



**NOTHING ABOUT US
WITHOUT US**

**YOUTH AND CULTURE IN
GLOBAL CITIES TODAY**

WORLD
CITIES
CULTURE
FORUM

المدينة
للثقافة Culture

World Cities Culture Forum

World Cities Culture Forum is the leading global network of civic leaders from over 40 creative cities.

Our cities span six continents and represent a total population of more than 270 million.

Our global network champions the transformative role of culture in urban development, acting as a driver to create equitable, prosperous and sustainable cities.

Our civic leaders share solutions to meet the challenges of the 21st century, from tackling climate change to growing affordable workspace, developing strategies for cultural tourism and the night-time economy, and increasing diversity in the public realm.

World Cities Culture Forum was founded in 2012 around the belief that global cities can achieve more by working together and being generous with ideas. It was founded and is chaired by Justine Simons OBE, London’s Deputy Mayor for Culture and the Creative Industries. Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, is our Patron.

A decade on, we’ve established the principle that culture is a golden thread in cities: supporting our communities, our health and wellbeing, attracting tourists and boosting economies. We champion practical solutions through our annual Summit and partnerships with leading institutions. We grow civic leadership with our Leadership Exchange Programme and Digital Dialogue Masterclasses. And as a global thought-leadership group, we make the case for culture with leading research, data and case studies.

Our cities

Abu Dhabi, Amsterdam, Austin, Barcelona, Bengaluru, Brasília, Brussels, Buenos Aires, Chengdu, Chicago, Cologne, Dubai, Dublin, Edinburgh, Guangzhou, Hamburg, Helsinki, Hong Kong, İstanbul, Jakarta, Kyiv, Lagos, Lisbon, London, Los Angeles, Melbourne, Milan, Montréal, Nanjing, New York, Oslo, Paris, Rio de Janeiro, San Francisco, São Paulo, Seoul, Shenzhen, Stockholm, Sydney, Taipei City, Tokyo, Toronto, Vancouver, Vienna, Warsaw, Zürich

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Justine Simons OBE, photo credit: Rankin

FOREWORD

JUSTINE SIMONS OBE

Half the world's population is under the age of thirty but fewer than 3% of elected politicians are.

At a time of rapid change and growing challenges – from the climate crisis and international tensions to the chaos of social media, the growing crises of mental health and the need for decent secure employment – we need the voice of young people more than ever.

But not just a voice, young people must have agency in shaping the future. They must be actively engaged in finding solutions.

Yet all the evidence points to declining levels of civic engagement by the young. Where attempts have been made to involve young people, they too often feel tokenistic and exacerbate feelings of cynicism and apathy. It's not surprising that young people are disaffected with the conventional political structures of our society.

But there is cause for optimism, across the World Cities Culture Forum, cities are working to fix this imbalance. Proving that once again culture can solve big problems with depth and sophistication, often where more traditional approaches have not delivered.

Culture is opening the door to active and engaged citizenship. City administrations and arts organisations recognise that access to the arts and cultural participation are powerful tools for building personal growth, engagement, empathy and social solidarity.

With this report, which is a collaboration between World Cities Culture Forum and Dubai Culture & Arts Authority, we showcase successful and practical ideas being led by our city partners. We reveal the emerging trends that can help us build more harmonious and dynamic communities in which young people play their part as full citizens, bringing their creativity and ideas to help shape all our futures.

Justine Simons OBE
Founder and Chair,
World Cities Culture Forum
Deputy Mayor for Culture
and the Creative Industries,
London

FOREWORD

HER HIGHNESS SHEIKHA LATIFA BINT MOHAMMED BIN RASHID AL MAKTOUM

Around the world, governments are increasingly recognising the immense power of youth as a catalyst for transformation. Young people are not just the future; they are the driving force of progress today, shaping the social, cultural, and economic landscapes of their communities. Across global cities, policies are being designed to place youth at the centre of strategic visions, acknowledging their essential role in building resilient, creative, and dynamic societies. But more than just inclusion, these policies must empower youth to lead, harnessing their energy, creativity, and ingenuity to steer us toward a sustainable future.

At the heart of this empowerment lies the investment in youth's cultural and intellectual development. Cultivating their creative potential equips them to navigate the rapid technological advances, environmental changes, and economic challenges of our time, but it also positions them as active contributors to the cultural evolution of their cities. This is not a passive process – young people need spaces and opportunities to co-create, to bring fresh perspectives to existing discourse, and to express their unique identities within the cultural narrative. When we prioritize youth engagement in culture, we lay the foundation for a generation of thinkers, visionaries, and leaders who will redefine the metropolis of tomorrow.

This research report explores how global cities, through the World Cities Culture Forum, are leading the way in designing and implementing effective policies that ensure their access to education, employment, and most importantly, culture. In all its forms, culture is the thread that binds individuals to their communities, shaping identity, building confidence, and opening doors for self-expression. Moreover, culture serves as a platform for individuals to connect with others beyond their own communities, fostering mutual understanding and shared values across diverse cultures. Through this powerful synergy between youth and culture, we witness the emergence of a dynamic force that drives cohesion, innovation, and resilience in our cities.



Her Highness Sheikha Latifa bint Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum

Dubai is a shining example of this approach. Through bold strategies and forward-thinking initiatives, the city has positioned itself as a leader in nurturing cultural and creative industries. By investing in the next generation of talent – entrepreneurs, innovators, and creators – Dubai has built a vibrant ecosystem where youth thrive as leaders. As we move forward, this commitment to granting more power to future pioneers in the cultural sector will continue to be the cornerstone of what makes creative cities flourish.

Her Highness Sheikha Latifa
bint Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum
Chairperson of Dubai Culture
& Arts Authority



INTRODUCTION

The Nobel Peace Prize winner and advocate for the universal right to education Kailash Satyarthi wrote “the power of youth is the common wealth of the entire world”. Instead of welcoming young people as the essential asset in building a sustainable and harmonious future, however, it is easy for those who are already in positions of power and responsibility to dismiss them as disengaged from conventional politics, cynical about politicians and unrealistic in their demands. It is just as easy for young people to regard government and city authorities as uncaring, unlistening and unimaginative. This report looks at some of the ways in which culture and the arts can provide a practical and effective way to bridge the gap, by giving young people a sense of empowerment in shaping their own futures and a sense of engagement in shaping the future of their cities and countries. That should not be seen as a privilege granted by an older generation but the right of every young person to be heard, and listened to, as the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child asserts. That is why this report is titled “Nothing about us without us”. What unites all the city partners of the World Cities Culture Forum is the belief that culture has the power to transform lives and engage all citizens, young and old, in building a better future.

