

# HABITAT III POLICY DIALOGUE ON “URBAN SOCIO-CULTURAL FRAMEWORK”

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Good morning, everyone.

I would like to sincerely thank [UN-Habitat](#) and [UNESCO](#) for the opportunity to participate in this “Policy Dialogue” on “Urban Socio-Cultural Framework”.

Before starting this brief presentation I would also like to thank the citizens of Quito for the warm welcome they have extended to the participants in the [Habitat 3](#) conferences.

I will give the speech in Spanish, one of the official languages of the Republic of Ecuador.

I want to acknowledge the indigenous peoples of Ecuador, who treasure a unique relationship between culture and territory, especially speakers of the indigenous languages, some of which are severely threatened.

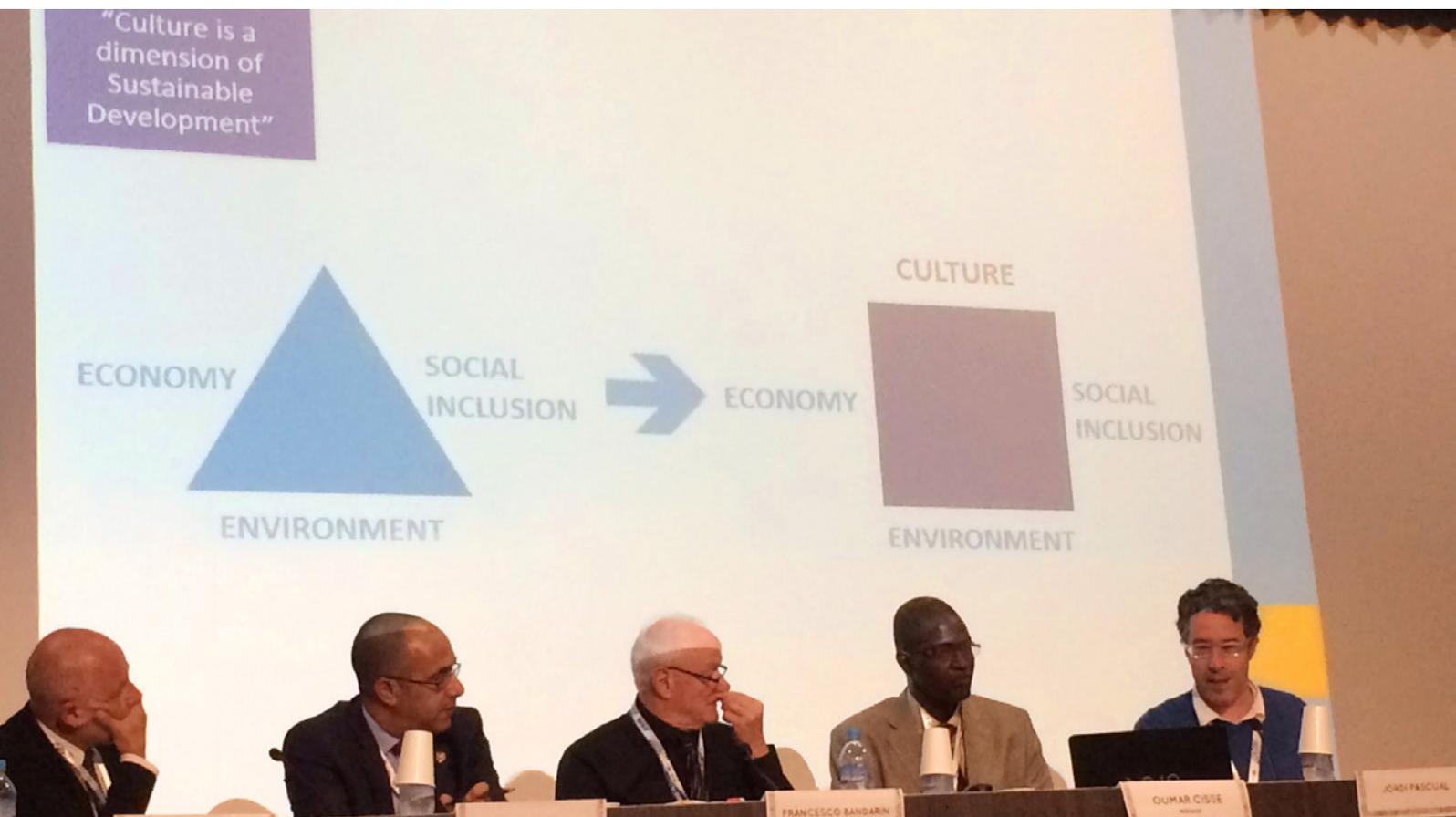
This talk will be made up of four parts. First, I will explain from what organisation I speak. In the second, I will tell you the narrative we use to explain “Culture in Sustainable Cities”. In the third, I will present some elements to operationalise this relationship. Finally, in the fourth part, I will attempt to share some observations on the role of culture in the New Urban Agenda.

