



ResiliArt x Mondiacult 2022

Libraries enabling inclusive and meaningful access to culture

Report on Outcomes and Recommendations

Background

In the leadup to the **UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development (Mondiacult 2022)**, UNESCO invited a diverse range of stakeholders to host ResiliArt x Mondiacult events and report on key findings. This bottom-up approach makes space for a variety of voices from across the culture sector to share their perspective and highlight priorities to inform the Mondiacult 2022 agenda.

In February 2022, IFLA invited diverse library perspectives to take part in this process through participating the event, *ResiliArt x Mondiacult: Libraries enabling inclusive and meaningful access to culture*.

This report contains a summary of observations and recommendations that arose in IFLA's ResiliArt x Mondiacult event. These results were shared directly with UNESCO and will be considered in the Mondiacult 2022 planning process.

The full event can be accessed online here: [\[YouTube\]](#).

Panellists

- **Ariadna Matas**, Policy Advisor Europeana Foundation (Netherlands)
- **Hayford Siaw**, Executive Director, Ghana Library Authority (Ghana)
- **Jonathan Hernández Pérez**, Associated Researcher, Library and Information Institute (IIBI) at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), IFLA Governing Board member (Mexico)
- **Ry Moran**, Associate University Librarian – Reconciliation, University of Victoria, IFLA ACCH Member (Canada)
- **Virginia Vassar Aggrey**, Manager, Immigrant and Refugee Service Programmes, Denver Public Library (United States of America)

Needs and Policy Gaps

Culture-Education Linkages

The speakers all highlighted the critical need to **strengthen culture-education linkages**. Culture in the curriculum cannot be seen as a luxury – it connects people to one another, sparks their creativity, teaches valuable history, and develops a sense of meaning. Curricula should instill a

sense of global citizenship but avoid globalisation to the extent that local relevance and connection are lost. It should preserve identity while inspiring dialogue and multiculturalism.

- There is a need for education policy to strengthen **partnerships** between the culture sector and the education sector, including both formal and non-formal learning.
- Education does not happen in a classroom setting alone. There is a need to come together to **reimagine how and where education happens** and ensure that it is accessible, inclusive, and does not reinforce harmful power paradigms. Libraries have a key role in creating these learning communities.

Inclusivity

It was noted that the concept of “inclusive access” to culture is key.

- There is a need for cultural policy to ensure people are able to participate in cultural life in the **language of their creativity**, and that all people are given equal ground to participate.
- In policy, this needs to be reflected in linkages between cultural rights and **human rights frameworks**. This includes ensuring efforts to uphold cultural rights equally consider all other rights, such as those guaranteed by the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#).

Digital Connectivity

Addressing gaps in digital connectivity, content and competences is a central role for libraries to play in their communities.

- There is the need for governments to prioritise significant **development of connectivity infrastructure** to ensure that the unconnected can connect to an increasingly digital world.
- There is a need for **training** on digital competencies for learners of all ages.

Copyright Law

Addressing legal aspects of access to culture is an important part of promoting access to education, knowledge, research and culture for all.

- There is a need for modern and effective **copyright laws** that allow libraries to carry out their missions.
- There is a need to promote adoption of **open practices** in knowledge production and sharing.
- There is a need to strengthen international mechanisms such as the [Marrakesh Treaty](#) to benefit users with print disabilities and the libraries that serve them.

Digital Heritage

Libraries must be able to preserve their collections and make them accessible to their users. This calls into question additional legal matters related to digitisation and preservation of cultural heritage, access to e-books, and legal deposit of art works created with digital media.

- Policymakers must address gaps **in policies focussed on data**, ensuring that cultural information and data continues to be accessible, that it is interoperable, and that it can be used for research and public interest uses.
- There is a need to strengthen mechanisms to preserve and provide access to **digital heritage**, both digitised and born-digital material, for the long-term and in a variety of formats.
- This must also strive to uphold Article 31 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which guarantees indigenous peoples the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.

Addressing the Digital Divide

UNESCO was particularly interested in receiving recommendations for mechanisms that enable heritage/creativity to harness the digital transition and new technologies.

Any effort to utilise digital technologies to uphold cultural participation requires access to such technologies and the know-how to make use of them. Therefore, IFLA's debate largely considered the critical need to first address the digital divide.

The digital divide is greater than a lack of access to the internet. The digital divide is made of up **gaps in connectivity, content, and competences** – each of which must be addressed to ensure equitable and inclusive access to culture in the digital environment.

1. Policymakers should include library stakeholders in the creation of national digital connectivity plans.

Addressing the digital divide is increasingly becoming a central role for libraries to play in their communities. However, libraries and library professionals cannot be leaned on too heavily to provide these services alone. This function of libraries should be **integrated into cohesive national plans** on digital inclusion and digital literacy.

The first recommendation would be for this role of libraries to be recognised by policymakers, and for library stakeholders to be included in the elaboration of national plans on digital inclusion.