Young people playing basketball in Paris
© Unsplash, photo by Paul Wallez



Tokyo Bordless TeamLab
© Unsplash, photo by Karsten Gohm

OVERVIEW

YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE FOREFRONT OF GLOBAL CHANGE AND INNOVATION

Every generation of adults worries about its young people. We are no different.

Despite vast differences in life chances, young people the world over are confronted with some daunting common challenges - economic uncertainty, increasing competition for jobs, a tsunami of information and disinformation on social media that feeds anxieties about identity and self-esteem, the after-effects of a pandemic that dominated their lives for at least two years, rising international tensions and, over-arching everything else, the acceleration of the climate crisis with its attendant consequences.

Many countries have attempted to engage with the younger generation in addressing these

challenges, but as a recent UN Youth Report observes, there are "...very few good examples of youth structures, government departments or administrative units which could be trusted and consulted by the youth in times of threat and danger". A 2021 report from the US National Intelligence Council put it more bluntly - "Slowing economic growth and gains in human development, coupled with rapid societal change, have left large segments of the global youth population feeling insecure, uncertain and distrustful of institutions and governments they view as corrupt or ineffective" (1).

Yet, while many young people feel alienated from traditional institutions of government, there is plenty of evidence that they are as actively concerned as any generation about the future and about the need for clear values and a sense of responsibility. A major 2021 survey of youth attitudes in six countries around the world, "Unleashing the power of GenZ" (usually taken to mean those born between 1996 and 2010) (2) concluded that some 70% of GenZ were active supporters of social and political causes, with climate change and social justice foremost.

In addition, numerous reports by brand and marketing agencies around the world make it clear that young people have no difficulty in feeling empowered as consumers, if not as citizens - 85% of a global research sample of young people (3) said that trusting a brand was an important issue in making a purchase, while another study reported that 90% of a globally dispersed sample of GenZ believed "companies have a responsibility to address environmental and social issues" (4) and that this influenced their decisions as individual consumers. Nor are they shy about sharing their priorities and concerns - another global brand agency recently said of 'GenZ' "...their innate ability to utilise connected technologies gives this cohort a voice that is louder than their size would suggest" (5) and a UNESCO report of 2021 pointed out that "despite disparities in education, no generation has been so literate and so exposed to ... a diversity of knowledge". (6)

How can some of that energy, commitment and 'voice' be channeled so that young people feel able to play their part as citizens and as "key agents for development and peace" in Kofi Annan's words?

One answer, pioneered by many cities of the World Cities Culture Forum, is to mobilise the creative power of arts and culture. An academic at the University of Cyprus summed up the capacity of the arts to simultaneously address issues of personal identity and civic or social identity when he wrote "Arts for citizenship education is grounded on two pillars - "who I am" and "who we are" (7).

"YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD BE AT THE FOREFRONT OF GLOBAL CHANGE AND INNOVATION. EMPOWERED, THEY CAN BE KEY AGENTS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE. IF, HOWEVER, THEY ARE LEFT ON SOCIETY'S MARGINS, ALL OF US WILL BE IMPOVERISHED. LET US ENSURE THAT ALL YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE FULLY IN THE LIVES OF THEIR SOCIETIES."
KOFI ANNAN, FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS



In other words, the arts enable young people to build their own sense of identity and, at the same time, develop a sense of wider social and civic responsibility.

Numerous studies from every part of the world support that view:

- Research in Helsinki’s Aalto university concluded “arts education ...can contribute to the shaping and supporting of processes of transformative global citizenship”. (8)
- A study by The University of Hong Kong concluded - “through the power of community music, young musicians developed core elements of citizenship like dignity, tolerance and a sense of belonging”. (9)
- A UK study on arts education concluded “young people talked constantly about art lessons as the only place where they felt free to experiment, make mistakes, express ideas and articulate arguments”. (10)
- A hip-hop dance project with young people in the United States reported that participants “have the opportunity to articulate their own perspectives on race, politics and society”. (11)
- A teacher in Cambodia told the Social Enterprise Arts Group “my experience of teaching in culturally diverse school settings has raised my awareness of the importance of art education in supporting diversity, equality, inclusion and anti-racism”. (12)
- As part of its strategy to “cultivate an innovation-ready workforce” Ghana’s Ministry of Education plans to make arts education a mandatory part of the national school curriculum up to and including junior high school. (13)
- A survey in São Paulo found that 97% of parents thought participation in cultural activities was important for children’s development. Amongst other benefits they listed improved family relationships, greater awareness and empathy and an increased sense of citizenship. (14)

These strands of evidence, and many others, led a report for the UN Convention on Rights of the Child to state.

“Studies have shown that children and young people who take part in regular arts activities show significant improvement in social cohesion, co-operation and pro-social attitudes, and children who engage in the arts are more likely to volunteer and vote as adults.”

Young woman looking at an artwork in a Melbourne gallery © Unsplash, photo by Thomas Pavitte

FIVE REASONS WHY CITIES SHOULD INVEST IN YOUNG PEOPLE’S ACCESS TO CULTURE

- 1** Culture helps young people build a sense of ‘self’ and a sense of their place in society and the world.
- 2** Easy access to arts and culture for young people promotes mental and physical health and contributes to emotional wellbeing.
- 3** Young people who take part in creative activities develop empathy, critical thinking, resilience and curiosity - all skills that research shows will be key for the future.
- 4** Young people who engage in the arts are more likely to volunteer and take an active role in their cities.
- 5** Young people’s active commitment to social justice, equality and action to prevent climate change are all crucial to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The case studies in this report illustrate the extent to which city partners of the World Cities Culture Forum recognise the value of imaginative arts and culture as a way of engaging and inspiring young people. They also illustrate the extent to which young people see arts and culture as an area of civic provision where their needs are obvious, where their voice needs to be heard and where they, in turn, can engage with the wider life of the city.

In a phrase that the World Cities Culture Forum has often used, culture is the ‘golden thread’ that can connect disparate elements.

Many cities have explored ways of giving practical expression to this engagement between young people and their city. As our case studies show, Hamburg worked with some of its young citizens to draw up a Manifesto and Helsinki encourages each newborn citizen to have an arts



organisation as their cultural ‘home’. A more formal way of developing such interactions is through the establishment of a youth council, not just to discuss culture and the arts but to consider any aspect of city governance that has relevance for young people.

