



culture 21

UCLG Committee



11 December 2024

WORKING TO BOOST THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN REGIONAL INITIATIVES AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES

#Culture2030Goal

CONTEXT

On 11 December 2024, the UCLG Culture Committee, in cooperation with UCLG-Africa and the UCCI, with the support of the European Union, and the technical support of Culture et Développement (NGO), organized a webinar to go in-depth on the relation between the Culture Capitals and the [Culture Goal](#), in order to boost the connections between the regional Capital initiatives and the global challenges.

The webinar's objectives were:

- Identify the relevant arguments and frameworks that would facilitate the inclusion of the "Culture Goal" considerations in the agendas of the key actors of the global conversation on development.
- Analyse how the current narrative developed by the Culture 2030 Goal Campaign is directly and indirectly already embedded in the preparation of 2024-2030 Capitals of Culture around the world, as well as how it can further inspire their development.
- Discuss a baseline and spark shared advocacy initiatives among Capitals of Culture in 2025-2026.
- Present the next steps of the Culture 2030 Goal campaign and identify ways to support the consultation process on the Culture Goal draft proposal (to be published in June 2025) at grassroots level, in cooperation with the Capitals of Culture.

1. TRENDS AND INITIATIVES OF THE REGIONAL CAPITALS OF CULTURE

Paloma Gámez, Union of Capital Cities of Iberoamerica, highlighted the 34+ years of experience of the network, with focus on sustainability, gender, artist mobility, local involvement, and cultural integration. Among the main accomplishments were mentioned the Plaza Mayor award, robust local-international ties, and open evaluation procedures. She also mentioned opportunities to foster cooperation between Capitals cities, such as exchanges on protocol development for award criteria, international visibility, and city-to-city cooperation. Capitals for the period 2024-2026 are San Juan de Puerto Rico (2024), La Paz and Sucre (2025), Lima (2026).

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Alessandro G. Lamonica, Anna Lindh Foundation, and **Rim Filali Meknassi**, Union for the Mediterranean, presented the Mediterranean Capitals of Culture initiative, based on twin capitals (one in the North of the Mediterranean and one in the South, per cycle) of 43 countries. They said that the objectives of the initiative are to foster Euro-Mediterranean identity, territorial cooperation, and bottom-up civil society engagement, and that the selection criteria focus on program quality, cooperation, governance, civil society engagement and environmental impact. Capitals for the period 2025-2026 are Tirana and Alexandria (2025), and Tetouan and Matera (2026).

Jean-Pierre Elong-Mbassi and **Rahmatouka Sow**, UCLG Africa, explained that the African Capital of Culture is an initiative inspired by the European model but initiated and led by a local authorities network, with the support of civil society and cultural actors (not states). The first designated city was Marrakech (later Rabat due to scheduling, for the period 2022-2023), and then Brazzaville-Kinshasa as a unique cross-border dual capital (2025-2026). They emphasized that some components of the programme are mandatory and linked to the need of strengthening the governance of culture in Africa and in African cities (including through more structured cultural policies to be developed). Its four pillars components are the celebration of African Culture Day, expert meetings, mayors forum, and ministers meeting. As a main challenge, they mentioned the need for stronger political recognition of culture, its sustainable funding, and institutionalization of the programme within the African continent, notably through a stronger partnership with the African Union.

Sylvain Pasqua, European Commission, presented the European Capital of Culture initiative. Created in 1985 by Melina Mercouri, this initiative was conceived to highlight the richness and diversity of European cultures and to raise awareness of their common history and values. He recalled that it went from celebrations awarded in large capital cities to the inclusion of small and medium-sized cities but also regions on its list of Capitals, with growing global outreach. Pasqua argued that today the initiative focuses more on promoting a diversity of cultural expressions, foster intercultural dialogue, link culture with urban and territorial development. Recent trends include an emphasis on sustainability, inclusion, outreach to non-participants, and international cooperation (notably with Africa and South America).

