

# CULTUROPOLIS #1 Challenges 2023

International Days  
on Cultural Rights



# Presentation

This document has been created jointly by the organizing teams of CULTUROPOLIS with the aim of collecting and proposing the main challenges in cultural policies for the recognition and promotion of cultural rights.

The Barcelona City Council is convinced that the cultural rights framework is the appropriate way to move towards transforming the local and global cultural ecosystems, enabling a true leap towards cultural democracy. For this reason, it will sponsor the first International **Conference for Cultural Rights - CULTUROPOLIS**, held between 16 and 19 November 2022. The conference was co-organised with Culture Action Europe, the largest European network of cultural actors, and received support from the World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG).

CULTUROPOLIS was a meeting space to reflect and debate cultural rights, consider how they are defined, and envision and discover mechanisms that promote and guarantee them.

In addition to all the collective debate and reflection, CULTUROPOLIS also aimed **to reinforce the recognition of cultural rights, guarantee their implementation and publicise their universal nature**. The conference was thus designed to be a city event that would reach out to the whole of the population. To achieve this, the conference was opened to the participation of all audiences, and various artistic and participatory activities were programmed, culminating in a large-scale festival for cultural rights on Saturday, 19 November, drawing thousands of people to Barcelona's Paral·lel Avenue.

Cultural rights, as declared by the United Nations, protect the rights of each person, individually, in community and collectively, to discover and express their humanity, world view and the meanings they give to their existence.

In 2021, the Barcelona City Council presented 'Fem Cultura. Plan For Cultural Rights in Barcelona', a pioneering plan that includes nine government measures for implementing new public policies that seek to recognise and expand cultural rights in the city. From a municipal viewpoint, this initiative is Barcelona's contribution to the international debate on cultural rights and provides a framework for ambitious political reflection, which paves the way for formal recognition of cultural rights at an international level through local practices.

The plan includes more than 100 projects, with a budget of nearly €70 million, aimed at ensuring that Barcelona has a cultural policy based on cultural rights which focuses on core considerations such as access, cultural practices, innovation, democratic governance, the recognition of diversity, creativity, cultural production and the strengthening of ties between local residents and sectoral stakeholders.

### The time for cultural rights

The celebration in Barcelona of the International Conference for Cultural Rights - CULTUROPOLIS, from 16 to 19 November 2022, marks the end of a year that could be a turning point for the role of cultural rights in public policy.

- > The year 2022 (23-24 May) will mark the 15th anniversary of the Fribourg Declaration, the first international document – supported by civil society – on cultural rights.
- > CULTUROPOLIS also took place a few weeks after the MONDIACULT 2022 conference, organised by UNESCO in Mexico City (28-30 September). In its final declaration, MONDIACULT 2022 recognised culture as a ‘global public good’ and reiterated a commitment to ‘foster an environment conducive to the respect and exercise of all human rights, in particular, individual and collective cultural rights, in all spheres of culture’ and proposed a broad approach to cultural rights, ranging from inclusive access to culture and participation, the social and economic rights of artists, the protection of artistic freedom, the safeguarding of cultural and linguistic diversity, including online, and the right of peoples and communities, including indigenous communities, to their cultural identity, memory and cultural heritage. Furthermore, taking up a petition from the global cultural networks gathered in the Culture2030Goal campaign, MONDIACULT 2022 called for the integration of culture ‘as a specific autonomous objective in its own right’ in the development agenda of the United Nations beyond 2030. The organising bodies and participants in CULTUROPOLIS called for these three elements to be swiftly translated into action and called on UNESCO and national governments to adopt public policies for the effective exercise of cultural rights. It is also worth mentioning, as the United Nations Special Rapporteur for cultural rights has reminded us, that national governments already have very clear obligations in the field of cultural rights. Therefore, the application of cultural rights is not ‘optional’ but an intrinsic dimension of promoting the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In 2022, certain processes in which the cities play a key role have also borne fruit. The existence of Culture 21 Actions (2015) and the Charter of Rome (2020), promoted by the World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments - UCLG, or the Charter of Porto Santo (2021), are proof of a municipal commitment to cultural rights. In fact, a few weeks before CULTUROPOLIS, UCLG reinforced the importance of cultural rights for the international municipal movement with the approval (14 October) of the Pact for the Future of Humanity.

