

## XIV EU-LAC Reflection Forum

### 'Challenges and opportunities for the construction of a shared cultural cooperation agenda between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union'

Palace of Fine Arts, Mexico City, 5 and 6 December 2023

– Report –



### Inaugural Session

During the opening session, **Adrián Bonilla**, Executive Director of the EU-LAC Foundation, emphasised the responsibility to enhance the Strategic Partnership between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean, and stressed the role of the Foundation in actively monitoring joint agendas, involving various actors, entities and members of civil society from both regions. In this regard, Dr Bonilla underlined the need to push forward the common objectives outlined by the high authorities, especially after the last EU-CELAC Summit on 17-18 July 2023. Despite challenges such as the economic crises and the Covid-19 pandemic, leaders from both regions agreed to strengthen dialogue and cooperation by committing to address new challenges and foster the bi-regional relationship, basing these actions on values that promote resilient, inclusive societies, peace, and human rights. In the context of current political, economic, and social scenarios that present opportunities and challenges in interconnected societies, Dr Bonilla underlined that working on common cultural issues offers an additional opportunity to connect people, governments, and policies. The essence of this Forum was therefore to foster dialogue and interaction, as well as to produce information that can be systematised for distribution and have a significant impact on public policies and decision-makers.

The General Executive Director for Cultural Diplomacy and Tourism of the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs, **Juan Patricio Riveroll Mendoza**, pointed out that Mexico is a country in transformation, which is projecting itself firmly into the future, largely thanks to the vitality of its cultures and arts. He underlined the relevance of the XIV Forum of Reflection as a bilateral space for cooperation that contributes to the development and promotion of Mexican cultural diplomacy. In this context, Mexico supports culture as a central axis of sustainable development, promoting the arts and creation with approaches related to growth, inclusion and empowerment of women and minority groups, as well as the fight against climate change and comprehensive attention to human mobility. In his speech, Mr. Riveroll explained that some of the objectives of the Chancellery were to develop and strengthen creativity, share successful practices and achieve shared, lasting and beneficial results. He also reaffirmed the common values of the Latin American, Caribbean and European regions, such as democracy, tolerance and human dignity, among others.

**Mariana Aymerich Ordóñez**, Director General for Cultural Promotion and Festivals, Head of International Affairs and Secretary of Culture of the Government of Mexico, highlighted the broad cultural legacy shared between Mexico and the European Union, which constitutes an important element of dialogue and interaction between the two regions. She also underlined how culture and exchange are essential components for dialogue and international cooperation, emphasising that beyond the borders that may separate, cultural actors have never ceased to engage in conversation, learn and enrich each other, remaining united by the force of creation. Likewise, culture has been and continues to be a shared action to connect with the past and build the future through diverse forms of expression. Finally, Ms. Aymerich expressed her hope that this Reflection Forum would lead to an analysis towards concrete actions, in favour of culture as an essential asset for the progress of peoples, well-being and the good life of citizens.

In a video message, **Leslie-Ann Millington**, Cultural Officer of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the member State currently holding the pro tempore presidency of CELAC, expressed her appreciation for participating in the XIV EU-LAC Reflection Forum, recognising that cultural opportunities outweigh the challenges in this field. She stressed the importance of shared cooperation as a means to create more opportunities to foster knowledge and understanding of policies and industries, thus enriching the heritage and culture of peoples. In addition, she underlined the initiative of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to collaborate with partners in the Latin American, Caribbean and European regions in the pursuit of unity, thus implying its active willingness to engage in an enriching dialogue that strengthens intercultural ties and promotes mutual understanding.

