

C21plus

A renewed commitment
to making culture central
in sustainable cities and
communities.

The background is a complex, hand-drawn collage. It features a grid of colored squares in shades of blue, green, and purple. Overlaid on this are various sketches: a globe, a person climbing a tall structure, a person pushing a large wheel, and a person holding a long pole. Text elements are scattered throughout, including 'REGIONS', 'COORDINATING', 'GLOBAL NETWORK', 'inspiration', 'movement', 'UCLG', 'CITIES VISIBILITY', 'on the GLOBAL level for LOCAL communities', and 'GLOBAL & LOCAL PERSPECTIVE'.

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UCLG

CITIES
VISIBILITY

on the GLOBAL
level for LOCAL
communities

GLOBAL
& LOCAL PERSPECTIVE



Culture is Central to Humanity and Its Future

Cities and local governments, facing today's global challenges

Today, the world faces several critical challenges, ranging from the climate crisis to social exclusion, limited access to basic services and human rights for many citizens, severe inequalities between countries and regions, disruptions and unprecedented transformations generated by technology, and political debates that frequently incite polarisation.

While this context can easily generate uncertainty and fear, across the world local communities also demonstrate energy, creativity and commitment to imagine and build a more just, caring and sustainable future. It is frequently in cities, towns and other human settlements, at the local level, where communities and local and regional governments act to tackle today's challenges and bring about a systemic transformation – one that bridges local actions and global trends, cares and guarantees equal rights for us all, is driven by well-informed, critical and empowered communities, and is based on solidarity.

These are the values that have guided the municipal movement for over one hundred years, and which continue to inspire its practice, as reflected in the [Pact for the Future of Humanity](#) adopted by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) in 2022. UCLG is committed to the strength of collective action, empowerment, co-creation, and international cooperation and solidarity: the very cornerstones of harmonious and sustainable societies. It places care at the heart of its Pact for the Future: care for the human rights of all people, and care for the integrity of our planet.



Culture is integral to sustainable development

Culture is an indispensable element of cities and communities. This has become evident in all the UNESCO conventions, all the resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly on culture and development and the work of agencies and programmes such as the World Health Organisation, UN-Habitat, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights or the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), among others.

Sustainable development can only be achieved if citizens make meaning of the places they inhabit, and if the diverse ways of life, knowledge and aspirations existing around the world, which imply diverse paths towards sustainability, are properly acknowledged. Likewise, human development can only be effective if the value of cultural factors such as heritage, creativity, diversity and knowledge is fully considered.

The international community has long recognised cultural diversity as the main heritage of humanity – the product of thousands of years of history, and the fruit of collective contributions by all peoples through their languages, ideas, techniques, practices, and creations. Diversity has multiple dimensions and layers, and can be found within the unique identity of every individual. Diversity is also integral to the essence of cities, what enriches them, gives them a narrative, and makes them attractive places to live in and discover.

Alongside diversity, culture also allows us to discover what is common to humanity, to find meaning in stories and ways of being that are different from our own, to be inspired and express emotion, affect and care, to learn from others. Through culture, we can recognise one another as equals. Culture is a common good, which requires protection and sharing.

In this respect, the recognition of cultural diversity goes hand in hand with the affirmation of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms. Culture can only enable sustainable development if every person can fully exercise their human rights, free from discrimination, and leaving no one and no place behind. Cultural rights are an integral part of human rights: no one can appeal to cultural diversity to infringe upon, nor limit in scope, human rights guaranteed by international law. The cultural freedoms of individuals and communities are both the result of, and an essential condition for democracy.



UCLG's commitment to culture and cultural rights

UCLG has worked since 2004 to fully integrate culture in approaches to sustainable development and has become the most influential global platform on this issue. This is reflected in the policies, strategies and actions of local and regional governments, as well as civil society initiatives, at the local and regional level. It is also embodied in the contributions made by the municipal movement to global debates on the future of humanity. These agendas need to place culture at the centre, see access to and participation in cultural life as a basic service, and embed creativity, diversity, heritage, knowledge and cultural rights as priorities of the present and the future. Today, this is conducted through the support to the Culture 2030 Goal campaign and the demand that the Post-2030 Development Agenda includes a dedicated, standalone Goal on culture.

