

Contribution of UCLG Culture Committee to the Report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights

June 2022

The UCLG Culture Committee welcomes the decision of the UN Special Rapporteur in the field of Cultural Rights, Dr Alexandra Xanthaki, to devote a report to the place of cultural rights in sustainable development.

In fact, the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Culture Committee was born in 2005 with the explicit mandate to implement cultural rights in local sustainable development. This mandate follows the guidelines of [Agenda 21 for culture](#) (approved in May 2004), the first-ever global document written by (and for) local governments on culture, human rights, sustainable development and peace. The Agenda 21 for culture reads:

A few years later, in November 2010, UCLG approved [the Policy Document "Culture, Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development"](#). The 4-pillar narrative had appeared simultaneously in several places around the world in 2001 (notably, [the outstanding monography by Jon Hawkes](#)). This narrative is still the best-equipped image or metaphor on the place of culture in sustainable development. Certainly, this image does not imply any hierarchy but the components of sustainability "in order of appearance" during the 20th century. It also expresses a clear will to humanise development, to merge the still separate narratives of "human" and "sustainable" development. Finally, it is also an invitation to make cultural policies explicit (cultural actors to sit where power is, and to interact, discuss with the already accepted actors of development) and operational (with resources, with governance structures, and open to the accountability of citizens).

Some interesting quotes from this UCLG Policy Document:

- Since the beginning of the century, voices of different parts of society, from international institutions to academia, began to question the validity of the current definition of sustainable development. They state that economic growth, social inclusion and environmental balance, no longer reflect all the dimensions of our global societies and propose the addition of the dimension of culture to policies aiming at sustainable development.
- The document does not consider culture as "the fourth" pillar or dimension in a hierarchy. The document is rather an advocacy document that promotes culture to become a specific pillar or dimension of sustainable development, fully interconnected with, and as important as, the other three.

In 2015, UCLG approved a very unique document: [Culture 21 Actions](#). Containing 100 actions, grouped in 9 commitments, this document is a complete human rights-based toolkit for cultural policies in local sustainable development. Each one of the 100 actions identifies a key concept and suggests actors (local government, cultural organisations and institutions, civil society, universities) for implementation. The toolkit is the most complete manual for the implementation of cultural rights locally.

This toolkit was written taken into consideration the pioneer work being implemented by cities (such as Mexico City, Barcelona, Gwangju, Montreal, Saint Denis, Bulawayo, Rome, Buenos Aires or Malmoe) in the first decade of the 21st century, as well as the reports of the UNSR on Cultural Rights and the civil-society initiatives such as the Declaration of Fribourg. We wish to insist in one evidence: the Culture 21 Actions toolkit proves that cultural rights can be implemented at a local level, should there be political will. In fact, the statements that convey the message "cultural rights are not well defined / are not easy to implement" often mask the lack of political will to connect the human rights frame to cultural policies. Finally, the Culture 21 Actions toolkit also proves that UN member states could develop national policies based on cultural rights, should political will exist, of course; perhaps a

global frame for these cultural rights-based national policies could be adopted at [UNESCO's Mondiacult 2022](#).

Some interesting quotes from Culture 21 Actions:

- At the dawn of this, the twenty-first century, we know that development can only be “sustainable” if culture is given a central role. Human development is defined by the expansion of the freedoms and capabilities of all, and this process is only sustainable when it respects the rights and freedoms of future generations. Human development can only be effective if we explicitly consider the integral value to the process of culture and cultural factors such as memory, creativity, diversity, and knowledge.
- In order for us to understand and transform the world, we must incorporate a cultural dimension, or pillar, into our current frame of reference for sustainable development. This pillar must be as clear, effective, and dynamic as the environmental, economic, and social pillars.
- Cultural rights guarantee that everyone can access the resources they need to freely pursue their process of cultural identification throughout their life, as well as to actively participate in, and reshape, existing cultures.
- Cultural rights refer to the rights of all individuals to freedom of speech, access to heritage, values, and identities, and active participation in cultural life. They are the foundation and guarantee of the coherence and legitimacy of policies.

