

PRESS RELEASE:

Cultural mobilization in the COVID-19 pandemic

#BeyondTheOutbreak #CULTUREcovid19

The COVID-19 crisis is having an impact on every dimension of our lives, including the cultural life of cities all around the world. The Live Learning Session on culture and COVID-19 aimed at better understanding how cities and local governments are reacting to the crisis.

This Live Learning Session that took place on April 22, organized in collaboration with the UCLG Committee on Culture partners the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), addressed the cultural response at the local level to the COVID-19 crisis.

Mayors, Vice-Mayors and Councillors from a wide range of cities across the world shared their experiences and learning around the COVID-19 crisis in their cities, and its impact on the local cultural life. **José Alfonso Suarez del Real**, Councillor for Culture of México City; **Enrique Avogadro**, Minister for Culture of the Government of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires; **Catarina Vaz-Pinto**, Vice Mayor in charge of culture in Lisboa; **Berry Vrbanovic**, Mayor of Kitchener and UCLG Treasurer; **Joan Subirats**, Vice Mayor in charge of culture and education of Barcelona; **Nicolás Montero**, Councillor for Culture of the City of Bogotá; **Luca Bergamo**, Vice Mayor in charge of cultural development of Rome; **Chiribabu Maharjan**, Mayor of Lalitpur, presented some concrete measures and key programmes their cities implemented in order to face the pandemic and its impacts; and reflected on the way forward and emphasized the fundamental need for culture to be placed at the centre of the post-crisis scenarios, through adequate and appropriate cultural policies to drive the recovery.

The Session also featured the Special Rapporteur of the UN in the field of Cultural Rights, Karima Bennoune, as a keynote speaker, Professor Gyonggu Shin, from the Gwangju International Center, Sipehele Ngobese, Researcher, Inclusion and Wellbeing, South Africa Cities Network and Elena Shchukina, Director of the Novosibirsk City Museum, as well as Giorgio Ficarelli, DEV-CO, European Commission, Ege Yildirim, Focal Point for the SDGs in ICOMOS and Gerald Leitner, Secretary General of IFLA.

Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN-Habitat, opened the session highlighting the opportunity to rethink a more sustainable future through the lens of culture and innovative

methods such as the Live Learning Sessions: *"The pandemic is forcing us to look deep into ourselves. But culture will remain at the top, since it helps cities to be more resilient,"* she said. She insisted on the need to capitalize on culture with a cross-cutting approach as an essential element for the recovery, considering communities' needs and local demands.

In his opening remarks, **José Alfonso Suárez del Real**, Councillor for Culture of México City and Co-president of the UCLG Committee on Culture, stated that as urban societies have been shaped by the logic of culture, cultural collaboration can be the key to building new futures, beyond immediacy and urgency. He shared the new initiative "Cultura en Casa", a digital platform designed to bring culture to citizens during lockdowns, developed jointly with the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires and other cities in response to the crisis.

The first round table, entitled "**Local Actions and Challenges: Impact of the crisis and initial measures**" was facilitated by **Jordi Pascual**, Coordinator of the UCLG Committee on Culture. The objective of this round table was to understand how cities and local governments, with their cultural initiatives, organisations, networks and actors, are reacting to the crisis.

He highlighted the Statement on "[Culture and the COVID-19 pandemic](#)", launched on Monday 20 April 2020 by the campaign #culture2030goal, aiming at promoting the place of culture in (expected) new initiatives around the UN 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Joan Subirats, Vice Mayor in charge of culture and education of Barcelona presented the 10 measures implemented by the municipality in order to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 crisis in the cultural sector.

Professor Gyonggu Shin, from the Gwangju International Center, recalled that Korea had been impacted by SARS and other recent epidemics, and that the society had learned that taking early measures is of paramount importance to win the battle, as well as loyal cooperation.

On his turn, **Nicolás Montero**, Councillor for Culture of the City of Bogotá, presented a range of initiatives and he emphasized that solidarity and creation are fundamental in the way Bogotá is addressing the crisis and that public policies must incorporate creators. In the same vein, **Chiribabu Maharjan**, Mayor of Lalitpur, gave many examples of the disturbances in cultural activities caused by the pandemic.

Giorgio Ficarelli, from DEV-CO, European Commission recalled that the cultural sector is one of the most affected by the pandemic, due to fragile and scarce social protection systems in place in many cities that affect cultural workers the most.

In addition, **Gerald Leitner**, Secretary General of IFLA, explained that the impact of COVID-19 is especially difficult and challenging for libraries and said they developed five measures for the “new normal”, the life beyond the pandemic, that will necessarily mean a different landscape for cultural life.

