



# THE 2020 ROME CHARTER

THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE  
FULLY AND FREELY IN CULTURAL  
LIFE IS VITAL TO OUR CITIES  
AND COMMUNITIES

*Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts, to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.*

*Article 27, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

## PREAMBLE

**W**e, the people, are the city. Through our beliefs, values and creative activities – our *culture* – we shape the city of stones and dreams. For better and for worse, it is the embodiment of our individual and shared imagination. Our city must support every inhabitant to develop their human potential and contribute to the communities of which all are part.

Culture is the expression of values, a common, renewable resource in which we meet one another, learn what can unite us and how to engage with differences in a shared space. Those differences exist within and between cultures. They must be acknowledged and engaged with. An inclusive, democratic, sustainable city enables that process, and is strengthened by it too. Culture is the creative workshop with which citizens can imagine responses to our common challenges. Sometimes it is a solution, sometimes it is how we discover other solutions.

The 2020 Rome Charter is published at a dark and uncertain time. The COVID-19 crisis shows that the current development models and their basic assumptions need to be rethought. It also shows that a real spirit of cultural democracy must shape the new models if they are to be inclusive and sustainable. The Charter is a promise to the people of Rome – and to all the world's cities. Placing our common and living cultures at the centre of the definition of the new models will not be simple, but it is how we will recover and rebuild our lives, together.

# CULTURAL CAPABILITIES

Public authorities, national and local governments, have legal duties in respect of participation in culture, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international treaties and conventions. Together with every player, they must put in place effective policies and adequate resources to meet those obligations, or their promises are mere rhetoric.

A city working towards a cultural democracy fulfils its duty to support its inhabitants to:

- DISCOVER** cultural roots, so that they can recognise their heritage, identity and place in the city, as well as understand the contexts of others;
- CREATE** cultural expressions, so that they can be part of and enrich the life of the city;
- SHARE** cultures and creativity, so that social and democratic life is deepened by the exchange;
- ENJOY** the city's cultural resources and spaces, so that all can be inspired, educated and refreshed;
- PROTECT** the city's common cultural resources, so that all can benefit from them, today and in years to come.

The 2020 Rome Charter imagines a more inclusive, democratic and sustainable city. Its achievement is in the hands of all who live here.

# WHY NOW, WHY THIS?

## Why now?

In a few short weeks, COVID-19 has swept away the world we knew. The measures we must take to protect our health have changed how we live and damaged our prosperity. We are grieving. We are remembering things we took for granted, including culture. We are also discovering unexpected resources of kindness, courage and solidarity in our societies.

At first, we talked about life 'after the crisis'. Now we are learning that the disease might be with us for a long time, and that we will have to adapt to its presence. The experience is changing how we think about ourselves, about others and about the communities in which we live. It is changing our sense of what matters, who we admire, and how we want to live.

A few months ago, the city of Rome began a process of reflection on people's participation in cultural life at local level, in the belief that commodification and economic priorities threatened equity, justice and human dignity. We wanted to contribute to global debates about development, citizenship and democracy, debates in which culture, human rights and cities are shamefully marginal. We still do – indeed we think it is now even more important and urgent. If this debate is genuinely global, avoiding historic eurocentrism, and inclusive of marginalised voices and cultures, it can lead to the strengthening of international institutions, programmes and policies related to the place of culture in development.

With the challenges it provokes, a crisis brings a responsibility and an opportunity to think beyond existing boundaries and do things that seemed impossible before, and already, in a few weeks, governments, institutions and citizens have sometimes done both. If some good can come from COVID-19, it will be because we have been brave enough to imagine different, better, more sustainable ways of living together and we won't stop after the immediate crisis is over. And cities, which will shelter two thirds of the world's population by 2050, are central to this challenge.

## Why culture?

Culture is how people transform experience into meaning – and not only good or true meanings: it is a power that has been and is now put to bad uses. Culture is how people form, express, share and negotiate their values – including those of which they are unconscious or unable to articulate directly. Culture is everything we do beyond survival. Culture is everything we do to enrich our lives. It is also the story that shapes our actions, even when we are unaware of it. Culture describes the world, and we see the world through its lens.

