



Cooperatives are Key Stakeholders in advancing SDGs through the Culture and Creative Sector



A UNESCO Mondiacult 2022 side-event



26 SEPTEMBER - HYBRID EVENT

On the 26 September, the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) hosted a side-event at the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development - Mondiacult 2022 looking at how cooperatives are key stakeholders in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the culture and creative sector.

Leaders and practitioners active in cooperatives, culture, politics and education joined panels and discussions held in person (in Brussels, Belgium) and online, exploring the links between coops and culture, and how these links could be strengthened and developed for a sustainable future.

The event was co-organised by the International Organisation of Industrial and Service Cooperatives (CICOPA) and Cooperatives of the Americas, and designed with partners from around the world (see partners in the last page).



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1st PART | BRUSSELS

Martin Lowery

Chair, ICA Board Committee on the Cooperative Identity



Giuseppe Guerini

President, CECOP

The first part of the side-event was hosted from Brussels. **Martin Lowery**, Chair of the ICA Board Committee on the Cooperative Identity, said the side event originated at a session at the 33rd World Cooperative Congress in Seoul, Republic of Korea (2021) which looked at the idea of cooperative culture and safeguarding cultural heritage. “It was decided by the panellists themselves that there should be a connection to the Mondiacult 2022 programme – and here we are. This is the first literal action to be taken out of the Congress,” he said.

Lowery highlighted how the ILO’s definition of cooperatives – enshrined in the Promotion of Cooperatives Recommendation (no. 193) 2002 – describes them as a means to meet economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations, and spoke of the importance of supporting sustainable systems of governance for culture: “There is no question in my mind that one of the greatest governance systems available to humanity is cooperative governance, because it is for the people, of the people, by the people,” he said.

“What we hope to accomplish through this event is the ability to expand and deepen our institutional collaboration with UNESCO which we value highly, and to see more of these opportunities in the future,” he said.

Giuseppe Guerini, President of the European confederation of industrial and service cooperatives (CECOP), highlighted how “cooperative enterprises rise from the ability of people to imagine a new economy with the power of ideas,” adding that coops were born of cultural heritage. “It is no coincidence that cooperation started with philosophers like Robert Owen and Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen ... This is why I’m convinced that without a cultural element, coops lose their main characteristics.” These characteristics include how coop businesses are intergenerational, long-lasting and promote a “common good”, he said.

As a group of people coming together, “the coop business model is the best way to organise and run a creative industry,” Guerini added. “We believe coops are the best solution to overcome loneliness, to build identity and a sense of belonging ... There is no freedom without identity”.



KEY NOTE ADDRESS



Thomas Knubben

Institute of Cultural Management, University of
Education, Ludwigsburg, Germany

The keynote address was given by **Prof. Thomas Knubben** of the Institute of Cultural Management at the University of Education, Ludwigsburg, Germany, who took part in the panel on cooperative culture and heritage in Seoul. He introduced a series of theses on the subject, arguing that cooperation and concurrence are two fundamental poles of social organisation.

"In modern industrial and capitalist society, the principles of competition and concurrence, based on the idea of economic liberty, private property and inheritance laws, have held the upper hand over the spirit of cooperation ... there has been a lot of collateral damage," he said.

But in his view, cooperatives can repair this damage because "they are not just another form of business-making, they are a form of problem-solving". This is partly because they "represent goals, values and principles [which can answer] the multiple challenges of today".

Knubben highlighted the difference between "the culture of cooperatives and cooperatives for culture" and how they represent a "double identity of culture" – which in turn have three dimensions – micro (models and practices), meso (legislation, education, economics) and macro (wider social participation and benefit).

He believes that "cooperatives can offer important chances to safeguard cultural heritage and foster the creative sector". But, he warned, in comparison to other cooperative movements, "cooperatives of culture are quite young and new", and that to apply successes from the micro level to challenges at the macro level "we need to make more effort to learn what they can achieve in terms of advancing the SDGs through culture, and what can be learned from the experience of others. We have to establish further research."



