“Cultural matters are integral parts of the lives we lead. If development can be seen as enhancement of our living standards, then efforts geared to development can hardly ignore the world of culture.”

Amartya Sen

As the world prepares for Rio+20, the focus is on environmental sustainability and green economies, a more efficient institutional framework for sustainable development and its seven priorities areas: jobs, energy, cities, food, water, oceans and disasters. These are the key words which will drive the agenda and shape the outcomes of this landmark meeting.

Although culture does not feature as an explicit theme of the Conference, its essential role in fostering sustainable development is being increasingly recognised. We are all familiar with the intrinsic value of culture as a repository of symbols and identity. But many are also becoming aware of the powerful contribution culture can make to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development, and indeed to each one of the key priority areas listed above.

At the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, in 2002, the importance of culture for development was stated in principle. Rio+20 provides an unmissable opportunity to move from theory to practice and agree on a concrete agenda for integrating culture into development programmes at global and national levels.

Browse through this web-site to learn more about why culture is a crucial consideration in development strategies and how it may contribute specifically to the various themes which will be discussed at Rio + 20.
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Culture and sustainable development: the key ideas

If achieving sustainability is first and foremost about making an appropriate use of the planet’s resources, then culture must be at the centre of our development strategies, since cultures frame people’s relationship to others in their society and the world around them, including the natural environment, and condition their behaviours.

Development initiatives and approaches which take local conditions and cultures into account are likely to result in more context-sensitive and equitable outcomes, whilst also enhancing ownership by target beneficiaries. Integrating culture into development policies and programmes, therefore, fundamentally contributes to their effectiveness and sustainability.

Moreover, as sectors of activity, heritage and the creative industries, contribute significantly to the objectives identified by stakeholders in the wake of Rio+20: from green jobs and more sustainable consumption and production patterns, to resilient communities that are able to better cope with disasters and have safe access to water and food, thereby reducing imbalances and poverty across regions and strengthening sustainability.

What is culture?

In the preamble to the *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* (2001), culture is defined as “…the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.”

This definition is in line with the conclusions of the World Conference on Cultural Policies (MONDIACULT, Mexico City, 1982), of the World Commission on Culture and Development (Our Creative Diversity, 1995) and the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies
**Culture and nature: the two sides of the coin**

“Biological and cultural diversity are intrinsically and inextricably linked and together hold the key to sustainable development”

From the 2010 Declaration on Bio-cultural Diversity

Cultures are rooted in a time and place. They define how people relate to nature and their physical environment, to the earth and to the cosmos, and they express our attitudes to and beliefs in other forms of life, both animal and plant. Even in our globalized world of cosmopolitan communities, made of transnational people, cultures tend to make roots in and adapt to the particularity of a specific environment and geo-historical context.

This is because, at a fundamental level, biological and cultural diversities are closely interdependent. They have developed over time through mutual adaptation between humans and the environment, and therefore, rather than existing in separate and parallel realms, they interact with and affect one another in complex ways in a sort of co-evolutionary process.

For this reason, traditional and indigenous practices for the stewardship and use of environmental resources, including buildings techniques, are in general green ‘by design’. They embody an intrinsically more sustainable pattern of land use, consumption and production, contributing also to food security and water access, based on knowledge and practices developed over centuries of adaptation.

This suggests that any local policy aiming to protect the natural environment and achieve sustainable development will necessarily also have to take into consideration, and act upon, the culture of the concerned communities.
Globalization and culture

Culture is a dynamic force for change rather than a rigid set of forms or parameters that must be strictly adhered to. As the World Commission on Culture and Development (WCCD) noted, a society’s culture is neither static nor unchanging but rather is in a constant state of flux, influencing and being influenced by other world-views and expressive forms.

The current era of globalization, with its unprecedented acceleration and intensification in the global flows of capital, labour, and information, is having a homogenizing influence on local culture. While this phenomenon promotes the integration of societies and has provided millions of people with new opportunities, it may also bring with it a loss of uniqueness of local culture, which in turn can lead to loss of identity, exclusion and even conflict. This is especially true for traditional societies and communities, which are exposed to rapid ‘modernisation’ based on models imported from outside and not adapted to their context.

