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POLICY

BRIEF

Towards a Multi-level Strategy for EU External Cultural Relations: Bringing Cities on Board¹

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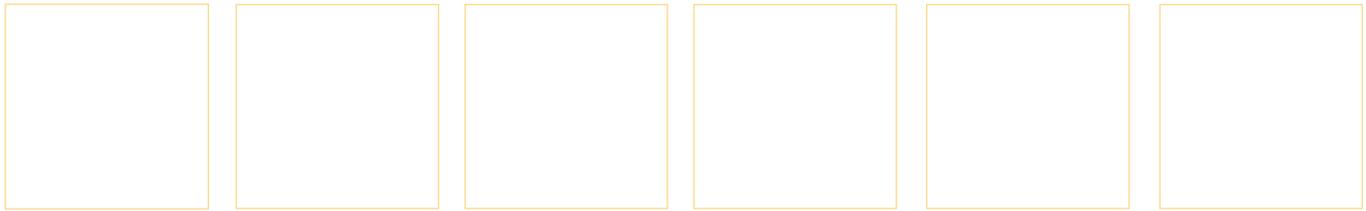
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Executive Summary

The EU strategy for international cultural relations sets out to move beyond an understanding of cultural diplomacy as soft power and towards a more inclusive and reciprocal approach built around “a new spirit of dialogue, mutual listening and learning, joint capacity-building and global solidarity”. To be fully effective, this strategy needs to involve all levels of governance, in particular cities. This policy paper aims to demonstrate the potential of European cities for achieving the objectives of the EU strategy for international cultural relations by proposing a revised multilevel approach.

European cities play a major role in the development of cultural ties across borders and they have increasingly established themselves as autonomous international cultural policy actors. Along with the rise of a multi-actor and multilevel diplomatic arena, cities and other sub-national governments have acquired an increasingly important role. The exponential rise in transnational city networks since the early 2000s demonstrates how cities have stepped up to form transnational alliances around an increasingly broader set of issues that were traditionally the domain of nation-states. Many of these networks promote cities as international cultural policy actors and provide effective structures for knowledge sharing and peer-learning on culture-led

1. This Policy Brief results from discussions initiated during the workshop “Cultural Diplomacy: What role for Cities and Civil Society Actors?” held at the EUI in May 2019. We would like to thank Yudhishtir Raj Isar and Anna Triandafyllidou for organising this workshop and for their valuable feedback on earlier versions of this paper.



urban and socioeconomic development, the use of culture to enhance local heritage, further intercultural dialogue and improve citizens' well-being.

The paper points out the numerous benefits that cities can bring to the EU's international cultural relations strategy:

- European cities and their transnational networks can share their experience and knowledge on culture-led sustainable development and emancipatory cultural policy models that foster social equality and cohesion.
- They can increase the impact of cultural cooperation by making it speak to today's major urban challenges.
- City leaders and civil society actors can act as mediators for more grassroots cultural relations beyond the logics of soft power and nation branding.
- Diaspora communities in European cities constitute a rich resource that the EU cultural diplomacy strategy can tap into to engage with the world in a horizontal manner.
- European cities and their transnational networks can act as intermediaries for connecting with more diverse and remote geographies beyond established East-West and North-South cultural flows.
- Regional cultural hubs like Singapore, Dakar or Cape Town can be relevant partners to establish more effective cultural relations with their broader region.

Building on these insights, the paper formulates some key recommendations for the transition towards a multi-level EU cultural diplomacy:

- Support city networking on cultural cooperation
- Partner with European and global city networks that have made international cultural cooperation a priority
- Expand the European Capital of Culture (ECC) programme to include non-European cities
- Involve the representations of local governments in Brussels in the future formulation and implementation of the EU cultural diplomacy strategy
- Map practices of European cities in the field of international cultural relations

Introduction

European member states have a long tradition of cultural diplomacy. While in the past, their pursuits focused on artistic exchanges and educational and scientific collaborations with other countries, today art and culture are increasingly mobilised to address global challenges, such as sustainable development, democratisation and conflict resolution. The recent launch of a joint European Union (EU) strategy for international cultural relations² can be seen as part of this broadening of Members States' cultural diplomacy agenda. However, to be fully effective, this strategy needs to involve all levels of governance, in particular cities and their local governments.

