



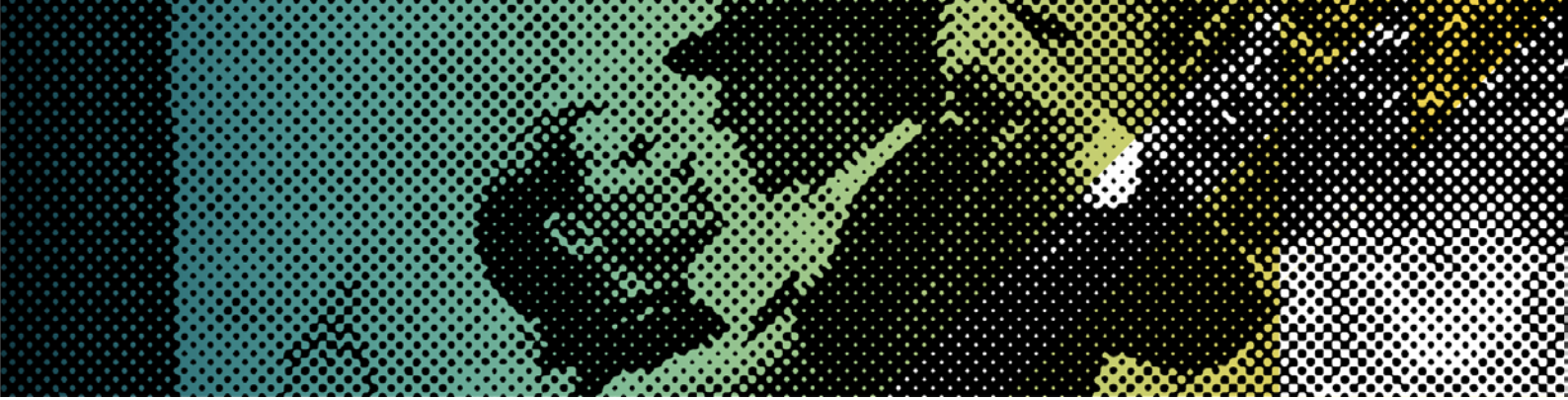
**3TH UCLG
CULTURE SUMMIT**
BUENOS AIRES
3-5 APRIL 2019

**Cities lead the actions
on the role of culture in
sustainable development**

**GENDER PERSPECTIVES:
REDESIGNING FOR CHANGE**
4 APRIL 2019

MS **AMMU JOSEPH**
INDEPENDENT JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR,
BANGALORE





INTRODUCTION

I would like to thank the UCLG, particularly Jordi Balta and Jordi Pascual, the City of Buenos Aires and its Minister for Culture, Mr. Enrique Avogado, and other organisers of this Summit for inviting and enabling me to be here today.

I must begin by saying that, professionally speaking, I am a newcomer to the field of culture, cultural diversity and cultural policies. I am essentially a journalist and my area of special expertise is the media in general, and the media & gender in particular.

However, I have learnt a lot in the process of researching and writing the gender equality chapters for the two UNESCO Global Reports on the implementation of the 2005 Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2015 and 2018). And, in the process, I have noticed that there are many parallels between gender & the media, on the one hand, and gender & culture, on the other.

I also think that being an outsider looking in, without any preconceived notions, has in some ways been an advantage during the fascinating voyage of discovery I have been on over the past few years.

