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Promoting sustainable development through culture: current status, challenges and prospects

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1. Introduction: emergent and changing themes

The traditional concerns of UNESCO as they impinge on culture can perhaps be summarized by education, communication and heritage. Naturally, in a development context education has always had pride of place. Education is of course a basic human right, but in relation to culture it is the key that opens up a door to ones own, and community histories as well as those of others.

The tools to enable education are both the recording of memories and the expression and communication of these understandings. Hence, the important UNESCO concern with developing communications technologies and the relative access of them by citizens: from books, to film and TV, telephones and the internet; and, the languages that are used, and the literacy attained. These are at once the tools and the expressions of our cultures. Recently these have been celebrated and contextualized in our attempts to archive and curate culture, as expressed in museums and archives, in tangible and intangible means. The network of world heritage sites, and creative cities, are examples of the recognition and the protection which we have sought to afford culture.

As an aid to the concrete actions of UNESCO to support such initiatives through programs and technical support efforts have been made to document, catalogue and monitor progress, as well as highlighting continuing challenges. In recent years we can note a shift, or development, of emphasis. I want to point to two developments which I think help to frame the current and future challenges in this field and illustrate contemporary debate about the relationship between sustainable development and culture.

First, is the commitment to support cultural diversity¹. This initiative, and concept, is parallel in many sense to the notion of environmental diversity; that it is a resource that we cannot now when it will be useful (until it is lost), once lost it is impossible to recover. In cultural terms the diversity of culture is an expression of human values and the plurality, and continual development of, cultural values. In cultural terms these are not valued as much for their economic utility, but as human utility: they are what it is to be human. This recognition of, and support for, cultural diversity marks an important iteration from an inward, self-regarding, cultural value, to one that is valued as unique but amongst many. And, that value can be equally attributed regardless of whether it has 1 million, or 10 million supporters.

Second, the growth of the cultural economy. This represents another expression of cultural value (albeit uneasy companion with the former). One of the defining aspects of the last century has been the growth of cultural mass production (film, tv, music). The commercial dimension of cultural production has created a new, parallel, and sometimes overlapping forms of cultural expression. Moreover, these are - mostly - traded commodities.

Whilst the diversity of cultural expressions has been commonly supported and sustained by nation states and non-profit bodies, commercial culture is obviously in the private sector and driven by market investment; importantly, some forms of it are very profitable, having grown to be leading industries. The challenge that we face lies between the economic (value) power of the creative economy, and cultural (value) of the non-commercial forms of expression. Nation states have often sought to mediate between these two fields, however in an international system, premised on free trade, such an idea becomes even more challenging, and more timely for debate.

Critically, this challenge not one of simply finding a balance point, but how to find an accommodation between two different value systems: one linked to economic livelihoods, the other to regional and political identity or sense of self. So, when we discuss culture and development this is precisely the complex field that we enter. Is one facet corrosive to the other? Is it possible to have both? Not easy questions!

I want to divide my comments in this paper into three parts. First, I will review the current thinking in UN agencies on this matter. Second, I want to challenge these plans and aspirations with a number of potential threats based upon how we see the relationship between cultural and development. Third, I want to draw out the consequences and possibilities and actions that might flow from clearer thinking on this issue through the lens of local capacity building.

2. The current status of culture and development

There have been many statements about culture and sustainable development in recent years; it is clearly an important agenda point for UNESCO, but it is also a larger question of how UNESCO can address the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (as well as the post-2015 agenda)². At a strategic level culture and development are linked and

¹ UNESCO (2001). *Universal declaration on cultural diversity*. Geneva, UNESCO.

² UNITED NATIONS, **2010**, *Keeping the promise : united to achieve the Millennium Development Goals*, Outcome Document of the UN MDG Summit
UNITED NATIONS, **2011**, *United Nations Secretary-General's Report on Culture and Development*,

interwoven. Two reports offer an insight into what I would argue is a changing understanding of the challenges and potential.

