

UCLG-MEWA COMMITTEE ON CULTURE & TOURISM POLICY PAPER

Background

The UCLG-MEWA Committee on Culture, which was initially carrying out its activities as a working group, was established with the decision taken during the UCLG-MEWA Executive Bureau and Council Joint Meeting held in December 2013 in Konya. UCLG-MEWA Committee on Tourism was established during the UCLG-MEWA Executive Bureau and Council Joint Meeting on November 13, 2015. During the UCLG-MEWA Congress to be held on 9-10 July 2019 in Amman, Jordan, it is envisaged to merge the committees under one single roof.

The immovable cultural heritage, especially the tangible and intangible cultural treasure and the Middle East and West Asia region, have a great tourism potential. According to the records of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Middle East is composed of 19 countries that have ratified the World Convention on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage. In UNESCO's survey of 19 countries in the Middle East region, 82 properties were recorded in the World Heritage List. Each year, the World Heritage Committee conducts field research to examine the current status of these works. Within the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), countries in the area covered by UCLG-MEWA have become members to promote tourism and promote their civilization to the world.

The UCLG-MEWA Committee on Culture and Tourism, together with currently 62 member municipalities, municipal associations and foundations under its umbrella, aims to create collaborations and build bridges at the local level by creating projects for the protection of local culture in the region, promoting local tourism and finding permanent solutions to existing problems. This document is intended to serve as advocacy and political statements to promote local culture and tourism.

Introduction

Culture and tourism are among the world's top priorities, both at regional and local levels, which are key factors in the global agenda. Local governments have a major duty to establish and develop cultural and tourism policies. In this sense, Agenda 21 is the highest level action plan. In order to ensure the sustainability of culture and tourism at the local level and to contribute to the development of countries, Agenda 21 plays an important role with the main headings, participation process and implementation steps.

At the Bilbao Meeting of 18-20 March 2015, representatives of cities and local governments from all over the world were invited to the meeting by the UCLG World Organization adopted "Culture 21: Actions" at the first Cultural Summit.

As known, culture and tourism are generally two elements that interact with each other. As well as the steps taken to ensure and develop the sustainability of culture, steps have been taken at the global level to promote tourism, to be sustainable and to determine its role. The Global Code of Ethics in Tourism (GCET), set out as the main framework for a robust and sustainable tourism, is a comprehensive set of principles designed to guide key factors on the development of tourism. Addressing similarities to governments, travel industries, communities and tourists, it is aimed to maximize the benefits of the sector and to minimize its negative impact on the environment, cultural heritage and communities.

With the transformation of the process that started with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 to the more universal Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, culture and tourism have also been included as sub-targets of these universal goals. Considering that climate change affects the immovable cultural heritage elements and the tourism sector, this process that emerged from the psychology that an age of change has begun, has been the pioneer of new approaches in many subjects and has been the reference source of this Policy Paper.

With the slogan "*Leave no one behind*", UN announced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for a more comprehensive, sustainability, taking into account the limits of our planet, considering the socio-economic needs of the individual, covering the underdeveloped and developing countries.

Despite extensive efforts, no direct culture targets were added to the 17 goals. Although there is no separate article for direct culture and tourism in the SDGs, it has characteristics that can be related to all cultural objectives, especially sub-goals 11.4, 4.7, 8.3, 8.9 and 12.b. These steps taken for a better livable world contribute to better preservation of culture and paving the way for tourism while struggling for this purpose. UCLG-MEWA is also the advocate of these objectives for cultural and tourism activities that should start at the local level.

Current Situation and Challenges in the UCLG-MEWA Region

The Middle East and West Asia Region is going through a difficult period, especially due to political unsteadiness and natural disasters. Civil wars and conflicts especially in these processes make it difficult to preserve cultural values and tourism development and sometimes make it impossible. At this point, domestic and foreign tourism is adversely affected both on national and regional basis and even travels are interrupted in some places.

Compared to other regions in the world, the Middle East and West Asia region share a common past and combine various cultural elements. As a roof organization, UCLG-MEWA conducts its activities by bringing together the cities and local administrations on a regular basis and announcing the activities in the region both to its members and to the world through UCLG. Within this context, UCLG-MEWA aims to unite all the members in a pot by considering the culture as a unifying factor in the region rather than being a conflict area.

