cultural
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PLATFORM

SIENA PAPER
SIENA CULTURAL RELATIONS FORUM

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

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on the basis of the contribution and further revisions of the Forum participants (see page 16).

BACKGROUND

Between **September 18-20, 2023**, 40 stakeholders in the field of international cultural relations (ICR) gathered in Certosa di Pontignano, Siena (Italy) to exchange and reflect on ICR and its future role in light of global challenges. Organised jointly by the Cultural Relations Platform and the University of Siena/CREDO, the fourth edition of the **Siena Cultural Relations Forum** brought together academics, policymakers and practitioners from 30 countries for three days of intensive dialogue and collaboration. Under the overarching theme "The Future of International Cultural Relations - Global Approaches and Perspectives", the Forum provided an enriching platform for exploring the connections between theory, policy, and practice in ICR.

The Forum aimed at stimulating deep reflections and dialogue among different actors in ICR, so as to listen and learn from each other's insights and experiences and facilitate the sharing of best practices. The central objective of this forum was to contribute to the current global conversations and discourse on the future of ICR through exchanges among the participants, to advance knowledge in the sector and to help pinpoint the challenges and opportunities present in the field.

Through various working groups, plenary discussions and activities, participants actively engaged in sharing insights, in doing so drawing from their diverse backgrounds and experiences. The sessions explored a range of relevant themes, including the role of ICR in addressing climate change, digitalisation, power dynamics, and more. Participants aimed to collectively draft potential scenarios and envision strategies to tackle these complex global challenges. The Forum also benefited from the attendance of around 20 participants of the Siena Autumn School, who joined the session on Monday, 18th September, to share their perspectives on the role of ICR in addressing global challenges.

The concluding phase of the Forum focused on envisioning the future of ICR, where participants were invited to share their reflections and recommendations, which form an integral part of this Siena Paper. This document aims to contribute to the ongoing development of the ICR field, serving as a valuable resource to advance the field, while offering a better understanding and guidance to address the identified challenges and opportunities.

DAY 1: Challenges and/or opportunities for International Cultural Relations - Building the Big Picture

The opening session centred on generating various scenarios linked to pressing global challenges, including the climate crisis, AI and digitalization, power dynamics, and more. Through active participation, participants collaboratively envisioned potential futures, fostering a deeper understanding of the evolving landscape while developing 'reliable forecasts' for the critical challenges that lie ahead.

In the second part of the session, the developed scenarios were ranked on a scale of probability from *highly likely* to *not likely*. Participants arranged these scenarios in an agreed-upon order within their groups and discussed them. Following the collective discussion, participants selected certain scenarios and considered the role of international cultural relations in the challenges or opportunities presented by them.

The text cloud below reveals the keywords, trends, and directions that emerged from the discussions. Importantly, the predominance of certain themes foregrounded themselves well into the deliberations, with these being highlighted by the size of their texts. However, the text size does not imply a hierarchy or importance of certain ideas over others, but rather emphasises emerging priorities for ICR amongst numerous concerns, opportunities and trends.

DAY 2: Global Perspectives: current ICR approaches and lessons to be learnt

Policy, practice, and academia representatives shared their insights, reacting and reflecting on the key highlights and takeaways from the first day. They then offered a comprehensive overview of the implications within their respective domains and synthesised their observations to provide inputs for discussion in the plenary.

Following this session, representatives from four EU Delegations (Togo, Sri Lanka, Morocco, and South Africa) were invited to share their situated experiences working in diverse contexts and to offer insights into the cultural and operational dynamics they have encountered across various countries and regions. This conversation provided rich and detailed perspectives on the importance of appreciating local contexts and the role of international cultural relations in engaging with local cultural audiences and stakeholders as well as deepening cultural awareness.

In the afternoon, participants were organised into working groups to engage in several workshops focusing on key ICR themes such as **human rights, power and politics, climate change, peace and security, and technology and digitalisation**. The working groups were tasked with exploring the intersections between these critical themes and ICR, with the aim of this session being to facilitate such in-depth exploration alongside the exchange of diverse perspectives, thereby enabling participants to exchange valuable insights and policy implications. The Siena Paper has been informed by the work performed in these sessions.

