



#CitiesAreListening

CITIES ARE LISTENING



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Upgrading Culture in Sustainable Development: The Time is Now

Briefing

The #CitiesAreListening sessions, launched jointly by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Metropolis, and UN-Habitat, and building on the #BeyondTheOutbreak Live Learning Experiences (LLE) — held from March to July 2020 —, aim to bring together Local and Regional Governments, their associations, and partner organizations to find together responses to current urban and social issues, focusing on each of the axes of the Pact for the Future that UCLG has been mandated to develop as a way to renew the social contract for the people, for the planet, and for governments. The #CitiesAreListening experience on culture in sustainable development, hosted by UCLG and powered by the #culture2030goal campaign, Rome City Council and Palaexpo on April 20th 2021, was devoted to upgrading the place of culture and cultural actors at the table of the future of humanity, considering the Rome Charter and the achievements of the #culture2030goal campaign as vital contributions.

Local and Regional Governments' efforts to promote culture as a pillar of sustainable development

Since the founding Congress of Paris, back in 2004, culture has been at the heart of UCLG's policy agenda. The work of UCLG on Culture in Sustainable Development is structured with conceptual policy documents such as the "[Agenda 21 for culture](#)", "[Culture is the Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development](#)" and the declaration "[Culture and Peace](#)", practical toolkits and guides, such as the "[Culture 21 Actions](#)" and the "[Culture in the SDGs: A Guide for Local Action](#)", and global events and programmes such as the 4th edition of the [Culture Summit](#), that will take place in Izmir on 9-11 September 2021, the biennial [International Award "UCLG – Mexico City – Culture 21"](#), the [database "OBS"](#) of good practices on culture in sustainable cities, the [learning and capacity-building programmes](#) and the international [advocacy](#) in the UN Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a major turning point towards the renewal of culture as an essential component for the recovery and to build back better. The pandemic has shown the profound need of people for culture and has also made evident the interrelation and interdependence of cultural policies with policies related to education, gender equity, health, inequalities, urban planning, public spaces, accessibility and technology, among others. Culture is seen as the

response to many challenges, and local and regional governments, with cultural organisations and civic society, continue to make efforts to reinforcing transversal actions and advocacy on culture as a fundamental dimension of sustainable development.

Remarkable collaborative initiatives have been launched in the last months and continue to develop, and they prove to be key to build the [Pact for the Future](#) of UCLG announced at the World Council in November 2020, “powered by solidarity, equality, culture, and accountable institutions that leave no-one and no place behind”. The #culture2030goal campaign, which is developing a strategic framework within the context of the UN Decade of Action, in April 2020 released a [Statement on Culture and the COVID-19 pandemic](#) that “emphasises the need to place culture at the heart of the response to the Covid-19 crisis today and at the centre of all endeavours, at all scales, to rebuild our societies, tomorrow”.

On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, in September 2020, UCLG and other members of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments released the [UN75 Visioning report](#). The report promotes the agenda of cities and local governments for the next 25 years and it recalls that the international community should recognise culture as a dimension of sustainable development, on equal basis to the economic, social and environmental pillars. Moreover, it affirms that the post-2030 Development Agenda should include “a stand-alone Goal on Culture” that includes several targets related to memory, heritage, creativity, diversity and knowledge, supported by a narrative that clearly identifies culture as a core component of local and regional identity, a strand of global solidarity, and a vector for peace and human rights.

In October 2020, UCLG and the City of Rome presented the [Rome Charter](#) as an original and forward-looking contribution of the international municipalist movement to efforts towards a new global development pact, and it was approved at the UCLG World Council of November 2020, held in Guangzhou and online. The Rome Charter includes the most compelling narrative on the Right to Participate Fully and Freely in Cultural Life, with 5 specific areas, or cultural capabilities, that unfold this issue: Discover, Create, Enjoy, Share and Protect. It is envisioned as an inspiration for innovative cultural policies worldwide and a main contributor to the Pact for the Future of UCLG.

The impact of the crisis has put even more pressure on a sustainable recovery which can provide answers to the most critical challenges humanity is facing with a holistic perspective that includes culture. The importance of culture during and beyond the pandemic has brought the [Urban 20](#), co-chaired by the cities of Rome and Milan, to include culture in its conversation and to liaise with the G20 meetings that will also devote space for the place of culture in sustainable development. These recent developments constitute the basis of the debate on the place of culture in sustainable development, which will serve to inform the Policy Council on Opportunities for All, Culture and City Diplomacy: Keys to Sustainable Development and Peace, whose priorities already include addressing the cultural dimension in the recovery, and the need to link human

and cultural rights, identifying democratic access to information technologies as a critical cultural right.