CULTUROPOLIS confirms that cultural rights can be conceived, applied and exercised and that the local level, where we live, is a suitable environment for doing so.

# First edition of CULTUROPOLIS

## The Preview

The organisation of CULTUROPOLIS was an initiative of the City Council of Barcelona, Culture Action Europe – which integrated its annual Beyond the Obvious conference— and the Committee on Culture of the World Organisation of United Cities and Local Governments, of which Barcelona has been a member and the seat of its World Secretariat since its creation in 2004.

These three institutions constituted the CULTUROPOLIS **Advisory Council**, which monitored the entire preparatory process for the conference, designed and approved the work themes, and provided experience and knowledge of the global cultural context and approaches to cultural rights.

One of the contributions of CULTUROPOLIS, which sets it apart from most meetings of cultural actors, was the integration of an **academic congress** into the conference. Through a **call for papers**, this conference brought together people and organisations that are presently researching the field of cultural rights. A total of 108 abstracts were received, of which 79 were finally submitted to CULTUROPOLIS in different formats (oral presentations, videos and posters).

For the design and oversight of the academic congress, a **Scientific Committee** was created, made up of people with different backgrounds within the world of academia and research related to culture. The academic congress allowed for the meeting of various actors carrying out research on the subject of cultural rights, and above all, it enabled the exchange and knowledge transfer within the cultural sphere and among society as a whole.

On the other hand, in order to ensure that the conference programme allowed for a broad view of different practices linked to cultural rights, a **call for international projects** was launched. A total of 257 projects from all over the world were received, of which 35 were selected and presented as part of CULTUROPOLIS. The conference thus became a showcase for local, European and international projects in the general field of cultural rights, specifically at the intersection of rights of access and participation in cultural life, artistic creation, sustainability, diversities, participation, communities, and digital environments. The selection of projects aimed to provide different perspectives on art, tradition, human rights, research, experimentation, politics, activism and other areas, combining initiatives from Catalonia and Spain with projects from Europe and elsewhere to create a space open to networking and collaborative learning.

## The Sessions

More than a thousand people took part in CULTUROPOLIS (a total of 1,034 people registered) from Catalonia (73%), the rest of Spain (5%) and different countries in Europe and other continents (22%).

Most of the actors who participated in CULTUROPOLIS shared certain characteristics.

Firstly, working with cultural rights in projects that relate memory, creation and diversity to some of the urgent challenges facing our societies: inequalities, climate emergencies and individual and social well-being.

Secondly, working with cultural rights in order to leave no one behind and to explicitly address the recognition of cultural practices that take place outside large institutions.

Thirdly, working on cultural rights as a commitment to future generations; access, participation and contribution to cultural life are processes that must form part of the commitment to sustainability in all its dimensions. Finally, cultural rights served as the framework for reflecting on the right of cultural professionals to work under decent conditions.

More specifically, the CULTUROPOLIS conference featured the following activities:

- > 7 roundtable discussions
- > 11 panel discussions and academic debate
- > 4 project presentation blocks
- > 36 international best practice projects
- > 12 performances and cultural activities
- > 5 participatory workshops

Classic formats of discussion panels were combined with more innovative ones, such as the Fira Culturopolis, which was the most popular activity among the attendees. The fair was an informal space to discover the projects and research selected by CULTUROPOLIS and thus create spaces for exchange and dialogue between cultural and artistic practice, academic research, and other research experiences.

CULTUROPOLIS took place in two venues on Barcelona's Avenue **Paral·lel**, the **Sala Paral·lel 62** and **El Molino** Theatre, paying tribute to the history of this iconic street which has served as a cultural and recreational point of reference for the city since the late 19th century.

