

**Contribution of the Chair of the World Heritage Committee to the High-level Political
Forum on Sustainable Development on SDG 11**

April 2023

a. Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDG 11 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the SDGs and targets, including policy implications of their synergies and trade-offs

Cities' engagement in culture and cultural rights was particularly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which also highlighted culture's transformative role for urban sustainability. The disruptive impact of the pandemic on the cultural sector – one of the most affected sectors, together with tourism – highlighted the culture sector's vulnerability. The pandemic massively curtailed cultural access and participation in urban areas and had a devastating impact on social and economic rights of artists and cultural professionals. For example, the 40 member cities of the World Cities Culture Forum reported a [50% average drop](#) in theatre and music performances between 2019 and 2021. The sustained closure of museums, cultural facilities and heritage sites also jeopardized their business models and exposed their over-dependance to the tourism economy. Meanwhile, this shock wave also led to unprecedented city level engagement towards culture and significant policy shift. Compensating massive cuts in national subsidies, cities had to innovate public policy schemes and funding frameworks, engaging in more systemic ways the private sector and philanthropies, as underlined in the UNESCO Culture and Public Policy [Tracker](#) (April 2021).

b. Three key areas where transformative actions for accelerated progress have been successful, and three key areas where support is most urgently needed, with regard to the cluster of SDGs under review in July 2023.

Over the past few years, through the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, but also other UNESCO Culture Conventions such as the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, UNESCO has stepped up its work on cities. Capacity building to site managers in World Heritage cities was expanded through on-site workshops conducted as part of the [World Heritage Cities Programme](#), as well as online tools such as the e-magazine [Urban Notebooks](#), the [World Heritage Canopy](#) or the [Urban Heritage Atlas](#). This work is framed within the UNESCO 2011 Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) which guides policy-makers in integrating policies and practices of conservation of the built environment into the wider goals of urban development that respect the "historic layering of cultural and natural values and attributes". This approach is being implemented by 125 cities in 61 countries. It goes beyond the notion of 'historic centre' to include the broader urban context and its geographical setting, including a site's topography, geomorphology, hydrology and natural features. It also includes infrastructure above and below ground, open spaces and gardens, land use patterns and spatial organization. The HUL approach applies to all historical cities – not only World Heritage sites – and shifts focus from 'monuments' to the urban fabric as a whole, also encompassing intangible dimensions of heritage related to diversity and identity, including social and cultural practices and values.

The 2003 UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage also increasingly encompasses urban issues. As rural and migrant populations are converging in cities

– bringing along their cultural practices, representations, expressions, knowledge systems and skills – these living practices are increasingly impacted by urbanization, under the combined effect of rural-to-urban migration, climate change, land scarcity or increased living costs. In view of their critical importance for social cohesion and resilience, increased work was undertaken over the past few years to document and monitor this impact in relation to SDG 11, notably through the [Dive into Intangible Cultural Heritage](#) online tool, but also through field experimentation as part of a dedicated [project](#) on community-based inventories of intangible heritage in urban areas, aimed at identifying income-generating living heritage practices, which are key to the sustainable development of the communities, such as traditional crafts, performing arts, as well as construction-related practices and traditional occupations. Guidelines to safeguard intangible heritage in an urban context are currently being developed to further support city level decisionmakers.

The critical role of culture for sustainable cities is increasingly profiled in international, regional and bilateral cooperation strategies. Within the UN system, the latest UN Secretary-General [Report](#) on Culture and Sustainable Development was published in 2021, documenting progress in harnessing culture for sustainable development, including at the city level through one dedicated chapter. Regional and sub-regional organizations increasingly incorporate culture within their strategies and policy frameworks as documented by the UNESCO Culture and Public Policy [Tracker](#) in its monthly section dedicated to regional perspectives. Echoing this commitment, the European Union has produced two reports entitled [Stormy times](#) (September 2022) and [the cultural dimension of SD in EU actions](#) (December 2022). Likewise, bilateral development agencies and other national stakeholders are increasingly engaged in that area, as reflected among other examples by the British Council's 2020 [report](#) or the manual on [the presence of culture in SDG progress reports](#) published by Spain (Spanish only).

Cities and sustainable urban development issues have also been an important entry point for culture in the VNRs and VLRs. While a [report](#) published by the Culture 2030 Goal Campaign in 2019 reported a relatively limited presence of culture in the VNRs published between 2016 and 2019, it however underlined evidence related to culture in relation to SDG 11. In the following years, culture gradually gained traction in the VNRs and other sustainable development frameworks (notably UNSDCF) as documented by UNESCO on a monthly basis through its [UNESCO Culture and Public Policy Tracker](#), whose 22 issues published between September 2020 and August 2022 monitor, within the dedicated “2030 Agenda” rubric, progress in the inclusion of culture in sustainable development frameworks, and notably in the VNRs. As regards more specifically the urban perspective, issue 13 of the Tracker provides a number of [examples of VNRs](#) which reflect ways in which Member States harness culture for urban sustainability, notably in relation to city-level policies aimed at safeguarding and regenerating urban heritage, increased city level investment for tourism and the creative sector, or ways in which culture-led regeneration supports more inclusive, people-centered public spaces.

