STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNESCO CREATIVE CITIES: CONCLUSIONS FROM THE XI UCCN ANNUAL MEETING (2017)

ESTRATEGIAS PARA EL DESARROLLO SOSTENIBLE DE LAS CIUDADES CREATIVAS DE UNESCO: CONCLUSIONES DEL XI ENCUENTRO ANUAL DE LA UCCN (2017)

PEDRO ALVES

Researcher at CITCEM-FLUP
CITCEM – Centro Transdisciplinar "Cultura, Espaço e Memória"
Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto
Via Panorâmica, s/n (Portugal) 4150-564
Tlf: + 351 226077177
Email: pmalves@porto.ucp.pt

Abstract

In 2017, the XI UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) Annual Meeting took place in Enghien-les-Bains (France), gathering representatives from the 116 Creative Cities and UNESCO. This meeting was an opportunity to present and discuss strategic contributions to several local urban implementations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda. It was also an opportunity to raise awareness and to evaluate specific creative strategies being undertaken by each city and each creative field groups, as well as struggles, needs and opportunities for improvement.

The event was divided in several sessions, such as the Steering Group working session, the Creative Cities workshops, the Mayors' Forum or the final Plenary Session. All of them enhanced an updated panorama of the current initiatives, difficulties and opportunities that Creative Cities of UNESCO are facing, allowing to draw some conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the Sustainable Urban Development goals' implementation.

From a report following the event's exclusive personal attendance, and taking into account official documentation by UNESCO, we intend to analyse and discuss some of the main conclusions from the XI UCCN Annual Meeting.

Resumen

En 2017, el XI Encuentro Anual de la Red de Ciudades Creativas de UNESCO (UCCN) se realizó en Enghien-les-Bains (Francia), juntando representantes de las 116 Ciudades Creativas y de UNESCO. El encuentro fue una oportunidad para presentar y debatir contribuciones estratégicas para la implementación local de la Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible y la New Urban Agenda. Fue también una oportunidad para desvelar y evaluar estrategias creativas específicas que cada ciudad y respectivo grupo creativo están siguiendo, pero de igual modo dificultades, necesidades y oportunidades para mejorías.

El evento se dividió en varias sesiones, como por ejemplo la reunión de trabajo del Steering Group, los talleres de los varios grupos de Ciudades Creativas, el Fórum de los Alcaldes o la Sesión Plenaria final. Todas las sesiones aportaron un panorama actualizado de las recientes iniciativas, dificultades y oportunidades que las Ciudades Creativas de UNESCO enfrentan, permitiendo dibujar algunas conclusiones relativas a la efectiva implementación de los objetivos de Desarrollo Urbano Sostenible.

A partir de un informe resultante de la asistencia exclusiva al evento y teniendo en cuenta documentación oficial de UNESCO relacionado con el mismo, pretendemos analizar y discutir algunas de las principales conclusiones del XI Encuentro Anual de UCCN.

Introduction

The UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) was launched in 2004 as a programme devoted to "strengthen cooperation with and among cities that have recognized creativity as a strategic factor of sustainable development" (UNESCO, 2014). This cooperation acknowledges sustainability regarding cultural, social, economic and environmental aspects, promoting cities' commitment towards the share of best practices and experiences, partnerships, engagement of cultural industries and, most of all, establishing culture as a key-factor in urban development politics and plans.

The UCCN is divided in seven different creative fields: Crafts and Folk Arts, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Literature, Media Arts, and Music. Cities who wish to become a member of UCCN must apply to one of these seven fields, depending on the city's history, tradition, cultural industries, creative agents and future cultural horizons and intentions. When a city becomes a member of UCCN within one of these seven creative fields, it incorporates a cluster of all the cities belonging to that creative field, integrating one's experiences, practices and ambitions in the cluster's guidelines and support. This allows a cohesion and proximity of creative and cultural practices from all over the world, bringing together different local agents, industries, projects and initiatives within the framework of a much larger cultural perspective (which also naturally translates into wider opportunities for cultural development).

