

ROMA



**UCLG**  
United Cities  
and Local Governments

 **culture 21**  
UCLG Committee



# THE 2020 ROME CHARTER

THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE  
FULLY AND FREELY IN CULTURAL  
LIFE IS VITAL TO OUR CITIES  
AND COMMUNITIES



*Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts, to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.*

*Article 27, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

## PREAMBLE

**W**e, the people, are the city. Through our beliefs, values and creative activities – our *culture* – we shape the city of stones and dreams. For better and for worse, it is the embodiment of our individual and shared imagination. Our city must support every inhabitant to develop their human potential and contribute to the communities of which all are part.

Culture is the expression of values, a common, renewable resource in which we meet one another, learn what can unite us and how to engage with differences in a shared space. Those differences exist within and between cultures. They must be acknowledged and engaged with. An inclusive, democratic, sustainable city enables that process, and is strengthened by it too. Culture is the creative workshop with which citizens can imagine responses to our common challenges. Sometimes it is a solution, sometimes it is how we discover other solutions.

The 2020 Roma Charter is published at a dark and uncertain time. The COVID-19 crisis shows that the current development models and their basic assumptions need to be rethought. It also shows that a real spirit of cultural democracy must shape the new models if they are to be inclusive and sustainable. The Charter is a promise to the people of Rome – and to all the world's cities. Placing our common and living cultures at the centre of the definition of the new models will not be simple, but it is how we will recover and rebuild our lives, together.

# CULTURAL CAPABILITIES

Public authorities, national and local governments, have legal duties in respect of participation in culture, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international treaties and conventions. Together with every player, they must put in place effective policies and adequate resources to meet those obligations, or their promises are mere rhetoric.

A city working towards a cultural democracy fulfils its duty to support its inhabitants to:

- DISCOVER** cultural roots, so that they can recognise their heritage, identity and place in the city, as well as understand the contexts of others;
- CREATE** cultural expressions, so that they can be part of and enrich the life of the city;
- SHARE** cultures and creativity, so that social and democratic life is deepened by the exchange;
- ENJOY** the city's cultural resources and spaces, so that all can be inspired, educated and refreshed;
- PROTECT** the city's common cultural resources, so that all can benefit from them, today and in years to come.

The 2020 Rome Charter imagines a more inclusive, democratic and sustainable city. Its achievement is in the hands of all who live here.

*These statements set our destination: designing the journey is the next task. We now begin a collaborative and consultation phase to develop detailed cultural policies, plans and actions specific to local contexts.*

# WHY NOW, WHY THIS?

## Why now?

In a few short weeks, COVID-19 has swept away the world we knew. The measures we must take to protect our health have changed how we live and damaged our prosperity. We are grieving. We are remembering things we took for granted, including culture. We are also discovering unexpected resources of kindness, courage and solidarity in our societies.

At first, we talked about life 'after the crisis'. Now we are learning that the disease might be with us for a long time, and that we will have to adapt to its presence. The experience is changing how we think about ourselves, about others and about the communities in which we live. It is changing our sense of what matters, who we admire, and how we want to live.

A few months ago, the city of Rome began a process of reflection on people's participation in cultural life at local level, in the belief that commodification and economic priorities threatened equity, justice and human dignity. We wanted to contribute to global debates about development, citizenship and democracy, debates in which culture, human rights and cities are shamefully marginal. We still do – indeed we think it is now even more important and urgent. If this debate is genuinely global, avoiding historic eurocentrism, and inclusive of marginalised voices and cultures, it can lead to the strengthening of international institutions, programmes and policies related to the place of culture in development.

With the challenges it provokes, a crisis brings a responsibility and an opportunity to think beyond existing boundaries and do things that seemed impossible before, and already, in a few weeks, governments, institutions and citizens have sometimes done both. If some good can come from COVID-19, it will be because we have been brave enough to imagine different, better, more sustainable ways of living together and we won't stop after the immediate crisis is over. And cities, which will shelter two thirds of the world's population by 2050, are central to this challenge.

## Why culture?

Culture is how people transform experience into meaning – and not only good or true meanings: it is a power that has been and is now put to bad uses. Culture is how people form, express, share and negotiate their values – including those of which they are unconscious or unable to articulate directly. Culture is everything we do beyond survival. Culture is everything we do to enrich our lives. It is also the story that shapes our actions, even when we are unaware of it. Culture describes the world, and we see the world through its lens.