The Joint Communication 'Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations', was adopted just three weeks prior to the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy in June 2016. It sets out to move beyond an understanding of cultural diplomacy as soft power and towards a more inclusive and reciprocal approach built around "a new spirit of dialogue, mutual listening and learning, joint capacity-building and global solidarity".

This innovative approach promises far-reaching impacts on other EU foreign policy areas such as International Development and Cooperation and the European Neighbourhood Policy. However, the implementation of the strategy's ambitions is highly challenging. The desired new spirit of dialogue essentially requires a bottom-up approach that limits government involvement in favour of people-to-people cooperation and co-ownership with local stakeholders in third countries. However, the framework for action adopted by the European Council in April 2019 barely mentions non-state actors such as local governments, independent cultural organizations and civil society. Instead, it relies almost entirely on partnerships with national cultural institutes (e.g. Goethe-Institut and Institut français) and their umbrella organization, the EU National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC).

Surprisingly, the EU strategy for international cultural relations was adopted in the same month as the Urban Agenda for the EU, which intends "putting multi-level governance in practice"³ and grants local authorities a

2. European Commission & External Action Service (2016) Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations Joint Communication. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=JOIN%3A2016%3A29%3AFIN>

3. European Commission (2017) Report from the commission to the



formal role in EU decision-making processes. While the urban agenda acknowledges cities' increasing role in tackling global challenges such as climate change, inequality and the promotion of cultural and religious diversity, the connection between the EU's urban and global agendas remains to be drawn. Three reasons may explain the lack of involvement of cities in the EU's cultural diplomacy strategy: first, the reluctance of Member States to devolve power to subnational governments in a domain they consider central to their sovereignty; second, due to uneven levels of decentralisation there are great differences among European cities in terms of their autonomy, competences, resources and motivation to engage in international cultural relations; and, third, cities do not invest sufficiently into lobbying work in Brussels to communicate their potential contribution to the EU's global strategy.

Yet, European cities play a major role in the development of cultural ties across borders and they have increasingly established themselves as autonomous international cultural policy actors. Notably, by cities, we do not only refer to city governments, but also the rich ecosystem of cultural institutions, civil society organisations, and artistic and cultural producers who together determine a city's cultural life. Urban centres traditionally concentrate a large proportion of their countries' cultural activities. Cities play a major role in the development and implementation of innovative cultural policies. Testimony to this is one of the most successful cultural initiatives of the EU, the European Capital of Culture Programme, which has greatly benefitted from putting cities at the centre of a multilevel governance system.

This policy paper aims to demonstrate the potential of cities for achieving the objectives of the EU strategy for international cultural relations by proposing a revised multilevel approach. With the EU's new chief diplomat, Josep Borrell, having taken office on 1 December 2019, there is an opportunity to review the EU's emerging cultural diplomacy and give cities real consideration as partners that could help implement the new spirit of intercultural dialogue and inform future EU policies and actions.

1. Cities As Cultural Diplomacy Actors

Many large and medium-sized European cities are cultural and creative hubs that are well connected internationally and engage directly with a wide range of geographical locations. Their international cultural action is symptomatic of the broader emergence of cities as global political actors that are taking on responsibilities that were traditionally the preserve of nation-states. The EU cannot ignore this reshaping of international relations if its cultural diplomacy strategy is to be effective.

During the past three decades, deep structural transformations at the global scale have led to the pluralisation of the diplomatic field. Along with the rise of a multi-actor and multilevel diplomatic arena, cities and other sub-national governments have acquired an increasingly important role. From being merely viewed as “paradiplomatic” actors, cities are increasingly recognized as legitimate interlocutors and important partners in all aspects of global governance, in particular when it comes to issues like climate change or culture where the urban scale of action is vital for the safeguarding of a more sustainable future.

