



# culture 21

Agenda 21 for culture  
Agenda 21 de la cultura  
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## Culture and sustainable development: examples of institutional innovation and proposal of a new cultural policy profile

Executive report





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**Culture and sustainable development:  
examples of institutional innovation and proposal  
of a new cultural policy profile**

Executive report

Study commissioned by the Division of Cultural Policies and Intercultural Dialogue of UNESCO to the Institutte for culture, Barcelona City Council, as Chair of the Committee on culture of United Cities and Local Governments – UCLG, in the framework of the process “Towards a new cultural policy profile”.

With the support of the Spanish Development Cooperation Agency – AECID

1 September 2009

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# Presentation

One of the most pressing challenges facing all of us who work in the cultural sector is to match our programmes and projects with the sustainable development paradigm. First coined more than two decades ago, sustainable development seeks to ensure that a society's progress does not compromise the welfare of future generations. The first conceptualisations of sustainable development were made in the field of the environment and were marked by the need to reduce the ecological impact of human actions. These conceptualisations, however, did not take into account culture.

Nowadays the sustainable development paradigm has been extended to encompass those values which should structure a society's progress. And of course the values which are intrinsic to cultural processes, such as diversity, creativity or critical thinking, are crucial here. This has been firmly stated by the Agenda 21 for culture, the most significant document for local cultural policies, and also, albeit rather more diffidently, by UNESCO's Convention on Cultural Diversity. At the theoretical level, nowadays neither those of us who work in the cultural sector or indeed anyone else who examines the contemporary world can dispense with the values which culture brings to a society's progress. In practical terms, however, when it comes to mapping out and implementing public policy there is still an enormous gap between cultural actors and work on sustainable development. That gap needs to be reduced, contacts need to be stepped up and new bridges need to be built.

Thus we find the process which UNESCO's Cultural Policies and Intercultural Dialogue Division started up in 2009, called "Towards a new cultural policy profile", to be extremely promising in terms of bringing cultural actors closer to sustainable development. The Committee on culture of United Cities and Local Governments – UCLG was delighted to receive an invitation from UNESCO to draw up a brief study which would constitute the vision of cities and local governments in this process of moving "towards a new cultural policy profile". The study was also supported by the Spanish Development Cooperation Agency, the AECID, which works closely with local governments including our UCLG Committee on culture.

The study presents a number of examples of local institutional innovation which bring cultural actors and the sustainable development paradigm closer together, with special attention being paid to those processes which work on cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. The study unreservedly advocates including a cultural perspective into all public policies for sustainable development, that is to say it encourages the concept that promotes culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development. I hope you enjoy reading it.

**Jordi Martí**

Councillor for Culture, Barcelona City Council  
President of UCLG's Committee on culture

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# Culture and sustainable development: examples of institutional innovation and proposal of a new cultural policy profile

## Executive report

Paper prepared by Jordi Pascual as coordinator of the Committee on Culture of United Cities and Local Governments, written for the Division of Cultural Policies and Intercultural Dialogue of UNESCO in the framework of the process "Towards a new cultural policy profile".

## Introduction

Despite the will of many researchers and policy makers, despite declarations and conventions... cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue are not considered as important dimensions or elements of sustainable development. The relation between culture and sustainable development is still unclear: the principles of cultural diversity, or intercultural dialogue, or creativity, are not mainstreamed in policies for sustainable development. In brief, culture is a marginal component of sustainable development. (Could it be different? For decades -better to say, centuries- most human societies have considered cultural diversity as a threat to the future of the group or the nation.)

*Eppur si muove.* The debates on the relation between culture, local communities and sustainable development are gaining ground on the agenda. Cities and local governments are mainstreaming culture in their urban policies. Examples of institutional innovation are being developed by local governments and civil society. Area-based development processes cannot neglect their cultural dimension any more.

This report describes some of these examples of institutional innovation, with some emphasis (as suggested by Unesco) on cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue.