From 2015 to our days in 2022, UCLG Culture Committee has implemented several capacity-building, peer-learning and networking programmes to support the adoption of Culture 21 Actions by cities all over the world, namely, the Leading Cities, the Pilot Cities and the Culture 21 Lab. The names of the cities that have participated in these programmes are listed below.

- [Leading Cities](#): Abitibi-Temiscaminge, Barcelona, Bilbao, Belo Horizonte, Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Concepción, Izmir, Jeju, Lisbon, Malmö, Mexico City, Porto Alegre, Rome, Vaudreuil-Dorion and Washington DC
- [Pilot Cities](#): Baie Mahault, Chignahuapan, Córdoba, Cuenca, Elefsina, Escazú, Esch-sur-Alzette, Gabrovo, Galway, Jinju, Konya, La Paz, Leeds, Mérida, Muriaé, Namur, Nova Gorica, Santa Fe, Sinaloa, Swansea, the island of Tenerife, Terrassa and Timisoara.
- [Culture 21 Lab](#): Greater Dandenong, Kaunas, Makati and Sant Cugat del Vallès.

All these cities have the experience to relate cultural rights to sustainable development.

The work of the UCLG Culture Committee has also invested in other initiatives related to cultural rights and sustainable development.

- The document “[Culture in the Sustainable Development Goals. A Guide for Local Action](#)”, published by UCLG in 2018, presents information on each one of the 17 Goals, helps to understand why cultural issues are important and provides relevant examples.
- The [International Award UCLG - Mexico City - Culture 21](#) recognises cities and individuals who have excelled in the promotion of cultural rights in the context of the sustainable development. It has awarded the cities of Belo Horizonte, Timbuctú, Vaudreuil-Dorion, Seongbuk, Lyon, Medellín, Ségou, Buenos Aires and Dublin. Also, the Award has recognised the work of Lourdes Arizpe, Daisy Fancourt, Eusebio Leal, Vandana Shiva, Basma ElHusseiny, Patrice Meyer-Bisch, Jon Hawkes, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Manuel Castells and Farida Shaheed.
- The [OBS - database](#). The Committee has developed a database containing more than 280 good practices on culture and sustainable development. The tool allows searches according to 3 criteria: the 17 SDG, the 9 commitments of Culture 21 Actions, and 75 keywords.

- The [Rome Charter](#) was adopted by the UCLG World Council in November 2020 as a contribution to post-pandemic policies. The Charter describes the right to participate “fully and freely” in cultural life as vital to cities and communities, and promotes the cultural capabilities: Discover, Create, Share, Enjoy and Protect.

Finally, since 2020, the UCLG Culture Committee has launched a specific programme to facilitate the localisation of the SDGs with a cultural perspective: [the Seven Keys](#). This programme has taken place in Bulawayo, Lisbon, Izmir, el Puerto de la Cruz, Concepción and Xi’an. The Seven Keys programme proves that the SDG frame (although being still very far from cultural rights) can be suitable for cities wishing to implement cultural rights locally, because “obliges” local actors to take commitments in climate action, gender equality, education or health, which are (still) often forgotten (or not explicit enough) in cultural programmes and projects.

We would like to close this contribution with a paragraph devoted to advocacy, and with a specific mention to the work of [the Culture 2030 Goal campaign](#). This campaign is led by seven global cultural networks (Arterial Network, CAE – Culture Action Europe, ICOMOS – International Council on Monuments and Sites, IFCCD – International Federation of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity, IFLA – International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, IMC – International Music Council and UCLG Culture Committee). The vision of the campaign is the recognition of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, and the goals include: (a) a stronger place for culture throughout the implementation of the current global development agenda, the UN 2030 Agenda; (b) the adoption of a stand-alone Goal on Culture in the post-2030 development Agenda, and (c) the adoption of a global agenda for culture.

UCLG Culture Committee