UNESCO Creative Cities Network
General Report
on the
Third Membership Monitoring & Reporting Exercise
May-June 2018

INTRODUCTION

At the end of last year, in the framework of the third UCCN Membership Monitoring and Reporting Exercise, 22 member cities[1] designated between 2010 and 2013 submitted their Membership Monitoring Reports (MMRs). Subsequently, these individual city reports have been evaluated by the cluster peer members within each relevant creative field. On the basis of this evaluation process, the present general report was prepared to include the following main findings and reflections.

OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

The evaluation reviewed 22 quadrennial reports prepared by member cities and the cluster (creative field) evaluations prepared by peer cities with a view to:

- identifying effective and innovative programme initiatives and practices;
- identifying weaknesses and shortcomings; and
- identifying significant themes and issues relevant to the UCCN mission.

This exercise sought responses from participating cities on:

- their contribution to the Network's operations and activities;
- major local initiatives; and

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[1] Bogota; Brazzaville; Saint-Étienne; Beijing; Enghien-les-Bains; Sapporo; Chengdu; Jeonju; Östersund; Seoul; Zhalé; Fabriano; Hangzhou; Icheon; Paducah; Dublin; Krakow; Reykjavik; Norwich; Shanghai; Graz; and Sydney. And concerned the following clusters: Craft and Folk Arts; Design; Gastronomy; Literature; Media Arts and Music.

- major inter-city or cooperative initiatives.

Details were also sought from the cities on their institutional arrangements supporting network membership, and a forward plan for membership activities in the coming four years. This is followed by an observation on the evaluation process. The report concludes with some reflections for further action.

OVERVIEW

The cluster evaluations of the MMRs provide relevant comments on the strengths and weaknesses of cities' programmes, the nature and extent of their engagement with the Network and the clusters, as well as the quality of their reports.

The current reporting exercise as an essential part of the UCCN monitoring system confirms both the dynamism and the potential of the programme as well as the nature of activities undertaken by the cities.

As for the city reports, the lack of comparable data for measuring programme impact, and the relative brevity of the cluster evaluations hinder the possibility of making clear judgments of cities' performance level. The peer reports vary in their amount of detail, depending on the peer cities' level of engagement with the Network, as well as their level of preparedness and capacity to provide in-depth positive and critical feedback.

It is challenging to extrapolate patterns and trends from the diverse range of programmes, in widely ranging spatial, economic and cultural contexts, which are presented in the city reports.

Overall, the 2018 monitoring and reporting exercise confirms a range of impressive achievements against the UCCN mission statement, although many of these are at city level rather than Network or cluster level.

From the data given it is possible to discern a general focus on education, training and skills transfer, as well as programmed event directed at young people. Both these aspects are encouraging as they promote the sustainability of a city's cultural heritage and innovation. However, what was less evident was the proactive engagement with marginalised groups. This may be due to an emphasis on the economic development of the creative industries.

Several cities reports specifically addressed the question of environmental sustainability and, particularly, the UN Sustainable Development Goals. However, this appeared not to be a widespread concern. This could be due to the fact that these Goals were incorporated at the end of the reporting period.

KEY FINDINGS

Four main outcomes have emerged from the evaluation of the individual reports:

1/ Local initiatives take precedence over inter-city ones

It is clear from the city reports that the focus of most city-level programmes is on their own local-level activities. The degree to which the objectives of the Network are achieved and advanced through cooperation and collaboration – that is, the degree to which they address the inter-city reporting criterion - ranges widely across cities. In several instances, the impact was quite minimal. Engagement in the Network and/or its clusters could go beyond some form of 'participation in', 'contribution' or 'support' for projects driven by individual cities, towards developing shared initiatives within a 'co-creation', 'co-organisation' and 'co-production' framework.

2/ Economic development is prioritised over social and environmental considerations

The focus of most city reports is on supporting economic or industry development, with comparatively little attention paid to social goals, the participation of civil society, and the pursuit of environmental goals. An exclusive focus on economic performance (and often a narrow understanding of what constitutes economic development) can inhibit collaboration, experimentation and innovation.

