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# CULTURAL RELATIONS

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# KEY APPROACHES IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

HOW CULTURAL RELATIONS CAN  
ENHANCE PEACE AND STABILITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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and the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa)

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

This report<sup>1</sup> aims to examine the linkages between cultural aspects, conflict and peace, with a particular focus on the place of international cultural relations in so-called ‘fragile’ countries and regions. Commissioned by the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC), the British Council and the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa), the report has been elaborated in a context of increasing attention to the connections between culture, conflict and peace. It ultimately aims to inform EU and national policies in development, stability and peace, on how cultural relations can contribute to peace and stability in fragile contexts.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) characterises ‘fragile contexts’ as ‘the combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacities of the state, system and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks’ (OECD, 2021). A multidimensional fragility framework has been developed, which identifies five dimensions: economic, environmental, political, security and societal fragility. Fragility can be understood as a continuum and is partly connected to sustainable development.

Cultural relations, as understood in this report, relate to the international cultural activities involving national institutes for culture (such as EUNIC members) and their partners in other countries, based on principles and goals of mutual understanding and sustainable dialogue. Although cultural relations can often encompass several areas of work, in this report the emphasis lies on programmes and projects related to the arts, creative activities, tangible and intangible heritage, leaving aside other areas like language learning or education.

<sup>1</sup> This document is an executive summary of the report “Cultural Relations - The Key Approaches in Fragile Context: How Cultural Relations Can Enhance Peace and Stability” (Jordi Baltà, September 2021). It was commissioned by EUNIC as a follow-up to “EUNIC Knowledge Sharing Workshop - Working in Fragile Context Report” (Alessandro Lamonica, November 2019).

## HOW CULTURAL RELATIONS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO ADDRESSING FRAGILITY

This report presents evidence of how EUNIC members and other agencies involved in cultural relations have undertaken activities that contribute to reducing fragility in the five aforementioned dimensions. In some of these, including societal and political fragility, there is extensive evidence of projects. Overall, the following connections can be observed:

- **Economic fragility:** cultural relations can contribute to addressing economic fragility by fostering entrepreneurship in cultural and creative areas, which in turn enhances employability and can foster the emergence of micro and small-sized enterprises; by integrating capacity-building in projects fostering heritage protection, restoration and improvement, and in broader programmes concerned with civil society strengthening; and by protecting and promoting cultural heritage as a component of sustainable tourism strategies.
- **Environmental fragility:** cultural relations can contribute to addressing environmental fragility by supporting the inclusion of cultural actors and resources in the face of natural disasters and climate change, through funding, technical assistance and heritage preservation activities; by making cultural organisations and venues more environmentally sustainable and responsible towards the climate emergency; and by supporting creative forms of environmental awareness-raising. This remains an under explored area, which could deserve further attention in the coming years.
- **Political fragility:** cultural relations can contribute to addressing political fragility by supporting civil society organisations that are committed to fostering democracy and human rights, recognising the role of artists in the promotion and defence of human rights and the exploration of political issues, providing 'safe spaces' for the discussion of controversial topics and the exercise of freedom of artistic expression, protecting artists and cultural agents at risk, and supporting institution-building in the cultural field (e.g., public bodies and strategies concerned with heritage, the arts and culture generally, as well as their intersections with other areas of peace, stability and development).
- **Security fragility:** cultural relations can contribute to addressing security fragility by facilitating an interpretation of the cultural dimensions of conflicts, responding to the impact of conflicts on cultural heritage (e.g., through restoration, mapping, management, capacity-building), and strengthening prevention and restitution measures towards the illicit trafficking in cultural goods. This remains a complex

area, in which only some national cultural institutes may be able to intervene (depending on mandate, staffing, etc.), but also one which is connected to several international and European policy priorities.

- **Societal fragility:** cultural relations can contribute to addressing societal fragility by investing in cultural heritage as a community-building vector, fostering capacity-building that enhances participation in society, enabling the emergence of alternative narratives about society and history, and promoting collaboration and networking between cultural actors and with broader civil society.

Several of the connections outlined above, including in particular how cultural relations can help to address societal fragility, rest on existing evidence (Baily, 2019)<sup>2</sup> that, in conflict and post-conflict settings, arts and cultural programmes can contribute to:

- **Community engagement:** artistic and cultural programmes can engage a wide audience in a way that resonates with their cultural background, foster community collaboration and engage marginalised communities.
- **Inclusive development:** the integration of cultural aspects in regional and national-level development strategies can foster an inclusive approach to development.
- **Social cohesion:** cultural activities based on a shared common heritage can build a sense of community and provide a platform for dialogue and moderate narratives. Storytelling provides a way for divided communities to address stereotypes.
- **Voice and agency:** in areas where traditional protest is difficult, the arts can provide an alternative outlet for expression, give voice to marginalised communities and provide them with a sense of agency.

