Meeting between
the European-wide research network "COST - Investigating Cultural Sustainability"
and the UCLG Committee on culture

Brussels, 14 November 2013, 9 am to 12 noon
COST Office, Avenue Louise 149, Brussels

Summary of the minutes by Raquel Freitas and Katriina Soini
9.2.2014

BACKGROUND AND AIM OF MEETING

A New Strategy for Agenda 21 for culture

Agenda 21 for culture (www.agenda21culture.net - A21C) was born in 2004 in the framework of the constituent process of UCLG – United Cities and Local Governments (www.uclg.org). The UCLG Committee on culture was created in 2005 to ensure the implementation of Agenda 21 for culture. For nine years, working in close cooperation with members, the World Secretariat and a wide range of partners, the Committee has brought leadership, intelligence and cooperation to UCLG as a whole and Agenda 21 for culture is now consolidated as the main contribution of cities to cultural globalization. It is an influential contribution to the relation between culture and local development. It shapes debates at a local, national and international scale.

The current Agenda 21 for culture has 67 articles that describe "the relationship between local cultural policies and human rights, governance, sustainable development, participatory democracy and peace." At the UCLG Executive Bureau held in Lyon on 6 and 7 June 2013, the President of the Committee, Catherine Cullen, said that "we believe it is time to renew our charter. We need a new guiding document for culture and sustainability. This charter will build on the success of Agenda 21 for culture, and update its recommendations. It will be more clearly oriented to the implementation of policies and will provide more space to promote intelligence and networking, with more exchanges (peer-review, expertise) between the best cities." The UCLG Executive Bureau took note of this decision, and the UCLG World Congress in Rabat ratified it. As a part of the process of designing a new strategy, UCLG has organised meetings with various stakeholders.

European Research Network: Investigating Cultural Sustainability

The COST Action IS 1007 "Investigating Cultural Sustainability" is a European-wide research network aiming at increasing understanding and determining the role of culture in sustainable development (www.culturalsustainability.eu). The work of the network (2011-2015) is funded by the European Science Foundation/COST (www.cost.eu) and it is based on national and transnational research activities dealing with the topic. To date, 25 European countries and 90 researchers representing different disciplines have joined the work. In addition, there is also co-operation with researchers beyond Europe, for example, from Australia, Canada and New Zealand. The network is composed of researchers from very different backgrounds interested in culture and sustainability. Such diversity brings specific expertise in very different fields of disciplines as well as a plurality of views on exploring concepts and policies. The network also seeks to cooperate with practitioners and policy-makers, and in this way significantly contribute to advancing this international discourse, which is increasingly gaining attention. The relevance of the topic is illustrated by Routledge's interest in investing in a book series "Routledge Studies in Culture and Sustainable Development" from the initiative of the Action.

As said, the main objective of this network is to explore the role and meaning of culture in sustainable development. This task is carried out by conceptualizing the cultural dimension of sustainable development, examining and comparing culturally sustainable policy practices[1] and investigating frameworks for assessing culture in sustainable development. Given the broad concept of culture, the Action has defined three different roles for culture in sustainable development: (a) fundamental, (b) transversal, and (c) self-standing. *Fundamental* refers to culture as a new paradigm of sustainable development. This implies that culture is an overarching concept which contains and influences social, environmental and economic actions within sustainable development, and that a cultural transition is needed on our way to a more sustainable society. *Transversal* suggests that culture can mediate as an instrument between the three classical pillars of sustainability. In other words, it is acknowledged that culture processes facilitate and translate sustainable development. *Self-standing* considers culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development parallel with ecological, social, and economic aspects. This means that cultural aspects need to be considered in the development processes alongside the ecological, social and economic pillars in order to fulfil the criteria of sustainability.[2]

The Aim of the Meeting

In a meeting in Brussels on 14 November 2013, the representatives of the UCLG Committee on culture, President Catherine Cullen and Co-ordinator Jordi Pascual, sought the views of researchers on the new A21C in preparation. The meeting was of an informal nature, marked by an open exchange of ideas and constructive criticism.

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[1] Soini, K. and Birkeland, I. 2014.

[2] These dimensions were first identified by a review paper on scientific discourse of cultural sustainability, and further worked and named by the COST Action. It is well recognized that these roles of culture are also discussed by Hayashi et al. 2013, but with slightly different contents and based on different analysis.

UCLG representatives had raised some conceptual and political issues related to the new strategy, concerning which they were particularly interested in having researchers' insights and comments. The discussion will be summarised here under three main topics: 1) concepts and scope; 2) implementation, operationalisation and impacts; 3) visibility.[3]

1. CONCEPTS AND SCOPE

First, attention was drawn to the diversity of meanings used for culture and for sustainable development in A21C. The idea of introducing culture as a 4th pillar in the Agenda 21 for culture is a strategic/tactical one. Although UCLG had acknowledged the challenges related to the concept of culture ("as it is everywhere"), it is important that culture also exists in its own right, as a pillar of its own, as long as sustainability is represented through the pillars.