As a conclusion to the event, on Saturday, 19 of November, the programming of CULTUROPOLIS took to the streets to celebrate and exercise cultural rights with all the citizens of Barcelona. This street party for cultural rights took over the avenue on Saturday morning with various activities, such as a live community television show, a play area with recycled materials, several participative dance performances for all ages, a radio show and music concerts. The festival was attended by more than 3,000 people.

# Conclusions and Challenges

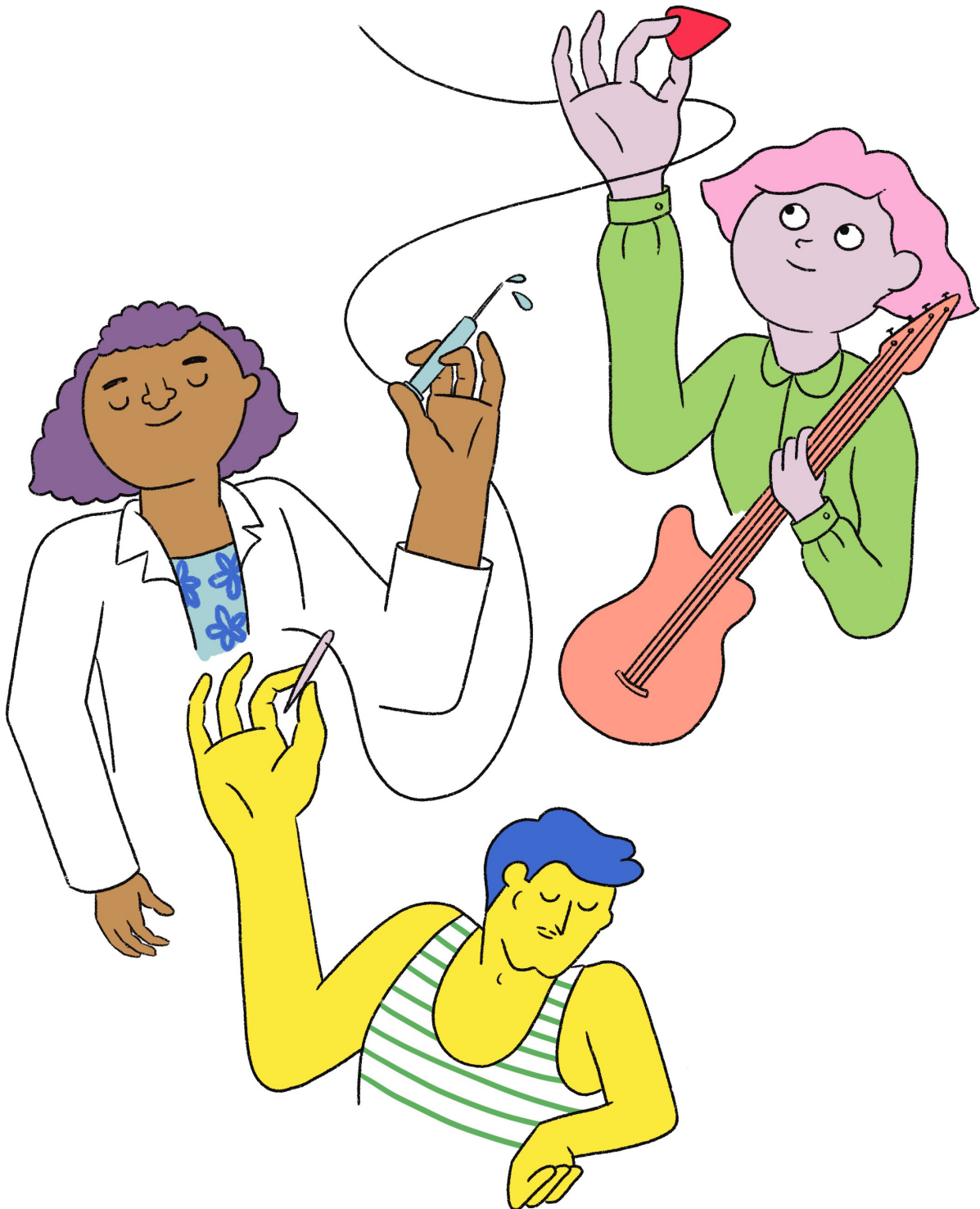
As declared by the United Nations, cultural rights protect the rights of each person, community and collective to discover and express their humanity, their vision of the world and the meanings they give to their existence.

