



# culture 21

UCLG Committee

#CULTUREcovid19

## CULTURE IN TIMES OF COVID-19: NATURE CLAIMED HER KINGDOM

LUCINA JIMÉNEZ

DOCTOR IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL SCIENCES FROM UAM-I. SPECIALIST IN CULTURAL POLICIES AND CULTURE OF PEACE. MEMBER OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS OF AGENDA 21 FOR CULTURE (UCLG). FOUNDER OF CONARTE AC. CURRENTLY DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS AND LITERATURE, MINISTRY OF CULTURE, MEXICO

Nature claimed her kingdom. The planet, suffering from global warming, shook humanity until it stopped the frenetic rhythm of millions of people. The global society designed for production and consumption suddenly had to work to stop doing so, to enter a period of slowness or inactivity. The COVID-19 virus, born in an illegal wildlife market, turned into a pandemic. What will this period of time teach us, what will the lasting effects be? That is something to reflect on, since the axis of each culture is the relationship between time and space.

Under a cloak of uncertainty and disbelief, through a dense network of social networks, with both real and fake news, a state of alert was generated and sometimes, irrepressible collective hysteria and anxiety during the confinement. The possibility of revaluing silence and spending time with family was renewed, even though it might heighten tensions of coexistence, some find themselves entangled with realities of violence, especially against women, girls, teenagers and youngsters. Recovering the excitement and the sense of life, and

contributing to the right of women to a life without violence will be essential for the cultural sector, which will need to work more closely with other sectors once this global crisis is over.

This highly contagious virus, firstly, jeopardized the international mobility of people, then progressed nationally and locally, breaking the physical proximity of communities in its path. Defining the new foundations of global mobility will take time. The risk is that fear and uncertainty constrain their possibilities. Stereotypes must be broken, since, currently, being Asian, Italian, American, or more broadly, foreigner, seems to arouse mistrust. In many countries, communication does not flow in the same way in their indigenous languages. After the lockdown, it is expected that the now contained festiveness of cultures retakes streets and public spaces, and that the involvement of bodies as emotional and cultural territories is revalued. It will not be easy at all.

Access to scientific and technical knowledge and the possibility of bringing it into daily

# #CULTUREcovid19

---

life has been put to the test. A new glossary has gained ground through the media: “suspected cases”, “to test positive”, “to flatten the curve”, “asymptomatic”, among other technicalities that today are part of an everyday life that is still astonishing. The risks of collapse that healthcare systems face, force us to rethink our understanding of health from the point of view of diversity, food cultures and traditional knowledge of peoples, which today are not present enough in the narrative of the pandemic. They continue working, “as much as we can”, points out a woman who plants creole corn in Mexico.

The process is not over yet, and is being experienced in different ways across countries, a fact that has allowed some of them to learn from others. As one might expect inequalities among nations, and within them, have come to light. In this context, international cultural cooperation is vital, especially for the reconstruction of the economy, healthcare, water management and cultural diplomacy, but the world will have to rethink its goals even within the Agenda 2030 framework.

While hospitals are advancing in their reconversion to get ready for the most critical stages of COVID-19, the cultural sectors of countries and cities are re-engineering and immersing themselves into the virtual world. They take advantage of content, produce, convene and communicate. Digital libraries are available and accessible, at least for those who have a smartphone or a computer at home. Global companies open their portals for free for a certain time. Virtual tours of museums, collective or individual concerts,

live conferences, workshops, lectures and many other formats become windows to the outside world.

Virtual platforms appear as the new stages where the term ‘audiences’ has a totally different meaning. Many creators opened or expanded their channels digitally in a collective manner. There are new compositions, lectures, video poems, virtual concerts. Emotional artistic experiences have been shared thousands of times all around the world. Nowadays, culture and arts are a key input for connecting with the rest of the world, and its revaluation as a strategic sector is highly desirable, as well as the strengthening of an approach to cultural rights in a sense of well-being. However, the scale of the challenges requires us to rethink priorities, as well as the economic side of the virtual contents.

The crisis caused by the closure of artistic and cultural centers, museums, galleries, theaters and other infrastructures, creates a renewed sense of urgency to rethink the sector in terms of sustainability, not only as a matter of operating costs. The emergency measures of the governmental cultural institutions vary according to the circumstances of each country or city. Strategic solutions involve structural changes in the cultural systems and their perspective of sustainable investment. The sharp decline in economic activity will also imply a slowdown in the recovery of cultural life and artistic production. It will be necessary to think quickly how to stop the decapitalization of the sector and strengthen collaboration.

Aesthetic reflections continue to advance in various artistic disciplines. In others,

# #CULTUREcovid19

---

the connection between art and productive areas is less sought to alleviate the crisis. In order to be considered an actor or an actress, can the theatricality energy typically overflowing from the stage, be accomplished while locked in your house, through a screen?

Which of the above-mentioned features will become part of the cultural stages in post-COVID-19 societies? Hard to know. Capitalism spares no one. The algorithm is reprogrammed to start promoting discounts at hospitals, or home office supplies. The poisoning of mass media and political opportunism do not spare anyone either. We are facing a global re-composition of the world that we will know nothing about until the crisis ends. Let us not lose sight of the steps the Asian countries take.

In Latin America, we are societies of memory, of oral tradition, but also creative and diverse. It is desirable that social groups deepen the technological learning that is now part of resilience, endowing it with the content of their numerous experiences. Also, cultural institutions should not renounce the virtual platforms built during the emergency period, rather should dare to make it a constant form of social interaction, benefiting from the reconnection of the society and the artistic sectors to rethink the existing ecosystems on the basis of a constructive dialogue.

We are going to experience a global reconversion of the ways in which producing, exhibiting and enjoying art and culture take place. If the global economy of culture acquires a less frenetic pace, not only because of the vulnerability of each

cultural sector, but because globalization will imply new agreements, the cultural policies of countries and cities will have to find their own ways to redesign themselves. Let us try not to get back to a "normality" that was already facing the collapse, and let us fight with renewed awareness so that it is replaced by a vision of cultural rights in a sense of well-being.

# #CULTUREcovid19

---

UCLG AND ITS CULTURE COMMITTEE  
DO NOT NECESSARILY SHARE THE  
VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THIS ARTICLE.

---

## CONTACT

**United Cities and Local Governments  
(UCLG)**

**Committee on Culture**

[info@agenda21culture.net](mailto:info@agenda21culture.net)  
[www.agenda21culture.net](http://www.agenda21culture.net)  
[@agenda21culture](https://www.instagram.com/agenda21culture)

---