Balancing the benefits of integrating into a globalized world against protecting the uniqueness of local culture requires a careful approach. Placing culture at the heart of development policies does not mean to confine and fix it in a conservative way, but on the contrary to invest in the potential of local resources, knowledge, skills and materials to foster creativity and sustainable progress. Recognition and respect for the diversity of cultures also creates the conditions for mutual understanding, dialogue and peace.
**Culture and human rights**

“No one may invoke cultural diversity to infringe upon human rights guaranteed by international law, nor limit their scope.”

UNESCO 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity

The dilemma of protecting local cultures is to reconcile universal human rights while respecting cultural diversity and the uniqueness of cultures. As much as traditions are to be valued and safeguarded, some of them can spell stagnation, oppression, inertia, privilege and cruel practices.

The universal nature of human rights is clearly established as international law in the UN Charter “for all without distinction”. The approach of UNESCO, through all of its cultural Conventions, is firmly grounded on this principle. The emphasis is on acknowledgment, understanding and tolerance of other cultures on the basis of a binding global ethic founded on universal values and mutual respect across cultural boundaries.

Human rights include many very important cultural rights, which should be given equal attention, such as the right to participate in cultural life, enjoy one’s culture, etc. Even these, however, are not unlimited. In accordance with international law, the right to culture is limited at the point at which it infringes on another human right.
One size does not fit all

Early theories of development considered culture and the associated traditions as an obstacle to social and economic welfare. Since at least the 1990s, there has been a major shift in approaches, which promoted development goals in humanistic rather than in purely economic terms and led to the notion of a “human development index” developed by UNDP. To this day, however, mainstream development policies are still often based on a one-size-fits-all philosophy that fails to adequately acknowledge the context.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have generated an unprecedented drive to mobilize the international community around clear and shared priorities and objectives.

In the lead-up to their elaboration, growing recognition of culture’s role led to important initiatives and research that aimed to capture and measure the links and relationships between culture and development. Unfortunately, culture was eventually left out of the MDGs’ and their indicators, largely due to difficulties in concretely measuring and demonstrating cultures’ impact on development.

Many have suggested, however, that acknowledged gaps and setbacks in the implementation of many well-intentioned development programmes are in fact due to a lack of consideration for local specificities, cultural identities and values, the ‘softer’ dimensions of development which are crucial for sustainability.
Progress at the United Nations

“We acknowledge the diversity of the world and recognize that all cultures and civilizations contribute to the enrichment of humankind. We emphasize the importance of culture for development and its contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.”

From: Keeping the Promise: United to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals, Declaration of the 2010 United Nations Millennium Development Goals Summit

In 2010 and 2011, the United Nations’ General Assembly adopted three historic resolutions, which marked a profound shift in perspective on culture: from a view of culture as ‘decorative’ or secondary to key development initiatives, to one which recognizes its fundamental role in addressing global challenges effectively and sustainably.

Following the 2010 UN Summit on the MDG and its outcome resolution called “Keeping the promise: united to achieve the Millennium Development Goals”, two other important resolutions specifically on culture and development were adopted, which emphasized the importance of culture as “an essential component of human development, a source of identity, innovation and creativity for the individual and the community”.

The Resolutions also stressed that culture is “an important factor in the fight against poverty, providing for economic growth and ownership of development processes”, and acknowledged “the positive contribution of culture in achieving sustainable development goals including the Millennium Development Goals.

The operational implications of this paradigm shift, however, have not yet been fully drawn in development policies and programmes. The time has now come to take action and fully integrate culture into the practical implementation of the global development agenda, in line with the work of 18 United Nations entities that have already taken action in this regard.
The contribution of culture to sustainable development

‘Culture is the fountain of our progress and creativity and must be carefully nurtured to grow and develop.’

World Commission on Culture and Development

Deep in our hearts, we all understand that the quality of our lives depends, to a great extent, on our being able to take part in, and benefit from our culture. We instinctively know, with no need for explanation, that maintaining a connection with the unique character of our historic and natural environment, with the language, the music, the arts and the literature, which accompanied us throughout our life, is fundamental for our spiritual wellbeing and for providing a sense of who we are. There is an intrinsic value of culture to a society, irrespective of its place in the human development index, which is apparent to everyone and which makes it a development outcome in itself.

However, when it comes to articulating the specific ways in which culture contributes to sustainable development, particularly to the objectives defined as priorities in Rio+20, the link is less obvious. Yet, the role of culture in creating green jobs, reducing poverty, making cities more sustainable, providing safe access to water and food, preserving the resources of oceans and forests, and strengthening the resilience of communities in the face of disasters, is truly major and irreplaceable. But how does it happen, in practice?