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Round Table 1: Cooperatives and In/tangible Cultural Heritage

Moderator



Diana Dovgan
Secretary General,
CICOPA and CECOP



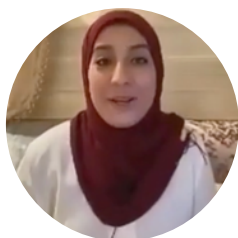
Korbinian März
Coordinator,
International Raiffeisen Union



Giovanna Barni
Co-President, Italian Alliance of
Cultural Cooperatives



Dinara Chochunbaeva
Expert, Central Asia Crafts Support
Association



Ouïam Aziz
Entrepreneur in the Argan sector



Faizal Khan
Registrar of
Cooperatives, Government of Fiji



George Oates
Executive Director, Flickr
Foundation

In the first panel, **Diana Dovgan**, Secretary General of CECOPA & CICOPA, chaired a discussion on cooperatives as a cultural heritage of humanity and their roles, responsibilities and potential in safeguarding other elements of in/tangible cultural heritage. "Cooperatives and culture are a perfect match, but we need to convince others," she said. "The purpose of culture is to survive through time and share stories of practice, history, tradition, skills and knowledge." Dovgan highlighted two particular cooperative characteristics that give them an advantage in this area: their intergenerational dimension ("this gives a long-term sustainable dimension that keeps the assets and the values alive in a community") and the fact they are community owned: "Culture is a community interest. Cooperatives unite different stakeholders that guarantee that the general interest is preserved."

Joining the panel from Germany was **Korbinian März**, Coordinator at the Secretariat General of the International Raiffeisen Union, who highlighted how his country's strong cooperative heritage was led by pioneers such as Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen and Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch, who were inspired by the Rochdale Pioneers and other practitioners to develop an idea of "self-help with entrepreneurship". "Now every fourth German is a member of a coop," he said. In 2016, the cooperative movement Germany used the momentum of the International Year of Cooperatives to successfully submit 'the idea and practice of organising shared interests in cooperatives' for inclusion in UNESCO's list of intangible cultural assets. "Although the application was initiated by Germany, it's a recognition for coops worldwide," März said. "But now we need to continue to advocate for the cooperative idea. Live it. Be active in it. Highlight it in the public sphere, and emphasise it in the press and in politics."



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Giovanna Barni is Co-President of the Italian Alliance of Cultural Cooperatives in Italy – one of the few countries with a national cooperative cultural body. Italy has almost 1,000 cooperatives active in cultural heritage and performing arts – which were all affected by COVID-19. The crisis had a “big impact on cultural organisations and workers,” she said, “but it also accelerated innovations to enhance the accessibility, sustainability and capability of the sector”. Partnerships played a key role here, Barni added, with advances made in collaborations between the producers and consumers of cooperative activities, and the development of public-private partnerships. She advocated for an international network of cultural cooperatives, and the export and replication of the Italian model.

From Kyrgyzstan, **Dinara Chochunbaeva**, from the Central Asia Crafts Support Association’s Resource Center, shared her experience as an expert on intangible cultural heritage and handicraft development. She described how the country had also successfully applied to UNESCO to inscribe two pieces of intangible cultural heritage: The art of making traditional Kyrgyz felt carpets (Ala-Kiyiz and Shyrdak) in 2012 and the art of making traditional Kyrgyz-Kazakh yurts in 2014. She described how cooperatives are involved in many parts of the handicraft process: “The craftsmen producing shyrdaks for local, tourist, and international markets are organised in coops, as are many of the sheep farmers who provide the wool for the felt,” she said. The yurts are often used by cooperatives. There are 525 coops in Kyrgyzstan.

Ouiam Aziz is an entrepreneur in the Argan sector. “In a previous life I worked for Cooperative Toudarte in Morocco that was mainly working with Argan oil, which is part of the cultural heritage of Morocco,” she said. Aziz witnessed how women in coops, often in rural areas, were supported through education, childcare and microloans, and wanted to address the issue of bringing even more value to the work of those women.

Faizal Khan – Registrar of Cooperatives and Acting Director of Department of MSME, Government of Fiji – shared how more than 90% of land in Fiji is community-owned and how the cooperative model is equivalent to local concepts of mutuality. “We are a small country,” he said, “but our culture and traditions have kept us going.” He gave the example of craftsmen and women keeping alive traditional crafts such as making wooden tanoa bowls, used for preparing and drinking kava, a local drink. An easy way to support such activities has been to make trademarks more accessible to crafters and microbusinesses, he said.

