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## ENHANCING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AT LOCAL LEVEL: A STUDY OF UNESCO'S INITIATIVE THROUGH CREATIVE CITIES NETWORK

**Luerdi**

Department of International Relations, University of Lampung  
Email: luerdi@fisip.unila.ac.id

### **Abstract**

*Sustainable development is a global shared agenda that has been discussed by global communities. Such agenda has, too, been a strong commitment among cities thanks to the role of international organizations like UNESCO with its initiative called the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN). Through the Network, UNESCO has contributed to enhancing sustainable development at the local level in terms of the development of creative and cultural industries. This study aims to describe such a role with a few specific objectives; to shed light on what norm the organization has embraced, how it has influenced membership of cities and maintained their commitment, and how it has promoted intercity cooperation. This research applied the qualitative method and the constructivist approach as well as the concept of norm entrepreneurship. The findings demonstrate that UNESCO plays its role as a norm entrepreneur in which sustainable development has been a global norm constructing its shared identity and conviction. Performing as a norm entrepreneur, UNESCO acts upon the role of agenda-setting and norm advocacy to introduce the idea of the UCCN and convince cities of the importance of sustainable urban development through creative assets. While socialization and the Network's membership application process contribute to diffusing the norm to the cities, reporting and monitoring are projected to be mechanisms to maintain the membership commitment. This paper offers a perspective that international organizations with significant normative power and policy innovation turn them into important actors in global politics of sustainable development.*

**Keywords:** UNESCO, Creative Cities Network, sustainable development, constructivism, norm entrepreneur.

### **Abstrak**

Pembangunan berkelanjutan merupakan agenda bersama global yang telah dibicarakan oleh komunitas global. Agenda tersebut juga telah menjadi komitmen kuat di antara kota-kota berkat peran organisasi internasional seperti UNESCO melalui inisiatif *UNESCO Creative Cities Network* (UCCN). Melalui jaringan tersebut, UNESCO telah berkontribusi menguatkan pembangunan berkelanjutan di tingkat lokal dalam hal pembangunan industri kreatif dan budaya. Studi ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan peran tersebut dengan beberapa tujuan khusus; yaitu menganalisis norma apa yang dipegang oleh UNESCO, bagaimana organisasi tersebut mempengaruhi keanggotaan kota dan menjaga komitmen mereka, dan bagaimana organisasi tersebut mempromosikan kerjasama antarkota. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif, pendekatan konstruktivis, dan konsep *norm entrepreneurship*. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan UNESCO memainkan peran sebagai *norm entrepreneur* di mana pembangunan berkelanjutan telah menjadi norma global yang mengkonstruksi identitas dan keyakinannya. Dengan bertindak sebagai *norm entrepreneur*, UNESCO telah menjalankan peran *agenda-setting* dan advokasi norma untuk memperkenalkan ide UCCN dan meyakinkan kota akan pentingnya pembangunan berkelanjutan melalui berbagai aset kreatif yang dimiliki. Di saat sosialisasi dan proses aplikasi keanggotaan jaringan tersebut berkontribusi dalam difusi norma, pelaporan dan monitoring diproyeksikan sebagai mekanisme untuk menjaga komitmen keanggotaan. Tulisan ini menghadirkan perspektif bahwa organisasi internasional dengan *normative power* yang signifikan dan inovasi kebijakan dapat menjadi aktor penting dalam politik global pembangunan berkelanjutan.

