



**CONVENTION ON THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF THE  
DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS**

**CULTURE IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:  
INSIGHTS FOR THE FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION OF ART. 13<sup>\*</sup>**

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**Article 2 Para 6 -- Principle of sustainable development:** Cultural diversity is a rich asset for individuals and societies. The protection, promotion and maintenance of cultural diversity are an essential requirement for sustainable development for the benefit of present and future generations.

**Article 13 – Integration of culture in sustainable development:** Parties shall endeavour to integrate culture in their development policies at all levels for the creation of conditions conducive to sustainable development and, within this framework, foster aspects relating to the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions.

## 1. Background

The concept of “sustainable development” originated in the 1970s with the debate that was prompted at that time by the report of the Club of Rome, which drew attention to the environmental consequences of rapid economic growth.<sup>1</sup> But the concept did not take more substantial shape until the publication in 1987 of *Our Common Future*, the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (“the Brundtland Commission”).<sup>2</sup> The Commission argued that exploitative resource use in industrialised countries was threatening the air, land and water systems of the planet and was a direct contributor to problems of poverty and lack of development in the developing world. The Commission pointed to the long-term consequences of failing to take action and advocated the adoption of policies aimed at achieving sustainable development, defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

During the 1980s as the debate about environmental and ecological sustainability continued, a shift was also occurring in thinking about the economics of development. Earlier ideas about the centrality of economic growth in development policy (increases in real GDP per head) were being replaced by broader notions of development as a human-centred rather than a commodity-centred process. Indicators regarded as relevant for assessing levels of development in different countries were expanded from those measuring only material gains to a range of statistics reflecting such aspects as nutritional levels of the population, health status, literacy levels, educational access and environmental quality.

This paradigm shift was accelerated particularly by the UNDP’s *Human Development Reports* which began publication in 1991, and also by the writings of the economist Amartya Sen, who characterised development as “human capability expansion”, i.e. enhancement of the capacities of people to lead the sorts of lives they desire, including their access to cultural resources and cultural participation.<sup>3</sup>

The particular role of culture in this evolving scenario was brought into focus by the World Commission on Culture and Development (“the Perez de Cuellar Commission”), whose report *Our Creative Diversity* was published in 1995.<sup>4</sup> The Commission pointed to the essential cultural dimensions of a human-centred development paradigm, and proposed bringing culture in from the periphery of development thinking and placing it in centre stage.

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<sup>1</sup> Donella Meadows et al., 1972. *The limits to growth: a report for the Club of Rome’s project on the predicament of mankind*. New York: Universe Books.

<sup>2</sup> World Commission Environment and Development, 1987. *Our common future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Amartya Sen, 1990. ‘Development as capacity expansion’, in Keith Griffin and John Knight (eds.), *Human development and the international development strategy for the 1990s*. London: Macmillan, pp. 41–58.

<sup>4</sup> World Commission on Culture and Development, 1995. *Our creative diversity*. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO further elaborated these processes in the wide-ranging contents of the two editions of the *World Culture Report* published in 1998 and 2000.

The WCCD's argument concerning the centrality of culture was given greater policy relevance at the International Conference on Cultural Policies for Development held in Stockholm in 1998, when the 150 governments represented agreed to make cultural policy one of the key components of development strategy. It was proposed that governments should recognise culture in such a way that cultural policies would "become one of the key components of endogenous and sustainable development".<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the apparent unanimity with which these sentiments were held, progress towards their implementation in most countries was slow. Although ideas about economic and environmental sustainability had become incorporated into policy-making in a number of areas, their extension to include culture was rare. In both developed and developing countries, opportunities to recognise the linkages between economic and cultural development within the context of sustainability were being overlooked. It was for these reasons that Article 13 was specifically included in the 2005 Convention, to focus attention on the need to take a holistic view of the development process, bringing the cultural dimensions of development together with economic and environmental objectives within a sustainability framework.