The sections below provide some key findings from the working groups.

ICR and Human rights

During the discussion on ICR and Human Rights, various key points emerged. The session commenced with an exploration of the definition of culture, underscoring its role in shaping our beliefs and cultural expressions. It was highlighted that artistic freedom should be accorded the same importance as press freedom and media freedom within the context of **freedom of expression**. An evident disparity in the protection of artists compared to journalists was noted, with more significant funding directed towards human rights defenders focused on environmental protection, for instance, rather than that of protecting artists and cultural workers or facilitating access to culture.

A central theme of the discussion was the concept of **cultural identity**, with the need to decolonise the way in which cultural identities and their evolution continue to be framed within societies being discussed. The session examined how ICR facilitates our understanding of human rights, drawing from examples from Ukraine and Pakistan illustrating the empowerment of cultural minorities and transgender individuals. The EU's role in human rights dialogues was acknowledged, although it was noted at the forum that EU Delegations may not always have a mandate to address these issues. The discussion concluded by highlighting the effectiveness of ICR as a method of engagement when rooted in culture-to-culture

emphasising the importance of critically owning and leading cultural relations by considering the role of governments and civil society. In essence, the session underscored the importance of **nuanced perspectives**, acknowledging cultural diversity, and engaging **civil society as a crucial stakeholder** in the realm of ICR 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. The interplay between power and politics was a central theme, with a special emphasis on the capability of peer-to-peer relationships to foster equity. The resultant conversation raised questions about the order of precedence between power and politics, exploring their roles and hierarchy as well as questioning the role of the EU in the current geopolitical context.

The discussion further highlighted the potential of ICR to enable transnational communities of destiny; however, it was noted that ICR remains under-explored, with there being a need to broaden its scope for deeper reflection. Power balances were a recurrent theme throught the discussion, sparking thought-provoking exchanges and deeper reflections on the complex relationship between power, politics, and ICR as well as on support tied to diverse political agendas.

ICR and Climate Change

In this working group dealing with the pressing issue of climate change and its intersection with ICR, participants emphasised the need for attentive listening and a critical appreciation and reflection on climate change's current status and its implications on ICR.

The group recognised the importance of addressing climate change through arts and culture, emphasising co-creation and collaboration as means to enable climate protection. They stressed that **different conditions required different approaches** and advocated for a bottom-up approach as a fundamental guiding principle to engage with the climate crisis. Climate change was characterised as an enduring process, not a momentary event, necessitating continuous grassroot responses.

The group called for urgent action, recognising the severe consequences of climate change, including conflicts, biodiversity loss, and migration. The group explored how ICR could play a crucial role in raising awareness, shaping mindsets, and fostering fairness and responsibility, in addition to highlighting the potential for learning from each other, sharing practices for critical negotiations, creating trust and understanding, and amplifying the voices of activists, artists, minorities, and indigenous communities through arts, culture and cultural relations. Moreover, they underscored the role of ICR in influencing policy and practice, bridging local and global communities, and using privilege and power to influence policy and lobby for change. The group emphasised the need to develop enabling platforms for cultural participation and to **adopt participatory, co-creative approaches to formulate local solutions to the climate crisis**.

ICR and Peace and Security

In this session on ICR for Peace and Security and its role in conflict resolution, participants comprehensively explored the dynamics spanning the pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict phases, with a focus on the during-conflict stage. It was emphasised that these temporal elements are not linear but rather yclical, with their definitions playing a crucial role in shaping events and responses to them.

Pre-Conflict: The group discussed the importance of facilitating cultural dialogues in a pre-conflict phase, considering various dimensions of engagement to avert conflict. The group explored how ICR approaches could fulfil bilateral or multilateral roles with various countries to understand, appreciate and securitise the evolving dynamics between them.

