UNESCO

Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity

a vision
a conceptual platform
a pool of ideas for implementation
a new paradigm

Cultural Diversity Series No. 1
Cultural Diversity: A Conceptual Platform

SUSTAINABLE DIVERSITY: THE INDIVISIBILITY OF CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

I. THE CHALLENGE

The dialogue between culture and development needs fresh energy and purpose. Much progress has been made in the last fifty years, through a variety of resolutions and initiatives at the level of communities, states and multilateral organizations, mainly in the United Nations system. Of these, UNESCO has been especially important in advocating and renewing the global commitment to cultural diversity, tolerance and pluralism as non-negotiable principles. During this period, other parts of the United Nations system, notably UNDP and UNEP, along with the FAO as well as the World Bank, have been working hard to set a new global agenda on human development and its measurement. Bridging these two trends, a large variety of international organizations, again led by the United Nations agencies, has placed human rights issues at the centre of the global agenda and laid the foundations for thinking about economic rights and cultural rights in a common framework. This framework has been especially useful in regard to refugees, children and migrant populations, but is not yet built on a deep conceptual consensus.

Culture in general, and cultural diversity in particular, face three new challenges: (a) Globalization, in its powerful expansion of market principles, has created new forms of inequality which seem to foster cultural conflict rather than cultural pluralism; (b) states, which were able to handle the demands of culture and education, are increasingly unable to handle on their own the cross-border flow of ideas, images and resources which affect cultural development; and (c) the growing divides in literacy (digital and conventional), have made the renewal of cultural debates and resources an increasingly élite monopoly, divorced from the capabilities and interests of more than half the world’s population, who are now in danger of cultural as well as financial exclusion.

To address this challenge requires a revitalized dialogue between culture and development, which UNESCO is uniquely positioned to lead. The following ideas are based on the principles enunciated in the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity adopted by the 31st session of UNESCO’s General Conference in Paris on 2 November 2001. Calling for a new understanding of the relationship between diversity, dialogue and development, they constitute a preliminary vocabulary for developing an action framework in which UNESCO will provide world leadership to its Member States and to other multilateral and intergovernmental initiatives in the area of culture and development.
II. SUSTAINABLE DIVERSITY: A UNIFIED FRAMEWORK

Just as cultural systems have tangible and intangible components which cannot be segregated, and just as cultural heritage has a profound intangible dimension, so development itself has a profound intangible dimension, which must be recognized and nurtured so that sustainable development can be truly realized.

Sustainable diversity is a critical requirement for intangible development, and without intangible development there can be no sustainable development. In spite of many efforts to envision development in a holistic manner, and to see people, values and social capital as an integral part of development, there remains a powerful tendency to define and measure development through methods and measures which are primarily material: schools, hospitals, dams, factories, seeds, ploughs, houses, clothing, medicines. Of course, every person and agency that has been involved in the challenges of development recognizes that these material goals cannot be sustained by material means alone. They require knowledge, vision, commitment and training to make them democratically driven, culturally legitimate and socially sustainable. These intangible dimensions of development have not been adequately linked to cultural capacities and cultural diversity. This linkage requires a strong plan for international cooperation.

The challenges of cultural diversity, heritage (both tangible and intangible) and sustainable development thus cannot be addressed in isolation from one another. They are critical linked elements in addressing the great variety of human creative resources that are needed in order to assure democratic and sustainable development in the era of globalization. The key to this linkage is that since we live in a world of “markets without borders”, so also our ideas for sustainable development must tap both diversity and dialogue on a global basis. The central idea for organizing such an approach is the idea of sustainable diversity.

In this context, the challenges of global governance, cultural diversity and democratic development cannot be addressed in a piecemeal manner. They must be taken up in a single framework. In the past the policies, values and agencies concerned with dignity and diversity have been developed separately from those concerned with poverty, technology and social equity. This state of affairs must change, for the following reasons.

First, there is a widespread recognition that development without participation is doomed to failure. Without enlisting the enthusiasm of the world’s poorer and weaker groups in the task of their own empowerment, and without making space for their own ideas about freedom, dignity and power, the work of development becomes another exercise in the imposition of power upon the weak. What is more, the lack of involvement of ordinary people at the grass-roots level, in defining the meaning, shape and design of developments in their own communities is probably a major factor in the limited successes of efforts to reduce both rural and urban poverty worldwide. Although there has been a significant effort to emphasize participation, empowerment and inclusion as both means and ends in development policy, the obstacles to such commitments have been many, including the mind-sets of technocrats, the ideologies of major lenders, the biases of local communities and the fear of local elites about losing power when women, children and weaker groups achieve “voice” in their own futures.

Second, for participation to become an effective means as well as a central goal in development work, there has to be a recognition that culture is not an optional benefit, to be added to the material objectives of development, but that culture is a central requirement in enhancing participation. One way in which to appreciate this “indivisible” relationship between culture and development is to concentrate on what has recently been called “the capacity to aspire” in the broader framework of cultures of aspiration. By focusing on cultures of aspiration, UNESCO underlines those dimensions of human energy, creativity and solidarity, (rooted in history, language and tradition to be sure), which help ordinary human beings to be full participants in designing their cultural futures. This new framework recognizes that aspiration links culture to development, since aspiration as a collective resource requires culturally diverse forms of creativity, imagination, tolerance, flexibility and living tradition. Rather than focusing on heritage, monuments, languages, art-forms, and even values exclusively as a historical resource, UNESCO views culture as a broad form of human or social capital which may strengthen the “capacity to aspire”.