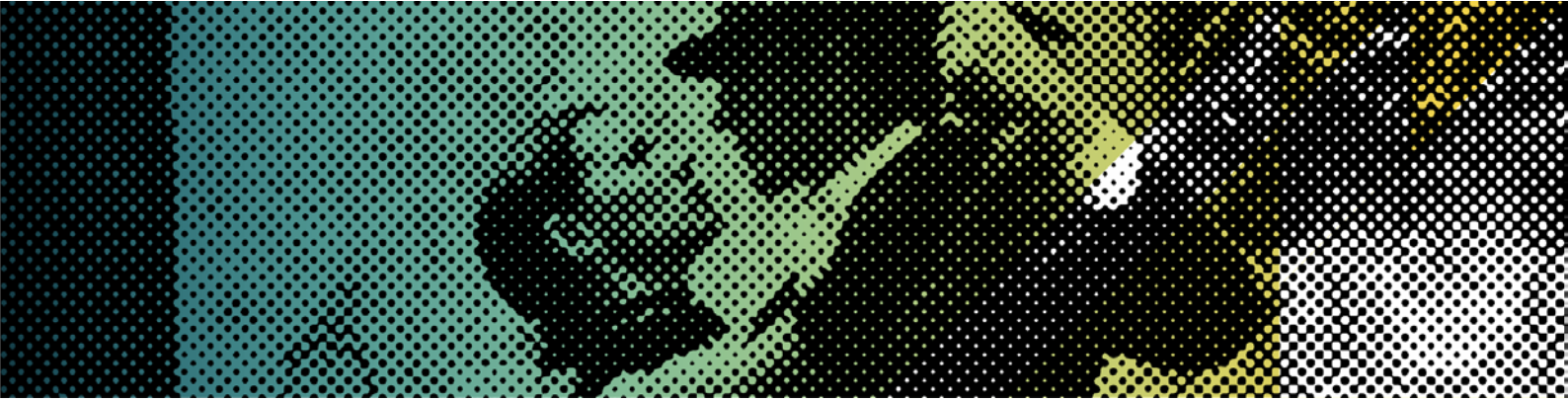
So, when I was invited to participate in this session and share my recent learnings, I was happy to accept. I also look forward to gaining many insights from fellow participants in this morning's panel as well as from the rest of the Summit.

I thought I would begin by sharing a couple of insights gained in the process of writing the gender equality chapters for the two UNESCO Global Reports.

»»» THE FIRST CHALLENGE IS A PERVERSIVE GENDER BLINDNESS – IN SOCIETY IN GENERAL OF COURSE, BUT MORE TO THE POINT HERE, WITHIN THE CULTURAL ESTABLISHMENT AND IN THE REALM OF CULTURAL POLICY.

On the basis of what I have learnt, mainly by reading the Quarterly Periodic Reports submitted to UNESCO by States Parties that have ratified the 2005 Convention, I would argue that there are at least two sets of challenges to the integration of a gender perspective in cultural policies:

The first challenge is a **pervasive gender blindness** – in society in general of course, but more to the point here, within the cultural establishment and in the realm of cultural policy. From what I heard here yesterday, this appears to be changing. But at least up to 2017 this was not reflected in country reports from around the globe. I found that where cultural policies did exist across the world, few appeared to actually mention women or gender equality. Even when there were references in cultural policies to fundamental rights and freedoms, equality, equal access, cultural diversity, and so on, there did not appear to be any recognition that gender is a vital factor that both affects and is affected by all of these. Even countries one would expect to be relatively gender-aware (judging by their general record on gender equality) often did not refer to women or members of the LGBTQI community in the context of cultural policies.



