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SIENA PAPER - SUMMARY
SIENA CULTURAL RELATIONS FORUM

September 18-20, 2023
Certosa di Pontignano, Siena, Italy

BACKGROUND

From **September 18-20, 2023**, the **Siena Cultural Relations Forum** took place at Certosa di Pontignano, Siena, Italy, bringing together 40 stakeholders in international cultural relations. Organised jointly by the Cultural Relations Platform and the University of Siena/CREDO, , this fourth edition of the Forum united academics, policymakers, and practitioners from 30 different countries to explore the future of ICR in the face of global challenges. With the theme "The Future of International Cultural Relations – Global Approaches and Perspectives", the Forum aimed to foster dialogue, exchange insights, and share best practices to contribute to the global discourse on ICR's future, with participants engaging in working groups and discussions on critical topics related to ICR. Reflections on the latter as well as recommendations developed during the Forum have been collected and summarised in this document, aiming to provide valuable insights and pathways for the future.

Global Perspectives: current ICR approaches and lessons to be learnt

Participants engaged in discussions in working groups focused on themes like Human Rights, Power and Politics, Climate Change, Peace and Security, and Technology and Digitalisation in the context of International Cultural Relations. These sessions encouraged exploration and the exchange of diverse perspectives, and served as a platform for in-depth discussions on critical ICR themes.

- **ICR and Human Rights**: This working group explored the intersection of International Cultural Relations and Human Rights. It emphasised the importance of artistic freedom in the context of freedom of expression, noting disparities in support and the funding of other fields and compared access to culture. Cultural identity and the need to decolonise the concept were discussed. This session also illustrated how ICR supports human rights and highlighted the importance of culture-to-culture interactions and the involvement of civil society in international cultural relations and human rights.

- **ICR and Politics and Power (Governance):** This group engaged in a dynamic discussion focusing on power and politics, particularly looking into definitions and their pivotal role in relationships, agenda-setting, and resource allocation. This session highlighted peer-to-peer relationships for fostering equity and raised questions about the hierarchy between power and politics. Throughout, the discussion emphasised the potential of ICR to create transnational communities of common destiny while acknowledging the need to broaden its scope for deeper reflection.

- **ICR and Climate Change**: This working group focused on the intersection of International Cultural Relations and climate change, and stressed the importance of using arts and culture to address climate change alongside the need for a bottom-up approach. Their discussion recognised climate change as an ongoing process and called for urgent action; as well, it highlighted the role of ICR in raising awareness, shaping mindsets, and fostering fairness and responsibility. This group emphasised learning from each other, sharing practices, and harnessing privilege and power to influence policy. They ultimately advocated for participatory, co-creative approaches to address the climate crisis.

- **ICR and Peace and Security:** In this working group, participants explored International Cultural Relations in the context of peace and conflict, and highlighted the multifaceted role of ICR in preventing, mitigating, and recovering from conflicts. Their discussion covered the pre-conflict, mid-conflict, and post-conflict phases, emphasising the non-linear and cyclical nature of conflict dynamics. Pre-conflict discussions focused on the importance of dialogue, while mid-conflict considerations included issues such as the conflict's scale, displacement, time of intervention and the impact of dialogue. Key working areas were identified, such as heritage preservation, the cultural and creative industries, and cultural practices for well-being. Post-conflict discussions centred on re-engagement, recovery, and healing.

- **ICR and Digital:** This working group explored the relationship between digital technologies, including AI, and international cultural relations. Despite digital tools at times being seen in a negative light, the group acknowledged their positive impact on enhancing ICR practices, promoting inclusivity and facilitating cross-cultural interactions globally. They advocated for a balanced approach that integrates both physical and digital means, emphasising the relevance of traditional arts and face-to-face engagement; the need for equitable access to digital knowledge in ICR was also highlighted. Additionally, the group recommended establishing a global online platform for collaborative decision-making to shape the future of international cultural relations.

Pathways and future directions to bring International Cultural Relations forward

Participants worked together to encompass the theory, policy, and practice of ICR into recommendations and pathways for the future, addressed to the international cultural relations community. These insights address global challenges and guide the way forward:

ROLE OF ICR/CULTURE

- **ICR should be profiled as an advocacy platform for addressing global challenges**, while proving its relevance in practical terms and with concrete tools and examples

- It is important to open up spaces to **different fields and policy areas to increase its visibility and impact**

- Acknowledging the limitations of ICR and continuous engagement in **self-reflection** by ICR professionals is essential to evaluating ICR's successes, failures, challenges, and **inclusivity** levels

