CULTURE 2030 GOAL CAMPAIGN

6 November 2026

THE AGORA MEETING

#Culture2030Goal

The Agora of the Culture2030Goal Campaign met on 6 November 2026 (15h-16h CET) to review the work carried out by the Campaign over the year, including the analysis of the 2026 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and to look towards 2027, the year of the next UN SDG Summit. There were the two main substantive points on the agenda:

1. PROGRESS OVER 2026

Jordi Pascual, Coordinator of the UCLG Culture Committee, opened the meeting by recalling that the Agora is the closest circle around the Steering Group of the Campaign (the Arterial Network, Culture Action Europe, ICOM, ICOMOS, IFCCD, IFLA, IMC and the UCLG Culture Committee). Since the adoption of the SDGs, the Campaign has worked in three areas: advocacy for a Culture Goal; the analysis of the reports submitted by countries to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF); and, the area for which it is probably best known, a clear proposal for a Culture Goal.

2025 had been a particularly active year, with the publication of "The Analytical Report on the Culture Goal, its Targets and Indicators", its summary "The Culture Goal: from Necessity to Reality", and the infographic "The Culture Goal in Brief" in the frame of MONDIACULT 2025 and the UCLG Culture Summit in Barcelona. In 2026, the Campaign internally worked by engaging with the countries reporting to the HLPF and analysing the VNRs presented this year.

Stephen Wyber, Manager, Policy and Advocacy at IFLA, presented the main conclusions of the Campaign's analysis of the 36 VNRs presented in 2026, published as "Culture: a strategic infrastructure for sustainability". Now in its fifth edition, the analysis looks at VNRs as evidence of how far culture already features in the way countries approach sustainable development.

Every country refers to culture at some point, although not in the same way and not with the same depth. All the targets of the Culture Goal are present, with heritage, cultural rights and the regenerative approach referred to most often, and cultural mobility and Indigenous governance least often. Standout examples include Jamaica, which places music on the front cover of its review; Italy, with an in-depth exploration of culture and sustainability; and Estonia, which dedicates a chapter to an "SDG 18" on culture. Jamaica and Uruguay explicitly call for a dedicated Culture Goal in the post-2030 agenda.

Another finding is the breadth of references to culture correlating with country income, and that VNRs from Sub-Saharan Africa refer to fewer aspects of culture. This reflects how sustainable development is conceived in those contexts, rather than the strength of their cultures, and underlines the value of promoting a broad understanding of culture (beyond national marketing, soft power or the orange economy) within UN processes, and not only through UNESCO. The analysis will be used to reach out to countries, to show what is already possible, and to encourage future VNRs to address culture fully.

2. LOOKING AHEAD TO 2027

Jordi Pascual, Coordinator of the UCLG Culture Committee, presented four main areas of work proposed for 2027:

- Advocacy: reaching out to the countries reporting in 2027 to let them know about the Campaign and the Culture Goal proposal, as well as to encourage them to include culture in their VNRs (be it an explicit support to the Culture Goal and/or the relation between cultural policies and programmes and the SDGs they are reviewing).
- The annual analysis if the VNRs, to be delivered at the HLPF in July 2027.
- The UCLG Culture Summit in Jeonju (Republic of Korea), on 6-8 September 2027, as the event to amplify the campaign, and to reach countries and key stakeholders, days before the UN SDG Summit in late September 2027.
- A possible revised version 1 of the Culture Goal; with two scenarios (a) an updated version to be published in the coming months, so that it is used in the advocacy in 2027, including the UN SDG Summit in late September 2027, or (b) to wait until the UN framework for the post-2030 agenda is clearer, after September 2027.

After this segment, the floor was opened and participants were invited to share their views, in particular on this last matter:

Alexandra Xanthaki, UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, expressed her concerns about the current proposal. In her view, the current proposal of indicators for the Culture Goal is grounded in UNESCO sources and has no human rights sources. This, she argued, does not address key elements of cultural rights, does not reflect the scope of the SDGs exercise and would set the stand-alone goal on the wrong foundations. It would in essence exclude existing protections, she argued. The UN Special Rapporteur had sent the Steering Group a proposal with several amendments to the current proposal, amending the wording of some targets, and adding new indicators. She suggested that it is imperative to include at least some of these amendments to reflect the existing international law standards. She offered her team's support.

Aysegul Sabuktay, director, Izmir Mediterranean Academy, presented the work of one of the co-presidents of the UCLG Culture Committee, on city data and indicators linked to the Culture Goal. A general questionnaire was designed with each section beginning with the corresponding target of the Culture2030Goal Campaign, so that the questionnaire itself constituted a manifestation of the Campaign and its targets. The questionnaire also asked institutions for their overall cultural budget and the budget allocated to each target. The questionnaire was addressed to central government institutions in Izmir, district municipalities, directorates of the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality and universities, and piloted with private sector and civil society organisations. The resulting report is a pilot shadow report for 2025, and the indicators will be adjusted according to its results.