Overall, culture-engaged urban development demonstrates tangible ways to localize sustainable development, building on the diversity of cities, and their specific identity and cultural features, to forge context-relevant development models. In the [analysis](#) of the Voluntary Local Reports undertaken by the Culture 2030 Goal Campaign, 74% out of the 73 Voluntary Local Reports produced between 2016 and 2021 include a cultural perspective, demonstrating the importance of culture in framing sustainable development strategies at the urban level. Such approach was also enacted on the ground through the UCLG [Seven keys](#) programme whereby 10 cities around the world, from Senegal and Turkey to Chile or China, engaged in localizing the SDGs through culture. This perspective encompasses all areas of urban planning, from territorial planning and

urban design, to transportation or public space development among others. Moreover, this vision of culturally-engaged planning was enshrined in several policy documents produced over the past few years, among which the [UNECE San Marino Declaration on principles for sustainable urban design](#). Dedicated manuals and pedagogic tools were also developed with a view to raising awareness of local stakeholders, among which policy guidance for heritage and development actors, published by ICOMOS in 2021

The monitoring of SDG indicator 11.4.1 allowed to advance culture-related data, while also highlighting the need to diversify and strengthen the measurement of culture's impact on urban development. Indicator 11.4.1 is dedicated to the total expenditure per capita on cultural and natural heritage. Data was compiled for 57 countries between 2018 and 2021, highlighting a number of significant results, notably the level of expenditure incurred by local governments, which exceeds national level expenditure in 8 of the surveyed countries. However, as a newly-developed tier II indicator, methodological issues remain to be addressed to strengthen the availability of disaggregated data and support countries capacities in implementing the indicator – an objective towards which a compilation guide on 11.4.1 is being developed by UIS. While 11.4.1 offered a relevant proxy to assess the level of countries' engagement towards culture, it should be complemented by other indicators, both qualitative and quantitative, to measure the full scope of culture's impact, across its different components, on sustainable development prospects. In that context, the [UNESCO Culture|2030 Indicators](#) can address some of these gaps by providing a framework of 22 thematic indicators, both quantitative and qualitative, which measure the impact of culture at both the national and city levels across several SDGs, from education and climate action, to social cohesion and economic development among others. The [framework](#) – the first results of which are currently being released – is being rolled out in 13 countries and 17 cities measuring notably culture's contribution to social cohesion, climate action, GDP or employment among other aspects. Beyond statistical indicators, the monitoring of culture in the SDGs also requires broader documentation and monitoring instruments, including case studies and storytelling, to capture the full spectrum of culture's impact. Most culture-related cities' networks are engaged in such compilation and analysis of cities' good practices, including the World Heritage cities network through the [World Heritage Canopy](#). This platform documents through 60 case studies the impact of cultural heritage on a broad range of issues, from disaster risk management and climate action, to education and learning, peace and security, gender equality, inclusion and participation, establishing explicit linkages with other SDGs.

c. Examples of specific actions taken to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic that also accelerate progress towards multiple SDG targets, including actions identified by your intergovernmental body, building on interlinkages and transformative pathways for achieving SDGs.

A wide range of policy measures were engaged by the UNESCO Creative Cities to support [immediate response to the COVID-19 pandemic](#) (UNESCO, 2020), while also laying the ground for longer term [longer term recovery](#) strategies (UNESCO, 2022). Such increased policy engagement is also reflected by a growing commitment of local governments in funding the cultural sector. Out of the 28 countries engaged in monitoring indicator 11.4.1 between 2018 and 2021 as per the statistical exercise undertaken by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 8 reported more than 50% expenditure on cultural heritage undertaken by local authorities, that is most likely an underestimate in view of the difficulty to collect data pertaining to this indicator at urban level.

d. Assessment of the situation in the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and within the

respective areas addressed by your intergovernmental body, and policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda

Over the reporting period, the role of culture for sustainable cities has particularly gained traction with enhanced recognition by decisionmakers, including by building on increased decentralization and transfer of competences to local authorities in the field of culture, from cultural access and cultural and artistic education, to urban heritage inventorying and conservation, the promotion of cultural expressions, cultural tourism and support to the creative economy. Culture is increasingly encompassed in the local development strategies of cities and local governments, from small- and medium- sized cities to metropolises, to achieve a diversity of development objectives, cutting across all SDGs. Culture-based urban strategies are notably intended, among other examples, to sustain social cohesion in increasingly multicultural cities, notably through meaningful cultural contribution of migrant and refugees to their host cities or the enhanced access to culture for marginalized or vulnerable populations; to foster greener, more compact and people-centered urban planning, building on the values enshrined in urban heritage; to culture-sensitive public spaces and transportation facilities, allowing access to, participation in and enjoyment of cultural diversity; to enhance learning outcomes and skills development – notably in the creative sector, cultural tourism or cultural conservation areas – with a view to supporting employment, targeting in particular women and the youth.

