

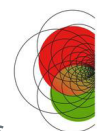


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Agenda 21 for culture

Agenda 21 for Culture: some reflections on the role of Cities & Local Governments in turning principles into practice through partnerships

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23 April 2014

The Committee on culture of the world association of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is the platform of cities, organizations and networks that foster the relation between local cultural policies and sustainable development. It uses the Agenda 21 for culture as its founding document. It promotes the exchange of experiences and improves mutual learning. It conveys the messages of cities and local governments on global cultural issues. The Committee on culture is chaired by Lille-Métropole, co-chaired by Buenos Aires, Montréal and México and vice-chaired by Angers, Barcelona and Milano.

This article was commissioned in the framework of the revision of Agenda 21 for culture (2013-2015) and it also contributes to the activities of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments for Post-2015 Development Agenda towards Habitat III (2016).

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Agenda 21 for Culture¹ intertwined with the global call for sustainable development, has succeeded within ten years of existence in being endorsed by some 500 cities and local authorities, yet the “power of culture” remains woefully neglected in the development agenda.²

In defining “culture”, UCLG aligns with UNESCO, namely as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs³, thus reaffirming in Agenda 21 for Culture, that cultural rights are an integral part of human rights⁴, and essential for democracy.⁵

¹ adopted by cities and local governments from around the world on 8 May 2004, the principles of Agenda 21 for Culture are intertwined with the global call for sustainable development, notably with regard to human rights - social, economic and cultural rights of groups as well as of individuals covering concerns over issues as wide as environment protection, climate change, risk mitigation, to equitable access to basic utilities and services, to the more specific access to employable skills, creative cultural and artistic expressions, and all that can be qualified to impact on the quality of life. In this regard, Agenda 21 for Culture has from the onset been prepared in cooperation with international and regional normative and standard-setting entities, notably of the United Nations System.

² Given specificities of the national and local context, and the diversity in socio-cultural, economic, legal and fiscal systems, and moreover, in the degree of decentralisation attained, Agenda 21 for Culture which sets out a series of principles, needs to be operationalized through a Plan of Action that can only be established by each UCLG-member city and government in accordance to their local conditions. Case studies are now being submitted by local governments to UCLG to serve other members


³ UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, which is in line with the conclusions of the World Conference on Cultural Policies (MONDICULT, Mexico City, 1982), of the World Commission on Culture and Development (Our Creative Diversity, 1995) and of the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development (Stockholm, 1998)

⁴ as per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)

⁵ see Article 2 & 3 of Agenda 21 for Culture

To follow-up on the links between Agenda 21 for Culture and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)⁶ UCLG has been involved in underscoring the importance of culture for sustainable development in defining the Post-2015 Agenda.⁷

The Hangzhou Declaration, “Placing Culture at the Heart of Sustainable Development Policies” of 17 May 2013⁸, reaffirmed the urgent need for new approaches that account for a broader picture of human progress, such as harmony among peoples, between humans and nature, equity ... and calls for the acknowledgement of “culture” as a system of values, knowledge capital, and source of meaning, creativity and innovation and a resource to address challenges in order to find appropriate solutions through people-centred and place-based approach. It stresses, above all, that different cultural perspectives will result in different paths to development, noting that “one size fit all” policies cannot work.



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Numerous studies carried out primarily from the sectorial approach⁹ in reviewing the achievements of the MDGs, conclude with criticism over the “top-down”¹⁰ approach, lack of local participation and over-emphasis on the purely economic approach in gauging success. It is hard to imagine how the cultural dimension in poverty eradication, hunger relief, education, gender equity, child and maternal health, or the combat against HIV/AIDS, or the protection of the environment can be ignored. Yet, it has been.

Despite the growing proportion of the world population now living in urban settlements where adherence to “tradition” maybe less pronounced than in the rural area of their origin, one cannot ignore the strong social and economic ties the recent migrants have to their ethnic or religious community, especially in the alien land of the city where poverty maybe even more pronounced in the city, requiring support from their socio-cultural network.

⁶ the attainment of MDGs were pledged by local governments, both through their national governments and collectively through UCLG. It is in this regard that UCLG has been involved over the past four years in evaluating the achievements of the MDGs and in framing the so-called “Post-2015 Agenda.


⁷ UN General Assembly Resolutions N. 65/1 (“Keeping the Promise: United to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals”, 2010), N. 65/166 (2011) and N. 66/208 (2012) on “Culture and Development”, as well as a number of other relevant declarations, statements and normative instruments adopted at international, regional and national levels. The outcome document of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, “The Future We Want” (Rio de Janeiro, June 2012) highlighted the importance of cultural diversity and the need for a more holistic and integrated approach to sustainable development.

⁸ Hangzhou Declaration resulting from the UNESCO International Congress on “Culture: Key to Sustainable Development: see: http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/final_hangzhou_declaration_english.pdf

⁹ In reviewing the eight MDGs from the perspective of how success could have been better achieved with greater understanding on the role of culture in the development process and on the role local governments, one can only stress the limitation of a sectorial approach in gauging the attainment of these goals.