George Oates, research fellow at the Institute for cooperative digital economy at the New School in New York, and Executive Director, Flickr Foundation. Set up in 2004, the photo-sharing site Flickr.com is now home to tens of billions of images; the Flickr Foundation acts as steward. She described how Flickr has been referred to as a world heritage site: “It’s not an ancient monument, it’s being made in real time.” The challenge she sees is that major corporations are not social institutions. “The foundation’s goal is to work out to make the archive last for 100 years; it’s my suspicion that a cooperative approach will help us to achieve that,” she said.



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Round Table 2: Cooperatives in the Cultural and Creative Sector

Moderator



Iñigo Albizuri

President, CICOPA



Yvon Jadoul

Secretary General, Smart, Belgium



Francesca Martinelli

International Relations, Cooperative
Doc Servizi



Rebecca Harvey

Executive Editor, The Co-operative
News



Amrul Hakim

Co-Founder, SAMA Sejahtera Media
Cooperative

The second panel, moderated by **Iñigo Albizuri** (ICA Board Member; President of CICOPA and Global Head of Public Affairs at Mondragon Corporation in the Basque Country of Spain), was dedicated to cooperatives as a viable alternative with a proven track record for organising workers and professionals in the creative sector.

The in-person element held in Brussels was hosted by SMART Belgium, whose Secretary General, **Yvon Jadoul**, explained how SMART wasn't originally a coop but rather set up as a "not-for-profit organisation dedicated to providing help, support and solutions to creative sectors to formalise activities which were too often informal; 25 years later we are a coop with 33,000 members". Around 40% of these members are creative, but also active in other sectors; the cooperative tries to promote cross-sector partnerships and working practices.

Jadoul argued that from a functional point of view, the link between cooperatives and the commons was increasingly important and that, because of their shared values, these movements should "work together to combat the considerable forces of neoliberalism and capitalism". He believes that one of the reasons there are relatively few coops working in cultural sectors is the "strong competition in the cultural world to have the right to exist and develop your project" – which might be harder to achieve in a collective.



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Francesca Martinelli is a researcher and Institutional Communications and International Relations, at Cooperative Doc Servizi, Italy – the largest cooperative of professional show operators in the country, with over 6,000 members.

She explained how European workers in the entertainment, culture and creative industries began organising as cooperatives in the 1980s: "Usually they chose worker cooperatives, because there they can have the double role of members and workers." As members they keep a certain level of autonomy in the management of their daily activities; as workers, they also access the opportunity to share resources and responsibilities, obtain decent working conditions, have more sustainable careers, and become part of a community of peers.

Rebecca Harvey is Executive Editor at Co-operative News, UK, a multi stakeholder coop owned by individuals and organisations. "Our role is to amplify cooperative culture both internally and externally, so coops can learn from each other, and those outside the movement can learn about it too," she said.

She described how over the last decade, the 150-year-old publication has witnessed a significant growth in the number of stories about cultural cooperatives, as people started organising differently in response to crises. This includes media coops, who "have the freedom to investigate, comment and advocate on behalf of their members in a way that traditional media doesn't because of political or financial constraints." Her message to delegates was to "work more closely with journalists – cooperative and non-cooperative – who can help you share these stories of cooperative culture."

Also working with media is **Amrul Hakim**, Co-Founder of the SAMA Sejahtera Media Cooperative (KoSAMA), Indonesia. In his country, mainstream media is largely owned by conglomerates, funded by advertising and created for political interest.

"My friends and I co-founded the Indonesian Film Coop as many Indonesian communities are educated through films; through the cooperative we have the space and opportunity to be more creative," he said. They involve communities in the production process, screen films and take part in festivals – and also collaborate with other cooperatives, including the Blake House Film Coop in the UK.



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Reflections by cooperative leaders



Ariel Guarco
President, International
Cooperative Alliance



Graciela Fernández Quintas
President, Cooperatives of the
Americas

Ariel Guarco, ICA President, and **Graciela Fernández Quintas**, President of Cooperatives of the Americas, shared their thoughts on cooperation and cultural heritage.