To conclude the inaugural session, **Lucina Jiménez López**, Director General of the National Institute of Fine Arts and Literature (INBAL), member of the group of the OEI Expert Committee on culture and of the group of UNESCO experts, convened to work conceptually on the notion of culture as a Global Public Good, highlighting the relevance of the conversation proposed by the EU-LAC Foundation and INBAL. She emphasised the richness of the diverse manifestations that characterise Mexico, as well as the recognition of the cultures that have contributed to the dynamism of the country. Furthermore, she stressed the fundamental axes of equality, inclusion and diversity, expressing that within this breadth of cultural expressions and contexts lies the opportunity to fully recognise cultural rights. Finally, she mentioned that in a period in which cultural public policies need to be reconsidered, the Forum posed the challenge of reflecting and shaping the future of cultural practices in a meaningful way.

## Training session: State of the art and guidelines for renewing International Cultural Cooperation in a contemporary global scenario.

During the training session, the consultants **Alfons Martinell Sepmere** and **Jorge Fernández León** made an exhaustive review of the working document (“Cultural Cooperation between European, Latin American and Caribbean countries: concepts, strategies and good practices”), which would serve as a reference for the different sessions of the Forum. This document aims to analyse the current state of international cultural cooperation (ICC), reflecting on its obligations, perspectives and commitments in a new and constantly changing global scenario. According to the consultants, the agenda of ICC should move away from the sole priority of governmental mobilisation of artists, institutions and educators to focus also on many of the global humanitarian concerns framed in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

As an introductory but necessary step, the consultants invited the participants to review the concepts on which this ICC is based, especially highlighting the need to understand the changing relationship between culture and development. Within the field of international relations and international cooperation, culture is present in four interrelated fields: foreign cultural policy, cultural diplomacy, international cultural cooperation and cultural cooperation for development. Closely linked to this last concept is that of fair and loyal cooperation, which implies a critique of previous models of cooperation and seeks to revise the interpretative frameworks of the ICC in order to address common problems from the standpoint of horizontality, real equality and collaboration.

Foreign cultural policy is mainly articulated from the perspective of the nation-state and the role of culture in contemporary societies. It goes beyond mere national cultural promotion and seeks to influence the country's image and promote political, economic and social links. Cultural diplomacy, on the other hand, is presented as a more open approach to exchange and relationship-building based on 'soft power'. It seeks pacts and relationships that allow for subtle influence in other countries. Thirdly, the concept of international cultural cooperation is based on the promotion of equality and mutual recognition. The action of cooperating is the basic action of cultural work and has to be the result not only of political agreement, but also of the creation of ties and links with civil society.

International cultural cooperation is undergoing significant changes due to the large number of cultural flows that we are currently experiencing as a global society, which has a considerable impact on its dynamics. Furthermore, it is essential to insist on the need to incorporate culture into official development aid, challenging welfarist visions and recognising the interconnection between cultural needs and the effective resolution of basic needs.

Beyond this, the consultants underlined that ICC is not an exclusive tool of governments, but involves a diversity of actors in a cultural system made up of governments, organisations, collectives and communities. In this system, the private sector also plays a very important role, as well as new actors, such as regional and local governments, which have to be integrated to guarantee a fair and equal representation, giving a voice and a vote to hitherto silenced and marginalised cultures, such as the cultures of the native communities of Latin American and Caribbean regions.

The training session generated a number of recommendations and reflections on the relationship and the key role of the ICC in addressing various issues. For instance, the imperative to address gender gaps also from within ICC was highlighted, calling for the need to implement gender



mainstreaming programmes throughout the process. The deep connection between ICC and climate change was highlighted, advocating for the fundamental role of cultural programmes in sensitising, educating and raising collective awareness of the crisis, as well as in finding solutions and promoting more sustainable alternatives. In addition, the ICC's involvement in ethical debates and bodies of control and protection of rights in the face of artificial intelligence is a field that is yet to be explored, however it is already regarded as fundamental in the future.

Finally, according to the consultants, ICC should be one of the main tools for deepening decolonisation processes, multiplying programmes that directly and actively involve people belonging to indigenous communities. This multifaceted approach of the ICC seeks to address decolonisation in a holistic manner, recognising and preserving cultures, languages, technologies, arts and histories that are fundamental to human diversity and intercultural respect.

