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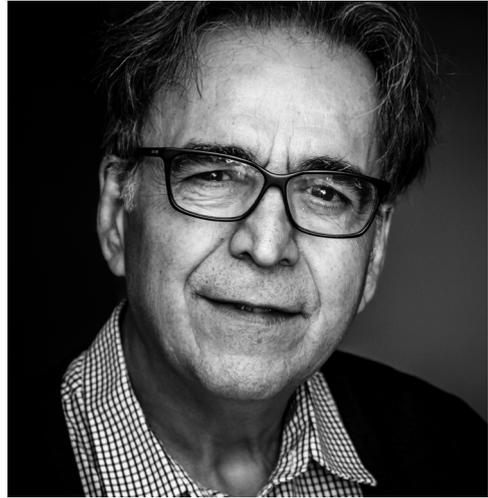
Leading City of the Agenda 21 for Culture
United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)



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NOTES ON CITY, CULTURE, AND (CULTURAL) POLICY

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I understand that every debate on culture and city needs its reflections to be understood within its current context, not just with respect to each specific city but rather within the global arena. It can be viewed within its cultural climate, denoting a specific policy environment, or the effects of the deep economic crisis we are going through. Instead this must be understood as the beginning of a new era. In an environment of historic large-scale transformation, brought about by changes in technology and globalisation, the city is once again centre stage. Although, it is quite difficult to speak of the city in general terms. Each city searches for its own path amid this uncertainty.

More globalisation and localisation have changed a city and its environment into a place where many things happen. It is a place for possibilities, but also a place for conflicts. Speaking about a city has always been synonymous with talking about its strengths and weaknesses. A city faces a number of unique perspectives on its ideal future goals and how to achieve them: Cultures of competition and collaboration, memory or heritage, but also of innovation and alternativeness. These include established, hidden, or emerging cultures. When speaking about urban culture, or a city culture, we inevitably end up talking about values, and about policies.

CITY

The concept of a city had, and still has, many meanings. A city is a specific place, with unique characteristics and differing population densities in its centre and surrounding areas. A city is a collection of things, buildings, and spaces, but different cities are made up of different elements. A city is a place for specific cultural practices. A city is a collection of social practices that are shaped over time—with a single memory and different unique memories. There is no single story, no single narrative possible for a city.

But, a city is not just a place. It is more than that. A city is home to dynamics that are not always visible. The city encompasses a large patchwork of exchanges and flows. Therefore, it is a place for intermediation and transfer. Different ideas, data, information, interests, and money flow through cities. And that's not all. Feelings are also concentrated here. A city is a stage where people live, love, suffer, and care for one another. One cannot overlook parts of a city defined by beliefs, values, and other things that

make a place unique. Something that is acceptable in one city may not be in another. What one takes pride in, another may view as negative.

A city must be able to be read, interpreted, described, and mapped in order to be discussed. In this sense, a city can adapt to its networks. Networks of urban professionals, architects, designers, artists, academics, writers, musicians, and many more, are all part of a city, and all depend on a city. In this way, we can also think of a city as a show. It is a place for major events and a concentration of large buildings. It is home to artefacts that express the different people living in this space. While it may seem contradictory, a city's spectacular nature, population flows, and density, all require large amounts of predictability and reliability. Things need to function, otherwise cities turn into inhospitable, inhabitable places.

We must also speak about memory, and memories, and therefore the city as time. Cities have been, are, and will be—past, present, and future. Cities move to

distinct rhythms, focused on one area or another. They can move quickly and slowly. They have cycles and surprises. They are places to think; places to change. Cities are history. But their unique people and their unique places have their own histories. They are never the same and never predictable, but continuous. Ultimately, as Lefebvre said, a city is a large machine of possibilities.

Here, I wish to discuss city and culture, and cultural policy from a perspective that aims to help build an open and socially just city, avoid inequality and exclusion, promote inclusion and recognition, reinforce emerging trends, and avoid dependency while simultaneously recognising essential interdependencies.

CITY CULTURE: A CITY AS A CULTURAL PRODUCT

What are we saying when we refer to culture and city? We are talking about city culture but also urban culture; about a cultural city, and about cultural policy.