**Kata kunci:** UNESCO, Jaringan Kota Kreatif, pembangunan berkelanjutan, konstruktivisme, *norm entrepreneur*.

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## INTRODUCTION

Global issues have been attention among international communities. Sustainable development, for example, has been a global conversation and an agenda championed by both global and domestic actors. In addition to states, the world's cities are exposed to sustainability which can be seen through its adoption into local policies. International organizations with their normative power are believed to have the capability of playing an important role in facilitating sustainability to reach the cities and encouraging municipal governments to practice sustainable urban development.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) which is one of the international organizations participating in shaping the agenda of global sustainable development – through its initiative called the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) – is the main topic discussed in this paper. The UCCN is one of the leading global networks comprising cities around the world as its members. Invented in 2004, the UCCN promotes cooperation with and among cities for sustainable urban development by acknowledging creativity as a strategic factor (UCCN, n.d.-a). Within the Network, the world's cities work together towards a common objective and from which “creative cities” can be defined; to “place creativity and cultural industries at the heart of their development plans at the local level and cooperate actively at the international level” (UCCN, n.d.-a).

There exists literature discussing the UCCN in various foci. The UCCN as a platform for city branding amidst the pressure of global competitiveness has been studied by a few scholars (Gathen et al., 2021; Pearson & Pearson, 2017). Being in the UCCN offers credibility as well as global recognition with potential economic impacts (Pearson & Pearson, 2017). Similarly, Gathen et al., (2021) argued that cities through the label of UCCN would attract visitors, skilled labors, and investors.

The role of local practices in the development of the UCCN has been examined by scholars (Arcos-Pumarola et al., 2023; Yilmaz et al., 2020; Zhu & Yasami, 2021). The studies suggest that the image element of a city contributes to achieving the UCCN's common targets (Yilmaz et al., 2020) and the synthesis of local resources owned by cities and intercity cooperation within the framework of the UCCN contributes to developing creative cities (Zhu & Yasami, 2021). Meanwhile, the study by Arcos-Pumarola et al., (2023) revealed the intangible heritage and creative industries as tourism assets deemed to be important contributors to the development of creative cities.

Rosi (2014) studied the effective functioning of the UCCN comprising branding and sharing aspects. Cities use labeling to be a branding tool as a framework of communication strategies to attract not only tourists and investors but also cooperation in which they can share best practices as a way to build a stronger identity (Rosi, 2014). The study also suggests a strong trend towards more effective collaboration and joint implementation of activities between creative cities (Rosi, 2014). However, such labeling does not impact cities in the same way as studied by Guimarães et al., (2021).

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Guimarães et al., (2021) attempted to compare the impacts of the application process for cities in which they may experience different results upon being awarded a particular labeling of creative city within the UCCN. Cities with various challenges, such as local competition, historical social structure, and more tend to have restricted impacts (Guimarães et al., 2021).

Critical studies on the UCCN have also been conducted by scholars (O'Connor et al., 2020; Xiaomin, 2017). Homogenization of creative cities discourse is seen to be Western-centric and has been promoted by the global epistemic community (O'Connor et al., 2020). The studies suggest localities shall be important aspects so that cities transform creative city discourse in their own image based on a new conception of localities (O'Connor et al., 2020). Similarly, Xiaomin (2017) argued there shall be a construction of localization of creative cities.

The literature reviewed demonstrates that the world's cities have an interest in the creative and cultural industries promoted by UNESCO through the UCCN. Being in a circle of UCCN, cities expect to gain some benefits, meanwhile, the practices of creative cities can sustain the ideas embraced and the missions championed by the international organization. However, the literature discussing the role of UNESCO in enhancing urban sustainability through the UCCN according to constructivism is still rare. This study is expected to narrow the gap and contribute to enriching the study of global politics of sustainable development as well as strengthening the argument that international organizations serve as norm entrepreneurs, especially in enhancing the adoption of sustainable development at the local level.

This paper seeks to shed light on the roles of UNESCO through its initiative – the UNESCO Creative City Networks (UCCN) – to enhance sustainable development at the local level. Specifically, this paper attempts to answer the following questions; (1) which norm has UNESCO embraced? (2) How has it influenced the world's cities (to join the UCCN) and maintained their commitment to sustainable urban development? and (3) How has it promoted cooperation among cities? This paper is expected to benefit those who have an interest in international organizations in global politics, normative theories, and sustainability issues.

