



Agenda 21 for culture  
Agenda 21 de la culture  
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## **ECOSOC 2013**

### **The role of culture in sustainable development to be explicitly recognised**

#### **Introduction**

We have prepared this document to assist members and partners of United Cities and Local Governments willing to effectively contribute to the 2013 session of the UN Economic and Social Council (**ECOSOC**), including its regional meetings and any consultations with national, regional and international key players.

The international community is debating **the new paradigm which will define development policies and programmes for the decades to come**. The international community has agreed that the development approach followed so far, despite the progress made, has exposed its limits. As the UN Secretary-General Mr Ban Ki Moon stated, “we cannot continue to burn and consume our way to prosperity” while poverty and inequalities continue to increase. It has become apparent that a transformative change is required and that “business as usual” is not an option.

**Culture must be brought to the stage.** A critical mass of the international community is convinced that, contrary to a view of culture as ‘decorative’ or secondary to sustainable development, mainstreaming and integrating culture within development efforts are crucial to tackle a large number of these global challenges more effectively and sustainably.

We believe that a Development Agenda cannot be successfully implemented if only three pillars (economy, social inclusion and environment) are considered. This 20<sup>th</sup> century paradigm is not useful to understand the world of today: these three dimensions alone do not reflect the complexity of our current societies. Moreover, today it is fully acknowledged that a paradigm that aims to *transform* the world must provide operational tools to improve freedoms and welfare. A three-pillar paradigm fails because it lacks a soul, the values, practices and expressions providing coherence and meaning to development in cities, nations and in our existence as human beings: culture.

#### **What is the Relation between Culture and Sustainable Development?**

Culture is about creativity, heritage, knowledge and diversity. These values are intrinsically connected to human development and freedoms. These values are being recognised as the **cultural dimension** (or the fourth pillar) of sustainable development at local, national and international level.

It is very important to make a clearer statement on some recurrent ‘**myths**’ regarding the relationship between culture and development. It has sometimes been suggested that an emphasis on cultural differences and the continuity of traditions would necessarily lead to social and political conflicts, be incompatible with the exercise of human rights, perpetuate inefficient governance and thus hamper development. It has also been stated that some

cultures are inherently less likely than others to foster developmental progress, for instance, in terms of democracy and economic development.

Myths exist, but reality is different. In fact, there is no evidence that **cultural diversity** in itself results in fragmentation and conflict, or that some cultures are incompatible with sustainable development, human rights and good governance. UNESCO promotes human rights as guarantees of cultural diversity: the Universal Declaration of 2001 on Cultural diversity clearly states that “no one may invoke cultural diversity to infringe upon human rights guaranteed by international law, nor to limit their scope.” On the one hand, the dynamic nature of cultures, constantly evolving in relation to the environment and changing societies, enables people to adapt their values and practices to overcome previous obstacles and limitations. On the other hand, acknowledging diversity should not be understood as raising barriers between communities, but on the contrary promoting the capability of individuals, men and women, to live and to be what they choose, within an increasingly complex world, by guaranteeing their access to a wide range of cultural assets and expressions. **Poverty**, it should be stressed, is not just a question of material conditions and income, but also of lack of capabilities and opportunities, including in cultural terms.

The truth is that **development rooted in culture and sensitive to local context is in fact the only one which is likely to be sustainable**. As Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen explains, “cultural matters are integral parts of the lives we lead. If development can be seen as enhancement of our living standards, then efforts geared to development can hardly ignore the world of culture”.

Today, development means freedom, widening the choices, putting human beings - children, men and women- at the centre of the future.

- Culture boosts the economic dimension: it generates income and employment, it is the engine of many development processes and it has impact on entrepreneurship, new technologies and tourism. Culture brings creativity and innovation to the economy.
- Culture is linked to the social dimension: it is the accelerator of resilience and rootedness, it gives tools to fight against poverty, it facilitates participation of citizens, intercultural dialogue and equality of rights.
- Culture embraces the environmental dimension because it explains the identities and raises awareness on ecological responsibility.
- Key values for development like creativity, heritage, knowledge and diversity must shape culture as the fourth pillar of development. A holistic and integrated approach to development will only be achieved when these values are explicit and operationalized.

## **What United Cities and Local Governments has done?**

United Cities and Local Governments played an important role in this decade to promote the role of culture in sustainable development.

In 2004, UCLG adopted the **Agenda 21 for culture**, a declaration with 67 articles that describes the relationship between local cultural policies and human rights, governance, sustainable development, participatory democracy and peace. The Agenda 21 for culture was the first worldwide document establishing principles and commitments by cities and local governments for cultural development. More than 450 cities, local governments and organizations from all over the world are linked to Agenda 21 for culture.

In 2010, United Cities and Local Governments approved the document “**Culture: Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development**” in its World Congress held in the City of Mexico. This document engages local governments to explicitly include culture in the model of development that ‘meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of

future generations to meet their own needs', as well as ensuring the enjoyment of culture and its components by all inhabitants, while protecting and enhancing the rights of citizens to freedom of expression and access to information and cultural resources. Operationally, the UCLG document "Culture: Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development" points to the relation between culture and sustainable development through a dual approach: developing a solid cultural policy (culture as a driver of development) and advocating a cultural dimension in all public policies (culture as an enabler of development). The Policy Statement also recommends to cities, nations and the international organisations to explicitly integrate this vision into local, national and international programmes on sustainable development.

United Cities and Local Governments, with Agenda 21 for culture, has created a unique platform, which gathers together cities, organizations and networks that foster the relation between local cultural policies and sustainable development.