Challenges and initiatives to effectively place culture at the table of decision-making on the future of societies

The session entitled “**Upgrading Culture in Sustainable Development: The Time is Now**” gathered mayors, councillors and local elected representatives from cities from across the planet, and representatives from six global civil society cultural organisations which lead the #culture2030goal campaign. Together they discussed the effects of the pandemic on culture and the need to reinforce actions and advocacy to defend and pledge for culture to be upgraded to its adequate value regarding development at the local level. Main priorities, challenges towards the development of the Pact for the Future of UCLG were identified as well. The session helped to consolidate the dialogue between civil society and local and regional governments, giving visibility to the campaign #culture2030goal and the 2020 Rome Charter, learning from the activities and challenges of global cultural networks, as well as from narratives and initiatives of UCLG members in the field of culture, while visualizing specific examples of work that relate culture and the arts with the SDGs.

Cities and local governments and cultural organisations highlighted the acknowledgement of culture as a structural element of society and as a sector that plays a crucial role in the recovery and beyond, in as it is a response to many of the critical challenges of humanity. **Emilia Saiz**, Secretary General of UCLG, recalled how cultural rights are shaping UCLG’s policies and strategies: “*As we work towards the Pact for the Future and renewed social contracts, we have learnt that there are strong avenues that link culture with the challenges that humanity is facing. We see culture as an important antidote for the negative effects of the crisis.*” **Catarina Vaz-Pinto**, Councillor for Culture of the city of Lisbon, emphasized that upgrading culture in sustainable development is a major goal for the overall city policy, not just at a sectoral level: “*Culture has the capacity to build bridges with other sectors. We are broadening our scope of interventions; this is important for the vitality of the whole ecosystem*”. In this regard, the 4th UCLG Culture Summit, to be held in Izmir from the 9th-11th September 2021, was presented by **Tunç Soyer**, Mayor of Izmir, as an opportunity to connect many key areas of development and traditional cultural elements such as heritage, diversity and knowledge through creativity and innovation: “*We will exchange about cultural policies and we will promote culture as the fourth pillar of development and a cornerstone for global solidarity.*” **Mohamed Sadiki**, Mayor of Rabat, argued that many local and regional actions are priorities of the UN 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda as they contribute to reinforce cultural exchange and to improve living together with communities. Culture is at the core of these initiatives, including the first African Capital of Culture title. “*Now our city has a new role, a prominent cultural role. We have a very clear cultural vocation.*” Participants agreed that culture can provide effective solutions to urban challenges with a creative and cutting-edge approach. Cities, cultural institutions and organisations are relying on culture to put in place the mitigation and adaptation to climate change, sustainable consumption models, gender equality,

and solutions to the pandemic. Many innovative and creative experiences implemented during the pandemic are informing public policies, and despite the unfavourable situation faced by the sector, culture is being put at the core of the reconstruction. **Cesare Pietroiusti**, President of Azienda Speciale Palaexpo, which is promoting the knowledge and use of the Rome Charter through the support to artistic projects, emphasized the transformative power of culture: *“The purpose of arts and culture is not only to offer beauty, but also to enable critical reflection and new awareness on the impact of daily life activities on the future generations.”* **Sara Alberani** and **Valerio Del Baglivo**, curators of the Orchestras of Transformation, an artistic project commissioned by Azienda Speciale Palaexpo on the occasion of the 2020 Rome Charter launch, showed artistic methods of intervention in the public sphere in order to implement paths of change and new action strategies working towards the achievement of the SDG objectives of the 2030 Agenda. As part of the Cooking Sections of the Orchestras of Transformation, **Daniel Fernández Pascual** and **Alon Schwabe**, creators of Climavore project, provided alternative imaginaries and new methodologies for cities and cultural institutions to shape adaptation to the climate crisis by changing agriculture models and food and production systems, which are having a great political impact at local and international level. *“We are helping to shape the future of generations to come in the face of climate emergency”*.

