

# LIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE: BEYOND THE IMMEDIATE RESPONSE TO THE OUTBREAK

CONCEPT NOTE 6:  
The cultural mobilization in the COVID-19 pandemic  
22 April 2020



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## Thematic session 6: The cultural mobilization in the COVID-19 pandemic

### Objective

Humanity is facing an enormous challenge. The COVID-19 crisis is having an impact on every dimension of our lives: public health, labour systems, social interaction, political debate, the use of public spaces, the economy, environment... and cultural life.

As stated in the Manifesto “The future of culture” approved at the UCLG World Congress of Durban in November 2019 ([see here](#)), culture is an unequivocal part of the solution to humanity’s present-day challenges. The Abu Dhabi Declared Actions ([see here](#)) resulting from UN Habitat’s WUF10 in February 2020 also acknowledge culture as a main strand of global solidarity. Following the global outbreak of COVID-19, these documents confirm their relevance as we respond to the crisis.

COVID-19 is hitting the cultural life of our communities very severely. Libraries, memorials, community centres, museums and all cultural venues have closed... Performances, festivals, parades, carnivals and intangible heritage events are cancelled or postponed. The active involvement of all in the cultural life of communities is being badly damaged...

But... the crisis has generated hundreds of thousands of initiatives, from the offer of online events, recordings and collections to the emergence of totally new initiatives that have COVID-19 as the central topic. People have turned to culture to create meaning, to show solidarity and to boost general morale. There cannot be a better illustration of why culture needs to consolidate as the fourth pillar of sustainable development. (Reminder: “fourth” in order of appearance in the global conversation on sustainable development; not in hierarchy.)

If we want to go, as these LLE series invites, “beyond the immediate response to the outbreak”, the crisis can also be considered an opportunity to improve the quality of some broad cultural dialogues that humanity needs to discuss, urgently: (a) the consideration of human rights as the frame that allows open discussions on our futures, (b) those (still hegemonic) conceptions of being that pretend the human do not belong to nature, (c) the importance of research, scientific evidence and critical thinking in our societies, and (d) the time and resources we devote to cooperation and solidarity in our lives. Will these



opportunities be seized? Or will the response to the crisis be based on unscrupulous competition, growing inequalities and less democracy?

The objective of this LLE session is to understand how cities and local governments, with their cultural initiatives, organisations, networks and actors, are reacting to the crisis. We will collect experiences and learnings, we will foster knowledge exchange and we will discuss how we can better guarantee that culture is at the centre of the reconstruction in an explicit and operational way (beyond nice words and promises).

### Responses to COVID-19

The impact of the crisis in the cultural spheres of our cities is huge. (The UCLG Culture Committee has been working to collect evidence of the cultural mobilization of cities and local governments, with a dedicated page to the issue -[see here](#)- that includes for more than 120 references.) The following list is just a thematic summary of the discussions and actions that are taking place as an immediate response to the outbreak:

- The need to physical distancing and to #StayAtHome have multiplied the creation of new possibilities to access heritage and knowledge, including access to the digital resources of libraries, virtual tours of museums or visual arts exhibitions, broadcasting online concerts, theatre, dance and opera performances. An enormous amount of this “cultural content” belongs to people through municipal, national or international institutions.
- It has also multiplied the consumption of newly produced contents by audiovisual producers such as Netflix, or the use of social networks. This increased traffic has also generated concerns on inequality (not all the residents have access to these contents), fair distribution (among artists, intermediaries like Google, Amazon or Facebook, or the broadband providers) and data ownership and protection.
- The impact of the COVID-19 crisis is big in the cultural economy, whose workers are very often in an already precarious situation (self-employed, freelancers) and may be left for months without any income. The vast majority of cultural initiatives and organizations will be forced to restructure their programmes because of the physical distancing principle.
- The economic impact of the crisis has led artists and cultural professionals to advocate governments to provide or improve access to unemployment payments and social benefits, to apply flexibility to existing funding schemes (allowing



beneficiaries to decide whether they should postpone, cancel or transform activities, or extend the cycle of the funded project) and to create emergency and hardship funds for the cultural sector, outside of existing budgets of cultural ministries and art councils, using the budget lines specially dedicated to mitigating the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. These examples have been taken from IETM's Plea to National Governments ([see here](#)) although some local governments have also joined this advocacy and/or created measures to mitigate this economic impact.

- The provision of programmes to support the most vulnerable population; that is, residents with less possibilities to access cultural life, either online or physically.
- The documentation of the local the impact of the pandemics, so that films, pictures, performances enrich the local or municipal archives, and also in the view of the creation of specific memorials or special events.
- The preparation of the post-confinement scenarios, with special local assemblies and councils, cultural plans, policies and programmes to guarantee that culture is at the centre of any local process of reconstruction.

When UCLG affirms culture is the fourth pillar of sustainable development (see [this Statement](#) and [this Manifesto](#)) is because we want these questions be at the centre of debate and because we are convinced that cultural communities, actors and agents need to take the lead in these debates.

In fact, the cultural mobilization “is happening” because the central engine of “culture” is the need to understand who we are, how we relate and what we should do together, especially in these moments of crisis, distress and uncertainty. This is a process that appeals to us all as human beings. This is why we believe that cultural rights are fundamental to our freedoms and our development, and that cultural rights need to inform long-term public policies of cities and the local governments, which are the closest to the residents, and therefore bear the greatest responsibility for leaving no one behind.

### **Live Learning**

UCLG, in partnership with Metropolis and UN-Habitat, are organizing a **Live Learning Experience** for local and regional governments on 22 April 2020, 15h00-17h00 (CEST) to push more than ever, through solidarity and political will, for the fulfillment of their critical role as drivers of change. It will be the opportunity to show that LRGs are working to guarantee that culture is at the centre of the recovery.



**Guiding questions:**

- *How has the COVID-19 crisis impacted the cultural policies of your city? Can you mention a fact / an experience that better illustrates this impact?*
- *What are the initial measures your city has undertaken? How are they received by the inhabitants of the city?*
- *What is the calendar for the next weeks and months? What actions are you planning to undertake? How are you planning the cultural recovery in your cities?*
- *In a more strategic stance: how can the recovery host the broad cultural dialogues that humanity needs to discuss (on human rights, on the relation human-nature, on research and scientific evidence, on the time and resources we devote to cooperation and solidarity)?*