We believe that **culture should be identified as the fourth pillar of sustainable development** because: (i) it offers an image that corresponds to 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges of people, cities and nations; (ii) it offers a wide picture that does not instrumentalise culture; (iii) it has the intrinsic values of culture (creativity, heritage, knowledge, diversity, etc.) as the core; (iv) it allows the connection between cultural and ecological stakeholders; (v) it contributes to linking culture to social actors; (vi) it considers cultural and creative industries as key areas; (vii) it empowers the cultural sector better than any other governance setting; (viii) it leads to the involvement of civil society in the elaboration and implementation of policies; (ix) it boosts the growing importance of culture in human rights, international relations, cooperation and diplomacy; (x) it is a clear and beautiful image.

**Successful local policies** based on the image of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development can be implemented with two complementary strategies (a) Culture as the driver of sustainable development: culture is fully integrated into governance, with the elaboration and the implementation of an explicit cultural policy, in close cooperation with civil society, and based on the needs and the expectations of inhabitants. (b) Culture as the enabler of sustainable development: policies capitalize culture's contribution to the economy, the social cohesion and the environmental balance, with the assessment of the cultural impact of these policies based on measurable targets and indicators.

## **International Benchmarks on Culture and Sustainable Development**

The **Millennium declaration** and the Millennium Development Goals were approved in 2000. Since that year, the international community has approved important documents (international benchmarks and standard-setting documents) to boost the relation between culture and development.

**UNESCO** approved the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) and the Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005). **UNDP** devoted a Human Development Report to cultural freedom in 2004 and opened a "Culture and Development" window in the MDG Achievement Fund in 2006, with outstanding results. **UNCATD** has published several Creative Economy Reports.

The Outcome Document of the **2010 MDG Summit**, published ten years after the Millennium Declaration, emphasized the importance of culture for development and its contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. These crucial messages were reiterated in two consecutive "Culture and Development" **UN General Assembly Resolutions** in 2010 (65/166) and 2011 (66/208), which called for the mainstreaming of culture into development policies and strategies, and underscored culture's intrinsic contribution to sustainable development. More recently, **Rio+20** (2012) acknowledged the natural and cultural diversity of the world, recognized that all cultures

and civilizations can contribute to sustainable development and underscored that all spheres of governments are key actors for the different dimensions of development.

Despite these significant advances, there is not yet a shared recognition that all development strategies and programmes, at global, regional and local levels, should integrate culture. **This recognition has to be achieved in 2015.** The next generation of global, regional and national policy frameworks must explicitly integrate culture within its goals, indicators and targets. Without this recognition, without explicit integration of culture, without concrete political actions and guidance, the potential of culture to contribute to sustainable development will remain largely untapped in all regions of the world.

The next two years –and in particular the upcoming sessions of the ECOSOC- will provide a unique window of opportunity to **make sure that culture is given adequate consideration in the post-2015 development agenda**, with the revision of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the elaboration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### Why is ECOSOC 2013 important?

ECOSOC (the Economic and Social Council) is a founding UN Charter body established in 1946. Its main concern is the world's economic, social and environmental challenges. ECOSOC is the place where such issues are discussed and debated, and policy recommendations issued. ECOSOC's more important meeting is its month-long substantive session held in July, on alternate years in New York and Geneva. ECOSOC includes an **Annual Ministerial Review (AMR)** that assesses progress in achieving the internationally agreed development goals.

The 2013 Annual Ministerial Review of ECOSOC will take place during the month of July in Geneva. It will be dedicated to the theme "Science, technology and innovation, and ***the potential of culture, for promoting sustainable development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals***" (emphasis added). The preparation for this event is coordinated by UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).

The outcome of this session of ECOSOC will be of critical importance in shaping the debate on the post-2015 development agenda, particularly in view of the themes discussed. It is **the first time that cultural issues are specifically integrated as one of the themes of the ECOSOC debates.**

### What are the messages?

1. We believe **there is a critical mass of the international community that is ready to include culture as an important dimension of sustainable development in the Post-2015 Agenda.** The ministerial declaration to be adopted at the end of ECOSOC should include a strong statement on this issue. This ministerial declaration will be of great significance in the formulation of the post-2015 agenda.
2. We believe that the new development paradigm should strongly rely **on local democracy and decentralization** as the suitable approaches to respond to people's demands and as the best tools to protect and promote cultural diversity.
3. We believe that all actors concerned by the relation between culture and sustainable development should work more closely together. **An alignment of strategies and the implementation of effective advocacy and lobby actions** should be promoted among key international organisations, nations, cities and civil society actors.
4. We believe that **a reference to culture as fourth pillar of sustainable development** should be included in the future framework of sustainable development. We also

believe that clear guidance and monitoring mechanisms should be established to ensure the implementation.

5. We believe that the **new Development Goals** should be limited in number, very concise and simple, integrating the fundamental principles of sustainable development (human rights, equality and sustainability), based on measurable indicators and reinforcing the commitment to cooperation. In this respect, we support that **a specific goal on “culture and sustainable development”** is agreed, and several targets and measurable indicators on creativity, heritage, knowledge and diversity are designed. This proposed Development Goal would aim at enlarging people’s capability to “lead the lives they have reason to value” through full participation in cultural life.

### What can you do?

- Analyse the list of current members of ECOSOC: <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/about/members.shtml>. If your country is represented in ECOSOC, please contact your government and mobilise it to support the integration of strong recommendations in the Ministerial Declaration of ECOSOC itself in relation to the inclusion of culture in the post-2015 development agenda formulation framework.
- Please participate in the E-Discussion on "Culture, sustainable development and the MDGs", on 5-15 March 2013. Please register here: <https://one.unteamworks.org/login?destination=node/302315>. It is very easy.
- If you are invited to take part in key regional meetings/proceedings to prepare ECOSOC, please align your inputs to this document.
- Please disseminate and spread this document.

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