In the discussion it was agreed that the concepts of culture and sustainability in policy use are very problematic: sustainable development (SD) is not consensual and some researchers prefer to use "sustainability" instead.[4] The researchers also suggested that sustainable development is very often considered as only related to environmental and ecological issues constituting a constraint for using the term "sustainability" in the social and cultural context. Similarly, some researchers may even avoid using it due to its vagueness and normative character. Culture is also a difficult concept. It receives different meanings depending on the context, and its meanings vary from one person to another. If culture is not defined, or is used in its broad sense covering all aspects of human life, even politics, it easily loses its power in policy or research. On the other hand, it was also noted that the concept of culture is often used as a tool for exerting power, showing off and even for propaganda.

However, it was agreed that it is difficult to avoid the concepts of sustainability and culture in the new A21C in the terms that are currently being used. Furthermore, it might be useful to define the concepts at least to some extent.

Missing Links between Culture and Other Dimensions of Sustainability
A21C is clearly a document to develop cultural policies, which is useful especially in times of crisis. However, at the local level (in politics) culture cannot be seen as a separate pillar, but as transversal, making links to the other pillars of sustainability or sustainable development. One of the problems of the A21C might be that the document is using the term sustainability, which implies various dimensions (economic, social, environmental, cultural), but it is not making the links between culture and, for example, environmental sustainability. On the other hand, it was noted that A21C was introduced because Local

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[3] It should be noted that this document does not present the official view of the network, but is based on the input of individual researchers involved in the network.

[4] It should be noted that although the concepts sustainability and sustainable development are often used as synonyms, they carry different meanings. Semantically, the term sustainability describes a stage (or state of being), while sustainable development points at processes towards or within that state.

Agenda 21 (LA21) did not include cultural aspects. A21C cannot become a second LA21 covering the approaches which are represented by it.

The gardening movement in Lyon, France, was used as an example of what the missing link between the environment and culture may lead to. This is an international movement that gathers a diversity of knowledge related to gardening. However, practices that bring together environmental sustainability such as biodiversity are not considered in the A21C approved by UCLG in 2004. It was noted that there is enormous potential in terms of creative reactions to environmental challenges, for example, but they are not taken up in A21C.

It was also stated that the current A21C is not precise about the most suitable ways to promote cultural industries, which often concerns processes beyond the local level. It was noted that cultural industries represent a more general trend and tension between culture as a tool for economic development and growth, opposed to a much more social approach about people for a better society and well-being as requested by the Brundtland report. It was noted that if A21C talks about cultural industries, it is important to reflect on what kind of industries and how are they contributing to the whole of society.

Ambitious Scope

The scope of the current A21C was considered to be ambitious. The primary aim of the document is to help people from the cultural sector to get organized in the city, but the document goes far beyond that. In addition to the challenging concept of culture and sustainability, human rights, governance, participatory democracy and peace have been used as key concepts in the document. Besides the broad scope of these concepts, the challenge is also that the linkages of five keywords are not clear in the document. They represent different scales and dimensions of society and governance. In other words, the document attempts to include different broad keywords resulting in "a collection" of issues, but it is not clear to what extent they work together. It may even be that some of them are contradictory. Therefore, it might be useful to clarify the scope of the concepts used and to show or even visualize the links with other areas in order to make the document truly transversal, proposing an integrated approach to culture and sustainability.

2. OPERATIONALISATION, IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

The presence of civil society in decision-making and support for writing local cultural strategies is an essential part of the work of A21C. However, it was noted that cities are not only interested in culture itself, but as a component for planning the future of the city. A21C is in a position to synthesize some broad principles for this work, and, for that purpose, *tool-boxes* that go beyond the cultural sector, but are useful for the cultural sector, need to be developed.

It was suggested that A21C could adopt a kind of structural approach when developing the tool-boxes for local actors. The tool-boxes should be structured in a way that makes the picture of culture in local development more coherent. The structural approach means that one set of boxes should describe the main goals and another one the tools for their achievement. In addition there should be a structure for the fields of different activities, the expected results and outcomes. Although the tool-boxes should not become an action-plan, they should be close to a similar template. Finally, there could be a few indicators included in the tool-boxes that measure the overall situation. As culture is a multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral topic by its nature, there is a need to consider what the "niche" of the culture and cultural approach is: what does A21C have that can be appealing to stakeholders in ecology, the environment or social activism?

It was suggested that although culture is a cross-cutting theme, A21C should be careful not to lose its identity as a promoter of culture-based approaches in local planning and governance. However, it should avoid a sense of competition: it is not "either culture or environment". It would be useful to use the word *ally*, to favour inclusive approaches rather than competition. In other words, A21C should not be the enemy or an alternative for the environmentalist movement, for instance, but rather a complement to what the environmental sector is doing.

Regarding the implementation and operationalisation, it is important to realize that urbanisation is now a key issue on the international agenda. Planning and implementation of policy will be happening in the cities. Despite the desire to connect to the local level in decision-making, the link has not been effective and international actors have not been able to foster networks. It is also important to recognize the changing role of local governments, which are no longer happy to merely receive policies to implement. Networks like UCLG are key actors in the horizontal exchange of expertise that is needed to feed into such implementation and operationalisation of networks on the ground. This horizontal networking has been helped by the proliferation of organisations, but not many networks are effectively assisting cities in expertise and in building capacities.