Among the objectives of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, we can find the stimulation of "initiatives led by member cities to make creativity an essential component of urban development", "partnerships involving the public and private sectors and civil society", and the "creation, production, distribution and dissemination of cultural activities, goods and services" (UNESCO, 2014). Also, it also intends the development of "hubs of creativity and innovation", expanding the "opportunities for creators and professionals in the cultural sector", the improvement of "access to and participation in cultural life" and a special address to the "enjoyment of cultural goods and services (…) for marginalized or vulnerable groups and individuals" (UNESCO, 2014). Therefore, these UCCN's objectives translate into areas of action such as "sharing experiences, knowledge and best practices" among each creative field cities, the development of "pilot projects, partnerships and initiatives" involving the public and private sectors and civil society, "professional and artistic exchange programmes and networks", "research and evaluation" on the Creative Cities experience, "policies and measures for sustainable urban development" and "communication and awareness raising activities" (UNESCO, 2014). In order to evaluate and share the experiences and projects that each city develops within the referred UCCN's objectives and actions areas, every year an Annual Meeting takes place in one of the UCCN's creative cities. This typology of event allows each creative field cluster to gather their member cities, articulating discussions and reflexions inside each group and also with UCCN coordination and UNESCO representatives. In 2017, the XI UCCN Annual Meeting took place in Enghien-les-Bains (France), one of the cities integrating the Media Arts cluster. We will use this meeting as a key-factor in the presentation and analysis of the UCCN framework.

Objectives

For the purpose of this research, we intend to understand UCCN's theoretical framework, related to official documentation from the United Nations and UNESCO, as well as to analyse UCCN's framework as an empirical cause and consequence of the work and outcomes developed within the UNESCO Creative Cities Network and the XI UCCN Annual Meeting.

Method

We were able to attend the XI UCCN's Annual Meeting in Enghien-les-Bains, having participated as well in the several sessions programmed. This allowed a close observation of what happened and was discussed at the meeting, which later resulted on a non-published report (Alves, 2017). For this paper, we will use the original information of this report and compare it with official documentation of UNESCO, UCCN and the United Nations, in order to analyse the correspondences and contrasts between theory-based documentation and the empirical observation of the implementation of goals, guidelines and action areas defended within UN and UNESCO.

1. The UCCN within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015) and the New Urban Agenda (2017)

In 2015, by the 70th anniversary of the United Nations, the Heads of State and Government and High representatives launched the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015). The main objective of this document was to assume a long-term commitment (2015-2030) to "end poverty and hunger", "combat inequalities", "build peaceful, just and inclusive societies", "protect human rights", "promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls", "ensure lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources" and "create conditions for sustainable economic growth, shared prosperity and decent work for all", "taking into account different levels of national development and capacities" (United Nations, 2015, p. 6). To ensure the awareness and accomplishment of these intentions, as well as to guide actions and decisions undertaken on a regional and global level, the document also announced 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) with 169 associated targets that clearly integrated and addressed the referred issues. These Goals and targets established a framework for different countries, cities and realities, orienting "the effective translation of sustainable development policies into concrete action at the national level" (United Nations, 2015, p. 10).

By 2016, a New Urban Agenda (United Nations, 2017) was adopted by Heads of State and Government, Ministers and High Representatives at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito (Ecuador). This New Urban Agenda was designed as a contribution "to the implementation and localization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in an integrated manner", maintaining and reinforcing the 2030 Agenda's main objectives, Goals and targets. Nevertheless, it also introduced "transformative commitments through an urban paradigm shift grounded in the integrated and

indivisible dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental" (United Nations, 2017, p. 11). These commitments are described and detailed as "sustainable urban development for social inclusion and ending poverty" (United Nations, 2017, p. 11), "sustainable and inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all" (United Nations, 2017, p. 14) and "environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development" (United Nations, 2017, p. 18). This pledge towards a new urban paradigm is also referred through: readdressing planning, financing, governing and managing mechanisms for transparent and sustainable urban policies; the recognition and strengthening of local and national governments through inclusive and effective initiatives and legislation involving civil society and other stakeholders; and reinforcing partnerships, people-centred policies and national and international cooperation (United Nations 2017, p. 8).

