

# Kudos to the Council for putting culture at the heart of sustainable development

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Culture and sustainable development go hand-in-hand. Culture is a powerful catalyst for the much-needed paradigm shift in thinking development beyond economic growth - for a future that is equitable, inclusive, peaceful, and environmentally sustainable.

It can help design new methods of thinking, elaborating new moral patterns of behaviour to move beyond merely patching up problems, but towards a true new, long-term and daring vision for the future. Because there is no doubt that culture and creativity can overcome the sectoral, reductionist and linear approach that most countries have been used to in

recent decades, and contribute to achieving the ambitious goals enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development objectives transversally.

This is why I very much welcome last week's [Council resolution on the cultural dimension of sustainable development](#), which is supposed to trigger an action plan to integrate cultural policies and perspectives into national sustainable development strategies.

The resolution defines culture as a self-sustaining pillar in sustainable development: "*Culture, as a system of shared meanings within a community, has an impact on how sustainable development measures are assessed by that community and, subsequently, is a driver for sustainable development that can mediate between different environmental, social and economic concerns.*"

As evidence has largely demonstrated, cultural aspects, in all their diversity and richness, have an enormous potential to foster sustainability. Indeed, the active participation in cultural life, the development of individual and collective cultural liberties, the safeguarding of tangible and intangible cultural heritages, and the protection and promotion of diverse cultural expressions, are core components of human and sustainable development.

The Preamble of the 2030 Agenda indicates: "*All cultures and civilizations can contribute to, and are crucial enablers of, sustainable development.*"

Clearly, the safeguarding and promotion of culture is an end in itself, but at the same time it contributes directly to many of the SDGs — safe and sustainable cities, decent work and economic growth, reduced inequalities, the environment, promoting gender equality and peaceful and inclusive societies. The indirect benefits of culture are accrued through the culturally-informed and effective implementations of the development goals.

The Council agreed to "*engage in participatory, multi-stakeholder and integrated governance of culture and sustainable development*". Clearly, civil society has a crucial role to play because culture cannot be imposed top-down and its strength results from it being part of the fabric of communities and their citizens.

I firmly believe that our common future depends on our capacity to raise the voices of all citizens: people-to-people approach, local empowerment, participation and co-creation' are essential, if we want to succeed. This engagement and cultural understanding is something that should be enabled all throughout our lives, irrespective of social and cultural background.

When I took up the Presidency of the EESC in April 2018, I coined the slogan *rEUnaissance - Dare a sustainable Europe*. One of the priorities I chose for my term in office was Culture, as I believe that culture has an enormous untapped potential for the future of Europe. With former European Parliament Culture committee chair, Silvia Costa, and Paul Dujardin, director general of BOZAR, [I called for culture to be recognized as the fourth pillar of sustainable development](#) on an equal footing with the economic, social and environmental pillars.

I put this conviction forward in the opinion "[Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations](#)", and I have relentlessly continued to promote this issue in the following years and during my Presidency. More needs to be done and the EESC is eager to work closely with other EU institutions as well as with other stakeholders to unlock culture's full potential for sustainability, though the development of the action plan on the cultural dimension of sustainable development.

For Culture can bring Hope and a second Renaissance to Europe. Culture is key to sustainable development- for either Europe is sustainable- or it will not be at all.