



DECONFINING

International cultural relations

Momentum to improve intercontinental relations between Africa and EU/rope: How can we all be actors of better cooperation?

INTERCONTINENTAL DEBATE #3, 29 MARCH 2023

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Deconfining – a 4-years EU project - aims at enhancing the international cultural exchange between cities and regions which implement(ed) Capitals of Culture or similar initiatives. The project has a special focus on Africa and EU/rope. By the means of cultural and artistic exchange as well as updated policies, different confined attitudes and stereotypes should be overcome.

As one of the first steps, we elaborated a study on the status and potential for improvement of international (cultural) cooperation between Africa and EU/rope. By the means of online debates, we aim at establishing sustainable intercontinental communities and platforms.

Debate 3 was dedicated to: “Momentum to improve intercontinental relations between Africa and EU/rope: How can we all be actors of better cooperation?” which includes the presentation of the



results of the Deconfining Study, an intercontinental forum for debate of actors of cooperation, and an intercontinental political conversation.

2. PRESENTATION OF THE DECONFINING STUDY

The Deconfining Study “How Cities and Local Governments Can Contribute to Better Relations Between Africa and EU/rope?” was presented by Sylvia Amann - inforelais, the study author. While the study was conducted in the context of the Capitals of Culture initiatives, one of the first lessons learnt from related interviews and intercontinental online debates was the need for a wider perspective. Culture is a major element for local development. Capitals of Culture and similar initiatives can be additional accelerators to tap the full potential of art, culture, heritage, and creative industries for local economic, urban and social development.

Furthermore, it is important to understand that the study has a special focus on the local level and how those being responsible for local development can contribute to as well as benefit from better intercontinental cooperation. Five main areas of attention and potential local action in the context of Capitals of Culture and similar initiatives were identified:

REFLECTION

- use momentum for new perspectives on common history; raise awareness towards policy stakeholders; etc.

EMPOWERMENT

- invest in intercontinental audience engagement; empower local stakeholders for international cooperation; etc.



INFORMATION

- use data to make the case for culture in local development; establish lasting cooperation with research institutes; etc.

NETWORKING

- engage in global (cultural/policy) debates; cooperate with networks; partner with national ministries, cultural institutes, and similar initiatives; etc.

ACCESSIBILITY

- ensure people-centered local-to-local co-creation settings; co-finance just transition settings; generate social / economic benefits;

Furthermore, it must be taken into account that the wider ecosystem for intercontinental cultural relations matters equally. While the modernization of visa systems is a long-term endeavor, all actors of cooperation can already engage in better frameworks. The study report highlights the following recommendations for immediate action in view of better eco-systems:

- **Policymakers from both continents** can e. g. engage for enhanced EU-AU and AU-EU cooperation in the field of culture; etc.
- **Implementation teams of CoCs and similar initiatives** can e. g. invest in local networks for enhanced international cooperation; involve wide strata of the local population and youth in international relations; etc.
- **Organizations which aim to work (more) internationally** can e. g. involve all kinds of audiences, local cooperation partners as well as CSR departments in intercontinental actions; etc.



The study further investigated a range of updated intercontinental cooperation options to be supported with the Deconfining community. These Flagship Actions (FA) could comprise:

- FA 1: An intercontinental meeting of (cultural) mayors from Africa and EU/rope
- FA 2: Online EU/rope-Africa creative industries labs
- FA 3: The co-development of international cultural strategies in Capitals of Culture and similar initiatives in EU/rope and Africa
- FA 4: An Africa-EU/rope Youth Culture Forum of Capitals of Culture and similar initiatives
- FA 5: An EU/rope-Africa Mobility and Cooperation Fund of Capitals of Culture and similar initiatives
- FA 6: An Africa-EU/rope Culture Expert Twinning Initiative of Capitals of Culture and similar initiatives

The study author concluded that it is time to act, and improvements need the engagement of all actors of cooperation as well as of the populations on both continents.

The full study report is [available to download](#).