The New Urban Agenda was important to underpin the Goals and targets inscribed in the 2030 Agenda, adjusting and intensifying UN's framework for their implementation on a local, national and international level. Among the 17 SDG's established in the 2030 Agenda, the New Urban Agenda highlights Goal 11 ("Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable") as a useful guideline for cities that seek "to promote inclusivity and ensure that all inhabitants (…) are able to inhabit and produce just, safe, healthy, accessible, affordable, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements to foster prosperity and quality of life for all" (United Nations, 2017, p. 5). Looking into SDG 11 and its specific targets, it is possible to observe the desire to enhance aspects such as: "adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services (…) and sustainable transport systems"; "inclusive and sustainable urbanization"; protection of "the world's cultural and natural heritage"; reduction of mortality and people affected by vulnerable situations (such as disasters); decrease the negative environmental impact on cities (promoting also the access to green and public spaces for vulnerable people); positive linkage "between urban, peri-urban and rural areas"; promotion of policies and plans towards inclusion or resource efficiency; the support to least developed countries (United Nations, 2015, p. 26; UNESCO, 2016b, p. 18).

In a 2016 report titled "Culture Urban Future – Global Report on Culture for Sustainable Urban Development" (UNESCO, 2016b), Irina Bokova, the Director-General of UNESCO, claims "culture lies at the heart of urban renewal and innovation", highlighting its role "as an enabler of sustainable development, and as one of the key conditions to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 11" (Bokova, 2016). Furthermore, the report also reinforces that "culture is key to what makes cities attractive, creative and sustainable", and that "cultural expressions give people the opportunity to identify themselves collectively, to read the traces of history, to understand the importance of traditions in their daily life, or to enjoy beauty, harmony and artistic endeavour" (UNESCO, 2016b, p. 17). Therefore, culture is addressed as a crucial element for Goal 11 and, more specifically, to target 11.4, aimed to "strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage" (United Nations, 2015, p. 26). It is a key-factor for creating new opportunities for human settlements and its inhabitants, diminishing vulnerability and marginality. It is also an important vehicle for safeguarding the role and importance of cultural institutions, to promote a creative and sustainable economy, or to improve inclusion and civil participation through the access to a city's public life.

Within this context of culture-driven action, the UNESCO Creative Cities Network represents a fundamental hub for a whole set of guidelines, projects, initiatives and cooperative partnerships related to creative and cultural urban solutions. As Francesco Bandarin (Assistant Director-General for Culture of UNESCO) utters, "the Creative Cities Network is a crucial partner for UNESCO to demonstrate the power of culture and creativity for sustainable development", assuming "a strategic role to play in the advocacy, implementation and follow-up of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (Bandarin, 2016). He also points out that UNESCO Creative Cities "are the avant-garde of this novel approach to redefining development strategies centered on culture and creativity". This highlights the Creative Cities "commitment to developing concrete policies and measures, innovative inter-city partnerships and participatory processes involving the public and private sector and civil society", which enables and drives "sustainable and inclusive growth, social cohesion, well-being, gender equality, environmental sustainability, and human-centered urbanization" (Bandarin, 2016). This commitment is clearly stated in the final recommendations of the "Culture Urban Future" report (UNESCO, 2016b, p. 245), which can be seen as guidelines that reflect the spirit and the horizons towards which UCCN initiatives and projects have been developing. First of all, people-centred cities are matched with culture centred-spaces, focusing on aspects such as the liveability of cities, the safeguard of their identities, social inclusion through culture, creativity and innovation in urban development through culture, and dialogue and peace-building initiatives built on culture. Second, quality urban environments are also addressed through culture, fostering human scale and mixed-use cities from urban conservation former practices, promoting a liveable built and natural environment, enhancing the quality of public spaces through culture and using culture-based solutions to improve urban resilience. Finally, culture enhances integrated policy-making towards sustainable cities, regenerating urban and rural linkages, reinforcing itself as a sustainable resource for inclusive economic and social development, and promoting participatory processes and enhancing the role of communities on local governance, through innovative and sustainable financial models for culture.