2. All stakeholders should consider public-private partnerships for connectivity.

The role of **public-private partnerships** in addressing the digital divide was noted as being successful in some cases in working to make digital literacy skills available to the population.

One speaker shared successful examples from Ghana, in which library authorities entered into partnerships with telecommunications companies such as Vodafone and MTN Group to carry out initiatives for increasing connectivity, as well as digital literacy training, through library services.

3. All stakeholders should consider lessons-learned regarding virtual and in-person barriers for participation.

During the pandemic, many institutions have gained a wealth of experience in adapting events to the virtual space. In terms of serving multicultural and multilingual communities, virtual events were noted to **lower barriers for participation** and enable more opportunities for translation services.

Access to digital cultural events also bypasses issues related to limited mobility and access to transportation for some marginalised communities.

Decisionmakers in institutions should prioritise exploring how future cultural programming can preserve these benefits, while also acknowledging the importance of in-person community-building.

4. Policymakers must address legal challenges to enable access to cultural heritage in the digital environment.

The digital transformation has expanded opportunities for research and mass analysis of data. It has made information more searchable, easier to find, more accessible, and more relevant for more audiences.

Digitised cultural heritage offers the possibility for people to access and learn from this material beyond the walls of the institution. However, as previously stated, there is a need to address the legal challenges associated with this access to enable access to cultural heritage in the digital environment.

There is a need for policymakers to recognise libraries as **trustworthy institutions**. A legal mechanism that allows libraries to **make copies and disseminate knowledge contained** in their collections is critical. Many copyright laws do not recognise the value of enabling libraries to preserve, curate, and disseminate their collections.

Moreover, there is a need for those who curate material to do so in liaison with those who created it. Concerned communities must be involved in decisions on how their material is being shared and used.

A rights-based approach must be baked into mechanisms of access, where cultural rights are upheld, but also rights such as those guaranteed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are respected.

5. Content creators and curators must ensure digital spaces reflect the multicultural and multilingual nature of our communities

Finally, the lack of **diversity in cultural expression** available online was noted. There must be a mechanism in place within the creation of digital content and selection of digital material for long-term

preservation that ensures technological progress serves **plurilingualism**. English is the dominate language in many internet spaces, and there must be concentrated effort to ensure digital spaces reflects the multicultural and multilingual nature of our communities.

It was noted that libraries are often connected with **creators in their communities** – offering space for YouTube creators to produce video, and for musicians and artists from the community to create and share their work.

With additional support, there could be scope for libraries to have a greater role in promoting and providing access to these diverse cultural expressions in the digital space.

Improving Cultural Infrastructure

Perhaps most relevant to the mission of libraries, UNESCO asked for ideas on how to improve cultural infrastructures and access to public space so diverse communities can equitably exercise their right to culture.

Libraries around the world offer **free-to-access public spaces**, which enable access to cultural expressions and heritage through the cultural events, programmes, exhibitions, and activities they organise. Wider recognition of libraries as **cultural hubs** in communities, and greater investment and support, can bolster their essential role in the cultural infrastructure.

In order to help libraries more effectively carry out this role, the following recommendations can be taken from this discussion:

1. There must be a **rights-based approach** integrated across all aspects of public policy, in which cultural rights are viewed as intersecting with all other aspects of public policy (education, urban planning, transportation infrastructure, and internet connectivity, for example). This must be seen in practice through the adoption of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People, and all other elements of the human rights framework, at both national and sub-national levels
2. There is a need to ensure that **non-formal learning spaces** are created to bolster participation in culture by reducing barriers, not by perpetuating harmful power dynamics. We must re-imagine how education happens and avoid the strict teacher-student dichotomy of a traditional classroom, looking instead at **equitable exchanges** in which all people have knowledge to share.
3. It was noted that traditionally marginalised communities may not have **transportation** to physically access cultural spaces. There are also discrepancies in the presence of public libraries between **urban and rural communities** and between capital and provincial regions. Online events can help provide access to virtual spaces, but there is a need to ensure physical access to cultural institutions for all communities.
4. Inclusivity and equitable access cannot be side-lined to a part-time or volunteer position within organisations and institutions. They must be **integrated** into all aspects of operation at all levels.
5. Capacity-building is needed to ensure **long-term preservation** of all types of cultural material (audio-visual, digitised, born-digital material). **Data-focussed policy** must be enacted to ensure that cultural information continues to be accessible, that data is interoperable, and that this material can be used for research and public interest uses.



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6. Library professionals must be among the stakeholders involved in **drafting and implementation of national plans** on education, cultural participation, and digital inclusion.
7. There is a need for more **research** on specific aspects of culture and their impact on social issues and sustainable development. This is necessary to ensure the value of culture for society is being acknowledged and understood by policymakers.
8. The many functions expected of library professional must be supported by ongoing **professional training opportunities**. Professional and continuing education for library professionals, specifically training to meet new and emerging challenges, is required to ensure that libraries can provide adequate services that meet evolving needs of their communities.

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