The debate with the participants focused on how the different actors of cooperation are addressed with concrete recommendations. The study provides a whole chapter dedicated to specific recommendations to all stakeholders in the system. In addition, the exchanges with the intercontinental audience were complemented with an online Mentimeter survey in order to better understand which actions should be privileged in the near future.

Participants highlighted that policymakers should first concentrate on the following actions for better local-to-local intercontinental (culture) relations:

- First: Strengthen the Local and City Dimensions of Support and Frameworks of International (Cultural) Relations
- Second: Support Local (Public/NGO) Structures for Cooperation in the Long Run



- Third: Provide Local-Impact Generating Cooperation Programmes

This first part of the third online debate was complemented by debates in small groups in the breakout rooms to allow for networking and common reflection.

3. CONVERSATIONS WITH POLICYMAKERS ON BETTER COOPERATION SETTINGS AND ACTIONS

The exchange with Hannes Heide, Member of the European Parliament, and Mamou Daffé, Festival sur le Niger / Centre Culturel kore with Sylvia Amann, Deconfining study author started with the question why we should engage (more) on local level for intercontinental cooperation.

The panelists emphasized the fact that a new Africa is emerging, and that culture can provide the necessary bridge between the African and European continent. The cities have a central role to play in these new relationships as they are well-positioned to reach out to wider strata of the populations. Local to local cooperation is a related fundamental pillar. This fact would also need cities to be more engaged and more involved in cultural diplomacy. This change is already happening and the Deconfining project can help to further address these areas of action.

From an European perspective, further engagement is needed to also enhance the knowledge about Africa in Europe. Arts and culture are elements which can help to gain a better understanding. This engagement also provides a strengthening of the civil societies on both continents which are crucially required. The objectives of the European and African citizens are the same and refer to e. g. the human rights or



freedom of speech. This engagement with the people will also have positive effects on peace and willingness of human beings to collaborate.

While we agree on the overarching considerations related to an enhanced local-to-local intercontinental exchange, the practical implementation of these objectives is often very complex. This experience is shared by the panelists in the sense of comments on too global or too exotic cultural programming because of the involvement of artists from other continents. The building of international partnerships is also more complex on a local level as the institutional settings differ from those available in big global metropolises. There were also cases when no local partners could be found.

Abayomi Bankolé stepped into the debate with the specifications that all settings of cooperation need to take care of equal level playing fields. The considerable imbalances in the current cooperation eco-systems still lead to experiences where ideas are extracted; and no adequate payment is provided. We must respect one another and value each other. Henrik Sand Dagfinrud shared experiences from perspectives on North-South-cooperation in Norway observing similar patterns like who has the right to make decisions, controlling and creating solutions, and who owns the idea. Furthermore, he stressed the fact that providing translation is crucial. But we should also not oversee that we have many perspectives in common like those experienced during the common residency of African and European writers in Bodo, Norway.

Further on imbalances and incoherences, these are also reflected in the funding programmes provided for intercontinental cooperation. If match funding is needed, programmes are often not available at the same time. From a European perspective, changes in geopolitical frameworks are still not well understood including e. g. growing Chinese and Russian influences on the African continent, and internal struggles harm from going further faster. This is also reflected by the pending decision on a new EU-ACP agreement.

There is an emergency to react and to come up with a new deal based on the completely modified frameworks in Africa – a continent which is now globalized and interconnected. Art and culture are



important for the development of societies and the pandemic was helpful to understand better the settings for becoming more resilient. New partnerships must be built up and Africa and Europe have to become closer again, creativity is the related key for action. This requires also trust in the local level and related access to finance (management). On the city level, investments in intercontinental cooperation strategies would be very beneficial. When further reflecting on the Deconfining Flagship Actions, intercontinental meetings of mayors from Africa and Europe could be an accelerator for local engagement in international culture relations. The Europe-Africa Youth Culture Forum could contribute to reach out to wider strata of the local populations.

4. OUTLOOK & NEXT STEPS

The artistic exchanges in the context of the EU project Deconfining continue in the upcoming months. In the area of cultural policy, we will finalize specific policy recommendations and invite further intercontinental debates. A next informal online gathering will still take place before the summer 2023. We are looking forward to meeting you again for this occasion!

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

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