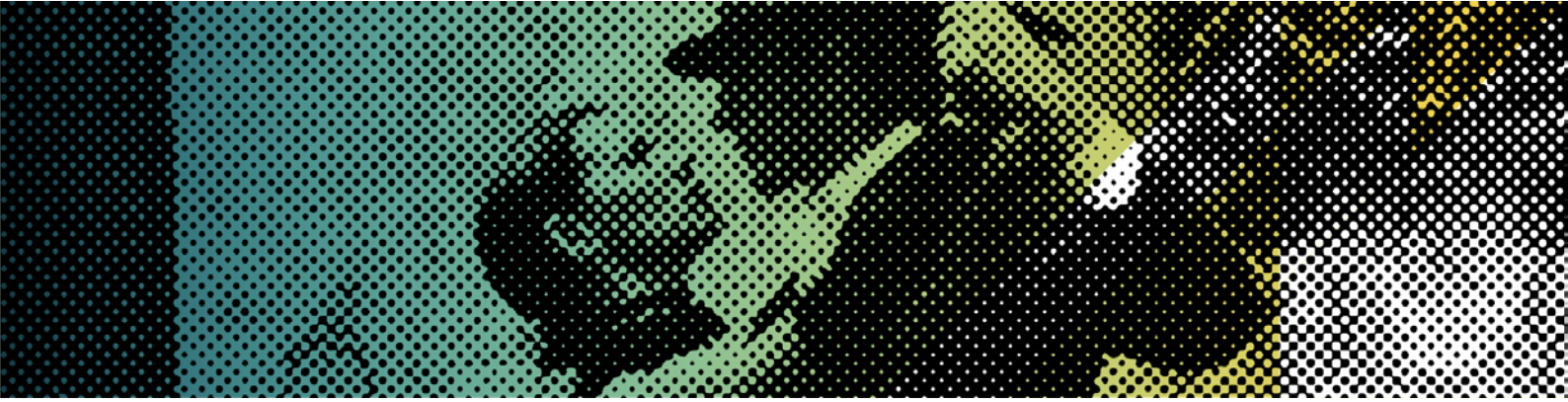
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The second challenge is a propensity towards ghettoisation or marginalisation of anything to do with women/gender.

In many ways, gender equality tends to still be seen as a narrow, niche issue to be taken into consideration in predictable areas such as education, health, political participation, participation, etc. These are, of course, important matters and it is vital to ensure gender equality in such areas. However, as everyone here knows, culture is equally essential for development and, therefore, gender equality within culture is just as imperative as gender equality in other aspects of life and society.

Similarly, when an attempt is made to come up with women-oriented cultural initiatives – for example, to fulfil the gender equality requirement under the 2005 Convention – there is a noticeable tendency to focus on activities traditionally associated with women, such as craft, food, textiles and clothing. There is obviously nothing wrong with these areas of cultural activity per se. There is no doubt that large numbers of women are engaged in creating these important aspects of cultural heritage and that they both contribute to and gain from such occupations. And these women certainly need and deserve encouragement and support.





However, there is clearly a problem if these are the only areas of cultural expression and production that women are expected and assisted to participate in. Measures that make it possible for a wide range of women (including women belonging to vulnerable social groups) to enter any field of creative expression and artistic production that interests them and fits their varied abilities and talents are vital for the advancement of both gender equality and cultural diversity.

A third way in which ghettoisation and marginalisation happens, according to me, is through the trend towards an instrumentalist view of culture purely as a means of dealing with gender-related problems, such as violence against women. While all efforts to harness the power of culture to bring about gender justice are certainly to be appreciated, in my view that should not be seen as the sole reason for paying attention to gender in the context of culture. Gender equality within the cultural field must be understood as important in itself, as a matter of cultural rights. It is imperative to recognise that cultural diversity simply cannot be secured without gender equality.

To sum up this part of my talk I would like to emphasise again that the first, crucial step forward is to recognise that gender equality is not an inessential, peripheral matter to be taken care of with token gestures. It is essential to recognise that there can be no claim to the promotion of cultural diversity in the absence of concerted efforts towards gender diversity in the cultural arena. Cultural policies must obviously reflect this recognition.

Another point I would like to stress on the basis of my work for the Global Reports is that the collection and collation of information is absolutely crucial to raising awareness which, in turn, is essential to making progress towards gender equality in the cultural arena. Sex-disaggregated data is critical for (a) identifying the problem, (b) tackling the problem and (c) evaluating measures meant to deal with the problem.

At present, going by my experience over the past few years, there appears to be very little sex-disaggregated data about cultural activities, occupations and industries, as well as about cultural products and services, across the world. However, it is important to recognise that the little information that does exist – mainly in Western Europe and North America – points towards substantial gender disparities in most cultural fields almost everywhere.