And culture is also the renewable, human resource we have turned to in this crisis. Science helps us find understanding, answers and protection. Art offers comfort, education and entertainment in isolation. Both result from research, competences, creativity and hard work, not only pleasure. Culture connects us across empty streets in music and song, it enables us form and share our feelings with others. It is how we know who we are and how we meet others. It is in culture that we tell stories, make sense, dream and hope. It is culture that will shape the values and conduct of the cities we must renew after the trauma of COVID-19.

Now, more than ever, we want to affirm the social value of culture, where people, not profits, are its heart and purpose. We cannot yet say what that might mean in the world that is now emerging. This is a process of discovery, shaped by the situation and the people who contribute. We believe that conversations that help citizens make sense of the present, and imagine the future in hope, are a good way to rethink the city. This is where we are, where we stand today.

We must move beyond established thinking – about culture, creative cities, inclusive urbanism, rights and duties. We don't know where it will end, but we are convinced that we need a cultural democracy more than ever. Our whole society needs a period of healing and recovery, but may face a period of more conflicts and further inequalities. We need to find a new direction that includes all. Old answers will not do. We must ask what kind of life we want now and for the next generations, believing that the answers depend on the resources of democracy and a spirit of generosity.



## Why Rome?

Cities are spaces of experimentation and creativity. It is in Rome's capacities to gather, connect and explore, a crossroads between worlds and times. We start from here: with Rome as a common crucible for new ideas about social models. Rome, ancient and modern, beautiful survivor, witness to plagues and wars and renaissance, is working for the inspiration to bring new paradigms into reality – and to share them. This is an invitation to create together an alternative future in those places that today represent a confinement as well as an opportunity: CITIES.

## Why UCLG?

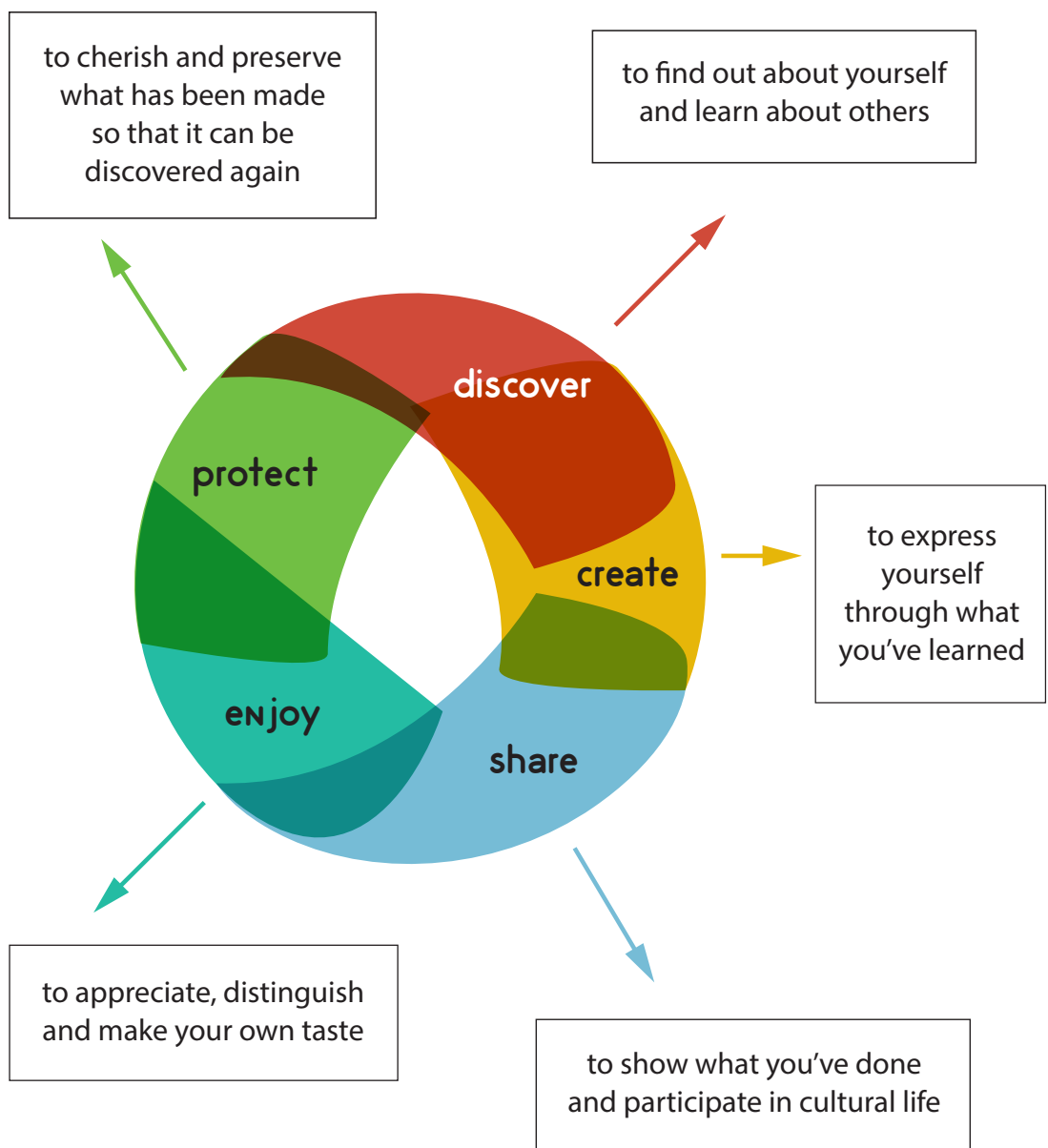
The World Organisation of United Cities and Local Governments – UCLG is the largest organisation of local and regional governments in the world. You, we, stand on the shoulders of countless women and men who have worked tirelessly to empower each other for over a century, to lift up our communities and to collaborate with one another to achieve positive change.