UNESCO argues that placing culture at the heart of our strategies is both the condition for enabling sustainable development, and a powerful driving factor for its achievement.
Consideration of culture effectively enables development when projects acknowledge and respond to the local context and the particularities of a place and community through the careful use of cultural resources, as well as emphasis on local knowledge, skills and materials. Emphasizing culture means also giving members of the community an active role in directing their own destinies, restoring the agency for change to those whom the development efforts are intended to impact, which is crucial to sustainable and long-term progress. Respecting and promoting cultural diversity within a human rights based approach, moreover, facilitates intercultural dialogue, prevents conflicts and protects the rights of marginalized groups, within and between nations, thus creating optimal conditions for achieving development goals.

On the other hand, culture as a sector of activity – including tangible and intangible heritage and the creative industries - is in itself a powerful driver of development, with community-wide social, economic and environmental impacts.

Experience is showing how the cultural resources of a community can be converted into economic wealth by promoting the unique identity, traditions, and cultural products and services of a region, towards generating jobs and revenue. Investing in the conservation of cultural assets, promoting cultural activities and traditional knowledge and skills developed by humans over very long periods of adaptation to the environment, moreover, are also very effective means to strengthen environmental sustainability and the social capital of communities.
Poverty Alleviation

The alleviation of poverty is a vital part of ensuring a sustainable future and of creating an equitable world in which the fight against climate change is a priority for all. The cultural sector provides a sustainable economic resource in which communities are empowered in their own economic development.

National economies significantly benefit from the cultural sector. Recent UNESCO Statistics (March 2012) show that in Ecuador, formal and private cultural activities contributed 4.76% to the 2010 GDP and in the same year, 2.64% of the total employed population worked in cultural occupations. Mali’s culture sector accounted for 5.8% of employment in 2004 and 2.38% of GDP in 2006, while in Colombia craft production represents an annual income of roughly 400 million USD, including some 40 million USD in exports.

Promoting sustainable tourism as a sub-sector for investment encourages investment in infrastructure and stimulates local, sustainable development. For example the International Council on Monuments and Sites in Ireland has estimated that every euro invested in heritage returns €300 to €400 to the exchequer. Every four full-time jobs created in the sector generate 10 jobs.

DID YOU KNOW?

Cultural industries account for more than 3.4 percent of the global gross domestic product with a global market share of approximately 1.6 trillion USD in 2007. (Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2008)

Cultural and creative industries represent one of the most rapidly expanding sectors in the global economy with a growth rate of 13.9 percent in Africa, 11.9 percent in South America, and 9.7 percent in Asia. (Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2008)

In Colombia, craft production represents an annual income of roughly 400 million USD, including some 40 million USD in exports; in Tunisia, 300,000 craftworkers produce 3.8 percent of the country’s annual GDP, while in Thailand the number of craftworkers is estimated at 2 million. (UNESCO World Report, Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue, 2009)
Green and Decent Jobs

Many activities, associated with the stewardship and production of culture, are green “by design” since they embody a more sustainable pattern of land use, consumption and production than most modern approaches. Sustainable tourism can be a strategic tool for income generation and poverty reduction, while the cultural industries require limited capital investment and have low entry barriers. As culture-related economic opportunities are also not easily outsourced, the culture sector offers the opportunity to develop intrinsically local, place based jobs that foster a connection to and respect for the environment.

The economic benefits of culture are being increasingly recognized. For example, a study carried out in Australia estimates that the country’s 17 World Heritage properties generate $12 billion annually and sustain more than 120,000 jobs (Australian Government Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts 2008, Annual Report 2007-08). While in Benin, supported by UNESCO’s International Fund for Cultural Diversity, the NGO World Rhythm Productions has been developing a new business model for the music sector, ensuring that Beninese artists can sell their music locally. These agreements also are allowing local distributors to buy music productions at lower wholesale prices, with profits reinvested back into the artists’ associations and other music stakeholders. This not only strengthens local cultural industries, but also means a reduction in the environmental costs associated with importing music from abroad.
**Sustainable Cities**

Culture, encompassing both heritage (tangible and intangible) and creative industries, plays a critical role as a non-renewable resource that is a vital part of cities, integral to their identity and underpinning their dynamism as hubs of economic development.