After the 2015 applications and the subsequent incorporation of new cities to the Network, by 2016 UCCN integrated 116 cities from 54 countries worldwide: 20 Creative Cities of Crafts and Folk Art, 22 Creative Cities of Design, 8 Creative Cities of Film, 18 Creative Cities of Gastronomy, 20 Creative Cities of Literature, 9 Creative Cities of Media Arts, and 19 Creative Cities of Music. On each creative field, each city is responsible to align their initiatives, policies and activities within the previously mentioned UNESCO goals, targets and recommendations. They also are encouraged to develop inter-city partnerships that enhance and expand the possibilities and opportunities for cultural urban intervention. Although many of the creative city clusters organize specific meetings for their creative field during the year, the UCCN annual meetings represent the formal gathering and the perfect opportunity for all seven groups of creative cities to share their experiences, align inter-group strategies, and discuss their needs and future initiatives along with UCCN coordination and UNESCO representatives.

2. UCCN's XI Annual Meeting (Enghien-les-Bains, 2017)

The XI and 2017's UCCN Annual Meeting took place in Enghien-les-Bains, creative city of Media Arts located eleven kilometres north of Paris (France). The event happened between June 29th and July 2nd[1]. Its agenda was divided in several sessions and programmes dedicated to the city delegates and representatives, which were distributed through some of the main city's venues. For the purpose of this research, we will focus only on the sessions specifically addressing the work of the Creative Cities' delegates and representatives, along with UCCN and UNESCO secretariat[2]. We will present some of the information and conclusions from a non-published report (Alves, 2017) elaborated from the attendance and observation of these sessions.

2.1. UCCN Steering Group

The UCCN Steering Group was established in 2014 (at the Chengdu VIII Annual Meeting) and ensures interface between UNESCO secretariat and the coordinators and vice-coordinators of the 7 Creative Fields. As reported by UNESCO (2017c), "its missions (…) include the coordination of activities within each creative field (…), participation in the evaluation process of member cities, evaluation of the membership monitoring reports and communication between cities and the Secretariat on activities concerning the creative sub-fields". Therefore, this group establishes a solid dialogue platform between UNESCO and each creative field cluster, defining and improving strategies that each coordinator will later pass on to the representatives of the cities belonging to their creative field. Through the Steering Group, UCCN is able to bring together groups with different projects and activities, through common strategies and frameworks.

The Steering Group working session allowed to understand not only the working dynamics of this particular assembly, but also a privileged updated panorama of some of the main struggles, needs and future initiatives and ideas designed by UNESCO and the Creative Fields coordinators.

Some of the participants pointed out the recurrent difficulty to convince local Mayors of the UNESCO cultural platform's importance, claiming that many of them aren't even familiar with UCCN. They also referred a common struggle in implementing long-term programmes and strategies, related to this lack of support from the political local authorities. Addressing this problem, the UNESCO secretariat highlighted the importance of working towards the incorporation of local and national political forces in the city cultural strategies and activities, giving as an example the role that can be undertaken by UNESCO National Commissions. However, the participants claimed that often these National Commissions are mere representatives of UNESCO, not becoming active and productive towards the accomplishment of projects and initiatives. The UNESCO secretariat asked cities to demand directly to them the kind of collaboration needed to accomplish their initiatives and projects, making use of the several partnerships that UNESCO's been developing over the years.

One other issue brought up was the problem of the non-responsive cities, from two perspectives. First, there are official city powers and institutions that do not answer the solicitations of UNESCO Creative Cities' representatives. Second, and inside each group, there are some cities that do not participate in the inter-

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city activities and communication, enhancing a scission between them and the cluster for not presenting the results of the initiatives they are implementing. Therefore, one of the needs identified by the participants was precisely the creation of a global platform that allows every city to show what is being done on a local level, implementing a more accurate awareness of the on-going projects and increasing the opportunities for inter-city activities. They also suggested the establishment of minimum requirements for cities to remain in the Network, demanding activity reports every 2 or 3 years, instead of the current 8.

Regarding other future initiatives and ideas to solve the problem of non-responsiveness, one of the participants highlighted the importance of developing common projects that bring together the creative cities of each cluster (for example, the Creative Cities of Gastronomy developed an e-book to showcase the initiatives and activities done by each one of its members). Other participant stressed out that this could also help to solve the problem of the lack of visibility of UCCN, raising awareness and perhaps promoting a deeper involvement of cities' political representatives and institutions. One other solution came from the Creative Cities of Literature group, which referred that the cluster divide their work in sub-groups to increase communication, to specify tasks and duties, and also to better integrate new-arrived UCCN members.

