

THE UNESCO Courier

July-September 2022



CULTURE: global public good

- Interview with Mexican actress Yalitza Aparicio
 - Nollywood's streaming romance
- Iceland: Giving new eyes to an old language
- Wijhat brings artistic projects to life in Beirut

OUR GUEST

Eka Kurniawan, Indonesian writer: "It would be great to live around people who read literature from across the world"



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Editorial

MONDIACULT 2022 – the World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development is part of a long-standing commitment by UNESCO to foster an inclusive dialogue on culture at all levels of society. As in 1982, MONDIACULT will once again be held in Mexico, where the buzzing intellectual and collaborative atmosphere led to a redefinition of the notion of culture. This broadened and deepened definition includes fundamental human rights, value systems, traditions and beliefs.

Forty years is not a long time, but it is long enough to allow us to look back at the public actions in favour of culture catalyzed by UNESCO over the past decades, as well as to look towards the future. The very purpose of MONDIACULT is to build cultural policies adapted to our time, given the immense challenges facing us – challenges that cannot be achieved without a renewal of global solidarity.

As the world gradually recovers from a pandemic not seen for over a century, something has irrevocably changed. The crisis has revealed the strong interdependence between our societies and has exposed both the gaps and the strengths in each sector. The cultural sector is still suffering from the effects of the health crisis, which disproportionately affected regions and creative areas. Covid-19 has had a particularly severe effect on women and has deepened gender inequalities. The crisis has exposed a number of fault lines, including the total disruption of tourism, the looting of archaeological sites, the casual nature of cultural employment, the precarity of the status of artist and of the business models of museums and cultural institutions, digital exclusion, and unequal access to cultural content. On the other hand, it has also vividly highlighted the impact of culture on every area of human development, from inclusion to education, from well-being to resilience, from dialogue to peacebuilding.

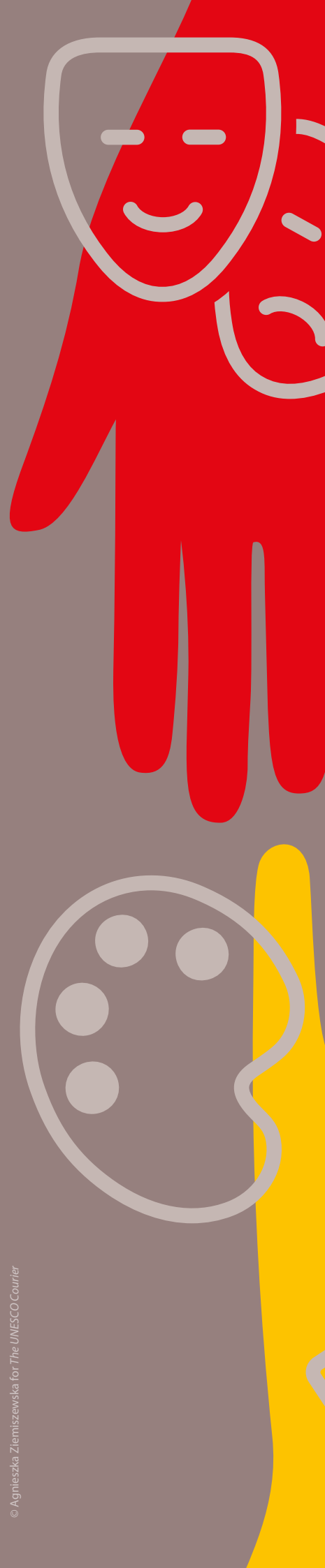
To coincide with MONDIACULT 2022, this issue of *The UNESCO Courier* presents some illustrations of the importance of culture as a vector for change in our increasingly interconnected and multicultural societies. The reality of these plural societies calls on us to develop public policies adapted to a variety of different contexts, to rethink the drivers of social cohesion and inclusion, of citizen participation and economic, social, and environmental development through culture. Our generation has a duty to renew the social contract and to accompany future generations in learning positively about cultural diversity, in all its complexity as well as in its capacity for enrichment. This generation must also ensure the transmission of knowledge, history and traditions through the preservation of heritage, and reinforce solidarity at all levels of our societies.




Culture is our most powerful global public good

Culture is what defines us in space and time – our past and present roots, our prospects. Culture is an inexhaustible and renewable resource, which adapts to changing contexts and which speaks to humans first and foremost through their capacity to imagine, create and innovate. Culture is our most powerful global public good. In the words of Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, culture has a role “as a desirable end in itself, as giving meaning to our existence”. Today, more than ever, we need to find meaning, we need universality, we need culture in all its diversity.

*Ernesto Ottone R.
Assistant Director-General
for Culture of UNESCO*



Culture, a global public good



In September 2022, Mexico will once again host the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies (MONDIACULT), forty years after the first conference in Mexico City in 1982. The discussions that have taken place over the past four decades have been particularly fruitful and have considerably changed the definition of culture, opening the way for the recognition of living heritage and the diversity of cultural expression. Beyond the profound impact of the health crisis on the cultural sector, the sector risks being threatened by new persistent challenges, from the effects of climate change on heritage to changes in the status of artists and the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural goods. These topics – and many others – will be centre-stage at the 2022 edition of MONDIACULT, which will also be an opportunity to reaffirm the place of culture as a global public good. This issue of the *Courier* explores the key role played by culture as a vector for resilience, inclusion and sustainability.



The first UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies, held in Mexico City in 1982, was a genuine turning point. It laid the groundwork, for decades to come, for the fundamental concept of the functional links between culture and the development of societies. And alongside the growing material manifestations of culture grew their interdependence with immaterial expressions. This in turn opened the way for the protection of all the manifestations of culture that punctuate our ways of life, and through which knowledge and values are transmitted from one generation to the next.

This broader concept led to the [UNESCO Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore](#) (1989) and opened up the field of human heritage to “living culture” and to synergies with other fields of development, such as well-being and education. Languages, music, dance, rituals and crafts are now included in the field of culture, while their socio-economic importance is increasingly gaining recognition. As the embodiment of the collective memory of communities, this living and evolving heritage strengthens the sense of identity and belonging, as well as resilience and the ability to project oneself into the future.

Link between culture and development

Considered as a mirror of the evolution of societies, culture has progressively been integrated into the international agenda, while its role in sustainable development and the defence of human

rights is increasingly recognized, notably through its contribution to social cohesion, employment and innovation. The promotion of cultural diversity in the 1990s stimulated a revitalization of creative resources, centred around the idea that development efforts have often failed due to the omission or neglect of the human element – the complex web of relationships and beliefs, the variety of values and aspirations, creative expression and imagination. This new impetus draws on the capacity of culture to expand “people’s choices ... individual opportunities for being healthy, educated, productive, creative and enjoying self-respect and human rights” (*Our Creative Diversity*, 1996).

The [UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity](#), adopted in 2001, was a milestone in reaffirming the indivisible link between culture and development. The principles of the Declaration have inspired a series of normative texts, adopted by UNESCO Member States, which have extended the scope of culture

to the [protection of underwater cultural heritage](#) (2001), the [safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage](#) (2003), the [protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions](#) (2005) and the [conservation of historic urban landscapes](#) (2011). Another step forward was the adoption of the [Declaration concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage](#) in October 2003.

Recreating social links

This evolution in the appreciation of the role of culture is not purely conceptual. In 2004, during the reconstruction of the [Mostar Bridge](#), destroyed in 1993 during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the challenge was not only to restore a monument, but also to overcome the collective trauma by involving the various cultural, ethnic and religious communities in the reconstruction. The Dayton Peace Accords (1995), which put an end to the fighting in Bosnia and Herzegovina, included a section on the protection of cultural heritage in their provisions on respect for human rights. For the first time, cultural heritage was recognized as a fundamental element in peacebuilding.

More recently, in 2014, UNESCO’s vast project in Timbuktu (Mali) on the [reconstruction of destroyed mausoleums](#) and the conservation of ancient manuscripts illustrated once again the need to integrate culture into peace efforts. The support for the reconstruction of the city of Mosul in Iraq, in the framework of the UNESCO project “[Reviving the Spirit of Mosul](#)”, or the measures to [safeguard the cultural heritage and educational system of Beirut](#) in Lebanon, coordinated by UNESCO, are



COVID-19 cost the world’s cultural and creative industries an estimated **US\$750 billion** in 2020 alone

 Source : *ReShaping Policies for Creativity*, UNESCO, 2022

The creative and cultural sectors account for **6.2% of all work** across the globe



 Source : *ReShaping Policies for Creativity*, UNESCO, 2022

examples of initiatives aimed at enabling communities to recreate social links through the reconstruction of historical monuments and entire neighbourhoods.