Evidence of how cities and communities include culture to advance towards sustainability, and to increase fairness and care, has driven the work of the UCLG Committee on Culture for over 20 years. It was first illustrated by the [Agenda 21 for culture](#) (2004), a set of undertakings by cities and local governments to integrate cultural policies and sustainable development, emphasising the importance of cultural rights and the parallels existing between biological and cultural diversity.

In 2010, UCLG adopted the Policy Statement “[Culture: Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development](#)”, emphasising that neglect of cultural aspects hinders the possibility of achieving sustainable development, peace and wellbeing, and that culture should be given as much importance as economic growth, social inclusion and environmental balance when conceiving and working towards sustainability.

Five years later, the [Culture 21: Actions](#) guide provided an opportunity to update the engagements of the Agenda 21 for culture and to enable its practical implementation. Through 100 specific actions on culture and sustainability, local governments, cities, towns and communities were able to evaluate their policies and programmes, discuss priorities with citizens and civil society organisations, and learn from one another thanks to a common framework.



The commitment of UCLG to recognising cultural rights as a central component of caring societies was affirmed in 2020, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, through the approval of the [Rome Charter](#). Drafted in partnership with the City of Rome, the Charter was entitled 'The Right to Participate Fully and Freely in Cultural Life is Vital to Our Cities and Communities'. Indeed, the crises of recent times have made us even more aware of the importance of culture to express our humanity, bring us together, connect with one another, protect the values and things that matter, and give us comfort while in difficulty.

As a connector of the local and the global, UCLG organises the [Culture Summits](#), convenes the International [Award UCLG - Mexico City - Culture 21](#) and runs programmes devoted to culturally localise the SDGs, with the [Guide on Local Action](#), the [OBS of good practices](#), and the workshops on the [Seven Keys](#).

These steps provide evidence of the cultural drive and vitality of cities and local governments, and their commitment to integrating culture and cultural rights, alongside other human rights, as core components of our vision for a fair, caring, sustainable future. In 2025, UCLG is renewing this engagement with a new guiding document: Culture 21 Plus.

The UCLG Executive Bureau approved the Culture 21 Plus document on 2 April 2025.



Introducing Culture 21 Plus

Building on its over 20 years of advice, monitoring, advocacy, collaboration and learning, the UCLG Committee on Culture has drafted a new framework document, Culture 21 Plus. An extensive process of consultation and discussion took place between May 2023 and March 2025, with workshops, seminars and webinars in Jinju, Mexico City, Lisbon, Elefsina, Esch-sur-Alzette, Puebla, Ségou and Bogotá, the networks of cities and culture professionals in Thailand, Indonesia and France, as well as with the regional sections UCLG-MEWA and UCLG-Eurasia.

This new tool updates the previous guide on culture in sustainable cities, Culture 21 Actions, and takes into account the experiences and lessons learned through its implementation, as well as the evolution in local and global contexts over the last decade. Culture 21 Plus is a dual-purpose tool that allows to (1) conduct a self-assessment of the current state of local cultural policies from the perspective of sustainability, and (2) design local cultural strategies based on cultural rights and sustainability.

Culture 21 Plus is also closely aligned with UCLG's Pact for the Future of Humanity. It is structured based on the three pillars that make up that Pact – namely, People, Planet and Government. In each of those pillars, two sets of 'fields' have been identified, thus making up six themes in which the connections between culture and sustainable cities can be explored: rights; communities; prosperity; territories; nature; and governance. Each one of the six fields is further structured into a set of thematic areas.