The creative fields coordinators and the UNESCO secretariat were also aligned regarding the need to reinforce research related to the creative cities' activities and projects. The UNESCO secretariat referred that they should always be aware of these outputs so they can produce common strategies and bring together every creative field cluster through a shared and broad research methodology. This common methodology will allow the comparison of different research in different fields, and it is a framework that UNESCO's already working on.

From what could be observed, the UCCN Steering Group is a crucial UCCN engine to allow a sincere and productive dialogue between the Creative Fields groups and the UNESCO Secretariat. The debate around the difficulties, the necessities and future opportunities inside and outside each cluster allows the several creative cities groups (through their coordinators) and the UNESCO representatives to work together towards solutions and improvements that are fundamental to the evolution of the Network. Also, it was an important start for the Meeting's agenda, as it allowed discussing aspects that would later be transferred to inner-group discussions, and translated, at the end of the event, into specific conclusions and future measures within a new strategic framework.

2.2. Mayors' declaration

One of the highlights of the XI UCCN Annual Meeting was the "Mayors' Forum", a session dedicated to brief presentations from city official representatives on the main creative and cultural initiatives performed by their respective cities. The relevance of this session can be understood from the previously mentioned need to create more proximity and awareness between the work produced within the UCCN and the political and governmental institutions and agents that can assume an important role in supporting the network's local activities and projects. Being an opportunity for Mayors and Mayor representatives to showcase some of the

main creative strategies and projects of their cities, this session enhanced their participation in the UCCN framework.

Perhaps the most important outcome of this session was the final presentation of a document signed by all the Mayors and Mayor representatives gathered in the XI Annual Meeting. The "Mayors' Declaration" (UNESCO, 2017b) reaffirmed the importance of culture and creativity for sustainable urban development, thanking UNESCO "for providing member cities with the opportunity to take part in international discussions" around this subject. The Mayors also addressed the SDG 11 and "underline[d] the strategic role of culture and creativity" to fully deliver its inherent targets, also reinforcing their "commitment towards the Network's mission statement", in the objectives and action areas that we have already mentioned. They emphasized "the strategic potential of the UCCN member cities in promoting culture-engaged urban development policies" and the Network as an important driver for "innovation and sharing good practices". The question of the involvement of local and national authorities was also addressed, through the encouragement of all cities "to renew their political commitment towards the Network and UNESCO" through the necessary institutional arrangements. Finally, they fully endorsed the new strategic framework (presented at the end of the event), reiterated the will for international and inter-city cooperation (including cities from under-represented countries and regions), and committed to financially support the UCCN's work within their possibilities.

The Mayors' declaration formally established a close partnership between the political powers and the cultural representatives of the UNESCO Creative Cities. Besides responding to the lack of proximity between local official institutions and UNESCO Creative Cities' representatives, this declaration also reinforced the recognition of the Network's mission, objectives and relevance within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It was a symbolic act meant to enhance the commitment of all local and national political forces directly or indirectly involved in the Network, with a clear focus on encouraging and delivering initiatives and projects that, through the UCCN's scope, may also signify local urban development through culture and creativity. By assuming their commitment towards future support, engagement and participation in the network's activities, it may be an important step to decrease the non-responsiveness and distance between UCCN city representatives and the political forces on which they depend to successfully deliver cultural activities, programmes and outcomes.

2.3. Conclusions of the UCCN XI Annual Meeting

In the final plenary session of the event, a document with 14 conclusions from the UCCN XI Annual Meeting was presented (UNESCO, 2017a). These conclusions highlight the main future strategies, outcomes and endeavours designed from and for the members of the Network, in order to enhance UCCN's full potential and desired results.

The first topic of the Conclusions refers the adoption of the new strategic framework (UNESCO, 2017c), focused on four key-factors: developing "research and knowledge management", creating "co-creative partnership mechanisms to support members and applicant cities", showcasing "member cities' innovative

power on an international platform", and establishing "effective communication and capacity-building materials for the whole Network". Regarding research (which had already been referred as a key-factor and need within the UCCN Steering Group working session), the document encourages collective efforts to enhance the Network's research capacity, by "sharing documentation, experiences and expertise built at city level" and by "collecting, analysing and sharing good practices and data". For this purpose, the importance of a close collaboration with experts and research and educational institutions is highlighted. As for the support to new member cities, the Conclusions address the development of "a capacity-building and up-streaming mechanism for newly designed cities as well to better prepare future candidate cities" and the encouragement of applications from under-represented regions, "to further the Network's geographical balance".