¹⁰ The fact that more than half of the aid coming from the developed countries going to debt relief and an important proportion of the remaining funds used for disaster relief and military aid perhaps explains the reason for the top-down approach and the almost exclusive dependence on the national state mechanism.

In the cities of many developing countries where governance and the rule of law are weak, community-control takes over. This self-help type of community welfare can be excellent but requires oversight by public authorities to ensure that community traditions are not oppressive and undemocratic. Access to basic survival needs such as drinking water, healthcare and education, have important culture bearings, particularly in traditional societies. Therefore they need to be understood by the local authorities responsible for the delivery of services.



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As a follow-up to the MDGs, the UN unveiled on 30 May 2013, a new report entitled, “A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development,” setting out an agenda up to 2030. It noted that “economic growth alone is not sufficient to ensure social justice, equity and sustained prosperity for all people...protection and empowerment of people is crucial.”¹¹ The non-sectorial approach of this 5-point call that stresses social inclusion and employment creation through partnerships and good governance through transparency, can perhaps be translated more aptly into action by local governments and civil society around the world than the MDGs which primarily targeted governments.

What follows are a few examples of successful past actions which can be undertaken by local governments to translate the 5-point global principles into local policies and projects.

1. Leave No One Behind: It is clear that authorities at the lowest administrative level of the governance structure¹² are better placed to identify the different forms of poverty and support modalities. In countries where no form of public subsidies can be expected, the local government could establish an anti-poverty unit or at least assign an officer to look into local support mechanism, notably in cooperation with NGOs and CBOs. Despite the different nature and degree of poverty, application of the notion of “shared poverty”¹³ can be studied to see how local wealth and resources can be better distributed. To avoid dependency on free provision of food or shelter, recipients of such aid can be required to participate in public works. Food-for-work projects implemented in the South, can also be applied to promote urban agriculture in the cities of the South as well as of the North so that citizens can participate in proximity production of food, even if it may only provide a small proportion of the local food needs¹⁴.

¹¹ High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in July 2012, co-chaired by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia; President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia; and Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom) released “A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development”.

¹² be they village councils or wards in a city council.

¹³ this term initially coined by Clifford Geertz for his study on Javanese rural societies, has evolved over the years to mean the sharing of scarce resources for the survival of a community.

¹⁴ interesting programmes on urban agriculture exist in the North as well as the South, eg. Strasbourg in France, Luang Prabang in Laos.

Urban agriculture permits citizens, especially the youth to stay in touch with the rules of nature. To understand the complexity of the cause of poverty and to adopt alleviation measures, partnerships with universities and research institutions should be solicited to carry out socio-economic surveys and research on appropriate solutions. Optimization of the socio-cultural capital, including traditional practices, which can be considered as “intangible heritage”, are important foundations of a society from which innovations can be made, rather than the importation of management practices alien to the local communities.

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2. Put Sustainable Development at the Core: If the all-encompassing notion of “sustainable development” is defined to cover economic, ecological, political and cultural¹⁵ sustainability, and as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”¹⁶ local governments must start by taking stock of local assets, including the natural and built heritage to understand the “what”, “why” and how” the existing physical, economic and social infrastructure came into being. Analyses of locally-based companies and factories are also crucial to determine public policies and programmes that can support the business sector to maintain local employment and to adopt anti-pollution and energy-efficient measures. The growth of cities should be anticipated and territorial extensions be avoided as much as possible in favour of densification to prevent urban sprawls. Existing housing stock, especially in historic centres should be maintained through adaptive reuse of historic buildings, not only for conservation of the built heritage but for the historic centre to be inhabited and integrated into the larger city, rather than to allow its degradation as settlements for the poor or become gentrified as an oasis for tourists. Moreover, a new paradigm of urban growth needs to be promoted through adoption of urban design, building standards and regulations that favour compact cities and the retrofitting of existing buildings which cause less environmental impacts than demolition and new construction as in the recent past. Historic cities can offer examples of density, mixed-use, energy efficiency and reduced vehicular circulation, with greater harmony between the natural and built environments. Mass

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¹⁵ UCLG puts « culture » as the fourth pillar of sustainable development.

¹⁶ definition as per Brundtland Commission in its 1987 report « Our Common Future ».

public transport systems as an alternative to individual vehicles need to be promoted to preserve public space for the inhabitants rather than for cars. To finance public transport systems, participation by companies (employing more than a given number of persons) and schools for the transport of pupils should be sought either through taxes or through financial or in-kind contributions depending on the local situation¹⁷. Car-sharing between private individuals can also be promoted and facilitated through government policies upon consideration of cultural sensitivities of the target groups. Public awareness-raising being vital to reduce environmental degradation, local authorities should prompt the preparation and diffusion of culturally-adapted didactic public information material, jointly with the communities concerned, supported by educators and communication professional on all aspects of the local environment. Better understanding and use of “heritage”, defined as the sum of existing assets, and “culture” defined as the dynamics of social relations, should be made by mobilizing socio-cultural networks for positive community resilience and action.