POWER IMBALANCES AND DIALOGUE

- ICR activities need to encourage **open dialogue**, effective communication and deep listening

- **Power imbalances and biases** in policy formulation and decision-making need to be addressed by ensuring the equitable participation of representatives of all regions in a balanced manner, while considering the diversity of cultural, economic, and social backgrounds

DIVERSITY, CO-CREATION AND INCLUSIVENESS

- ICR practices need to be **inclusive of different voices** and perspectives

- The specific needs and **cultural sensitivities** of different communities should be taken into account in the development of ICR initiatives and strategies

- ICR initiatives should operate with a diversity of stakeholders and promote cultural **decentralisation and decolonisation**

- ICR activities should aim at involving and **empowering local communities** and organisations, and promoting **co-creation practices** and people-to-people exchanges

- ICR initiatives should embrace **intergenerational perspectives** – not only people of various cultures, backgrounds, nationalities, and sensitivities, but also varying degrees of experience

CLIMATE CHANGE

- **Climate change must be factored into conversations on ICR**, recognising that different regions possess different levels of responsibility for the environmental crisis while acknowledging the common yet differentiated responsibilities of the EU and its Southern neighbours

- ICR initiatives should consider **environmental sustainability**, and any interactions and initiatives must be realised through strictly sustainable tools and methods, embedding climate responsibility in all its practices

DIGITAL

- ICR initiatives should **leverage digital tools** for wider reach and inclusive exchange and connections, while gathering insights through big data analytics

- ICR actions should consider technology's impact on democratisation, recognising that technological changes and digital tools may not always be universally democratic or as accessible as assumed

HUMAN RIGHTS

- ICR can foster **human rights and social justice** by harnessing culture to address issues like racism, discrimination, and inequality, as well as providing a platform for civil society organisations to advocate for cultural rights and artistic freedom of expression while emphasising inclusivity and diversity

PEACE AND CONFLICT

- ICR has a role to play in **promoting peace and conflict resolution** by envisioning a new world and fostering global relations in regions affected by conflict. This role extends across various phases, including the build-up of tensions, the conflict itself, and the post-conflict

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- ICR should be more widely included in **education curricula**

- **Cultural workers and officials should be trained in ICR**, creating a comprehensive training program for cultural workers/practitioners aimed at equipping them with the knowledge of the evolving global policies and practical cultural factors relevant to their specific contexts

ROLE/INVOLVEMENT OF ARTISTS/ART ORGANISATIONS

- ICR initiatives should regularly **involve artists and arts organisations**, expanding ICR beyond academic and policy circles, thereby fostering broader participation and divorcing themselves from multilateral organisations in favour of grassroot initiatives

ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATION

- ICR initiatives should heighten their visibility through **accessible and clear communication** on international cultural cooperation initiatives, including EU actions

- An active international cultural relations **advocacy strategy** that uses the language of other stakeholders rather than those typically involved in ICR should be developed

POLICY AND FUNDING

- ICR and culture should be **mainstreamed in EU policy and programmes** through improved synergies between EU and MSs actions and increased funding

- It is essential to develop a **global framework for ICR** that encompasses delineated guidelines, exemplary practices, and universally applicable standards, one that possesses the flexibility to accommodate the myriad of cultural contexts and facilitate effective collaboration among nations and other stakeholders

- Instead of imposing a one-size-fits-all development model, EU institutions should consider the specific **priorities and needs of their neighbours in the South**

- There is a need for **new evaluation models** which can encompass the emotional factor through which culture impacts communities

About CREDO

The mission of the Jean Monnet Center of Excellence in Cultural Relations and Diplomacy (CREDO) is to rethink the nature of diplomacy and culture in International Relations and transform research results into knowledge and insights supporting policymaking. Based on the cooperation of four departments of the University of Siena and the Santa Chiara Lab, the Centre of Excellence seeks to stimulate cross-fertilisation of ideas between the University of Siena's wider network and its external partners. Together, CREDO offers innovative solutions to challenges to international cultural relations through its work in research, teaching and training, and dissemination and exploitation.

About the Cultural Relations Platform

The Cultural Relations Platform (CRP) is a 6-year project funded by the Partnership Instrument (Service for Foreign Policy Instruments) launched in April 2020 to support the European Union with engaging in international cultural relations within the framework of the EU strategy for international cultural relations.

The Cultural Relations Platform: provides advice and expertise to EU institutions and EU Delegations all over the world; undertakes research into the cultural and creative sectors around the world; facilitates co-operation and networking between cultural practitioners; strengthens the capacity of cultural practitioners globally to deliver international cultural relations, through local conferences, workshops and training.

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