Although it is the more recent document, the Hangzhou Declaration³ that reflects a more traditional lineage of policy ideas and makes the point that culture has a key part to play in any development future, and that the characteristics of culture are a

“source of meaning and energy, a wellspring of creativity and innovation and a resource to address challenges and find appropriate solutions. The extraordinary power of culture to foster and enable truly sustainable development is especially evident when a people-centered and place-based approach is integrated into development programs and peace-building initiatives.” (2013: 2)

This is a very good expression of what we might call the instrumental use of culture to deliver development programs whether they be better housing or sanitation. This approach does not deny the intrinsic value of culture to individuals and communities - an even older policy agenda - however, culture is very much envisioned as the tool of development. If one then reviews the document, it can be seen that it places culture at the centre of sustainable development for sure, but one finds that culture should be part of every aspect of initiatives. It is as if culture is the infrastructure through which every policy will be delivered. The risk is that culture is overburdened, but also it is everywhere, but nowhere; it is an enabler but not the focus, nor prime objective.

It is not the aim of this presentation to critique this point of view; clearly it has laudable and logical aims; and, we know from scientific evaluations that culture ‘works’ in this way, and indeed it is very efficient at enabling delivery of such programs. However, my objective is to point out that this is but one side of a coin. That other face of culture and development is the economic value of culture. The UNESCO (2012) paper ‘Culture: a driver and an enabler of sustainable development’ offers a different interpretation of how to progress the MDGs⁴. Here the emphasis comes from the Department of Economic Affairs and UN Development Program. Its point of entry is very different, it points to the UNCTAD reports on the Creative Economy⁵ that point to the real direct economic impact of cultural jobs and cultural trade; plus the fact that the creative economy is one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy, plus that the potential for those in the Global South was as great, if not greater than, the Global North.

Despite the focus on economic outputs, which of course are vital to real economic growth and sustainability the report refers to the non-monetized benefits such as skills and knowledge, and self reliance and responsibility; as well as capacity to maintain local cultural ecosystems. So, this is a newer story, one that we have heard much of in the Global North; but stressing that the Global South also has a significant role and

UNITED NATIONS, **2010**, *Resolution on Culture and Development*, adopted by the General Assembly

³ UNESCO/Hangzhou International Congress (2013), *Placing culture at the heart of sustainable development policies*

⁴ UNESCO (2012) ‘Culture: a driver and an enabler of sustainable development’ (UN system task team on the post-2015 UN development agenda)

⁵ UNCTAD, UNDP, UNESCO, WIPO, ITC, (2008), *Creative Economy Report: The challenge of assessing the creative economy towards informed policy-making*. Geneva/New York, UNCTAD/ UNDP.

UNCTAD (2010). *The creative economy report. Creative economy, a feasible development option*. Geneva/New York, UNCTAD/ UNDP.

UNESCO (in press) *The creative economy report*

opportunity. It is, of course a second form or instrumentalism, but at least many would argue that the focus is on cultural production for its own sake (which leads to income generation).

So, in summary we have moved on from a traditional protect and support culture because it is intrinsically good to variants of instrumentalism. One version that offers culture as a solution to every problem as a way of solving problems; and another version that capitalizes on the traded opportunities of culture as a commodity. This clearly simplifies the picture too much, but it does highlight a space of tension between the positions. Moreover, the danger that the two aspirations might be mutually exclusive. The central question is one of power and centralization, or monopoly; against diversity and locality. However, as in the case of the environment, we do not have the luxury to get the balance wrong as we will have an absolute loss of cultural diversity. However, this draws the contrast too sharply; the differences are more subtle, as I will explain in the next section.

3. Challenges to the culture and development agenda

In this section I will argue that the challenge is to find an accommodation between a culture in development model, or a cultures of development model. Both are viable, but the outcomes, expectations, evaluations and results are different; they are 'different horses for different courses'. I will argue that thus far we have tended to explore culture in development; and in so doing we have left, as relatively neglected, cultures of development. I want to argue that this tension presents us with a useful opportunity for creative policy innovation.

Both Northern nation states' experimentation with cultural and nation building policies, and earlier iterations of UNESCO policy making have stressed idealism⁶ - choosing the very best culture - and instrumentalism : where culture functions as a social worker, or an exponent of soft power. The final aspect is how tourism has been mobilised as both generator of income, and a means to display local cultural wealth. There is not space here to enumerate the complex conflicts, trade-offs and challenges in these approaches. However, I want to suggest that they are what might be regarded as normative approaches, and are a generally accepted occupants of a pallet that policy makers might use. This is what I would refer to for simplicity as culture in development⁷, but there is an alternative.