As a response to these presentations, **Ege Yildirim** from ICOMOS emphasized the benefits of cultural heritage as a core component of culture, saying it could lead to the development of safe spaces.

The second round table, entitled “Imagining the tomorrow” was moderated by **Emilia Sáiz**, Secretary General of UCLG, who highlighted Culture as one of the key priorities of the local governments’ Network, identified as such in the [Decalogue of Local and Regional Governments for the post COVID-19 era](#), the UCLG Political Charter for the times beyond this crisis that will guide the advocacy of UCLG in the coming years, as an “antidote for the secondary effects” of the outbreak

“We only achieve true humanity as individuals together with others. It is what we do with others, our values, principles, customs, in fact our cultural framework that gives us humanity. This is what we leave for future generations and needs to help us shape the aftermath.”

Luca Bergamo, Vice Mayor in charge of cultural development of Rome and Vice President of the Committee on Culture of UCLG, stressed the need for cities to develop a vision for the future centred on cultural rights, such as the Rome Charter (currently under development) suggests. He also called for the consolidation of public funding and mechanisms in order to address inequalities in opportunities and access to cultural life.

In line with this, the Vice Mayor in charge of culture in Lisboa and Co-president of the UCLG Committee on Culture, **Catarina Vaz-Pinto**, questioned our capacity to go back to our previous model of living, consuming and producing, and reminded the meeting of the importance of including flexibility, sustainability and creativity as strong values in shaping the future of culture in the post COVID-19 crisis context.

Elena Schukina, Director of the Novosibirsk City Museum introduced the new strategy developed by her museum to ensure a better access for citizens to cultural resources and exchanges.

Karima Bennoune, the Special Rapporteur of the UN in the field of Cultural Rights, affirmed that culture is at the heart of the response to COVID-19 and stressed the importance of valuing artists’ work in the future. She also stressed the need for culture to address key issues such as gender equality, inclusiveness, accessibility and climate.

Berry Vrbanovic, Mayor of Kitchener and UCLG Treasurer, explained how the articulation between the local, federal and national levels in Canada has allowed the development of financial support mechanisms to be effective, especially in the Government response to the impact of the crisis on the artistic and cultural sectors.

Enrique Avogadro, Minister for Culture of the Government of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires and Co-president of the UCLG Committee on Culture, emphasized that cooperation is a key in the recovery of cities' social and economic vibrancy and he also stressed the important role of alternative, independent and grassroots sectors as key local cultural players.

Then, **Siphelele Ngobese**, from the South Africa Cities Network emphasized the need to reflect about how the digital gap might impact democratic participation and access to opportunities.

Finally, **José Alfonso Suárez del Real** closed the debate saying it was critical to base the future on cultural rights, as fundamental human rights, and to build policies and strategies for solidarity in the long term with an inclusive and integral approach and in view of achieving more democratic societies and communities and in line with the 2030 Agenda. The session finished with a video: [the Couch Choir singing "Heroes"](#).

About the Live Learning Experience Series:

The Live Learning Series hosted by UCLG, Metropolis, and UN-Habitat, has brought together more than 1,000 participants over the course of six sessions in which participants from local and regional governments, the UN system, and partners from civil society shared their experiences, initiatives, and actions to support their communities facing the pandemic through the provision of key basic services.

The Live Learning Sessions will continue throughout the month, taking place on Wednesdays and Thursdays during the crisis. Local Finance, Local Economic Development, and Informalities will be among the topics covered as cities around the world are looking at how to overcome challenges with a new generation of solutions.

About United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)

UCLG is the global organization of local and regional governments and their associations that represents and defends their interests on the world stage. Representing 70 per cent of the world's population, UCLG members are present in all world regions: Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe, Eurasia, Middle East-West Asia, Latin America and North America - organised in seven continental sections, a metropolitan section and a regional forum. This network covers more than 240,000 cities, regions and metropolises and more than 175 local and regional government associations present in 140 countries. UCLG includes among its main areas of political interest local democracy, climate change and environmental protection, the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, the role of culture in sustainability, local finance, urban development and city diplomacy for peacebuilding. Visit www.uclg.org and follow [@uclg_org](https://twitter.com/uclg_org) for more.

About UN-Habitat

UN-Habitat is the UN agency focused on our cities, towns and communities. UN-Habitat works in over 90 countries supporting people in cities and human settlements for a better urban future. Working with governments and local partners, its high impact projects combine world-class expertise and local knowledge to deliver timely and targeted solutions. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a dedicated Goal on cities, SDG 11 – to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Visit www.unhabitat.org and follow [@unhabitat](https://twitter.com/unhabitat) for further information.

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