“ICA is very proud to represent a movement with a good trajectory,” said Guarco. “Our model is a heritage that is useful for sustainable development and for us all.” He described how cooperative identity is linked to the capacity of putting ideas and practices at the service of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.

“It’s a very important topic for us, and also an opportunity for our movement to continue defending our identity,” he said. “We have a mandate to teach and inform our members of the value of cooperatives for a sustainable world. Through this event I expect to strengthen links with UNESCO and help to incorporate cooperative values in different levels of education systems. I’m glad we have this opportunity to put cooperatives on the spot.”

This was echoed by Fernandez, who said it was “important that we have visibility today”. She added that while the worldwide pandemic was a holistic crisis that is still here, “in the end it will make us stronger, even if it has consequences”. She described how COVID-19 had brought an “increase in inequality and will have implications for years [but it] also confirmed the resilience of cooperatives for rebuilding and recovery”.

She said: “We need to take care of our communities at the local and global levels. We need to listen, and spread our knowledge, including our ancestral knowledge. It’s important to create a culture of exchange and get to know other cultures.”



2nd PART | AMERICAS

Discussion 1: Education as the key to a better world



Danilo Salerno

Director, Cooperatives of the Americas



Erbin Crowell

Executive Director, Neighboring Food Cooperative Association

Opening the second part of the event, organised by Cooperatives of the Americas, the Director **Danilo Salerno** introduced the idea of how cooperative organisations contribute to the creation of culture and could foster sustainable development through education.

Erbin Crowell, Executive Director, Neighboring Food Cooperative Association (USA) described how he learned about cooperatives “not from Robert Owen, but from indigenous communities for the preservation of local environment and cultural traditions ... this alternative model for globalisation involved a high level of community engagement and education, and was a revelation to me.”

Crowell is part of the ICA’s Cooperative Identity Committee, and believes “democracy is not viable without a commitment to ongoing education”. He described how (Mondragon founder) José María Arizmendiarieta is credited with saying “Cooperativism is an economic movement that uses the methods of education” but that it can also be said that “Cooperativism is an education movement that uses the methods of economics”. Crowell said: “I’m going to take the liberty of amending Arizmendiarieta’s statement further: Cooperation is a cultural movement that uses the methods of cooperation to empower economic lives.”



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Discussion 2: Institutional efforts in promoting Principle 5 to safeguard cooperative culture



Fabiola Nader Motta

General Manager, Organization of
Brazilian Cooperatives



Javier Di Biase

President, Sancor Seguros
Foundation

Fabiola Nader Motta, General Manager, Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives (OCB), said that while “we know cooperatives prioritise people, decent work and a more sustainable future ... It is urgent for us to promote the benefits further. International organisations and governments must do more to grow cooperation as an economic model that puts people before capital. It’s up to us to bring forward cooperative identity.”

OCB is working with cooperative members and workers, society in general, and decision makers, to show the difference between coops and traditional companies. It runs social and environmental projects, cooperative business promotion through the Negocios Coop platform, and national awards to recognise the best practices of cooperatives. OCB also offers education opportunities through the Capacita coop website, with 30,000 people enrolled across 90 courses. Every year it presents the interests of cooperatives to the government, regardless of who is in power; and there is activity to help strengthen the use of the COOP Marque across the country. All this educational activity is paid for by a pot contributed to by all cooperatives from their net surplus, she said.

From Argentina, **Javier di Biase**, of Sancor Seguros Foundation, shared examples of how cooperatives supported the cultural and educational space, in sectors like education, road safety, environmental security, occupational health and hygiene and agriculture. He described how partnership work was important here, too: For example in February 2021, a cooperation agreement was reached with UNESCO’s Montevideo Office to develop joint actions and strengthen the work of both institutions, with special emphasis on the SDG 4 : Quality Education.