Enhanced engagement in the field of culture at the city level was also spurred by a growing acknowledgment of the driving role of culture for urban economies and employment. As reported in a UNESCO-World Bank 2021 [publication](#), up to 13% of urban employment in major cities is based on the creative industries, as the largest share of that cultural and creative industries – which account for [3.1% of global GDP](#) – are hosted in urban settlements. Cultural tourism is another core component of urban economies. In 2019, prior to the global lockdown, tourism injected [US\\$8.9 trillion](#) into the global economy, or 10.3% of global GDP, with cultural tourism accounting for an estimated [40%](#) of all tourism worldwide – the widest share of which is also driven by urban settlements. Cities are increasingly investing in culture to explore more inclusive, locally-based economic patterns, while others seek to leverage culture and creativity to transition to post-industrial economic models, focused on knowledge and innovation. Safeguarding heritage is also a strategic priority for many small- to medium-sized cities, particularly in developing countries, where heritage-related activities account for a large proportion of the economic flows and local jobs. Over time the focus of city-level tourism strategies has shifted to encompass not only monuments, museums and religious sites but also intangible cultural heritage, such as food/gastronomy, handicrafts, festivals and performing arts. This aspiration is shared by all typologies of cities. World cities and metropolises, alike, are increasingly turning to culture to renew their development models, as illustrated by the 40 members of the [World Cities Culture Forum](#) – most of which are capital cities – whose 2022 [report](#) shares a vision of the transformative impact of culture on urban economies and societies. At the global level, such recognition of the power of culture for inclusive growth is reflected by the unprecedented inclusion of [culture as a dedicated workstream in the G20](#), under the successive presidencies of Saudi Arabia (2020), Italy (2021), Indonesia (2022) and India (2023).

The growing recognition of culture's agency for sustainable urban development by local governments is also reflected by the continuous growth of the membership of culture-related cities networks and the expansion of their scope of action, from [climate action](#) to education and social inclusion. Among them, the [UNESCO Creative Cities Network](#) has grown from 180 cities in 72

countries in 2018 to almost 300 cities in 90 countries in 2023, engaged in a diversity of cultural domains, from crafts, music, film and literature to design, media arts and gastronomy. This sustained growth across all typologies of cities reflects a growing aspiration from cities around the world, both in the Global North and the Global South, to harness culture and creativity for sustainable urban development. The global network of World Heritage Cities is equally expanding, totaling 323 cities by the end of 2022, which accounts for a third of all World Heritage sites worldwide, making urban heritage the most represented category on the World Heritage List. Likewise, some [1060 cities and other constituencies](#) were reported by UCLG to be engaged in the network's culture agenda in 2022 compared to 750 in 2017, highlighting not only the level of cities' engagement towards culture, but also the diversity of partnerships and alliances mobilized in that endeavor.

Culture-based urban strategies have often been harnessed to streamline rights-based agendas within local development strategies. Such strategies are notably intended to foster social cohesion, inclusion and citizenship within increasingly multicultural urban societies, under the combined effect of urban growth and increased migration. This enhanced commitment to the promotion of cultural rights attention city level is notably enshrined in the [2020 Rome Charter](#) enacted by UCLG, promoting cities as privileged grounds for the exercise of rights and open-air laboratories for pluralism, as exemplified by innovative policy developments taken by local or regional governments aimed at promoting culture as a [public service](#) or as a public good. Allowing all urban citizens, including migrant communities and refugees, to practice and access their culture, promoting cultural diversity in urban areas and particularly public spaces; enabling intercultural dialogue between different urban communities to strengthen exposure to and understanding of cultural diversity and tackle discrimination, building on cultural infrastructure and heritage sites as civic spaces; supporting access to culture as a lever for urban regeneration in urban peripheries or informal settlements; enabling cultural access and participation through enhanced accessibility for all segments of the population, including the disabled and vulnerable people, in museums or public spaces; are among the core issues increasingly addressed by local authorities, as exemplified by numerous case studies pertaining to inclusion and participation, be it from the [World Heritage canopy](#), or from the UNESCO Creative Cities 2022 [publication](#) among others. Likewise, culture is increasingly at the forefront of global cities networks dedicated to inclusion and rights, such as the UNESCO International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities – [ICCAR](#).