We represent, defend, and amplify the voices of local and regional governments, so that no-one and no place are left behind. Together we are the sentinels of the hopes, dreams, and aspirations held by individuals in communities around the world – searching for a life in which the ideals of the Sustainable Development Goals are a lived reality, and advocating for a strong multilateral system built from the territories around the world.

The place of culture in the sustainable development of our communities is one of the key areas of work of UCLG.

# AN EXPLANATORY NOTE OF THE CHARTER

The cultural capabilities key words are all verbs – actions: we suggest to follow a cyclical progression for a bottom-up, people-centred approach





## DISCOVER

**cultural roots, so that we can own our heritage, identity and place in the city**

Everyone has their own heritage, personal and shared, the legacy that comes from their family, community, body, time etc.; it is also important we have the capacity to understand others' contexts, roots and narratives

## CREATE

**our own cultural activity, so that it can be part of and enrich the life of the city**

Participation in cultural life includes the capacity for creation – having the means, the resources, the training, the education, the time to make our own artistic work, whether it is singing, dancing, needlework or writing our own computer game or imagining another future

## SHARE

**cultures and creativity, so that social and democratic life is enriched by exchange**

And if I am a creator, I have the right and capacity to share my creations with anybody who's interested, who's open to listening, seeing, talking and criticising my work. It doesn't mean everything is of equal value – it means that you accept everything as having the right to be there so that it can be liked or not liked

## ENJOY

**all the city's cultural resources, so that they can be inspired, educated and refreshed**

Access to culture – the friends we choose – is how we develop the capacity to know what we like and don't like, how we choose to define our values and shape our future identity. I may inherit one culture but I choose to be a rapper or an opera singer and unless my culture gives me pleasure – inspires and refreshes me – what is it worth?

## PROTECT

**the city's common cultural resources, so that all can benefit from them, now and in future**

We must have the capacity to cherish all cultures, teach them, pass them on, and prevent them from being destroyed deliberately or by neglect. It is like biodiversity, the whole ecology needs protecting because it is interdependent and you never know who will want what or when



# WORKING WITH THE 2020 ROME CHARTER

In the same spirit as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Rome Charter aspires to global relevance, while accepting the challenge that implies in a world of immense cultural diversity. For this reason, the Charter aspires to be short, clear and useful. It is not a legal instrument but a practical guide for sustainable cultural development. Its identification of five interdependent human capabilities offers a firm conceptual basis for approaching the relationship between state and people in cultural policy and planning.

This chapter provides some explanatory context, questions to develop policies, and some indications of the kind of action open to policy-makers. In doing so, it evidently cannot reflect all cultural specificities and contexts, and not everything here will be applicable or meaningful everywhere. It builds on the Charter itself to suggest some paths for interpretation, development and cooperation between public bodies, cultural actors and citizens.