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Discussion 3: International Partnership to Advance the 5th, 6th and 7th Cooperative Principles



Neil Calvert

CEO, Cooperative College



Sarah Alldred

Head of International partnerships,
Cooperative College



Carlos González

Research and Project Officer,
Cooperatives of the Americas



Marcela Bautista Grimaldo

CNM and project representatives
from Chiapas



Dov Orian

CNM and project representatives
from Chiapas

The Cooperative College (UK) and ICA Americas shared examples of how they have collaborated to strengthen capacity and build cooperative resilience for the concern of the community and of the planet.

Neil Calvert, CEO, Cooperative College, introduced the organisation, whose 2022 strategy focuses on four areas: Cooperative learning (about cooperation and through cooperation); thought leadership; international cooperative development; and youth empowerment. “We are most effective when we work together in partnership,” he said.

Sarah Alldred, International Partnerships Manager at the Cooperative College, described the culture the organisation aims to build within its partnerships; “Enduring trust; unshakeable mutual respect; united belief; shared humility; nurturing generosity; and compassionate empathy are all vital,” she said, adding that together these create a cultural ecosystem of cooperation and trust.

She introduced the International Cooperative Working Group, a UK body set up in 2020 to represent major UK cooperative societies who work internationally. It coordinates discussions and shares information, and coordinates responses to global crises and ongoing development projects in line with cooperative principle 6.



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One such project is Resiliencia Cooperativa Mexico, which aims to strengthen the cooperative model and its culture through capacity building for women and youth; business development; cooperative marketing and communication solutions; and resilience to climate change. **Carlos González Blanco**, Project Development and Research Officer, Cooperatives of the Americas, described how the empowerment of women was an important part of the process.

“In some communities, women have to comply with roles as wives and mothers, and do not have the capacity or support to develop careers. We try to help cooperatives encourage roles for women,” he said. The project has run workshops on healthy economies and sustainable development with, for example, coffee producer cooperatives and coops active in ecotourism. “We want them to be empowered businesswomen and grow within the cooperatives.”

Marcela Bautista Grimaldo and Dov Orian, CNM (Mexico National Council) representatives from the Chiapas region, described how for them, cooperativism is an opportunity for development. “Chiapas is one of the regions suffering the most cases of poverty, and from the effects of climate change,” said Grimaldo. “We work with indigenous communities, women and displaced people to create new opportunities at the local level, especially for the most vulnerable ... cooperatives have great networks and reinforce social fabric.”

Orian explained how in Mexico, ecotourism networks are trying to work with an integrated approach. “We are looking at how to reinforce the business approach of activity, while reinforcing the essence of cooperatives.” This includes working with other organisations – such as the government of Chiapas – who are facilitating the use of infrastructure.



Cooperatives are Key Stakeholders in advancing SDGs through the Culture and Creative Sector



Panel Discussion: What does collaboration for cultural policies for sustainable development look like?

Moderator



Hagen Henry

Chairperson, ICA
Cooperative Law
Committee



Andrew Allimadi

Coordinator of Cooperative Issues,
UNDESA



Martin Lowery

Chair, ICA Board Committee on the
Cooperative Identity



Thomas Knubben

Institute of Cultural Management,
University of Education,
Ludwigsburg, Germany



Christine M Merkel

Member, UNESCO_EU Expert Facility
Creative Economy and Cultural
Policies



Guilherme Brady

Head, Family Farming Engagement
and Parliamentary Networks Unit,
FAO

Introducing the final session, **Hagen Henry**, Chair of the ICA Cooperative Law Committee, spoke about how the good practices that can be inferred the cooperative identity can be done so in such a way “that they require us to contribute to sustainable development”.

“But for cooperative identity to be successfully translated into legal rules and practices, the subject needs to be integrated into the education curriculum at all levels,” he said.

“If we want to have peace, we cannot allow ourselves to not work towards sustainable development. If we have no social justice there is no political stability, or peace. If we have no political stability, there is no economic security. If we have no economic stability, and then people just can’t listen to these nice ideas about sustainability and the environment.”

Martin Lowery (Chair, ICA Board Committee on the Cooperative Identity) summarised his takeaways from the day and how the event has revealed the potential of an extended relationship between UNESCO and cooperatives, particularly with the ICA. “We talked about cooperative culture. We talked about cooperative contributions to cultural heritage. We talked about cultural cooperatives themselves. And we talked about the role of education,” he said.