There is a tendency in the city reports to dwell on programme successes. There are no reported instances of 'brave failures' or experiments that may have fallen short of expectations, which are shared within the Network.

The city or municipal government often appears to be the main, if not the sole, effective player, reinforcing a focus on urban economic development. It is worth recalling that cities are not merely the municipalities and local authorities, but a complex economic, social, cultural and environmental system in which a variety of actors and stakeholders interact and thus have symbiotic impact on each other.

3/ Bilateral or trilateral partnerships are common

The city reports indicate that, while the Network is currently structured along the lines of creative fields, many cities have active partnerships on a bilateral or trilateral scale. Some – perhaps many – of these partnerships occur not only across the sub-networks, but across the boundaries of the Network itself. That is, some of the city reports indicate productive relationships with non-member cities. These small-scale partnerships may be both more manageable and more secure in terms of inter-city cooperation, particularly when it is resulted from twinning between cities.

4/ Distinctive patterns emerge between North and South collaborators

Member cities from the South have some distinctive features in the way they engage with the Network and structure their programmes, in contrast with cities from the North.

Cites from the South generally anchor their programme within national public institutions that are in charge of culture. They show a willingness to use their designation or Network membership as an opportunity, indeed a responsibility, for engagement and, at times, even leadership in their respective region. They also demonstrate a strong capacity to incorporate their creative focus into other development agendas and cross-sectoral cooperation. However, these member cities also face specific challenges, including mobility and language.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE REPORTING AND EVALUATION PROCESS

As a general observation, there was a tendency for the reports to focus on facts and outputs rather than processes. A more discursive or narrative style of report may provide more in-depth insights and facilitate discussion of what worked or didn't work during the reporting period.

A second observation is the tendency of making assumption that all cities can be measured against standard benchmarks, rather than starting from a position that every city participates at the level of its own potential and capability.

While all cities provided extensive plans and data as part of their initial applications, only a few referred back to that original document in their 2017 monitoring reports. It is difficult to gauge through this exercise the extent to which cities have reached their potential, or fulfilled plans set out in their original membership applications.

SOME REFLECTIONS

Aligned with the evaluation findings, the reflections are focused on three main elements:

1/ Strengthening the approach to monitoring and evaluation

The UCCN, in partnership with appropriate stakeholders including experts or academics, could undertake a review of different evaluation options for the Network, with a view to determining the approach that is most fit-for-purpose, to ensure that member cities are appropriately skilled in and committed to the evaluation model. Widening the evaluation framework to focus not only on outputs and outcomes, but on network effects, could be a starting point.

2/ Improving the content of monitoring and evaluation forms

A section in the individual reports or the evaluation process could be filled in by actors or stakeholders from the civil society to bring in a complementary perspective to the individual city reporting exercise.

Also, greater attention to the distinctive focus of each city could be the object of a reporting entry; as well as discussion of the level of seniority and the capacity of cities to engage with other relevant UN programmes, instruments and priorities, such as the SDGs or the 'Africa focus'.

3/ Considering encouraging new, cross-cutting or transversal inter-city relationships

The UCCN member cities could prioritise the development of definitive strategies for creative industries to develop in environmentally sustainable ways, and of measures on how such development can be assessed. Also, capacity building processes could be more effectively built into the reporting and monitoring systems.

CONCLUSION

The UCCN Secretariat would like to thank the clusters for their participation in the evaluation of the 22 MMRs; the SG for its coordination in the evaluation process within their respective cluster; other contributors for their valuable inputs; and most of all, the 22 member cities for their active commitment to this exercise.

The present report provides a comprehensive and useful overview of the third Monitoring and Reporting Exercise. With the continuing growth of the Network, new approaches and options should be brought in to further strengthen this exercise. The Secretariat calls on the member cities to continue working closely with it towards this united goal.