The idea of national youth councils or youth parliaments is well established, with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (the international organisation of parliaments) claiming more than half the countries in the world have them, but it’s at city level that they are often at their most relevant and effective.

The 2023 UNESCO report ‘Enhancing youth participation in urban governance through city youth councils’ points to the particular role of cities – “As the prime movers in cultivating youth empowerment, local governments are in the best position to accord institutional space for the participation of young women and men in the planning and decision-making processes for cities and communities alike”. But the report goes on to stress that this is not something for local administrations to attempt on their own – “Civil society organisations are essential partners in community-building ...”. It’s where the informality of community-based organisations can be fused with the formal authority of a local authority that young people have the space to be candid in their opinions and innovative in their insights.

A study of six youth councils in Africa said “Youth Councils have a lasting effect on both individuals and communities...ranging from tangible results for the community to more profound behavioural and societal changes” while the Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe’s (OSCE) manual for youth councils reports “Local youth councils mean an opportunity for creativity”, they give young people “the opportunity to have a direct contribution to the improvement of their own lives”.

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously. That approach not only benefits the child; in the long term, it benefits society as a whole. As Antonio Guterres puts it “Achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals requires a seismic shift which can only happen if we empower young people and work with them as equals”.

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Child at school

© Unsplash, photo by Jerry Wang

“THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES’ STRATEGY FOCUSES ON INVESTING IN THE ENERGY OF YOUTH TO ENGAGE THEM IN DECISION-MAKING AND MOTIVATING THEM TO BE THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND POSITIVE CHANGE IN THE JOURNEY OF BUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT. OUR MISSION IS TO WORK ON BUILDING A SOCIETY THAT EMBRACES AMBITION AND PROMOTES EXCELLENCE BY PROVIDING THE IDEAL ENVIRONMENT THAT ALIGNS WITH THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE YOUTH AND ENABLES THEM



Image courtesy of Minister of Youth Affairs Office

TO CONTRIBUTE EFFECTIVELY IN SHAPING A BRIGHT AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR OUR COUNTRY.”
HIS EXCELLENCY DR SULTAN BIN SAIF ALNEYADI, MINISTER OF STATE FOR YOUTH AFFAIRS, UAE

THE DUBAI EXPERIENCE

We’ve achieved so much.

Mariam Ali Yousef, Vice President of the Dubai Culture Youth Council, defines the council’s purpose as “To give a focus to the youth voice and take young people to a higher level so they can improve themselves and help build the future”. In her view, the Youth Council empowers young people to be involved “in every pillar of society”, and that includes politics. As part of a ‘Young Parliamentarians Programme’, open to young people throughout the UAE, one of her colleagues had an opportunity to go to the UAE Parliament, attend some of its meetings, and engage with diplomats, politicians and officials. Other programmes in Dubai focus on housing, media and the arts with events such as the ‘Dubai Festival for Youth Theatre’ and ‘Dubai Performing Arts Programme’. At a national level, ‘youth circles’, of which there are more than three hundred, encourage members to express their views and opinions.

These initiatives are all part of a longer-term process to integrate young people into the civic and political life of the country. In 2019, the UAE Cabinet agreed to promote the participation of young Emiratis on to the boards of government entities, and in 2020 30 young people were duly appointed to the boards of federal bodies. An annual youth empowerment survey assesses how Emiratis feel about their role in society and a National Youth Agenda 2031 aims to empower younger role models, with one of its objectives being “to make the UAE the easiest country in the world to access basic services”.

The Dubai Youth Council is part of a wider network across the UAE, all overseen by the Federal Youth Authority. Citizens of Dubai aged 18 to 35 can apply to join, with appointments made following an interview by the Federal Youth Authority. Members serve a two-year term, with the option to apply for a second. The Council manages its own budget for administration, communications, and hosting events, discussions, and classes. While its establishment in 2014 was seen as a significant achievement, Mariam believes the real turning point came in 2015 with the appointment of the country’s first Youth Minister, which, she says “was like a first step that made all young people feel more empowered and wanting to achieve and contribute to change”.



Mariam Ali Yousef

Mariam believes a major step forward happened this summer when the Dubai Youth Council and the Dubai Culture Youth Council hosted the Dubai Youth Retreat. The event brought together 85 Council members along with participants from the government and private sectors. Attendees were divided into six ‘dialogue platforms’ to discuss challenges facing young people and brainstorm ideas for sustainable development. Their recommendations were compiled into a single document and presented to the Executive Council of Dubai and the Federal Youth Authority at the national level. Mariam said: “We’ve achieved so much this year that I like to think what we could achieve in the next five years. We’ve been given the opportunity to contribute to every aspect of our government. I’ve no doubt our Retreat will be adopted in other emirates of the UAE and we would certainly want to repeat it here in Dubai.”

Mariam Ali Yousef was interviewed by John Newbiggin, World Cities Culture Forum Associate in September 2024



Jugando en las calles del Abasto
© Ministry of Culture of the City of Buenos Aires

YOUTH CASE STUDIES

Buenos Aires

A credit card for culture

The City Ministries of Culture and Education in Buenos Aires collaborated to create a Culture Pass for students between the ages of 16 and 19. Participating students received a special credit card each month that gave them access to cultural institutions and experiences, including theatres, galleries, museums, bookshops and cinemas. The card was a physical object, not an online pass, to ensure that young people without cellphones could also benefit, and the purpose of the pass was to “promote diverse cultural consumption habits” in the hope that these would continue into adulthood. The two Ministries stressed this was not intended to be a form of welfare benefit for the poor - it was for the cultural and personal advancement of any participant and within two months of its launch in 2018, ten thousand young people had joined the scheme. In a generous gesture to maximise the card’s benefit, many of the participating cultural institutions, both public and private, offered additional discounts for the young people. The city had wanted to integrate the Culture Pass with the city’s transport system but it had not been possible - for now!

Dakar

Celebrating art and sport

Dakar is the host city for the Summer Youth Olympic Games in 2026, an historic occasion as it will be the first African city to host an Olympic sports event. To make this a catalyst for sporting, social, cultural, educational and economic transformation that will resonate across Africa, the city launched Dakar en Jeux, an annual arts and sports festival that attracts thousands of athletes, artists and spectators for a week-long programme of free sports events, workshops, concerts, poetry slams and street art demonstrations. First held in 2022, the festival will continue until 2026 and is spread across three cities, with a further programme of sports and arts activities in schools throughout the country. Developed by and for young people, Dakar en Jeux hopes to create a legacy that will spread the dreams and values of the Olympic movement to communities in Senegal and beyond. Amadou Fall Ba, the festival director, oversees a team of a hundred university students, all from the Vocational Education Training Centre at the Senegal Talents Campus, who will follow the festival programme over its four-year life, from 2022 to 2026, and contribute to the planning and delivery of the Youth Olympic Games in 2026.