The exponential rise in transnational city networks since the early 2000s demonstrates how cities have stepped up to form transnational alliances around an increasingly broader set of issues. Notably, eighteen percent of today's transnational city networks engage with cultural policy and culture related issues. Among the most influential are UNESCO's Creative Cities network, Eurocities's Culture Forum, the Committee on Culture of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the European Creative Hubs Network funded by the European Council, and the Culture Next network, established in 2017 by current and former candidate cities to the European Capital of Culture title. These networks promote cities as international cultural policy actors and provide effective structures for knowledge sharing and peer-learning on culture-led urban and socioeconomic development, the use of culture to enhance local heritage, further intercultural dialogue and improve citizens' well-being.

council on the urban agenda for the EU. November 2017. Brussels COM(2017) 657 final http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/themes/urban/report_urban_agenda2017_en.pdf



2. What Can Cities Bring to the Table?

There is a convergence of interests and visions between the external cultural action of European cities and the strategy for international cultural relations adopted at EU level. On the one hand, the EU's emphasis on issues such as local sustainable development and democratic participation clearly resonates with the priorities of cities. On the other, cities could contribute to a more effective implementation of the EU strategy for international cultural relations and to reaching its ambitious targets.

Capacity Building Through City Networks

Cooperation with cities is essential to one of the principal concerns of the EU's international cultural relations agenda: to support culture as an engine for sustainable social and economic development. Recognizing the important role of cities in the culture-development nexus, the 2016 Joint Communication already highlighted the need to support capacity building in this area among local authorities in partner countries. If this suggestion is to be taken seriously, cooperation with European cities and their transnational networks is fundamental. The latter cannot only share their experience and knowledge on how culture can contribute to sustainable economic development and emancipatory cultural policy models that foster social equality and cohesion, but also provide established international networking and partnership structures and the relations of trust and sharing these are built on. European cities have accumulated a wealth of reflexive knowledge, urban experiments, and success stories that can serve as a source of inspiration and references for cities around the world that wish to invest in culture for sustainable urban development. In this endeavour, regional city networks like ASEAN or MERCOSUR that have a similar interest in mobilising culture for development and fostering regional identity represent potential strategic partners for the EU.

Huế, Vietnam: Decentralised Cooperation and the Rise of a Festival City

In 1992 the old imperial city of Huế launched a cultural festival that has been a catalyst for enhancing the city's image and transforming its urban landscape.⁴ This initiative benefited from exchanges with the French Region Poitou-Charente, which shared its experience in developing urban festivals such as the renowned International Comics Festival in the city of Angouleme. The Huế festival has attracted more than 1 million participants annually since the 2000s and helped finance the rehabilitation of local heritage. It has become a blueprint for other Vietnamese cities seeking to foster local development through culture.

Addressing Urban Issues Through Cultural Cooperation

Cities can increase the impact of cultural cooperation by making it speak to today's major urban challenges. Today's cities face many new problems that are related to climate change, rising urban inequalities, and emerging patterns of exclusion and intolerance. In rapidly urbanising regions, these add up to pressing challenges such as housing shortages and unequal provisions of urban services that are detrimental to the social contract and reduce confidence in institutions. To be perceived as relevant to peoples' concerns and needs, cultural cooperation must address these challenges. It must enhance civic participation and an inclusive cultural life that can contribute to building more resilient urban societies that can better adapt to these risks.

Cultural producers are increasingly concerned with addressing urban challenges, and funding bodies like the EU have made them integral to their agenda. For example, the EU's cultural cooperation programmes in the MENA region (e.g. Med Culture, implemented between 2014-2018, and Tfanen-Tunisie Créative, developed in Tunisia between 2016 and 2019) have encourage local cultural actors to engage with issues of sustainable urban development. European cities are logical partners for such programmes that address problems they face on a daily basis.

4. Boufferrou, S. & Moumeni, G. (2018) Fabrique et enjeux d'une ville festival: le cas de Hué au Vietnam, Rapport Urbanistes du Monde www.aimf.asso.fr/IMG/pdf/vf_rapport_hue_1_-min.pdf



Tfanen-Tunisie Créative: Tackling Urban Issues Through Culture in Tunisia

Tfanen-Tunisie Créative is a 3-year programme to support the Tunisian cultural sector through sub-granting calls and technical assistance in capacity building of local cultural actors. It is funded by the Tunisian EU Delegation and implemented by the British Council in partnership with the Tunisian EUNIC cluster. With Tunisia, like the rest of the MENA region, being a rapidly urbanising country, many of the selected sub-grantee projects focus on issues related to the new inequalities that emerge from these demographic shifts, such as the exclusion of urban peripheries, youth unemployment, access to education and culture, and civic participation.

