

THE SOFT POWER OF CULTURE

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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WHAT IS CULTURAL SOFT POWER?

Cultural soft power – sometimes referred to as cultural diplomacy – is a form of soft power that strives to foster the exchange of views and ideas, promote knowledge of other cultures, and build bridges between communities. Ultimately, it seeks to promote a positive vision of cultural diversity, highlighting it as a source of innovation, dialogue and peace.

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WHAT ARE UNESCO'S LINKS WITH SOFT POWER?

The Constitution of UNESCO proclaims that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”. When UNESCO’s founders penned these words in November 1945, the devastation of World War II was undoubtedly foremost in their thoughts. They saw clearly that hard power alone could not maintain peace. What was needed was the soft power of culture. Guided by this belief, UNESCO has worked to build a more peaceful world through the promotion of intercultural dialogue and exchange in the fields of culture, the natural sciences, education, social and human sciences and communications.

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HOW DOES UNESCO EXERCISE SOFT POWER?

- i. **Supporting post-conflict reconstruction.** For decades, UNESCO has supported the reconstruction of heritage as a means to promote unity and reconciliation in countries recovering from conflict. UNESCO led the reconstruction of the Mostar Bridge – a powerful symbol of peaceful coexistence – in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2004. More recently, UNESCO supported the reconstruction of the mausoleums of Timbuktu, destroyed by extremists in 2012, and has launched a new initiative to “Revive the Spirit of Mosul”, with over \$50 million in funding from the UAE.
- ii. **Working through its normative tools.** Through the 1970 Convention, UNESCO is fostering partnerships among a diverse array of global actors – INTERPOL, customs officers, museums and auction houses – to halt the growing looting and illicit trafficking of cultural objects. Under the 1972 World Heritage Convention, UNESCO organizes a yearly World Heritage Youth Forum, offering young people a chance to learn more about heritage conservation, and practice the values of dialogue and mutual understanding. Both the World Heritage Convention and the 2003 Intangible Heritage Convention encourage transboundary and multi-country nominations for the safeguarding of tangible and intangible heritage, uniting countries around their shared heritage practices and know-how.
- iii. **Strengthening the creative industries.** UNESCO’s International Fund for Cultural Diversity (IFCD) aims to support the emergence of vibrant cultural industries in developing countries, financing 97 projects in 54 countries to date. The 2005 Convention is also working to achieve a balanced flow of cultural goods and services through its global capacity-building programmes, which includes training workshops, policy advice, and technical assistance missions.
- iv. **Celebrating the arts.** UNESCO fosters intercultural dialogue through events such as International Jazz Day, 30 April, which brings together students, artists, historians, and jazz enthusiasts from all over the world to celebrate and learn about jazz. UNESCO also mobilizes its more than 100 Artists for Peace and Goodwill Ambassadors – including the World Orchestra for Peace – as champions of dialogue and understanding.

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KEY MESSAGES



The Constitution of UNESCO proclaims that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed”. UNESCO’s founders saw clearly that hard power alone could not maintain peace. What was needed was the soft power of culture.



Cultural soft power – the exchange of ideas, information, art and other cultural expressions between countries and people – is fundamental to UNESCO’s efforts to promote peace through international dialogue and exchange in the areas of culture, natural science, education, social and human sciences and communications.



Cultural exchange is key to addressing the challenges of urbanization. With more than 50% of the world’s population now living in urban areas, cities are increasingly places where growth, innovation and diversity exist side by side with inequality, discrimination and conflict. To bridge this divide, cities must harness the power of cultural exchange to promote development that works for everyone.



Cultural soft power is essential to countering the systematic destruction of cultural heritage by extremists, as well as to rebuilding societies in post-conflict situations. Extremists target heritage for the values it represents, seeking to destroy references to diversity that clash with their own exclusionary vision of history and culture. Intercultural dialogue and respect for diversity are therefore among our most powerful tools for safeguarding heritage and promoting reconciliation.



Cultural exchange can also support sustainable development. Global trade in creative goods more than doubled between 2004 and 2013, and today the cultural and creative industries represent around 3% of global GDP and 30 million jobs. Promoting the mobility of artists, particularly from the Global South, is therefore an effective means of encouraging both intercultural understanding and economic development.