We must consider and recognise ongoing flows, and the creative and destructive dynamics of any city by incorporating essential components of what make up the urban experience. This means to coexist in proximity with foreigners and fellow citizens—a coexistence mediated through social status, different genders, or place of origin. There are different cities for unique people. There is no reason to confuse a city with any preconceived idea of it. We propose a city in which visitors and actors can always exchange with each other, or rather, a city as a cultural product. Understanding culture as a process of forming, expressing, and exchanging ideas such as those that emerge from art, architecture, film, or fashion. The city is a cultural product, and a place where a large part of cultural activity unfolds. The urban nature of this cultural production and exchange is relevant for seeing culture and city within the same context.

At every turn, cities have been built by, and continue to be defined by, decisions made by those with power, money, or technology. Institutions have the obligation to regulate this dynamic through their positions of influence. However, while various plans and goals may be developed, it is ultimately the specific individuals and groups that pursue these initiatives. They improvise, follow the plan, or both. Daily life, different ways of using, incorporating, living, or capturing the city end up creating unique and specific urban cultures.

The plan for each city is determined by social, economic, and political factors. These factors are cultural, and not “natural”, in that they are thought, lived, and determined by past and present. They are ever-changing and serve different interests. How a city is perceived and lived is mediated by each person’s cultural values and their loyalties to class, ideology, or neighbourhood. A new neighbourhood, full of architecturally important buildings, can be seen as one that expresses modernity and the future, or as a way of disrupting pre-existing urban balances. Surrounding



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neighbourhoods can be seen as an expression of social disorder or as an example of community strength. Diversity characterises a city. Appropriation and resistance can be reflected in activities, and in expressions of endurance. These highlight subcultures that break from an idea of indisputable progress that predominates the vision of architects in the modern city. These are architects whose visions come from the very hierarchy that created their seemingly unquestionable professional and technical perspectives, apparently immune to the social processes of appropriation and involvement.

Jane Jacobs spoke of the city as a casual space, as a space for urban interaction, and as a space in which to weave trust. Cities depend on the cultural flows that move within them. This is expressed in their cultural production, but also in the images that emerge from this. They are sometimes dangerous places, but

also desirable. Power, money, and technology strongly influence the shape of a city. Democratising a city means creating transparency and participation in creating urban spaces and in the narratives that underpin this transformation. As a result, it is critical to examine which decisions are made from the perspective of assumptions, interests, and values.

With respect to this, Sharon Zukin said that to discuss the city is to discuss culture and power. Therefore, whose city is it? Does it belong to those who live in it? Who has the right to live there? Can we, or must we, be concerned with those excluded from the "centre", or those who do not feel represented by prevailing views? We must make these barriers visible and readable in order to re-present the city, thereby rebuilding the city as a community.

This involves seeing the city as a space where unique perspectives live together, but this fragmentation is

both a strength and a weakness. A city is a concentration of the modern world and all of its distinct perspectives. A city's symbolic nature is embodied by its "wandering" character: not only does it stroll aimlessly, but it seeks other perspectives that are unconventional or differ from those in

power. This helps prove that there are more "cultures" beyond "the culture" without forgetting that a city also depends on other places. Culture and ecology help inform the need to accept a city's fragility and dependence, rather than envelop it.

CITIES AND CULTURAL POLICY

Aside from the debate on whether there is a need for cultural policy, as institutional intervention on the creation and access of unique cultural forms and expressions, the truth is that it is impossible to imagine a city and all of its nuances without culture, in the broad sense of the word. In this way, a local government that wishes to defend the idea of a city, or to protect a set of values and ideas through its spaces and dynamics of activity, cannot forgo cultural policy. Indeed, aside from safeguarding heritage and taking care of what we would call "high enlightened culture", a programme of action should try to establish priorities, help practice values that are considered essential, redistribute costs and benefits, improve access dynamics, or recognise individuals and groups for their different practices. This helps show how the sense of urban cultural policies has evolved in recent years.

