HABITAT III ISSUE PAPERS:
"4 – URBAN CULTURE AND HERITAGE"

Comments from the Committee on Culture of UCLG

JULY 2015

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

1.   UCLG's Culture Committee welcomes the publication of a specific issue paper on 'Urban Culture and Heritage' as part of the preparations of Habitat III, and generally agrees with the arguments presented by the paper. This confirms the increasing importance given to the cultural dimension in sustainable development and the role of cities in this context.

2.   UCLG's Culture Committee is also pleased to see references to its work, including mentions of the Agenda 21 for culture as an example of the networks which acknowledge culture as a key priority of local development (page 6) and of Culture 21: Actions as a relevant reference (p. 8).

SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.   The issue paper seems to concentrate mainly on the nexus between heritage, urban regeneration and tourism, on the one hand; and that between the cultural and creative industries, employment and economic development, on the other. While there are references to the role of culture in 'rehumanising' cities and making them more resilient and inclusive, it may be convenient to include more precise references to the following aspects:

a) the importance of accessible, decentralised and well-resourced cultural infrastructures, including not only museums (p. 5), but also art schools, libraries or theatres;

b) the relation between culture and education, e.g. how formal and non-formal education and lifelong learning should recognise cultural diversity and integrate artistic and cultural education;

c) the relation between culture, health and well-being, e.g. how health and welfare policies should be responsive to cultural diversity and explore the benefits of cultural participation;

d) the relation between culture, technologies and knowledge, e.g. how cultural participation may enhance individual and collective knowledge and how cultural policies should be concerned with access to digital tools.

4.   References to the role of culture for economic, social and environmental sustainability of cities and to the need for a comprehensive approach integrating culture in sustainable urban development (p. 3) should be welcomed. However, a more ambitious stance, recognising culture as the fourth (or the first) pillar of sustainable development and quoting UCLG's work in this field (including 2010's policy statement) would be desirable.

5.   The inclusion of references to culture in documents related to the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the SDGs is indeed welcome (pp. 3-4), but emphasis so far has been placed mainly on the heritage dimension, at the expense of creativity, diversity and cultural participation. The issue paper could stress that these aspects deserve more attention in Post-2015 documents. The global platform #culture2015goal has produced three outstanding documents, on culture as a goal (October 2013), on targets (May 2014) and on indicators (February 2015), rich in contents, that it is worth using in the definition of the new Urban agenda.

6.   The role of civil society may need to be mentioned within the 'renewed governance system' called for in p. 7. This would be in line with references to participatory approaches which are included throughout the document.

SUMMARY

7.   The New Urban Agenda must provide details (key issues, main actors, essential processes and fundamental resources) of a culture-based approach to local sustainable development.