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## Framework

In January 2009 the Committee on culture of United Cities and Local Governments – UCLG, chaired by the City of Barcelona, was commissioned by the Division of Cultural Policies and Intercultural Dialogue of UNESCO to contribute to the “new cultural policy profile” process, which was defined as follows (quotes from the Concept Note provided by the Division of Cultural Policies and Intercultural Dialogue):

- The new cultural policy profile that UNESCO is framing will therefore address the challenges of sustainable development and peace through a dual approach: one, to develop the cultural sector per se (i.e. heritage, creativity, cultural industries, crafts, cultural tourism), notably by responding to needs for legislation, training in cultural administration, mediation and management of cultural resources; and two, to ensure that culture has its rightful place in all development policies, particularly those related to education, science, communication, environment and social cohesion.
- The new profile intends to propose innovative concepts, planning approaches and flexible strategic infrastructure to provide new orientation in the field of public policy design and programming for sustainable development and mutual understanding based on due consideration of cultural diversity principles and intercultural dialogue, notably as they are now reflected in an internationally recognized body of standard-setting instruments related to culture.
- The new cultural policy profile shall nurture a new public debate on cultural policies taking into account the dialectic relationship between cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. It intends to capture and bring into dialogue the new ways in which policies and action address today’s cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue challenges, the “new” language used in this regard in the different institutions, research communities, countries and regions.
- The new cultural policy profile will thus offer a useful tool for policy makers as well as all public institutions and civil society actors to translate principles of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue into national policy options and concrete initiatives.

It was agreed that the contribution from UCLG’s Committee on culture would be a brief report, that could be seen as an “update” of the report the Committee issued in 2006 on “Local policies for cultural diversity”, which was published as “Report 1” in our collection (see [www.agenda21culture.net](http://www.agenda21culture.net)). On 5<sup>th</sup> April 2009 a “circular 26” was sent to all members of our UCLG’s Committee on culture asking for contributions and suggestions in order to complete such a report. Our draft report was presented at a Unesco seminar on 6-8 July 2009 in Paris with all the organisations that were contributing to the process. We are grateful to Elisenda Belda, Marie-Eve Bonneau, Pascale Bonniel-Chalier, Jean-Robert Choquet, Kim Dunphy, Nancy Duxbury, Irena Guidikova, Julie Hervé, José-Ramón Insa, Eduard Miralles, Joëlle Oudard and Hector Pose for their critical and useful comments to the draft version of the report. After the seminar, some weeks were granted to finalise the report. The document you are reading is the executive version of the final report. The final report is available in English at [www.agenda21culture.net](http://www.agenda21culture.net).

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## Main results

A. THE REPORT SUGGESTS THE NEW ROLE OF CULTURE IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IS ABOUT INCLUDING A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE IN ALL PUBLIC POLICIES.

Any other answer seems reductive. “Culture in sustainable development” is not only about “using artists to raise concern on climate change” or about “building cultural venues that are efficient in the use of energy and natural resources”. It is not only about the income that cultural industries can bring to the economy. It is not about “asking more” to the cultural circles. These are very important questions that need to be addressed, but they do not articulate the core question. The role of culture in sustainable development is mainly about including a cultural perspective in all public policies. It is about guaranteeing that any sustainable development process has a soul. This is the core question.

B. THE REPORT SUGGESTS THAT A NEW CULTURAL POLICY PROFILE COULD BE BASED ON THE ARGUMENT OF CULTURE AS THE FOURTH PILLAR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

Cultural policies are becoming too important for the society not to receive an equal treatment to other spheres of governance (the economy, social equity and the environment). The concepts that cultural policies articulate (which are the intrinsic values of culture: memory, creativity, diversity, dialogue, rituality, etc.) are too important (for an individual and for a society) not to be allowed to have the capacity to influence the mainstream processes that shape the futures of our societies, at a global and a local level. A critical mass of researchers in several countries around the world (mainly Australia, Canada and Europe) is already using this image. Some cities are articulating their policies for culture around this image, mainly those that are connected to UCLG’s Committee on culture and its declaration *Agenda 21 for culture*.