2. ADVOCACY FOR THE CULTURE GOAL, BY THE CULTURE 2030 GOAL CAMPAIGN MEMBERS

Jordi Pascual, United Cities and Local Governments, Culture Committee, offered an overview of the Culture 2030 Goal Campaign. It started as early as 2013, advocating for the first time for a dedicated culture goal in the SDGs. As he recalled, while SDGs include several references to culture and creativity, heritage, a culture goal was not integrated in the structure of the SDGs. So, over the years the campaign has worked hard in the fields of advocacy, research and monitoring for the achievement of the SDGs with the culture component as explicit as possible.

Silja Fischer, International Music Council, commented on the biggest achievement of the campaign so far, the formulation of the Zero Draft of a Culture Goal in 2022. The Zero Draft, within the framework of the institutional and international exchanges on the post-2030 agenda, has 10 targets, including cultural rights, heritage, diversity, economic/social rights of artists, mobility, indigenous empowerment,

environmental linkages and transversality, and including also ongoing consultations, aiming for a refined proposal by June 2025 for Mondiacult in Barcelona (September 2025).

Cynthia Gervais, International Federation of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity, explained the process to Mondiacult 2025, in which the campaign is holding a continuous dialogue with UNESCO about revised zero-draft targets with a framework of corresponding indicators, seeking connections between the upcoming 2025 framework for cultural statistics, so the revised framework, and existing indicators such as the UNESCO thematic indicators for culture in the 2030 agenda.

The proposal to adopt a shadow goal approach in which an interested government, local or national, may take steps on a voluntary basis to put the draft goal to test, and in doing so, to provide practical feedback on operational challenges and effective practices and gradually expanding the network of supporters of the goal, was also mentioned.

In the round of comments, **Jorge Melguizo**, Cultural Policy Adviser, City of Bogotá, affirmed that in Latin American cities like Medellín or Santiago de Chile, like Mexico City or Rio de Janeiro, like Bogotá, culture is already, in practice, an objective of sustainable development. He also inquired about the way in which the SDG may dialogue with the municipal projects and the cultural ecosystems of cities.

3. CHALLENGES AND WAYS FORWARD

In the second part of the webinar, participants discussed about the Culture Goal process and feasibility, the roles of actors and stakeholders, mobility, and opportunities in cooperation among Culture Capitals.

Francisco d'Almeida, Culture et Développement, insisted in the idea of seizing the moment to This means that work on the visions of what development is, what culture is, and how it contributes to the life of societies, so that it is shared by everyone, just as education is.

Cristina Farinha, former president of the Jury, ECOC, raised the question on how the programs of the different capitals of culture can balance the celebration of local culture, the affirmation and the positioning of the city in the map, with the need to foster cross-cultural exchange and global collaboration, conciliating the local and global sustainable development, in terms of criteria, objectives and evaluation frameworks, making sure that culture professionals are provided with skills and resources.

Hugues Ondaye, Secretary of Culture, Municipality of Brazzaville, African Capital of Culture 2024-2025, called for a "Ville Culture ODD" label, and emphasised the role of culture as a means of social cohesion, economic growth, and reconciliation.

Giorgio Ficarelli, DG-INTPA, European Commission, highlighted the aspect of the local dimension of the European Capital of Culture programme, rather than global. He said that the actors of the development, of the change of societies, which have the closest impact to the population, to the development of society, and which are very often forgotten in the recent reports, are the cultural actors and the local authorities, which are the dimension of the public power closest to the citizen.

Rossella Tarantino, President of the Jury, ECOC, recalled the importance to work on awareness, both at the level of European capitals and at the level of other capitals, and also to have an exchange, a meeting between capitals at the level of cities, at the level of the ecosystem and civil society, so that they are able to participate and be involved.

Christian Nzau Lembe, Kinshasa, African Capital of Culture 2024-2025, mentioned that culture has repeatedly demonstrated its power of cohesion and reconciliation, through music, sport and theatre, between the cities of Brazzaville and Kinshasa. For African capitals of culture, for cultural capitals around the world, working jointly opens up a political arena that sets a precedent for the African continent, with two capital cities working together at the same time for common culture goals.

Laura Latour, Candidacy of Namur for ECOC 2030, added that in order to promote local-international collaboration and test out novel approaches and metrics, Namur is utilising its Capitals of Culture candidature.