I want to spend a little more space on the discussion of cultures of development. If we treat the creative economy as an economic activity like any other then we might simply apply industrial and trade regulation to it. In fact there is a strong tradition concerned with the analysis of the concentration of power and control of media operations and the tendency toward, and consequences of, the resultant monopolies. On one hand, the asymmetries of global trade can be interpreted as a failure of market logic, or symptom of insufficient market control. On the other hand, asymmetries could be a result of regulatory and institutional forms that are by their nature locally differentiated. This presents us with many challenges as how to counter these patterns of asymmetry, as left unchecked they erode

⁶ There is not space to discuss it here; however idealism tends to favor a singular hierarchy of cultural value; something that will inevitably present a challenge to cultural diversity.

⁷ Pratt, A. C. (2013). 'Creative Industries and Development: culture in development, or the cultures of development?' *Handbook of creative industries*. C. Jones, M. Lorenzen and J. Sapsed (Eds). Oxford, Oxford University Press.

cultural diversity and choice which might otherwise lead to concentration and monopoly not only of power, but also of cultural expression.

Structural asymmetries are not the only problem; distinct spatial asymmetries exist too. There is striking inequality of the concentration of creative industries in a small number of global cities (mainly in the Global North). Moreover, other work points to the fact that within nations there is also a massive concentration inequality between the capital city and the rest. Not all creative producers fit this model, and some industries have different patterns; but the salient point is that creative industries are primarily urban, and predominantly a global city phenomena (with the higher value added activities located there). Global hubs are thus one dimension of what is regarded by many City governments as 'good' forms of monopoly (although places outside the city region may contest this). A further example of 'good monopolies' is their mobilization in urban and national branding strategies, or tourism and heritage, to compete for national foreign direct investment (of manufacturing, financial services; but not in the creative economy). There is a real danger of a zero-sum game in the competition for a finite tourist or investment dollar.

Another dimension potentially offers more hope. Debates about the process of development implicitly refer to modes of organization and governance often simplified as either top-down or bottom up. If we then turn to culture we can consider its manifestations as economic, social or political, or combinations thereof. We can see culture as naturalized, or as constructed, as imposed, or opposing. Culture can be conceived of as anthropological practices, or as alienated and commoditized activities; and everything in between. Since the 1980s the term 'cultural industries'⁸ has been used to 'pluralize' and critique the 'culture industry' model popularized by the Frankfurt School (in which industry was opposed to, or denigrated, culture). In so doing the balance of debate has shifted from an emphasis on aesthetics and consumerism to the varieties and specificities of cultural production, as well as the rest of the economy, and the rest of society.

A really important step taken in recent years has been to investigate the organization, economics, social and cultural formation of the creative/cultural industries; in short, how they really work. A key finding has been that the operation is quite different to 'normal' industries, but also different to the idealized model of the craft worker or artist. The concern is with understanding how this creative ecosystem works, its critical linkages and dependencies is the key to understanding the delicate balance between the formal and informal, the for profit and not for profit that drives the vibrancy of cultural activity. These interdependencies are captured in the model of the creative industries shown in Fig 1., which has helped to systematize data collection as well as create a common framework for analyses.

⁸ In recent years the commonly used term is 'creative industries' or 'creative economy'