### **ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

This research applied constructivism and the concept of norm entrepreneurship to analyze the behavior of UNESCO. Instead of assuming the direct outcome of material drivers like military power, strategic resources, and other causes to world politics as does realism or liberalism, the constructivist approach suggests the socially constructed world that depends on the web of meaning and practices among actors (Hurd, 2009). The latter refers to intersubjectivity belief which is preceded by an interaction process.

Constructivism suggests that an actor's behavior, including identity and interest, is shaped by ideational drivers one of which is the norm. Norm is defined as the "collective expectations for the

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proper behavior of actors with a given identity (Katzenstein, 1996).” Whereas, closely to sociological language, Wendt (1992) defines a set of norms and practices as an institution. The evolution of constructivism has brought about the notion of various actors in international relations in which individuals, societal actors, and international organizations play meaningful roles in addition to states.

Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) suggest norm life cycle into three stages; norm emergence, norm cascade, and internalization. Norms do not just happen but are deliberately created by agents (actors) with strong beliefs about acceptable or desirable behavior in their community. During the first stage, the agents will need organizational platforms to call attention to issues by the use of language that labels, interprets, and dramatizes them (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). The latter is often recognized as a framing strategy. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) name the agents at this stage as norm entrepreneurs.

Norm entrepreneurs can be variously defined, for instance, as the “agents of social change with an ability to shape the collective behaviors of others” (Björkdahl, 2002) and the “actors who legitimize or de-legitimize behavior and thus change norms or engage in moral proselytism” (Nadelmann, 1990). Despite various definitions, the literature suggests that norm entrepreneurs are the actors with a “strong commitment to promoting a particular idea” (Friedrich Naumann Foundation, 2022). International organizations have been recognized as norm entrepreneurs. Acting as norm entrepreneurs, the literature suggests that international organizations fulfill such roles in several ways, such as agenda setting, norm advocacy, norm diffusion, norm enforcement, and norm institutionalization.

#### Agenda-setting

Agenda-setting is simply the act of “transforming difficulties into problems that are put on the agenda” (Saurugger, 2016). Agenda-setting is a process comprising of identifying, framing, and justifying problems all of which shall not take place in a sequence, but oftentimes simultaneously (Saurugger, 2016). In this study context, international organizations play a role in establishing the global agenda by drawing attention to new problems and elevating them to the status of global concerns through, for example, reports, resolutions, and declarations. During the process, international organizations construct a particular issue to convince other actors of the emergency or importance.

#### Norm advocacy

Norm advocacy can be defined as the efforts to actively promote and champion specific norms. Norm advocacy is a strategy to gain influence mostly by the actors with limited material or strategic resources, but with meaningful normative power, such as ideas, values, and norms. Björkdahl (2008) conceptualizes normative power as a “norm-generating and norm-spreading capability” exercised to alter normative convictions and establish normative standards through norm advocacy processes. Similarly, norm advocacy is the persuasion conducted by norm advocates to share their

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normative convictions (Keck & Sikkink, 2014). To share their normative convictions, international organizations can engage their policy initiatives, diplomatic efforts, and public statements with particular norms.

#### Norm diffusion

Norm diffusion refers to the process in which norms can be eventually, voluntarily accepted by other actors (audiences) through socialization. In this case, there exist meaningful interactions between norm diffusers and those to be exposed to the norms (audiences, norm consumers/adopters). As often assumed by constructivist scholars, international organizations diffuse norms throughout the international system (Park, 2005). However, international organizations can be norm diffusers as well as norm consumers (Park, 2005).

As norm diffusers, international organizations facilitate the diffusion of norms by disseminating information, best practices, and model policies to their members. Further, international organizations can assist the adoption and implementation of particular norms in local policies through, for instance, technical assistance, capacity-building programs, and knowledge-sharing platforms. In this case, international organizations construct the members' identity and role expectations so that their behaviors can comply with the diffused norms.

