



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Forum of Ministers of Culture

19 November 2019

in the framework of the 40th session of the General Conference

Preliminary concept note

Background

Since its establishment, UNESCO has provided a strategic platform for inter-ministerial dialogue in all areas of its mandate. Major inter-ministerial conferences are in line with the Organization's strategic functions and add value across all the basic functions assigned to it: (i) to serve as a laboratory of ideas, (ii) to develop the global agenda through policy analysis and monitoring, (iii) to set norms and standards, (iv) to strengthen international cooperation (institutional, operational and intellectual) and (v) to provide guidance for policy development and implementation. Over time, these major events have made it possible to support reflection and public debate in the fields covered by UNESCO's mandate and offer Member States concepts and tools providing them with backing as part of a forward-looking vision in support of the development and implementation of public policies.

The major cultural conferences are fully in line with this approach. Several major meetings have been held by UNESCO – particularly, the World Conference on Cultural Policies – *MONDIACULT* (Mexico City, Mexico, 1982), the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development (Stockholm, Sweden, 1998) and the intergovernmental conference “*Culture Counts: Financing, Resources and the Economics of Culture in Sustainable Development*” (Florence, Italy, 1999). These meetings widely mobilized Member States and led to decisive progress in the years following the conferences, and these advances made it possible to position UNESCO in its cultural mandate on a global scale. This must be maintained. The advances include the expansion of the concept of culture to include the intangible cultural heritage, for instance, and the definition of a new global agenda for cultural policies for development, integrating the contribution of culture to sustainable development.

The ministerial meetings accompanied the decisions of Member States in defining their priorities and in the emergence and elaboration of UNESCO's cultural conventions, recommendations and declarations. The standard-setting texts that were adopted in subsequent years, including the 2001 *UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, the 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* and the 2005 *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, drew their *raison d'être*, as well as their founding concepts and principles from these meetings. The dynamics of reflection and political impetus generated by these major meetings had also accompanied the three earlier conventions (the 1954 *Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict*, the 1970 *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* and the 1972 *Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*) in gradually adapting their concepts and approaches to meet the challenges

of the contemporary world. The expansion of heritage categories, and the adaptation of heritage conservation practices to meet development challenges, are among major developments.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development offers today a fundamental opportunity to reactivate ministerial meetings. The 2030 Agenda reflects a common vision of sustainable development adopted by all States. The issues formulated in it – from education to social inclusion, from the climate crisis to rapid urbanization – concern in a cross-cutting way the various areas of the Organization’s mandate and constitute an invitation to revisit and fully reinvest its five founding functions, in particular support for the development and implementation of public policies. The challenge is to effectively support Member States in the implementation of the Organization’s conventions and programmes, which must be consistent with and support the national mechanisms for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The 2030 Agenda is a particularly crucial milestone for the Culture Sector. The conceptual and policy-related progress achieved with regard to the role of culture in development over the past two decades – progress fuelled both by standard-setting action and major international conferences – and related to advocacy and demonstration efforts deployed by the Organization, has made it possible to firmly place culture at the very heart of the 2030 Agenda in a cross-cutting manner. Culture is fully a part of this global vision of sustainable development; its role as a driver and facilitator of sustainable development is now recognized by the entire international community. This role is also reflected, in a cross-cutting manner, in many of the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda – not only Sustainable Development Goal 11.4, which concerns cultural heritage, but also the goals related to education, social inclusion, innovation and job creation, urban sustainability and environmental transition.

Cultural conventions and programmes have revisited their strategic approaches in the light of the 2030 Agenda. While the concepts related to sustainable development are at the heart of most cultural conventions, each convention brings a particular perspective to the matter, depending on its field of application and its specific conceptual framework. Most of the conventions have incorporated the Sustainable Development Goals into their implementation mechanisms – to varying degrees and in different ways – and address cross-cutting issues such as education for sustainable development, the promotion of gender equality, adaptation to climate change and the digital revolution.

Drawing on this progress, the aim today is to adopt a comprehensive approach to the needs expressed by Member States. Today, many States have expressed the need for more cross-cutting support for the development and implementation of cultural policies, and for their more explicit inclusion in national policies related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The difficulty lies in addressing more generally certain central themes of cultural policies – cultural and artistic education and cultural participation, for example – by combining the conceptual and operational achievements of the various conventions. It is ultimately a question of developing tools for measuring the impact of the Organization’s cultural conventions and programmes and the contribution of culture to sustainable development, in order to inform public policy and to support cultural advocacy more broadly.

The establishment of the Forum of Ministers of Culture falls within this strategic perspective. It directly echoes 39 C/Resolution 87, since interactive ministerial roundtables/debates are encouraged to provide space for strategic dialogue and interaction among ministers, thereby helping guide the work of the Commissions and future C/5 documents. These roundtables could be organized in a cost-neutral way per sector, strategic priority, or relevant SDG in parallel with the General Policy Debate or as high-level side events. It also provides strategic insight in preparation for the Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2029.

Objectives

In this context, the Forum of Ministers of Culture aims to address the priorities, challenges and opportunities identified by Member States and their governments in the development and implementation of their cultural policies so as to engage in dialogue on cultural policies in the light of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Forum of Ministers of Culture aims more specifically to:

- (1) support the Member States in the development and implementation of their cultural policies, drawing on all the Organization's cultural conventions and programmes;
- (2) restore exchanges so as to enrich cross-cutting reflection on the place of culture in sustainable development in the light of contemporary challenges, and to firmly place cultural policies in perspectives relating to the 2030 Agenda.

Approach and process

Preparation of the Forum of Ministers of Culture is part of a process of close consultation with Member States, structured around the following four pillars:

- (1) **A series of regional studies** on priorities, challenges and opportunities for cultural policies in the different regions of the world will be conducted by different regional and subregional intergovernmental organizations. It will reflect the individual trends in each region and the priorities and concerns of Member States. The results will be presented in a strategic document to provide input for discussion at the Forum.
- (2) **A written consultation of Member States** will run from the end of April 2019 until late July 2019 to seek States' recommendations on the Forum topics.
- (3) **An information meeting** on the preparation process for the Forum will be held for Member States in May 2019.
- (4) **A summary of the discussion** will inform the Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2029.