On the other hand, the document also introduces some new requirements in order to ensure its fully sustainable development: the decrease of the maximum number of designations per country per call (as of 2019, a maximum of two applications instead of three); a rotating mechanism within the Steering Group, to strengthen representativeness, where its members may only serve a maximum of two 2-year mandates; and the mandatory submission, every 6 months, of a plan of activities from each creative field, through its coordinator, to guarantee "greater consistency in reporting and comparing across fields".

Moreover, the Conclusions also address the importance of the political forces to fully participate, within its possibilities, in the Network's initiatives and endeavours. The UCCN member cities assume their commitment to take actions that "enhance participatory policy-making and activity implementation", reiterating also the need for financial contributions to the Network due to the extra-budgetary nature of the UCCN programme. They also suggest that all cities must ensure one senior political representative to participate in future Annual Meetings, and encourage the designation, by city, of an official political representative alongside with the Focal Point (main representative of each Creative City). This seeks "to further integrate culture and creativity into local development policies, strategies and plans, as well as to strengthen the communication between UNESCO and the member cities".

The Conclusions of the XI UCCN Annual Meeting clearly focus on some of the major needs and struggles identified in the Steering Group working session (political responsiveness, research, communication, new-member integration). On the other hand, it also reinforces the importance of the commitment of the Mayors through the declaration presented at the Mayors' Forum, showing the will for greater proximity between the creative cities' focal points and political official representatives. It is an important statement in order to establish commitments, to rearrange UCCN's dynamics and framework, as well as to ensure a fully sustainable development of UCCN, towards an integration of new cities and countries in the Network that does not compromise the quality of the initiatives and projects undertaken by current UCCN member cities.

2.4. A new strategic framework for the future

A major outcome of this XI UCCN Annual Meeting was the adoption and presentation of a new strategic framework for the Network (UNESCO, 2017c), following a request by member cities at the 2016 Östersund

UCCN Annual Meeting. As stated in the document, it "represents the collective vision of the whole UCCN network, shared by both UNESCO and UCCN member cities, and carries a global message on way in which culture and creativity can serve cities' development" (UNESCO, 2017c, p. 1). Therefore, this Strategic Framework incorporates several aspects previously mentioned, across its different sections. It defines what is the Network and how it has been working in the past years up until now, contextualizes UCCN within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda, and draws a collective vision for the future of the Network based on three main aspects: the strategic objectives of the Network, the UCCN's priorities and future action plan, and the implementation mechanisms for the referred objectives and priorities. In short, it not only responds to the needs, difficulties and opportunities identified within the UCCN Steering Group, but also summarizes the main aspects of the UCCN Annual Meeting conclusions and enhances the Mayors' commitment for deeper political involvement of local and national institutions.

The first issue addressed by the document is an overview of the UCCN today, focusing on its active expanding feature. Among other things, it once again highlights that UCCN has, since its creation, "strongly asserted and demonstrated on the ground the power of cultural and creative industries", as well as "contributed to strengthening advocacy efforts towards the integration of culture in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (UNESCO, 2017c, p. 2). Furthermore, it also points out that, within this concern for sustainable development, the Network "has become increasingly attractive" for under-represented regions, and that despite some geographical unbalance remains to be solved, "this diversity in city profiles allows the emergence of a large variety of practices at the urban level aimed at facing common challenges" (UNESCO, 2017c, p. 2).

Second, the new strategic framework reinforces the role of culture as a key-factor within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as in the New Urban Agenda, which "confirmed the need for a paradigm change in urban development strategies to face the challenges of sustainable urban development" and "provides an action-oriented mechanism to implement Sustainable Development Goal 11" (UNESCO, 2017c, p. 3-4). Furthermore, it claims that "the New Urban Agenda clearly acknowledges the key role of local authorities in innovating policies towards sustainable cities", and that "capturing this local innovative power and bringing it to the international level to be integrated in policy-making mechanisms, is an essential endeavour" (UNESCO, 2017c, p. 4). Finally, it also remarks that "many local authorities and their networks have reshaped their strategies and programmes to meet the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda" (UNESCO, 2017c, p. 4), giving as an example networks such as Eurocities, UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments), Interreg Europe, Urban Transformations, C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group and UCL City Leadership Laboratory.