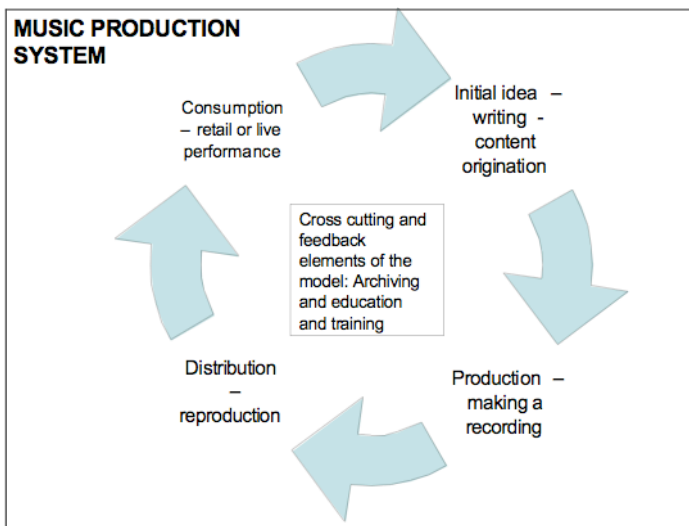


Fig 1: The cultural production ecosystem; illustrated by music production⁹

The model proposes the ‘cycle’ of cultural production from making, through (re-)producing, distribution, exchange, and archiving. All cultural products travel this path, but have different specificities. Critically, these processes are embedded in local and global social, economic and physical infrastructures of skill and training, technologies and machines, and buildings. Moreover, the ecosystem - which we can call the whole - is dependent on network intermediaries to mobilize it, and to govern it.

In short there is more to production than simply devising and making a product, or pure genius. Getting the product to market, and generating a demand is critical: the two must be synchronized with logistics and related markets. We know this even from mature creative industries markets in the Global North like music: a good product will fail if it does not have the right marketing, and is release at the right time and place. How much harder the task is for creative products producers from the Global South seeking entry into markets in the Global North, as well as within the wider Global South. We explore the consequences of this in the final section.

4. Prospects and actions

The creative economy exists in a complex field of competing demands. Hence it is a key challenge to clarify the precise scope of action when one considers the creative economy. It is clear that this is but a partial interpretation of the field of culture and development, but the economic dimensions of the creative economy are the focus here. In this case it is not the contribution to other goals (social or cultural) that is primary - although they will be present - but, how to facilitate the development of the creative economy. In this sense we must look to the rest of economy and society and ask what it can do for the creative economy rather than *visa versa*.

⁹ From Pratt, A. C. (2007). “The music industry and its potential role in local economic development: the case of Senegal”. *Creative Industries and Developing Countries: Voice, Choice and Economic Growth*. D. Barrowclough and Z. Kozul-Wright. London, Routledge: 130-145. See this model deployed in UNESCO/ Institute for Statistics (2009). *Framework for Cultural Statistics*. Paris, UNESCO, and UNCTAD (2008), *Creative Economy Report: The challenge of assessing the creative economy towards informed policy-making*. Geneva/New York

What is it that makes the creative economy a viable sector of the economy, and the individual creative industries prosper? One answer is that the creative economy is no different to any other industry. It is true that there are many generic policy initiatives aimed at small and micro enterprises that are relevant to the creative economy (as it is dominated by this size of business activity). However, an alternative answer is that there are a number of creative economy specific concerns that relate both to the newness of the creative industries (that is there is not any similar activity to 'borrow from'), and the fact that the creative economy is starting from such a low base (although its growth rate is significant) such that it does not generally benefit from critical scale economies.

We can illustrate this challenge by reference to any number of industrial strategies, even those aimed at the creative industries, logically focus on existing trade mechanisms, namely: i) trade liberalisation of goods and services; ii) removal of barriers to people's movement; iii) tourism enhancement; iv) subject matters related to promotion and protection of intellectual property; v) trade facilitation; and vi) development of a physical infrastructure for transport, communications and energy. It is important to recognise that any producer, especially a cultural producer, needs to have grown to a particular scale before most of these strategies come into play. Thus, the immediate challenge is to provide a stepping stone to reach such a stage. Generally, this is what the strategy of local capacity building is based upon: the establishment of a foundation and the nurturing of the creative economy.

By contrast, local capacity building is about removing a barrier to development through the investment in skills, training education and infrastructure such that industries are 'scalable', that is they can grow and operate in a wider context. Capacity building strategies are familiar in most industries, and in that sense generic; once again we can make the case that the creative economy is in need of special measures. In this case the argument is on the basis that in most places the creative economy is new, there is no pre-existing tradition of extended production to build upon, hence the project is almost to begin from scratch. In such cases it is critical to target resources where they will impact most, and in the creative economy, this requires an in-depth understanding of particular organizational forms, and economic and cultural challenges, as well as the opportunities. Local capacity development is a familiar notion in sustainable development debates; but it has not until now been explored in the context of the creative economy.