The rise of globalization

Over the years, from one international conference on cultural policies to another, other themes have emerged. At the 1998 conference in Stockholm (Sweden), in a context characterized by rapid growth of globalization, topics such as access to culture, freedom of expression, participatory governance and the trade in cultural products came to the fore. The development of digital technologies was beginning to profoundly change cultural consumption and distribution. But, while these new technologies allow unprecedented access to content – leading to a boom in cultural and creative industries – they also come with challenges, such as the deregulation of markets, the need for more equitable remuneration for artists and cultural professionals, economic concentration, the digital divide, and cultural normalization. These are issues that remain highly topical.

The future of our societies is now being played out on a global scale. Mass

tourism, uncontrolled urban growth and the effects of climate change threaten a number of emblematic sites inscribed on the World Heritage List, whether it is Venice and its lagoon, the rice terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras, the Galapagos Islands (Ecuador), the Great Barrier Reef in Australia or the Forest of the Cedars of God (Horsh Arz el-Rab) in Lebanon.

Rethinking our relationship with the world

During the COVID-19 crisis, culture demonstrated its capacity for adaptation and resilience, highlighting solidarity within the sector and across other fields, such as the economy, health and education, during times of lockdown. However, it also highlighted the persistent fragilities of the cultural sector, urging us to rethink its core foundations.


The concepts forged over the past forty years also provide a conceptual foundation for UNESCO's normative and programming work. In the wake of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and beyond, UNESCO must take on a key role, leading the international dialogue on emerging challenges. Issues such as cultural diplomacy, the fight against illicit

trafficking in cultural property and return and restitution of these properties to their countries of origin, the status of the artist, freedom of expression, creative economy, the impact of digital transformation, sustainable cultural tourism, and the role of culture in climate action will be centre-stage in discussions at the [Mexico Conference](#). Its objective is not only to clarify our future action, but also to reposition culture as a global public good.

“

The role of culture in sustainable development is increasingly recognized

Access to culture – including online – must be ensured to all, cultural diversity as part of the global commons must be safeguarded, and full cultural rights must be guaranteed in the face of new challenges. To address these imperatives, local and national commitments need to be accompanied by a global and concerted effort by the international community as a whole. To build inclusive and supportive societies, it is essential to acknowledge the transformative role of culture as a global good. It is vital to take culture fully into account when designing this new social contract. Culture is our reservoir of meaning, our creative energy; it forges our sense of belonging, frees our imagination, our power of innovation and our commitment towards a more sustainable future for the benefit of all humanity. ■



The number 1 barrier to creative collaboration is the lack of funding



4 out of 10 heads of arts and cultural councils are women

In *The Tracker: Culture & Public Policy*, UNESCO reviews emerging issues and debates around culture for sustainable development, a topic at the heart of the MONDIACULT 2022 Conference.

Yalitza Aparicio:

“More needs to be done to improve diversity in film”

A sunny presence in Alfonso Cuarón’s film *Roma*, which won three Oscars in 2019, Mexican actress Yalitza Aparicio is a socially committed woman. A UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Indigenous Peoples since 2019, she also supports the UN campaign, “I say NO to racism” and contributes to the work of the Mexican Commission for the Defence and Promotion of Human Rights. In parallel, she works to raise funds for schools in her hometown of Tlaxiaco, convinced that education is key to fostering diversity.

Following your Oscar nomination, you became a spokesperson for the demands of indigenous peoples. How did this commitment come about? How does it manifest itself on the ground?

My fight for the recognition of indigenous peoples didn’t start overnight – it has always been with me. I had long understood that very few people are aware of the diversity of society, mainly because of the lack of presence and plurality of indigenous peoples in various places of power and in the media. So when I had the opportunity to share this feeling with the rest of society, I did not hesitate to do so, because positive change in society requires the support of everyone. It is a team effort.

In recent years, the film industry has been criticized for its lack of diversity. Do you think that attitudes are changing?

For many years, indigenous people were treated by the film industry in a very stereotypical way. Over time, however, society has begun to realize how important it is that indigenous peoples and other agents of cultural diversity are better represented. As role models, they promote inclusion through their stories and are seen as change agents. This industry has

its own norms, but we have started to break down some of the barriers by exposing prejudice and offering a more inclusive vision through concrete actions. However, we still have a long way to go to change things.

“

Positive change in society requires the support of everyone



▼ Yalitza Aparicio at her nomination ceremony as UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for the indigenous peoples, in October 2019 in Paris.



What would the cultural industries gain from being more open to indigenous cultures?

A better representation of these cultures would allow people to better understand our identity and the cultural richness that exists in the four corners of the world, as each culture is a world to be discovered. Also, greater openness would help us to develop a society that is open to change and more inclusive, not only in discourse but also in everyday life.

What are the main obstacles to the visibility of indigenous peoples?

It is undoubtedly the lack of tolerance and respect for diversity, which we see in attitudes such as discrimination based on dress, skin colour or a certain type of physiognomy. The visibility of indigenous peoples is also hampered by unequal opportunities and a lack of awareness of their unique and authentic cultures.

Each culture is a world to be discovered

The lack of recognition of indigenous languages is another major obstacle, as it forces their speakers to express themselves in another language in order to integrate into society, while at the same time devaluing their mother tongue.

The culture of indigenous peoples is under threat. What can be done to preserve it?

In order to collectively preserve the cultural identity of each group, we need to prioritize education, as it is the only way to reach people at their deepest level and influence their development. But this education must be of high quality and give students the tools they need to take into account the diversity of society.

It is in the educational environment, whether school or university, that every child and young person can be made aware of cultural differences. Education can enable them to recognize, from their own world view, the uniqueness of each individual. ■

Aymara has not said its last word

Although widely spoken, the Aymara language shares many of the same vulnerabilities as other indigenous languages. But in recent years it has gained better recognition, which has led to political, cultural and technological progress.

Since May 2022, it has been possible to use Google Translate to translate Aymara. This is the newest technological advancement for the Aymara language, spoken by more than two million people in Bolivia, Chile and Peru. And it's not the only one. In recent years, mobile phone applications targeting the community have multiplied. "Killa" connects Aymara speakers with health personnel, whereas "Felisa Yanapiri" offers virtual assistance allowing Bolivian women to know their rights and escape the cycle of gender-based violence. In addition to helping the language to integrate into the technological world, such initiatives can stem its decline.

Aymara originates from the Andean region of Lake Titicaca, and is the third most widespread Amerindian language after Quechua and Guarani. Despite the large number of speakers, the situation of the language remains fragile and is symptomatic of the vulnerability of other indigenous languages. It is estimated that of the approximately 6,700 languages spoken in the world, more than 2,300 are threatened because they are not sufficiently practiced – and the majority of them are indigenous.

Speakers of indigenous languages tend to associate their disadvantaged social status with their culture and therefore often renounce their language in order to overcome discrimination. However, the loss of unique history, culture and environmental knowledge that occurs when a language dies is irreparable. To draw attention to the decline of indigenous languages and the need to preserve them, the United Nations has proclaimed the period between 2022 and 2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

As for the Aymara language, recent years have brought some signs of revival. It has now achieved formal status as an official language in Bolivia and Peru, which has resulted in better political and cultural recognition. In Peru, for instance, the public television station recently began broadcasting news in Quechua and Aymara, a first in the history of the country. Besides, in 2009 the intangible cultural heritage of Aymara communities in Bolivia, Chile and Peru was selected for the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices by the Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee of UNESCO.

Alwa, one of Bolivia's first rappers, represents a new generation that does not hesitate to affirm the regained dignity of indigenous peoples. Wearing the traditional *pollena*, an ample Bolivian skirt, and the black bowler hat *bombín*, the young girl, whose first name means "dawn", is about to release her first album following her success on Tiktok.

Nollywood's streaming romance

The Nigerian film industry produces approximately 2,500 films a year. With its rapid and low-cost production model, Nollywood has become one of the continent's most prolific cinema industries. Major digital platforms' interest has prompted a shift towards better-funded and more diversified content.

Nollywood is on the verge of an explosion. Several streaming platforms, the American company Netflix in particular, are courting local content creators. The Nigerian film industry is thus booming with projects and investments. Netflix, which launched with much fanfare and vigour in 2020, has already established itself as the leader in the industry, committing to original movies and shaping innovation and progress.

In December last year, Amazon Prime Video inked a multi-year agreement with Inkblot Studios, an African production company that has created some of Nigeria's biggest box office hits. It is the first licensing agreement the streamer has struck with an African production company. After the theatrical runs, Amazon will own the exclusive, worldwide rights for Inkblot's slate of releases.



Streaming has delivered on many promises, from access to capital and training courses to infrastructure contributions

The feeling in Lagos, Nigeria's commercial and creative hub, is upbeat. Filmmakers are feeling the boost of being connected to a global audience. Streaming has delivered on many promises, from access to capital and training courses to infrastructure contributions. In addition to galvanizing an audience tired of frequent visits to the movies, it has increased the choice of films available to consumers. "There's a shift in the types of films people make", says film director Imoh Umoren. "Now we are making more nicely framed shots, Mexican opera style movies... since we try to compete with shows on American channel HBO, we tend to emulate their style."