During the questions and answers section of the training, the debate revolved around the important global role of cultural tourism. Considering the importance of the sector as an economic engine in many countries, tourism is drifting into a model of mass consumption, where culture, life and citizens' rights are endangered. Participants convened in that new conditions for tourism needed to be created, so that more sustainable and cleaner models of consumption, as well as the protection of cultural richness and diversity could be promoted.

### **Exchange of experiences (1) - How to design institutional policies and practices to position culture as a common good in the 2030 Agenda and sustainable development?**

The moderator of this session raised in this group the question of how to design institutional policies and practices to place culture in the 2030 Agenda, especially from a sustainable development perspective.

From the European External Action Service (EEAS), the importance of evolving from cultural diplomacy towards stronger international cultural relations was emphasised. Details were also shared on five pilot projects of the 'European Spaces for Culture' Programme between these regions, highlighting their innovative approach to tackling current phenomena through cultural initiatives. These projects, developed in Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, Uruguay, Peru, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, use tools such as mobile gaming, science, art, co-production and theatre to address various social issues, including the eradication of violence, education, the incubation of scientific innovation projects and the need for inclusion of people with disabilities. In addition, the role of the European Union as a guest at the Guadalajara International Book Fair 2023 (FIL 2023) was highlighted, as well as the production of 'Unearthing', a performance by European artists presented at FIL 2023 that interactively engages the public in science and theatre to jointly look at viable solutions to the challenges posed by climate change. Finally, it is important to consider how culture can sometimes be an essential language for dialogue with the population.

Aiming to delve deeper into the subject of the design of public policies and the sustainable development agenda, the Peruvian Ministry of Culture highlighted the importance of achieving various guidelines on cultural issues, backed by their experience. They emphasised that it is not only about sharing cultural expressions, but also about fostering the exchange of knowledge. In addition, it is important to highlight the Peruvian government's intensive dedication to the preservation and maintenance of its immovable heritage, as well as the management of cultural industries such as museums and libraries, promoting more activities in this field.

To develop such activities and projects, it is important to set clear objectives, adopt good practices and carry out actions to mobilise culture, along with effective budget management. Thanks to these efforts, Peru has positioned itself as a reference in the cultural industry and in the preservation of historic buildings, facilitating dialogue and cooperation with other countries through the creation of agreements and the exchange of knowledge between local and international bodies. Furthermore, it is fundamental to underline the importance of trade and economy as allies to promote cultural expressions and industries abroad. Finally, it should be considered that, being a middle-income country, Peru not only seeks financial resources, but also aspires to demonstrate perspectives to offer support and cooperation at the international level. With enthusiasm, it was announced that Peruvian ceviche has recently been recognised as a World Heritage Site.

From the government of the State of Veracruz (Mexico), the relevance of approaching the issue of culture from the local level was underlined. The State of Veracruz has played a successful role in sharing its cultural practices at national, regional and international level, not only because of its geographical location in the Republic, but also because of its abundant and valuable cultural heritage, which establishes significant connections with other states and countries. In this framework, it becomes fundamental to raise awareness among the population about the relevance of its heritage.

Starting with a specific case, the ritual ceremony of the *Voladores de Papantla*, originating in El Tajín, Veracruz, was presented. It was highlighted how the town of Papantla and the community were transformed into tourism and commercial engines, highlighting the efforts dedicated to the restoration of ancestral practices, the emphasis on native languages such as Totonaco, and the special attention to the reforestation of the area. This focus on preserving the culture and observing its evolution has allowed the population to position ancestral practices as an engine of cultural and economic development. An impulse supported by the realisation of diverse musical, artistic and cultural events that celebrate the rich traditions of the region. Likewise, the *Voladores* have become an artistic expression of interest in Latin America, constituting a ritual that is experienced on a daily basis. In this respect, the support to civil societies that promote ancestral traditions, such as the *Voladores de Veracruz* meeting with other regions like Guatemala or Nicaragua, was emphasised, with the aim of generating and establishing measures for the preservation of the ritual towards the south. In addition, the School of *Voladores* was showcased as an active strategy to preserve cultural heritage. This heritage is alive and to ensure its permanence, it is necessary to allow it to evolve. An example of this change is that, previously, women were not allowed to participate in the ritual, but now girls are allowed to participate, thus contributing to the preservation and growth of the tradition. Overall, there was discussion about strengthening collaborative ties and promoting the legacies of culture in Mexico, which has resulted in a festive people with multiple traditions and synergies.