Stefan Teisanu, Secretary General of Culture Next, presented a research project carried out over the last two and a half years with 12 European Capitals of Culture, in line with the Campaign, on how cultural

outcomes can be measured for the SDGs. The final report will be published at the European Capitals of Culture Summit, on 2 December 2026 in Brussels. While the national indicators of the Culture Goal can show whether a national policy exists, the report found that the 12 cities used over 3,000 indicators, no two cities used the same ones. The project proposes a qualitative evaluation framework with core city-level indicators, as well as an AI tool to be presented in Brussels. Should the Steering Group prepare a new version, he suggested reflecting the efforts made by other actors since the publication of the proposal.

Matti Hakamäki, Director at Finnish Folk Music Institute, presented the Culture Goal Campaign Finland, a two-year project adapting the Campaign's awareness-raising and capacity-building work to cultural actors and civil society in Finland. Engaging grassroots actors in this kind of administrative thinking remains challenging, and calls for more concrete approaches. A follow-up project, subject to funding, would extend the work to the Nordic and Baltic area and introduce thematic work. He also raised possible scenarios for the post-2030 agenda, including room for new Goals, no sustainability agenda at all, the same framework, or the same SDGs but with opened targets, and asked how the Campaign might position itself in these scenarios.

Olga Partina, Focal Point for Sustainable Development at ICOMOS, considered that the Culture Goal should be reviewed and calibrated with the inputs shared in the meeting. ICOMOS has taken the list of countries presenting VNRs in 2027 and will hold 5–6 regional meetings in the coming months to present the Culture Goal and its indicators, and to push for more culture-related information in the reports.

Yves Zimmermann, Director of Project Agenda 2030 (Strasbourg), recalled the work of Strasbourg work on the SDGs through its Voluntary Local Review and an SDG budgeting approach. He called for a broader, more anthropological approach to culture: culture needs to be "goal-able" this time, and understood as a way to transformation. He recalled the proposal made in 2025 and suggested adding two targets: one on the link between people and their territories, and another on time use. Yves Zimmermann stressed the importance of indicators in culture and the need to better assess the economic impact of culture.

Silja Fischer, Secretary General of the International Music Council (IMC), noted the need to streamline the indicators used by cities, in order to compare them, and to move towards a qualitative framework. Methodologies based on narratives, such as those used in Voices for Change (a project with the International Voluntary Service movement in which the IMC is a partner), show that even if targets need indicators, the Campaign should also advocate for qualitative narratives.

Johanne Bouchard, Human Rights Officer (OHCHR), suggested identifying additions that could be integrated easily into the document as it stands – notably to the indicators – with the targets unchanged (or with only minor amendments), so as to strengthen the proposal while limiting the amount of work, leaving new targets or qualitative, city-level indicators for a later stage.

Nil Navaie, Founder of Arts for Global Development, highlighted through an intervention from the chat, that qualitative and quantitative indicators can help establish meaningful baselines if grounded in context, as part of an experimental and iterative process, not to establish one universal way of doing things, but to raise awareness of culture's intrinsic value and its cross-cutting role in the agenda beyond 2030.

Alexandra Xanthaki further distinguished between improving the proposal (which will take time, and requires keeping it short enough for states to accept) and remedial work that could be carried out in a more agile way: adding UN treaties to the sources, and adding two "anthropocentric" indicators to each target. She suggested making the document an open document so that this remedial work can be done promptly, leaving further improvements for when the positions of states and of the new UN Secretary-General are clearer.

Stephen Wyber closed the open floor by reminding the participants that the Campaign advocates in a broad sense, for culture to be recognized as central to sustainable development. Within that, the questions of "what culture" and "how" are not the same, but are not entirely separate either, and the line between remedial work and improvement will need to be worked through. Stephen Wyber noted that the inputs received from the Special Rapporteur's team has been extremely helpful in providing concrete, actionable proposals, and there is considerable scope (especially on indicators) to work with "remedial approach" at short term.

3. ACTIONS

- The Steering Group of the Campaign will meet to discuss the inputs received from the Agora, including the proposed remedial work and a potential update of the Culture Goal proposal.
- In parallel, the Campaign will continue its work of advocacy with countries (ministries of Foreign Affairs, ministries for culture, national permanent delegations in the UN) to ensure culture is acknowledged as an integral part of sustainable development
- Participants were encouraged to review the list of countries presenting VNRs in 2027 and encourage contacts in their own country, neighboring countries or countries where they have good contacts to include culture in their reviews, whether or not they refer to the Culture Goal proposal.

BACKGROUND

During the process of creation and adoption of the UN 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, several cultural global networks campaigned, under the banner 'The Future We Want Includes Culture', for the inclusion of one specific Goal devoted to Culture, and the integration of cultural aspects across the SDGs. In the context of this #Culture2015goal Campaign, 4 documents were produced: a Manifesto – Proposal for a Goal (September 2013), a Declaration on the inclusion of culture in the 2030 Agenda (May 2014), a proposal of indicators for measuring the cultural aspects of the SDGs (February 2015), and a Communiqué on the final 2030 Agenda (September 2015) which highlighted "progress made" but also noticed that "important steps remain ahead".

