

UNESCO Congress of Hangzhou "Culture: Key to Sustainable Development" KEY MESSAGES OF UCLG

The International Congress "[Culture: Key to Sustainable Development](#)" will be held in Hangzhou (China) from 15 May to 17 May 2013. This is the first International Congress specifically focusing on the linkages between culture and sustainable development organized by UNESCO since the Stockholm Conference in 1998. As such, the Congress will provide the very first global forum to discuss the role of culture in sustainable development in view of the post-2015 development framework, with participation of the global community and the major international stakeholders.

We celebrate that UNESCO organizes this international congress and we would like to explicitly recognize the leadership of UNESCO in this crucial issue.

A high level delegation of UCLG will be present in Hangzhou. The Committee on culture of UCLG has prepared this document to assist members and partners to contribute to Hangzhou.

BACKGROUND

United Cities and Local Governments played an important role in this decade to promote the role of culture in sustainable development. A few landmarks follow.

- In 2004, United Cities and Local Governments adopted the [Agenda 21 for culture](#), a declaration with 67 articles that describes the relationship between local cultural policies and human rights, governance, sustainable development, participatory democracy and peace. The Agenda 21 for culture was the first worldwide document establishing principles and commitments by cities and local governments for cultural development. More than 450 cities, local governments and organizations from all over the world are linked to Agenda 21 for culture.

- In 2010, United Cities and Local Governments approved the document "[Culture: Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development](#)" in its World Congress held in the City of Mexico. This document engages local governments to explicitly include culture in the model of development that 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. Operationally, the document points to the relation between culture and sustainable development through a dual approach: developing a solid cultural policy (culture as a driver of development) and advocating a cultural dimension in all public policies (culture as an enabler of development).

- In 2012, United Cities and Local Governments was present in the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and was leading the advocacy for the role of culture in sustainable development. The Committee on culture of UCLG recently published a report on [Rio+20 and culture](#), which analyses in detail the Outcome Document, explains why it is insufficient and suggests a better alignment of the strategies of the actors concerned on the role of culture in sustainable development.

- In 2013, United Cities and Local Governments convened a [Global Taskforce of Local & Regional Governments for Post-2015 and Habitat III](#). This Taskforce represents the world-wide municipal movement. The Taskforce presented a document to the High Level Panel on Post-2015 Development Agenda which includes “culture as driver and enabler of development and people-centered societies”.

- United Cities and Local Governments, with its [Committee on culture](#), has created a unique platform, which gathers together cities, organizations and networks that foster the relation between local cultural policies and sustainable development. The Committee is chaired by Lille-Métropole and co-chaired by Buenos Aires, Mexico and Montreal and it has members and partners in all continents.

CULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The international community is debating the “**Development Agenda post-2015**”, the **new paradigm** which will define development policies and programmes for the decades to come. The international community has agreed that the development approach followed so far, despite the progress made, has exposed its limits. As the UN Secretary-General Mr Ban Ki Moon stated, “we cannot continue to burn and consume our way to prosperity” while poverty and inequalities continue to increase. It has become apparent that a transformative change is required and that “business as usual” is not an option.

Culture must be brought to the stage. A critical mass of the international community is convinced that, contrary to a view of culture as ‘decorative’ or secondary to sustainable development, mainstreaming and integrating culture within development efforts are crucial to tackle a large number of these global challenges more effectively and sustainably.

It is very important to make a clearer statement on some recurrent ‘myths’ regarding the relationship between culture and development. It has sometimes been suggested that an emphasis on cultural differences and the continuity of traditions would necessarily lead to social and political conflicts, be incompatible with the exercise of human rights, perpetuate inefficient governance and thus hamper development. It has also been stated that some cultures are inherently less likely than others to foster developmental progress, for instance, in terms of democracy and economic development.

Myths exist, but reality is different. In fact, there is no evidence that **cultural diversity** in itself results in fragmentation and conflict, or that some cultures are incompatible with sustainable development, human rights and good governance. UNESCO promotes human rights as guarantees of cultural diversity: the Universal Declaration of 2001 on Cultural diversity clearly states that “no one may invoke cultural diversity to infringe upon human rights guaranteed by international law, nor to limit their scope.” On the one hand, the dynamic nature of cultures, constantly evolving in relation to the environment and changing societies, enables people to adapt their values and practices to overcome previous obstacles and limitations. On the other hand, acknowledging diversity should not be understood as raising barriers between communities, but on the contrary promoting the capability of individuals, men and women, to live and to be what they choose, within an increasingly complex world, by guaranteeing their access to a wide range of cultural assets and expressions. **Poverty**, it should be stressed, is not just a question of material conditions and income, but also of lack of capabilities and opportunities, including in cultural terms.

The truth is that **development rooted in culture and sensitive to local context is in fact the only one which is likely to be sustainable**. As Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen explains, “cultural matters are integral parts of the lives we lead. If development can be seen as enhancement of our living standards, then efforts geared to development can hardly ignore the world of culture”.