Lowery noted that the link between cooperatives and the commons had come up in several panels, and that discussions also “neatly related to a short version of UNESCO's purpose, which is peace and security through international cooperation in education, arts, sciences and culture”. “I'm very, very positively encouraged and influenced by what we learned today and the potential for stronger partnerships,” he said.



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Andrew Allimadi, Coordinator of Cooperative Issues, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, warned that the world is not on track to meet the UN's SDGs. "This was our common agenda that was supposed to be a wake-up call for the world," he said. "With conflicts, the climate emergency and other global crises, how can society even begin to address them?"

He described how UN Secretary-General António Guterres called for an increase in global solidarity and cooperation in response to global crises. "The reality is that we live in a world where the logic of cooperation and dialogue is the only path forward," Guterres said in an address to the UN General Assembly, explaining that no power or group alone can call the shots. "No major global challenge can be solved by a coalition of the willing. We need a coalition of the world."

Allimadi said this links directly back to cooperatives: "[Guterres] sees cooperation as the way we can work to a common agenda and is proposing holding a world global social summit in an attempt to restart a global pact [and develop an] inclusive mechanism aiming for a global common public good ... Cooperatives are a perfect example of how this can be done. The ICA's message needs to be amplified within the UN system."

Guilherme Brady, Head, Family Farming Engagement and Parliamentary Networks Unit, FAO, described how too often, agricultural areas are only seen as production spaces, not as spaces of life. "There is enormous cultural richness in rural areas, through folk music, festivals, arts, and food landscapes," he said, adding that "the recognition of cultural heritage can benefit populations in rural areas".

He gave UNESCO's Cooperative Cultural Heritage Systems project as an example of policy that can strengthen the livelihoods of communities, sustainability, family systems and landscape management.

Professor Knubben asserted the need to research and map cultural cooperatives in the world to argue better in the political sphere. He noted that although the cooperative movement is one of the biggest in the world, there is little data about it. Finally, he encouraged ICA and UNESCO to partner in that effort.

From her experience as a member of the UNESCO_EU expert facility to strengthen cultural governance in developing countries, **Christine M Merkel** encourages ICA for a sustained and strategic cooperation with UNESCO. "Mondiacult 2022 will be a turning point," she said, but warned that the time for cooperatives to act is now. "Don't be shy. There's no need to be defensive," she said.

As the Mondiacult Declaration sets a new calendar for a periodic forum of Ministers of Culture from 2025 onwards, Merkel supported the idea of developing an international networking platform among cultural cooperatives as a learning community. She also suggested ICA to seek accreditation as a competent advisory NGO to UNESCO's 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions as well as to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.



CLOSING REMARKS



Bruno Roelants
Director General, ICA



Stefania Marcone
Moderator, WCC 2021 Parallel
Session 1.4 on Cooperative Culture
and Cultural Heritage

Closing the event, ICA Director General, **Bruno Roelants** emphasised the trio of dimensions in cooperative definition, as enterprises meeting economic, social and cultural needs. He added that the event had highlighted how cooperatives and the ICA are not alone. “Once again we have seen the importance of the ICA, its sector and its outreach,” he said.

Stefania Marcone, who moderated the World Cooperative Congress 2021 Parallel Session on Cooperative Culture and Cultural Heritage which led to the Mondiacult 2022 side-event, stressed that cooperatives “cannot lose this opportunity to take this step forward.”

She said: “In Seoul we opened a path. Today we made a further step forward ... Now is the moment to make the voice of cooperators heard within the Mondiacult conference which will define the next year's cultural policies. It is also important to cooperate and collaborate to open new doors to sustainable development in which cooperatives active in the cultural sectors can make a difference.”

Marcone added it was important that the side-event had shared concrete examples from around the world, and said cooperatives were vital for the future of humanity: “[Coops] represent a pillar in any future people-centred sustainable development.”

“We are here to contribute to shaping the future of the world and the future of the cultural policies for the years to come,” she concluded, “but it is important to remember that on this path we are not alone.”



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A UNESCO Mondiacult 2022 side-event

Location



BRUSSELS

Smart Belgium | online



SAN JOSÉ

online

Partners