Broadly, the experimental development of a number of local capacity building initiatives in the field of the creative economy can be sub-divided into three types: skills, networks and community. As a field such capacity building is still in its experimental stage. The best developed initiatives that tend to concentrate on human capital development: skills and training. The main new focus has been on entrepreneurial skills to enable creative activities to be marketed. Development of these support programs for the creative economy has incorporated important regional dimensions. Perhaps the foremost amongst these is the social dimension of entrepreneurial activity, which often provides a bridge between the formal and the informal.

Additionally, programs have clearly identified that special skills are required. The agenda is not only "front line" creative activities, but the entire range of support skills without which many creative events and processes cannot take place. Often access to such training is limited by the capacities of local education systems, and the simple but critical concerns of cost and distance. Such training also needs to take into account the limited resources of the majority of the population in order to achieve the benefits of diversity. Thus the embrace of youth cultural forms has been vital. The challenge to trainers is that these new

forms generally rely on cutting edge digital technologies. At present the lack of up to date digital training and resources is a barrier; it is doubly unfortunate as it is precisely these areas that are most likely to result in income earning operations, and have most potential for export earnings. Overall this presents a difficult double challenge, not only that of increasing training and skills to a basic level, but that of embracing cutting edge skills.

Equally important is cultural leadership in the public sector. If the creative economy is to be sustainable it will also need leaders in the public sector who are cognisant of current trends and challenges. Programs for this purpose are extremely rare. Another area of “under-skilling” is the public sector capacity to monitor, evaluate and manage policy initiatives.

By contrast with other industries, little growth of micro-credit and business support is visible in the creative economy. The experience from the global North has been that specialised schemes are needed for advice and loans due to the unique risk structure of creative businesses, and the relative unfamiliarity of general business advisors and banks in assessing creative businesses. There is clearly potential for similar schemes to be developed in the global South as well.

Experience has shown that dedicated buildings allow creative business to find a stable place to carry on their activities, and to engage in networking and peer-to-peer learning. Such sites also perform the function of creating a critical mass of cultural workers and hence create the market for provision of other services by for, or not for profit agents. It is critical that this type of provision in sharp contrast with the “flagship” development of prestige projects that are based upon national Foreign Direct Investment aspirations rather than linked to local creative industry needs. It is not simply the provision of space that is critical, but the curation of that space so that users can really benefit from the synergies generated. However, it is clear that property based solutions are not the only tool to be used.

The final set of issues covered related to community, and it is these that are in many ways the least developed, but perhaps have the most potential. Access for the whole population not based upon income level will continue to be a challenge here. The role of civil society and civil society organisations clearly underpins the creative sector, many of the examples that have been quoted have civil society partners, and some are wholly civil society supported. The critical bridging role of civil society organisations is about inclusion and diversity, but it is also vital since so much economic activity takes place in the informal sector. Finally, national social, welfare and labour policies impinge on the creative sector in sometimes fraught ways. The creative sector presents a number of challenges to normative social policies. For many, the creative economy is not a viable career choice unless they already have money. In effect, others are excluded from participation. Ways still need to be found to ensure that workers in the creative economy can achieve the same rights and opportunities as those in traditional employment.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to examine the current state, prospects and challenges of the cultural sector in relation to sustainable development; in this we have focused on the opportunities and challenges offered by the creative economy . We reviewed the UN system’s turn to the creative economy as a new dimension of the cultural field; however, also at the complex set of relationships that this introduced into the equation. Traditionally the focus had been on culture’s role as handmaiden to development, and of the protection

of cultural assets. These were often in tension; but a new vector has been added with the new and emergent role of the creative economy where tensions exist between the formal and informal, for profit and not for profit, the global and the local, etc.

I discussed the consequential challenge to policy making and successful sustainable development. In particular I sought to draw a contrast between culture in development and cultures of development. I stressed the positive new opportunity of the latter. Finally, I considered the ways in which policy might be developed based on current emergent practices. I pointed to local capacity building for the creative economy as a new focus (but the challenges needed to refine the approach). It is an area that will continue to attract lively discussion and experimentation, but I wanted to stress the huge potential gains for development whilst maintaining diversity and promoting sustainability (not just economic or environmental sustainability but including cultural sustainability).