CULTUROPOLIS demonstrated the transformative power of projects based on cultural rights, focusing especially on the spheres most closely related to citizenship, i.e. neighbourhoods, cities and local communities.

The following challenges emerged from collecting all the contributions made during the conference. Contributions were made through oral presentations, discussions, project presentations, posters and videos.

# CHALLENGE 1

## EXPANDED CULTURE: promoting mainstreaming work and new relations



The cultural rights framework approaches the role of culture from a broad perspective, taking into account the challenges of today's society and working to reduce inequalities and strengthen democracy. The ambition is so great, and the obstacles so complex and multifactorial that parcelling out knowledge and ways of generating it is meaningless. Cross-cutting work and the hybridisation of knowledge and roles are essential, and right now, culture has to act as a vector rather than as a sector or a sum of sectors.

Based on this approach, CULTUROPOLIS has chosen to create a space where **action** to support and defend cultural rights (projects, workshops and performances) and **research** on the cultural rights framework (research, debates and theoretical reflections) intersect. This space for exchanging practical and theoretical knowledge blurred the boundaries between the two spheres. The same field of research has also gone beyond the academic world, opening up participation to many different entities —including cooperatives, foundations and public bodies— which generate knowledge about cultural rights and which have also contributed from a research standpoint.

While it has been present in cultural policy debate forums for many years, another pending link is the tie between **culture and education**. This debate was also present in CULTUROPOLIS. In this case, hybridisation and cross-cutting work are once again the main challenges. However, accumulated experience tells us that it is necessary to go beyond the interaction between cultural and educational actors: we must also facilitate the hybridisation of schools, established and emerging pedagogies, formal and informal environments, and different artistic disciplines. There is broad consensus in the world of culture on the need to incorporate the arts or give them a greater presence in curricula—a vision that is shared by an increasing number of actors in the education sector. However, work is still required when building joint structural policies and actions. There are still open debates on how to address this link across the board in order to develop policies and programmes that will truly reduce inequalities regarding the right to participate in cultural life.

The debate about **the role culture has or should have in relation to current eco-social challenges** was a key part of CULTUROPOLIS. This debate moved beyond the specific table dedicated to the question of sustainability and introduced another necessary link requiring a cross-cutting approach, which is still being defined. The discussion is about eco-social challenges rather than about environmental sustainability because the planet's eco-physical limits cannot be separated from the forms of production, consumption, participation and representation of our societies.

Although this link is still being forged, the importance of culture in the **imagination-building process** is clear. Culturally defining such important issues as what we mean by progress, competitiveness, success, failure or what futures are possible is a difficult task. The role of culture is undeniable, but the debate on what these imaginaries could be is open. Constructing a single imagined scenario is impossible because the challenges, including the eco-social ones, vary depending on the location. When we talk about sustainability, for example, we must bring up the question of what we want to sustain and what we truly need to have a dignified life. Involves a political dispute.

Finally, another issue that has been very present in CULTUROPOLIS and reinforces the need for this cross-cutting approach is the link between **culture and health**,



particularly, but not exclusively, related to community health. As demonstrated by some of the projects and research, linking health and culture improves people's physical and emotional health as well as their critical capacity and their level of networking, along with their ability to create links with other people and with the environment. If the most effective activities to improve health are those aimed at improving the living environment, health care cannot be limited exclusively to the medical sphere. A more holistic view of people and a less specific view of illnesses allows for many points of convergence with culture in a broader sense, rather than using one or another artistic discipline as a specific tool for timely intervention.

In order to materialise all these links — these cross-cutting and hybrid approaches — it is necessary to be creative, have time and accept that mistakes provide the lessons needed to move forward.