C21 plus

6 fields, 30 areas

C21plus
Rights

C21plus
Communities

C21plus
Prosperity

C21plus
Territories

C21plus
Nature

C21plus
Governance

Rights

Ensuring cultural democracy by promoting the capabilities of all inhabitants to discover, create, share, enjoy and protect cultural resources

- Area 1** Cultural Rights
- Area 2** Cultural and Creative Ecosystems
- Area 3** Citizens' Cultural Expressions, Community Culture and the Commons
- Area 4** Public Cultural Services, Facilities and Spaces
- Area 5** Knowledge and Information

Communities

Mobilising culture to reinforce social cohesion and inclusion, address local challenges and build more democratic, sustainable and strong communities

- Area 6** Culture, Inclusion, Social Cohesion and the Fight against Poverty and Inequalities
- Area 7** Culture, Health and Wellbeing
- Area 8** Culture and Education
- Area 9** Culture and Gender Equality
- Area 10** Culture, Peace, Security and Coexistence

Prosperity

Making culture a driving force for a sustainable and inclusive local economic development

- Area 11** Culture and Local Economic Development
- Area 12** Cultural Industries, Employment and Livelihoods
- Area 13** Decent Work and Socio-economic Conditions for Artists and Cultural Workers
- Area 14** Culture and Sustainable Tourism
- Area 15** Culture, Digitisation and Technology

Territories

Making culture a key dimension of local planning and development in order to improve the living environment, the sense of belonging and the quality of life of the population

- Area 16** Cultural Territorial Planning
- Area 17** Culture and Public Spaces
- Area 18** Cultural Heritage
- Area 19** Public Art and Urban Cultural Expressions
- Area 20** Culture, Architecture and Urban Design

Nature

Fostering harmony between nature and culture, and mobilising culture in the fight against climate change and towards climate resilience and a sustainable and fair transition

- Area 21** Culture, Landscapes and Natural Heritage and Spaces
- Area 22** Culture, Agriculture, Food and Gastronomy
- Area 23** Culture and the Just Ecological and Social Transition
- Area 24** Culture and Climate Change

Governance

Building a participative, transversal and cooperative local governance of culture

- Area 25** Cultural Strategies and Policies
- Area 26** Implementation and Evaluation of Public Cultural Policy
- Area 27** Citizen Participation
- Area 28** Collaborative and Multi-level Governance
- Area 29** National and International Cooperation
- Area 30** Communication



Implementing Culture 21 Plus

Culture 21 Plus will be the framework document for the operationalisation of UCLG's commitment to culture in sustainable cities and communities in the coming years. It builds on the Committee on Culture's previous and ongoing programmes and initiatives, including its learning and policy implementation activities (the Seven Keys, Leading Cities, Pilot Cities, and Culture 21 Lab).

It also takes into account other research, learning and advocacy initiatives implemented in this field, as well as the wealth of knowledge and good practices on culture and sustainability implemented by cities and local governments around the world, and other relevant research and expertise in the relevant areas.

Finally, Culture 21 Plus is closely connected to UCLG and its partners' advocacy for the inclusion of culture in global agendas, and will provide renewed evidence of how culture matters in the path towards sustainability and to get closer to the achievement of the goals established at the global level.

Learning and implementation modules

Because of its breadth, and with the aim of enabling cities and local governments to make progress in those areas that they feel are more relevant and adapted to their contexts, Culture 21 Plus will be implemented through a set of modules, enabling participatory self-assessment, learning, and policy design and implementation. Some of the modules foreseen at this stage are tailored to specific local contexts (e.g. an 'essential' set of actions for smaller cities and towns, or those in the early stages of developing cultural policies; as well as a module for metropolitan areas), are meant to address specific policy challenges (e.g. modules on culture and climate change; and on culture and gender equality), or are conceived in collaboration with the main sectoral cultural networks working with UCLG (e.g. modules on cultural heritage; and on culture, freedom and technology).



