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Agenda 21 for culture

Operationalising culture in the sustainable development of cities

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*Cultural matters
are integral parts
of the lives we lead.
If development
can be seen as
enhancement of
our living standards,
then efforts geared
to development can
hardly ignore the
world of culture."*

1. INTRODUCTION

This document was prepared to provide initial ideas on the role of culture in the sustainable development of cities[1]. This topic was selected as one of seven key areas of interest for the GOLD IV report, which will be published in 2016 by the international association of United Cities and Local Governments - UCLG. Each of the seven key areas of interest in GOLD IV are closely related to the main topics of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments for Post-2015 Development Agenda and Habitat III, which was convened by UCLG in order to build a joint strategy to contribute to the international policy-making debates.

The international community is debating a new paradigm that will define sustainable development policies and programmes for decades to come. Habitat III is a key landmark in this process as it will be a standard-setting document with the capacity to influence new generations of urban policies. Thus, in the short term, this document aims to assist members and partners of United Cities and Local Governments to effectively contribute to the World Urban Forum (Medellin, April 2014) and to the Habitat III national and regional meetings (2014 and 2015).

This document analyses the place of culture in the sustainable development of cities. It documents key landmarks in international policy on culture and urban development since Habitat II (section 1), highlights recent influences of culture on urban policies (section 2), outlines key cross-cutting issues (section 3), suggests some operational conditions and tools (section 4), and raises questions to open the debate (section 5). The most significant conclusion is that **cultural resources must be integrated and operationalized in the sustainable development of cities**.

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1   We wish to highlight that the concept of cities in this paper includes metropolitan areas, large cities, intermediate cities, small towns, villages, and rural communities. We also acknowledge the key role that regions and provinces play in sustainable development.

2. CHANGES SINCE HABITAT II

In the Habitat Agenda adopted in 1996, Heads of State and Government committed themselves to two main goals, "Adequate Shelter for All" and "Sustainable Human Settlements in an Urbanizing World", and to implementing a Plan of Action based on these goals.

a. With respect to the goal of "Adequate Shelter for All", Heads of State and Government committed themselves to enabling people to obtain shelter that is healthy, safe, secure, accessible and affordable and that includes basic services, facilities and amenities, and in which everyone enjoys freedom from discrimination in housing and legal security of tenure.

b. With respect to the goal of "Sustainable Human Settlements in an Urbanizing World," Heads of State and Governments committed themselves to developing societies that make efficient use of resources within the carrying capacity of ecosystems and by providing all people, in particular those belonging to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, with equal opportunities for a healthy, safe, and productive life in harmony with nature and their cultural heritage and spiritual and cultural values, and a life that ensures economic and social development and environmental protection, thereby contributing to the achievement of national sustainable development (parag. 42, Habitat Agenda).

Without doubt, the cultural dimensions of housing provision are of vital significance in achieving the goals of "Adequate Shelter for All." However, we believe that the relationship between culture and sustainable development of urban areas is equally important but less thoroughly understood by local governments and more difficult to operationalize. Hence, this paper focuses on the relation between culture and Sustainable Human Settlements in an Urbanizing World and proposes ways to integrate and operationalize culture in the sustainable development of cities towards Habitat III.

The world has changed a lot since 1996 with rapid urbanization and hyper-globalization bringing with them numerous tensions and contradictions in urban areas. Some of these tensions are economic, such as the bitter effects of the recent global financial crisis; tensions due to inadequate mechanisms for governance at the local, global, and regional levels; social tensions exacerbated by persistence of poverty and discrimination world wide; environmental tensions due to ecosystems threatened by uncontrolled flows of energy and waste. Globalisation also has many cultural tensions, and since 1996 there have been greater attempts to include culture into the policy frameworks of development, but they have not yet been fully integrated.

