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Agenda 21 for culture

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## Lille and the Agenda 21 for culture

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## Lille and the Agenda 21 for culture

**Catherine Cullen**

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### Culture as the very soul of development

Lille 2004 - European Capital of Culture created an opportunity for the city to embark on a decisive stage in its cultural development, broadening the policy it had adopted some years earlier in a way that would be structurally sustainable and equipping itself with the means for a new dynamic. It represented an exceptional opportunity for reinforcing and promoting the city's cultural facilities and installations, restoring its heritage, creating new paths and inter-neighbourhood networks, transforming the public space and creating cultural structures that had never been seen before in the form of *Maisons Folie* (old buildings restored as cultural centres), which added an artistic presence to the very soul of popular neighbourhoods and linked in with the projects of their inhabitants.

The aim of the programme was to turn 2004 into a test run of what could be a new way of life at the turn of the 21st century in a metropolis of one million two hundred thousand inhabitants in the heart of a euro-region of 9 million inhabitants. The idea was to transform this opportunity into a challenge: to make culture the epicentre by making it a factor in the sustainable transformation of an area. The exceptional experience of Lille 2004 showed us the extent to which culture could act not only as a line of development, influence and attraction, but also as a means of forging ties in our neighbourhoods, introducing a different vision based on different values and restoring the pride of the region's inhabitants deeply affected by the social and economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s.

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To follow up the momentum gathered by Lille 2004 - European Capital of Culture, Lille has launched lille3000. As a gateway to all new worlds (economic, cultural and intellectual), lille3000 seeks to set up lines of work, come up with answers to today's questions, put forward different viewpoints and prepare for the future. Lille 3000 follows up the momentum of Lille 2004 by focusing on modernity and the chief questions of our time through contact with new cultures.

Encouraged by this cultural policy based on the conviction that creativity is a guarantee of sustainability, we decided to get involved in the Agenda 21 for culture, which the city of Lille adopted at the City Council meeting of 31 January 2005.

The implementation of the Agenda 21 for culture fits in well with our cultural policy, the three main lines of which are: support to artists and creation; access to culture for the masses; and the desire to make Lille a city of heritage and innovation. Obviously, there is still a great deal to be done to improve the organisation of officials, artists, the public and institutional actors around a common vision of what culture should be. We have led Lille to reflect as a whole on the public space and on the role of culture, in an attempt to integrate art and artists into the city's epicentre. Culture is, above all, the organisation of the territory, of its common space. The aim is to carry out an effective task of improving life for everybody in the city.

**Our involvement in the Agenda 21 for culture network encouraged us to delve further and set down the principles of this text in the form of our future Charter for Culture to be discussed and written in constructive dialogue with all cultural actors.**

Our involvement in the Agenda 21 for culture network encouraged us to delve further and set down the principles of this text in the form of a charter: our future Charter for Culture and the progress made along the lines of the principles of the Agenda 21 for culture will rest on the idea that a municipality requires its policies of cultural development to be cross-cutting and on the desire to obtain constructive dialogue with all cultural actors, whether they be artists, amateurs or the general public. The aim, therefore, is to promote consultations and exchange between the city and its partners in a global move towards co-construction, in accordance with the principles of the Agenda 21 for culture. This work has been underway since 2006.

The expected results are as follows:

- drafting of a charter of reciprocal involvement between the city of Lille and cultural actors in Lille;
- introduction of a method of accompaniment for cultural actors based on the measurement of progress;
- testing and evaluation of the method during an initial pilot phase with voluntary associations.

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Since we adopted the Agenda 21 for culture, the link between culture and sustainable development has been constantly questioned, raised, enriched, and many suggestions have been put forward. We organise regular meetings called 'culture breakfasts' for small groups, structures, cultural associations and independent artists from the city, which allow us to gather opinions and requests and to evaluate the impact of the decisions made.

Since we adopted the Agenda 21 for culture, the link between culture and sustainable development has been constantly questioned, raised, enriched, and many suggestions have been put forward.