## CHALLENGE 2

SUSTAINABLE CULTURE:  
bringing dignity to cultural work  
and respecting the environment



The cultural rights framework also includes the right to work in cultural sectors. The full capacity to transform and fight against cultural rights inequalities cannot be realised if the people who work there do not do so under **dignified conditions**. If the conditions of cultural workers are precarious, cultural projects will be fewer, less diverse and of lower quality. Returning to the previous challenge, we need powerful and diverse cultural projects, if we seek transversal and creative approaches to current challenges.

Precisely because of the large presence of cultural workers in CULTUROPOLIS, this issue was discussed in great depth in different spaces through projects, workshops and presentations. Many of these spaces highlighted **the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic** on the conditions of artists and cultural workers, who were subjected to marginalisation due to economic insecurity. This reality has been a catalyst that has changed the attention that local and state and transnational institutions such as the European Union and the United Nations have paid to the occupational dignity of cultural workers. The demands and struggles for an artist's statute in the different European countries present in CULTUROPOLIS (such as Spain, Belgium and Portugal), as well as the demands for a European framework that unifies criteria in the matter of the working conditions of artists and cultural workers are currently occupying national and European debates that, for the first time, are transcending strictly sectoral boundaries.

However, there are other related debates, beyond the consensus on the need for cultural workers in decent conditions. Firstly, the debate on who is responsible for ensuring adequate working conditions, what roles workers themselves and professional or trade union organisations can play, and the importance of advocacy. On the other hand, there are also debates on how to recognise and make all the work necessary for culture worthwhile, not only the most visible tasks, and to address, from an intersectional perspective, inequalities that are also reproduced within cultural work itself.

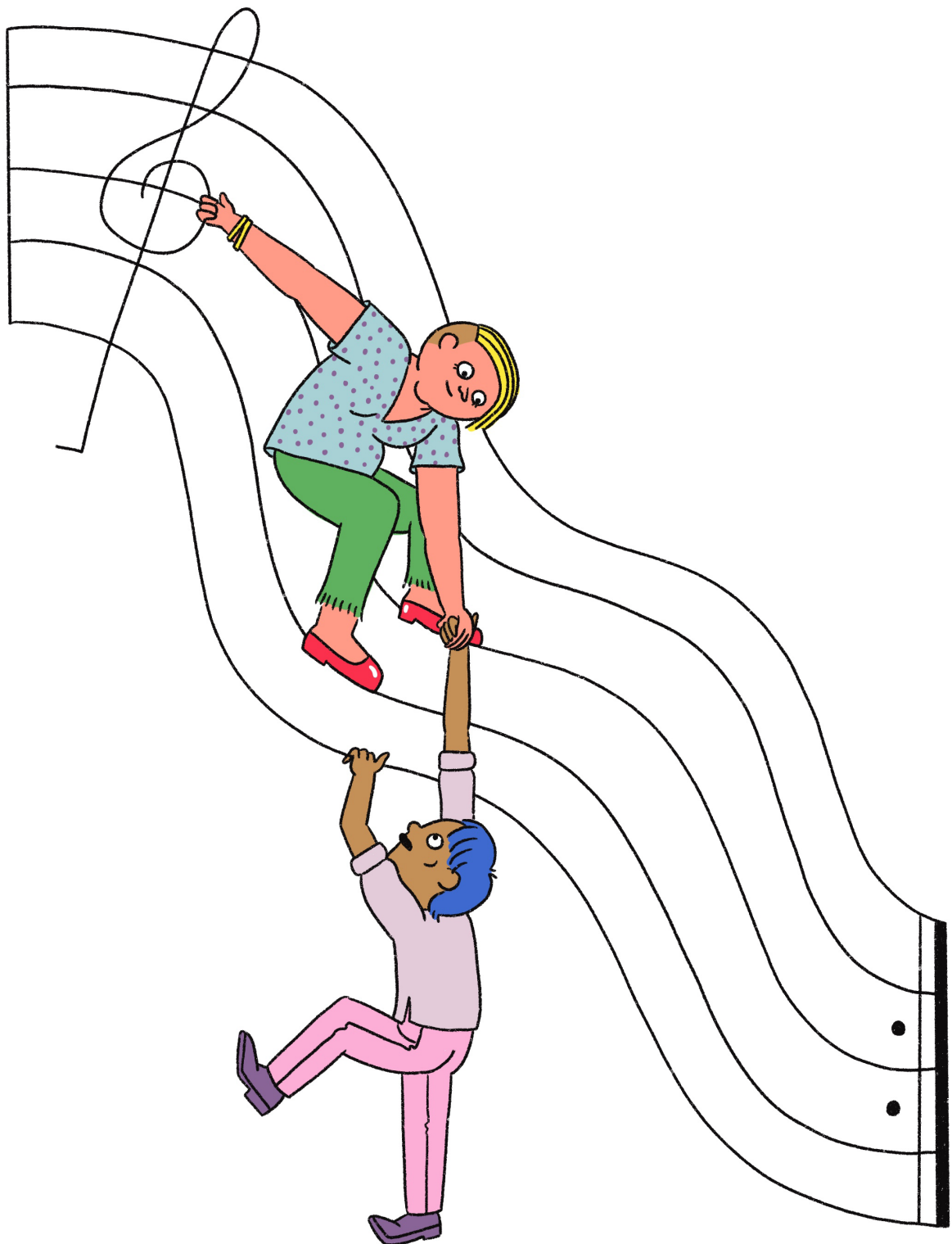
One of the debates at the conference was the capacity of the administrations, especially those that do not have jurisdiction in the regulation of social security or labour legislation. Innovation and good practices in **procurement models** are issues with a great deal of room for improvement. Considering that local or regional administrations are the main contractors of the cultural sector at the European level, innovation on this issue can have a wide-reaching impact.

