

The Kulturvertrag between the two Basels

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

The cultural institutions of the city serve the whole region, while their costs fall largely on Basel-Stadt. Part H described the division of Basel into two cantons in 1833 and the persistent tensions between the urban and the rural half.¹ Culture is one of the fields in which those tensions are negotiated. Since the 1990s a cultural agreement between the two cantons, the *Kulturvertrag*, has provided that Basel-Landschaft pays a lump sum to Basel-Stadt as a contribution to the central cultural institutions that its residents use, among them the Theater Basel and the Sinfonieorchester.²

The arrangement has repeatedly been tested. In 2011 the voters of Basel-Landschaft rejected an additional contribution towards the renovation and operation of the Theater Basel, a result that was widely interpreted as a sign of declining willingness in the rural canton to share the costs of urban culture.³ In 2015, when Basel-Landschaft faced a budget crisis and announced that it would halve its cultural contribution, the two cantons agreed on a temporary arrangement under which Basel-Stadt paid its neighbour a sum of about eighty million francs over four years. The rural canton maintained its contributions to the university and to culture in return.⁴ The cultural agreement was later renewed on revised terms. Its current amounts and duration should be checked against the most recent cantonal decisions.⁵

These disputes illustrate a structural problem of regional culture. The benefits of a museum, a theatre or an orchestra extend well beyond the boundaries of the jurisdiction that pays for them, and the Basel institutions also draw visitors from Germany and France who contribute nothing to their public financing. Economists describe such situations as spillovers, which tend to lead to underfunding unless the jurisdictions concerned agree on compensation. Since the Swiss federal constitution assigns culture primarily to the cantons, such agreements are the main instrument available.⁶ The Basel case shows that such agreements remain politically

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fragile because rural voters do not always perceive the regional benefit of urban institutions.

1 Notes

1. On the separation of the cantons of Basel-Stadt and Basel-Landschaft in 1833 and the later debates on reunification, see Parts C and H. To be verified. ↩
2. On the cultural agreement (Kulturvertrag) between Basel-Stadt and Basel-Landschaft, first concluded in the 1990s, and the Kulturvertragspauschale paid by Basel-Landschaft for central cultural institutions in Basel-Stadt, see the publications of the two cantons. Date and amounts to be verified. ↩
3. On the vote in Basel-Landschaft in 2011 rejecting an additional contribution to the Theater Basel, see the official results of the canton of Basel-Landschaft and contemporary reports. Date and subject to be verified. ↩
4. On the agreement of October 2015 between Basel-Stadt and Basel-Landschaft, under which Basel-Stadt paid about CHF 80 million over the years 2016 to 2019 while Basel-Landschaft maintained its contributions to the University of Basel and the Kulturvertragspauschale, see the publications of the two cantonal governments. Figures to be verified. ↩
5. On the renewed cultural agreement between Basel-Stadt and Basel-Landschaft and the current level of the Kulturvertragspauschale, see the most recent publications of the two cantons. Status to be verified. ↩
6. On the primary responsibility of the cantons for culture under Art. 69 para. 1 of the Federal Constitution (SR 101), and on intercantonal burden-sharing for central cultural institutions, see the constitutional literature and the publications of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Culture. To be verified. ↩

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