

The Izmir Declaration: Culture Shapes the Future of Humanity



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MAHA
MAGAZINE



IZMIR, 10 SEPTEMBER 2021

Culture has a vital role in our lives. Although this fact has been acknowledged in several global statements on development made in the last decade, its effective articulation in agreements and agendas is still very limited. The Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent crisis have made the need for more meaningful articulation of this narrative even more apparent: it is urgent to consolidate culture as an essential dimension of sustainable development.

Whatever we do in our lives, be it science, art, sports, or politics, culture is present in all of them. Culture is the mortar that holds it all together, the sap of life. If it oozes away even a little bit, the harmony in life distorts. Life ceases to be a whole. It disintegrates into individual and disconnected parts. Therefore, not only art, but also science, politics, sports and all aspects of life stand on the shoulders of culture. In the absence of culture, progress separates art from science, science from politics, and politics from real life. Progress devoid of culture empowers and glorifies the egotistical-patriarchal mind.

The 4th UCLG Culture Summit, hosted by Izmir Metropolitan Municipality on 9-11 September 2021, has confirmed that many cities and local governments have explicitly embraced the narrative that confirms culture as an integrative and essential dimension of sustainable development and are implementing policies that are fully coherent with it. It has also confirmed the rigorous work and the serious commitments of the #culture2030goal campaign on the inclusion of culture in global development agendas, and the global networks leading it.

The 4th UCLG Culture Summit has shown the outstanding and generous response to the pandemic given by cultural communities: thousands of initiatives have appeared to mourn those who have left, to boost access and engagement in cultural life, to encourage awareness and tolerance, to create new expressions, to identify new energies and to build the capacities to imagine a new future, all together. Participants to the UCLG Culture Summit have underlined the impressive power of culture to widen rights and freedoms of all, to improve well-being for all, and to build healthier and more resilient communities that leave no one and no place behind.

The Summit builds on the work around culture and sustainable cities made by UCLG since its founding Congress (Paris, 2004) and the adoption of the Agenda 21 for culture (also in 2004). Since that moment, UCLG became a global champion of the narrative that places culture as an essential dimension of sustainable development. The Policy Statement on “Culture, the fourth pillar of sustainable development” (2010) grounded this work. The practical toolkit Culture 21 Actions (2015) explained in detail how a cultural policy informed by cultural rights can be designed and implemented by local governments. The guide “Culture in the SDGs” (2018) and the programme “Seven keys” (2020) showed feasible and suitable ways to localise the SDGs



with a cultural perspective. The declaration “Culture and Peace”, approved in Mexico City (2018), the manifesto “The Future of Culture” approved in Durban (2019) and the 2020 Rome Charter created strong avenues that connect cultural challenges with the other challenges faced by humanity.

The 4th UCLG Culture Summit of Izmir has become the perfect place to discuss why and how culture needs to be at the centre of the global conversation.

- We are all on board. Development, in the 21st century, requires active participation of all communities in public debates. It also requires respect for cultural diversity, as a source of knowledge, as a vital element of citizenship and as a component for peaceful resolution of conflicts.
- We are evolving together. Development also means shared conscience. Many assumptions (our relationship with nature, patriarchy, patterns of production and consumption, our relationship with the past) must evolve. Bolder commitments are needed to address the climate emergency, heal the consequences of colonialism and achieve gender equality. Culture has a strong role to play to reduce inequalities at the global level and within national borders, that particularly affect older people, minorities, women and girls, Indigenous peoples and those with less access to health and other basic public services and economic resources.
- Culture is freedom. Policies on culture and education must be better connected to support the acquisition of cultural competences, skills and knowledge. The participation in cultural life is a right. Culture cannot serve as an instrument for ideological indoctrination or political control, but should be the quintessential space for freedom, critical thinking, and even dissent.
- Place matters. Cultural policies are essential to promote a sense of place, identity and belonging that leaves no place behind. The integration of heritage and culture in urban planning needs to include appropriate cultural impact assessment methods.
- We are all concerned and open governance is required. At a local level, participative cultural policies contribute to the way we can imagine and shape the future, because human creativity and cultural diversity are vital aspects of human experience and a source of progress and innovation. At an international level, all actors concerned should participate in the conversations to define more ambitious global agendas, with goals and targets on the place of culture in development



The UCLG Culture Summit in Izmir has shown that when local governments, cities and communities acknowledge culture as part of sustainable development they can empower all humanity. This is the way to meet the UN 2030 Agenda. Otherwise, we will have to assume, once again, that global choices are leaving people and places behind.