Conserving and adaptively re-using the historic urban environment contributes to the quality of life of their inhabitants in many ways. In addition to strengthening their sense of belonging, social cohesion and providing a pleasant environment, it also mitigates excessive urbanization, attracts tourists and visitors as well as investments, while providing for green, locally-based, stable.

Cultural industries and creativity are also an essential factor of urban renewal, as they bolster a city’s image and contribute to its socio-economic development, thus improving the living standards of the inhabitants. Investments in cultural institutions and activities will support a creative economy and further promote sustainable urban development.

A heritage-driven urban development policy also contributes to mitigating and adapting to climate change, since conserving the existing fabric (built with traditional techniques and local materials and skills) is more environmentally friendly than demolishing and reconstructing. In the UK, for example, the energy embodied in the construction of a building is estimated at 15 to 30 times the annual energy use.
Food and water

As the need for basic resources, such as food and water, puts increasing strain on the planet, the consumption patterns and environmental management techniques of local, rural or indigenous people are being increasingly recognized. This includes small-scale production with little surplus and low energy needs, as well as a custodial approach to land and natural resources that avoid waste and resource depletion.

Traditional land management techniques can provide a great source of inspiration for more sustainable approach to freshwater use. Traditional irrigation techniques can be re-established in modern development projects and ensure a more respectful use of the environment. In Algeria, populations of the Saharan oases, confronted with population growth and environmental deterioration, have realized that by restoring traditional irrigation techniques they are supporting practices that respect the environment. They chose to restore palm trees and rehabilitate foggaras, an ingenious, effective and sustainable traditional irrigation system consisting of underground galleries that drain water by the force of gravity. Water is captured at depth and transported by canals that do not damage the ecosystem.
Marine World Heritage Sites and the preservation of Oceans

Oceans are integral to the health of the planet and also form an important part of the heritage and culture of many people. Traditional and indigenous knowledge is an important asset in managing the ocean resources, which play a major role for the livelihood of the concerned communities.

Through its Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS) programme, for example, UNESCO has collaborated with a team of Mayangna researchers in Nicaragua to gather and transmit the local knowledge and views of the aquatic resources. This information attests to their extensive, detailed knowledge of the fish and turtle species of the Bosawas Biosphere Reserve, and demonstrates to scientists and policy-makers the depth and breadth of local knowledge of the natural milieu, and the key role that such knowledge must be given in the sustainable development of the region.

UNESCO’s World Heritage Convention also plays an important role in protecting our oceans. In total 45 marine areas are currently inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List for their exceptional natural features. Together, they cover 1/3 by surface of all Marine Protected Areas on the planet and include 5 of the world’s largest Marine Protected Areas.

These World Heritage marine sites are listed for their special value and monitored and evaluated yearly on their management effectiveness under the international protection mechanisms of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention.
Resilience is the capability of systems and individuals to cope with significant adversity or risk.

As natural disasters and wars rip apart societies, and as large-scale modernization projects, urbanization, and transnational migration bring about sudden dislocations, the endurance of cultural beliefs, values, practices, and knowledge, and their transmission across generations have become significant concerns. Projects carried out by UNESCO in Haiti, for example, have found that the vibrant local culture plays an important part in rebuilding a sense of community after disasters and is a key asset during the difficult process of rebuilding.

But culture is also an important resource in reducing disaster risks, before the associated hazards have happened. A well-maintained historic environment, including built heritage and cultural landscapes, is likely to be very resilient to natural phenomena such as earthquakes or extreme weather events, because it incorporates traditional knowledge accumulated over centuries of adaptation to the environment. In 2009, a great number of traditional buildings managed to stand a terrible earthquake in Kashmir, saving the lives of their inhabitants, while conversely, reinforced concrete buildings which were badly constructed collapsed completely in the same affected areas, killing everyone inside.

When integrated into modern disaster risk management schemes, traditional management techniques have proven to be efficient and cost-effective tools to mitigate environmental risks and reduce vulnerability.
The way forward: a human centred approach to development

After Rio+20, the international community shall concentrate on the review of the MDGs and on defining the post-2015 development agenda. It is crucial to ensure that the next model and strategies for sustainable development include consideration of culture. UNESCO, working in partnership with Governments, sister UN Agencies, the private sector and the civil society, is promoting a new agenda for development that integrates consideration for culture, based on the following main strategic actions:

1. Integrate the cultural dimension in the conception, measurement, and practice of sustainable development. Commit to encourage taking into account and integrating traditional scientific knowledge and practices in sustainable development policies in particular related to the sustainable management of natural resources, food security and access to clean water.

