

# Welcoming Remarks

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A special thanks to Vishakha Desai for masterminding the event and making it happen. This is an extraordinary gathering and the people gathered today are experts and leaders doing groundbreaking work in the field of arts and culture in the world today and in the vibrancy and the health of cities. The purpose of this gathering is to have an intimate conversation as practitioners and thinkers on this issue of equitable cities and arts and culture.

**Kate D. Levin**  
Former Commissioner  
NYC Department of Cultural Affairs  
New York City, USA



I would like to say thanks to colleagues at the Ford Foundation, Vishakha and to all the participants here for your gifts of ideas, time, candor, throughout the course of the day. In one of the early conversations about doing this event, it was noted that in the United States, in terms of government innovation, the momentum has generally tilted away from federal and state levels towards cities. While the reasons for this are not cheering, many localities have taken the opportunity (often out of desperation) to ramp up their capacity to find new and different ways of creating positive change. To take advantage of this situation, we need to find more comprehensive and nuanced ways of expressing the value of arts and culture to urban leaders. Today's conversation is therefore timely, bringing expansive perspectives to understanding the present and potential future of this field.

## Saskia Sassen

Robert S. Lynd Professor of Sociology  
Co-Chair, Committee on Global Thought  
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I agree with Kate. I do not work with arts and culture, per se, but my expertise lies with the city. I think of the city as a complex but incomplete system. One of the major threats to cities today is that there is a strong tendency of over determining urban space. The city is a critical mixture of incompleteness and indeterminacy. This is a timely conference as in the last thirty years there has been a major rebuilding of cities with the emergence of the global city. I think of arts and culture as a social practice. It has become a strategic issue and the challenge of a social question; rather than one variable, it consists of many different modalities.



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