

Minister Plasterk;
Urban Envoy Beets
Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom
Relations
Postbus 20011
2500 EA Den Haag

7 April 2016,
Amsterdam

Dear Minister Plasterk,
Dear Urban envoy Beets,

The European Cultural Foundation, together with Pakhuis de Zwijger, Agora Europa, Alderman for Culture Amersfoort Mrs. Houweling, Leeuwarden – Fryslân European Capital of Culture 2018, Kunsten '92, Dutch Association of Public Libraries, Connected Action for the Commons, European Alternatives, Culture Action Europe, Eutropian and Rede DLBC LISBOA - welcome the leadership of the Dutch Presidency of the EU Council on the EU Urban Agenda.

We are taking this opportunity to highlight the **importance of embedding culture and participatory governance models involving citizens, local authorities and EU institutions in the EU Urban Agenda.**

Participatory governance models offer sustainable ways of working together to address some of the biggest challenges European cities and urban regions are facing. We have collected 23 inspiring models and practices in the [Build the City Manifesto \(2016\) that is herewith included](#). The evidence shows that through the participation of citizens and by co-creation, cities manage to turn abandoned places into vibrant, cultural community centers, manage to lower the rent of housing up to 50% by cooperative housing projects and be more sustainable in energy and food consumption. Culture contributes to social revitalisation of urban districts, brings dignity to communities but above all, it helps us to live together in our diverse communities. The growing number of incoming migrants and refugees increases the need to provide access to culture and informal learning as a means for connecting people, creating a shared identity and ensuring a safe environment for everyone. In the end people and communities are the social fabric of our societies.

To improve EU legislation and funding on the twelve urban issues, communities are valuable stakeholders as they are concretely dealing with

these topics. They have a wealth of knowledge to implement in the Action Plans.

Hence we appeal The Netherlands and other EU Member States to acknowledge and integrate culture and these participative governance models, to ensure the role of civil society organisations (CSO's), citizens and communities as equal partners and stakeholders in discussions and the implementation of the EU Urban Agenda via three concrete proposals.

Our three proposals are:

1. To include civil society organisations (CSOs), communities and citizens as stakeholders in the Pact of Amsterdam and the Partnerships, by

- creating **civil-public initiatives as part of the Partnerships as a model of good urban participative governance**. As the evidence of the practices in the *Build the City Manifesto* have shown civil-public partnerships have created a bigger impact on housing, sustainable use of land, urban poverty and more. By involving citizens and communities beyond traditional participation processes, they have become equal partners in decision-making (co-govern) and city planning (co-design). These civil-public initiatives create a broader support for implementation of EU regulation and decisions, provide better solutions as civil initiatives have a wealth of experience for the urgent urban issues and improves directly the democratic legitimacy of the European project.

Methods, tools and actions that can be used: cities would be the appropriate authority to bring in the expertise of the citizens in the Partnerships, as they are the direct link on local level. A combination of methods and tools can be used via participatory processes as for example: participatory workshops, site visits, focus groups, digital platforms, and so on.

- **Introduce a new theme for Partnerships: Co-creating the City - Urban Communities through Citizens Participation**. To acknowledge the increasing development of community-led initiatives in Europe and the important contribution of citizens to the urban challenges, this should be reflected in a specific partnership entitled Co-creating the City. This would create a testing ground and pilots for cities to strengthen citizens' involvement and their recognition as solid partners in the design, delivery and evaluation of the EU Urban Agenda. An effective mechanism could be the creation of civil-public partnerships, to be tested via this new theme.
- As the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) Opinion suggested, partnerships should have a **more balanced representation, with greater involvement on the part of CSO's, communities and**

citizens. The Pact of Amsterdam would benefit from greater clarity on two levels: firstly, how CSO's, citizens and communities will be selected or identified in the Partnerships, how they will be consulted and involved in the process of the Partnership, and how they will be part of the reporting back to the Urban Agenda Group? Secondly, we suggest adopting a larger share of representation of CSO's, citizens and communities in the Partnerships. The success of a Partnership will largely depend on the implementation on local level by CSO's and communities.