#### Norm enforcement

International norms restrain the foreign policy of actors (not only states but also non-state actors) including their choices and behaviors (Shannon, 2017). The actors' compliance with the norms takes place when the norms contribute to constructing their identity. However, contestation between existing and new norms affects the actors possibly changing their identity and encouraging noncompliance if they adopt the newly diffused norm.

Constructivism suggests international organizations as independent actors thanks to the authority and autonomy they own as the result of a social construct (Barnett & Finnemore, 1999, 2004). Such authority is constituted by delegation, morals, and expertise (Barnett & Finnemore, 1999, 2004). This allows them to function well in playing their role, including in disciplining their members. Unless international organizations act upon the members who violate the established norms that will possibly be perceived as normalization of deviation – especially when persistently conducted, the legitimacy and effectiveness of such norms will decrease. Monitoring compliance, conducting investigations, and imposing sanctions are some common ways the international organization can enforce norms. Furthermore, Dannenberg et al., (2023) suggest naming and shaming as strategies to enforce institutions – in the absence of stronger alternatives – to influence the actors' behaviors.

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### Norm Institutionalization

Institutionalization can be defined as the “process through which various social structures such as rules, norms, practices, and routines become taken for granted in everyday social life” (Hassan & Gil-Garcia, 2008). Institutionalization also refers to the “process of developing or transforming rules and procedures that influence a set of human interactions” (Keman, 2017). In this sense, norms are expected to be habits and widely accepted and day-to-day practiced by global communities. In addition, Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) suggest that institutionalization is the mechanism for norm cascade and internalization in which legitimacy, reputation, esteem, and conformity become motives. International organizations institutionalize norms by incorporating them into international cooperation and other legal frameworks. Multilateralism and consensus building often become mechanisms for international organizations to promote and uphold the norms over time.

Relying on constructivism, this paper suggests that UNESCO acts as a norm entrepreneur taking all roles above which can be seen from the very beginning; starting from its effort to introduce the UCCN as a platform for cities (agenda-setting and norm advocacy), to influence their membership and maintain their commitment on sustainable urban development (norm diffusion and norm enforcement), and to promote intercity cooperation (norm institutionalization). The roles that the international organization performs can be perceived as a long process to contribute to enhancing sustainable urban development.

### **METHODS**

This research applied the qualitative method. This type of research suggests a focus on attributes of things as well as meanings and processes that are not tested or evaluated through experimentation. Researchers emphasize the “socially constructed nature of reality,” the “intimate relationship between researchers and what is studied,” and the “situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Furthermore, researchers address the questions by stressing “how social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

This research was a literature study whose data were collected from the recorded sources. While the official documents released by UNESCO and the UCCN were retrieved as primary data, journal articles, books, and other relevant sources were retrieved as secondary data. Such data were analyzed through a data analysis spiral comprising a few steps; managing and organizing data, reading and memoing emergent ideas, describing and classifying codes into themes, developing and assessing interpretations, and representing and visualizing the data (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

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## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Sustainable Development and UNESCO Creative Cities Network**

The emergence of the sustainable development concept can be traced back to the United Nations Brundtland Commission's 1987 report defining sustainable development as the "development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations, n.d.). The concept arose due to the growing concerns of environmental degradation, social inequality, and economic instability. International communities have been addressing sustainability issues by taking cooperative and collaborative steps since sustainability is complex and multifaceted. In other words, sustainability is an approach to balancing societal needs and environmental, social, and economic limitations.

Having experienced a long transformation and set up as a global agenda that is championed by international communities, sustainable development or sustainability is now a global norm (Biermann et al., 2017; Luerdi, 2023). International organizations have a role in encouraging countries to adopt sustainability in domestic policies. The United Nations, for example, prescribes 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) for member countries to address their domestic problems by goal-setting governance. Sustainability not only becomes a concern among national governments but also among local governments, like those in the cities.