To cite an example, we have begun a 'live' pilot project with a regular artistic event to launch the Agenda 21 for culture: this is based on the organisation of evening '*bals*', a new genre of 'dance' event, in a former dance hall of a popular Lille neighbourhood. These original, festive and artistic events have nothing in common with dance evenings or traditional dances; instead they develop an education of 'sustainable development and culture'.

We have begun a 'live' pilot project to launch the Agenda 21 for culture, based on the organisation of evening '*bals*' in Fives, a popular neighbourhood of Lille.

The event is called 'Dances at Fives' (the name of the neighbourhood) and its Sustainable Development and Culture Charter is in all of the programmes. Our aim is to get the maximum possible number of partners involved in order to:

- promote traffic between neighbourhoods and research into the co-existence of participants;
- create artistic creation residences throughout the year;
- put forward quality, live events with artists who, during their time in residence, set up interesting projects in the neighbourhood;
- create an event with a marked identity, values and focus by offering a programme that reflects cultural diversity. For example, the 'Congo Punk' dance mixes African and electronic music; the Association of Bretons of the North fuses with musicians from the Maghreb;
- stimulate implausible intercultural hybrid fusions by encouraging a variety of musical influences at single dances and exchanges and ties between modern and traditional musicians, and, by extension, between modernity and tradition;
- encourage people to dance and sing together, for example, by setting up initiatives before each dance and awareness-raising workshops in the neighbourhood at social centres, neighbourhood centres, schools, cafés, associations and other collective venues;

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- encourage co-existence between generations as social intermingling by proposing popular traditional games, most often with wooden toys that have been brought in, and professional dancers on the dance floor to guide the public and help them overcome their shyness (such as the evening that fuses hip hop and tango, stilettos and trainers, etc);
  - favour exchanges and partnerships with neighbourhood associations for the entertainment, decoration and catering of the dances, making use of the experience of the Department for Culture in the organisation of events;
  - find a place for all tastes while adopting a policy of products from sustainable development for catering at the dances: use of local and/or fair-trade products, taking into account the quality of both content and container;
  - adopt a policy of prevention by offering a range of original non-alcoholic beverages that are fairly priced and healthy, while offering the public the opportunity to discover traditional wines and beers that are low in alcohol, to be drunk in moderation;
  - comply with Lille's Nightlife Charter, with a special emphasis on limiting noise from the public outside the Events Hall (campaign against noise for general well-being);
  - promote specific practices to keep this public space clean;
  - actively participate in the prevention of risks associated with noise from amplified music (compliance with authorised sound levels, quality sound installations, public information on these risks, availability of ear plugs);
  - do everything necessary to allow individuals with reduced mobility or the physically or mentally handicapped to attend events;
  - defend the right to culture and knowledge of all citizens by setting up a price policy that will encourage access for people from all backgrounds and walks of life.

These dances have been very popular and represent the first implementation of our Sustainable Development and Culture Charter .

**Culture is the fourth pillar of a local Agenda 21 that has long attempted to tackle economic, social and environmental issues: Lille has been working for some time on the launch of a second stage for its local Agenda 21 (the first local Agenda 21 was adopted in 2000), which will integrate – and this is a first! – culture in its plan of action.**

In short, culture is the fourth pillar of a local Agenda 21 that has long attempted to tackle economic, social and environmental issues: Lille has been working for some time on the launch of a second stage for its local Agenda 21 (the first local Agenda 21 was adopted in 2000), which will integrate – and this is a first! – culture in its plan of action. The local Agenda 21 and the Agenda 21 for culture are two essential and complementary tools. Through our involvement in the promotion of sustainable urban development through culture, the local Agenda 21 of Lille has added this fourth pillar to its action.

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## Difficulties implementing the Agenda 21 for culture

Which direction should be taken for improved communication of the Agenda 21 for culture, in order to make it more accessible, and a real tool for promoting cultural diversity and the sharing of experiences? To put it another way, which programmes, lines of research and partnerships should be set up?