Modules are all drawn from the core Culture 21 Plus framework document (with 6 fields and 30 thematic areas) and can be used independently, in accordance with the circumstances and aims of local governments, civil society organisations and other stakeholders. At this stage, the following modules are foreseen:

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The Essentials

A module that covers the six fields and involves approximately 50 'key', fundamental actions. It also explores the connections between culture and other basic services at the local level. It is the best toolkit for those cities that consider placing culture at the centre of caring societies.

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Extended

This module comprises the 30 thematic areas and 200+ actions, and is meant for those with wide experience in the integration of culture in approaches to sustainable development and willing to address new challenges.

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Rome Charter

A module which draws inspiration from the Rome Charter, and its five cultural capabilities, on the basis of which it is structured: Discover cultural roots; Create cultural expressions; Share cultures and creativity; Enjoy the city's cultural resources and spaces; and Protect the city's common cultural resources. It focuses primarily on the exercise of cultural rights, the recognition of cultural diversity and the fight against discrimination.

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Culture and Gender Equality

A module centred around the mainstreaming of a gender perspective across cultural policy, and the promotion of gender equality across cultural aspects in local life. Building on UCLG's previous research and capacity-building activities in this area, the module combines actions from several thematic areas of Culture 21 Plus.

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Culture and Climate Change

A module exploring how culture intersects with environmental sustainability and can inform policies and measures in this field, as well as how cultural policies, programmes and projects can foster approaches to mitigation and adaptation of climate change and to regenerative development. Building on UCLG's previous research and capacity-building activities in this area, the module combines actions from several thematic areas of Culture 21 Plus.

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Cultural Heritage

A module gathering actions related to tangible and intangible cultural heritage, how they contribute to local identity and cohesion, as well as some broader frameworks in the field of cultural policy. It will allow to explore how cultural heritage intersects with most of the thematic areas addressed by Culture 21 Plus. The module should be of interest to cities that wish to connect the fields of heritage, urban planning, regional development, tourism, and international relations.

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Culture, Freedoms and Technology

A module exploring connections between culture and several areas of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including access to information, freedom of expression, and freedom of association. It also examines the impact of technology on access to culture, the transparency of data and public decision-making, and some areas of cultural rights.

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Culture in Metropolitan Areas

A module addressing the specific challenges and policy approaches connecting culture and sustainability in metropolitan areas. It will collect actions from several of Culture 21 Plus' areas and place emphasis on issues including territorial planning and governance.



The flexible framework provided by Culture 21 Plus means that other modules may be devised in the future, at the request of partners or groups of cities, or in response to emerging needs. The first modules will be available in mid-2025, with others being released later in 2025 and in 2026.

Modules enable the organisation of one- or two-day workshops to discuss the implementation of Culture 21 Plus, and the assessment of existing frameworks and policies. More work-intensive methodologies can be also explored.

Each module will be rolled out through a tailored methodology, comprising a set of online and offline resources enabling participatory self-assessment and learning, and setting the context for subsequent policy design and implementation. The Secretariat of the UCLG Committee on Culture will be available to provide technical assistance, assessment and capacity building to cities and local governments requesting support. It will also involve a group of experts with expertise in different world regions and capable of helping to identify strengths and weaknesses and facilitate participatory approaches and learning within and between cities.

We believe this new framework document, and the set of tools resulting from it, will be useful for cities and local and regional governments. Culture 21 Plus is an invitation to mobilise local cultures and policies in the pursuit of a more fair, sustainable world. It provides a setting for the exercise of the cultural rights of everyone.

Now, Culture 21 Plus is all yours.

CONTACT

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The background is a complex abstract composition. It features a dark, textured base, possibly a night photograph of a building or landscape. Overlaid on this are numerous semi-transparent geometric shapes: squares, rectangles, and circles in various shades of blue, purple, orange, and brown. A large, bold, white text 'c21 plus' is centered in the lower half. To the left of the 'c' is a white semi-circle. In the upper left corner, there is a blue triangular shape. On the right side, there are several overlapping blue circles. At the bottom, there are some dark, rectangular blocks.

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