UNESCO, one of the United Nations' partner bodies, has attempted to reach the world's cities with a specific initiative called the Creative Cities Network or the UCCN. The UCCN lays creativity as a strategic factor in pursuing sustainable urban development. Cities have crucial roles in promoting sustainable development since they are home to more than half the world's population as well as three-quarters of its economic activity, including a large share of the creative economy (UCCN, n.d.-a). In addition, cities serve as laboratories for cultural diversity and are seeking cultural recognition to affirm their identity in a globalized world (UCCN, 2007).

Emphasizing creativity, cities can develop their cultural potential by transforming them into creative industries (i.e., sustainable tourism) contributing to urban economic growth. It resonates well with the SDGs (i.e., SDG Goal 8); to "promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all" (United Nations, n.d.). In addition to being a lever for sustainable development, creative and cultural industries act as the "breeding ground of action and innovation" for the implementation of the 2030 sustainable development agenda (UCCN, n.d.-a).

The UCCN translates creativity into seven creative fields (sub-networks) in which individual cities can propose their membership and devote resources to one of the fields; creative city of crafts and folk art, design, film, gastronomy, literature, media arts, and music (Arcos-Pumarola et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the Network's Mission Statement tells several objectives and areas of action as the following:

Table 1. UCCN's Objectives and Areas of Actions

| <b>Objectives</b>  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strengthen international cooperation between cities that have recognized creativity as a strategic factor of their sustainable development;</li> <li>• stimulate and enhance initiatives led by member cities to make creativity an essential component of urban development, notably through partnerships involving the public and private sectors and civil society;</li> <li>• strengthen the creation, production, distribution, and dissemination of cultural activities, goods, and services;</li> <li>• develop hubs of creativity and innovation and broaden opportunities for creators and professionals in the cultural sector;</li> <li>• improve access to and participation in cultural life as well as the enjoyment of cultural goods and services, notably for marginalized or vulnerable groups and individuals;</li> <li>• fully integrate culture and creativity into local development strategies and plans.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Areas of Action</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sharing experiences, knowledge, and best practices;</li> <li>• pilot projects, partnerships, and initiatives associating the public and private sectors, and civil society;</li> <li>• professional and artistic exchange programs and networks;</li> <li>• studies, research, and evaluations on the experience of the Creative Cities;</li> <li>• policies and measures for sustainable urban development;</li> <li>• communication and awareness-raising activities.</li> </ul>  |

*Source:* ((Guimarães et al., 2021; UCCN, n.d.-c)

Having initiated the network as a breakthrough to enhance sustainable development – considered a global norm – at the local level, this paper suggests that UNESCO has been acting as a norm entrepreneur. Through the membership of the network, cities are expected to behave according to the mission of the network; promoting sustainable urban development by taking advantage of creativity and culture. This also aligns with one of UNESCO's goals; promoting cultural diversity. In this sense, UNESCO acts as an agent of social change to shape and legitimate the collective behavior of cities as the UCCN's members as argued by Björkdahl (2002) and Nadelmann (1990).

As the concept of norm entrepreneurship suggests, to begin with, UNESCO attempts to draw the attention of cities to the importance of sustainable urban development as they possess the cultural potential to develop. The UCCN was launched following UNESCO's initiative of the Global Alliance for Cultural Diversity set up in 2002 to bring together partners from public and private sectors as well as members of civil society to support the growth of the creative industries and create new opportunities for global cooperation (UCCN, 2007).

The UCCN could be a spotlight for the world's cities – especially for those not yet in the Network – through declarations, reports, events, or other routines regarding urban sustainability and achievements by cities in addition to the legitimacy and reputation of UNESCO. These efforts aim to frame sustainable urban development as a common concern and share normative convictions embraced by UNESCO. The UCCN should be a platform to unlock the power of urban cultural and



creative industries for such development. This is in line with the role of agenda-setting and norm advocacy that the international organization has played as the concept suggests (Keck & Sikkink, 2014; Saurugger, 2016).