Young man playing football © Unsplash, photo by Natalia Blauth

Dubai

Ideas for policy-makers

The Dubai Youth Council, with the support of Dubai Culture, held the Dubai Youth Retreat in August 2024 to give its young members an opportunity to discuss the future with prominent figures from business and politics. Six ‘dialogue platforms’ explored possible initiatives in policy fields ranging from the economy and environment, to innovation and future leadership. As well as generating practical ideas for policy-makers, the retreat gave powerful expression to the goals set out in the country’s National Youth Agenda 2031 and, by focusing on a broad sweep of policy areas, not only those that might have a direct relevance to young people, showed that young people’s contribution to policy development could be substantial and imaginative. The success of the retreat makes it likely that it’s a format that will be adopted in other emirates in the UAE. The President of the Dubai Youth Council welcomed it as a pioneering step that has enhanced the role and status of young people in the public sphere, as well as further strengthening Dubai’s status as a global leader in innovation and leadership.

**“THINK WHAT WE
COULD ACHIEVE IN THE
NEXT FIVE YEARS”**
**MARIAM ALI YOUSEF,
VICE PRESIDENT OF
THE DUBAI CULTURE
YOUTH COUNCIL**



Helsinki culture © Julia Kivelä & City of Helsinki

“WE HAVE BECOME CITY-MAKERS” MEMBER OF THE BLUEPRINT COLLECTIVE, LONDON

Hamburg

A Manifesto for change

Hamburg’s Ministry of Culture and Media has updated the city’s policy framework for young people by shifting the focus away from institutions that serve young people and focusing instead on the wishes and concerns articulated by young people themselves, expressed in a Children’s Manifesto for Arts Funding. This was created over a six-month period by 120 young people between the ages of 7 and 18 years, from different districts of Hamburg and from a variety of schools. It calls on the city to address a wide range of issues, including young people’s personal freedom and safety, a need for “spaces where rules can be challenged”, free and low-cost access to the arts, the need for every school to have a theatre and the need for more inter-generational exchanges. The completed Children’s Manifesto for Arts Funding was presented to Hamburg’s Senator for Culture and Media at a public ceremony. The whole project was managed by an independent cultural organisation rather than the city administration itself, demonstrating the importance and value of mutual trust in such a sensitive process. The Manifesto is one element in a wider policy framework that Hamburg will begin to implement in 2025.

Helsinki

A cultural home for every young person

Over the last few decades, Helsinki has become, in every way, a more diverse city with changing needs and expectations. ‘Culture Kids’ launched in 2020 has been a bold and imaginative response by the city’s cultural institutions. Every new-born child in Helsinki is paired with a particular cultural institution which thus becomes the child’s ‘cultural home’ with some responsibility to help nurture their development and enjoyment of the arts as they grow up. About 14,000 children, 70% of those born in Helsinki since 2020, have already joined the scheme, and with more than thirty prominent arts and cultural institutions involved, parents (and babies) have access to a wide choice and a wide range of experiences. The city believes that such early access to the arts helps children acquire skills essential for their future and will encourage them to become fully engaged citizens, as well as benefitting their families by bringing them into a rich and supportive cultural environment. Last but not least, the programme is seen as being of benefit to participating cultural institutions as such close and long-lasting engagement with children and their families will stimulate new ways of working.