I will also share some slides with you.

## 1.

I am the coordinator for the [United Cities and Local Governments \(UCLG\) Committee on Culture](#). The United Cities and Local Governments (or United Cities) organisation is akin to a UN for cities. It is an organisation that fights for more and better local democracy, for local governments that work closer with their citizens and with civil society, and which cooperate through international networks to establish a globalisation that promotes diversity.

UCLG works for culture through a [Committee](#) led by 11 cities around the world, with a foundational document called [Agenda 21 for culture](#), approved in 2004.



## 2.

The narrative UCLG uses to explain “Culture in Sustainable Cities” is simple.

First, you’ll note that we use “in” rather than “for” or the adjoining “and”. We believe that cultural topics form an essential part of any process that progresses a society toward a better future. As a result, “culture in sustainable cities” is more apt.

We also believe that the current triangular (economic, social and ecological) paradigm of sustainable development or sustainability (I am aware that these two concepts are not equivalent, but I do not have the time to elaborate, so please pardon this)

- does not describe the reality cities face,
- nor the reality of the world.

By not explaining it, it does not help to transform it.

Presently, the current triangle for sustainable development, cultural topics (which have a lot to do with memory and heritage, creativity, ritual, diversity, and critical knowledge) are either ignored or instrumentalised, and are always considered secondary or subordinated to other causes.

In the current paradigm, there is no route for cultural topics. Our narrative is different.

We believe we have to fight for a change in this paradigm to include culture as a fourth pillar of sustainable development.

Simple.

We consider culture to be a dimension, pillar, or axis of sustainable development, and it should be treated with the same attention that economic, social, and ecological pillars are, on both local and international levels.

We believe that a narrative that explicitly includes culture in this way makes it possible to develop and transform our cities and, with them, the whole world. This helps us sculpt a more democratic, open, and responsible future geared towards the expansion of freedoms of every individual.



In considering culture as a dimension of sustainable development, it must be done without any hierarchy or subordination under the already existing economic, social, and ecological dimensions.

Therefore it is vital that we urgently let culture have its own voice in the debate on sustainable development.

In 2009 we published a [report](#) which detailed ten specific reasons for changing the current paradigm, from the triangle to a square.

Today, there would surely be even more.