<sup>2</sup> Baily, A. (2019). *The art of peace: The value of culture in post-conflict recovery*. British Council. Available at <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/insight-articles/art-of-peace>.

## HOW CULTURAL RELATIONS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO FOSTERING PEACE, STABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

In this respect, cultural aspects can find a good entry point in contemporary notions of 'peace', which are increasingly connected to development and social justice, and which go beyond a binary opposition of conflict and peace. This understanding is reflected both in academic studies and in international agendas such as the UN's Sustaining Peace agenda and the EU's integrated approach to conflict. Cultural aspects intersect in several ways with this understanding of conflict – they may be used to undermine security and stability, but they can also provide early warnings of conflict, serve as a coping mechanism, foster cohesion, etc. Cultural relations can contribute to sustaining peace in, among others, the following ways:

- Facilitating arts interventions that foster resilience and empathy, or which give visibility to victims and groups at risk;
- Contributing to the protection of tangible and intangible cultural heritage at risk in the context of armed conflicts;
- Paying particular attention to the rights, identities and expressions of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, which may be threatened in fragile contexts as well as during armed conflicts;
- Promoting memorial and remembrance initiatives which stimulate civic engagement;
- Providing support to initiatives in the cultural and creative industries, through the provision of capacity-building, networking opportunities and other support; and
- Enhancing freedom of artistic expression and other fundamental freedoms, through public debates and measures to safeguard artists and cultural rights defenders at risk.

These connections have been acknowledged in several EU policy documents in recent years, including the 2016 Strategy for International Cultural Relations<sup>3</sup>, the 2018 New Agenda for Culture<sup>4</sup>, and the 2021 Council Conclusions on EU Approach to Cultural Heritage in Conflicts and Crises<sup>5</sup>. Several of these documents also recognise the important role of EUNIC and its members in the delivery of the EU's external cultural action.

There is also an increasing awareness, both at the EU and within professional fields, that cultural aspects can contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, although this remains underexplored in practice.

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, *Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the European Parliament and the Council* (2016) *Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations*. JOIN(2016) 29 final. Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=JOIN%3A2016%3A29%3AFIN>

<sup>4</sup> European Commission. (2018). *A New European Agenda for Culture*. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. European Commission, COM(2018) 267 final. Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2018:267:FIN>

<sup>5</sup> Council of the EU. (2021a). *Council Conclusions on EU Approach to Cultural Heritage in conflicts and crises*. Council of the EU, 9837/21. Available at <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9837-2021-INIT/en/pdf>

Further to the SDG targets which have more evident connections with culture (e.g., education, economic growth, sustainable tourism), examples analysed in this report show that cultural relations can contribute to the achievement of several other targets (including sustainable cities and communities, peace and justice, climate action). In general, the analysis suggests that SDGs 8 (education), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 16 (peace and security) and 17 (partnership for the goals) are those more frequently addressed by cultural relations programmes in fragile contexts.

## ENABLING FACTORS AND CHALLENGES

An examination of 11 diverse examples of how cultural relations have addressed fragility, peace and stability in different contexts informs the analysis presented in the full report. Further to presenting the different ways in which cultural relations are connected to the five dimensions of fragility and the fostering of peace and stability as outlined above, the report identifies a set of enabling factors and challenges to strengthen these connections.

**Enabling factors** include:

- Increasing global attention to the nexus of culture and conflict, as exemplified in UN Security Council resolutions, UNESCO and EU initiatives, etc.;
- Community leaders sensitive to the importance of cultural aspects, where this exists;
- Consultation with and involvement of local communities in project management and delivery, as exemplified in several of the examples analysed in the report;
- The adoption of holistic approaches, which include cultural aspects as one factor in a multidimensional perspective on peace, stability and development, and the recognition of complex forms of causality (rather than simple cause-effect connections);
- A people-centred and process-oriented approach, which places emphasis on skill-development, person-to-person relations and long-term engagement; and
- The adoption of an enabling role by national institutes for culture, who should operate as mediators, interpreters and facilitators of cultural relations at local, national, regional and/or international level;
- The adoption of a shared strategic vision between EUNIC clusters and EU Delegations in third countries, as illustrated by examples of work in Egypt and Sri Lanka.

**Challenges** include:

- Competing policy priorities and the relatively low attention that global and EU agendas still devote to culture;
- The legacy of colonialism and the resulting mistrust that may affect the operations of national institutes for culture in some countries and regions;
- The asymmetric implementation of the Joint Guidelines for collaboration between EU and EUNIC, which have led to positive change in some countries but less so in others;
- A set of operational difficulties, including security costs, a limited network of local partners with professional skills, etc.;
- The risk of raising unrealistic expectations as per the role of culture in these contexts;
- The prevalence of some imbalances in cultural participation; and
- The difficulties of operating in the digital realm, a need which has been exacerbated in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis conducted, a theory of change model connecting cultural relations with the promotion of peace and stability has been proposed in the full report. It should be seen as part of a broader set of interconnected strategies.

