than 1000 full-length feature films and documentaries, and backs a number of cinemas in different countries.

> www.coe.int/eurimages

**CULTURAL ROUTES**

Throughout human history in Europe, people have travelled across the continent for trade, culture and religion. The Cultural Routes remind Europeans of their common cultural identity by identifying past adventures and endeavours through our geographical landscape. The Council co-ordinates the efforts in setting up the routes, which range from discovering where Mozart lived to following the path of the Vikings.

> www.coe.int/routes

**FREE STUFF!**

Every year, during a weekend in September, over 30 000 monuments, museums and other sites across Europe are opened free or at reduced admission. This initiative aims not only to make it possible for European citizens to better understand their cultural heritage, but also to enable them to develop a greater understanding of the different cultures around them.

> www.ehd.coe.int/

**YOUR HERITAGE**

All Europeans are equally responsible for making sure that the continent’s wealth of cultural traditions stay as they should and pass them on to the next generations. Cultural heritage provides a sense of identity and helps you to know the differences between different communities in a climate of globalisation. It also allows people from different cultures to understand each other better.

> “Everyone wants to change the world whenever they make the effort to do something”

Krzysztof Kieślowski
The Council of Europe contributes to this mission by promoting the continent’s many national cultures through different projects and programmes.

www.coe.int/EuropeanLandscapeConvention

ENVIRONMENT

A healthy environment is what makes it possible for us to live in comfort and in health. The planet we live on is something that we all share, and its ability to give us fuel and energy is based on a very delicate balance of different factors. For example, the consequences of one group or individual’s actions can affect people on the other side of the world. That is why it is important to co-operate and co-ordinate efforts to protect the environment at local, national, regional and international level.

The Council has produced a number of ways of encouraging governments to protect and manage the natural environment in Europe and to keep the human environment and habitat as it is or better.

PROTECTING ALL THOSE OTHER SPECIES: THE BERN CONVENTION

The main goals of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (also known as the Bern Convention) are:

- To protect rare and **ENDANGERED** species, as well their natural habitats;
- To prevent **PROTECTED SPECIES** from disappearing;
- To put a stop to **ILLEGAL TRADING** in animals.

**NOT JUST A LOAD OF GRASS, ROCKS AND MUD**

The European Landscape Convention sets out ways of protecting, managing and planning landscapes throughout Europe in order to achieve **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT** between social environment. It is important that there is the right balance.

**1 ENDANGERED** means that the species is at risk of all its members dying until there are none left, as the births are not keeping up with the deaths.

**2 PROTECTED SPECIES** are protected by law because their numbers are going down. This usually means that they cannot be legally trapped or hunted.

**3 ILLEGAL TRADING** is when you buy or sell something when it is against the law to do so.

**4 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT** means that we use the world’s resources in a way which means that people in the future will be able to enjoy them in the same way we did. So if a forest is chopped down, a new one must be planted so that future generations will also have forests and clean air.

MORE TO DISCOVER!

- www.coe.int/culture
- www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Co-operation/
- www.coe.int/eurimages
- www.coe.int/routes
- www.ehd.coe.int/
- www.coe.int/EuropeanLandscapeConvention
CULTURE

The scope of “culture” is vast and ever-changing. Working with young people on cultural issues inevitably involves choice as we cannot hope to cover everything. We can aim to help them to understand the main components and to find their own way through the maze.

MY CULTURE, YOUR CULTURE, OUR CULTURE

Culture is a fairly abstract term and one way of starting to understand what it might mean is the so-called iceberg model.

All the things, behaviours, etc. that you can see in a culture are the visible part of the iceberg (what’s on the surface); what you cannot see is the foundation of all that you do see: values; principles; aesthetics; tradition.

A simple example: in many cultures people greet each other by shaking hands. But why? Centuries ago this was a sign meaning that people were not going to use their swords.

Each pupil should work individually to produce their interpretations of what constitutes their culture in the form of an iceberg – what is beneath different traditions and customs. Compare the icebergs to find common points and differences.

OUR CULTURAL ROUTE

All over Europe people are rediscovering or revitalising their cultural heritage.

Ask your pupils to discover the important landmarks and traditions in the area near your school. Identify those which have links to other European countries. Using the Cultural Routes as an example, devise a new cultural route to include your region.

ENVIRONMENT: WHY DO WE BOther?

In the history of our planet, millions of life forms have quite simply ceased to exist. They are no more. Some refer to this process as “natural selection or the survival of the fittest”. Today we find nature reserves, zoos and other projects - all of them having the goal of “preservation” or “protection”.

Apart from dinosaurs (!), which extinct life forms would your pupils wish to bring back to life?

Discuss the reasons for preserving species: who chooses? Are we only concerned about the “pretty” animals or plants?

LOCAL NATURE RESERVES

Where is the nearest wildlife or nature reserve?

Plan an outing with your pupils.

What are they interested in finding out?

Why was this area chosen to become a nature reserve?

Is it part of the European network of “biogenetic” reserves?

WHICH FIGURE IS BEHIND THIS QUOTE? 

"Everyone wants to change the world whenever they make the effort to do something."

Answer on the back
LOCAL ACTION

Observe with your pupils the wildlife in the immediate vicinity of your school.

How many species can they find?

Do your pupils know that frogs are significant indicators of the health of the local environment?

What measures are taken by the local authorities to protect wildlife?

Contact local non-governmental organisations involved in environmental issues: what do they do?

Discuss with your pupils what action they would like to take. Suggestions could include: measuring pollution levels and sharing them with the rest of the school; planting trees; creating a pond; measuring air pollution; collecting relevant materials for recycling; starting a campaign for protecting the local environment.

If your school is in contact with one in another country, compare their environmental situation with your own.

DISASTERS

What examples of natural and/or technological disasters can your pupils find?

Can they find examples of disasters which had effects across national borders?

What systems are in place locally to inform the population in the event of a disaster?

SOURCES

*Krzesztof Kieślowski*: Extract of interview with Krzyżtof Kieślowski by Stanislas Zawiśliński

*www.coe.int/culture*