Finally, the document specifies a set of ideas and strategies meant to build a more sustainable collective vision for the future of the Network. First, it addresses the main strategic objectives of UCCN, in accordance with some of the issues discussed within the Steering Group and reflected in the conclusions of the XI Annual Meeting. The four main objectives highlighted are: a) "showcasing member cities' innovative power on an international platform", through the improvement of the network's impact and outreach, the enhancement

of strategic partnerships and the increase of stakeholders and collaborators involved in UCCN's initiatives (UNESCO, 2017c, pp. 4-5); b) "managing sound growth of the Network", through the guarantee that UCCN expansion to new countries and cities "remaìns compatible with the available resources and the operational capacities of both the Secretariat and member cities" (UNESCO, 2017c, p. 5); c) "improving the Network's geographic representativeness", through "equitable representation", "inclusiveness", the exploration of "new dimensions of creativity" and the "capacity to demonstrate the power of creativity for sustainable development in diverse social and economic contexts" (UNESCO, 2017c, p. 5); and d) "ensuring financial sustainability", through funding mechanisms that enable to "support the current expansion of the Network", "to strengthen the Network's innovation potential", to "facilitate the participation of the Network in strategic events" and "to ensure visibility of the programme and of the member cities" (UNESCO, 2017c, pp. 5-6).

The second set of features established within this collective vision for the future relates to UCCN's priorities and future action plan (UNESCO, 2017c, pp. 6-7). The suggested activities contemplate: a) gathering the experience of member cities, through collecting existing material and building on the reports provided by member cities, as well as producing analytic documents that may "synthetize key outcomes and strategies and ensure visibility for member cities"; b) developing "guidelines, strategies and operational instruments on culture-engaged urban policies to further demonstrate and measure the impact of creativity on urban development", taking into account the member cities' potential as privileged agents to enhance local implementations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; c) implementing pilot projects that may "conduct practical experimentation" on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda's SDGs and targets, fostering inter-city partnerships and producing innovative best practices; d) "elaborating training modules and/or activities" that may address needs from member cities (specially those from the Global South) and the preparation of new member cities' integration in the Network (UNESCO, 2017c, p. 6); and e) communication activities that may translate into the "publication of communication and information materials", the promotion of the Network's activities at the international level" (fostering the participation of member cities in events closely related to the UCCN's scope) and "a more action-oriented and interactive website", that may facilitate knowledge management and data sharing (UNESCO, 2017c, p. 7).

One last aspect referred by the document within this collective vision for the future of UCCN regards some fundamental implementation mechanisms. First, it values UNESCO's hosting of the UCCN secretariat, by benefiting from its "international reputation and influence" and from the provision of "a vision and strategic guidance" and "visibility on a global platform" (UNESCO, 2017c, p. 7). Second, it recommends not only the expansion of the scope of activities from the Steering Group through "data collection", "programme implementation", "co-partnering" or "capacity building", as well as a "more equitable and inclusive" rotating coordination mechanism (an aspect which was also mentioned in the meeting conclusions) (UNESCO, 2017c, p. 7). Third, the creative fields are addressed through the need for more transversal cooperation, fostering "integrated, territorial approaches across different creative sectors", as well as ensuring visibility and facilitating fundraising to support each city and creative field activities (UNESCO, 2017c, pp. 7-8). Fourth, the creation of a new funding mechanism is considered to be a fundamental aspect to "ensure the financial sustainability

of the Network" and to provide the required resources to "fulfil the Network's potential". Therefore, a voluntary contribution of 2.000 USD per city has been implemented as a first step towards this new funding framework (UNESCO, 2017c, pp. 8-9). Finally, the document also stresses the need for implementing a co-creative partnership mechanism, in order to support new members' applications by improving "their vision, strategy, action plan and (…) implementation capacity" (UNESCO, 2017c, p. 9).