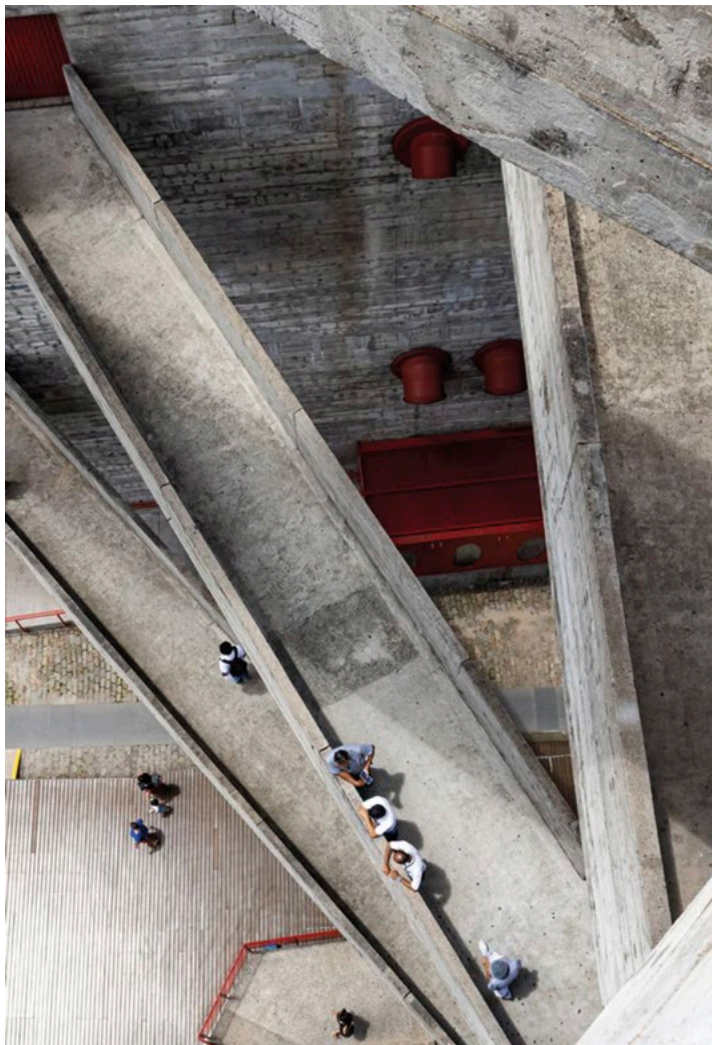
London

Re-imagining public space

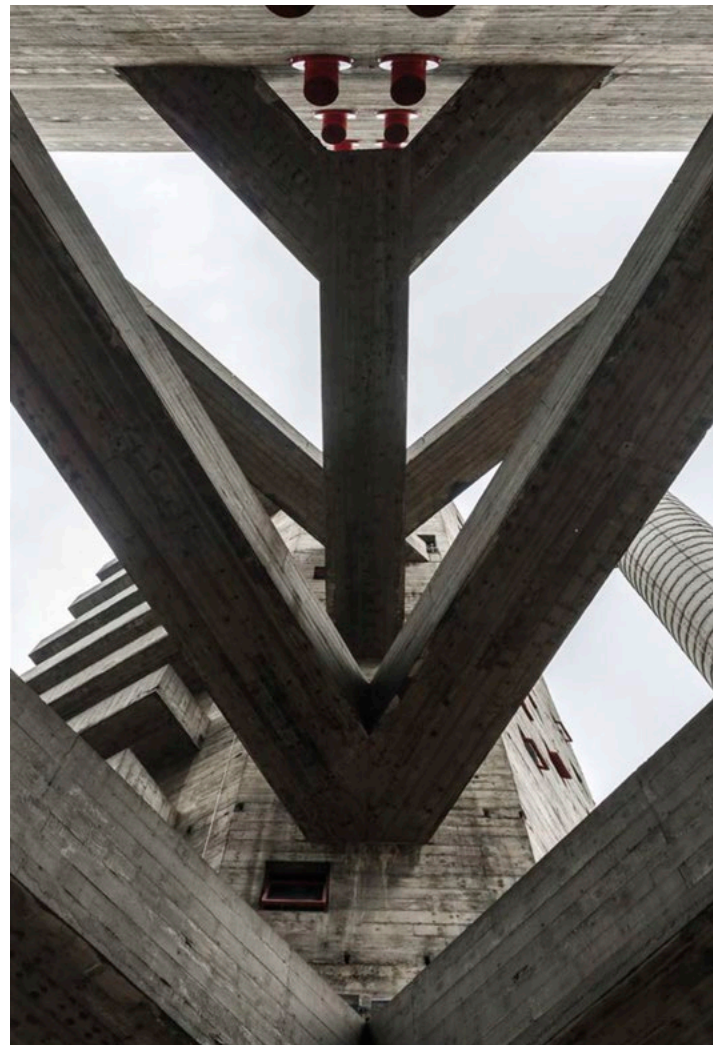
The neighbourhood of London’s famous Wembley Stadium has seen major housing development in recent years. A group of young local activists who call themselves the ‘Blueprint Collective’ argued that, in planning public space, developers and the local authority failed to acknowledge the needs of young people – in fact, they seemed to regard young people as a community problem rather than a community asset. In partnership with the London School of Economics, they worked with developers to design a substantial public space for the benefit and enjoyment of young people near the football stadium. Additionally, they developed a Youth Charter, offering recommendations for how commercial developers and public authorities can better address the needs of young people and involve them more actively in planning decisions.

“THE PAST TWO DECADES HAVE BROUGHT DRAMATIC CHANGES IN PUBLIC EDUCATION, YOUTH DEVELOPMENT, ARTS AND CULTURE, AND IN THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES THAT DRIVE OUR REGION’S ECONOMY. BUT ONE THING HAS REMAINED CONSTANT: OUR DEEP COMMITMENT TO ENSURING YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE ACCESS TO THE ARTS – ALL YEAR, EVERY YEAR – AS A CORE PART OF THEIR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT.”

**DENISE GRANDE,
DIRECTOR OF
ARTS EDUCATION
AT LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF
ARTS AND CULTURE**



SESC Pompéia SP © SESC Pompéia-SP



© Divulgação-Acervo Casa da Arquitectura



SESC Pompéia-SP © Carol Vidal

Los Angeles

Taking arts education beyond the school

Although Los Angeles has a long-standing commitment to arts education within the school system, the County Arts Education Collective felt changing social and work habits required a new approach and launched a consultation process with more than 600 participants, including many young people, to draw on “the community’s collective wisdom”. The resulting strategy broadens the programme’s focus beyond in-school arts education to include arts learning that occurs after school, in the community, and within the juvenile justice system. It emphasizes building partnerships and promoting greater public awareness of the value and importance of arts education in shaping young people’s lives and outlooks. The new arts education strategy reaches one million young people each year, including many within the juvenile justice system and has been able to leverage \$59m to grow opportunities for young people to engage in the arts. It includes an active coalition of 75 school districts, 12 local government agencies, more than 150 non-profit arts organisations, at least 25 philanthropic arts partners and 17 publications that share information on practice and research data.

São Paulo

Bringing the generations together

São Paulo’s Serviço Social do Comércio (SESC programme) is a network of community centres which, for more than 70 years, has been improving the quality of life for the city’s people with educational, cultural, recreational and health services. Some of their centres have been designed by acclaimed architects, one, SESC Pompéia, has transformed an old factory into a thriving multi-functional space. All the centres aim to provide different target groups with a range of activities in a way that encourages different generations and groups to mix and learn from each other, creating an environment that offers space for both individual and collective development. A recent and wide-ranging survey of cultural habits, carried by the Itaú Foundation in partnership with Datafolha, asked parents to rate how they thought exposure to arts and culture benefited their children. An overwhelming 97% of parents said they thought participation in cultural activity was important for children’s development and many of them talked of the benefit that the arts contributed to children’s creativity, empathy, self-knowledge and a sense of citizenship.

**“PARENT OPINIONS
ARE A GOOD GUIDE
FOR ENCOURAGING
PUBLIC POLICIES
THAT STRENGTHEN
CULTURE AS A CROSS-
CUTTING ELEMENT
IN EDUCATION”**

**ANNA PAULA MARTINI,
DIRECTOR OF
THE ITAÚ FOUNDATION
OBSERVATORY**



Above: Tokyo Borderless TeamLab
© Unsplash, photo by Note Thanun
Right: Bon dance at Funabori, Edogawa City
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Overleaf: Tokyo Met SaLaD Music Festival
© TMS

Tokyo

From childhood to adulthood

Tokyo's Cultural Strategy 2030 aims to make the city "an environment where everyone can enjoy the arts". The strategy includes an age-related two-stage programme for 'kids and youth.' The first, entitled 'Start as Children', proposes initiatives such as a first visit to a museum, opportunities to make music and a general expansion of arts education for younger children. The second, 'Carry on as Teenagers', suggests a range of arts and cultural experiences for young people, including free or reduced cost entry to museums and other cultural institutions, activities that are built around digital technology and opportunities for young people to engage actively in cultural activities and not just be passive consumers. One prominent element of this programme is 'Welcome Youth 2024' which invites young people under the age of 18 to enter a lottery draw for free entry to a wide range of exhibitions and events, including events which highlight the creative potential of digital technology through Augmented Reality (AR). The aim is to enable young people to "casually interact with arts and culture", in other words to find it naturally integrated into their everyday experience. Dividing the youth strategy into two stages will make it easier to develop age-appropriate music workshops and education programmes, and promote new ways of using digital technology as an art medium and as a way of engaging young people.