Finally, the last intervention of the panel addressed the axes of cooperation and culture outlined by the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They highlighted the importance of international development cooperation within the Mexican Foreign Ministry and underlined that Mexico, due to its strategic location, demographics, economy and cultural profile, occupies a privileged position in the global arena. It was stressed how cooperation leads to integration and better mutual knowledge, considering culture as a valuable tool to peace building and human development in line with the 2030 Agenda. Mexico has 83 cooperation agreements in force, which allows institutionalising and formalising cooperation. The importance of accountability and maintaining constant evaluation to determine the continued viability of a project was emphasised. In Addition, the relevance of collaboration with academia and universities was highlighted, form instance

through the establishment of networks as well as sharing experiences and good practices. Despite limited resources, the lack of budget has boosted creativity in the implementation of projects and the search for new means. Finally, the relevance of co-financing as a tool to generate responsibility among participants and to create a stronger bond of interest among those involved and the importance of ICC for a better mutual understanding was highlighted.

## **Exchange of experiences (2) - How to take advantage of new technological and digital tools to promote culture?**

During the second exchange of experiences, an open dialogue was initiated that focused on the essential question of how to use new technological and digital tools to boost the promotion of culture. Under the leadership of the moderator, the relevance of this topic in the context of global digitalisation was dealt with, and participants discussed how this phenomenon not only presents challenges, but also opportunities and new perspectives to bring culture to new spaces that allow a wider reach for cultural cooperation.

In a first intervention the need was stressed to rethink technology as an integral tool for art, especially in light of the experience lived during the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, it was reflected upon how academia and the arts have been transformed by technologies, underlining the importance of creating and seeking networks and collaborators with different instances to guarantee the sustainability of projects; highlighting digitalisation as a key element to strengthen and create relationships, as well as to bring exchanges and knowledge to new spaces. The relevance of ensuring a fair contribution and salary for artists was commented, placing them at the centre and guaranteeing their visibility in the technological context. The importance of protecting copyrights within digital platforms was emphasised, preventing them from being diverted to areas that do not belong to cultural institutions. The question was also raised about the need to establish new regulations at international or national level to safeguard the creation and scenarios of the future, exploring how to incorporate these emerging forms for the benefit of culture.

In another intervention, the need to adapt the technological networks to the Spanish language was highlighted. The perception of being overwhelmed by the predominance of English in creative networks and among the academic generations was expressed, underlining the importance of looking for algorithms that facilitate searching in Spanish. It was emphasised that the Spanish language provides identity, and culture between different countries in both regions. The need for greater inclusion within digital platforms and the necessary presence of native languages or sign languages in these spaces was also emphasised.

Another contribution to the debate underlined the importance of further supporting digital creation and its dissemination, pointing to the need for better frameworks or initiating the creation of legal frameworks for digitisation in cultural matters. In addition, the importance of having a vision of the future impact of artificial intelligence on the arts was emphasised. It was also commented that cultural policies implemented in France are supporting multilingualism and that the country was working on upcoming projects that will use artificial intelligence to explore how to create new giant linguistic models and train algorithms to interact with other languages, opening new perspectives in the field of artificial intelligence applied to language.

The conversation revolved around the idea of integrating sustainability into artificial intelligence processes. The possibility of collaborating in an open artificial intelligence space that is not completely controlled by the interests of large corporations was explored, which represents an

important challenge for ICC. It was emphasised that the first phase of artificial intelligence is already a reality and should be considered as a working tool, urging reflection on how to use it effectively and underlining the importance of people's participation in such technological processes.