Conclusions

This overview on the main outcomes from the XI UCCN Annual Meeting has confirmed the alignment of the initiatives, priorities, objectives, strategies and action plans undertaken by the Network with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda. Not only the on-going experiences and practices directly address sustainable development through cultural and creative interventions on the urban spaces, as the identified necessities and improvements have contributed to reach new visions and proposals that may become a reality over the next years. The observation and analysis of the meeting's different sessions, documents and outcomes allowed a clear understanding of the positioning and strategy followed by the Network regarding UNESCO's and the member cities' goals. The Annual Meetings enhance a fundamental possibility for dialogue, proximity, sharing and improvement of the work being done by all of the agents and institutions involved in UCCN. And, as seen by the New Strategic Framework, it also represents a crucial moment of reflexion and action towards the proposal of new opportunities, mechanisms and strategies for the Network to sustainably expand and improve.

Lats year (2017), by the end of October 64 cities from 44 countries were announced to join the Network, adding 17 members to the Creative Cities of Crafts and Folk Art (now 37 in total), 9 to the Creative Cities of Design (now 31), 5 to the Creative Cities of Film (now 13), 8 to the Creative Cities of Gastronomy (now 26), 8 to the Creative Cities of Literature (now 28), 5 to the Creative Cities of Media Arts (now 14), and 12 to the Creative Cities of Music (now 31)[3]. This means that until 2019 (year for the next new UCCN membership applications) the UCCN will integrate 180 cities from 73 countries. With the new 2017 approved members, UNESCO was able to expand the network to 19 countries that were not yet represented in UCCN and 9 new African cities were welcomed to the network. Therefore, UCCN was able to accomplish one of the objectives stated in the XI UCCN Annual Meeting Conclusions and the New Strategic Framework, which stressed the encouragement of applications from under-represented regions and, specially, from the African region (UNESCO, 2017a; UNESCO, 2017c, p. 5).

The network's expansion means new opportunities and possibilities for cultural partnerships, knowledge and experiences. It adds new horizons to the former creative cities and supports new projects within the new members of UCCN. The integration of these new creative cities will be a key-factor for the successful implementation of the objectives, Goals and targets that guide UCCN's mission within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, on a national level. Furthermore, the identification of difficulties and needs within the UCCN Steering Group and the proposal of solutions with the UCCN's New Strategic Framework will most definitely enable the accomplishment of satisfactory outcomes for the problems the creative clusters

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might feel. The XI Annual Meeting observation confirmed the effectiveness and responsiveness of the UCCN coordination (through the UNESCO secretariat and the creative field coordinators) to what urges in terms of developing and improving the network. It was also able to establish a clear and undisputed document that summarizes actions, priorities and strategies for the years to come. Nevertheless, the cities' focal points and representatives must ensure that this potential is fully delivered through the continuation and enhancement of more and better culture-based initiatives, partnerships and cooperation, in order to extend the fulfilment of these goals from theory to practice. The close involvement of political regional and national authorities is fostered by initiatives as the Mayors' Forum and enhanced by commitments as the Mayors' declaration. They might be decisive to guarantee the conditions that UCCN creative city representatives need to deliver the network's intended outcomes and results. Moreover, the UCCN's New Strategic Framework will most certainly establish a fundamental point-of-reference to bring together all of the agents and institutions from which depends the success of the Network's implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda.

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Author

Pedro Alves (PhD). Guest lecturer at the Sound and Image Department of the Catholic Portuguese University's School of Arts. Researcher of CITCEM-FLUP and collaborator of CITAR-UCP. Member of the Scientific Associations ICONO14 (Spain) and AIM (Portugal). Trainer of the National Film Plan (Portugal). His two latest publications are:

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Endnotes

1 Other cultural programmes took place on the 3rd and 4th of July, but outside the scope of the UCCN formal meeting. More information about the event is available on its webpage: http://creative.ville-enghienlesbains.fr/en.

2 These sessions are the 2-hour "UCCN Steering Group working session" (June 29th morning) and the 3-hour closing "Plenary session" (July 2nd morning).

3 Official information at UNESCO's webpage: https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/events/64-cities-join-unesco-creative-cities-network.