



# izmir '21

OPENING SPEECH  
9 SEPTEMBER 2021

TUNÇ SOYER  
MAYOR OF IZMIR





*Hoş geldiniz.<sup>1</sup>*

*Monsieur le Ministre,*

*Excellences,*

*Gouverneur,*

*Mesdames et messieurs les maires,*

*Chers journalistes,*

*Mesdames et Messieurs,*

*Bienvenue à la 4e biennale et à la première version hybride du Sommet Culture de la CGLU et bienvenue à Izmir.*

*Je suis très heureux d'avoir le privilège de vous accueillir dans notre ville, surtout dans cette période sanitaire troublée.*

*Au cours des prochains jours, des responsables politiques, des décideurs du monde de l'entreprise, des intellectuels et d'éminents experts venus du monde entier échangeront lors de discussions sur le thème que nous avons retenu cette année pour le sommet: «Culture: façonner l'avenir».<sup>2</sup>*

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This two-thousand-year-old artwork behind me originates from the Mediterranean region of Turkey. It reflects us a timeless lesson of Anatolia about how we should consider life.

This picture is evidence of the Anatolian civilization's never-ending revolt against the masculine and authoritarian mind.

With this relief, the Anatolian civilization describes a culture, repeating its main phrase that it has expressed for thousands of years:

If one, we are alone. If together, we are complete.

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<sup>1</sup> In Turkish in the original speech.

<sup>2</sup> In French in the original speech.



That is why I see culture as the mortar that binds a building together, or the drops of water that connect the roots and branches of a tree. Whatever we do in our lives, be it science, art, sports, or politics. It does not matter...

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 its individual parts.

Therefore, not only art, but also science, politics, sports and all aspects of life stand on the shoulders of culture. Reducing and limiting culture to art is a major obstacle



to proliferation of anything in life, including the art itself. In the absence of culture, progress separates art from science, science from politics, and politics from real life. Even worse, progress devoid of culture empowers and glorifies the egotistical and masculine mind.

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Dear participants,

There is no science without culture. If so, it creates an atomic bomb.

There is no economy without culture. If so, there is hunger, there is inequality, there is the climate crisis.

There is no politics without culture. If so, there are wars, there is destruction.

There is no urbanism without culture. If so, there are floods, there are disasters.

Therefore, we cannot build a future without defining a different culture.

At the United Cities and Local Governments' Culture Summit in Izmir, we look at life from that vantage point.

I am aware that this historical summit in Izmir is taking place at the right time and with the right context for humanity. During the summit, cities of the world will be able to define urban resilience rooted in our collective wisdom.

I am very proud that our city is hosting such a valuable event.

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My hometown İzmir, located in Western Anatolia, is one of the largest port cities in the Mediterranean with 4.5 million inhabitants. It has 8500 years of history. For centuries, the merchants of Izmir have been shipping goods coming from Asia through the silk road to Europe and the rest of the world.

Anatolia, where we are right now, is a peninsula starting in the East from Mount Ararat. It descends gradually and extends to the Aegean Sea in the West. This invaluable land has witnessed a great cultural accumulation across its mountains,



valleys, plains and coasts for thousands of years. The first villages and cities of the world were established here; and the fundamentals of agriculture, theatre, painting, architecture and music were developed in Anatolia for the first time. Many economic innovations, such as the invention of money and global commerce, have emerged on the trading routes and ports of this spectacular Peninsula.

Thousands of years ago, this rich culture outgrew and overflowed like a seed that could not fit into its shell. It stretched out from Izmir and other Aegean cities, right from where we are now, to the entire Mediterranean.



This accumulation and overflow in Anatolia found a great response in other regions of Mar Medi Terraneum — “sea in the middle of the land”. Mediterranean Civilization gave birth to and nurtured many of today’s universal values, primarily democracy. This cultural fertility of the Mediterranean is a unique story. The story of the transformation of a sea into a Blue Continent, giving life to its surroundings.