## **2. The present situation**

Although there is now widespread acceptance of the idea that human development should be a primary focus of development thinking, the incorporation of culture into development processes remains unclear, and there is no agreed model for describing how this should occur. Certainly the advances made over the last ten years or so in understanding the role of culture in development that were mentioned above have consolidated an acceptance that such a role exists, but how this should be articulated, and how it translates into policy, are matters that remain to be fully resolved. Meanwhile considerations of cultural policy have become increasingly pre-occupied with the cultural industries. Although the relevance of the cultural industries to the question of integrating culture into sustainable development may not be immediately apparent, these industries do in fact offer a pragmatic way of capturing policy-makers' attention, as explained in the following paragraphs.

Recognition of the cultural industries<sup>6</sup> has of course been with us for a number of years, but it has been only relatively recently that analysis of their structure and measurement of their performance has begun to take shape. A sharper understanding is accumulating of the contribution the cultural industries make to a range of economic and social objectives including GDP growth, employment creation, regional development, urban revitalisation and social cohesion. From this is emerging a realisation that in both developed and developing countries, a cultural industries paradigm offers means of linking culture and the economy in ways that acknowledge both the economic importance of creative activities and the specific cultural value inherent in and produced by these activities.

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<sup>5</sup> UNESCO, 1998. *Final report of Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development: the power of culture*, Stockholm, 30 March–2 April. Paris: UNESCO.

<sup>6</sup> Precise definition of the cultural or creative industries remains a contested matter. UNESCO defines them as those industries that combine the creation, production and commercialisation of contents which are intangible and cultural in nature and which are typically protected by copyright. Most classifications of the cultural industries include at least the following: visual and performing arts; music; audio-visual industries including radio, television and film; publishing; print media; new media; cultural heritage; some aspects of design; and some creative services such as architecture.

What are the implications of the cultural industries for cultural policy? At one level a distinction might be made between the situation in economically advanced countries as compared with countries at earlier stages of development. In the former, the cultural industries are likely to be dominated by large corporate enterprises – the global publishing houses or music corporations, for example – suggesting a strong commercial orientation to cultural policy. By contrast, the cultural sector in developing countries will typically be characterised by small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), with local economic and cultural development as a principal policy focus.

However, this is by and large a false dichotomy because, regardless of the stage of development, most countries have an interest in the cultural industries at all levels. So, in *developed* countries for example, although large-scale cultural enterprises may make the greatest economic contribution, the cultural sector in these countries is as likely as anywhere else to be just as concerned about local cultural activity based on grass-roots artistic production and consumption. Likewise the attention of policy-makers in *developing* countries is not necessarily focussed solely on local cultural development, but is likely to extend to exploring possibilities for increased engagement in the global cultural marketplace as well.

Thus when considering the significance of the cultural industries for sustainable development, a more comprehensive view needs to be taken, one which is general enough to capture the elements common to development processes wherever they occur but flexible enough to be tailored to specific countries' particular circumstances and requirements. Such an approach is outlined below.

### **3. Towards an operational approach to culturally sustainable development**

Taking account of the way understanding has evolved concerning the concept of sustainability and the role of culture in development as discussed above, we now put forward a set of principles for culturally sustainable development and suggest that they can best be made operational through a broad-ranging conceptualisation of the cultural industries and their potential place in any country's development agenda.

We begin by noting the formal similarities between natural capital (natural resources, biodiversity and natural eco-systems) and cultural capital (cultural assets, cultural diversity and cultural "eco-systems" or networks). Accordingly, it is possible to derive a series of principles for development that can be regarded as *culturally* sustainable from the criteria that underlie the concept of sustainable development articulated from an *ecological* or *environmental* perspective. A suggested set of principles is as follows:

- *intergenerational equity*: development must take a long-term view and not be such as to compromise the capacities of future generations to access cultural resources and meet their cultural needs; this requires particular concern for protecting and enhancing a nation's tangible and intangible cultural capital.
- *intragenerational equity*: development must provide equity in access to cultural production, participation and enjoyment to all members of the community on a fair and non-discriminatory basis; in particular, attention must be paid to the poorest members of society to ensure that development is consistent with the objectives of poverty alleviation.
- *importance of diversity*: just as sustainable development requires the protection of biodiversity, so also should account be taken of the value of cultural diversity to the processes of economic, social and cultural development.
- *precautionary principle*: when facing decisions with irreversible consequences such as the destruction of cultural heritage or the extinction of valued cultural practices, a risk-averse position must be adopted.