And culture is also the renewable, human resource we have turned to in this crisis. Science helps us find understanding, answers and protection. Art offers comfort, education and entertainment in isolation. Both result from research, competences, creativity and hard work, not only pleasure. Culture connects us across empty streets in music and song, it enables us form and share our feelings with others. It is how we know who we are and how we meet others. It is in culture that we tell stories, make sense, dream and hope. It is culture that will shape the values and conduct of the cities we must renew after the trauma of COVID-19.

Now, more than ever, we want to affirm the social value of culture, where people, not profits, are its heart and purpose. We cannot yet say what that might mean in the world that is now emerging. This is a process of discovery, shaped by the situation and the people who contribute. We believe that conversations that help citizens make sense of the present, and imagine the future in hope, are a good way to rethink the city. This is where we are, where we stand today.

We must move beyond established thinking – about culture, creative cities, inclusive urbanism, rights and duties. We don't know where it will end, but we are convinced that we need a cultural democracy more than ever. Our whole society needs a period of healing and recovery, but may face a period of more conflicts and further inequalities. We need to find a new direction that includes all. Old answers will not do. We must ask what kind of life we want now and for the next generations, believing that the answers depend on the resources of democracy and a spirit of generosity.



## Why Rome?

Cities are spaces of experimentation and creativity. It is in Rome's capacities to gather, connect and explore, a crossroads between worlds and times. We start from here: with Rome as a common crucible for new ideas about social models. Rome, ancient and modern, beautiful survivor, witness to plagues and wars and renaissance, is working for the inspiration to bring new paradigms into reality – and to share them. This is an invitation to create together an alternative future in those places that today represent a confinement as well as an opportunity: CITIES.

## Why UCLG?

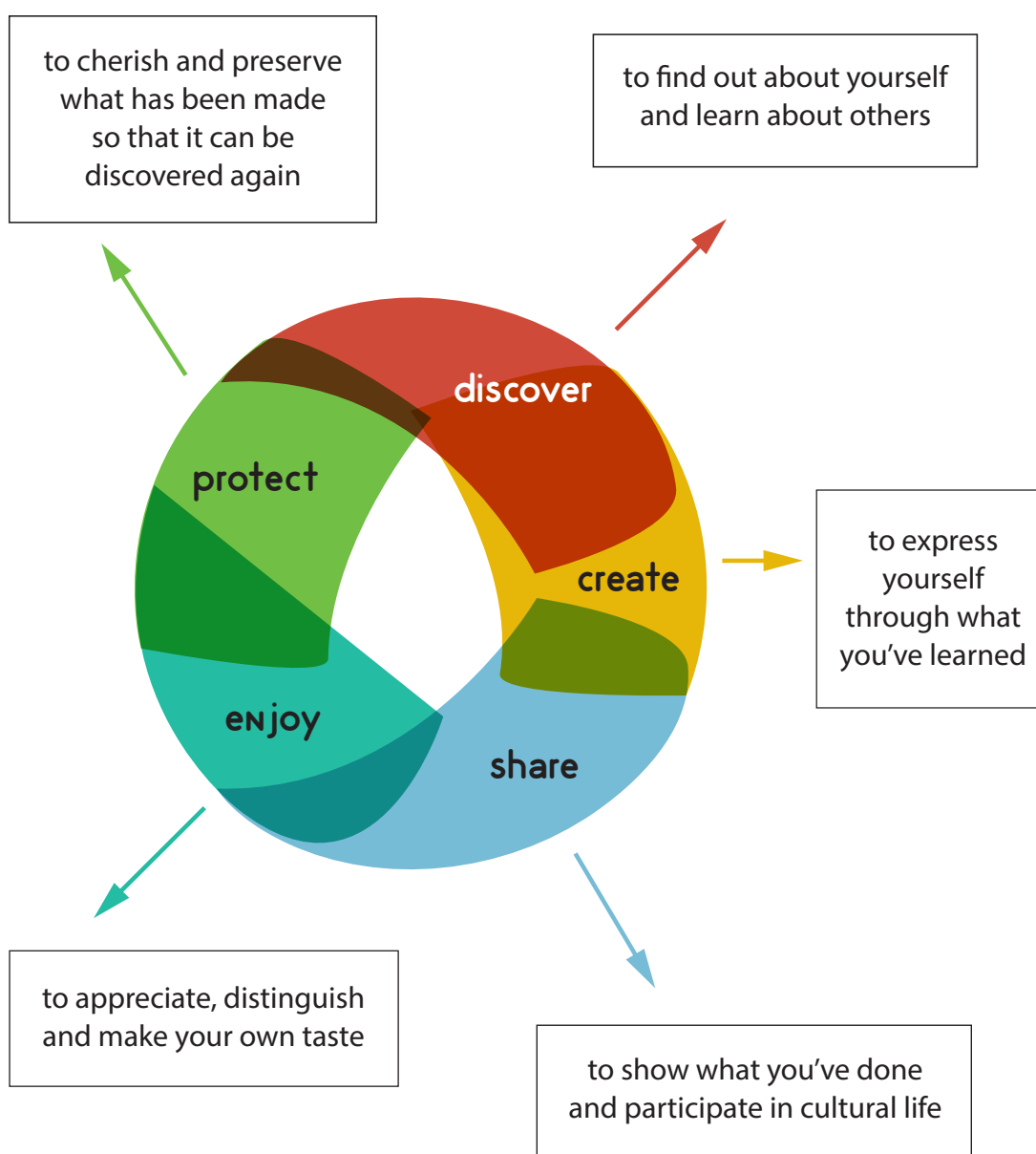
The World Organisation of United Cities and Local Governments – UCLG is the largest organisation of local and regional governments in the world. You, we, stand on the shoulders of countless women and men who have worked tirelessly to empower each other for over a century, to lift up our communities and to collaborate with one another to achieve positive change.