Meteoric rise

Nollywood has grown in leaps and bounds since the 1990s when it first emerged from the shadows. The Nigerian film industry quickly grew popular despite its shortcomings – early Nollywood was mainly characterized by its volume and weekly, low-budget releases. Critics complained about restrictive budgets, weak plots and repetitive dialogue.

Whereas the era turned out classics such as *Living in Bondage*, *Glamour Girls*, and *Nneka The Pretty Serpent*, the storylines tended to overlap, with recurring themes including relationship dramas, revenge, and explorations into voodoo.

Profit-driven filmmakers regularly churned out cheap, rushed movies, as the industry struggled with fast growth and

an insatiable demand for new content around the continent. In the early 2000s, Nollywood was producing up to 50 films per week, with an annual total of over 2,500 movies.

Most Nollywood movies were developed for the small screen and mainly viewed on DVD and video formats. Overproduction eventually led to market saturation. "When you have budget constraints like we did, you mainly tell drama, because drama is about people's lives", says Naz Onuzo, a co-founder of Inkblot.

Movie time

A change occurred in the early aughts when filmmakers began to take local production to the cinemas. This marked a turning point for the industry. From 2006, the Nigerian film industry began to create movies using an innovative approach to everything, all in a bid to rescue an ailing industry. The new wave was crystallized with *The Figurine* by Kunde Afolayan in Nigeria. Filmmakers – among them Afolayan, Chineze Anyaene, Obi Emelonye, Stephanie Linus, Jeta Amata and Mahmod Ali-Balogun – adopted a different marketing strategy to bolster filmmaker finances. This new strategy brought Nollywood back to the cinemas.

With cinemas, Nigerian filmmakers could attract a primarily urban middle class audience. Consequently, Nollywood entered the golden age of movie premieres and extended marketing campaigns throughout the continent.



▼ Idumota market, the nerve center of Nigerian film distribution in the 2000s.

This change came with its challenges. Nigeria – with a population of over 200 million people – had only 77 cinema screens in 2020, as indicated in the UNESCO report *The African film Industry: trends, challenges and opportunities for growth* (2021). Most of them are located in major cities. It's also still considered a luxury to go to the movies in a country where 40 per cent of the entire population live below the poverty line.

The control that certain power holders exert over film distribution poses another obstacle. Filmmakers in Nigeria have to navigate the cinema industry politics to get their films accepted and shown across the country. In 2021, a veteran filmmaker, Mildred Okwo had her movie, *La Femme Anjola* pulled from prime cinema locations owned by FilmHouse Cinema, the largest cinema franchise in Nigeria. "FilmHouse has removed us from all cinemas... I guess it is to make way for their new film. It is their cinema and they will do with it what they please", Okwo wrote on Twitter.

Okwo's tweet incited an industry debate along several lines. FilmHouse

is affiliated with FilmOne, a production and distribution company. The sister companies provide screen owners the leverage to make films, distribute them and use their cinemas in strategic locations for bottomline priority. Due to their large market share, the best performing movies need ample showtime at FilmHouse. And to ensure that, filmmakers hustle to get FilmOne as distributors.

“
**For a population
of 200 million,
Nigeria has only
77 cinema screens
in 2020**”

In a predominantly conservative country, some films considered controversial may offend. In April 2014, the global hit, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, was banned for months. The movie examines the

Nigeria-Biafra Civil War, one of the most searing episodes in the nation's history.

Breath of fresh air

Streaming allows for greater freedom in this context. "It has given filmmakers hope to make more films, and at least we have something to bank on if you can't get into the cinemas", says Blessing Uzzi, a film director whose debut film, *No Man's Land* is due for release this year. "If the streaming companies had not been here, I wouldn't have made *No Man's Land* in Nigeria", she says.

The influx of capital from streaming giants presents a clear opportunity for filmmakers to expand their visions. With better access to capital, local producers can afford to dream a little, to create better films. The reverberations are already being felt. Nollywood has attracted its first one million dollar budget thanks to producer Editi Effiong's latest project, a political thriller titled *The Black Book*. Nigeria's drug trafficking gangs of the 1980s are featured in the film, which has yet to be released. ■

Iceland: Giving new eyes to an old language

When a multilingual writing workshop for women opened in an immigrant neighborhood of Reykjavik in 2015, no one could have quite predicted its impact. With the support of the capital of Iceland, a UNESCO Creative City of Literature, this initiative provided an unprecedented literary space for newcomers, which is still flourishing today.

Icelanders see themselves as a nation of poets and readers. The rocky North-Atlantic island of 360,000 inhabitants has a literary tradition stretching from the 13th century and such a resistant language that the classic viking Sagas can still be read without much difficulty. Books are the most common Christmas present and the number of new Icelandic titles published each year is impressive for such a small linguistic group. However, seclusion and linguistic protectionism have long kept immigrant writers away from the literary scene.

“When I first moved to Iceland, people of foreign origin didn’t have much room as writers. The few of us here tended to be tokenized”, explains Canadian-born poet and interdisciplinary artist Angela Rawlings who moved to Reykjavik early last decade. Yet the environment is changing rapidly, partially due to a multilingual writing lab facilitated by her.

“The first plant that colonizes a bare rock is moss”, says Angela and pulls up a notebook to sketch out her botanical allegory for the literary scene. “I think better when I write and draw at the same time”, she says, drafting a rock and threads of moss. “It takes a lot of moss to form good soil, in which primary succession plants can then take root.”

In 2015 Angela facilitated a five-month writing workshop, free and open to all women, regardless of their mother tongue. The organization of this multilingual writing laboratory

was one of the initiatives taken by Reykjavik as a [UNESCO Creative City of Literature](#). The capital of Iceland received this designation in 2011 for its active involvement in preserving and promoting literature, and as a result, also joined the [UNESCO Creative Cities Network](#). One of the city’s ambitions is to reach a more diverse audience by developing the literary scene.

Demographic trends

Even though Iceland is still a relatively homogenous nation, its population has changed drastically in the past few

decades. In the late 1990s only two per cent of the inhabitants were first or second generation immigrants. The inhabitants were still almost exclusively white, had traditional patronymic surnames ending with *-son* or *-dóttir*, and spoke Icelandic. A quarter of a century later the number of immigrants has risen to sixteen per cent. In terms of integration and representation in politics and culture, this rapid change has posed various challenges.

The multilingual writing lab was held at a library in Breiðholt, which is the most ethnically and linguistically diverse neighbourhood in Reykjavik. Women from



© Patrik Ontkovic

▼ Creative writing workshop facilitated by Polish author Ewa Marcinek in Reykjavik in June 2020.

ResiliArt: A global effort to support artists and culture

Precarious contracts, unstable working hours, random remuneration: even before the Covid-19 crisis, many artists across the world were struggling to make ends meet. The pandemic, however, has made matters in the creative economy worse.

That is why UNESCO launched [ResiliArt](#) in April 2020 – a global movement joined by cultural professionals worldwide that sheds light on the current state of creative industries through virtual discussions with artists and civil society. Themes include the financial consequences of the health crisis on creative professions; measures that various actors can put in place to support artists; how to develop cultural policies and funding models that adequately respond to crises, notably on the status of the artist.

So far, ResiliArt has been embraced by artists and cultural professionals in over 115 countries, fostering over 300 debates. It has generated a host of universal as well as regionally specific recommendations on consultative mechanisms involving civil society; expansion of investment and diversification of funding mechanisms for

cultural projects; fair remuneration of creators in the digital space and the repurposing of unused buildings as publicly accessible cultural infrastructures.

Launched during the pandemic, ResiliArt aims to ensure the continuity of conversations, data sharing, and advocacy efforts long after it subsides. The opinions and points of views expressed during sessions provide a crowd-sourced wealth of knowledge on resilience in the creative sector for governments, decision makers and the private sector to build resilience in the cultural and creative industries.

To inform the preparatory process of the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development, [MONDIACULT](#), taking place in September 2022, UNESCO is expanding the ResiliArt movement to gather inputs on the ever-evolving needs, gaps and opportunities on the ground. Under the title ResiliArt x MONDIACULT, more than 50 debates have been organized, gathering artists, cultural professionals, academics and activists to contribute to this historic moment for cultural policies.

all walks of life attended the event. Some were experienced writers, some were total beginners, some dreamed of publishing books, and others joined just for the fun of it. These 15 women speaking 22 different languages met weekly and shared their writing with each other. Angela admits that this linguistic diversity called for an untraditional approach to listening, reading and giving feedback. “There are ways of dealing with the sensorial materiality of text, where the focus isn’t on semantics or meaning-making.”