C. THE REPORT SUGGESTS THAT AN EFFORT IS MADE BY HEGEMONIC WESTERN CULTURES TO DISCUSS THE MEANING OF THE RELATION BETWEEN CULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

The meaning of the concept “culture” in non-European languages is not well known. The Western paradigm for culture (based on fragmentation and instrumentalisation) is worth deconstructing. Could we perhaps discover that “culture” means “live” in many languages and cultures? Would we perhaps discover that a “cultural policy”, formulated in most of the languages of the world, should per se contribute to sustainable development?

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D. THE REPORT EMBRACES THE CULTURAL DIVERSITY *MOMENTUM* BY  
WARNS ABOUT THE LIMITS OF INSTITUTIONALITY.

The approval of UNESCO's Declaration and Convention on Cultural Diversity has created this *momentum*. But the institutionality has its limits. The task of deconstructing / reconstructing collective identities (that implicitly cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue entails) is very difficult for the vast majority of nation states. Unless the civil society articulates a global movement for cultural rights, cultural diversity or intercultural dialogue, there will not be substantial progress.

E. THE REPORT SUGGESTS THAT ANY NEW CULTURAL POLICY PROFILE  
SHOULD RELY ON THE COMPETENCES AND THE CAPACITIES OF CITIES  
AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS.

Cities cannot defend teleological discourses on the "cultural identity" of their citizens, as nation-states do (or used to do). Cities have always been the point of destination of immigrants, who, after a few years, become inhabitants and citizens. The identity of cities is obviously dynamic: it has always balanced the expression of traditional cultures with the creation of new cultural forms. Citizens request democracy at a local level, services delivered with efficiency, processes that are transparent, a facilitating local government, a city as an open-ended system... A city that creates new meaning with its inhabitants. Cities are ready to act in the world today both with the universalistic formula "think global, act local", and also with its diversalist complement "think local, act global". The process of elaboration, and implementation, of a new cultural policy profile needs the involvement of cities.

F. THE REPORT OFFERS SEVERAL EXAMPLES OF INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION  
IN THE RELATION BETWEEN CULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

The examples have been obtained after a process of consultation with some members of the Committee on culture of UCLG and an analysis of recent bibliography in the field. Examples include (1) cities such as Genève, Montréal, Barcelona or Lille, (2) provincial governments such as the Québec, (3) organisations such as the Council of Europe or the European Commission, and (4) networks such as Eurocities, the Cultural Development Network of Victoria or the Observatory of Cultural Policies in Africa.