**Influence Membership and Maintain Commitment to Sustainable Urban Development**

The membership of the UCCN has increased significantly since its inception in 2004. By the end of 2023, the Network has designated 350 municipalities of a hundred countries as creative cities within all seven thematic networks. That cities are striving to gain economic return and international recognition by attaching themselves to the label of creative cities is a common reason (Gathen et al., 2021; Pearson & Pearson, 2017). In addition to economic motives, cities can preserve local cultures and enhance partnerships to advance cultural understanding in a globalized world within the Network as the efforts to build and strengthen urban identities (Rosi, 2014).

UNESCO – just like many international organizations – uses persuasion to convince cities of the UCCN’s function and effectiveness in supporting sustainable urban development including the benefits of being in the Network. Socialization through publications, reports, and various events associated with the organization can be tools. However, cities are supposed to meet the criteria of any thematic sector of the UCCN if they are willing to apply for membership, and often, cities need preparations and efforts to fit them. The criteria of each thematic network can be seen as the following:

Table 2. UCCN’s Membership Application Criteria

| <b>Literature</b>   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality, quantity, and diversity of editorial initiatives and publishing houses;</li> <li>• Quality and quantity of educational programs focusing on domestic or foreign literature in primary and secondary schools as well as universities;</li> <li>• Urban environment in which literature, drama, and/or poetry play an integral role;</li> <li>• Experience in hosting literary events and festivals aiming at promoting domestic and foreign literature;</li> <li>• Libraries, bookstores, and public or private cultural centers dedicated to the preservation, promotion, and dissemination of domestic and foreign literature;</li> <li>• Active effort by the publishing sector to translate literary works from diverse national languages and foreign literature;</li> <li>• Active involvement of media, including new media, in promoting literature and strengthening the market for literary products.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Cinema</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Important infrastructure related to cinema, e.g. film studios, film landscapes/environments, etc.;</li> <li>• Historic links to the production, distribution, and commercialization of films;</li> <li>• Experience in hosting film festivals, screenings, and other film-related events;</li> <li>• Collaborative initiatives at a local, regional, and international level;</li> <li>• Film heritage in the form of archives, museums, private collections, and/or film institutes;</li> <li>• Filmmaking schools and training centers;</li> <li>• Effort in disseminating films produced and/or directed locally or nationally;</li> <li>• Initiatives to encourage knowledge-sharing on foreign films.</li> </ul>  |

**Music**

- Recognized centers of musical creation and activity;
- Experience in hosting musical festivals and events at a national or international level;
- Promotion of the music industry in all its forms;
- Music schools, conservatories, academies, and higher education institutions specialized in music;
- Informal structures for music education, including amateur choirs and orchestras;
- Domestic or international platforms dedicated to particular genres of music and music from other countries;
- Cultural spaces suited for practicing and listening to music, e.g. open-air auditoriums.

**Crafts and Folk Art**

- Long-lasting tradition in a particular form of crafts or folk art;
- Contemporary production of crafts and folk art;
- Strong presence of craft makers and local artists;
- Training centers related to crafts and folk-art-related occupations;
- Efforts to promote crafts and folk art (festivals, exhibitions, fairs, markets, etc.);
- Infrastructure relevant to crafts and folk art, e.g. museums, handicraft stores, local art fairs, etc.

**Design**

- Established design industry;
- Cultural landscape fueled by design and the built environment (architecture, urban planning, public spaces, monuments, transportation, signage and information systems, typography, etc.);
- Design schools and design research centers;
- Practicing groups of creators and designers with a continuous activity at a local and/or national level;
- Experience in hosting fairs, events, and exhibits dedicated to design;
- Opportunity for local designers and urban planners to take advantage of local materials and urban/natural conditions;
- Design-driven creative industries, e.g. architecture and interiors, fashion and textiles, jewelry and accessories, interaction design, urban design, sustainable design, etc.

**Media Arts**

- Development of cultural and creative industries triggered by digital technology;
- Successful media arts integration leading to the improvement of urban life;
- Growth of electronic art forms seeking the participation of civil society;
- Wider access to culture through digital technology development;
- Residency programs and other studio spaces for media artists.