Finally, as an economic field, culture must also explore ways to reduce environmental impact. In that regard, cultural institutions must also be exemplary.

# CHALLENGE 3

## DIVERSE CULTURE:

integrating diversities, promoting  
interculturality  
and guaranteeing equality



When we talk about diversity in the context of cultural rights, we are referring **to reducing inequalities** and ensuring that cultural expressions and the people participating in them represent the society in which they exist. This diversity can respond to a wide variety of variables (origin, class, sexuality, gender, language, religion, territory, functional diversity, etc.).

Projects and cultural policies framed in cultural rights have a vested interest in the presence of diversity. They have addressed this through the variety of projects, entities, research and initiatives that are present as part of CULTUROPOLIS. As the Mayor of Barcelona pointed out at the conference's opening ceremony, diversity is the primary resource in fighting against extreme right-wing discourses and strengthening democracies. As such, we must **stand up to the homogenisation** implied by the commercialization of culture.

However, even sharing this common sense of the need for the culture to be diverse, a series of debates about how to do it and what obstacles may arise. Firstly, there is great difficulty in marrying diversity with the idea of universality that also characterises cultural rights. Universality makes us share values, but how we express them depends on our communities. If we defend the radical idea that all people can know, recognize and contribute, **how do we guarantee they have the resources** to do so?