- *interconnectedness*: economic, social, cultural and environmental systems should not be seen in isolation; rather, a holistic approach is required, i.e. one that recognises interconnectedness, particularly between economic and cultural development.

These principles can be seen as a checklist against which particular policy measures can be judged in order to ensure their cultural sustainability.

The reasons for arguing the case for culture-in-development within a broad-ranging cultural industries framework are essentially pragmatic. Development policy both in developed countries and in the developing world is generally framed in economic terms, articulated through the various means by which governments deliver economic policy: fiscal and monetary policy, trade policy, labour market policy, regional development policy and so on. Economists who control the purse-strings in treasuries and ministries of finance tend sometimes to be unimpressed with arguments based solely on the virtues of culture. In such circumstances it can be suggested that the best hope for introducing culture into the development policy agenda is by demonstrating how the cultural industries can contribute to sustainable development, through the contribution that artistic and cultural production, dissemination and participation make to economic empowerment, cultural enrichment and social cohesion in the community.

Such an approach does not imply that economic objectives should take precedence over cultural ones in progress towards culturally sustainable development. Indeed achievement of sustainability in the development of cultural industries across the board requires careful nurturing of core artistic activity which is an essential foundation upon which the wider industries are built. This argument can be strengthened by appeal to the conceptualisation of the cultural industries as a series of “concentric circles” built around the core components of primary artistic and cultural production.<sup>7</sup> This model asserts that a healthy and flourishing environment for creative artists and arts organisations is necessary to support the more commercial operations of the cultural sector. By ensuring a policy of support for the arts and heritage, the essential integrity of artistic and cultural production and consumption can be maintained while scope is given for enhancing the economic contribution that the wider range of cultural enterprises can make.

#### **4. Proposal for Operational guidelines**

The above considerations can be drawn together into a set of practical guidelines for policy formulation aimed at integrating culture into sustainable development. The following guidelines are suggested:

- No single policy prescription or instrument will deliver culturally sustainable development; rather, a package of policy measures will be required whose components will differ in emphasis in different countries depending on particular needs.
- For this reason policy formulation will not be the responsibility of a single ministry, but will require collaboration and cooperation across a range of government instrumentalities and agencies concerned with economic, social and cultural development.
- Recognising the economic potential of the cultural industries provides a practical way for introducing culture into a broader economic development agenda. At the same time the responsibilities of policy to deliver cultural as well as economic benefits must be recognised; this requires a clear distinction to be maintained between economic value and cultural value in the deliverables from the cultural sector of the economy,
- In line with the previous requirement, an essential element of any culturally sustainable development policy, regardless of the national context, will be attention to the needs of

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<sup>7</sup> See further in David Throsby, 2001. *Economics and culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

creative artists and arts organisations and a strong policy stance in regard to the conservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

- Attention should be paid to long-term investment in infrastructure including: *physical* infrastructure to support cultural production, distribution and consumption; *institutional* infrastructure such as public cultural instrumentalities and agencies; *legal* and *regulatory* infrastructure such as an effective copyright regime; and *financial* infrastructure to provide a sound basis for provision of financial services.
- Given that ultimately the processes of culturally sustainable development are played out within communities, it is important that long-term capacity-building at local level be undertaken, so that decision making and resource allocation for culture can be devolved as far as possible to local levels.
- Any package of policy measures put together in accordance with these guidelines should be assessed against the principles for culturally sustainable development specified above in order to ensure the essential requirements for sustainability are met.