**Gastronomy**

- Well-developed gastronomy that is characteristic of the urban center and/or region;
- Vibrant gastronomy community with numerous traditional restaurants and/or chefs;
- Endogenous ingredients used in traditional cooking;
- Local know-how, traditional culinary practices, and methods of cooking that have survived industrial/technological advancement;
- Traditional food markets and traditional food industry;
- Tradition of hosting gastronomic festivals, awards, contests, and other broadly-targeted means of recognition;
- Respect for the environment and promotion of sustainable local products;
- Nurturing public appreciation, promotion of nutrition in educational institutions, and inclusion of biodiversity conservation programs in cooking schools' curricula.

*Source: (UCCN, 2007)*

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Prospective cities can justify their applications on one of the UCCN's fields they excel in based on the criteria. The applications have to show unequivocally commitment, readiness, and capability to contribute to the goals and mission of the Network. Technical assistance during the application process can be helpful for the cities to meet the prescribed criteria. When the applications are favorable through the selection process by a panel of experts, cities are entitled to the UCCN and allowed to use their logo under the terms and conditions of UNESCO's graphic charter (UCCN, 2007). Upon being a member of UCCN, cities can engage in several gatherings (i.e., Annual Conference) held the UNESCO as well as specific meetings among cities within the same particular fields of creativity or sub-networks which allow them to experience an exchange of knowledge and best practices in implementing sustainability in the local level.

As the constructivist approach believes, the cities' willingness to be part of the UCCN demonstrates convergent identity to the significant others – here the UNESCO. Acting as a norm diffuser, the organization facilitates norm diffusion through various tools as the concept suggests. The application process has an important role in this phase as cities should adapt to suit the criteria which means that they have adopted a certain degree of sustainable development contributed by creative sectors. Furthermore, the status of membership intensifies such diffusion since cities are exposed to policies parallel with the UCCN's objectives in addition to direct participation in various events.

Once the cities become UCCN members even for an unlimited period, they have to comply with the existing rules. In other words, cities have to maintain the commitment to sustainable urban development through the development of creative and cultural industries. UNESCO uses reporting and monitoring as instruments to measure the members' commitment. In terms of reporting, following the IX Annual Conference of the UCCN held in Kanazawa (Japan) in 2015 adopting a new guidelines document, cities are required to submit a four-year basis of membership monitoring report on the progress made regarding the local and international implementation of policies and activities (UCCN, 2021).

The membership monitoring report which demonstrates steadfast commitment is comprised of several important parts, for instance, contribution to the global management of the UCCN's programs, major local initiatives as well as "intercity and international cooperation" initiatives implemented to achieve the objectives of the UCCN, and proposed action plan for the upcoming four-year midterm period (UCCN, 2021). The new document has replaced the previously annual basis of report to the UNESCO (UCCN, 2007). Should the cities no longer show commitment and defy the Mission Statement and objectives of the UCCN, UNESCO can invite them to leave the network. Consequently, the cities are no longer allowed to use the membership, including the UCCN's name and logo in their strategic communication materials (UCCN, 2007).

As norm entrepreneurs, the actors should act as norm enforcers to determine quite effective mechanisms to enact compliance among their circles. Securing compliance means that the actors are

still becoming legitimate in upholding the norms and enhancing the implementation. In the case of the UCCN, both reporting by the member cities and monitoring by UNESCO are the available mechanisms to ensure sustainable development implemented at the local level. This paper argues such norm-enforcing tools are quite effective in maintaining the cities’ commitment to urban sustainability as none of the reports has informed that any member city is expelled from the Network’s membership. On the other hand, more and more cities are showing their interest in and admitted to being members of the Network, in terms of not only quantity but also geographical distribution.