During the process of deindustrialisation, cities whose splendour was specifically linked to the industrial sector looked to the "cultural shift" for ways to recover competitive strength, and covert abandoned spaces. An "entrepreneurial city" such as this sought unique strategies to ensure that cities maintained their ability to contribute to the economy and compete worldwide. This demanded a

certain level of autonomy, and places like Hong Kong or Singapore with their city-state status were sometimes used as prime examples. To the extent that technological change combined with economic financialisation in a productive system made it less necessary to have large spaces or attract large parts of the population, the challenge was to achieve a high level of technological development in addition to highly trained and creative human capital. On the one hand, it was true that the world was becoming "flatter", or more equal in every area, but at the same time it was becoming "sharper" (Peter Hall), and in many cases cities exemplified those competing "peaks".

In this context, cultural policies have been used, and deliberately manipulated, to promote cities' economic potential, thus avoiding the "I have space available" argument as the only one used to attract outsiders. The combination of a "global city" and a "city with a strong local identity" has helped build the idea of a "destination". A "destination" is capable of offering all the advantages of a well-connected, well-prepared space to accommodate any type of business. At the same time, it is a place with specific characteristics, and its own idiosyncrasies. Culture, commerce, training, and enterprise are distinct components that have blended



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together to break down barriers and to entice new people.

In this way, the cultural components of a city have been key factors to be considered in connecting to the rest of the world and maintaining a unique identity. Therefore, it is not unusual that certain parts of the world have undergone processes of industrial restructuring and the revamping of port areas. This has taken place alongside investments in cultural infrastructure, the promotion of creative industries, artist modules, and the establishment of office spaces and innovative commercial centres. In some cases public institutions have had a relevant role in moving or establishing museums, thereby having a positive impact on their areas thanks to their iconic nature. Similarly, initiatives have been linked to major events including the Olympic Games, universal exhibitions, cultural capital, etc. All this has contributed to the development of “city brands”, which

place cities in different categories according to their characteristics, but also according to their own strategies.

Cities’ cultural policies have also sought to strengthen aggregations or clusters of creators and cultural initiatives, thus facilitating structure dynamics that help reinforce and connect different parallel cultural sectors. In other cases, the goal has been to construct new buildings or infrastructure to serve as urban icons. They managed to attract attention and made it possible to change urban trajectories that were considered obsolete. These other strategies, such as those focused on sports or the presence of a significant academic environment, have been used to showcase certain cities as global, culturally relevant spaces.

The strong and thriving industry of tourism is also important in this “cultural turn”, which shows cities as “unique” spaces to visit, using cultural



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elements that best suit what cities want to project to the world. The image that emerges tends to influence urban dynamics, creating what is known as a process of “Disneyfication”, which showcases “authentic” aspects of a culture that cater to the tastes and expectations of visitors.

In this evolution of the concept of urban culture and urban cultural policy, the idea of “creativity” has taken on an important role. From the perspective of knowledge and creativity, cities have sought to clearly define themselves as unique by offering a solid foundation for attracting visitors while remaining different. Richard Florida spoke to this very clearly through his contentious creation of the “creative class”. From his perspective, as opposed to investing more in infrastructure to attract outside investment and generate development, cities should create spaces and environments that are significantly attractive to “creators”. Their presence would be followed by

investment and development. His argument is founded on a need to establish a plurality of jobs, a desirable lifestyle, and opportunities for social interaction, as well as to empower all forms of diversity, authenticity, and a significant amount of local identity. This led to the creation of a kind of instruction manual or toolbox to help each city become “creative”, but this was not easy for many aspiring places.

A number of cities around the world have continued to build their brand and profile by using unique instruments, dipping into their history, unique facets, and by complementing or reconfiguring their existing strengths to improve their image and attractive elements. In all of these strategies, culture emerged as more of an economic asset rather than one that simply improves the capacity for action of individuals and groups, their full inclusion in urban life, and quality of life.

At their root, these trends tend to turn

the city into a place with its own needs more than simply a commodity for trade. They also use culture as an instrument for achieving that goal. Homogenising processes have not taken place everywhere equally, and it is important to see the extent to which a city's cultural policy can affect this, through a genuine creation of such policy based on values that serve the population, and through significant, comprehensive, and plural implementation. However, what must be avoided is the mere subordination of a city's cultural strategy to the extent that the city is deprived of its unique character, thereby limiting any strategic transformation.