Genci Kojdheli, Municipality of Tirana, shared the city's achievements in international awards and leadership roles; noted the regional spill over effect where smaller Albanian cities and regional cities have followed Tirana's lead in aspiring for international titles, and highlighted the importance of cities communicating and sharing best practices in a climate of tense relations between states.

Angela Kilusungu, East Africa Culture and Development, commented on East Africa mayors' planned meeting, the revision of the national culture policy to enhance the role of culture in development, the importance of the creative economy and employment, and the need for more precise metrics and creator recognition.

As general needs and challenges, participants outlined the following:

- | Underfunding and resource gaps: a lot of programs, particularly in Africa and some cities in the Mediterranean and Middle East, lack consistent funding.
- | Capacity and skills: need for upgraded training considering different levels of expertise and practice, peer learning, particularly in project management, evaluation, and internationalisation.
- | Policy alignment: The challenge of coordinating cultural goals at the local, national, and international levels.
- | Awareness and advocacy: Outside of specialised circles, the contribution of culture to development is still not well recognised despite the raise of declarations, projects and programmes.
- | Inclusion: making certain that young people, artists, and under-represented groups actively participate in the planning and execution of projects.
- | Impact: transitioning from event-based to long-term, structural change is known as "sustaining impact".

Suggestions for future action and joint ways forward included:

- | Develop actions (training, webinars, peer learning) to create standardised metrics and approaches for assessing cultural impact.

- | Boost peer-learning and decentralised collaboration between cities/local authorities.
- | Plan collaborative events across regions to highlight accomplishments and promote joint visibility of common goals (e.g. during Africities and World Day for Cultural Diversity...).
- | Boost the mutually beneficial partnership between different capitals initiatives and the culture 2030 goal campaign by encourage coordinated advocacy for the Culture Goal in the post-2030 SDG framework during the Capitals programmes across regions (online and offline, through participatory events).
- | Encourage the sharing of information about funding models, inclusion and participatory strategies targeting all groups within a community (cultural rights perspective), and innovative policy.
- | Test new strategies, support pilot and joint projects and “laboratory” cities promoting international cooperation added value during the Capitals programme and beyond (long term and impact-oriented pilot projects).
- | Make use of Capitals of Culture as venues for cross-sectoral innovation and democratic engagement.

NEEDS

Greater recognition of culture in SDG frameworks

Capacity building for local authorities and cultural operators

Sustainable funding and resource mobilization

Clearer evaluation and impact measurement tools

Inclusion of diverse voices and marginalised groups (youth, minorities, artists, civil society)

Bridging local and global priorities

Stronger integration of culture in urban and territorial development

Sustaining impact beyond event-based programming

OPPORTUNITIES

Sharing and scaling up best practices across regions

Strengthening international and interregional cooperation

Leveraging Capitals of Culture as platforms for innovation and advocacy

Using Capitals of Culture to foster social cohesion and economic development

Building platforms for decentralized cooperation and cross-border cultural dialogue, training on internationalisations of activities for teams

Developing new indicators and methodologies for cultural impact assessment

Organizing joint events (e.g., World Day for Cultural Diversity, Africities Summit, Mondiacult)

Developing new indicators and methodologies for cultural impact assessment, participatory design and implementation of the programme, stronger evaluation of the process, political commitment

4. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

At the end of the session, next steps were outlined:

- | Encouraging regional and interregional discussion of issues and best practices, by sharing lessons learned and experiences from ongoing Capitals of Culture annual programmes in different regions; and involve universities across regions in joint research initiatives based on the needs' assessment of the Capitals of Culture programmes.
- | Contributing to the Culture Goal consultation process and support the Culture 2030 Goal campaign in each Capital program, both individually and through a collaborative narrative;
- | Examining pilot projects and collaborative events for 2025 (e.g., World Day for Cultural Diversity, Mondiacult, Africities, which was postponed to 2026 in Egypt);
- | Creating and disseminating methods to foster cultural impact;
- | Encouraging peer learning and decentralised collaboration between cities and regions.
- | Involve partners from the financial and private sector for the support (both financial and technical) of pilot and capacity building initiatives.

CONTACT

Please do not hesitate to contact the Secretariat of the UCLG Culture Committee should you need any additional information.

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