The Rome Charter invites responses primarily from leaders and policy-makers in local government and cultural institutions. It is open to engagement equally by municipalities and public bodies such as museums, theatres or galleries. In both cases it asks the same key questions:

- What is each person able to do and to be in cultural life?
- How can their capabilities to discover, enjoy, create, share and protect culture be enabled?

The answers to those questions will be different in Mexico City, Cape Town, Delhi and Rome, as they will be different in cities with millions of inhabitants and rural areas with thousands or hundreds. The differences are legitimate, if they reflect the particularities and diversity of local cultures and conditions. The common ground – the universal commitment – is in recognising that the purpose of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives – and in doing that, to leave no one behind.

## Background: A Capability Approach to Culture

*The real wealth of a nation is its people. And the purpose of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives. This simple but powerful truth is too often forgotten in the pursuit of material and financial wealth.*

Mahbub ul Haq, 1990<sup>1</sup>

The economist Mahbub ul Haq wrote those words in the first UN Human Development Report, published in 1990. In the 30 years since then, the idea that government's primary goal is to strengthen people's capabilities has been theorised by Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum and others, and become firmly established in practice, though it is contested and far from universally applied. The capability approach, as it is usually known, is a powerful idea because it is clear, flexible and responds to people's wishes for themselves. In 2009, Sen explained it as: "An intellectual discipline that gives a central role to the evaluation of a person's achievements and freedoms in terms of his or her actual ability to do the different things a person has reason to value doing or being".<sup>2</sup>

**What matters to us is being able to do what we value.** The capability approach is rooted in human rights and social justice. It asks, in Nussbaum's words: 'What is each person able to do and to be?'<sup>3</sup> This question is central to people's relationship to culture, that domain of human meaning-making that is so powerful, so subjective and so universal.

Culture is a human right, guaranteed in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which protects everyone's right to participate in the cultural life of the community and enjoy the arts. This idea is the foundation of cultural policy, but it is also a cultural artefact that reflects its creators, their context and their time.

**As a framework for cultural policy and planning, the 2020 Rome Charter asks how Article 27 can be a reality that improves people's lives?** This is where the capability approach is so valuable, because it asks what the state and its institutions can do to ensure that people have the capabilities to make their own choices. And culture, more than any other field of human flourishing, is a matter of choice.

Informed by the work undertaken by UCLG with Agenda 21 for culture, and confronted with the experience and challenges of a city such as Rome, the Rome Charter defines five interdependent and mutually reinforcing capabilities, any one of which may seem more or less important at different times, in different situations and to different people. How they choose to act with their capabilities is a matter for each person, because diversity is a constant in culture; it is not for the state or its institutions to decide. Culture is, and must always be, a matter of free choice.

Anything less is a threat to human dignity. But that choice depends, as in their different ways ul Haq, Sen and Nussbaum all imply, on being able to develop the capabilities to be an actor within the cultural life of the community.

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<sup>1</sup> Mahbub ul Haq, *Human Development Report 1990*, UNDP, p. 9

<sup>2</sup> Amartya Sen, cited in Ingrid Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice: The Capability Approach Re-examined*, Cambridge: Open Book Publishers 2017, p. 7

<sup>3</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum. *Creating Capabilities, The Human Development Approach*, Harvard: The Belknap Press, 2011



## Cultural capabilities of the 2020 Rome Charter

### *Discover*

**DISCOVER cultural roots, so that everyone can recognise their heritage, identity and place in the city, as well as understand the contexts of others**

As children, we discover our world and our culture simultaneously. In fact, we discover the world through the cultural lenses of family, community and society. Foundations of identity are established early, and with them a series of codes and behaviours that reflect the value systems of those who care for us. This is also when, with appropriate guidance, we learn to discover, respect and appreciate the cultures of people from other backgrounds and traditions. Young people need help to acquire the resources for cultural discovery, but learning is a life-long process and concerns working and retired people too.