Vienna

Instructions for the future

To mark the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2019, the city of Vienna prepared a 'municipal strategy' reflecting the needs and dreams of young people. More than a thousand workshops were held, targeting children and young people of different ages and needs, all of whom were asked what they thought worked for them in the city and what needed change. The resulting strategy covers an extraordinary range of policies from a ban on single-use plastics, to better careers guidance and apprenticeship opportunities, and from better provision for dogs to enabling the resources to ensure every child in the city could plant a tree every year. As well as their immediate concerns young people were invited to set out their 'instructions for the future' to the city authorities. A full programme of monitoring and evaluation means that the proposals and their implementation are kept under regular review.







Young people at climate protest in New York City © Unsplash, photo by Katie Rodriguez

SIX KEY TRENDS

1 DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE IS INCREASINGLY UNEVEN

Currently, the five major cities with the highest proportion of under-15s are in Sub-Saharan Africa and the five major cities with the highest proportion of over 65's are in East Asia.

Almost all population growth will occur in Africa, whose youth population is expected to represent 40% of all the young people in the world by 2030, generating a huge demand for policies that reflect the needs and aspirations of young people.

Slowing population growth and aging societies in many parts of Europe, North America and Oceania, but especially in East Asia, will mean significant increases in health and care costs with consequent pressure on the distribution of wealth and resources between younger earners and older, retired, non-earners.

2 CITIES, LARGE AND SMALL, WILL CONTINUE TO GROW

With 70% of the world's population expected to be urban by 2050, and 60% of all city dwellers in developing countries under the age of 30, city administrations rather than national governments will need to be at the forefront of pioneering strategies for employment, education and housing as well as developing effective engagement strategies with and for young people.

Citizens' confidence in city administrations is significantly higher than their confidence in national governments (ESPAS research revealed that while only 21% of European citizens have faith in their national governments, 45% have faith in their city and regional governments).

A particular issue in some megacities is that an estimated one billion urban residents, including many young and marginalised people, and those with disabilities, live in 'informal settlements' posing challenges to city administrations but also holding out the opportunity for new ways of managing resources and engaging young people. Smaller cities are expected to grow faster than the great megacities; the World Economic Forum says "to invest in growth, look beyond the top 100 cities. Look to the top 1000".

3 PATTERNS OF TRUST ARE SHIFTING

UN research finds 76% of under-30's think politicians do not listen to young people. In addition, polling conducted in six countries around the world in 2023 indicated that fewer than 37% of 18 - 29-year-olds trust their governments, suggesting widespread cynicism and apathy. But the same research also revealed that 70% of 'Gen Z' (those born between 1996 and 2010) are actively committed to social, political and environmental causes, with a focus on climate change and social justice.

Furthermore, extensive research elsewhere indicates that young people are becoming more responsible consumers who seek out and support brands they feel they can trust. Research by the brand agency MarketLine reported that 65% of Gen Z "express their identity through brand choice". Another global survey by McKinsey concluded that 90% of Gen Z believe brands have a responsibility to address environmental and social issues.

4 ATTITUDES TO HEALTH AND WELLBEING ARE CHANGING

Research indicates that people living in cities are more likely to suffer from depression than those living in rural areas (in some studies by more than 40%).

More than 80% of young people agree they need to do more to look after their mental health, indicating a rise in anxiety, tension and uncertainty about the future. This is reflected in strong views amongst young people worldwide about identity, diversity and inclusion, particularly with regard to issues of gender and disability.

The long-term impact of the COVID pandemic is likely to be felt more acutely by young people than any other group. Recent research agency MarketLine observes “of all the major events since GenZ was born, the pandemic is likely to be the defining experience that shapes how they view the world, pursue opportunities and confront obstacles”.

Changing attitudes and rising health costs are encouraging more city administrations and national governments to look for non-clinical solutions to physical and mental illness through sport, arts, and a range of social or cultural activities. This approach, often called ‘social prescribing’ was recently described by the UK’s National Director of Community Health as “the single most influential development in health care in recent decades”.

5 MIGRATION WILL INCREASE WITH BOTH ‘PUSH’ AND ‘PULL’ FACTORS

Accelerating climate change and the widening chasm of economic opportunity between countries will drive increases in economic migration, especially by well-educated young people, with a consequent ‘brain drain’ harming growth in many countries while boosting the already good economic prospects of others.

Countries - or cities - that are able to offer easy access to education, skills, work visas, high speed internet and housing will be amongst the winners. For example, a recent report from The Economist magazine found that of the one thousand students with the highest scores in the entry exam for India’s top technical universities, 36% migrated after graduation.



Above: Young boy painting, photo courtesy of Getty / Canva
Overleaf: Young boy photographing graffiti © Unsplash, photo by Chris Benson

6 NEW SKILLS ARE NEEDED FOR A NEW ECONOMY

Global education levels are rising, albeit not as rapidly as anticipated. Even so, some studies suggest the number of students at upper secondary and post-secondary level will increase by a billion between 2025 and 2040 (from 2.86bn to 3.89bn). Higher levels of education and disposable income may mean rising interest in arts, culture and leisure pursuits, including tourism, with the biggest growth in middle-class lifestyles taking place in South and East Asia.

However, graduate unemployment is a major and intensifying problem, meaning a growing number of young people are unable to achieve their full economic potential. The World Economic Forum asserts that the top skills wanted by future employers will include analytical and creative thinking, resilience and adaptability, self-awareness, curiosity and a commitment to lifelong learning. That almost exactly mirrors a statement from the International Child Art Foundation - “Research indicates that a child who is exposed to the arts acquires a special ability to think creatively, be original, discover, innovate and create intellectual property - key attributes for individual success and social prosperity in the twenty-first century”.