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the #Culture2030Goal Campaign released on 20 April 2020 a Statement entitled "Ensuring culture fulfils its potential in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic", which was officially launched on 21 May 2020, on the occasion of the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development. The Statement has been endorsed by the President of the United Nations General Assembly and signed by more than 280 individuals and organisations worldwide.

The Campaign has published two analytical (and critical) reports on the cultural dimension of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda: "Culture in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda", analysing the National Voluntary Reviews, in 2019, and "Culture in the Localization of the SDGs: An Analysis of the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs)", in 2021.The Campaign has also promoted several discussions in the context of the 2020 and 2021 United Nations High-Level Political Fora (HLPF).

In 2021, the Campaign published its strategic vision. The Campaign wants a stronger place for culture throughout the implementation of the current UN 2030 Agenda, the adoption of an explicit Goal for Culture in the post-2030 Development Agenda, and the adoption of an ambitious and comprehensive Global Agenda for Culture.

In 2022, in the context of the UNESCO Global Conference on Cultural Policies organised in Mexico City, Mondiacult 2022, the Campaign launched a Zerodraft of a future Culture Goal, and welcomed the undertaking in the Final Declaration of the Conference to integrate a specific Culture Goal in the post-2030 Development Agenda, with the Statement "Commitment to an explicit culture goal in MONDIACULT Declaration welcome: now is the time to deliver".

In 2023, we have seen five key high-level, cross-governmental declarations that recognise the need for an explicit Culture Goal:

- First of all, on 23 August 2023, the leaders of the BRICS group committed to integrate culture into their national development policies as a driver and an enabler for the achievement of the SDGs.
- Second, on 9-10 September 2023, G20 heads of state and government released their G20 Leaders Declaration including a whole heading on culture as a transformative driver of the SDGs. In particular, they called to advance the inclusion of culture as a standalone Goal in future discussions on a possible post-2030 Development Agenda.
- Third, all UN Member States, meeting at the SDG Summit on 18 September 2023, reaffirmed the role of culture as an enabler of sustainable development, contributing to more effective and sustainable development policies and measures at all levels.

- The Ministers of Culture of the European Union adopted the Caceres Declaration on 26 September 2023, committing to work for culture to be recognised in and of itself as a new Sustainable Development Goal.
- The UCLG Culture Summit, on 30 November 2023, in the Dublin Statement reaffirmed the commitment of cities and local and regional governments in favour of a Culture Goal.

These declarations point to a strong and positive trend in favour of substantial efforts to integrate culture into development agendas.

In September 2024, the Ministers for Culture of the G7 released the Ministerial Declaration "Culture, common good of humanity, common responsibility", in which they commit to "promote the inclusion of culture as a standalone goal in future discussions on how to advance sustainable development beyond 2030". Also in September 2024, the UN Pact for the Future committed "to protect and promote culture and sport as integral components of sustainable development" (article 11).

In 2025, the Campaign published a detailed proposal of the Culture Goal, in "The Culture Goal: from Necessity to Reality". This proposal was accompanied by "The Analytical Report on the Culture Goal, its Targets and Indicators", that is, the complete analysis of the survey and the wide consultation undertaken by the Campaign in 2024-2025. Also, the Campaign published an infographic entitled "The Culture Goal in Brief". These documents were released in September 2025, in Barcelona, in the frame of UNESCO's Mondiacult, whose Outcome Document mentions the importance of a Culture Goal in the post-2030 Development Agenda.

In 2026, the Campaign released "Culture: a strategic infrastructure for sustainability", an analysis of culture in the 36 Voluntary National Reviews presented that year, written by Stephen Wyber (IFLA). The report uses the Culture Goal proposal as a frame of analysis and identifies examples of good practice from very different geographies, which shows that a Culture Goal has global relevance.

The Culture2030Goal Campaign and its members stand ready to accelerate work in this area, working in partnership with relevant actors at all levels. The Campaign looks forward to leading cross-governmental work programmes around the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the implementation of the Pact for the Future. This includes the exploration of the feasibility of a Major Group within the UN system, as well as a robust advocacy for a Culture Goal that includes UN member states as well as Major Groups and other stakeholders.

Arterial Network
Web: www.arterialafrica.org

Culture Action Europe
Web: www.cultureactioneurope.org

ICOM - International Council of Museums
Web: www.icom.museum

ICOMOS - International Council on Monuments and Sites
Web: www.icomos.org

IFCCD - International Federation of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity
Web: www.ficdc.org

IFLA - International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
Web: www.ifla.org

IMC - International Music Council
Web: www.imc-cim.org

UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments) Culture Committee - Agenda 21 for culture
Web: www.agenda21culture.net



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