“

When I first moved to Iceland, people of foreign origin didn’t have much room as writers

One of the participants was Ewa Marcinek, originally from the city of Wroclaw in Poland. Following a breakup, she moved abroad and eventually settled in Reykjavik, where she found work in the service sector and struggled to learn the language. “I saw the workshop as an opportunity to be around like-minded women, and I felt welcome because I knew I could participate without speaking Icelandic”, she says.

Multilingual literary journal

In the end, the workshop was more than just a one-time event; it became a movement that still continues today. A strong community was created during the semester and many of the women kept meeting regularly after it ended. The collective soon started hosting poetry events under the name Ós (“river mouth” in Icelandic). Because they struggled to understand the local literary journals, all published in Icelandic, they simply founded their own, [Ós – The Journal](#). “We

asked ourselves: who will be interested in publishing texts in English or Polish or Spanish? And who is interested in the voices of female immigrants? We just felt that nothing would happen unless we’d do it ourselves”, says Ewa. Around 30 authors are published in each issue, so today, up to 180 writers have had their texts published in different languages.

Ós completely changed the literary scene for international newcomers in Iceland. Now they had a place to publish their work no matter their language. This was already the case when Venezuelan-born Helen Cova arrived. She had fallen in love while on a holiday in Iceland, and decided to move to the small Nordic island and get married. Being a writer had been a dream of hers in Caracas, but she had never considered it as a viable career option. When she told some Icelandic friends about her idea for a children’s book she was immediately pointed towards Ós, this multilingual platform and community of foreign immigrant writers.



"This made things a lot easier for me. Ós Pressan was already there, I didn't have to create it", Helen reflects through a webcam from her home in Flateyri, a fishing village of around 250 inhabitants located in the Western fjords. Thanks to Ós, she heard about a multilingual writing lab facilitated by Angela in 2019. It was a revelation to her to realize that mixing and exploring different languages, even broken Icelandic, was permitted. "As an immigrant you naturally tend to do this mixing, but it is important to realize that this is actually OK in literature. This is why these workshops are so valuable: they make you feel confident." Her surrealistic microstories were released last year under the title *Autosarcophagy, to eat oneself*. This was the first book published under the umbrella of Ós, written in English but also available translated in Icelandic.

“**Ós completely changed the literary scene for international newcomers in Iceland**”

Opening doors for the next generation

The face of Icelandic literature is changing. Books and collections by foreign-born writers without the traditional surnames are now published. More broadly, Icelandic music, theater, cinema and visual arts are becoming more diverse, more accents are being heard and people of colour can now make their voices heard. Angela says this is something to be celebrated: "It can give new eyes to a language that has such a long history, and it can extend its usage. More people are using Icelandic – and loving it."

Ewa goes further and says that the vitality of the culture is dependent on the inclusion of immigrants. "Culture and arts should reflect reality. A culture that

© Ós Pressan & Rubén Chumillas



▼ Cover of Ós – The Journal (n°6-2022), Icelandic literary magazine where foreign newcomers can publish their works, regardless of the language.

ignores 15 per cent of its population cannot thrive. Immigration should be seen as an opportunity: it is not a threat to the culture but an enrichment of it."

Her first poetry book, *Iceland Polished*, mixes English, Polish and Icelandic to describe the immigrant experience. Iceland's largest publishing house published the book earlier this year – making it one of the first books written by a Polish-Icelandic author in the country, despite the fact that Poles are the biggest

minority in Iceland. Ewa hopes that her example will inspire others. "If there is a Polish teenager out there who reads in the newspaper that a Polish author has been published, this can give them hope. That's why it is so important that these different texts and names are present in the cultural life." ■

Wijhat brings artistic projects to life in Beirut

Every year since 2017, this organization based in the Lebanese capital has helped dozens of creators from the Arab region realize their projects or perform abroad.

In the auditorium of the Tournesol theatre in Beirut, thunderous applause welcomes distinguished Lebanese director, Eliane Raheb, and Michel Jleilaty, the main character in her latest documentary *Miguel's War*. Around 200 spectators attend the screening of this Christian militiaman's story. His service with the Lebanese Forces ended in exile due to the civil war (1975-1990).

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Projects that go off the beaten track have a harder time convincing investors

Michel reveals his dark side as well as his traumas in this intimate story. “The character might be unique,” insists Eliane Raheb, “but the message is universal”, adding that she had difficulty financing the project. “In Lebanon, the cultural sector cannot really rely on public funding. This means that independent cinema has to look abroad for backing.” But projects that go off the beaten track or tackle sensitive subjects have a harder time convincing investors. “I used a lot of my own money to make the film”, she confides. “Then I turned to more progressive forms of funding, like the Wijhat grant.”



© Tarek Moukadem

▼ Thanks to a Wijhat grant, dancer Serge Moawad was able to stay at the Vaganova Academy in Saint Petersburg (Russian Federation).

Funded by the pan-Arab NGO Mawred, which is supported by private foundations and international players, such as the European Commission and the Swedish Art Council, Wijhat (“destinations” in Arabic) enables some thirty creators from the region to carry out projects each year. A scholarship worth €7,000 is awarded to the creators. “Our funding is aimed at all Arab artists without distinction, regardless of their discipline, their reputation, or their country of residence. Our objective is to enable them to spend time abroad”, explains Areej Abou Harb, the programme’s director. From Morocco to Egypt, the association seeks to promote cultural exchanges in the Arab world. “With wars in Syria and Yemen, instability in Iraq and the crisis in Lebanon, the creative world needs support more than ever”, she says in her Beirut office.

Economic crisis

Lebanese artists have been hard hit by the economic crisis, which has left many struggling to make a living from

their art in a country where the national currency has lost 95 per cent of its value in three years, and where the monthly minimum wage is now capped at US\$30 compared to US\$450 before 2019. This has devastated the local scene, while performing abroad can be like an obstacle course.

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The creative world needs support more than ever

Without the Wijhat grant, Fadia Loubani would never have been able to take her women’s theatre group to Denmark. The three-week overseas tour, last September, left a lasting impression on the actresses. “It was like a dream”,

smiles Hala, in her twenties. “What a chance to finally see something other than our daily routine!” As with the other actresses in the play, she comes from Bourj el Barajneh, a Palestinian refugee camp south of Beirut.

“Until the plane landed in Copenhagen, I couldn’t let myself believe it”, says Maha, in her fifties, with a leopard print scarf over her hair. “I was too afraid to be disappointed.” Solemnly entitled *This is Us*, the play relates their difficult daily lives. In the play, the six actresses talk about love, loneliness and the discrimination they suffer in a still very patriarchal society. One of them talks about the rejection of her community, as her husband suffers from schizophrenia. Another, a teacher, tells of her struggle for education and women’s emancipation. A third woman recounts the death of her husband from coronavirus as a result of not receiving medical care. “The audience was won over. When we cried, they cried with us. When we laughed, they laughed with us”, smiles Maha, still amazed that the



© Albaqer Jafeer

▼ Image from the documentary *Take me to the Cinema* (2021), directed by Albaqer Jafeer and produced with the support of Wijhat. With the story of a deserted Iraqi soldier finding shelter in abandoned cinemas, the film questions the future of cinema in the country.



▼ In her solo performance *Another Lover's Discourse*, artist and Wijhat grantee Riham Issac explores personal relationships in Arab societies.

troupe has sold out all over Denmark. "I didn't expect so many foreigners to be interested in our stories."

Making your dream come true

Not every project can be financed by Wijhat – an institution based abroad must first give the green light to host a troupe, an artist in residence, or to exhibit a work. The dancer Serge Moawad was thus able

to receive a grant to spend time at the prestigious Vaganova academy in Saint Petersburg, Russia, which enabled him to perfect his technique "with the best teachers in the world".

Coming from a modest family, he knew that the opportunities available to him were limited. "In Lebanon, there is no structure for professional ballet dancers. I was doing odd jobs to pay for my trips to Europe. That's how I was able to travel to Bucharest and Prague. But the

devaluation of the Lebanese pound made all this very difficult."

The 21-year-old now lives in Paris, where he has joined a dance company. "I would not be where I am today without my time in Saint Petersburg", says the curly-haired dancer, his face framed by thin glasses. "Thanks to Wijhat, I was able to make my dream come true." Serge dreams of returning to Lebanon one day to start a dance school "and pass my passion on to the next generation". ■

Professor at the School of Sociology at Soochow University, Wang Qin's research focuses on history and the development and use of information resources.

In Suzhou, the night belongs to cultural heritage

The city of Suzhou in eastern China is famous for its canals, bridges and classical gardens. Today it uses digital technology to leverage its rich cultural heritage and boost its economy. Since the launch of the “Gusu 20h30” initiative, visitors have been flocking to the site – not just during the daytime but also at night.

Customers served by busy vendors in traditional Chinese clothing; tourists immersing themselves in a myriad of products – the scene from the evening fair on Canglangting Street in the UNESCO Creative City of Suzhou is reminiscent of ancient Chinese paintings.