2. Underline the importance of the conservation of natural and cultural heritage and the strengthening of international co-operation in this area, for sustainable development. Commit to develop the capacities for the conservation, protection and safeguarding of our heritage.

3. Recognize the important role of cultural as well as creative industries, sustainable tourism, and heritage based urban revitalization for sustainable development and a green economy and the potential of these economic subsectors to generate green employment, stimulate local development and trade opportunities, and foster social inclusion and creativity.

4. Recognize that cultural factors influence lifestyles, individual behaviour, consumption patterns, values related to environmental stewardship, and the ways in which we interact with our natural environment. Therefore a move to more sustainable consumption and production habits will need to engage with and utilize culture.
The UNESCO Cultural Conventions: a tool for sustainable development

All seven of UNESCO’s Cultural Conventions are intended to safeguard and nurture some aspect of culture and creativity, from tangible and intangible heritage, the diversity of cultural expressions and creative industries, to the fight against the illicit trafficking of cultural goods.

While some have a development agenda more explicitly built into them than others, all of the Conventions have implications for development both in terms of how they can contribute to it and in the impact that development has on culture.

Firmly grounded in a human-rights based approach, these Conventions establish a range of governmental and international funding and cooperation mechanisms, as well as monitoring and evaluation tools. They promote capacity building programmes and other initiatives for the safeguard of culture (including natural heritage) and its integration in national and local development strategies.

Examples of how the Conventions contribute to development include the UNESCO designated sites, such as the nearly 1000 World Heritage properties and over 500 Biosphere Reserves, which provide ideal laboratories where innovative heritage-driven approaches to sustainable development are tested. Under the International Fund for Cultural Diversity (IFCD) and other funding mechanisms, established in the framework of the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, support is also provided on a regular basis to developing countries through cultural projects and technical assistance missions, which promote social and economic development through new cultural policies and the strengthening of the system of governance in the culture sector.
Established in 2006, the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund (MDG-F), funded by Spain, seeks to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the MDGs. Building on the comparative advantage of United Nations organizations, the MDG-F supports national governments, local authorities and civil society organizations in their efforts to tackle poverty and inequality in eight thematic areas, including Culture and Development. UNESCO, as the UN specialized agency with a specific mandate on culture, is responsible for this theme.

Through this fund, eighteen Culture and Development Joint Programmes have been implemented worldwide for a total amount of 95 million USD and have reached out to approximately 1 million direct and 7 million indirect beneficiaries, targeting in particular indigenous and ethnic groups as well as women and youth.

These programmes give clear evidence that culture is an economic sector which generates incomes and jobs, thereby contributing to poverty eradication (MDG1); that culturally adapted curricula content allows for improved quality education and citizenship building (MDG2); that culture-oriented activities such as craft entrepreneurship are a source of gender empowerment (MDG3); that socio-cultural approaches to health lead to cost-effective and more efficient health policies (MDG 4, 5 and 6); and that cultural and traditional know-how are inexhaustible resources for sustainable environment and livelihoods (MDG7). The MDG-F programmes have also enhanced cooperation among partners nationally and internationally, thus contributing to global partnership (MDG8), while building strong national ownership through highly participatory processes.
Measuring the immeasurable: the impact of culture on development

One of the challenges of a culturally-sensitive development agenda is the ability to measure its impact. The attempt to quantify the specific contribution of a ‘culturally-appropriate’ development policy, as opposed to one that does not take culture into consideration, is unavoidably complex.

In response, UNESCO has been spearheading two important initiatives that provide an evidence-based picture of culture’s role in development. This includes the development of a Framework for Cultural Statistics and an operational project, the “UNESCO Culture for Development Indicator Suite.

The ‘Suite’ consists of indicators ranging from the economic weight of the culture sector, to social cohesion, cultural participation, and individual freedoms, to education, governance, or access to means of communication among others. Together, these indicators provide a snapshot of the situation and valuable development policy analysis. The project involves as well providing capacity building for national statistical agencies to collect and analyse cultural statistics.

The UNESCO Culture for Development Indicator Suite quantitatively demonstrates culture’s role in sustainable development at the national level, generating the first quantitative evidence of culture’s weight in national economies and its role in strengthening a range of other development policies. For example, in Ecuador, the contribution of formal and private cultural activities to GDP reached 4.76% in 2010, with households spending 4% of their budget on cultural products.