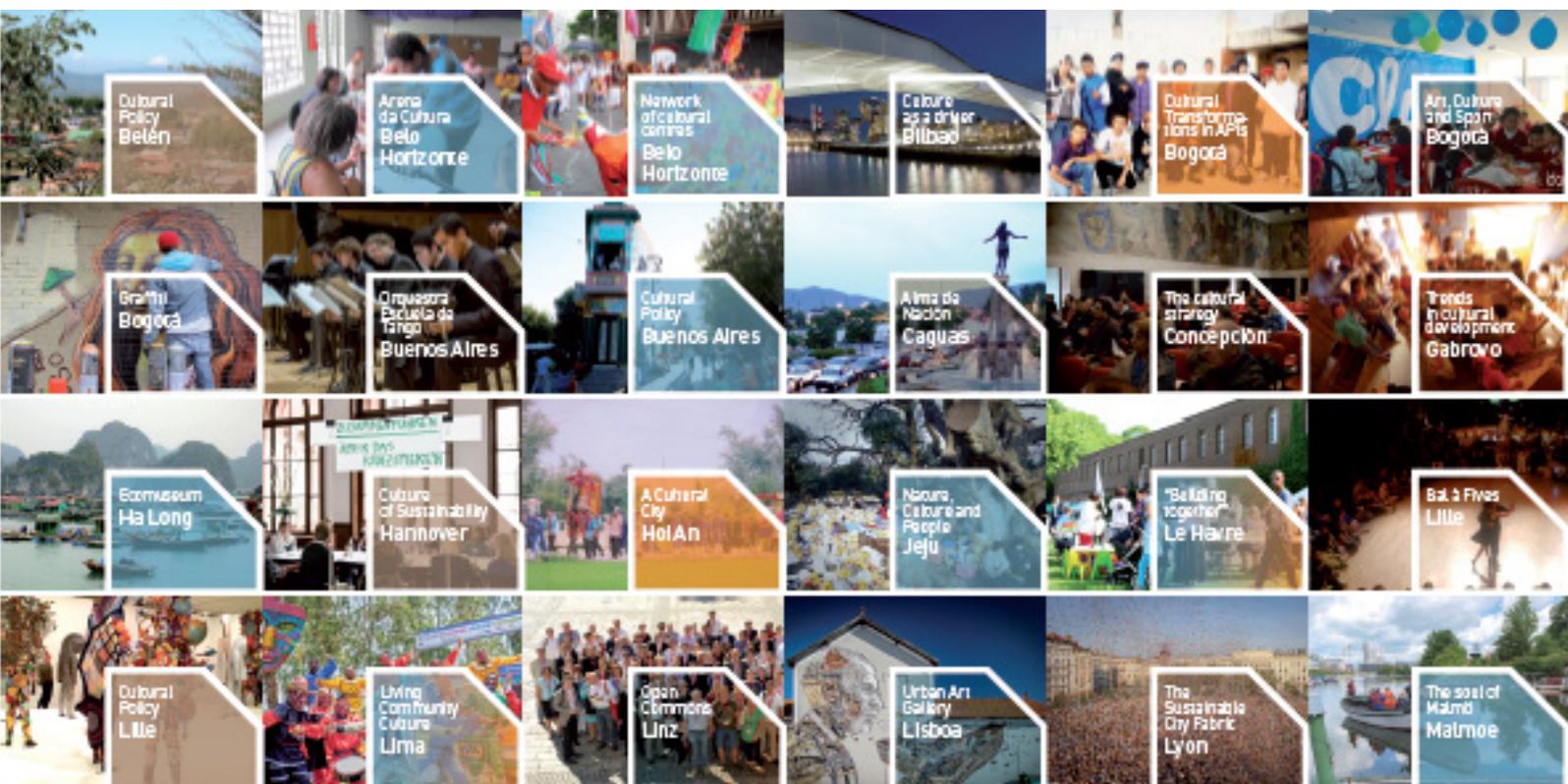
Since I do not have time to outline them all, I will concentrate on just two:

- a. In proposing culture as a pillar, or dimension, it reconnects the current three pillars. This reconnection allows the paradigm to be “localised” and “civilised”. That is, it focuses development on local factors and gives greater prominence to civil society.
- b. By not exploiting culture, and placing it at the highest level of dialogue on the future of a society, this approach can empower actors in the “cultural sectors” (without whom transformational change is not possible). Above all, this empowers people who need cultural capacities to understand and transform the world. The “leave no one behind” principle implies working in-depth with cultural issues.

In 2010, at its tri-annual congress held in Mexico City, UCLG unanimously approved a policy paper called “[Culture is the Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development](#)”, which still remains in effect.

The international community urgently, and seriously, needs to address the debate on the role of culture in sustainable development.

We are asking, here, to “repoliticise” the role of culture in sustainable development, namely by publicising and returning cultural issues to the great debate over what we want for the future of both our cities and our societies.



This narrative cannot only be an intellectual. Indeed, this is not the cornerstone that automatically allows for cultural issues to be duly considered. No.

Above all, in this approach it is important for cultural sectors to analyse their limitations, challenges, and problems. It requires us to be more critical of ourselves, as the people and organisations that we are a part of, or we identify with, as cultural actors.

There is much work to be done, as much in concept as in practice.

In the conceptual side, there remain complex arguments and myths that we must dismantle. These arguments are used to minimise and devalue the role of culture in sustainable development. Examples of some conceptual problems: (a) that a lack of a relationship persists between culture and human rights, (b) that the relationship between economy and culture prevails, (c) that it continues an approach to culture as a “good in and of itself”, as if there were no conflict or tension in this area.