Relying on the constructivist approach, the authority UNESCO owns to discipline the cities is the result of a social construct comprised of morals, delegation, and expertise as suggested by Barnett and Finnemore (1999, 2004). In addition to being the actor delegated as a principal of the UCCN, the organization has both longstanding normative and operational experience to contribute to enhancing sustainability through policy advice, technical assistance, and capacity building, especially in urban areas by utilizing the cities’ creative assets.

**Promoting Intercity Cooperation**

The UCCN not only emphasizes the adoption of sustainable urban development through individual efforts of member cities but also encourages them to build intercity cooperation. The annual conference which can be seen as the most important gathering of the UCCN is one kind of available platform to encourage such cooperation and the annual conferences often bear declarations and working documents strengthening commitment to sustainable urban development among cities. The annual conferences offer a unique occasion to strengthen ties between cities as specified by the main objectives, as the following:

Table 3. Main Objectives of UCCN Annual Conferences

| <b>The Main Objectives of UCCN Annual Conferences</b>  |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exchange updated, practical information on policies and activities carried out by cities to further implement the objectives of the Network both at the local and international level and stimulate inter-city collaborations;</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer a key platform of discussion between UNESCO and Creative Cities on the Organization’s priorities of action in the field of culture and development as well as other issues of mutual interests;</li> </ul>                          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Showcase and broaden the impact and outreach of the Network and its member cities by nurturing dialogue with other relevant stakeholders, notably those from the local levels.</li> </ul>   |

*Source: (UCCN, n.d.-b)*

In addition to the annual conferences, cities have working meetings to engage and discuss more specific creative issues based on individual creative fields or sub-networks. Such gatherings whether conferences and meetings under the framework of the UCCN enable cities to learn and exchange best practices and policies on how sustainable principles are implemented in urban areas. This sharing aspect – together with branding – becomes the factor driving the effectiveness of the

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UCCN as argued by Rosi (2014). In addition, the existence of the Network and local resources owned by the cities have a share in developing creative cities (Zhu & Yasami, 2021).

The UCCN's gathering events have also paved cities to conduct cooperation cross- or/and within sub-networks which becomes part of the UCCN's membership monitoring. To mention a few of them, for example, are the cooperation between Sapporo and other Japanese creative cities (Sapporo, 2021), Tsuruoka and other cities of gastronomy (Tsuruoka Creative City of Gastronomy Promotion Committee, n.d.), Dublin and Iowa City (Cities of Literature, n.d.), and many more. Such cooperation often results in intercity initiatives to develop creative and cultural industries in smaller scopes and achieve the UCCN's objectives through either bilateral or multilateral ties. Furthermore, Rosi (2014) notes the cities within the UCCN have demonstrated effective collaboration and joint implementation of policies.

As the constructivist approach suggests, international organizations can institutionalize norms through international cooperation and other frameworks referring to the process of transforming norms to be habits affecting a set of interactions among actors (Hassan & Gil-Garcia, 2008; Keman, 2017). Promoting intercity cooperation through conferences or meetings that are normally followed by a more specific collaboration between two or more two-member cities is the effort for such norm institutionalization. In this sense, intercity cooperation has been day-to-day business within the UCCN platform. In addition, this phase raises awareness that legitimacy, reputation, esteem, and conformity are the actors' motives as suggested by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998).

## CONCLUSION

UNESCO acts as a norm entrepreneur taking its role to enhance sustainable urban development in terms of creative and cultural industries. Such effort has been conducted through an experiment of the UCCN initiative to consolidate cities' commitment to adopt and implement policies and activities compliant with the mission and objectives of the Network. The initiative began with the agenda-setting to mainstream the idea of the Network, followed by other phases until the norm incorporated in intercity cooperation was seen as "business as usual."

Normative power has been a driving factor in global politics, especially that is owned by international organizations. They can contribute to directly transforming norms in smaller areas of states and change the local governments' behaviors thanks to their convergent identity. In this regard, global norms are no longer subject to only states' concerns but also sub-states'. This paper offers a perspective that serving as norm entrepreneurs as well as performing capability of making innovation have paved international organizations to be important actors in global politics of sustainable development.

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