In Turkey, we use the following words at the beginning of lullabies:

*“While I was gently rocking my “mother’s” cradle...”*

That expression, which is difficult to understand at first glance, is perhaps the sentence that best describes the relationship between İzmir and the Mediterranean.

If we look at the course of history, Anatolia – the cradle of western civilization – nurtured İzmir and İzmir nurtured the wider Mediterranean. But over the centuries, the flow of culture has always shifted around the Blue Continent. That allowed the cities of the Mediterranean to give life to each other again and again. Moreover, the cultural movement in this Blue Continent has gone beyond its borders, defining the universal values of humanity for centuries.

That is why, holding the World Culture Summit in Turkey, especially in İzmir, has a special meaning.

There is another saying in Turkish that I admire a lot: *“Everything returns to its origin”*.

I believe with all my heart that this meeting will once again spread the seeds of culture from İzmir, to the entire world.

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Dear participants,

We need to make a stand here. Otherwise, we may linger much longer. Capitalism cannot replace culture. If it does, the result will be the problem-filled world, in which we live today: Poverty, hunger, pandemics, biodiversity extinction, and the climate crisis.

That is why we must now boldly speak about circular culture as a new concept. In my opinion, a “circular culture program” should re-connect four pillars of culture at local and global levels.



Harmony with our nature. Harmony with the past. Harmony with each other. And last but not least, harmony with change.

Humanity has lived for a very long time thinking that its own mind is superior to the intelligence of the universe. The revolution, which is called enlightenment, made us a successful species on one side, and on the other hand caused humanity to withdraw into itself. Humanity, the inventor of art, philosophy and economy, inspired by the universe, came to a moment when it broke all ties with nature.



From here, the climate crisis was born. A planet is formed, where a species becomes extinct almost every ten minutes. For this reason, the circular culture program that we will outline during the summit must clearly express our demand for harmony with our nature.

The second pillar of circular culture that we dream of in Izmir is harmony with our past. It is not possible to design the future of culture without understanding the cultures that lived before us. Especially in Turkey, where the history of humanity goes back thousands of years, this second topic is of great importance.

*Meşveret, şura, imece*<sup>3</sup>... These are just a few words in Turkish that we use to bring harmony to each other and to empower shared wisdom in our lives.

However, these words gradually lost their place in our discourse. If we want to realize the cultural change that the world needs so much, this third pillar should be one of our basic starting points: Harmony with each other. In other words, democracy in every moment of life, respecting universal values of human rights. Here, inclusivity is the key principle to secure equal citizenship, strengthened by our appreciation of nature-rights.

Heraclitus, the ancient philosopher who lived in Izmir, had a valuable saying: “*The only constant in life is change*”. That saying describes that change is also in the DNA of culture. Being so, it excludes all possibilities that may turn culture into a dogma, an ideology or domination of power. Therefore, I take harmony with change as the fourth pillar of circular culture. I put it this way: We must ensure that cultural evolution is nourished by both the creativity of young generations and the inspiration from nature.

We are describing a new urban culture in Izmir that includes all these four pillars. This program dedicated to re-cultivate circular culture, named CittaSlow Metropol and led by İzmir, sees cities as an ecosystem that fosters calmness and harmony, instead of populism and autocracy. It unites art, science and our dreams, reconnecting them in a single word, that is “Life”. CittaSlow Metropol is a progressive model for urban living that unites local and universal values.

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Once again, I would like to welcome you all to Izmir, a frontier city of the Mediterranean.

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<sup>3</sup> In Turkish in the original speech



I am grateful to UCLG and its members, for trusting Izmir to host this major event in our city. I believe from the bottom of my heart that our valuable participants and speakers will contribute immensely to the success of the Izmir Culture Summit.

I am confident that the Izmir Declaration, the key output of our summit, will play a tremendous role to shape the future of our planet through our commitment for circular culture.

Hepinizi, sevgi ve saygıyla selamlıyorum.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> In Turkish in the original speech



#IzmirCultureSummit

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[www.uclg-culturesummit2021.org](http://www.uclg-culturesummit2021.org)

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