This is not to undervalue the weight that culture has today on the development dynamics of each city, nor to omit its capacity to alter both urban spaces and social dynamics. Indeed, it is to understand that it should not prevent thinking in more comprehensive and democratic terms in its implementation and objectives. We must incorporate the richness of different conceptions of culture that coexist in metropolises, and which must be recognised without forgetting the cultures of daily life that arise out of a city's different coexisting communities. There are different cultures, just as there are different "cities" within one city.

CULTURAL POLICY

In a large city today, a cultural policy cannot be separated from a set of values that guide its objectives and support its practices. As a result, it is necessary to politicise cultural policy. This means accepting that some decisions will benefit some and harm others. There is no political option that can be left out of an unequal distribution of costs and benefits. From this perspective, any cultural policy must consider what values it wishes to promote, and what legislative goals it wants to achieve. Therefore, it is not a question of choosing between different seemingly neutral or ideal strategies. Don't we want cultural policy that strengthens the capacity of inhabitants, as well as their personal and collective autonomy? Do we understand that a cultural policy cannot be separated from dynamics of inequality that continue to grow in many cities? Do we understand that policy must therefore fix problems of access to culture, and promote the necessary redistribution of educational and cultural resources

and skills? Can we imagine a cultural policy today, amid diversity, actions, and strategies that does not begin with the necessary recognition of all aspects and dimensions of heterogeneity?

If we answer "yes" to these questions, in line with Agenda 21 for culture promoted by UCLG, we understand autonomy, equality, and diversity to be ideal values which must be present in a cultural policy that aims to contribute to social transformation processes necessary in changing times. These are "intrinsic values" that inform "institutional values" and which set limits on what Holden calls "instrumental values". Many of the characteristics that shaped industrial societies, and which were involved in shaping public policy in the second half of the 20th century, are now hopelessly in crisis. The ideas of work, family structure, types of social aggregation, vital cycles for different ages, knowledge creation, and traditional intermediation structures are all things that are



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questioned today. It seems clear that cultural debate is more necessary than ever in the construction of meaning and perspective: a cultural debate that takes sides. That is to say, one that does not avoid tackling problems caused by unequal distribution of resources to access channels for unique cultural expressions.

It is therefore necessary to overcome a view of culture that limits itself to only highlighting strictly fundamental perspectives. Rather, there are different cultural expressions that must be seen as essentially linked to the dynamics of economic development, or city promotion, such as branding, or city image. Alternatively, in this very fundamental or functional view of culture, we should include projects related to urban renewal dynamics, in which cultural initiatives like museums, art centres, opera theatres, festivals, and others, are linked to long-term urban planning operations. All of this does not imply that we pretend

to ignore the value of culture or the cultural significance of these kinds of projects, but we would like to imagine that it is possible to avoid strictly utilitarian approaches, which often end up damaging the organisation and sustainability of intended goals. From here, there is only one step left to a discussion of cultural rights. This is a step that must be taken to move beyond concepts like “cultural consumption”.

Therefore we must talk about culture and city, situating the relationship at a certain time and place. A “situated” culture involves relating current or planned actions with specific, contemporary expectations and problems. Knowing that we must consider cultural dynamics within a specific context implies an awareness of the effects they cause, and can continue to cause, precisely through the transformation of that context; in our case, of the city.

CULTURAL ACTION IN A CITY LIKE BARCELONA

Barcelona, like any other city, needs cultural policy based on specific values that aims to create links between these values, the city's current cultural actions, and the stakeholders that carry out, implement, and manage these actions. It is not about imposing values, practices, or entrenching creative processes. Not at all. It is about the city government having clear standard guidelines on these practices and cultural actors. The city is experiencing severe problems with job insecurity, a crisis of legitimacy and trust in democratic institutions, debates about identity and colonisation, the spread of xenophobia worldwide, the effects of technological change that call many spaces, groups, and jobs into question that were previously necessary, but which are no longer so. The language and terminology that were used throughout the 20th century to address many problems now seem obsolete. Today, cities are once again spaces where the severity of these problems demands creative and innovative responses. Along with other cities, Barcelona is on the front line of these issues, and its cultural policy cannot be pushed to the sidelines. Instead, it should be a part of facing these challenges.

