



izmir '21

SPEECH

10 SEPTEMBER 2021

SANA OUCHTATI

DIRECTOR,
MORE EUROPE





Good morning to everyone,

It is my pleasure and honour to be invited to kick off this discussion and this panel from a bit far, but I hope that the lucky ones who are on the spot today are enjoying the gathering, and the Summit in the beautiful city of Izmir.

I would like to start by thanking the organisers, UCLG and the Metropolitan Municipality of Izmir, for inviting me to this interesting and promising discussion on the role of cities and local governments in international cultural cooperation. Having worked for many years now as an advisor and expert for several initiatives based in Brussels and elsewhere, addressing the external cultural relations of the EU, and international cultural relations in general, I am very happy to be with you to touch a bit upon the EU framework in this area and more precisely, to look at the role of cities and local governments, which is a very important actor in this field. However, its potential, I believe, has not been fully explored yet.

The title chosen for this panel, makes me want to quickly attempt to shed some light on the different approaches of cultural diplomacy and international cultural relations and cooperation. As they are both mentioned in the title of this panel, they are actually confirming sort of blurred boundaries. I would like to bring in here two distinctions, one based on the approaches themselves, and their expanded definitions; and the second, based on the actors who are initiating, supporting and practicing cultural activities.

The first distinction is that cultural diplomacy does not entail a two ways exchange between cultural operators, professional and artists. It is rather a form of projection, a soft power tool that is used by governments and public authorities to pursue some foreign policy objectives. International cultural relations and cultural cooperations rather encompass two ways dialogue exchanges, peer-to-peer learning, and joined reflection and even joined implementation of projects and programmes.

The second distinction is that traditional cultural diplomacy, and here I really stress the word "traditional", involves mainly states, state actors, as well as international organisations, whereas cultural cooperation and cultural relations involve non-state actors, non-governmental organisations, individual artists and art organisations who are driven by the desire to collaborate together beyond the borders. The latter applies also somehow to an expanded definition that is used nowadays of cultural diplomacy where civil society actors would play an important role.



Having made these small distinctions and clarifications, one could not go further and address the topic of this panel without looking at the global context we are living and operating in, especially the Covid-19 crisis that held our breaths for more than one year and a half now, that is still affecting many cities, countries, and regions around the world, and that is disrupting all our certainties. The crisis has affected not only relations between countries and states, including altering good diplomacy and relations, but it has also affected and heavily hit the cultural and creative sectors worldwide.



In a study carried out in 2020 by the Cultural Relations Platform (an initiative funded by the European Commission to support EU institutions to strengthen their engagement in international cultural relations, and to which, by the way, the UCLG Culture Committee is a member of the advisory board), the researchers have attested the devastating damages of the crisis on the culture and creative sectors in the EU and its partner countries all over the world, and the huge losses in the sector. At the same time, the research mentioned that non-state actors have played a very important role in mitigating the risks and alleviating the negative economic and social impacts of the crisis. In several countries, regional and local authorities have played a key role in interacting with civil society and also in preparing emergency measures to support the cultural sector. Some examples in countries, for instance, with a federal system government (like the US, Brazil, Canada, India...), local authorities and the State, at a municipal level have been more effective and more responsive than the central government in supporting the cultural sectors. These findings show undoubtedly that cities and local governments can play an important role in addressing, at their level, some impacts of a global crisis that has ramifications within the sector but also, of course, outside the sector.