The area of UCLG-MEWA covers a difficult geography considering the policies of local governments in different countries. At this point, UCLG-MEWA, whose General Secretariat is located in Istanbul, plays a key role in becoming a mediator, providing confidence and expanding the scope of activities among the countries in the region. Within the framework of the cultural and tourism policies that have developed in the region and in the world, the local governments, which have a great treasure, stand out in cultural and touristic contexts and promote themselves and support the conduct of the SDGs in order to ensure the regular and systematic progress of these promotions, projects and collaborations.

Understanding of the roles and duties of local governments in tourism, developing common tourism policies and providing common intelligence and cooperation for establishing standards are important factors that accelerate both local development and country development.

These situations and challenges determine the main operating strategies of the committee; and to make new recommendations to the decision-makers in this regard by highlighting the importance of local governments' decisions and practices in ensuring the sustainable development of culture and tourism.

UCLG-MEWA and Cultural Policies

UCLG-MEWA's work area includes prehistoric archaeological sites, rocky art sites, ancient Greek heritage, Roman artifacts and pre-Islamic sites to modern cultural heritage sites. With this feature, the region is a junction point of cultural and tourism areas from East to West pointing to almost every important historical period.

Culture is a heritage that has been carried from past to present and which is important for societies in the common denominator. This heritage is both an activator and an administrator for the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development, ranging from cultural and creative industries to tourism and gastronomy.

The UCLG-MEWA Committee on Culture and Tourism, as a platform for its members in the initiation and implementation of programs and policies highlighting the role of culture in sustainable development; works to put forward the importance of the integral relationship between culture, tourism and sustainable development. It aims to promote culture, cultural diversity and tourism, which is one of the basic steps of sustainable development in spreading "**Agenda 21 for Culture**", locally and internationally.

The Committee aims to advocate for the cultural needs of the regional local governments and cities, to analyze the cultural problems globally, to develop projects among its members, to encourage the sharing of experiences by establishing a network and to develop mutual learning.

Priorities of the UCLG-MEWA Committee on Culture and Tourism

The priorities of the UCLG-MEWA Culture and Tourism Committee are as follows;

- Sustainable Development Goals; Making cities and human settlements embracing everyone, safe, strong and sustainable (Goal 11); Increasing efforts to preserve and protect the cultural and natural heritage of the world (Goal 11.4); It supports the promotion of peaceful and inclusive communities for sustainable development (Goal 16).
- To advocate for all committed areas of "Agenda 21 for Culture" and monitor the implementation by local authorities.
- To support the protection of and defense cultural diversity, which is the main heritage of humanity.
- To emphasize the importance of historical centers and their environment in the development of the region in the protection of cultural heritage in their programs and projects.
- To promote and defense cultural rights.
- To advocate the need for the development of Sustainable Tourism, which interacts with cultural ecosystems.
- To understand the roles and duties of local administrations in tourism, to develop common tourism policies and to establish common standards and collaborate.
- Travel and tourism is an advocate of the Global Ethics Principles in Tourism, which covers the economic, social, cultural and environmental components and is the main framework of sustainable tourism.

- To support the active participation of local people in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of public cultural policies.
- To encourage the culture of peace among its members by considering a peaceful solution to the internal and external conflicts of cities.
- To encourage committee members to refer national and international special days for the establishment of culture and peace in their activity programs.
- Since culture is in close interaction with the environment, social inclusion and governance; to develop policies and strategies in cooperation with the Committees on Environment, Local Governance and Social Inclusion.

At this point, UCLG-MEWA, one of UCLG's regional organizations, acts in coordination with UCLG World Organization in order to support culture and tourism within the Middle East and West Asia Region and works with its members to establish exemplary works and collaborations throughout the world.

Conclusion

This policy paper is intended to address the objectives, priorities and general policy of the UCLG-MEWA Committee on Culture and Tourism. UCLG-MEWA, which has 15 officially operating countries and is open to networking with local governments all over the world and advocating within the framework of SDGs in the global context, works with the Committee on Culture and Tourism under its body to raise awareness and to promote activities for culture and tourism in the local area.

UCLG-MEWA Committee on Culture and Tourism, considering the needs of local governments and cities in the region in terms of culture and tourism, aims to increase the visibility of the areas where these cities stand out in the international arena, to develop projects among its members by analyzing the problems globally, to encourage the sharing of experiences through networking and to improve mutual learning.