Located in Jiangsu Province, Suzhou possesses a rich architectural and artistic heritage that makes it an important tourist destination. The city is home to six UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage elements and two UNESCO World Heritage sites, including the [classical gardens of Suzhou](#) where the Canglang Pavilion is located. Inside the Pavilion, a live performance immerses spectators in the drama and delights of Shen Fu and Madame Yun, characters in Chinese writer Shen Fu's 200-year-old autobiography, *Six Records of a Floating Life*. The couple dressed in embroidered costumes of Suzhou silk strolls through the garden. Visitors get to follow them as they make tea, enjoy the moon, burn incense, arrange flowers, compose poems, listen to music and sing melodies.

Revisiting the classics

So far, the immersive adaption of the classic work has proved a great success: it has been performed around two hundred

times and attracted 25,000 viewers in less than two years since 2018, setting a national record for newly-adapted opera performances.

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The “Gusu 8:30 p.m.” initiative encourages the reinterpretation of the city's rich cultural heritage to attract visitors

Six Records of a Floating Life incorporates elements from Kun Qu Opera – a form of Chinese opera characterized by combination of song and recital and by a complex system of choreographic techniques, acrobatics and symbolic gestures – with the classical gardens of Suzhou and the city's ancient waterfront towns, such as Zhouzhuang and Tongli.

The performance provides a good example of the city's “Gusu 8:30 p.m.” initiative.

This initiative was launched by the Gusu District of Suzhou in December 2019 to encourage the reinterpretation of the city's rich cultural heritage, and to attract visitors through shows, tours, food, shopping, and so on. The aim is to boost Suzhou's nighttime economy and cultural and creative industries by extending the reach of cultural consumption and diversifying the offer, and subsequently, to create more jobs. Various stages of the cultural production chain are supported, including design, manufacturing, transportation, marketing and management.

Night tourism

The “Gusu 8:30 p.m.” initiative incorporates the rich cultural heritage into new, creative and often digital formats. Take, for instance, the “Neo Suzhou's Golden Age” night tour program, an interactive experience where pedestrian streets are brought to life by real-time interaction, holograms and lighting effects. Visitors get an insight into local culture and can find routes that combine food, accommodation, travel and entertainment.

Some 180,000 visitors attended the first performance night in April 2020, a success that helped to shore up the



▼ Nighttime view of the city of Suzhou.

economy in the aftermath of the Covid-19 outbreak.

The nighttime tourism program reproduces the prosperity of Suzhou as depicted in *Suzhou's Golden Age*, a famous genre painting from 1759. This first-grade cultural relic in China depicts street stores selling silk, musical instruments, tea and porcelain. Its ancient walls, rivers, streets and alleys still exist in Suzhou today, and they have become important cultural heritages of the city.

Dive into the heart of intangible cultural heritage

Efforts to showcase the city's cultural heritage are not only limited to its streets, they have moved into the digital realm as well.

For example, when browsing the channel of "Feiyiban" on the video-focused social networking service Douyin, viewers will find themselves absorbed in vivid demonstrations of cultural

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The success of the first performance night helped to shore up the economy in the aftermath of the Covid-19 outbreak

heritage as they discover the work of artisans who showcase the stitches of Suzhou embroidery and elaborate on the techniques involved. When playing the popular online game, *Honor of Kings*, players will see stitches distinctive to Suzhou embroidery incorporated into

the character designs. Similarly, when stepping into the digital experience hall of the Suzhou Museum, visitors have the possibility to encounter the Twenty-Four Solar Terms – the traditional Chinese lunar calendar created by farmers, listed as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage – with all their senses.

Examples such as these illustrate how a rich cultural heritage – and related economy – can be revitalized through out-of-the-box creativity and use of digital innovation. This concept has proven fruitful in Suzhou, whose nighttime economy has been greatly boosted. Over 11,000 companies were part of the nighttime activities by last September. In 2021, Suzhou's per capita spending on education, culture and entertainment climbed by 32.7 per cent compared to the previous year. ■

ZOOM



Vineet Vohra's New Delhi with a smile





In his relentless wanderings through the streets of his homeland, Indian photographer Vineet Vohra mischievously captures pictures that are as improbable as they are ephemeral. The vision of this celebrated master of street photography is in fact poles apart from the usual rehashed clichés of the Indian megapolis.

A self-proclaimed adept of serendipity with a gift for finding treasures by chance, Vohra's lens captures the quirky moments of everyday life – whether it's a billboard concealing a secret door, a rooster with a man's head, or a passer-by whose hat blends with the fruits of a market stall.

These unexpected, joyful encounters, gleaned by chance on street corners, are there for everyone to find, so long as they are paying attention. Vohra's images offer us a moment of respite, a gentle peek at the simple, the everyday, the banal, sublimated by his mastery of composition and perspective. "The photographer falls in love with a moment. It's up to him to seize that moment and capture it", he explains. Vineet Vohra pulls it off perfectly. ■

















© Courtesy of Refik Anadol Studio



▼ Piece from the series Unsupervised – Machine Hallucinations – MoMA Dreams by Turkish-American digital artist Refik Anadol. The series is produced by an Artificial Intelligence model that the artist trained with metadata from the Museum of Modern Art in New York. It will be made available to collectors as an NFT.

Art market goes crypto with NFTs

Over recent years, several record-breaking sales have established non-fongible tokens (NFTs) as the new black in the world of art. These secure, authenticated digital certificates allow the acquisition of virtual art, which means new income opportunities for artists and a greater interest in digital art among museums. But are we really witnessing a revolution, or a speculative bubble about to burst?

Most people outside the world of blockchain and crypto currencies probably first became aware of nonfungible tokens, or NFTs, in March 2021, when the auction house Christie's sold *Everydays – The First 5,000 Days*, a collage by an artist known as Beeple (his real name is Mike Winkelmann), for the eye-popping figure of US\$69 million.

The sale made Beeple – who had been unknown in the traditional art world – one of the most expensive living artists. It prompted baffled news headlines and unleashed a speculative frenzy on NFT platforms.

That gold rush still continues, despite the successive crashes that have affected the crypto currency market. But regardless of the market, NFTs have already had an impact on the course of art history. Many experts in digital art see the colossal price-tag for Beeple's work (which no NFT sale has since even come close to) as an extension of developments that can be traced back to the middle of the last century.

Turning point for digital art

"We were all taken by surprise by these high prices for NFTs, but we probably shouldn't have been", said Alfred Weidinger, the director of the Oberösterreiches Landesmuseum in Linz, in Austria. "Digital art is nothing new.

There has been a continual development, and even NFTs have been around for some time."



**Tokenization
is a way to turn
a digital artwork
into a unique
object**

One of the museums Weidinger oversees, the Francisco Carolinum in Linz, is celebrating the 95th birthday of Herbert W. Franke, a trailblazer of computer art, with an exhibition – and an NFT "drop" (sale) to benefit his foundation. This Austrian precursor, who is also a science fiction writer and a physicist, produced abstract algorithmic art on a computer as early as the 1960s.

It is important to understand that NFTs are not, in themselves, artworks. An NFT is simply a token, or a certificate, with a unique code secured by a blockchain protocol – a data storage and transmission technology designed to be transparent and secure at the same time. The most commonly used protocol is Ethereum. An NFT can be attached to

any form of information: a deed of home ownership, a ticket for a concert, an internet meme, or a photo of your cat. Or even a social media post – days after the Beeple sale, crypto entrepreneur Sina Estavi paid US\$2.9 million for an NFT of Twitter chief executive Jack Dorsey's first tweet. (Estavi tried to resell it for a vast profit a year later, and failed: the highest bid was US\$6,800.)

Unique objects for collectors

The application of NFTs to the art world, though, has stirred the most interest. From an artist's point of view, tokenization is a way to turn a digital artwork, which is otherwise infinitely replicable, into a unique object that as such, can be sold and collected. This has already had far-reaching consequences, opening a world of new opportunities for artists working in the digital field.

"NFTs are an amazing tool for artists", said Dirk Boll, the European president of Christie's Auction House in Europe and the Middle East. He likens the advent of NFT technology to the introduction of home glass-blowing equipment in the 1960s. "There was a huge release of creativity in glass art", Boll said. "This is a comparable moment for digital art."

Quantum, produced in 2014 by American artist Kevin McCoy, is considered the very first NFT. The project



was developed in collaboration with the technologist Anil Dash and Rhizome, an organization affiliated with the New Museum for Contemporary Art in New York. Among the earliest collectible works are *CryptoPunks*, a set of 10,000 pixelated characters created in 2017 by Matt Hall and John Watkinson.