The new A21C should encourage its constituencies to include cultural *indicators* (both quantitative and qualitative) in assessing their and other stakeholders' work and to teach them how to use indicators as an advocacy tool. Indicators could be used to make culture more visible and to communicate with other sectors. It was emphasized that it is not possible to measure culture as such, but *dimensions* of cultural development such as access/participation in culture, cultural rights, cultural heritage, which are measureable. These indicators could be used in assessing the impacts of the work and become a suitable advocacy tool. It was noted that in the environmental sector indicators are much more advanced, although the field is not necessarily less simple. Measurements should not be restricted to indexes like GDP or similar kinds, but some composite indicators could be developed.

3. VISIBILITY

One of the challenges related to A21C is that it is still relatively unknown. Possibilities to increase awareness and efficiency in conjunction with the launch of the new A21C were discussed.

Defining and Clarifying the Goal

The new A21C could have a clear message. It was noted that we are moving slowly to a new "culture of sustainability". This is still a very vague trend, but the international discourse denotes this ambition. It is important to clearly formulate the aims in this process. A new vision of culture is needed, which is seeking new developmental goals: smart economic growth that is in balance with the social, ecological and human aspects of development implying changes in each sector of society. It is important to label this vision correctly and raise the importance of culture of sustainability in this context of change. New emerging Sustainable Development Goals provide a window of opportunity to make this issue less vague and more explicit.

It was noted that the new A21C cannot necessarily include the principles of this changes in the document, but rather focus on the significant trends and indicate how they can be translated into specific tools that can be used by the cities. There is still work to be done by UCLG to explore which tool-boxes of processes in a city that transform urban life into spaces are more meaningful to citizens, and place key elements related to culture more at the core of the processes of change.

It was also proposed that it might be good to link the new A21C in the ongoing social and environmental trends, such as climate change, demographic changes, and economic changes. We should establish how the A21C can help to identify these challenges and address them. If the environmental sector is talking about climate change, A21C can advocate societal change.

Naming or Renaming the New Strategy

There was also discussion about the name of the new strategy. Continuity was considered important and, therefore, a completely new name was not favoured, but rather an expression which links the document to the previous one, like A21C 2.0. Whether or not to abandon A21C comes down to being pragmatic: the difficulty of changing the name A21C is that A21C is already well known and has a life (brand, image) of its own. A21C is the young sibling of a much bigger agenda (LA21) with bigger resources. However, if A21C jumps in the main pool (LA21), A21C will not become more visible, nor get more resources. Therefore, it was suggested the existing identity of A21C should be kept while developing revised conceptual guidelines and principles in more accessible language for different audiences.

It was suggested that it might be a good idea to use the 10th anniversary to (re)launch A21C with a suite of new terms ("keywords") that other active groups and policy-makers use, and thus to facilitate dialogue and joint action. Words used by potential allies and supporters, such as "place", "landscape" (in the sense of the European Landscape

Convention) and "heritage" (in the sense of the Faro Convention) are often used to mean very similar things to culture and can be used as proxy terms to translate your concepts and aims into "their" language. Those that connect culture to specific localities are especially powerful. One keyword could be social learning.

Supporting the Launch of the New Strategy

Moreover, a methodology for implementation of a new A21C was suggested. In order to identify the best practices and to promote the new agenda in an interactive way that enables feedback to be incorporated into its implementation, a short and focused online questionnaire needs to be circulated. Visits to the cities were also suggested, but only after a longer time period after the implementation, because adoption of the agenda at the local level and changes that follow take time.

In order to promote good practices, there should be a designation of one city as an example of best practice, made visible and more concrete through the keywords of the Agenda in order to attract interest of mayors and visibility. There is already an international Award for A21C (promoted by UCLG and Mexico City), as noted, but maybe it could be better utilized to increase visibility and operationalise the Agenda.

SUMMARY OF THE CONCLUSIONS

Concepts and Scope
- Clarify, concretise, visualise and operationalise the key concepts.
- Consider links and relationships with other dimensions of sustainability.
- Find a balance between "transversal" and "cultural" approach.
- Do not lose your identity!

Operationalisation, Instrumentalisation and Impacts
- Link your message and goals with the ongoing trends and challenges.
- Develop structure of the tool-boxes in a way that it supports the overall Agenda and its implementation.
- Use simple indicators to show the impacts and for communication.

Visibility
- Develop your image and brand systematically.
- Utilize the 10th anniversary in the launch of the new agenda.
- Monitor the impacts of the A21C and communicate the results.

ANNEX
List of participants

UCLG

Catherine Cullen, President UCLG Committee on culture, Councillor for Culture of Lille and Community Councillor of Lille-Métropole
Jordi Pascual, Co-ordinator UCLG Committee on culture

Carlos Mascarell Vilar, Policy Officer – Citizenship, Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), European section of UCLG.

COST Action IS1007 Investigating Cultural Sustainability

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