At the same time there is encouraging evidence that the availability of data can trigger constructive action towards promoting gender balance on the part of governments and official agencies as well as private cultural entities.

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So the importance of gathering information in a systematic way cannot be over-emphasised.

Yet another point I would like to make is that cooperation and collaboration between governments and civil society organisations is another important factor to be kept



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in mind. And that here, too, it is essential to ensure that women's organisations and associations of female cultural professionals are included in such cooperation and collaboration. The involvement of women and other marginalised groups in the process of formulating cultural policy could go a long way towards making such policies more sensitive and responsive to the perspectives, priorities and needs of diverse sections of society, as they ought to be.

It is also important to connect the dots between women/gender and various aspects of culture as well as different cultural activities. For example, as you are no doubt aware, nowadays there is quite a bit of focus on culture in the context of sustainable development, the digital environment and artistic freedom. But, as I've outlined in the 2018 UNESCO Global Report, the gender dimensions of these important issues, and culture within them, are all too often ignored.

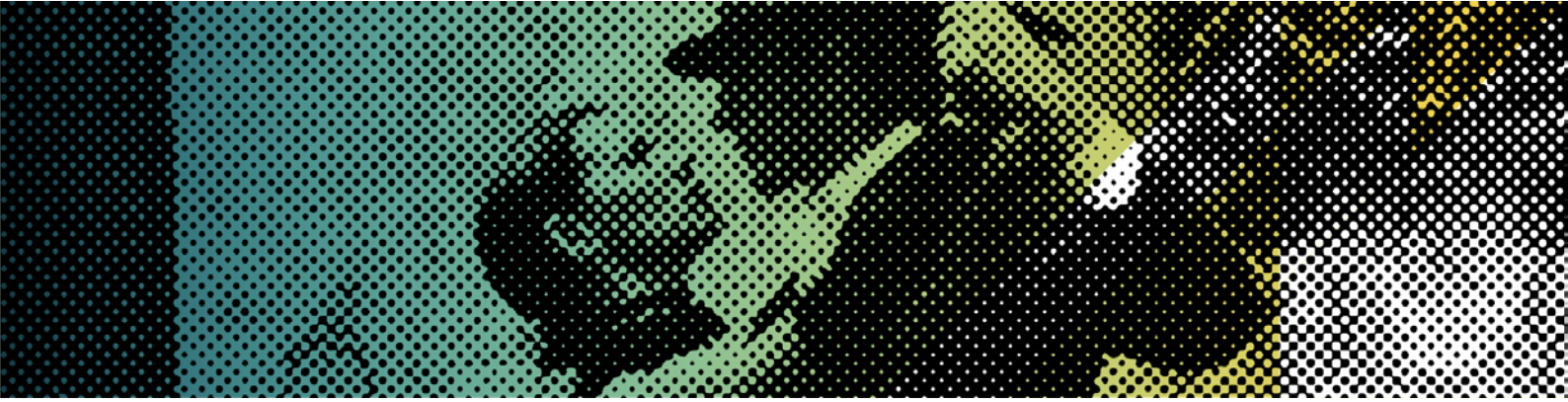
I think it is also necessary to understand and accept that gender needs to be kept in mind while planning and implementing a range of measures – such as state or city subsidies for films, efforts to promote a country's or a city's culture abroad, festivals/competitions/celebrations and other such cultural events, awards or pensions for artists and other creative professionals, or disbursement of national/local culture funds (if any). Unless there is a deliberate attempt to make these inclusive in terms of gender and other such factors, they will not benefit everyone, or tap the potential of all those engaged in cultural expressions, or indeed showcase the full range of a country's or a city's cultural wealth.

These are all points that I think framers of cultural policy would do well to keep in mind.