2. **Make culture a cross-cutting issue**

The draft Pact of Amsterdam notes that civil society together with the institutions shape the future of cultural quality of Urban Areas as well. Therefore the contribution of culture should be taken into account in the Partnerships in the transformation towards more sustainable, economic and socially inclusive cities and urban areas in Europe. This could be done by making culture part of the cross-cutting issues. As an example, the city of Solin (Croatia) has drafted a plan, in cooperation with students and citizens, to redevelop a disused quarry into a vibrant cultural space to be actively used by local residents. The city of Leeuwarden demonstrates how, as the European Capital of Culture 2018, cultural interventions are used to develop solutions to combat urban poverty, improve the quality of education and creating jobs and skills. The city's strategy includes bottom-up processes, led via the community, to reach these positive and transformative effects. This was also reflected by Leeuwarden in their proposals for city deals. Moreover the growing number of incoming migrants and refugees increases the need to provide access to culture as a means for connecting people, creating collective identity and ensuring a safe environment for everyone. Specifically the theme *inclusion of migrants and refugees*, can benefit from ensuring that culture is a key element in development.

3. **Embed evaluation and impact assessment**

It is important to develop a **balanced methodology, based on quantitative and qualitative methods for monitoring and evaluation** of the EU Urban Agenda. In order to assess the effectiveness of the partnerships, for example in relation to the inclusion of migrants and refugees, it will require a holistic approach to evaluation, reflecting the social impact (according to the EESC Opinion, social impact assessments are still lacking), and the spillover effects of culture on other areas.

We hope these proposals can be included in the Pact of Amsterdam to be signed on 30 May 2016 to make it not only effective but future-oriented and inspirational for cities and urban territories across Europe. The objectives will also be included in the *City Makers Agenda*, which will be presented by Pakhuis de Zwijger and Agora Europa to the EU Member States during the informal Ministers Meeting on May 30.

We have based our proposals not only on our own and partners' experience and evidence from the 23 collected practices, but as well as on previous declarations and reports as for example:

- **EESC Opinion on the future of the EU Urban Agenda seen from the perspective of civil society** (January 2016) underlining that: to formulate the most effective provisions, ensure public acceptance and achieve strategic goals is not possible without the support of local citizens and CSO's';
- **Riga Declaration**: calling for the use of participatory approaches, connecting EU strategies and policies with the local specificity and the citizens and to share good practices;
- **Draft opinion of the Committee of the Regions**: that modern governance based on an integrated approach is the key to solving problems in cities;
- **Own initiative report by MEP rapporteur Kerstin Westphal on the urban dimension in EU policies**: that models 'which improves multi-level cooperation, both vertical and horizontal, with governmental and non-governmental actors at local, regional, national and European level, thus bringing government closer to the citizens and improving the democratic legitimacy of the European project';
- **European Commission, DG Connect**, in the report on the future of cities in 2050 [Futurium]: Cities throughout Europe will compete among each other as places to be, developing their own forms of participatory citizenship to drive a continuous co-creation of the city-scape and its multicultural social fabric.

We remain at your disposal if you wish to discuss any of the above in more detail or would like to share some further thoughts, and look forward to your response and suggestions.

Yours sincerely,



Katherine Watson, Director [European Cultural Foundation](#)

And with the official support of:

[Pakhuis de Zwijger](#)

[Agora Europa](#)

Alderman of Culture Amersfoort, mrs. Houweling

[Leeuwarden – Fryslân, Europees culturele hoofdstad 2018](#)

[Kunsten '92 – Dutch Association for the Arts, Culture and Heritage](#)

[Vereniging van Openbare Bibliotheken](#)

[Connected Action for the Commons](#) – represented by Culture 2 Commons -

[Alliance Operation City](#), [Clubture Network](#), [Right to the City](#) – (Croatia),

[Les Tetes de l'Art](#) (France), [Krytyka Polityczna](#) (Poland), [Oberliht](#) (Moldova),

[Platoniq - Goteo](#) (Spain) and [Subtopia](#) (Sweden)

[European Alternatives](#)

[Culture Action Europe](#)

[Eutropian](#)

[Rede DLBC LISBOA](#)

And with the [European Economic and Social Committee](#) support as stated in their *Opinion*