***How might policy and programmes enable people's capabilities to discover culture? Possibilities include:***

- Protecting the cultural rights of all, especially of minorities and indigenous peoples
- Embedding the perspective of women, children and young people in cultural policies
- Putting artistic and cultural education in the core curriculum at all ages
- Providing affordable adult education and lifelong learning
- Requiring cultural institutions and universities to offer education and access programmes
- Programming inclusively to reflect a spectrum of cultural expression
- Recognising cultural diversity, locally and globally, as a rich, renewable resource

### *Enjoy*

**ENJOY the city's cultural resources and spaces, so that all can be inspired, educated and refreshed**

People enjoy culture because it offers rich and varied satisfactions. It can make us laugh and move us to tears, bring us together in moments of community, and console us in loneliness, it sparks curiosity, informs and educates. It challenges us mind and body, and can transform how we see ourselves and the world around us. But the capability to enjoy culture must not be taken for granted. There are financial, geographical, social and, paradoxically, even cultural barriers to be overcome. Discovery is a vital pathway to enjoyment, so inclusive policies are needed to ensure that all local people feel welcome in the city's formal and informal cultural life.

***How might policy and programmes enable people's capabilities to discover culture? Possibilities include:***

- Pricing, timetable and opening policies that ensure all can access cultural venues
- Supporting for the widest spectrum of cultural activity and expression
- Removing inequalities in access and participation in cultural activities
- Supporting cultural activities for vulnerable and disadvantaged people
- Innovating in making culture accessible in and through the digital world
- Public transport provision that facilitates access to cultural sites and experiences



## Create

### **CREATE cultural expressions, so that they can be part of and enrich the life of the city**

The rise of cultural participation – and more importantly, perhaps, its recognition – challenge outdated ideas about professional production for appreciative consumers. The lines between professional and non-professional artists have become blurred. Many people who discover and enjoy art want to make it themselves. Being able to study art and culture is often the next step towards creation, whether for pleasure, for social reasons or for a career. All these activities enrich the cultural ecology of a community. Signalling that all forms of cultural creation and diversity are respected is vital, but the capability to create must be equitably distributed too. In culture, strength in depth is preserved by nurturing a creative ecology in which each person can flourish where they want.

*How might policy and programmes enable people's capabilities to discover culture? Possibilities include:*

- Ensuring equitable access to education and training in art and cultural professions
- Supporting resource spaces for artistic creation open to local people
- Specialist youth art provision and training programmes
- Encouraging colleges and universities to support artistic research, training and creation
- Employment and taxation policies that sustain cultural workers
- Policies to assist informal, social and amateur cultural activity

## Share

### **SHARE cultures and creativity, so that social and democratic life is deepened by the exchange**

Art exists when it is recognised. It is essentially a means of transmission, a way to communicate ideas, feelings, beliefs and values, especially when they are too complex, vague, uncertain or insecure to be put directly into words. So the capability to bring your culture to others – to friends, neighbours and fellow inhabitants of the city – is essential to participation in cultural life. Debate and exploration in art, science, philosophy or social life is cultural life. It is in sharing their cultural traditions and creations that individuals and community groups become visible in the city, gain recognition and create dialogue with others.

*How might policy and programmes enable people's capabilities to discover culture? Possibilities include:*

- Creating inclusive cultural platforms of different kinds and scale (including online)
- Supporting community groups to bring their work into public spaces
- Opening the programming of cultural institutions and venues to local voices
- Ensuring that staff and boards reflect the cultural and social diversity of the community
- Supporting international cultural cooperation, exchanges and networks



## ***Protect***

**PROTECT the city's common cultural resources, so that all can benefit from them, today and in years to come.**

Cultural resources are not static. Their meaning and value changes as society changes. Cultural rights protect all that legacy of tangible and intangible heritage, the universally revered as and the unpopular or misunderstood. Unless we can preserve and pass on our culture, the other capabilities mean little. But no one's cultural rights can be exercised against anyone else's. Democratic negotiation is our best resource with which to manage conflict, requiring us to understand and tolerate other cultures, debate the value of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and provide suitable legislation and measures that consider the new challenges we all have as a single humanity.

***How might policy and programmes enable people's capabilities to discover culture? Possibilities include:***

- Legislative protection for tangible and intangible cultural heritage
- Embedding cultural considerations throughout local government's work
- Considerations and commitments related to climate change
- Support for the work of cultural rights defenders
- Access to training and resources in conservation, documentation and archiving
- Public debate about the management and the meaning of cultural sites, monuments and elements of tangible heritage and intangible heritage

# THE 2020 ROME CHARTER

*Is developed by* Roma Capitale and UCLG – Culture Committee.

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