We say “the Time is Now” because::

- The pandemic and the crisis are an opportunity to place the cultural dimension at its rightful place.
- The UN Decade of Action 2020-2030 has already begun.
- The International Year of Creative Economy is happening in 2021.
- The Mondiacult conference will be organized by UNESCO in 2022.
- A new “Pact for the Future of Humanity: for people, for the planet, for the government” will be approved by UCLG in 2022. The Pact is powered by solidarity, equality, culture, and accountable institutions that leave no one and no place behind.

In this context:

- We call global leaders to be bold and embrace a real global conversation on culture in sustainable development, which unfolds with truly ambitious programmes of international cultural cooperation and cultural diplomacy. We urgently need, as humanity, as world citizens of our spaceship, mother Earth, to forge new forms of cooperation and solidarity.
- We invite all cities and local governments to place culture at the centre of local development, including the local achievement of the SDGs, the strategies on resilience and the plans on equity and the climate emergency, and to take into consideration the statements and practical tools elaborated by the UCLG Culture Committee.
- We invite UNESCO to design an ambitious Mondiacult 2022, inviting all actors to actively participate to the conversation, and aiming at allowing the international and the national frames of cultural policies to be adapted to the challenges of the 21st century. These frames could closely relate cultural rights and sustainable development, and consolidate the image of culture as the fourth dimension of sustainable development, on an equal basis to the economic, social and environmental pillars. Also, Mondiacult 2022 could set new adequate protection standards for cultural workers and artists.
- We invite the UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) to engage in a dialogue with the global cultural actors so that a dedicated Goal on Culture



becomes a reality as soon as possible, and certainly in the post-2030 Development Agenda. A Culture Goal is the best way to assume responsibilities and to empower actors. As the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments affirmed one year ago, in its UN75 Visioning report, a Goal that “includes several targets related to memory, heritage, creativity, diversity and knowledge, supported by a narrative that clearly identifies culture as a core component of local and regional identity, a strand of global solidarity, and a vector for peace and human rights”. We recall that a dedicated Goal would not prevent culture from also being considered as a cross-cutting element in other Goals, in keeping with the interconnected nature of sustainable development.

- We invite all actors related to culture to become more active in national and local plans to implement the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. The success of this global commitment also stands on the cultural dimension of sustainable development being explicit and operational, and this requires a step-forward from the cultural sectors, institutions and organizations, with bolder and more explicit commitments in addressing human rights, gender equality, inequalities and climate change.

The 4th UCLG Culture Summit has taken place in Izmir, with great success and outstanding local involvement of inhabitants and cultural circles. The Summit has shown to the world that “another culture is possible”, with “circular culture” as a new concept composed by Harmony with nature, Harmony with the past, Harmony with each other and, last but not least, Harmony with change. The climate crisis is the result of the assumption that humanity is in a constant battle with nature. In fact, nature is not only a resource. We need to learn, very fast, how-to live-in harmony with nature and all species. Harmony with the past is essential: it is not possible to design the future of culture without understanding the cultures that lived before us. Harmony with each other needs to be a reality: it refers to democracy in every moment of life, and inclusivity as the key principle to secure equal citizenship, strengthened by our appreciation of nature-rights. Harmony with change needs acknowledgement: we must ensure that cultural evolution is nourished by both the creativity of young generations and the inspiration from nature.

This proposal launched at the UCLG Culture Summit of Izmir proves that culture enables cities to be more resilient by making our lives more meaningful and creating solidarity. As the host of the 4th UCLG Culture Summit in 2021, Izmir has confirmed its role as facilitator of ideas, arts and culture, within the Mediterranean basin and now connecting all global urban actors. The example of Izmir can be reproduced in all corners around the world..



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