THREE RECOMMENDATIONS

1 CITY ADMINISTRATIONS NEED TO DO MORE THAN SIMPLY PROVIDE ACCESS TO ARTS AND CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES AS A WAY OF ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE
THEY SHOULD DEVELOP LONGER TERM STRATEGIES THAT CAN OFFER ROUTES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO MOVE FROM PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT AND SELF-DISCOVERY TO SOCIAL COMMITMENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

2 CITY ADMINISTRATIONS SHOULD DEVELOP LOCAL YOUTH COUNCILS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS SETTING OUT CLEAR REMITS, BUDGETS AND FORMAL ACCOUNTABILITY TO BE EFFECTIVE AND TO FEEL EMPOWERED, YOUTH COUNCILS NEED EVIDENCE OF CLEAR COMMITMENT BY THE CITY ADMINISTRATION, INCLUDING STAFF SUPPORT, AND FORMAL LINES OF COMMUNICATION

3 CITY ADMINISTRATIONS COULD LEARN FROM BRANDS, CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND CAMPAIGNING MOVEMENTS THAT USE AND ANALYSE SOCIAL MEDIA AS A WAY OF BUILDING TRUST AND PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE PERSONAL DECISION-MAKING IN YOUNG PEOPLE
GEN Z'S INTEREST IN RESPONSIBLE CONSUMERISM MAY PROVIDE A VALUABLE TEMPLATE FOR BUILDING RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP



YOUNG GENERATIONS IN THE PACT FOR THE FUTURE

The Summit for the Future was a high-level meeting promoted by the United Nations that took place in September 2024 in New York City and brought together, not only representatives of Member States, but also of cities and local governments, private sector, youth organisations, civil society movements in general. Its outcome was the adoption of the Pact for the Future [1], a document which ambition is to pledge a new beginning for multilateralism. The pact is a call for action, a path for the United Nations System and other key multilateral institutions to deliver a better future for people and planet, to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and respond to existing challenges and opportunities.

The Pact recognises that, not only 'today's generation of children and young people is the largest in history, but also that they are critical agents of positive change and can give important contributions to peace and security, sustainable development and human rights.'

Therefore the Pact includes a specific chapter about Youth and Future Generations, in which Member States assume their responsibility to create the conditions for young people to reach their full potential as individuals and change drivers.

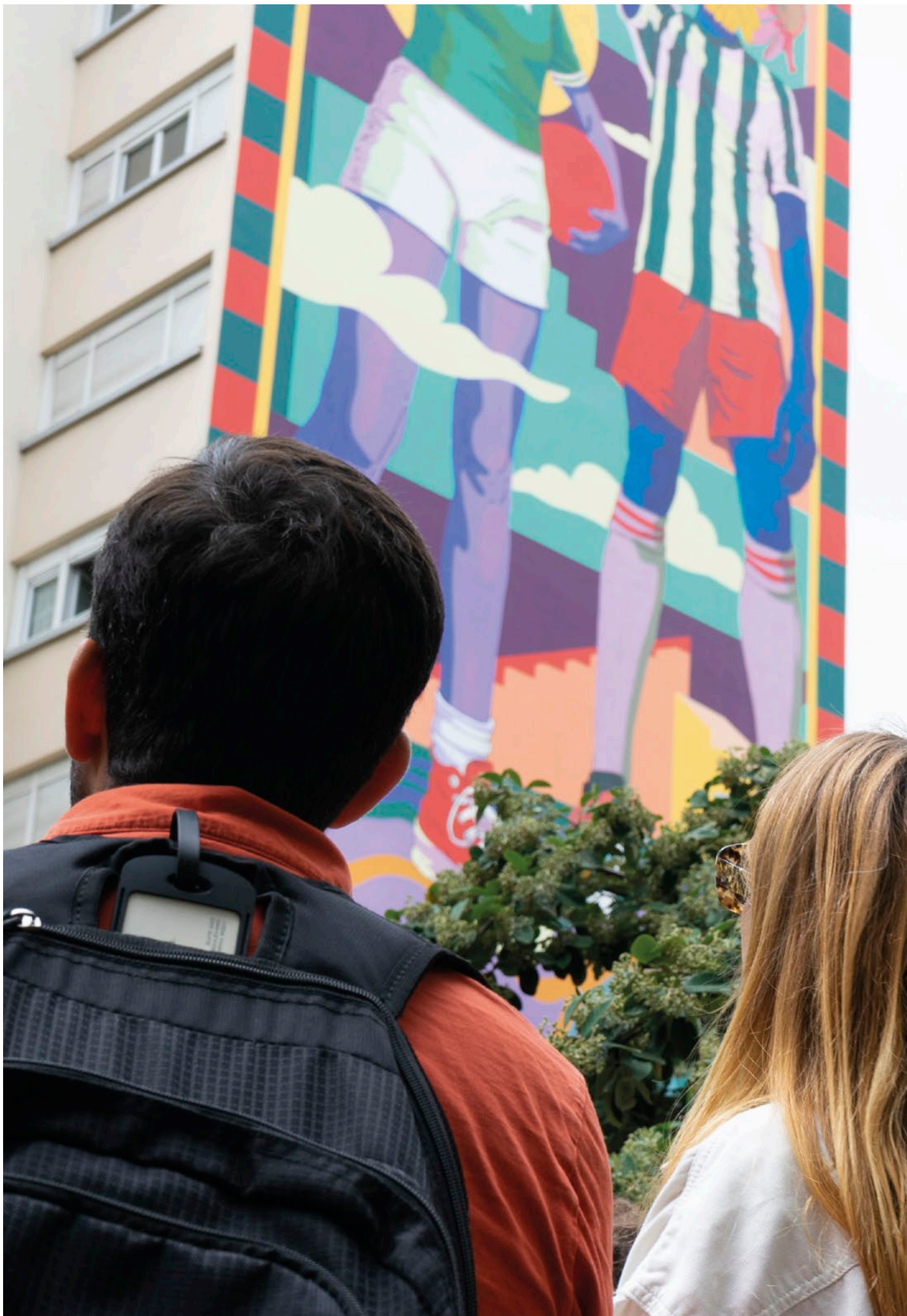
In order to achieve that, Member States agree to invest in the social and economic development of children and young people, as well in the promotion, protection and respect of their human rights, social inclusion and integration.

Moreover, Member States assume the need to design the future through the 'lens' of young generations and to create the necessary mechanisms for their engagement and participation to become a reality. For young generations to have 'a seat at the table', Member States recognise that they have to listen to them and enable their meaningful participation in decision-making processes, whether at local, national or international level.

Source

[1] A/Res/79/1/22 September

Climate protester at a march
© Unsplash, photo by Ma Ti



WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE DO AND THINK?

33% OF THE WORLD'S PEOPLE ARE UNDER 25, 25% ARE UNDER 15

This means that amongst World Cities Culture Forum cities there is likely to be c. 90m people under the age of 25.