Conflict: This discussion addressed the complexities of the conflict phase, categorised by scale (micro, macro, mega) and influence, encompassing civil, national, and international dimensions. The group examined the active and protracted nature of ongoin conflicts, as well as dormant ones. They also scrutinised the intricacies of local versus national conflicts and the various forms of displacement, such as internal, external, and cross-border displacement. The role dialogue can play was discussed, focusing on its limited effects and its impact on relationships at differing levels, whether directly, indirectly, or within safe spaces. The **timing of cultural interventions** was considered, including emergency responses, mid-term support during ongoing conflicts, planned legacy initiatives, resilience-building, and the provision of financial assistance.

The working group identified potential areas in which arts and culture can have an influence during a conflict. The first of these is the preservation of cultural heritage - both tangible and intangible - as well as living heritage and the preservation of memory and identity. The second is continuous support to professionals of the cultural and creative industries, doing so by providing opportunities and funding for mobility and exchange, sustaining livelihoods, infrastructure and networks and ensuring their ability to continue their work in collaborative action. The third is the community's well-being and their use of cultural practices for therapy and healing. The understanding of cultures and their role in conflicts through learning and research was emphasised., and the group also acknowledged the critical role during conflicts played by symbolic acts and adaptations, safeguarding, and behind-the-scenes efforts during conflicts.

Post-Conflict: Conerning the post-conflict phase, the group helf that cultural relations can be an important element in at least two ways: first the recovery and healing of people affected by conflict through tools and methods such as storytelling, arts expression, etc.; and secondly by facilitating re-engagement and dialogue among disputed groups in order to foster understanding and reduce the division of perspectives.

Overall, this working group highlighted the multifaceted role ICR plays in peace and security, from preventing conflicts through dialogue to mitigating their impacts during conflicts and contributing to recovery and healing in post-conflict settings.

ICR and Digital

During the discussions, this working group examined the interrelation between digital technologies, including AI, and international cultural relations. One of the key messages that emerged from this group is that often digitalisation can be viewed in a negative light; however, it should also be considered as a tool for improving ICR practices, and even once which can provide more inclusive spaces for dialogue and the sharing of information. For example, digital tools - such as online programs and virtual exhibitions - can profoundly impact how individuals from diverse regions engage with one another. Moreover, this group emphasised the transformative potential of these tools have regarding fostering substantive cross-cultural interactions on a global scale. The utility of big data in deciphering cultural trends and contributing to the research and academic field of ICR was also noted.

The group highlighted the importance of not neglecting traditional arts and face-to-face interactions, given their ability to bring people together. They advocated for a balanced approach, emphasising the utilisation of both physical and digital means. The group put forth the notion of further reflection and allocating resources to ensure more equitable access to digital knowledge, including in the field of ICR. Additionally, the group proposed the exploration of new learning methods that integrate physical and online interactions, while being mindful of cultural sensitivities and avoiding biases.

Furthermore, the group suggested the establishment of a **global online platform** to diversify International Cultural Relations (ICR) networks. The envisioned platform would encourage collaborative efforts to shape the future direction of ICR, fostering a collective decision-making process.

DAY 3: Pathways and alternative future directions to bring International Cultural Relations forward

In the session dedicated to exploring future directions in International Cultural Relations, participants engaged in individual preparations and the submission of their recommendations to shape the theory, policy, and practice of ICR. These recommendations, addressed to the international cultural relations community, have been compiled in the next section.

These insights are intended to provide a roadmap for the future of ICR, addressing global challenges and guiding the way forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are addressed to all academics, policy makers and practitioners, directly or indirectly engaged in International Cultural Relations worldwide.

Role of ICR/Culture

- As cultural and policy praxes, ICR provides significant opportunities to facilitate cultural understanding for a better world.

- **Profile ICR as an advocacy platform to address global challenges**: In a world of political, climatological and economic instabilities, there should be greater recognition of the intangible outcomes of the ICR, such as developing connections and increasing empathy. At the same time, it is important to demonstrate the relevance of ICR in practical terms and through concrete tools, examples and best practices for solid proof-based advocacy.