This example leads me to focus a bit now on the role and place that cities and local governments can play in international cultural relations in general, and in particular in the EU's external cultural relations. I will focus and insist on the latter because of my area of expertise and because of the global framework of the EU policy in this area. As many of you might know, the EU Strategy for international cultural relations is the main framework that is governing international cultural relations. This Strategy goes beyond cultural diplomacy as a tool of soft power, but rather towards a more inclusive approach through the spirit of dialogue, global solidarity and joint capacity building. It also sets out a multilevel approach that includes member States, through ministers of culture, national cultural institutes but also EU delegations, European and international networks, civil society organisations, NGOs, as well as the national, regional and local governments. The multilevel approach confirms a global tendency that many more actors are on the diplomatic stages and, among them, cities and local governments. It is a multilevel and multiactor diplomatic arena we are operating in, especially when it comes to the field of culture. Nevertheless, despite the ability and the de-facto legitimacy of cities and local governments to participate actively in the implementation of this framework, I believe that the reach-out is still weak and the potential is somehow underexplored. There might be many factors that can explain



this gap, depending on the countries, the governance system, the global engagement, the place of culture in the urban policies of a given city, but also on the predominance of State agencies in this field. I believe that the panellists will address these issues and obstacles in a few minutes.

Recalling that, projections show that most of the humanity, and here I am speaking about beyond 50%, will be concentrated in cities by the middle of this century. We can already see many cities that are being connected globally and that are developing their own joint actions to address and face global challenges. The examples of cities' geopolitical power are the efforts, for instance, to address climate change by coming together in support of the Paris Agreement.



There are some notable examples such as the European Capital of Culture initiatives, as well as the work of international city networks, such as the Unesco Creative City networks, the UCLG Culture Committee with Agenda 21 for Culture, European Creative Hub network, Eurocities Cultural Forum, to name only a few. These networks, and some big cities, have an immense role to play in international cultural relations through their experience, their collective work, their knowledge sharing and their global engagement. They do not only address the economic objectives of the European Strategy in this field, but they also tackle global issues, such as sustainable development, climate change, inequalities, democratic transitions, violent extremism and many others. It is very clear that all these aspects have a clear cultural dimension. They are often cited as brokers and facilitators of connections, reflecting the multistakeholder approach of the EU Strategy for international cultural relations, they also have the capacities to foster the development of a bottom-up approach by including local authorities and inspiring new ways of engaging at a global level.

Lastly, cities as acclaimed by many studies, are laboratories for new ways of working. Their proximity to citizens allows them to be responsive and innovative. I believe this innovation aspect will also be addressed in the discussion today; it is highly important in the context we are living in and in the post-Covid context.

As I approach to the ending of this opening, I would like to cite Richard Longworth, who worked and wrote many books on globalisation. He says in his recent essay that for a city to achieve its global stages, there are four essential dimensions: economic, political, educational, and cultural. For many, it may sound obvious or taken for granted that culture is part of the city dimensions, but culture is often very much neglected in city's international relations. This should keep us realistic and make us make double efforts to advocate for culture. It is equally important to consider the realities at a local level where many cities around the world, even if they have featured culture within their policies, they hardly have the capacities to reach out properly to the international level of collaboration and cooperation, and to bridge elements of local and global processes.

This said, I believe that the sharp and consistent advocacy should be developed, organised and materialised in real concrete steps and action plans for cities to practise and develop enhanced cultural diplomacy and international cultural cooperation. The process should be as much inclusive as possible and should go beyond the usual



actors, involving smaller and less equipped cities, and those who are geographically in remote locations, to avoid increasing the gaps.

To end with a sort of plea, I believe there is a clear need for an appropriate and a very tangible framework for enhanced cultural cooperation between local, regional, national, European, and supranational levels. I believe that the level of ambition of this gathering today in Izmir is quite high and it will help to shape the future through culture, which remains a key feature and an important pillar of any city plan or any city policy.

Thank you for your attention.



#IzmirCultureSummit

#UCLGmeets

#UCLGculture

#Culture21Actions

#Listen2Cities

www.uclg-culturesummit2021.org

UCLG Culture Summit 2021

culturesummit@uclg.org

international@izmir.bel.tr



Supported by



This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and does not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union



This document has been financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida. Sida does not necessarily share the views expressed in this material. Responsibility for its content rests entirely with the author.