Today, development means freedom, widening the choices, putting human beings - children, men and women- at the centre of the future.

- Culture boosts the economic dimension: it generates income and employment, it is the engine of many development processes and it has impact on entrepreneurship, new technologies and tourism. Culture brings creativity and innovation to the economy.
- Culture is linked to the social dimension: it is the accelerator of resilience and rootedness, it gives tools to fight against poverty, it facilitates participation of citizens, intercultural dialogue and equality of rights.
- Culture embraces the environmental dimension because it explains the identities and raises awareness on ecological responsibility.
- Culture brings its intrinsic values to development: creativity, heritage, knowledge and diversity. A holistic and integrated approach to development will only be achieved when these values are explicit and operationalized.

A Development Agenda cannot be successfully implemented if only three pillars (economy, social inclusion and environment) are considered. This 20th century paradigm is not useful to understand the world of today: these three dimensions alone do not reflect the complexity of our current societies. Moreover, today it is fully acknowledged that a paradigm that aims to *transform* the world must provide operational tools to improve freedoms and welfare. A three-pillar paradigm fails because it lacks a soul, the values, practices and expressions providing coherence and meaning to development in cities, nations and in our existence as human beings: culture.

Culture is about creativity, heritage, knowledge and diversity. These values are intrinsically connected to human development and freedoms. These values are being recognised as the **cultural dimension** (or the fourth pillar) of sustainable development at local, national and international level. (For further explanation, see our Report to UNESCO on [Culture and Sustainability](#).)

Successful local policies based on the image of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development can be implemented with two complementary strategies (a) Culture as the driver of sustainable development: culture is fully integrated into governance, with the elaboration and the implementation of an explicit cultural policy, in close cooperation with civil society, and based on the needs and the expectations of inhabitants. (b) Culture as the enabler of sustainable development: policies capitalize culture's contribution to the economy, the social cohesion and the environmental balance, with the assessment of the cultural impact of these policies based on measurable targets and indicators.

THE TIME IS NOW

The **Millennium declaration** and the **Millennium Development Goals** were approved in 2000. Since that year, the international community has approved important documents (international benchmarks and standard-setting documents) to boost the relation between culture and development.

UNESCO approved the [Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity](#) (2001) and the [Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions](#) (2005). The Outcome Document of the **2010 MDG Summit**, published ten years after the Millennium Declaration, emphasized the importance of culture for development and its contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. These crucial messages were reiterated in two consecutive "Culture and Development" **UN General Assembly Resolutions** in 2010 (65/166) and 2011 (66/208), which called for the mainstreaming of culture into development policies and strategies, and underscored culture's intrinsic contribution to sustainable development.

Despite these significant advances, there is not yet a shared recognition that all development strategies and programmes, at global, regional and local levels, should

integrate culture. **This recognition has to be achieved in 2015.** The next generation of global, regional and national policy frameworks must explicitly integrate culture within its goals, indicators and targets. Without this recognition, without explicit integration of culture, without concrete political actions and guidance, the potential of culture to contribute to sustainable development will remain largely untapped in all regions of the world. UNESCO has recently published a [Thematic Think Piece on “Culture as a driver and as an enabler of sustainable development”](#).

The next two years –and especially the Congress of Hangzhou– will provide a unique window of opportunity to **make sure that culture is given adequate consideration in the post-2015 development agenda**, with the revision of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the elaboration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

KEY MESSAGES IN HANGZHOU

Our messages in Hangzhou are summarised in the following key points:

(1) The new UN development agenda post-2015 should be one (integrating all processes: MDGs and SDGs), and universal at the same time that it recognizes differentiated responsibilities. It should **acknowledge local and regional governments** as a specific sphere of government and as key actors of development building on their proven contribution to innovative solutions addressing global and local challenges.

(2) The UN development agenda post-2015 should include an explicit reference to **culture as fourth pillar of sustainable development**. Culture is about creativity, heritage, knowledge and diversity. These values are intrinsically connected to human development and freedoms. These values are being recognised as the cultural dimension (or the fourth pillar) of sustainable development at local, national and international level.

(3) The new Development Goals should be limited in number, very concise and simple, integrating the fundamental principles of sustainable development (human rights, equality and sustainability), based on measurable indicators and reinforcing the commitment to cooperation. In this respect, we support that **a specific Goal on “culture and sustainable development”** is agreed, and several targets and measurable indicators on creativity, heritage, knowledge and diversity are designed. This proposed Development Goal would aim at enlarging people’s capability to “lead the lives they have reason to value” through full participation in cultural life.

(4) All actors concerned by the relation between culture and sustainable development should work more closely together. An **alignment of strategies and the implementation of effective advocacy and lobby actions should be promoted in order to achieve this Goal** among key international organisations, nations, cities and civil society actors.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Please consider using this document and its arguments if you attend Hangzhou
- Please disseminate and spread this document.

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