57% THINK THE WORLD IS GETTING BETTER, MEASURED BY HEALTH CARE, CLEAN WATER, EDUCATION, OPPORTUNITIES TO PLAY, SAFETY AND WELL-BEING

'Changing Childhood' report, UNICEF

59% IN WEALTHY COUNTRIES THINK CHILDREN WILL BE WORSE OFF THAN THEIR PARENTS

IPSOS Group SA, Global Trends, 2023

69% IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES THINK CHILDREN WILL BE BETTER OFF THAN THEIR PARENTS

IPSOS Group SA, Global Trends, 2023



80% FEEL “WE ARE HEADING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTER UNLESS WE CHANGE OUR HABITS QUICKLY”

IPSOS Group SA, Global Trends, 2023

82% AGREE “I NEED TO DO MORE TO LOOK AFTER MY MENTAL HEALTH”

IPSOS Group SA, Global Trends, 2023

72% THINK GOVERNMENTS “DON’T LOOK AFTER THEIR CITIZENS”

‘2030 The Megatrends’ - European Commission

54% THINK “BUSINESS LEADERS DON’T TELL THE TRUTH”

‘What is GenZ’, McKinsey, 2023

76% OF RESPONDENTS UNDER 30 THINK POLITICIANS DON’T LISTEN TO YOUNG PEOPLE

UNICEF

75% USE THE INTERNET

International Telecommunications Union

Young people breakdancing
© Unsplash, photo by Vale

6 HOURS IS THE AVERAGE LENGTH OF TIME
THAT GEN Z (BORN 1996 – 2010)
SPEND ON A PHONE EACH DAY

International Telecommunications Union

60% OF GEN Z USE TIKTOK

“Gen Z - a fully connected, socially conscious generation
comes of age”, MarketLine, 2023

90% OF GEN Z BELIEVE COMPANIES
HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY
TO ADDRESS ENVIRONMENTAL
AND SOCIAL ISSUES

‘What is Gen Z’, McKinsey 2023

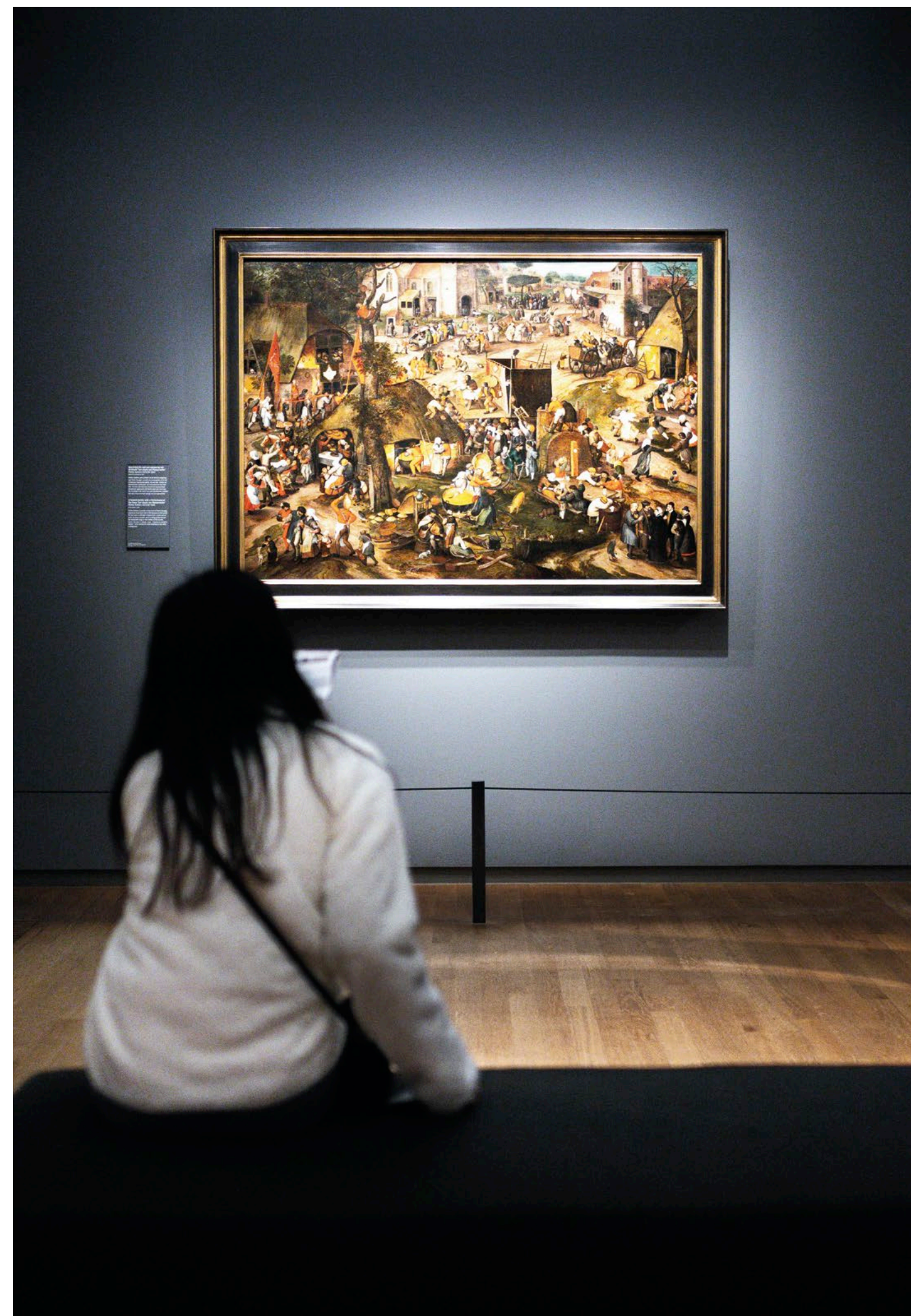
23% OF THE GLOBAL POPULATION
ARE STUDENTS

And the number of university students has doubled since 2000
‘Education Worldwide - Statistics & Facts, Statista, 2024

60% OF URBAN DWELLERS IN
DEVELOPING COUNTRIES WILL
BE UNDER 18 BY 2030

UNICEF

Young person at Rijksmuseum
© Unsplash, photo by Red Charlie



**“CULTURE IS OPENING
THE DOOR TO
ACTIVE AND ENGAGED
CITIZENSHIP.
ACCESS TO THE ARTS
AND CULTURAL
PARTICIPATION ARE
POWERFUL TOOLS
FOR BUILDING
PERSONAL GROWTH,
ENGAGEMENT,
EMPATHY AND SOCIAL
SOLIDARITY.”**

**JUSTINE SIMONS OBE,
FOUNDER AND
CHAIR, WORLD CITIES
CULTURE FORUM**