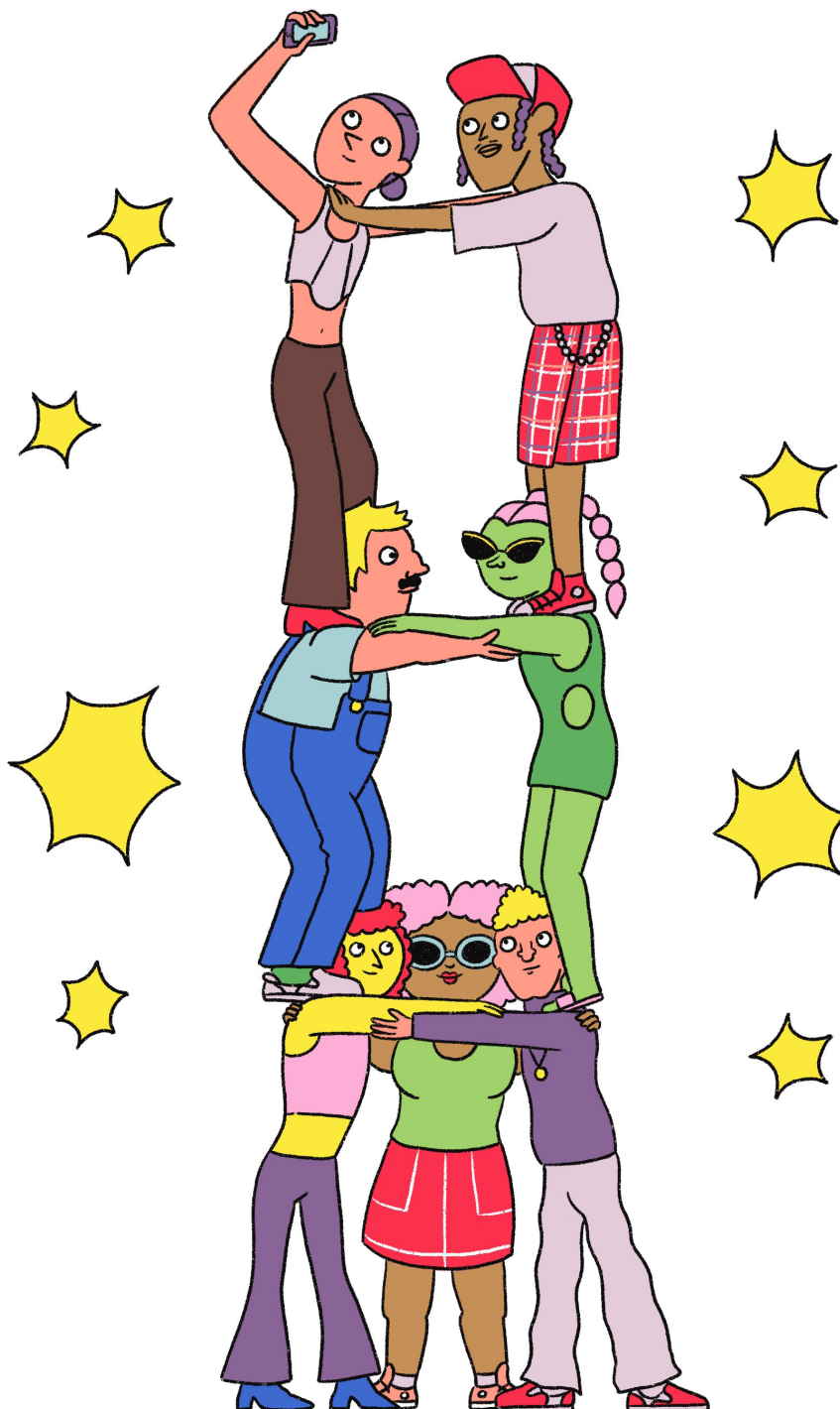
Another debate concerns spaces for reflection that, like CULTUROPOLIS, reproduce **representation biases**. Are they diverse enough, or are there more homogeneous groups of people who want to integrate diversity into their practice? How do we implement participation so that spaces like CULTUROPOLIS are diverse?

Many of the projects submitted to CULTUROPOLIS work with diverse, marginalised groups (migrants, elderly people, sick individuals, people with diverse abilities, non-binary individuals, etc.). How can we intervene, empower and give voice to collectives without resorting to paternalistic or power-driven logic? How can cultural projects promote real conditions of independence and dignity?

The consensus on the need to respond to this challenge is clear, but the way to do it, from where, or the means to make it possible are so varied that, in some cases, they may even seem contradictory.

# CHALLENGE 4

COLLECTIVE  
AND COMMUNITY CULTURE:  
fight to combat inequalities and new  
forms of action and management  
of culture



The struggle to guarantee cultural rights is collective. Public, private, cultural and non-cultural actors must move forward together to recognize the exercise of freedom and identity. However, speaking of cultural rights in these terms transforms the foundations on which states, and all their levels of government, have built their relationship with the citizenry.