In addition, the relevance of the EU-CELAC 2023 Summit and the Joint Declaration issued by the Heads of State and Government was emphasised, addressing various aspects related to the responsible human-centred digital transition. The declaration sought to highlight the importance of privacy as a fundamental right, improve digital connectivity, close digital divides and foster a sustainable use of artificial intelligence. Participants noted that the implementation of artificial intelligence in cultural creation is a process that demands significant effort and the adoption of new adaptive measures, and the importance of the participation of the cultural sectors in the regulation of artificial intelligence was reiterated. In the dialogue, the importance of addressing the challenges through digital literacy training, especially for cultural agents, was highlighted, proposing an enhanced presence of cultural entities through digital repositories. This encourages the use of free software tools in platforms that ensure permanence, overcoming the exclusive dependence on commercial platforms.

The last intervention focused on the dialogues before and during the EU-CELAC Summit on the bi-regional digital strategic partnership. It was discussed that digitisation is also a social indicator reflecting inclusion and exclusion, with an emphasis on access, highlighting the need to consider digitisation as a social policy issue, not just a technological one. Similarly, the concept of 'public good' was introduced, highlighting culture as a resource and common good. The importance of producing digital tools that enable access to and democratisation of public goods, such as culture, was underlined.

In conclusion, the reflections shared during the session distinguished the critical need to embrace digital transformation in a responsible way and to focus new technologies in the field of ICC, putting people at the centre.

### **Exchange of experiences (3) - How to create conditions for more equitable, participatory, accessible cultural cooperation policies and programmes?**

This session highlighted the importance of promoting a system of cultural cooperation based on respect for identities and cultural diversity, as well as on the production of accessible and equitable culture at local, national, regional and international levels. During their interventions, participants mentioned different policies, programmes and good practices as examples to illustrate the need for an inclusive approach at all stages of the cultural process. Successful experiences were highlighted that demonstrated how equal access to culture, as well as the participation of multiple actors in its production, not only strengthen social cohesion, but also contribute significantly to intercultural dialogue and sustainable development.

Underlining a successful initiative of international South-South and North-South cultural cooperation, the International Cooperation Programme 'Transcultura', a programme coordinated, implemented, monitored and evaluated by the Government of Cuba, was presented during the session. Promoted by UNESCO and the European Union, the programme aims to deepen integration in the Caribbean, strengthen regional cooperation and exchange and build cultural and linguistic bridges. Throughout its four years of implementation, 'Transcultura' has resulted in the establishment of the cultural and creative sectors in the Caribbean region, in the creation of new local cultural networks and in the training of up to 1300 young people who, after receiving

professionalisation courses in the artistic and cultural sector, have returned to their countries of origin to positively impact their communities, generating a multiplier effect on the cultural and social development of the entire region.

In the State of Yucatán (Mexico), special emphasis was placed on the protection and promotion of local cultural wealth, in particular Mayan culture and language, through projects and programmes focused on the integration, participation and self-management of the Mayan community in the production of art and culture. Aiming to empower local communities in the preservation and promotion of their cultural heritage, the Secretariat of Culture and Arts of Yucatan has created community museums that are self-managed by the original communities. In addition, the Mayan language has been placed at the centre of several initiatives, with translations and campaigns to make it more visible. A concrete example is the implementation during the Covid-19 pandemic of the 'Cultura en Línea' programme, which allowed communities to access cultural programmes in the Mayan language. This approach seeks not only to preserve cultural and linguistic identity, but also to strengthen the social fabric, ensure the transmission of local knowledge and promote the creation of a cultural heritage with a gender, intercultural and inclusive perspective.