Promoting Dialogue at Citizen Level

When compared with the cultural diplomacy of nation states, the most innovative aspect of the EU's international cultural relations strategy is its ambition to move beyond a government-to-government and towards a people-to-people logic that can stimulate 'a new spirit of dialogue'. This goal begs the question of the mechanisms of mediation that would enable such interactions. City leaders and civil society actors can act as mediators for more grassroots relations beyond the logics of soft power and nation branding. As a EURO CITIES study has shown, while these innovative modes of international cultural engagement are considered a 'paradigm shift' at national and EU level, they are "already firmly embedded in the policies and working methods of European cities."⁵ Operating within the collaborative logic of city twinning programmes, city networks and decentralised cooperation, cities have advanced models of cultural cooperation that put reciprocity and people-to-people exchanges centre-stage. Their proximity to citizens has made them test-grounds for new participation models and strategies for responding to the specific needs of different cultural communities and institutions in their territories.

Urban Diaspora Diplomacy

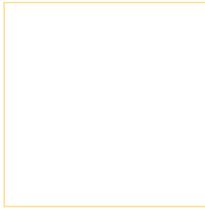
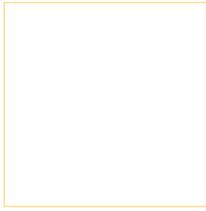
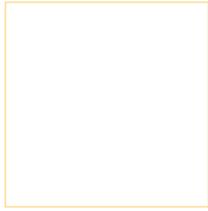
The cultural diversity of European cities constitutes a great potential for developing people-to-people driven

cultural exchanges with third countries. In recent years, the self-organisation of diasporas has often been stigmatised and accused of diluting the national identity of host countries. Yet, they hold great potential for enhancing Europe's capacity to engage with the world in a horizontal manner. Many European cities are home to diaspora communities that organise cultural projects to maintain relations with their countries of origin. A large part of these projects receive municipal subsidies that are designated for local community activities. Yet, city governments generally fail to embed these activities into their wider international cultural relations strategy. Few cities recognise that the ties they develop with their diaspora communities locally have the potential to become bridges to third countries. The EU strategy for international cultural relations could raise awareness around practices of urban diaspora diplomacy and establish it as one of its official mechanisms.

Countering Nationalist Rhetoric in International Relations

Many commentators have recently conferred new relevance on the EU's emergent cultural diplomacy as a stronghold of resilience against the growing populist nationalist zeitgeist and the isolationist cultural discourses it thrives on. However, the rising nationalist rhetoric also constitutes a severe obstacle to the development of international cultural relations. In this context, city-to-city diplomacy can potentially foster alternative liberal political visions and ways around interstate tensions. For example, in countries like Russia and Turkey where recent events have generated antagonism with the EU, local governments such as Moscow under the city's Cultural Minister Sergei Kapkov (2011-2015) and Izmir were able to establish parallel cultural relations with Europe that promoted European democratic values.

5. Eurocities (2017) Cities' external cultural relations: trends and actions http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/EUROCITIES_study_on_culture_in_cities_external_relations_2017.pdf



Izmir’s Mediterranean Academy: Maintaining a Spirit of Dialogue

Izmir, Turkey’s third largest city, has historically had an open and progressive outlook. In October 2009, the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality launched the Izmir Cultural Workshop. As part of the project scientists, artists and citizens were invited to formulate their vision of a city of innovation and design and develop relations with other Mediterranean cities. In a context in which Turkey-EU relations have been hampered by nationalist political rhetoric on both sides during the past decade, such initiatives show that a spirit of dialogue can be maintained at city level and that civil society can continue to collaborate, exchange and celebrate their common values and heritage.

Decentralizing Cultural Diplomacy

Engaging cities can also contribute to expand and decentralize the reach of EU cultural diplomacy. The activities of Member States’ cultural institutes often concentrate in the capital and major cities of partner countries and have difficulties to reach out to more remote areas. European cities and their transnational networks could act as intermediaries for connecting with more diverse territories. This decentralization is urgently needed if the EU wants to respond to the global reality of today’s cultural flows, rather than just continue treading the beaten tracks of established EU and Member State cultural relations, which tend to run along older East-West and North-South geopolitical fault lines. Beyond this well-known terrain there are many cities with innovative art scenes and a cosmopolitan outlook.