Some key landmark developments are:

(a) UNESCO's *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* (2001) and *Convention on the Protection and the Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* (2005);

(b) United Cities and Local Governments' declaration *Agenda 21 for culture* (approved in 2004) and the policy statement *"Culture: Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development"* (2010) engaged local governments to explicitly include culture as a driver and an enabler of a model of development that 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs';

(c) UNDP devoted a *Human Development Report* to cultural freedom in 2004 and opened a *Thematic Window* on "Culture and Development" in the MDG Achievement Fund in 2006;

(d) The work of the *UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights* (since 2009), whose recent issues in focus include the right to artistic freedom, memorialization processes, access to cultural heritage, and cultural rights in divided and post-conflict societies;

(e) The *Outcome Document of the 2010 MDG Summit* emphasized the importance of culture for development and its contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and reiterated this message in three consecutive *"Culture and Development"* UN General Assembly Resolutions in 2010, 2011 and 2013;

(f) The *Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development* (2012) acknowledged the natural and cultural diversity of the world, recognized that all cultures and civilizations can contribute to sustainable development and underscored that all spheres of governments are key actors for the different dimensions of development; and

(g) The UNESCO *Hangzhou Declaration* (2013), recognizing culture's cross-cutting role across a variety of fields, advocated for placing culture at the heart of all public policy, and to integrate culture in strategies to address the world's most pressing developmental challenges, such as environmental sustainability, poverty, and social inclusion.

Overall, the more recent approaches have been aimed at cross-thematic integration of culture across all policy domains.

3. RECENT INFLUENCES OF CULTURE ON URBAN POLICIES

Globalisation has brought cities to the centre of the debate on economic progress, the fight against poverty towards a more equitable society, the struggle for environmental balance and the right of citizens to choose their freedoms and decide their future. Cities are the spaces of encounter and debate, of citizen participation and freedoms, and the places in which solutions are found and collectively worked out. All in all, there are very good examples, in all continents, on ways to successfully operationalize culture in urban sustainable development.

- In cities, cultures are dynamic, not static. Culture is multi-faceted, incorporating a range of expressions and values embodied in built heritage, intangible heritage, collective activities, and the contemporary arts, as shown explicitly in the formulation of the cultural policies of Vancouver or Amsterdam.

- Human rights include cultural diversity, which is an asset and a source of innovation for cities. Freedom, innovation and transformation are integral and necessary to the functioning and evolution of societies, as stated in the policies of cities like Barcelona, Buenos Aires or Milan.

- Cultural ecosystems balance the roles and participation of public, NGO and private actors, like in Montreal or Angers.

- Cultural actors have been successfully involved in memorialization processes, to preserve memories of people or events, and in upholding cultural rights in divided and post-conflict societies such as in Bogotá or Johannesburg.

- Local cultures and built heritage are core elements of distinctive urban development and identity, such as the experience of cities like Kanazawa prove.

- Urban regeneration strategies have included an explicit cultural dimension, which successfully combine basic cultural public services for all, new infrastructure and respect for initiatives of civil society, like in Medellin or Bilbao.

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- Traditional local knowledge and building technologies are often best suited for local environmental conditions, as proven by post-tsunami policies of Banda Aceh or the urban planning of Saint-Louis de Senegal.

- Urban development can be informed by international practices, but they must be adapted to the specificities of local resources, values and frameworks, like the policies of Lille-Métropole or Mexico City.

The experiences of cities such as those highlighted here provide models for the successful integration of culture in sustainable development.

4. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

Habitat III will become a standard-setting document with the capacity to influence the new generation of urban policies. We believe that the key element for local sustainable development in the next decades will be located in the interconnections among civic domains, interlinking concerns such as heritage, housing, physical planning, inclusion, mobility, culture, nature, resilience, and governance. Positive transformations will be generated through the interrelation and integration of these domains.

In its 2010 policy statement on culture and sustainable development, the United Cities and Local Governments provided initial guidance for the **integration and operationalization of culture in local sustainable development**, and put forward a **dual approach** to the relation between culture and sustainable urban development. First, culture is considered to be a **driver of development**, and thus the UCLG suggests that cities elaborate a solid cultural policy. Secondly, culture is considered to be an **enabler of development**, and, therefore, the UCLG advocates for the presence of a cultural dimension in all public policies. As mentioned above, leading thinking and policy approaches in this area have been increasingly aimed at cross-thematic integration of culture across all policy domains.