CITIES, CULTURE AND GENDER EQUALITY

Turning to cities, culture and gender equality, I must confess that if I am a novice in the area of culture and cultural policy, I am even more of a neophyte in the specific area of cities and culture.

However, while thinking about the Summit and the question of gender, cities and cultural policies, it occurred to me that the #MeToo phenomenon that has erupted across the globe over the past year and a half or so is worth taking on board in this context. Apart from the world of cinema, especially Hollywood, which catalysed the process of calling out sexual predators in a range of professions, it is important to note that the visual and performing arts as well as literature/publishing and, of course, the media in many countries have been convulsed with allegations of sexual harassment at the workplace, some of the reported incidents dating back decades.



»» IT IS VITAL TO FACTOR IN THE ISSUE OF SAFETY AND SECURITY IN CREATIVE WORKSPACES WHILE FORMULATING CULTURAL POLICIES.

In this context, I think it is vital to factor in the issue of safety and security in creative workspaces while formulating cultural policies. In the wake of the second #MeToo wave that swept India from October 2018 onwards, during which some prominent men in various cultural fields were named and shamed, there have been attempts by organisations and individuals involved in the arts to begin conversations about how to move towards more congenial, comfortable working environments in which everyone can be free and fearless.

While preparing for this session I got in touch with a few friends and acquaintances, especially younger women, who are active in the cultural field in India to solicit their views on how to rethink and redesign public cultural policy to include a gender perspective and help move towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. I would like to share some of their thoughtful inputs with you because I think some of their ideas could open up different ways of approaching the question of gender equality in cultural policies in the urban context.

A couple of them highlighted the safety issue, too. As Arundhati Ghosh, Executive Director of India Foundation for the Arts, said, “It’s not just about cultural policy but how safe and welcoming a city is for women and gender queer folk to be present, active and to participate in cultural activities.” She pointed out that policies relating to safety on the roads and in public spaces are equally required to achieve this, as is the accessibility of convenient and safe public transport.

Theatre artist Mallika Taneja mentioned an initiative she is involved in where groups of women go midnight walking in the city she lives in (Delhi) to reclaim the streets and highlight the importance of being able to walk without fear at any time, the need for better street lighting, and so on.

She, too, mentioned the crucial role of public transport in enabling women to be more mobile and active in the public sphere. So I was happy to learn here yesterday about interventions in this area in several cities across the globe, including Buenos Aires.

There are a couple of other initiatives by women in India that also aim to reclaim public spaces for women and emphasise their right to “loiter” wherever they wish to whenever they wish to. One involves women gathering in parks and lying on benches or on the grass – as men often do but women have traditionally not been able to – basically to assert their right to claim public paces for themselves. I don’t know how relevant this kind of thing is in urban contexts in other parts of the world but such activities have certainly caught on in various South Asian countries, including Pakistan.

I would like to refer to another point made by Mallika Taneja, based on the work she has done through a small organisation called Lost and Found, which aimed to bring the arts to different neighbourhoods in the city, using existing spaces such as community centres, parks, garages, even malls. Pointing out that the arts have come to be concentrated in certain parts



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of Indian cities even though traditionally they were more accessible, she says it is time for the arts to return to the people instead of expecting everyone to come to particular venues if they wish to experience the arts. Again, it was great to hear about initiatives with similar aims during various sessions here yesterday.

According to Mallika, the maximum support for this project came from the women and senior citizens of the neighbourhood – and even among the seniors, the women were the most enthusiastic. “Women were most of our audience, most of our volunteers, most of our artists,” she says. She also pointed out that becoming more aware of the lives of these women taught her how not to take supposedly simple things like show timings for granted. She learnt to ensure that programmes ended in time for the women to go back and make dinner for their families. Cultural policy makers may like to keep this in mind.