Established digital artists such as Refik Anadol, Kevin Abosch and Nancy Baker Cahill have embraced NFT technology. With his *Rocket Factory*, the space-focused American artist Tom Sachs has invited collectors to purchase an NFT of a part of a digital rocket. A physical rocket will be launched simultaneously: if it is recovered, the owner of the NFT will also receive the real thing.

Digital natives rush in

NFTs have opened the art world to new audiences. The generation of digital natives who are buying them have a different demographic background from collectors who visit auction houses and galleries. Many enter the NFT world via computer games and crypto currencies – hence the huge value placed on the work by Beeple, an artist with a background in animation and graphic design who often satirizes the tech world and peppers his art with references to popular internet culture.

The market for NFTs is still not for the fainthearted, fuelled largely, as Boll put it, “by people with crypto money who don’t know what to do with it”. It is “radically more rife with speculation” than the analog market, wrote Marc Spiegler, the global director of Art Basel, an international art fair organized annually in Basel, Switzerland, in his foreword to the fair’s 2022 Art Market Report. The exceptional growth in value in 2021 was “driven by short-term trading,” he said, adding that “on average, art NFTs are owned for just over a month before being resold”.



The NFT market is more rife with speculation than the analog market

The total market value of NFTs in 2021 was almost US\$18 billion, according to data from the website nonfungible.com. Of that, US\$2.6 billion was related to art. In the first quarter of this year, the volume of trades dropped slightly. A big test faced

the market in May 2022, when more than US\$300 billion was wiped out in three days as a result of a crypto-currency crash.

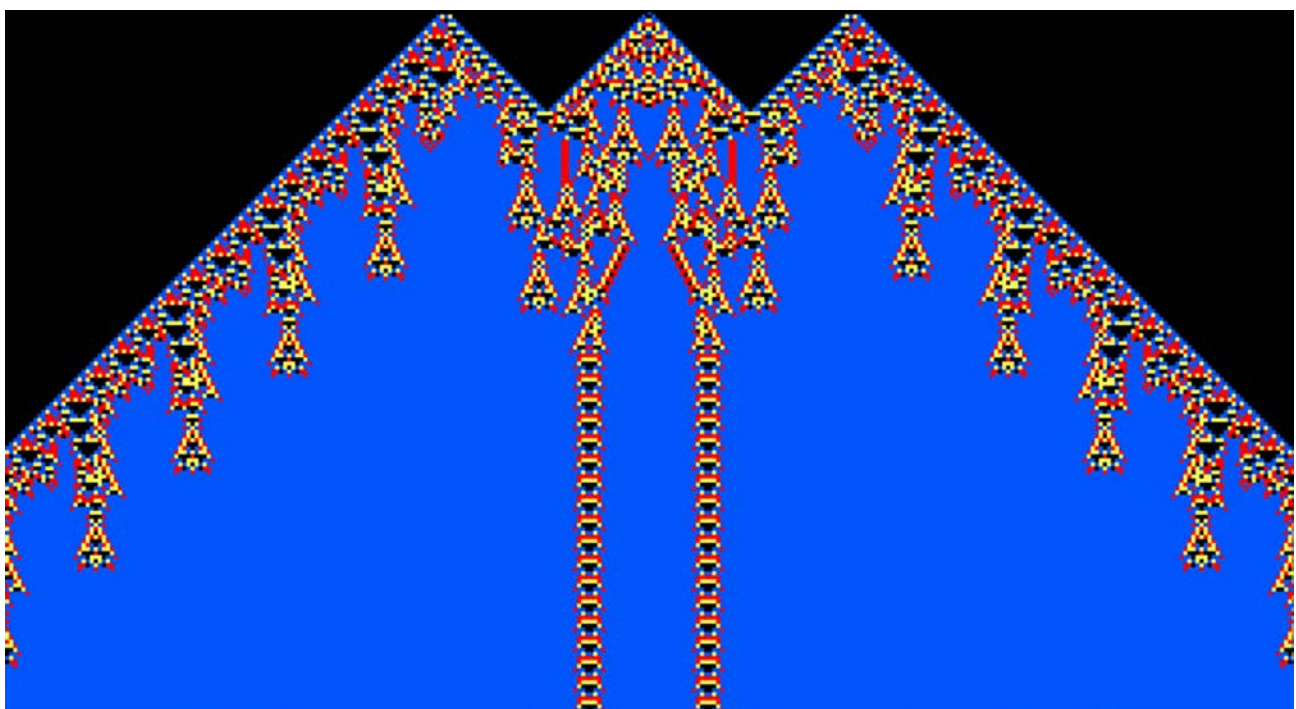
Moment of truth

That may, in turn, cause the market to mature, said Boll. “There will be a big moment of truth”, he said days before the crash. “People will understand that there are a few interesting pieces of art as NFTs and a gazillion that are not.”

Christie’s and Sotheby’s were quick to enter the NFT market. A few art galleries have followed – for instance, in August last year the König Galerie in Berlin launched MISA, which it described as “the first art world NFT platform”.

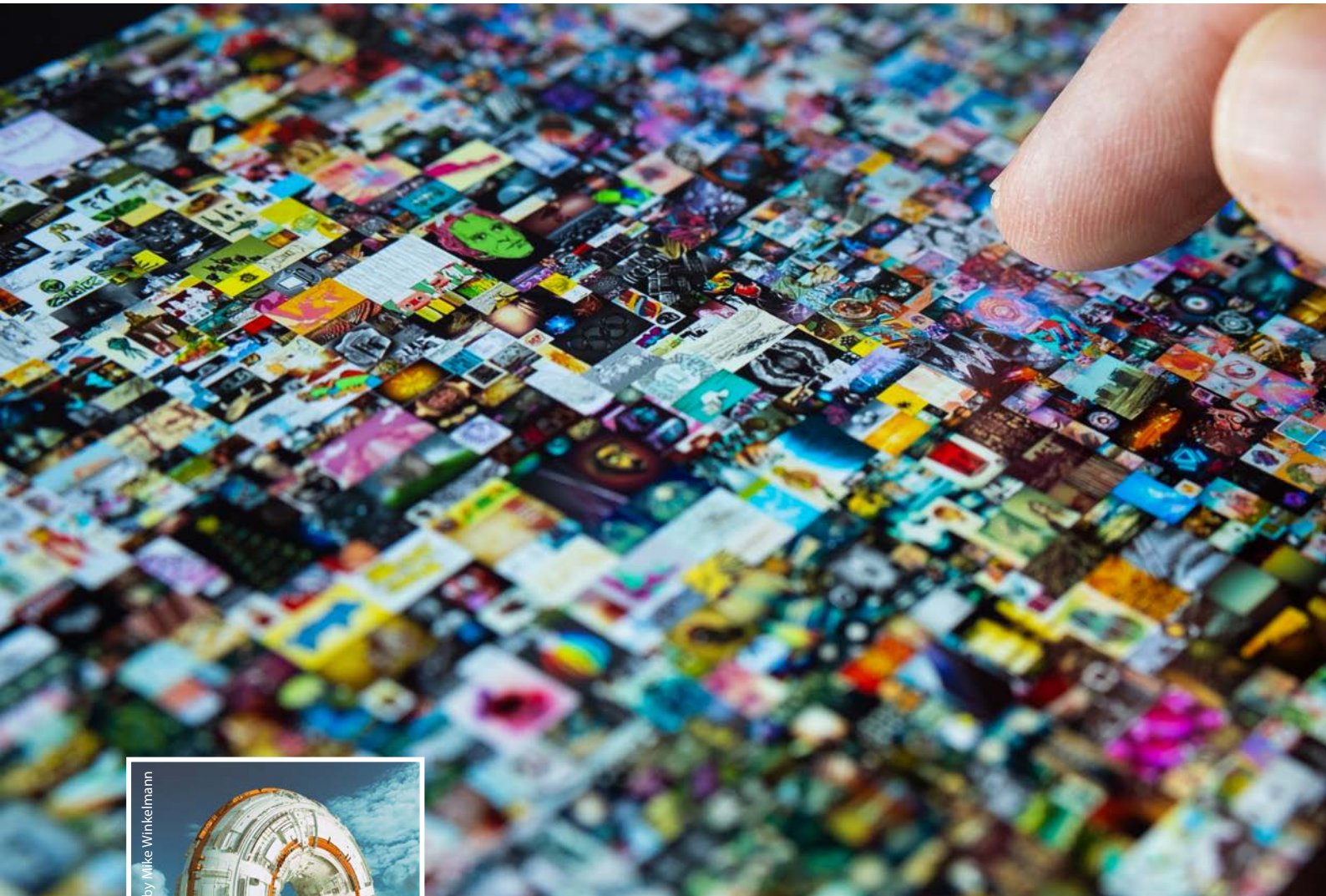
But there are plenty of obstacles for conventional art market players that have a duty to conduct due diligence. The owner of an NFT, unlike the owner of a physical artwork, does not have possession of it – instead it is located on a digital platform over which he or she has no control. What happens if the platform goes bankrupt? While the legal framework races to catch up with technology, there is much about the market that remains risky.