This dual approach incorporates an array of **cross-cutting issues**, linking culture to other development goals and concerns:

CULTURE IS A DRIVER OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, THE KEY ELEMENT OF MEANING, VITALITY, CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION.

- **Culture is a resource to address challenges and find appropriate solutions that concern citizens**. Culture is the fabric for the dynamic construction of identities and in local policies everywhere, culture is should flourish as a desirable end in itself.

- **Access to and participation in culture is both a fundamental right and an avenue of city development**. Cities are the forefront of providing cultural services to their residents. The active participation of people in cultural activities (poetry, dance, sculpture, theatre, music...) improves the quality of life, enhances life opportunities, and enables individuals "to live and be what they choose." Culture provides knowledge about our existence as inhabitants of our cities and as citizens of the world. We all need to learn about the past of our city, so that we can "own" it and propel this identity and local knowledge into the future.

CULTURE IS AN ENABLER OF SUSTAINABILITY, THROUGH THE SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS THAT IT MAKES TO PROMOTE INCLUSIVE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY, HARMONY, PEACE AND SECURITY.

CULTURE BOOSTS THE ECONOMY

- **Culture is one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy**. It generates income, employment and new businesses in large metropolis, in big cities and in all scales of local communities.

- Culture **provides content** for cinema, Internet and games and other communication products and conduits. Digital technologies provide new forms of social and economic exchanges and contribute significantly to new types of creative economies.

- Culture is **closely associated with tourism** because heritage and the arts attract visitors and shape the "brand" of a city.

- **The production of goods and services incorporates a very strong cultural component**: on one hand, traditional crafts are extremely valued internationally, and on the other hand, more 'mass consumption' products (from cars to clothing) include cultural designs. The value of consumer items is closely linked to their design and symbolic significance: companies look to cultural expressions and processes to develop unique products, communicate more effectively, and look for new ways to stand out.

- **Culture can foster entrepreneurship capacity and skills**: Participation in culture generates skills such as being able to speak in public, being able to continuously learn and appreciate new perspectives, being able to generate a suitable climate of partnership, etc. – all fundamental to success.

- **Culture fosters youth to be more imaginative and innovative**. The processes of creation and cultural participation provide knowledge and techniques to imagine and expand horizons, integrate diverse elements, and create something new. Cultural experiences can be important platforms for the development of capacities that expand self-knowledge, self-expression, self-determination and life satisfaction and well-being.

CULTURE IS LINKED TO EQUITY AND THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF DEVELOPMENT

- **Culture provides tools to fight against poverty** when it broadens the capacities and expands the opportunities of vulnerable groups. While culture can provide employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, it is also important to keep in mind that poverty is not only material, but also the lack of capabilities and opportunities, the difficulties of marginalised people to envisage a better future, and the lack of creative capacity to imagine new perspectives and become a citizen. Culture-based initiatives can directly address these issues.

- **Culture enables citizen participation, community empowerment and social cohesion** as it promotes grassroots processes that build connections within communities and can accelerate

the rootedness of newcomers. Cultural activities and expressions can provide knowledge, heighten awareness, and foster processes that also relate inhabitants to the past, the present and the future of a city.

- Culture can offer **new approaches to tackling complex social issues** and addressing neighbourhood "problems," and promote understanding and exchange among different groups.

- Cultural policies can **foster intercultural dialogue and conflict resolution,** which sometimes originate from misunderstandings and a lack of careful explanations of the contexts that make up the identity of individuals and communities.

CULTURE EMBRACES THE ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION BECAUSE CULTURAL AND NATURAL DIVERSITY ARE INEXTRICABLY LINKED AND HAVE EVOLVED TOGETHER

- **Culture explains and gives meaning to the identity of people and societies**, often related to the founding land, to place, to landscapes, to mountains, seas and rivers. Leading thinking about landscapes recognizes that all territories (even degraded ones) hold environmental, cultural and other values that are worthy of valuing and preserving. Historic narratives of cities also include culture and nature.