Cultural diplomacy and cooperation between different countries are key strategic tools to strengthen bilateral ties through cultural exchange, mutual understanding and the promotion of artistic activities. In the case of the Embassy of Mexico in Brussels and Luxembourg and the Mission of Mexico to the EU, the instruments of cultural diplomacy focus on representing and projecting Mexico's cultural wealth through the visibility of its art, music, gastronomy and literature. This results in the construction of ties that are not only cultural, but also political, economic and social. On the other hand, in the area of cultural cooperation, the promotion of artistic exchanges and joint cultural events, as well as support for educational programmes and the promotion of cultural diversity, seek to strengthen mutual understanding and create a cultural network that allows for closer ties in other sectors, such as research, technology and culture. Some of the programmes that seek to enrich cultural cooperation between Mexico and the EU are those focused on the restitution of archaeological pieces; programmes that seek to involve different cities and states as actors in cultural exchange; and initiatives that seek to decentralise cultural promotion abroad, through the visibility of local artistic and cultural expressions at the international level.

The last intervention of the exchange sessions addressed the priorities of the French Ministry of Culture, which have been established with the aim of promoting more participatory, equitable and accessible cultural policies in the framework of the ICC. These priorities include support for the ecological transition in artistic production, the implementation of a 'cultural pass' to give young French people equitable access to culture, the defence of cultural diversity and multilingualism, the promotion of ethical and fair international cooperation and the reparation and reconciliation of memories, especially with the African continent. In the framework of relations with the Latin American and Caribbean regions, the French Ministry of Culture has launched initiatives such as the 'Regional Programme for the Performing Arts in Spanish-speaking South America' and the 'DEENTAL Programme' to support film producers, both aimed at strengthening cooperation and promoting training, mobility and cultural access in the region.

## Closure

**Adrián Bonilla**, Executive Director of the EU-LAC Foundation, emphasised the significant importance of these two days dedicated to the analysis of cultural issues during the Forum. He underlined that cultural goods are not exclusive, thus, this space for reflection showed the need for everyone to have access to culture.



He thanked the participants for their commitment to addressing cultural diversity and their openness during the dialogue. He stressed the idea that, in bi-regional relations, all cultural manifestations have an intrinsic value and should not be compared in terms of inferiority or superiority. This approach highlighted the crucial need to incorporate the idea of access as a fundamental policy.

The Ambassador of the European Union in Mexico, **Gautier Mignot**, outlined key aspects that could constitute the fundamental pillars of the shared cooperation agenda between the two regions: the importance of cultural exchange, cultural policies and cooperation aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as addressing the issue of the restitution of cultural property. He stressed that an innovative facet in the cultural field on the part of the European Union is its ability to foster cultural cooperation at regional level, working closely with its Member States and other partners. He exemplified this initiative by citing the prominent participation of the European Union in the FIL 2023, where it acted as guest of honour, promoting and demonstrating the EU's literary and cultural wealth. He also mentioned how these actions contributed to the strengthening of regional ties with Latin America and the Caribbean. Finally, the Ambassador acknowledged that, at the regional level, the European Union continues to make progress in matters of cooperation, establishing protection measures for artists that provide them with visibility, durability and security in the cultural sector, thus strengthening the artistic profession in all its fields and in the implementation of regulations that protect the artist and cultural goods.

In her closing speech of the XIV EU-LAC Reflection Forum, **Lucina Jiménez López**, Director General of the National Institute of Fine Arts and Literature (INBAL), highlighted how this event has provided a key platform to demonstrate Mexico's commitment to transformation. In particular, she emphasised the relevance of this dialogue between officials responsible for or impacted by the cultural sector, underlining the pioneering position of adjusting perspectives, concepts and strategies to new realities. Furthermore, the Forum was a space for dialogue, where Mexico assumed the responsibility to give continuity to cultural conversations and to act as a hospitable country in the construction of diverse thinking. In this context, she referred to the significant achievement obtained, where the Bolero has been recognised as intangible heritage of humanity thanks to the cultural collaboration between Mexico and Cuba. Finally, she emphasised that the conversation and the design of the forum serve as a practical implementation that demonstrates that International Cultural Cooperation is multi-sectoral, diverse and recognises the multiple languages and diversities that characterise us between countries, regions and cultures.

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