The vital role of culture to support peacebuilding and reconciliation in conflict-affected urban settlements, as well as place-based, people-centered reconstruction patterns has also been increasingly recognised. The UNESCO-World Bank position paper [Culture in City Reconstruction and Recovery](#) (2018) offers operational guidance for policymakers and practitioners for the planning, financing, and implementation phases of post-crisis interventions for city reconstruction and recovery – both in post-conflict and post-disaster situations. Likewise, the UNESCO's flagship initiatives [LiBeirut](#) & [Revive the Spirit of Mosul](#) demonstrate the power of culture to engage communities in resilience processes. In Yemen, the [Cash for Work](#) programme, implemented by UNESCO with support from EU, also demonstrates how restoration of urban heritage following conflict and natural disaster can support youth employment and skills building, thus also countering the effects of violent extremism.

While cities' engagement in culture cut across all regions of the world, a number of specific regional trends may also be highlighted. Among the priorities set forth by African cities, stands the need to support youth employment through a rapidly growing creative economy, strengthen social and economic rights of artists – notably to monetize online cultural trade or support the

informal sector – and harness culture for post-conflict reconciliation. In Latin America and the Caribbean, supporting social cohesion and inclusion through culture – notably in view of ever-growing social inequalities and enhanced migration and conflicts – as well as strengthening the linkages between culture and education, are major areas of focus. In Asia and the Pacific, leveraging cultural knowledge and practices for climate action, supporting intercultural dialogue in urban settings or amplifying cultural routes through tourism, are among the topics of policy engagement. In the Arab States, promoting the conservation of urban heritage – among which the medinas – as levers for urban sustainability, youth employment and cultural tourism, or supporting the growing potential of the creative economy through enhanced engagement in the digital transformation, are among the overarching priorities. In Europe, a particular focus is laid on ensuring equal access to culture to urban communities through a rights-based perspective, propelling the ecological transition through culture and opening up more sustainable cultural tourism pathways.

Looking forward, the aspiration for more culture-centered development expressed by cities around the world calls for more systemic inclusion of culture as a global public good and a standalone goal in the post 2030 Agenda. Such commitment is notably enshrined in the [Declaration](#) of the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies – [MONDIACULT](#) 2022, unanimously adopted by 150 Ministers of Culture in September 2022. At the city level, culture has increasingly taken the lead in fostering access, inclusion and participation, including with regard to advancing anti-discrimination initiatives fostering gender equality LGBTQ+ rights and the needs and rights migrants, as well as cultural rights as a whole. Cultural policies and initiatives driven by public and private institutions, as well as key actors including civil society, such as open-access initiatives and cultural festivals or development related initiatives are driving the transformation and development of more inclusive approaches to sustainability at the urban level.

In the same context, public policies in a diversity of development areas such as employment, urban planning, transportation, tourism, food security, health, youth, infrastructure and environmental sustainability have evolved towards greater interministerial cooperation in the field cultural policy planning and development taking advantage of the capacity and agency of culture and cultural resources to catalyze support and engagement of diverse segments of the urban population. This upward trend has led traditional economic and political fora such as the G20, or the G7, as well as the International Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2022 to assert explicitly the role of culture as a global public good, calling upon the UN Secretary-General to enshrine culture as a standalone goal in the post 2030 agenda and to ensure an in-depth reflection on culture's impact upon sustainable development and social transformation. This ambition is equally supported by UNESCO partners and networks across all constituencies, as reflected by the [culture goal](#) proposal tabled by the Culture 2030 Goal Campaign.

UNESCO is taking the lead in this regard through the elaboration of a study on culture as a global public good in close cooperation with the Nordic Council, through its contribution to the UN Secretary-General policy briefs to help shape the forthcoming UN Summit of the Future in 2024, as well as through the UNESCO Global Report on Cultural Policies to be launched in 2025. In the same vein, The Interagency Platform on Culture and Sustainable Development launched in 2021 under UNESCO's initiative is rallying 22 UN organizations, as well as development banks and interregional stakeholders to assess the multidimensional impact of culture from a comprehensive sustainable development perspective which encompasses the urban level, employment, human rights and climate action while fostering a more systemic cooperation.

**e. Key messages for inclusion into the Political Declaration of the September 2023
SDG Summit**

- We commit to ensuring cultural rights for all, supporting inclusive access to and participation in cultural life and strengthening the economic and social status of artists and culture professionals, including in the digital environment.
- We advocate for the protection of cultural heritage and diversity, as the foundation of peoples' identities, particularly in times of crisis, including by countering the illicit trafficking of cultural property.
- We reaffirm our commitment to supporting the creative economy, by strengthening the cultural and creative industries and promoting sustainable cultural tourism.
- We call on the UN Secretary-General to firmly integrate culture as a specific goal in its own right in the Pact for the Future and the development agenda beyond 2030.