Naturally, **community culture** has been very present in CULTUROPOLIS. For years, community practices have been emerging as a way of working in the cultural sphere that perfectly aligns with the logic of cultural rights. This trend is taking place in different geographic locations. Some of the projects and investigations that have participated in the conference originate in the social sphere and have introduced a cultural or artistic perspective; however, artistic initiatives are also discovering how the community approach gives new value to artistic practice. In this regard, public administrations, especially local ones, are also devoting more and more efforts to the community perspective. Sometimes it is more in the speeches than in the resources, but this seems to be a path that has not yet been fully travelled. A shared challenge in this regard is tackling the current inequalities in exercising cultural rights.

One thing that is closely tied to the idea of community and community culture is debates on **memories and heritage**. The recovery, visibility and re-signification of memories are very effective means of community action, and this has been demonstrated by many organisations and agents present at CULTUROPOLIS who, through practice or research, are working in this area.

The community issue was dealt with so thoroughly that highly specific debates were opened on the relationship between community projects and **major cultural events**. The potential capacity for community impact of large venues or festivals was one of the questions raised during the conference.

However, community action cannot be the sole source of cultural rights, or focused solely on community action or dynamisation. The **community management** of services, equipment or projects opens up a range of possibilities for the future. This is also the case in the digital sphere, in which specific communities can manage digital archives and digital content. When communities can manage assets that are publicly owned, it is possible to establish **public-community relations**, a very broad field in which to study and continue working.

# CHALLENGE 5

CULTURE AND DIGITAL RIGHTS:  
promoting digital sovereignty to ensure  
access and cultural participation





The defence of cultural rights cannot be separated from the fight for digital rights, not only because the digital environment is increasingly present in our lives. Both are **struggles for democracy, access and participation, decision-making and individual and collective empowerment**. To speak of digital rights is also to speak of diversity and, therefore, of the fight against homogenisation, which, as mentioned above, is closely associated with commercialisation. In the digital environment, this commercialisation is materialised in algorithms designed and controlled by transnational companies which trade in users' data and obstruct access to cultural content, leaving diversity on the sidelines. For too long, these two struggles have fought their separate battles. In the movement for cultural rights, digital rights have not been considered, but in the fight for digital rights, cultural rights have not been sufficiently present either. It is time for a common front.

However, how can digital and cultural rights be implemented in an environment controlled by a very small number of large platforms and transnational companies focused on data extractivism and the fragmentation and homogenisation of cultural proposals? This reflection has been prominent in the different areas of CULTUROPOLIS, and various responses have been debated. On the one hand, there is the possibility that governments must create **public digital infrastructures**. In this regard, the city of Barcelona showed that this was possible by creating the Decidim citizen participation platform. But can real change be brought about if we do not work in alliance with other administrations? Without large-scale investment, it will be very difficult to guarantee the protection of public value.

Another proposed approach involves the creation of standards: of **legal frameworks** that allow for different relationships with the Internet, with digital content and, above all, with the data of users and consumers, who are, in reality, the whole of the citizenry.

Other issues that are also directly related to cultural rights arise in connection with the issue of data. How can the public value of data be protected and maximised? If the current model is based on monetising personal data and advertisements, how can we intervene and avoid this monetisation? Maintaining all access that is now perceived as 'free' must be possible. In a time of global challenges, we cannot do without sharing and exchanging knowledge; limiting it is no longer an option. In fact, some people point out that it needs to be opened up much more, especially in terms of scientific and academic knowledge.

Looking specifically at the **digital world's content and cultural and artistic expressions**, we know that they can produce other forms of legitimisation and power for new intermediaries. However, this does not mean closing the door to continued innovation and experimentation on how the digital environment can offer new opportunities for creation, distribution and remuneration for artistic and cultural agents.

Finally, there are debates on the need to **digitise European cultural institutions** and the role that these institutions must play in breaking down market logic and capturing and defending the European cultural imaginary.

All the issues discussed, shown and debated in CULTUROPOLIS have indicated some of the necessary elements to defend and promote cultural rights. These are major challenges, and they include debates that remain open and aim to mark the way to continue working and deepening the recognition of cultural rights. The three institutions that formed the CULTUROPOLIS Advisory Council are committed to continuing this work in the coming months and years, and they encourage cultural actors from around the world to join them.



<https://www.barcelona.cat/aqui-es-fa-cultura/en/culturopolis>



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