



# CONTRIBUTION OF ANGERS TO A NEW AGENDA 21 FOR CULTURE

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*Collaborative work from the **City of Angers.***

15 March 2014

*“Our Agenda 21 for Cultures reveals the democratic potential of our territory while acting as a powerful catalyst for innovation and mobilization.”*



In 2008, the city of Angers took on the original text of the *Agenda 21 for Culture* with the goal of consolidating and broadening a sustainable development policy that had already been in effect since the beginning of the 1990s. We adapted it to the unique needs of our situation by carrying out a plan that had the active participation of city residents to draft, initiate and evaluate the cultural policies.

This collaboratively designed project is the fruit of two types of contact between the public (residents, local associations and cultural organizations) and the city (including both elected officials and municipal employees):

- Town-hall style meetings open to all based on open debate and the principle of “one person, one voice.”
- A partnership to coordinate the execution and implementation of the plan.

This dialog allowed for a collectively defined, inclusive definition of culture that recognizes each person as a bearer of culture and an agent in the evolution of his or her region.

Our “commitment charter,” collectively developed with the input of more than 400 city residents, was adopted in 2011 and is the keystone of the entire process. It defines the issues at hand, adapts them to our local context and delineates processes on how to address these considerations. This road map not only reconciles our goal of questioning cultural policy with the changes our society is facing, but also our willingness to recognize culture as a powerful tool for social, environmental and economic development. Our project faces social and societal changes and technological advances with the goal of promoting harmony between residents, multicultural collaboration and the recognition of each individual. These principles are in direct opposition to the gradual degradation of community and individual identities, isolationism and individualism. By recognizing cultures as a shared resource, a catalyst for social bonds and force in public policy, we have committed ourselves to an *Agenda 21 for Cultures of the Territory of Angers*.

The result of collective effort, our *Agenda 21 for Cultures* has been operational since 2012. Numerous actors collaborate to develop collective actions. For example, artist collectives are being formed with a spirit of mutual aid and solidarity. Meanwhile, companies are working to reduce the environmental impact of their projects. Also, multidisciplinary projects combine scientific, artistic and participatory approaches with the goal of reconciling city residents and the natural world. In addition, these projects aim to represent the territory and redefine a new rapport between the city and its individual neighborhoods.

The plans of action are implemented in different institutions following guidelines from the initial plan of the City of Angers, unanimously voted in by the city council in June of 2013. With 48 actions, the plan places culture at the forefront of public policy and encourages collaboration between these policies. It also defines the policy goals of guaranteeing space for artistic creation and cultural expression, which are considered



essential for the development of our city since they encourage democratic debate and the dynamic meeting of ideas.

Our *Agenda 21 for Cultures* reveals the democratic potential of our territory while acting as a powerful catalyst for innovation and mobilization. Our approach is dynamic in nature and strives to take into account changes that must be made along the way. A new equilibrium in the practice of representative and participatory democracy is being defined. Both spaces for and modes of expression should be strengthened to permit citizens and other actors in cultural life to be a part of the development of cultural policy. This could lead us to rethink the mission statements of cultural institutions in order to better take into account the artistic and cultural diversity of representative projects, as they are seen through the lens of Agenda 21 for Cultures and to consider these factors when questioning how funds are distributed.

Our six years of implementation have allowed us to locally adapt cultural issues to the needs of sustainable development, developing cultural practices accordingly. This shows the importance of shared experience and partnership between various actors to develop evolving local dynamics over the long term.

Thanks to the understanding gained by this experience, we support a rewriting of the *Agenda 21 for Culture* aimed at reaffirming and updating the values that connect culture and sustainable development along certain lines: cultural diversity and human rights; solidarity between cultures and generations; a diverse and responsible economy; biological diversity and climate change; international cooperation and exchange and, finally, the interdisciplinary nature of policies.

This approach leads us to consider culture, or more accurately, cultures, as a link between the greater issues in the area of sustainable development.

In support of the Committee on culture foundational text, we recommend the drafting of tools and support structures which encourage the transmission and adaptation of the future *Agenda 21 for Culture* according to the specific needs of each territory in order to explain its goals using examples of application.