- **Culture provides the local knowledge for contextualised resilience**, by emphasizing locality and historical continuities, which are key elements in the fight against climate change and natural hazards like earthquakes and floods.

- Culture **raises awareness** of the impacts of our ecological footprints, the need to transform production and consumption patterns (e.g., slow food, 0 km products, etc.), and our collective responsibility to reconnect our values towards a more harmonious balance with the environment.

- Cultural activities can **catalyse collective public action and pilot new ways of living** in our cities. Artistic and collective cultural activities can initiate public dialogue, connect people to their environment, invent more sustainable living practices, and spearhead initiatives to improve the local or regional environment.

5. KEY QUESTIONS TO OPEN THE DEBATE

The following list of questions aims to elicit discussion on the integration and operationalization of culture in local sustainable development for UCLG members and partners.

CULTURAL POLICY, DEMOCRACY AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

(a) Are **citizens** and their expectations of a better future at the centre of local public policies for culture? Or, instead, do policies for culture primarily serve the interests of the cultural sector (professional elites)?

(b) How can we encourage and stimulate the **democratic participation of citizens** in the formulation, exercise and evaluation of public policies on culture?

(c) Are cultural policies and programmes sensitive to **gender**? What strategies should be considered to place the issue of gender at the centre of cultural policies?

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND CHANGE

(d) What are the best ways to recognise and strengthen the **cultural diversity** and cohesiveness in cities? Are there successful programmes to empower citizens with backgrounds in other places and to recognize the endogenous diversity of a place?

(e) How do cultural policies contribute to building the **identity** of cities? What are the best programmes that aim to invite citizens to enroot locally, and be proud and engaged in the long-term urban development of their city?

CULTURE AND OTHER CIVIC GOALS

(f) How does culture contribute to the **fight against poverty**? (Poverty is not only material. Poverty is also the lack of knowledge, skills and opportunities to imagine new perspectives and become a citizen.)

(g) How does culture contribute to **economic progress**? Culture is a driver for inclusive economic and social development. Heritage, cultural industries, arts and crafts, sustainable cultural tourism, culture-led urban revitalization and cultural infrastructure can serve as strategic tools for revenue and employment generation. How can cultural diversity be connected to economic progress?

(h) What is the relation between **cultural diversity and biodiversity**? Can a cultural approach contribute to the success of environmental programmes and policies? How?

CULTURE-BASED PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING

(i) Are **education and culture** connected in cities? How? What are the best examples of joint education-culture programmes?

(j) How do **local media** inform and relate to residents in the city? What are the best strategies to connect media with urban development?

URBAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES, HERITAGE AND CULTURE

(k) What are the keys to **preserve heritage and improve the cultural quality of public spaces** (e.g. through the meaningful use of public art, distinctive architecture, design, landscapes, etc.)?

(l) How can **urbanisation and physical planning** embrace heritage and culture and integrate them into policy frameworks? Should policy frameworks and action plans provide a common "Cultural Impact Assessment" mechanism? What other mechanisms and tools have been developed?

(m) Do local authorities and/or residents explicitly use culture in local **urbanization processes** (e.g. in slum upgrading, in regeneration of city-centres and urban peripheries, in the creation of new districts and neighbourhoods)? How?

(n) Are there indicators for the positive integration of culture in sustainable development? How can we prove that the **active involvement of citizens in cultural practices** correlates with community connectedness and resiliency, good education, better health and deliberative democracy?

MACRO POLICY COORDINATION AND FRAMEWORKS

(o) Is there **intra- and inter-governmental coordination**? Is there coordination between the department for culture and the strategic plans of the city and other integrated local planning processes?

(p) What **national or international frameworks** are used by cities to inform and elaborate cultural policies that aim to influence city development?

All these questions can be summarised in one:

What are the most effective operational ways to place culture at the centre of the sustainable development of cities?

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