Goethe-Institut’s Decentralisation Efforts

The national cultural institutes of EU Member States, such as Germany’s Goethe-Institute, have ever smaller networks of physical representations. Due to reduced funding and the transition to more digital programming, the number of institutes has been radically reduced in recent years. Today, few institutes exist beyond capital and major cities. To reach audiences beyond these geographic limitations, the Goethe-Institut regularly funds projects of partner organisations located in other cities and regions. For example, the Goethe-Institut Mexico collaborates with cinemas throughout the country to show contemporary German films. However, these sorts of projects tend to fall into the category of one-way cultural

projection rather than cultural dialogue and exchange. Partnerships with European local governments that have established relations with small and medium-sized cities in non-EU countries could provide an effective strategy for reaching more peripheral geographies.

Building Relations With Regional Cultural Hubs

Throughout the world, there are cities that have positioned themselves as cultural centres for their regions. Examples include Singapore, Hong Kong, Istanbul, Dakar, Doha and Cape Town. They have invested in cultural institutions and programmes with a regional outlook, with the objective of becoming their region’s main link with the global art world. But most importantly, these are cities where new approaches to culture are being crafted and that have a particular relevance for the regions in which they are located. The EU should recognise the relevance of these cities as partners it can learn from and as strategic hubs for establishing cultural relations in the broader region.

The Asia-Europe Foundation in Singapore

Created in 1996, the Asia-Europe foundation has 39 Asian and European member countries. It promotes greater understanding between Europe and Asia by organising conferences, workshops and preparing publications. Each year, it organises 100 activities involving 3000 participants from Europe and Asia. Based in Singapore, it can easily reach out to cities and countries in the region. With the foundation’s funding being membership-fee based it fosters reciprocal relations of cultural exchange that go beyond promoting European culture in Asia and vice versa.



3. Recommendations: Towards a Multilevel EU Cultural Diplomacy

In order to be successful, the EU strategy for external cultural relations cannot content itself with duplicating the model of cultural diplomacy advanced by its Member States. We suggest that the most promising way to avoid this risk is to take a multilevel approach, that considers the added value of each level of governance and, in particular, the potential of existing initiatives at urban and regional level.

The below recommendations, point towards ways to rethink the EU international cultural relations strategy from a multilevel perspective.

Support city networking on cultural cooperation. To better exploit the potential of cities as international cultural actors, support could be provided to new city networking initiatives with non-EU cities. Similar to the URBACT networks for sustainable urban development at European level, cultural networks could be created on subjects that connect cities throughout the world and foster mutual understanding across continents.

Partner with European and global city networks that have made international cultural cooperation a priority. An obvious choice would be UCLG, the worldwide association for local and regional governments and their networks, which has a Committee on Culture that leads international policies and programmes on culture and sustainable development. Other potential partners could be Eurocities and UNESCO's Creative Cities Network. Further, the EU could foster the creation of networks of exchange and mutual learning with other regional city networks like ASEAN or Mercosur, that put cities at the centre of efforts to create a regional cultural identity.

Expand the European Capital of Culture (ECC) programme. Several cities in European Accession Countries have been awarded the ECC label to foster cultural integration and Europeanization. Following the recommendations of the Preparatory Action for the Joint Communication, we propose that a sub-section of the programme could also be opened up to third countries. This expansion of the ECC could encourage the discovery and popularisation of shared urban histories and cultural influences. In alternating years, a European city and a city outside Europe could serve as the locus for exchanges. Further, the emulation of the ECC programme in other

world regions such as Latin America, East and Southeast Asia, has created opportunities to set up for frameworks of exchange and mutual learning.

Involve the representations of local governments in Brussels in the future formulation and implementation of the EU cultural diplomacy strategy. The active engagement of local governments would be beneficial to both them and the EU. Local governments would be given the opportunity to better understand and assess the relevance of the EU cultural diplomacy strategy for their own cultural policies and actions. In turn, the EU could benefit from local authorities bringing the strategy closer to European citizens and the enhanced impact this would create. Further, the EU could benefit from the knowledge and experience of city representatives for identifying the urban challenges that partner countries face, and understanding how these can be addressed through international cultural cooperation.

Map European cities' best practices in the field of international cultural relations. Given the myriad of external cultural actions at city-level, the identification of successful initiatives would allow for them to be replicated elsewhere and adopted as an integral part of the EU strategy for international cultural relations. The Commission could earmark research funds for a project that would map and analyse the international cultural relations of European cities.

Further Readings

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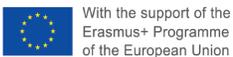
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Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

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