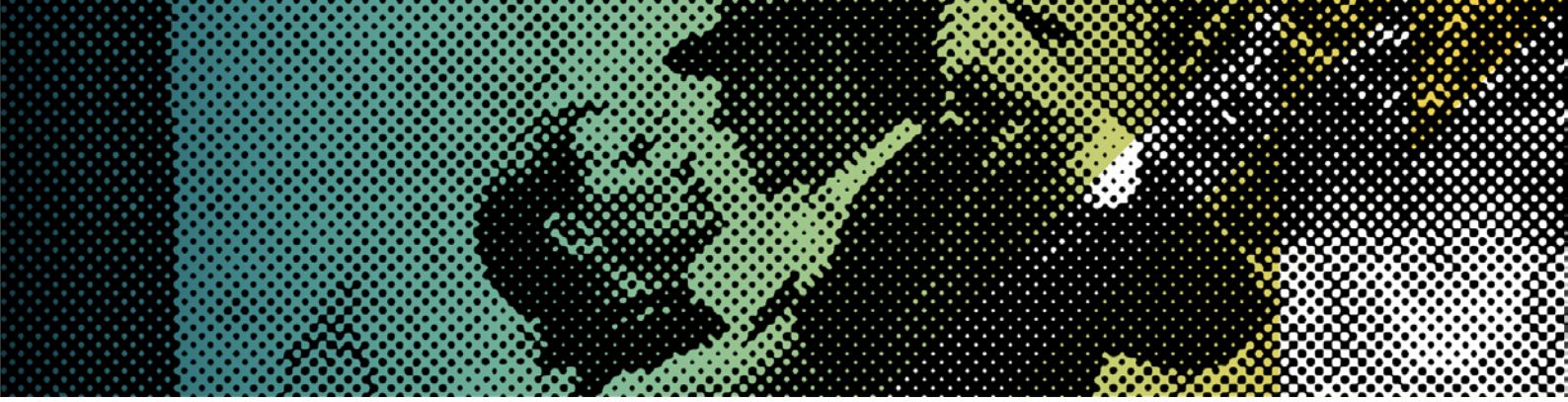
Mallika also believes that gender sensitisation has to be part of cultural policy, with everyone in the arts going through it. As she puts it, “The arts suffer from all the ailments that every other field suffers from when it comes to gender – perhaps things are even a little worse because people in the arts tend to take the moral high ground!” According to her, “Historically and culturally there must be more of a focus on what women have done – to establish and remember that our cities were and are not built and occupied only by men.”

However, as she says, “For all or any of this to happen, we have to first believe that women are important. And women also have to believe that they are important, that what they have to say, their thoughts, aspirations, dreams and desires are also valuable.” She thinks it is essential to have arts-based practices that focus on women all over the city. “We have to rethink how, where and when we do arts events so that women, too, can attend them.”

I am probably running out of time now – so I will wind up. But I would like to say that it was encouraging to find that gender and/or women were referred to in almost every session I attended at the Summit yesterday – by speakers as well as in questions or comments from the audience.

This is as it should be. It may be necessary to continue to have special sessions focussing specifically on gender, at least in the near future – just to ensure that the issue remains in the spotlight until it is well and truly integrated into our ways of seeing and doing things. But integration is the goal. Much of my work in the field of gender and media has been to highlight the importance of examining all events and issues through a gender lens (along with various other lenses). It could well be that the same may be worth trying in the cultural field as well.

Indeed, I was pleased to hear a speaker in the Creative Mobilities session yesterday say that improving public transport in keeping with women’s needs would actually ensure that



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it would also serve the interests of children and senior citizens. In other words, subjecting cultural policies and projects to the gender test may be an effective way of ensuring that they will pass the humanity test, too.

I would like to end with a quote from the 2012 Report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights which I think goes to the heart of the matter: "Women's perspectives and contributions must move from the margins of cultural life to the centre of the processes that create, interpret and shape culture."¹

Thank you.
Ammu Joseph

¹ Shaheed, F. (2012). *Report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights*. UN General Assembly – 67th Session





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