We represent, defend, and amplify the voices of local and regional governments, so that no-one and no place are left behind. Together we are the sentinels of the hopes, dreams, and aspirations held by individuals in communities around the world – searching for a life in which the ideals of the Sustainable Development Goals are a lived reality, and advocating for a strong multilateral system built from the territories around the world.

The place of culture in the sustainable development of our communities is one of the key areas of work of UCLG.

# AN EXPLANATORY NOTE OF THE CHARTER

The cultural capabilities key words are all verbs – actions: we suggest to follow a cyclical progression for a bottom-up, people-centred approach





## DISCOVER

**cultural roots, so that we can own our heritage, identity and place in the city**

Everyone has their own heritage, personal and shared, the legacy that comes from their family, community, body, time etc.; it is also important we have the capacity to understand others' contexts, roots and narratives

## CREATE

**our own cultural activity, so that it can be part of and enrich the life of the city**

Participation in cultural life includes the capacity for creation – having the means, the resources, the training, the education, the time to make our own artistic work, whether it is singing, dancing, needlework or writing our own computer game or imagining another future

## SHARE

**cultures and creativity, so that social and democratic life is enriched by exchange**

And if I am a creator, I have the right and capacity to share my creations with anybody who's interested, who's open to listening, seeing, talking and criticising my work. It doesn't mean everything is of equal value – it means that you accept everything as having the right to be there so that it can be liked or not liked

## ENJOY

**all the city's cultural resources, so that they can be inspired, educated and refreshed**

Access to culture – the friends we choose – is how we develop the capacity to know what we like and don't like, how we choose to define our values and shape our future identity. I may inherit one culture but I choose to be a rapper or an opera singer and unless my culture gives me pleasure – inspires and refreshes me – what is it worth?

## PROTECT

**the city's common cultural resources, so that all can benefit from them, now and in future**

We must have the capacity to cherish all cultures, teach them, pass them on, and prevent them from being destroyed deliberately or by neglect. It is like biodiversity, the whole ecology needs protecting because it is interdependent and you never know who will want what or when



# THE 2020 ROME CHARTER

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***The cities, local governments and their associations:*** Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Lisbon, Barcelona, Bilbao, Bogotá, Izmir, Malmö, Washington D.C., Xi'an, Baie-Mahault, the Diputació of Barcelona, Córdoba, Dublin, Gwangju, Leeds, Makati, Maputo, Montreal, São Paulo, Swansea, the Cabildo of Tenerife and Vancouver.

***The participation of:*** African Capital of Culture Initiative, Americans for the Arts, Asia-Europe Foundation, ASVIS, Culture Action Europe, INTACH - Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, National Theatre of Accra, Nhimbe Global Affairs Observatory, SDG Global Festival of Action, UCLG Africa, UCLG-MEWA, UNESCO...

The involvement and the frames of the UCLG World Secretariat and the UCLG sections and the operational support of the Department for Cultural Activities – Roma Capitale.

*To all of them, and to the many more to come, the deepest gratitude for their time, thoughts, experiments and care.*



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more at  
[www.2020romecharter.org](http://www.2020romecharter.org)