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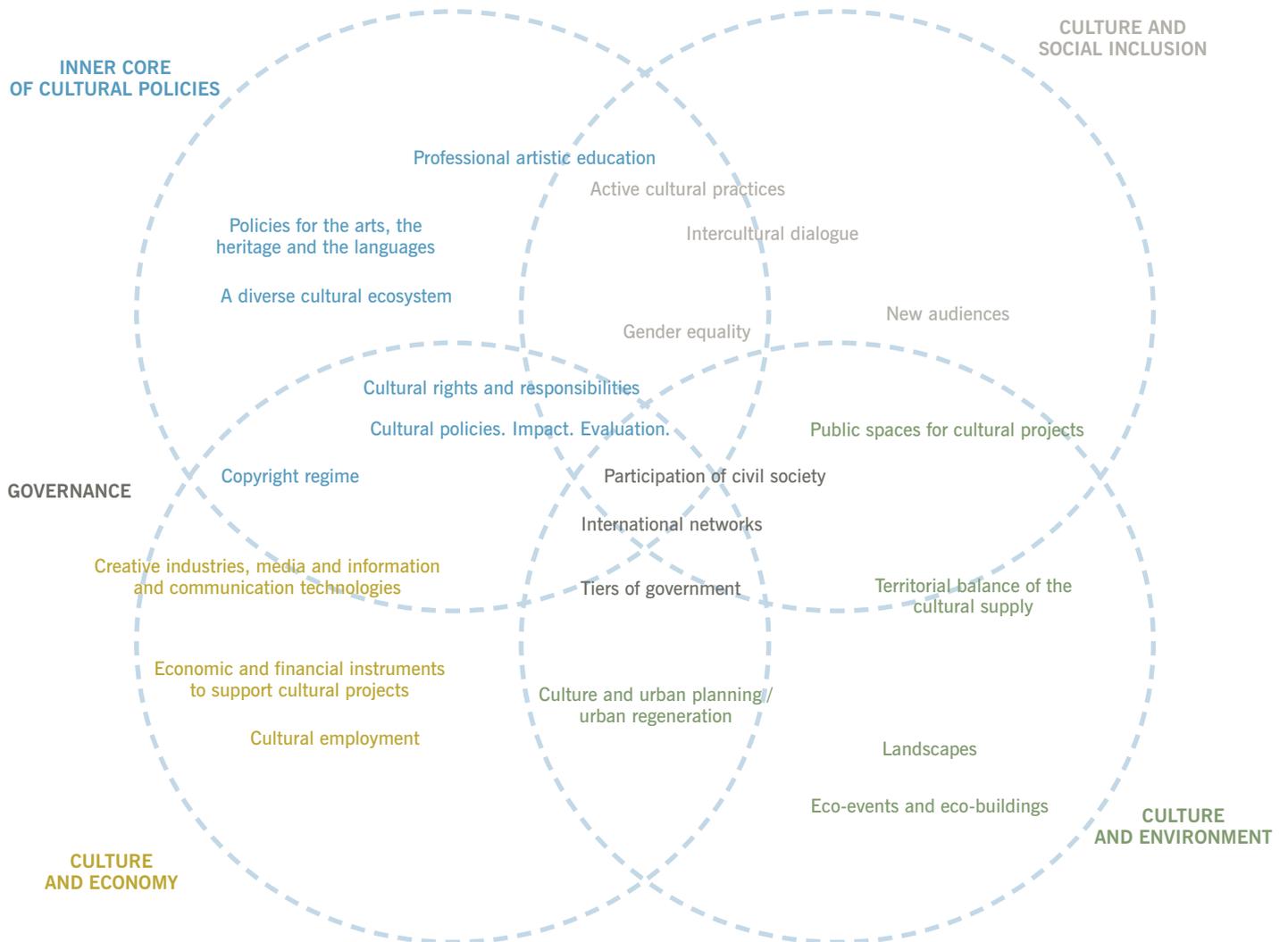
G. THE REPORT SUGGESTS THE NEW CULTURAL POLICY PROFILE IS BASED ON THE ARGUMENT OF THE FOURTH PILLAR, AND IT GIVES TEN REASONS.

These are the ten reasons: (1) It is a new argument. (2) It offers a wide picture that does not instrumentalise culture; (3) It preserves the intrinsic values of culture (memory, creativity, diversity, dialogue, rituality, ...) as the core. (4) It fosters the connection between cultural and ecological stakeholders. (5) It contributes to linking culture to social actors. (6) It considers cultural and creative industries as priorities. (7) It empowers the cultural sector. (8) It leads to the involvement of civil society in the elaboration and implementation of policies. (9) It entails the growing importance of culture in international relations, cooperation and diplomacy. (10) It is a clear and beautiful image.

H. THE REPORT SUGGESTS THE NEW CULTURAL POLICY PROFILE HAS FIVE MAIN CHAPTERS AND INCLUDES TWENTY-ONE POLICY DOMAINS.

An organisational chart for the proposal is provided in annex.

# Annex 1. Organisational chart for the proposal of a new cultural policy profile



Source: Own elaboration, following to the results of the report “Culture and sustainable development: examples of institutional innovation and proposal of a new cultural policy profile”.



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