The Rome Charter on the Right to Participate in Cultural Life was presented as an envisioning tool and a major step-forward to place culture at the centre of the recovery of COVID-19 crisis and beyond, with the most solid and innovative narrative on cultural rights. **Luca Trifone**, Director of International Relations of Rome, acknowledged the notable role given to culture in the G20 process under the Italian Presidency and celebrated that the U20, co-chaired by Rome and Milan, fully acknowledges culture in its communiqué as an essential part of city life. He also delivered important messages based on the Charter to bring to the global conversation: *“Resilience strategies must adapt to the new and the unknown. Culture builds a sense of belonging, preserves forms of participation, recognizes what brings us together.”* Secretary General of UCLG Africa **Jean-Pierre Elong Mbassi**, facilitator of the panel devoted reflecting on the contribution of the Rome Charter to the UCLG Pact for the Future, recalled how cities from across the world are translating the Rome Charter *“alphabet”* made up of five cultural capabilities – discover, create, share, enjoy and protect – into concrete policies and actions. **Vannesa Bohórquez**, Secretary for Culture from Mexico City, particularly focused on the capacity of culture to tackle the climate emergency, and referred to the Charter capabilities as integral elements already included in the Declaration of Human Rights and fully aligned with the work done by Mexico City and at national level: *“We believe that this roadmap articulates perfectly with the one enshrined in the Mexican Constitution. We hope to further deploy the full constellation of cultural rights recognised in Mexico City and bring this message to many cities.”* **Gonzalo Olabarria**, Secretary for Culture from Bilbao, reaffirmed the claim for culture as a right and a value in itself, and referred to the Charter as a set of principles that should be a guide for all in times of uncertainty: *“We need to redouble our efforts to move from words to deeds, so that culture takes a central role in the daily life of our cities. On this path we have*

the Rome Charter, a turning point in promoting commitment to diversity and democratic values.”

The prominent efforts made by structured civil society to put culture at the core of global debates, with full support of local and regional governments, were illustrated by members of **the #culture2030goal campaign**, a global coalition that began its global advocacy work under the title #culture2015goal, as recalled by Octavi de la Varga, Secretary General of Metropolis. **Nupur Prothi**, Board member of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), emphasised the need to scale up intentions regarding the role of culture and knowledge in transformative development: *“Culture is providing a key for every citizen. This gives hope to find solutions to the challenges of the future.”* **Beat Santschi**, President of the International Federation of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity (IFCCD) stressed the devastating effects of the crisis for actors and cultural practitioners, which have a tremendous impact on the value chain and the economy. *“It is important to engage civil society in the design of measures and policies for the sector, including the status of artists.”* **Victoria Okojie**, Nigerian Library Association, and Board member of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), highlighted the role of libraries in upgrading culture in sustainable development as enablers of inclusion and fulfilment of human potential, and encouraged collaborative efforts towards the Pact for the Future: *“We have the opportunity to work together, to innovate together, in order to deliver on the Rome Charter – and so the SDGs – everywhere.”* **Silja Fisher**, Secretary General of International Music Council (IMC), argued the need for culture to be recognised as the 4th pillar of sustainable development, and recalled that *“culture can have a transformative role in local public policies and global debates”*. **Pierre Claver Mabiala**, President of Arterial Network, reaffirmed the increasing interest to work on the cultural dimension of development by governments in Africa and the need to bring culture closer to the populations. *“We need to embed the fundamental role of culture as an enabler for peaceful coexistence at all levels, especially into regional development policies.”* Finally, **Tere Badia**, Secretary General of Culture Action Europe, warned that cultural diversity and cultural rights are at stake, and that it is necessary to rethink holistic strategies that include a strong cultural dimension towards multidisciplinary and multilevel responses and show the interdependence of culture with other policy areas. *“Without culture at the core of global debates there is no way to improve life and wellbeing as a whole.”*

Participants to the session also emphasized that culture has been catastrophically impacted by the pandemic and at the same time it plays a very important role in economic development of cities. **Karima Bennoune**, UN Special Rapporteur in the field of Cultural Rights, affirmed that pandemic may lead to a global cultural catastrophe if effective action is not taken immediately, and this may affect the achievement of SDGs and UN 2030 Agenda. Cultural sectors have been among the hardest hit, and a cultural approach to the pandemic is essential. *“Many say that without culture they would not have survived the lockdowns, but without appropriate measures culture will not survive. Solidarity must be extended internationally.”* **Jordi Pascual**, Coordinator of the UCLG Culture Committee, emphasized the urgency of putting the cultural perspective in public local policies as well. The Minister for Culture of the Autonomous City of Buenos