- **Open up spaces to different fields and policy areas to increase ICR's visibility and impact**: engaging in conversations with other sectors and pushing for the inclusion of ICR as practice/approach, as well as a topic, can allow for a wider impact.

- **Recognise the limits of ICR**: While ICR can foster trust between borders, engender positive relations, raise awareness of global challenges, and celebrate/appreciate commonalities and/or differences, it cannot solve all crises. Understanding and being realistic about its limitations will allow ICR to lean into its strengths and justify its place within the larger framework of international relations.

- Academics, policy and practice professionals of ICR should be self-critical in evaluating their successes, failures, challenges, opportunities and ICR's level of inclusivity.

Listening and dialogue

- **ICR activities must encourage open dialogue, effective communication and deep listening**: ICR should provide a platform for the safe exchange of thoughts and opinions, promoting mutual understanding, respect for diverse perspectives, and fostering trust. Disagreements and differences in opinions should not close the dialogue but rather be embraced and seen as opportunities for growth, understanding and acceptance of diversity.

- At the institutional level, ICR actions should maintain an open dialogue, connecting various contexts and countries while actively addressing bias, stereotypes, and problematic language in conversations.

Diversity, co-creation and inclusiveness

- **ICR practices must embrace different voices and perspectives**: ICR must be a safe space for a variety of voices and viewpoints to be expressed, ensuring the inclusion of different perspectives and approaches. No group or community should be overlooked and excluded from the conversation. Importantly, specific needs and cultural sensitivities of different communities should be considered in developing ICR initiatives and strategies.

- **ICR initiatives should operate with a diversity of stakeholders and promote cultural decentralisation and decolonisation**: It is essential to promote cultural decentralisation that includes going beyond the capitals, including the regions and peripheries in order to "break" the usual bubbles, democratise access to exchanges, address inequalities and the territorial dispersion of cultural resources and activities. Encouraging regional, national, and local collaborative networks and facilitating program exchanges and cooperation can yield significant results with limited funding by fostering trust and shared responsibility.

- **ICR activities should involve and empower local communities and organisations**: It is fundamental to prioritise the involvement of local communities and grassroots organisations to drive ICR efforts and amplify the impact of community-driven cultural initiatives. This should foresee engaging wuth all relevant stakeholders in order to foster mutual understanding of needs and requirements, as well as to listen and learn from each other. **Local intermediaries** are pivotal in bridging gaps and facilitating exchanges between policymakers and practitioners. Establishing a systematic dialogue involving the private sector, academia, civil society, institutions, artists and other key actors is essential for sharing knowledge and shaping sector priorities.

- **Acknowledge the diversity of understandings, reasonings, and realities that exist**: The assumption of universal definitions, especially in concepts like human rights or climate change, where there could be a diverse array of meanings in different cultural contexts, should be avoided. Recognising that culture is grounded in diverse practices, it is therefore necessary to develop theories and policies that appreciate these differences rather than trying to fit everything into a unique framework and pattern.

- **Promote co-creation practices and people-to-people exchanges**: Co-creation and participative practices should be a guiding principle in ICR actions, considering the relevance of the collaboration process itself. A participatory approach should also be integrated also into the process of updating of strategic ICR approaches and decision-making in terms of program development, financing, and implementation. The main goal should be ncouraging artistic exchange and mobility with a long-term perspective, fostering real cooperation, genuine relationships, and meaningful engagement among people as all actions should ultimately be aimed at benefiting and improving people's well-being.

- In terms of discussing policies and their relevance, **ICR should embrace intergenerational perspectives – not only people of various cultures, backgrounds, nationalities, and sensitivities but also varying**

degrees of experience (though in some instances fresh perspectives should be promoted and empowered if there is an imbalance) – ideally creating a balance and including those who are very fresh, fresh, in their mid-career, etc. (and not only the fake dichotomy of "young" vs "old").

