

Communique – priorities for the future UK/ Italy bilateral cultural relationship | Building on the legacy of UK/IT 2020 Season

The UK/IT 2020 Season of Culture concluded on 30 November 2020 after delivering to audiences more than 50 virtual events spanning dance, literature, music, theatre and visual arts – the British Council’s first ever digital-led Season.

The Season’s timing was crucial, with the UK’s imminent departure from the EU and the pandemic that had torn across the world – there was an urgency for the dialogue and artistic content to centre on social, economic and cultural recovery. The Season provided a platform to reimagine the future with culture and collaboration at its heart, strengthening and creating new bilateral alliances for a richer and more sustainable future.

Where are we now?

New Ipsos Mori Research presented during the Season on the UK and Italy’s perceptions of each other paints a nuanced, but positive picture. Both countries hold a high degree of mutual regard for one another and uphold shared values for democracy and equality. Both countries however feel pessimism and fear for the future against a context of rapid globalisation, economic uncertainty and the climate emergency. This research tells us that whilst we differ on some of our responses to these challenges, ultimately our shared culture is stronger than we realise.

The British Council and our partners in Italy and the UK resolve to take forward the spirit of optimism sown through the Season.

Together, we will continue to support transcultural priorities that seek to find solutions to shared challenges, providing a platform for knowledge transfer through dialogue. These priorities include:

- Making the case for culture as a vehicle for resilient societies and wellbeing; supporting new narratives around why culture and creative expression matters as a human right as well as being drivers of health and prosperity
- Addressing the climate crisis, and the need for a sustainable future, reducing environmental impact through embracing digital innovation
- Championing diversity of representation in cultural institutions and practice – challenging who is present and who is absent from our organisations and outputs
- Supporting empowered and diversified cultural leadership and practice with an increased focus on the social value of arts & culture in our communities
- Galvanising the next generation of UK/ Italy relations: engaging young people in the practice of cultural and educational exchange for a richer future
- Protecting cultural heritage at risk from the impact of terrorism, conflict and climate change.

We will make a commitment to upholding these priorities through:

1. Establishing the first British Council Italy Culture Advisory Board to drive our shared agenda on key issues outlined above and inform our contributions to key fora including the annual Pontignano Conference, and the Culture Salon series 2021
2. Launching the Culture Salons 2021 series – these virtual roundtable events were an essential element of our Season, enabling us to share culture sector best practice.