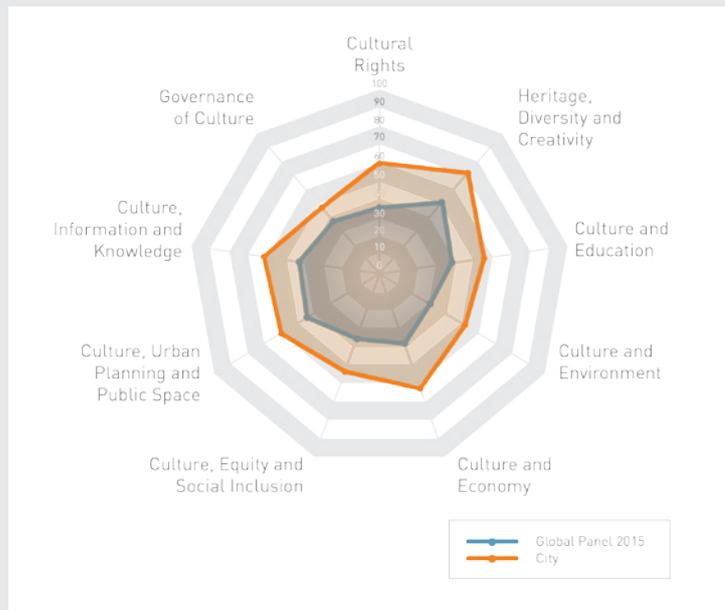
On the practical side, in reality, across cities I know their cultural sectors: (a) show a tendency towards elitism, (b) are often facing internal quarrels that prevent them from speaking with one voice, (c) fail to document their impact, and are not adequately accountable or transparent, (d) have no specific policies on culture, access and internet (e) large cultural institutions including museums, festivals or auditoriums still do not place the active participation of citizens at the centre of their programmes and their projects.

Cultural policies are not usually focused on people. They are not people-centred. Rather, cultural policies are not yet aimed at effectively promoting the right to culture as a fundamental human right.

We need to carry out this self-criticism in both the conceptual and practical sides.

We need a new local governance of culture.

In the article we signed along with Nancy Duxbury, Jordi Baltà, and Jyoti Hosagrahar for the UNESCO Global Report on Culture for Sustainable Cities, called “[Culture: Urban Future](#)”, which by the way will be presented this afternoon in Quito, we analyse these issues in more detail. I refer to this article in case anyone would like to take this speech in that direction.



### 3.

So, how does UCLG, along with Agenda 21 for culture, establish “Culture in Sustainable Cities” in practice?

We use a very practical document, useful for cities and local government who wish to work in depth on this topic. This document details 9 commitments and 100 very concrete, viable, and transformative actions. We call this toolkit, or manual, “[Culture 21 Actions](#)”.

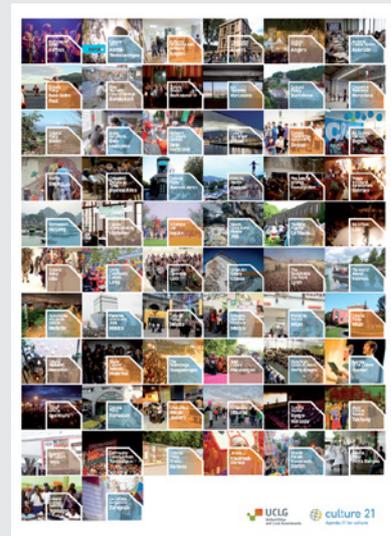
The 9 areas we work in are: (1) Cultural Rights. (2) Heritage, Diversity, and Creativity. (3) Culture and Education. (4) Culture and Environment. (5) Culture and Economy. (6) Culture, Equity, and Social Inclusion. (7) Culture, Urban Planning, and Public Space. (8) Culture, Information, and Knowledge. (9) Governance of Culture.

In each city within our network, we work with actors related to the cultural policies of a city, including the local government as well as civil society. In this way, our capacity-building and learning programmes include: (a) self-assessment of the local reality, (b) exchanges and peer-learning between cities, (c) transformative local actions, (d) communication, and (e) identifying good practices.

One of the results of this programme is this radar-shaped graphic.

We are currently working in around 30 cities, like Cuenca (here in Ecuador), Izmir, Lisbon, or Jeju. You can find more complete information on the pages for [leading cities](#) and [pilot cities](#) on our website.

I would like to welcome Antoine Guibert, Enrique Glockner, and Lucina Jiménez, who are here today. They are part of our team of experts, along with Serhan Ada, Jordi Baltà, Catherine Cullen, and Beatriz Garcia. Thanks. It’s a pleasure working with you.