Power imbalances

- **ICR policy practices should seek to remove power imbalances and biases in decision-making through equitable participation**: decision-making processes in ICR should include all global actors in a fair and equitable manner, including those processes led by EU institutions for the EU agenda.

- **Power imbalances in policy formulation** must be addressed by ensuring the participation of representatives of all regions in a balanced manner, also considering the diversity of cultural, economic, and social backgrounds. Co-creation and co-designing in programmes and policy frameworks with a global perspective ensures that various voices and experiences contribute to comprehensive solutions for global challenges, leading to stronger impact. ICR should not be used to impose any vision or values onto the world.

Climate change

- **Climate change must be factored into ICR conversations**: When addressing environmental standards and responding to climate change, it is important to begin these discussions by recognising that different regions hold different levels of responsibility for the environmental crisis and acknowledging the common yet differentiated responsibilities of the EU and its southern neighbours (and beyond). To achieve this, there should be a focus on self-reflection and open discussions in order to develop a fair and effective approach to environmental issues.

- **ICR initiatives should consider environmental sustainability**: ICR interactions and initiatives must be realised with strictly sustainable tools and methods, embedding climate responsibility in all its practices. This includes encouraging slow mobility and longer stays at the destination, securing more funding to apply sustainable solutions, and sharing the CO_2 offset among the participants of events. The reality of climate change and its impact on migration, food insecurity, natural disasters, etc. must always be considered, and ICR shall develop a leading role in this matter.

Digital

- **ICR should leverage digital tools for wider reach and inclusive exchange and connections:** ICR should strategically use digital tools and technological innovations to broaden the reach and impact of its initiatives. This entails the development of online cultural exchange programs, virtual exhibitions, and interactive platforms, facilitating meaningful cross-cultural interactions among individuals from

diverse geographical regions. Additionally, employing big data analytics can provide valuable insights into cultural trends, preferences, and audience engagement, enriching our understanding on a global scale. ICR should also implement digital tools and platforms to develop meaningful hybrid peer-learning models, combining physical meetings with virtual spaces, promoting inclusivity, diversifying the network and preventing bias.

- **ICR actions should embrace technology, considering its potential impact on democratisation:** As ICR embraces technology, it must be mindful of its potential impact on democratisation: It is crucial to recognise that technological changes and digital tools may not be as universally democratic and accessible as assumed. Therefore, while exploring ICR's role in the digital age, it is essential not to overlook the power of traditional forms of art, like performing arts, in physically uniting people and fostering deep connections. However, digital platforms could be an opportunity for ICR to actively engage in the technological landscape to democratise culture and knowledge sharing.

Human rights

- **ICR can foster human rights and social justice:** ICR can serve as a catalyst for promoting human rights and social justice globally, harnessing culture to address issues like racism, discrimination, and inequality. ICR provides a platform for civil society organisations to advocate for cultural rights and artistic freedom of expression while emphasising inclusivity and diversity. ICR also creates safe spaces, both physical and mental, though practitioners must ensure the protection of participants facing endangerment or persecution within their own countries. Additionally, it should actively consider its role in promoting mental health and well-being through cultural engagement.

Peace and conflict

- **ICR has a role in promoting peace and conflict resolution:** ICR performs a significant role in envisioning a new world and global relations in regions affected by conflict. Understanding the dynamic nature of conflict, ICR must adapt to its various stages, including the build-up of tensions, the conflict itself, and the post-conflict phase centred on re-engagement, reconciliation, restoration, and healing. Recognising that conflicts can be cyclical or prolonged underscores the importance of the need for the readiness of ICR to adjust as situations evolve. Moreover, ICR's contribution to peace and conflict resolution should prioritise the perspectives of those who have experienced conflict, focusing on developing tools to address post-war challenges, particularly collective trauma, memory, and identity issues.

