

UCLG Culture Summit, Jeju – Culture and the SDGs: Towards a 2030 Goal
Sarah Gardner, IFACCA -- 11 May 2017

I congratulate Mr WON Hee-Ryong, President of UCLG ASPAC and the Governor of Jeju Special Self-governing Province on its hosting of this Summit; and Mpho Parks Tau, President of UCLG --for its longstanding commitment to recognising explicitly Culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development and its leadership in developing Culture 21 Actions Toolkit.

My organisation, the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies, brings together national arts councils and ministries of culture in 70 countries. It has been IFACCA's great pleasure to work closely with UCLG Committee on Culture for over a decade – and specifically with Jordi Pascual, its coordinator.

As some of you may know, I will be leaving IFACCA later this year having been the founding ED for over 16 years. So, this will probably be my last official presentation at an international conference such as this.... And I'm delighted and honoured that it is this particular event where there are so many familiar faces.

In the session I chaired this morning we heard from many talented network leaders about Building a Culture Goal for 2030. In introducing the session, however, I shared my concerns about the place of culture in international debates generally let alone in the Sustainable Development Agenda.

I have just attended two major international UNESCO Forums – one on Youth and their Social Impact, for NGOs in liaison with UNESCO, held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; and another on Intercultural Dialogue held in Baku, Azerbaijan. Both events attracted very prestigious speakers and together about 2500 delegates of which half were international. You would think that the debates and speakers would have been quite familiar, related as they are to culture ...yet they weren't.

I must admit my bias here: that IFACCA's focus has tended to be towards the end of cultural definition spectrum, (or if you prefer, in the centre of the concentric circles of culture), that is on the arts – music, theatre, literature, visual arts and craft, dance etc – in terms of both creation and participation. Or in UNESCO's terms, the 2005 Convention of the Protection and Promotion of Cultural Expressions. However, many of IFACCA's members – the Ministries of Culture – of course have a broader responsibilities in culture being tangible and intangible heritage, museums, libraries, plus IP, the creative industries and the like – so those are also increasingly part of IFACCA's daily cultural interests and inputs.

These two conferences focused yes on the Sustainable Development Goals - on issues such as security, youth empowerment, extremism in cyberspace, peace, food security, education for girls, populism, tourism, inter-religious harmony etc. Yet across both events, there was only one presentation by an artist - Saudi Artist, Ahmed Mater, about cultural diversity and intercultural exchange... with the other artists involved as entertainment, the cultural program: as background.

There are thousands world conferences happening all the time in every other field – medicine, water management, transport, housing, agriculture. How many of them invite artists to the podium and not just to perform in the background?

If the culture sector is to be seen to be relevant to sustainable development, to be at the forefront of the debate, we have to face some difficult realities.

First of all we have to acknowledge that there is a major gap between what we think about culture's place in society and what the rest of the world thinks about it. We all know that the arts matter, that culture matters but let's face it, we are pretty much talking to ourselves about how great we are. And frankly the rest of the world hardly knows that we exist or what we bring to society.

Secondly, we have to care about that gap – many don't and that is fine but then be prepared when you are ignored – or worse – by governments, by business, NGOs and civil society, and by our own communities.

Thirdly, we have to be a lot smarter about promoting the case for culture. I think the UCLG Culture Committee has been exemplary on this – probably because they had to be as part of a cross-sector organisation. The rest of us should learn from their lesson. We need much better at reaching the hearts and minds of decision makers and policy makers in other sectors. We need to be much better at providing evidence, tools, best practices and many, many case studies showing how the arts and heritage contribute to sustainable development. A great suggestion made today is to start to analyse how each country's national SDG plan has included culture (or not) and monitor annual and mid-term reports.

Finally, we have to 'get out more' – mix in a different crowd and open up new conversations and break some of those barriers that prevent people from understanding the power of culture. It would make a huge difference if everyone in this room committed to just once a year, find a way to talk to a non-culture audience about why you care about culture. It might be a community group, your sports club or a school, a professional association or student group. I'm sure you can think of something. Each of us just needs to give it a go and then build.

In summary – see the gap, decide if you care about it, plan and prepare your case, and get out there and present it... over and over again.

I know that 2030 seems a long way into the future but as I was involved – with several others here – in the last campaign for getting culture recognised in the 2015 SDGs, I must warn you that the negotiating on the goals will begin at least three years beforehand – that's 2027 – and that is only 10 years away.

So there is no time to waste. Wouldn't it be fantastic if we could agree to collaborate on a 10-year plan of how to get culture recognised in the 2030 Development Goals and to commit to making change ourselves at the personal level? And of course, think about how to inform and inspire the next generation of leaders to continue this effort. Please think about how you can start today.