We advocate for:

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- **EU institutions, EU Member States, EUNIC members, international organisations, national and local authorities and civil society actors in the areas of arts, culture, democracy, development and conflict prevention and management should recognise the potential of integrating cultural aspects in approaches to peace, stability and development.**
  - **These stakeholders should also strengthen the position of cultural aspects in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, both in those areas where explicit connections with culture exist and in others to which culture can also contribute, as evidenced in this report.**
  - **Steps should be taken towards pooling of resources and efforts, developing joint strategies on peace, stability and development at national and regional level which integrate cultural aspects alongside other relevant dimensions.**
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Furthermore, the report closes with a set of recommendations to EU institutions, EU Member States, EUNIC members and other stakeholders on ways to strengthen the consideration of cultural relations in the design and implementation of policies and programmes relevant to cultural relations, peace and stability in fragile contexts.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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### To EU Institutions:

- The EU should mainstream cultural aspects in initiatives and programmes concerned with peace, stability and development (including e.g., conflict analysis and prevention, peacebuilding, post-conflict strategies), involving EUNIC clusters and members, as well as other cultural actors in the relevant countries and regions. In addition, the European Commission should integrate culture substantially, with clear goals and allocated resources, in the implementation of the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), including with regard to the promotion of peace and stability.
  - The EU should mainstream cultural aspects in initiatives concerned with the promotion of human rights and democracy
  - The EU should strengthen the position of cultural aspects in the implementation strategy for the 2030 Agenda, both in those SDG targets where explicit connections with culture exist and in some others to which cultural relations can contribute to (particularly SDGs 8, 11, 16 and 17).
  - The EU should ensure the effective implementation of the Council Conclusions on EU Approach to Cultural Heritage in Conflicts and Crises, including by ensuring that suitable budget allocations are made at country level and by fostering an exchange of experiences between Member States and organisations active in this field (including e.g., UNESCO, ICCROM and ICOMOS).
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### To EU Member States:

- EU Member States and other interested countries should mainstream cultural aspects in initiatives and programmes concerned with peace, stability and development (including e.g., conflict analysis and prevention, peacebuilding, post-conflict strategies), involving EUNIC clusters and their partners.
- EU Member States and other interested countries should strengthen the position of cultural aspects in their implementation strategies for the 2030 Agenda, both in those SDG targets where explicit connections with culture exist and in some others to which cultural relations can contribute (particularly SDGs 8, 11, 16 and 17), and involve national cultural institutes where relevant.

- EU Member States and other interested countries should mainstream cultural aspects in initiatives concerned with the promotion of human rights and democracy (e.g., by including artists, cultural workers and cultural rights defenders as potential beneficiaries of protection measures where necessary, and by supporting civil society organisations active in this area), at both global and country levels, and involve national cultural institutes where relevant.
  - EU Member States and other interested countries should ensure the effective implementation of the Council Conclusions on EU Approach to Cultural Heritage in Conflicts and Crises, by taking steps towards their effective integration in programmes and projects at national and EU level and by fostering collaboration with other organisations (e.g., UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS).
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**To EUNIC:**

- EUNIC should strengthen collaboration with the European Commission in areas related to culture, peace, stability, fragility and development.
- EUNIC clusters should work together with local and national stakeholders in the countries where they are based, to call for the inclusion of the principles of the Council Conclusions in relevant country strategies, with earmarked funding.
- EUNIC members should strive to provide safe spaces to artists, cultural professionals and organisations working around culture and cultural rights, strengthening their role in the context of conflict and fragility.
- EUNIC members should identify/highlight areas of expertise which could contribute to enriching approaches to resilience and sustainability.
- EUNIC members should increasingly be guided by a cultural relations enabling approach supporting local cultural scenes and fostering local ownership.

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**EUNIC** – European Union National Institutes for Culture – is the European network of organisations engaging in cultural relations from all EU member states and associate countries. Through culture, we strive to build trust and understanding between the people of Europe and the wider world. We work to make culture count in international relations.

The **British Council** builds connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and other countries through arts and culture, education and the English language. We help young people to gain the skills, confidence and connections they are looking for to realise their potential and to participate in strong and inclusive communities. We support them to learn English, to get a high-quality education and to gain internationally recognised qualifications. Our work in arts and culture stimulates creative expression and exchange and nurtures creative enterprise.

**ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen)** is Germany's oldest intermediary organisation for international cultural relations. It promotes a peaceful and enriching coexistence between people and cultures worldwide. ifa supports artistic and cultural exchange in exhibition, dialogue and conference programmes, and it acts as a centre of excellence for international cultural relations. It is part of a global network and relies on sustainable, long-term partnerships.