At UCLG, with Agenda 21 for culture, we also organise:

- In even-numbered years, the “[UCLG International Award – City of Mexico - Culture 21](#)”, which recognises cities and individuals. The award attracted the attention of 56 candidates in its first year (2014) and of 83 candidates in the second (2016).
- In the odd years, our important “general meeting” of our network takes place. It includes the cities and all the actors involved in the role of culture in a sustainability and a globalisation which we want to be more citizen-oriented and more democratic. As a result, in 2015 we organised the [Bilbao Summit](#) and we invite you to join us at the [Jeju Summit](#) from the 10th to the 13th of May, 2017.
- A [good practices](#) programme, with some 120 well-documented examples.
- A line of communication with very visual biweekly [info](#) and a heavy social media presence.



#### 4.

I would not want to end this presentation without highlighting the work of international advocacy we are carrying out with UCLG, with Agenda 21 for culture.

In the period between 2013-2015, we fought so that cultural issues were included in the 2030 Agenda and in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

- We promoted a global coalition, called “The Future We Want Includes Culture”, also known as the [#culture2015goal](#), formed by cultural networks of nations, cities, and various parts of civil society.
- We published four documents that included: (a) how there could be a “Goal” dedicated to culture in the SDGs; (b) what the “Targets” linked to culture in the SDGs could be; (c) which “Indicators” would be the most appropriate, (d) a conclusive document.
- These four documents can be downloaded from [this page](#) on our website.

The title of the final document of this campaign was “Culture in the SDG Outcome Document: Progress made but important steps remain ahead”. It shows that we are not too satisfied with the results achieved.

Between 2014-2016 we fought so that the New Urban Agenda was explicit and effective in the issues dealing with the role of culture in sustainable cities. We were present at the three Habitat 3 preparatory committees, drafted [this position paper](#) (with several of the [#culture2015goal](#) coalition’s networks) and were active in the “[Policy Unit](#)” dedicated to the “Urban Socio-Cultural Framework”.

The result is uneven.

We believe that the [New Urban Agenda](#), which will be approved in Quito this week, is a significant document because:

- In the “declaration” or foreword, it contains several interesting mentions of cultural development (par 4), cultural diversity (par 10), and cultural expressions (par 13).
- There are several positive phrases in the implementation plan.
- Firstly, some sentences related to cultural services, for inclusion and mutual understanding (par 26, 34, and 37).
- There is recognition of the contribution by heritage and cultural industries to economic development (par 45 and 60).
- Some interesting sentences are devoted to the role of natural and cultural heritage as key elements in integrated urban policies (par 38).



- In what is surely the most concrete mention, it calls for the due consideration of heritage and culture in urban planning and design (par 97, 124, and 125).
- It engages indigenous peoples and local communities in the promotion and dissemination of knowledge of tangible and intangible cultural heritage and protection of traditional expressions and languages, including through the use of new technologies and techniques (par 125).

However, the New Urban Agenda remains a weak document because:

- Culture is not recognised as the fourth pillar of sustainable development.
- There is no chapter dedicated to cultural issues.
- There is no mention of creativity, the arts, rituality, critical knowledge, nor the relationship between culture, access and the internet. Today, all of these issues are fundamental parts of urban life.
- Some transversal elements of urban policies, such as the relationship between culture and education, or between culture and tourism, are also missing.

(A side note, but important. In the [Alternative Habitat 3](#) debates, whose schedule is full of content as interesting, if not more so, than the official programme, and which is simultaneously taking place over the next few days in Quito, cultural themes are not very present.)

## 5.

These are the Sustainable Development Goals we have.

And this is the New Urban Agenda we will have.

After these documents we will need to work.

And we shall work.

I wanted to end with a call to action. Local and global.

- We need solid local platforms for culture that include civil society, cultural institutions, local governments, and other actors.
- We need strong global connectivity in the area of culture, such that it brings civil society and cities together with UNESCO, other United Nations agencies, and national governments.

Please, don't sit back and watch these processes from the stands. Start today. Connect with these debates and become very active in these networks. Get up on stage.

Thanks.

## CONTACTS

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The Committee on Culture of UCLG is co-chaired by Buenos Aires and Mexico City, and Vice-Chaired by Angers, Belo Horizonte, Barcelona, Bilbao, Bogotá, Jeju, Paris and Porto Alegre.



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