Education and training

- **ICR should be more widely included in education curricula:** To promote the diffusion of cultural knowledge and awareness on a global scale, it is recommended that strategies be implemented to

integrate cultural studies and global citizenship education into educational curricula, commencing at an early stage of development. Collaborative efforts between educational institutions and ICR organisations can facilitate the provision of cultural exchange opportunities to students, educators, and scholars, thereby nurturing empathy and respect for cultural diversity. These programs should be integrated and form a cohesive network for collaborative research and scholarly discourse.

• Considering the high interest in ICR from students and early graduates, it is worthwhile to compile a list of organisations working on ICR or associated policy areas that provide regular internships and make this knowledge available.

• **Cultural workers and officials should be trained on ICR**: It would be useful to create a comprehensive training program for cultural workers/practitioners aimed at equipping them with the knowledge of evolving global policies and practical cultural factors relevant to their specific contexts. The need for training also extends also to public officials engaged in ICR, where it is essential to ensure inclusivity by incorporating perspectives and insights from all global stakeholders. Priority should be given to listening to a diverse range of voices and realities, including those from civil society, individuals, NGOs, academia, and more.

Role/involvement of artists/art organisations

• **ICR should regularly involve artists and arts organisations: they can play a pivotal role in ICR**. This can include expanding ICR beyond academic and policy circles, fostering broader participation and breaking away from multilateral organisations towards grassroot initiatives. Artists, through various mediums, have the potential to challenge dominant narratives, address power imbalances, and amplify marginalised voices, thus contributing to social critique and dialogue. Bridging the gap between cultural policy and the arts is necessary, with artists and their initiatives playing a fundamental role in global challenges.

Advocacy and communication

• **ICR should increase their visibility through accessible and clear communication**: accessible information on international cultural cooperation initiatives, including EU's actions, should be communicated in a clear and transparent manner through adequate channels. A focus on digital content, promoting mobility and exchange programs, and creating platforms for engagement can enhance the visibility of various activities and approaches. ICR should be able to advocate for itself using the language of other stakeholders.

• An active international cultural relations advocacy strategy that uses the language of other stakeholders rather than those involved in ICR (e.g. well-being), should be developed. At the same time, addressing the challenge of misinformation in international cultural relations is crucial, as it requires verifying information on the ground and involving the relevant actors in local communities.

Policy/funding

- **ICR and culture should be mainstreamed in EU policy and programmes through increased synergies and funding:** Continued advocacy and political support for ICR at the EU institutional levels is needed for ICR strategies to be reformed and improved, seeking to strike a balance between EU and MSs actions. In order to do so synergies and complementarities between national-level initiatives and EU-level efforts must be fostered to ensure a more cohesive, influential, and robust European approach to cultural matters. To achieve this, EU programs must incorporate ICR on the ground and explore ways to seamlessly integrate it into foreign policy tools. More projects, more resources and more budget are necessary in these regards. This necessitates increased funding, more projects, and expanded resources, as well as a larger budget allocation to support dialogue and exchange spaces while providing assistance to artists, cultural organisations, and practitioners. Inspiration can be drawn from the successes and lessons learned from existing EU initiatives like those within the Creative Europe program and to internationalise these approaches by integrating them into INTPA initiatives.

- **A global framework for ICR**: In theory, the establishment of a comprehensive global ICR framework would be helpful if not, is essential. This framework should encompass meticulously delineated guidelines, exemplar practices, and universally applicable standards. Moreover, it must possess the flexibility to accommodate the myriad of cultural contexts and facilitate effective collaboration among nations and other stakeholders. Similarly, engaging further with the UN and considering the development of a global platform and funding scheme related to ICR could help distance ICR from the EU institutional perspective and generate further trust among stakeholders from other regions of the world.

- **Prioritising development and sustainability**: 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. This involves supporting sustainable development initiatives, including capacity-building, technological transfer, and financial assistance to address the challenges of underdevelopment and poverty. Future forums could specifically address these necessary and concrete actions, and advocate for them through ICR.

- There is a need for new evaluation models which can encompass the emotional factor through which culture impacts communities. A change in robust reporting templates should follow this.

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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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