One of the biggest drawbacks is the carbon footprint of NFTs – estimates for carbon emissions caused by an NFT sale



▼ Cellular Automata (1992-1998) by Austrian artist Herbert W. Franke, one of the pioneers of computer art, as well as a science fiction writer and physicist.

© Herbert W. Franke / Archive art meets science



CC BY 4.0 by Mike Winkelmann

▼ Detail from *Everydays: The First 5,000 Days* consists of 5,000 digital drawings created by American artist Beeple at a rate of one per day for the purpose of improving his drawing and graphic skills. The certificate of ownership (NFT) of this collage was sold for US\$69 million in 2021.

► One of the 5,000 images in Beeple's collage depicts a man facing a giant torus in an arid landscape.

on the Ethereum blockchain calculate them at about the same as those caused by a month of electricity use by a person living in the EU. More sustainable technology, however, is on the way, and some blockchains are already much more energy efficient. NFT advocates point out that the traditional art market is not more environmentally friendly, given the flights to trade fairs, exhibitions and biennials around the world, and the shipments of art from one continent to another.

Museums join the action

Museums also jumped on the NFT bandwagon, selling tokens of classic works to raise money in the cash-strapped pandemic-lockdown era. The Uffizi in Florence, for instance, sold an NFT

of Michelangelo's *Doni Tondo* last year for €140,000. But as Weidinger pointed out, this is not selling art. He likened such tokens to "fridge magnets".

Boll also described them as very expensive museum shop gadgets. "Museums are taking advantage of a certain window that will close, because people will realize it is not really interesting", he said. "They are striking while the iron is hot."

That window may already be closing: Vienna's Belvedere offered 10,000 NFTs featuring fragments of Gustav Klimt's *Kiss on Valentine's Day* this year. Less than a quarter had been sold by early May, according to local press reports. Those trading in the secondary market were priced lower than the initial price-tag of €1,850.

Few museums have purchased NFTs of digital art for their own collections, Weidinger said. However, his museum is the only one in Austria to have acquired them. Another notable exception is the ZKM (Centre for Art and Media) in Karlsruhe, which purchased NFTs back in 2017, four years before the Beeple sale, and is now showing them in an exhibition called "[Crypto Art: It's Not About Money](#)".

Yet it was money – in vast quantities – that first brought NFTs to the attention of the general public. The Beeple sale, Weidinger said, served as a wake-up call, meaning that finally "museums are catching up and doing their homework on digital art". ■

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**The novel is
a perfect form
to describe
a world**



▼ Eka Kurniawan in his home in Jakarta, Indonesia (spring 2022).

Eka Kurniawan:

“It would be great to live around people who read literature from across the world”

Since the publication of his first novel *Beauty Is a Wound* in 2002, Indonesian writer Eka Kurniawan has made himself a name internationally. Drawing on the myths and beliefs of his country while combining earthliness and poetry, magic and realism, his short stories have been translated into more than thirty languages.

You grew up in a village in Java, an island in the southwest of Indonesia. How did you develop an interest in literature? What kind of reader were you?

I lived with my maternal grandparents in a very remote village until I was ten years old. They were farmers, working mostly in paddy fields. I knew nothing about literature back then, but there was an old woman, a close relative of my grandmother, who used to tell weird and magical stories in our veranda to entertain children. I think that was the first time I became really interested in stories, and how people tell them. Later, I also got very into drama programmes on the radio.

My introduction to literature, in book form, took place when I moved to stay with my parents in Pangandaran, a small town on the coast of Java. I was in primary school and as a new kid in our neighbourhood, I had no friends. Luckily, there was a small ‘library’, a 1 by 1 metre kiosk near a bus station that lent cheap novels. I read a lot of horror and martial arts novels, sometimes crime and romance. Many of these were actually for adults, but the library owner didn’t care too much about my age. Even at that time, I started trying to write my own stories.

Where do you write?

I can write anywhere, as long as people let me write and don’t talk to me. In my early days as a writer, I used to write my short stories at my parents’ house, in the kitchen. My first novel was written in a rented room in Yogyakarta. I moved to Jakarta in 2003 and started writing my second novel by hand in a lined notebook while I was waiting to have lunch with my girlfriend. Nowadays I write my stuff at home, but sometimes I go to a coffee shop nearby and write there (as I am right now, answering these questions while waiting to pick up my daughter from school).



© Fransisca Angela for The UNESCO Courier

▼ Eka Kurniawan founded the Moooi Pustaka publishing house to bring foreign authors to Indonesian audiences.



You are also a journalist. How did the novel become the means through which you describe the world?

I was a journalist for a very short time, yes. I learned journalism at a university magazine, and then I was asked to write for another magazine wishing to publish long pieces we called 'literary journalism'. I read books in the same genre, such as *Hiroshima* by John Hersey and *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote. Even if I've been influenced by a lot of different sources, I've learned a lot from journalism. Particularly how to construct events as elements of stories. However, I stopped working as a journalist when the magazine ceased publication. I found a new job in a film production company, and I got back into writing novels and short stories in my free time. I think that the novel is a perfect form to describe a world, allowing me to construct stories with a mixed realistic approach – like in journalism – and a fantastical (sometimes weird) approach, influenced by cheap novels I read when I was a teenager, or the folktales the old woman used to tell when I was a kid.

Your first language is Sundanese but you write in Indonesian. What connection do you maintain to this language?

Actually, I almost never write in Sundanese (although I can write and read in it). Sundanese is the spoken language I use with my family, or some of my neighbours. Like many Indonesians in my generation, I started using Indonesian as early as in first grade in primary school since it's the official language in schools and offices. So, for me, Indonesian is a written language from the very beginning, and therefore I didn't have to convert my thinking when I started writing. Moreover, in Pangandaran, where I grew up, several languages are spoken: Sundanese and Javanese. This made me familiar with the two languages, along with Indonesian, which sometimes serves as a bridge between people who don't understand either of the languages. As a writer, I sometimes borrow words or grammatical constructions from Sundanese (and Javanese) in case it works better in a sentence. In any case, it's my privilege to be able to do it.

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We could read García Márquez as if his works were situated in a tropical province in Indonesia!

Since the publication of your first novel, *Beauty Is a Wound*, your stories, which combine the magical and the bizarre, grace and dread, have often been compared to the magical realism of Gabriel García Márquez. Do you recognize yourself in this comparison?

I can understand the comparison. I read a lot of García Márquez's works when I was a university student, as well as other Latin American writers. In the late 1990s, there was plenty of interest in anything Latin American, particularly for political reasons. Students made comparisons between Suharto and military dictators from Latin America, the influence of religious leaders (Catholic and Islamic) in society, mystical cultures and poverty. There was so much similarity that we could read García Márquez or any other Latin American writer as if their works were situated in a tropical province in Indonesia!

In your second novel, *Man Tiger*, the main character, who brutally murders another person, blames his actions on the tiger that exists within him. Does this represent the animal within us? What is the role of myths in your writing?

In fact, it was not intended to be a psychological, Freudian story. But of course people can read it that way. To be honest, I wrote it as if it were real. In



© Francisca Angela for The UNESCO Courier



Indonesia, many people believe in such phenomena. Like I said earlier, I grew up with weird stories and mystical beliefs. However, I don't want my stories to be just mystical or fantastical. Although they have mystical elements, I want them to represent the world we live in, the problems and the politics we deal with, that is, the power of games. The mystical elements may seem familiar to my readers, which – I hope – make them curious, but also open the door to symbolism. For these reasons, the reader can consider the tiger in the novel as a symbol too.

You want to share your love of world literature to fellow Indonesians through Moooi Pustaka, an independent publishing house which translates foreign titles from their original languages into Indonesian. What motivates you to do this?

In recent years, my books have been published in many languages in a lot of countries, notably with small populations – some smaller than the city of Jakarta, which has more than ten

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**Sometimes
I wonder where
this interest
in my books
comes from,
me being a writer
from a far away
place**”

million inhabitants. Sometimes I wonder where this interest in my books comes from, me being a writer from a far away place, with a very different culture and even a different climate. I'm very jealous. It would be great, I think, to live around people who read literature from around the world. Whenever I travel, I visit local bookstores and every time I'm amazed by the diversity of translated books published.

This made me realize that I wanted to see the same diversity in Indonesia. Some editors have already done this job, and still do, but there are still a lot of interesting works to translate. Another issue is that a lot of books are translated from English, no matter what the original language is. For me,

this creates a bias since publishers from the US and the UK filter what kind of literature can be read. I think there needs to be an effort made to translate directly from the original, even if the work is not popular in English-speaking countries.