As mentioned above, personal autonomy, equality, and diversity are the three clear policy parameters for building cultural policy for any city, and also for Barcelona. This is so because we cannot talk about culture without discussing education, health, work, or subsistence, and individual and collective dignity. Very often, cultural policy hides these dilemmas and assumes simplistic values. We cannot

dissociate education from culture or work when we know that the cultural sphere is instrumental in addressing issues facing production processes or new jobs requiring creativity, innovation, adaptability, acceptance of diversity, and entrepreneurship, among others. We also cannot disconnect culture from health, as it is a social determinant of health, nor from democracy or political engagement. The latter is because of a proven correlation between culture and education levels and the amount that people follow and become involved in citizens' responsibilities and activities.

Currently, we are in what Bauman would call a time of interregnum; of transition between two eras, and the cultural debate in any city cannot be avoided. The cultural policy of a city government must try to have a positive impact on this scenario. It must favour the conversion and adaptation of existing cultural institutions, and help consolidate experiences that are, as a whole, a part of the transition. Policy must also open spaces, create connections, and experiment with other sectors, hybridising practices and arts. It must encourage the emergence of new spaces that construct models, test new languages, and create new practices among artists, educators, designers, activists, or community spaces.

We must therefore ask ourselves: What is the significance of the cultural dynamics supported by government? Which values do they reflect? How do they connect with other policies carried out by the municipality and other social actors? How can we improve and better connect those



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practices and dynamics? How does culture contribute to making a city less dependent, more open, and able to make more independent decisions about its future? To do this, it is vital to examine what is being done, evaluate the results of these practices, and think about new dynamics that will help better assess the issue, while facilitating a smooth and strong transition.

Some of the key challenges being faced pertain to both the conceptual aspects outlined above, which are absolutely crucial to the development of any urban cultural policies, and the substantive implementation of these concepts in different sectors of activity. Of course, another challenge is the functional dynamic that involves the necessary and positive plurality of the large number of creators and cultural agents that any city houses. A public policy must consider the values that it represents, which simultaneously justify its own existence, as well as

how it is to be implemented and what area of activity it involves. Undoubtedly, policy must also consider to what degree an institutional role is acceptable, which partnerships with other actors are necessary, how to distinguish between the regulation, financing, and management of each of the actions or interventions intended to be carried out. Every city has a unique “cultural mix”, which blends institutional, partnership, trade, and community roles. It is this plurality of activity that ends up establishing a specific, public urban cultural space.

More and more, it is becoming clear that a change in the times cannot allow ongoing policies or procedural habits to continue, because while they may seem safe, they are growing increasingly obsolete. It is not about changing normal responses, or adapting them to the current crisis situation. In many cases the very questions themselves need to be reconsidered. Do museums still make



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sense? What role do libraries play in the digital world? Does a division between the specialised and creative sectors still apply in an increasingly hybridised artistic reality? How can we include ownership in open, collaborative perspectives? What models of artistic and creative subsistence are possible in a context of general job insecurity? How do we coordinate institutional, social, and community collaboration? Should we not get over the idea of equating the institutional with the public sphere? These, and many other questions on funding, self-government, accountability, ownership of results, and much more are realities in any city, and in any urban cultural policy that seeks to address issues in our ever-changing world.

According to Sennett, cities are spaces for excellence in disputes and disorder, but it is precisely their conflict density that forms a basis

for their creative density. Culture is an essential component in the public sphere. It is, and must be, a public space. In this way, it builds the city by interacting and establishing dialogue with those representing existing power structures and interests. A city is a physical, virtual, and symbolic space for conflict and debate, and these are its strengths. It has the ability to take advantage of closeness to intensify the creative capacity of artistic ideas and creation whose value lies more in their collaboration and connection than in their competition and rivalry.

Cities like Barcelona depend heavily on the depth of their cultural and creative life, as it is expressed through unique languages, in order to maintain their adaptability and be a place with decent living conditions. However, this depends on a city's ability to remain more open, plural, and democratic.

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