Firstly, the difficulty lies in thinking and acting with a cross-sector approach. Work with departments for education, solidarity, the elderly and campaigns against exclusion is carried out smoothly but we experience numerous difficulties with departments for economics, urban planning and finance.

Secondly, we have observed that the actors of sustainable development often have little awareness of problems relating to culture. Moreover, the quantitative criteria of sustainable development often seem cold and technical compared to the criteria of art and artistic practice, which need to be more sensitive. Actors of culture and sustainable development have to fight against this prior absence of language and common methods for working together.

It is also necessary to continually reinvent the educational content of the Agenda 21 for culture for officials, the press, cultural actors and inhabitants (often the first to understand). We need to implement practical actions immediately in order to show them examples.

Lastly, we should mention the segregation of cultural actors from different artistic disciplines. As regular meetings of the city, its structures, artists and all cultural actors involved, 'culture breakfasts' are, I think, a good way of tackling different ways of working and envisioning creation. This 'desegregation' work will take time, but it is necessary.

It is equally important to set quantity and quality objectives and to list and, where possible, evaluate the actions carried out. Evaluation is essential because cultural policies are, like other public policies, subject to a democratic imperative of transparency and effectiveness. However, this is a very difficult exercise, since cultural policies perhaps touch on values and the domain of the subjective more than other local policies. In Lille, we have been carrying out a quantitative evaluation of our culture policy for some time now (covering aspects such as figures on use, fulfilment of specifications). We analyse the variety of the cultural programme and the cultural targets, the opportunities for inhabitants to take part in the drafting of the culture policy, and the presence of artists in the city, etc. Moreover, we believe that the quality of a culture policy is expressed through a permanent exchange between culture and the other areas of public action.

We believe that it is more appropriate to think in terms of progress made rather than aims. Ideally, gauges of progress would be set up for individual structures to value the progress made by the different actors based on their features, rather than setting inflexible aims for them.

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From our experience in Lille, we would suggest:

- introducing Agenda 21 for culture training and/or presentation sessions for local actors;
- further researching the link between culture and economics, ICTs, creative industries and works of art based on virtual reality;
- strengthening ties and exchanges with other culture and sustainable development networks and clarifying their respective areas of competence (United Nations agencies, European Union networks, Alliance of Civilizations, Organization of World Heritage Cities, International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, etc);
- dedicating an exchange session to the difficulties faced by local actors of culture in implementing cross-cutting policies;
- improving communication and education in other integrated local planning tools;
- promoting UCLG's Committee on culture as a unifier of existing initiatives in the research and development of local indicators of culture;
- focusing research into indicators on gauges of progress;
- placing more emphasis on different interpretations of the idea of cultural and artistic diversity in countries with different cultures and political systems in order to show that local implementations depend largely on the social, political, cultural and economic context.

## Conclusion

Sustainable development requires first and foremost a change in behaviour; that is, a cultural change in which the notions of heritage, wealth and resources are rethought as part of a more global vision of the well-being of individuals and our collective future. The central role of culture and its quantitative and qualitative repercussions are not yet clear to all actors involved in making cities today, be they policy-makers, artists or the general public. It is therefore still necessary to emphasise that cities are organic units in which each function depends on the next and that it is culture that creates the most lasting link between all of its components. This is what Lille calls 'a way of making a city and a new way of life.'

**Sustainable development requires first and foremost a change in behaviour; that is, a cultural change in which the notions of heritage, wealth and resources are rethought as part of a more global vision of the well-being of individuals and our collective future. The central role of culture and its quantitative and qualitative repercussions are not yet clear to all actors involved in making cities today.**

Since culture's contribution to quality of life is so significant, it is one of the necessary conditions for sustainable cities. We must take as our guideline cultural, human, social, biological and environmental diversity. Art is a very specific way of adding value to this diversity.

- The article and the full report are available on-line at <http://www.cities-localgovernments.org> and <http://www.agenda21culture.net>. They can be reproduced for free as long as UCLG and Barcelona City Council are cited as sources.
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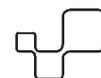
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