I talked with some of my friends about the possibility of creating a small publishing house focused on world literature. Recently, we made it happen. ■

State of play: Diversity of cultural expressions

Although the cultural and creative sphere is one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in the world, it suffers from a severe lack of investment, according to a UNESCO report, entitled, *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity: addressing culture as a global public good*, published in February, 2022.

Ten million jobs in cultural and creative industries worldwide were lost in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. And while the accelerated shift of cultural content and performances towards digital platforms is a clear trend that has emerged from the crisis, there is an urgent need to design fairer remuneration systems for artists whose content is consumed online.

CULTURE AND CREATIVITY

WHERE DO WE STAND?

Culture and creativity contribute to the global economy

3.1% of global GDP **6.2%** of all employment

The global Gross Value Added in the cultural and creative industries contracted by

US\$750 BILLION IN 2020.



10 MILLION
jobs were lost in culture and
creativity in 2020 globally.





MOBILITY

Artists, especially from developing countries, face challenges in accessing funding, visa, information, training and cultural infrastructure.



Passport-holders from **industrialized countries** can visit an average of **169 COUNTRIES** visa-free

Passport-holders from **developing countries** can visit only **86 COUNTRIES** visa-free



79% of international artist residencies are in **Europe and North America**

South-South mobility remains difficult in part due to poor regional connectivity

WHAT IS NEXT?

- Re-imagine mobility in more digitally accessible and sustainable ways
- Provide administrative support to artists, in addition to funding
- Ensure equal representation in mobility opportunities
- Improve support for intra-regional mobility among developing countries

DIVERSITY IN THE MEDIA

MONITORING GAPS AMONG STATES



48% monitor balanced gender representation in the media



51% monitor editorial independence of the media



54% monitor online media



59% monitor diversity in media ownership

WHAT IS NEXT?

- Limit concentration of media ownership, ensure transparency and support local media outlets
- Set targets for diverse representation on and off screen
- Financially support local creation to enable media outlets to comply with content quotas
- Invest in data collection and monitoring and evaluation of media systems

 Source: ReShaping Policies for Creativity, UNESCO, 2022

ONLINE CONTENT

Online activities are on the rise.

From 2016 to 2021, online activity has exploded:



62.1% OF TOTAL
MUSIC REVENUES

came from streaming in 2020

N

HOURS WATCHED ON NETFLIX

per minute went up from

69,444 to 584,222



HOURS LISTENED
ON SPOTIFY

per minute went up from

38,052 to 196,917

WHAT IS NEXT?

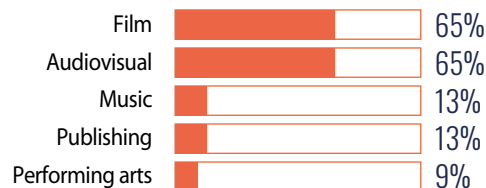
- Design business models that fairly remunerate creators online
- Invest in local content and enhance its discoverability on digital platforms



GENDER EQUALITY



Gender equality initiatives implemented by governments and civil society organizations (progress by sector):



Representation of women remains low in:



32%
National art prizes



33%
Film awards



8%
Conductor performances



25%
DJ performances



30%
Gaming workforce

53% of countries regularly collect and share data to **monitor gender equality** in the sectors

IN AFRICAN STATES this is 17%, illustrating the stark difference between regions

WHAT IS NEXT?

- Apply affirmative action measures in recruitment, promotion, funding and awards
- Eliminate precarious labor practices in the cultural sector such as short-term contracts, long working hours and pay gaps
- Make continuous efforts to measure and monitor progress towards gender equality and gender diversity
- Adopt and strengthen policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality

New publications



Journalism is a public good

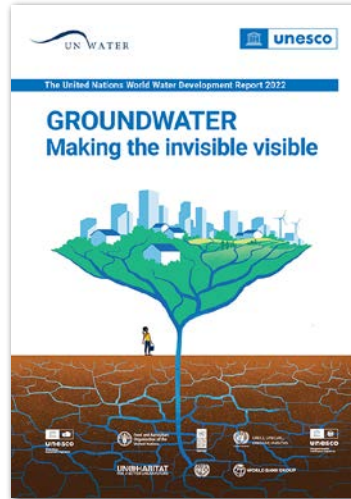
World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development Global Report 2021/2022

ISBN 978-92-3-100509-1
160 pp, 215 x 280 mm, paperback, €55
UNESCO Publishing

Independent journalism is in peril. The rapid erosion of the business models underpinning media sustainability has deepened a crisis in the freedom and safety of journalists around the world.

Over the past five years, approximately 85 per cent of the world's population experienced a decline in press freedom in their country. Even in countries with long traditions of safeguarding free and independent journalism, financial and technological transformations have forced news outlets, especially those serving local communities, to close. The subsequent COVID-19 pandemic and its global economic impact have exacerbated this trend, now threatening to create an "extinction level" event for independent journalism outlets.

The 2021/2022 edition examines these questions with a special focus on "journalism as a public good".



Groundwater: Making the invisible visible

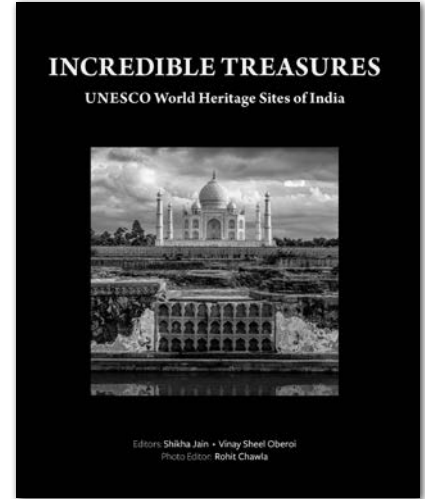
The UN World Water Development Report 2022

ISBN 978-92-3-100507-7
248 pp, 210 x 297 mm, paperback, €55
Published by UNESCO on behalf of UN-Water

This report shines a spotlight on groundwater, calling attention to its specific roles, challenges and opportunities in the context of water resources development, management and governance across the world.

Groundwater – accounting for approximately 99 per cent of all liquid freshwater on Earth and distributed over the entire globe, albeit unequally – has the potential to provide societies with tremendous social, economic and environmental benefits, including climate change adaptation.

Yet, despite its enormous importance, this natural resource is often poorly understood, and consequently undervalued, mismanaged and even abused. In the context of growing water scarcity in many parts of the world, the vast potential of groundwater and the need to manage it carefully can no longer be overlooked.



Incredible Treasures

UNESCO World Heritage Sites of India

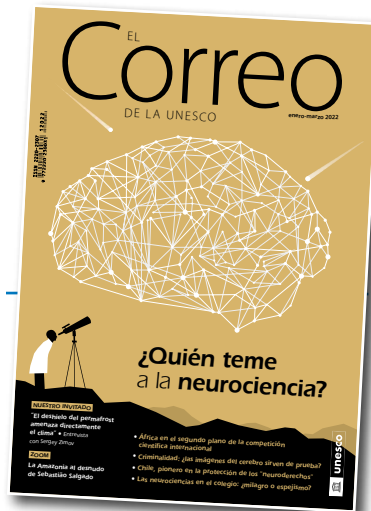
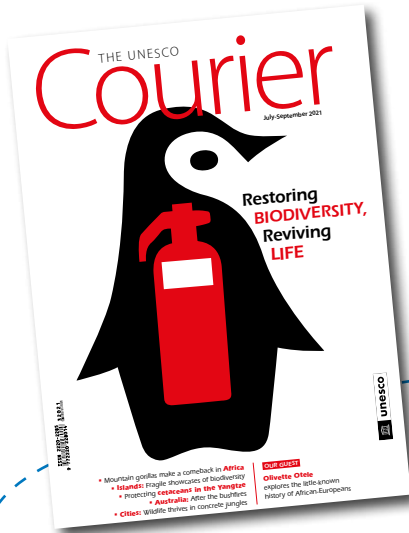
ISBN UNESCO 978-92-3-100440-7
ISBN Mapping 978-93-85360-71-8
240 pp., 254 x 305 mm, hardback, €49.90
UNESCO Publishing/Mapin Publishing

As of May 2021, there were 38 UNESCO World Heritage Sites in India: thirty cultural sites, seven natural sites and one mixed site. This publication presents them all together for the first time, with informative, accessible commentary and stunning photographs.

Several experts in the fields of architecture, cultural conservation, sustainable heritage development, wildlife and ecology contributed to this publication that presents heritage from prehistoric cave walls to rock-cut sanctuaries and mighty temples. It casts light on elements marking the birth and spread of Buddhism and on masterpieces of pluralism borrowed from Hindu. The publication also dives into colonial-time heritage and takes us through India's natural and mixed heritage sites, from the slopes of the Himalayas to the wildlife sanctuaries.

Many voices, one world

This issue of *The UNESCO Courier* is published in Chinese, English, French and Spanish, and also in Catalan, Esperanto and Korean.



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on Cultural Policies

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28 - 30 September 2022