Aires, **Enrique Avogadro**, also stated that at city level, cultural ecosystems are fragile and need a response that goes beyond local solutions, such as economic help or digitalisation. *“We claimed the realm of culture: we took cultural venues to streets, parks, open spaces... These experiences are staying with us after the crisis. Culture is what we do in order to survive, not after survival.”*

Key messages and identified ways forward

1. Culture is an important antidote for the negative effects of the current crisis, and for others, as expressed in the UCLG Presidency Decalogue for the COVID-19 aftermath. Culture is a dimension of sustainable development and needs to be explicit to provide accurate and suitable responses to the main challenges of humanity, from climate change to gender equality, inclusive societies or covid-19, and many others. Thereby, culture is a key element to drive the social contract renewal through the UCLG Pact for the Future: For the people, planet, governments. It is urgent to put the cultural perspective in public local policies. Local and regional governments need to scale up intentions, increase investment and develop innovative policies for the full inclusion of culture in the recovery of the crisis and the global debates on the future of humanity. The place of culture in development needs to be upgraded and actors promoting the cultural narratives should sit at the main table of the future of humanity. The time is now.
2. The Rome Charter on the Right to Participate in Cultural Life is a document that “includes the most compelling narrative on cultural rights”. It provides a solid basis to bring a human-rights-based approach to development. Since its creation, it has allowed significant progress in the acknowledgement of culture as an essential part of city life, at many levels. The U20, co-chaired by Rome and Milan, and the G20 process under the Italian Presidency are important milestones in this regard. Now there is the chance to be more inclusive and imaginative in order to ensure that the Pact for the Future provides opportunities to deliver the Rome Charter, as well as the UN 2030 Agenda and SDGs.
3. Artistic expressions can boost innovative thinking on urban resilience strategies. Initiatives such as the Orchestras of Transformation in Rome and their projects aiming at raising awareness on the role of cities, cultural institutions and organisations in the mitigation and adaptation to the climate crisis, are significant bottom-up examples of the role of culture as an enabler of urban resilience in the face of disasters and crises, which can be replicated. The 4th edition of the UCLG Culture Summit in Izmir as an excellent opportunity to connect culture and resilience and promote creativity and innovation through heritage, diversity and knowledge, as fundamental elements of local sustainable development. Local and regional governments must join efforts with civil society to elevate the role of culture in supporting resilience strategies, including environmental responsibilities and economic development, and to make more apparent and explicit how crucial culture is to achieve the UN 2030 Agenda and SDGs.

4. The #culture2030goal campaign constitutes one of the most recent successful initiatives driven by global civil society in the promotion of culture as the 4th pillar of sustainable development. It also exemplifies the critical role of networks in shaping the future of multilateralism, and building a recovery that offers opportunities for all, which is one of the priorities of the Policy Council on Opportunities for All, Culture and City Diplomacy: Keys to Sustainable Development and Peace. The campaign, led by several global cultural networks, is putting many efforts in mainstreaming the transformational role of culture in development, undertaking bold actions to enhance culture in local public policies and global debates. Local and regional governments and partners must continue to support the #culture2030goal campaign and join the call for the integration of culture as an explicit and operational dimension of sustainable development.
5. There is a growing interest to work on the cultural dimension of development by governments at different levels, and the need to promote cultural policies based on diversity, democracy and freedoms. Many developments are taking place at local and regional level in this regard, and these are aligned and recognised by global agendas of sustainable development. Territorial approaches to the implementation of cultural measures for the recovery and beyond are vital in order to reach all citizens and communities.
6. Although culture has demonstrated to be vital in coping with the current challenges, cultural actors are the first to suffer the effects of the crisis and will be among the last to return to the previous conditions. At a city level, cultural ecosystems are fragile and need a response that goes beyond local solutions, such as economic support or digitalisation. Inclusive and sustainable cultural sectors and creative economies must be fully supported and acknowledged as essential contributors to the welfare and wellbeing of communities. The international law requires actions to lead to the cultural renewal as an essential component to build back better, leaving no one and no place behind.