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3. Transform Economies for Jobs and Inclusive Growth: MWhile noting the importance of profit-based economic growth, recent crises have shown that the global economy must be geared for local employment and sustained local economic growth to ensure livelihood and social development. Without this, progress in human development would depend on external and domestic transfer mechanisms of aid and redistribution of public spending with their inherent limitations. Local authorities need to adopt policies to translate growth to social development. In this regard, local governments all over the world are soliciting private sector investments in their territory. Concessionary lease of public land or tax benefits to attract installation of private companies is now current practice everywhere, but transparent procedures are vital. As land-ownership has strong cultural roots, it is vital that all communities are fairly treated, as many cases exist of certain ethnic groups being dispossessed of their traditional property rights. While noting the principles of fair competition, local governments in issuing public contracts are increasingly including in their selection criteria, aspects such as employment or training benefits for the local inhabitants, particularly of marginalized groups so that employment becomes a means of social integration. More diversified economies can be promoted by capitalizing on the cultural diversity of the citizens with valorization of their cultural assets both tangible and intangible to promote the creative cultural industries, going beyond that of tourism. Interesting examples exist of local government support for cultural business incubators, notably for young designers, crafts-persons, artists and IT start-ups which have succeeded thanks to municipal government provision of low-rent or rent-free shops and offices for an initial period of 2-3 years,

¹⁷ While mass transport is a service that should be provided, or at least facilitated by the public authority, examples of innovative public-private partnerships and even voluntarism exist.

or soft-loans from a revolving micro-credit system for cultural industries.¹⁸ In the selection of places to invest, companies increasingly mention the city's attractiveness, greatly valorized by its cultural heritage and natural setting. Urban heritage is also a valuable endowment with vast non-economic development potential to strength social ties through identity and improved livability of the city. When upgrading of skills for jobs or new technological advancements for industries are necessary, local authorities can foster partnerships with training institutions as well as with scientific bodies.



The management of cultural diversity to avoid ethnic-based conflict is an important task for local governments by fostering tolerance and pre-empting tension, and by promoting equity among communities through socially inclusive policies.

- 4. Build Peace and Effective, Open and Accountable Institutions for All:** While decentralization is considered the best mechanism for democratic participatory governance, it must come together with the decentralization of technical competence and financial means. Despite a third of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) channeled to the 50 Least Developed Countries, the lack of funds trickling down to the local level has not proved effective in promoting local development. With multi-ethnicity being a reality in almost every city today, the management of cultural diversity to avoid ethnic-based conflict is an important task for local governments by fostering tolerance and pre-empting tension, and by promoting equity among communities through socially inclusive policies. Local governments, even if unsupported financially by national governments, can nonetheless foster cooperation among community-based associations and seek their support in grass-root governance. Even if the provision of subsidies to community associations is not possible, creating a platform for civil society involvement in urban projects has proven effective in many countries.
- 5. Forge a New Global Partnership:** This fifth point, on solidarity, cooperation, and mutual accountability calls for new forms of people-focused partnership for inclusive development, linking national and local governments, multilateral institutions, civil society organizations, and the scientific and academic community, businesses, and private philanthropy, arises from recognition that public authorities cannot on its own, deliver social programmes to reach the people, particularly the vulnerable groups. While specific mention is not made of the importance of culture, it is again clear that greater understanding of the socio-cultural specificities of vulnerable groups and of civil society groups that are culturally linked to the target beneficiaries is needed to forge partnerships. Alliance with universities is vital in elaborating actions adapted for the local situation.

¹⁸ Among the many examples are success stories in Lyon, Strasbourg, as well as in St Louis le Senegal and Porto Nouvo on business incubators of cultural industries. For recent examples of projects, see UNESCO website on International Fund for Cultural Diversity (www.unesco.org/culture/cultural-diversity)

In conclusion, culture being omnipresent in all aspects of social dynamics, knowledge on cultural diversity and its management are vital in the promotion of development goals. If harnessed positively, and with democratic principles of equity and transparency, differences between communities can be worked out through consultations to reach the necessary compromises required for collective interest, as long as governments, particularly the local authorities provide the enabling environment and play its role as mediator with fairness and direction. With regard to the built environment, especially of the city, its heritage represents an important physical and socio-economic capital accumulated by the inhabitants and city government through investments of knowledge and labour over long periods of the past, giving character to the city's identity and wealth to be optimized for the present and the future with public education for sustainable practices. While culture as a sector of activity needs to be fully integrated into agreed development strategies, programmes and practices at global, regional, national and local levels, sustainable development is not the sum total of the Post-2015 Development Agenda nor of the MDGs, as it is a "humanization process" where success can only be attained when the common interest of "civilization" of all nations and people are understood and pursued. In this regard, Agenda 21 for Culture, is not only the fourth pillar of development but a transversal principle that needs to be integrated in good governance.



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