Third, if we agree that the capacity to aspire is as much a capacity which we should build as other capacities, and may indeed be the pre-condition for them, we must also recognize that this capacity cannot be built without paying attention to the future of cultural diversity both within and across societies. Ideas about dignity, hope, planning and futurity do not appear in generic and universal forms. Different groups and populations articulate them in terms of highly specific idioms of value, meaning and belief. Ideas about the good life, of which aspirations are the central anchor, are rarely abstract. They always appear in specific images of beauty, harmony,
sociability, well-being and justice. In such images, the bones may be universal but the flesh is local, and is thus culturally framed and experienced. As cultural diversity is reduced, and as minorities are terrorized or eliminated, we experience a reduction in this bank of images of the good life. So, as with the threat to biological diversity, we impose a shrinking range of images of the good life on larger populations, whose own images no longer find a mirror in official images of the good life. Thus, the reduction of cultural diversity, whether by accident or by cultural design, is a direct hazard to the building of the capacity to aspire, without which development projects can never succeed. This is the key argument for the indivisibility of culture and development, as interlinked projects for the advancement of democracy and equity on a global basis. Likewise, in a world without borders, cultural diversity cannot be confined to national or local limitations but must profit from cross-border dialogue. Such dialogue not only increases the chances of international and intercultural cooperation, it also multiplies the resources available to any particular community, in its search for cultural futures. Dialogue brings globalization down to earth.

Fourth, if we recognize that development requires participation, that participation requires aspiration, and that aspiration is meaningful only as culturally articulated, then one further implication follows. We must also recognize that the relationship between past and future is not a zero-sum relationship, and that the cultural past and the cultural future are mutually linked resources. The capacity to aspire and the capacity to remember must be nurtured as linked capacities. In this way, the global commitment to cultural capacities can be given a new relevance by using the perspective of cultural aspiration. This has a double value since cultural heritage can include problematic memories, divisive values and anti-democratic practices. By insisting on a constant dialogue between the capacity to aspire and the capacity to remember, we can provide a system of checks and balances, so that aspirations do not become unrealistic and memories do not become exclusive or xenophobic.

Fifth, if we recognize that past and future, memory and aspiration, are intimately connected, we can also recognize the intimate links between tangible and intangible heritage. There has been significant progress in linking tangible and intangible forms of heritage since the tangible heritage comes to life only by its interpretation through intangible forms of knowledge, art, craft and symbolism. Cultural heritage cannot be externally divorced from cultures of aspiration, nor should it be internally divided into tangible and intangible dimensions.

Finally, such indivisibility requires the creation of the optimal conditions for cultural creativity. Creativity has always been the hallmark of the human spirit, of our capability to imagine new forms of truth, beauty and justice. But today creativity is also the critical basis of diversity, in the face of the forces of cultural homogenization. Creativity recognizes no border and thrives on dialogue, exchange and interaction. And creativity is always janus-faced, drawing on memory and heritage to imagine the new and the possible.

### III. DEVELOPING DIVERSITY: A GRAMMAR FOR POLICY

Cultural Diversity may be defined as a principle for organizing sustainable cultural plurality, both within and across societies. Cultural diversity is therefore more than an open-ended menu of differences or variations. It is a mechanism for organizing the most productive dialogue between meaningful pasts and desirable futures. As such, it cannot operate strictly within national boundaries and must profit from the dialogue between societies, much as market-based globalization profits from commerce across national borders.

Defined in this manner, cultural diversity is a mechanism that assures that creativity, dignity and tolerance will be partners rather than victims in the design of models for sustainable development. In other words, maximizing cultural diversity is the key to making culture a renewable resource in the effort to make development sustainable.

To assure the workings of cultural diversity as an indispensable partner in sustainable development, we need to recognize that cultural diversity implies a creative balance between internal debates and external dialogues. We also need to recognize that cultural diversity is a mechanism for assuring a creative and sustainable relationship between past and future, or between heritage and development.

Sustainability may be defined as a criterion for the long-term survival prospects of any desirable human arrangement. Thus, sustainability is the capacity to reproduce and revitalize key human resources in the context of new kinds of global market integration and new possibilities for intercultural dialogue. So far, the concept of sustainability has been used mainly in environmental and economic discourses about development. UNESCO should insist that sustainability from the
Tangible heritage is that part of the physical inheritance of particular societies, and of mankind as a whole, which is marked by special sites of moral, religious, artistic or historical significance. This dimension of heritage can be contained in monuments of huge scale or in the sacred bodily relic of a religious or national hero. Tangible heritage can appear in special features of the physical landscape of a group (such as a mountain or a river) or in highly crafted objects, structures or physical systems. Such forms of heritage can belong equally to small groups, to entire nations or to humankind as a whole, though the limits of these forms of possession can be hotly debated in a world without tight frontiers. Tangible heritage is a form of congealed cultural value, and insofar as all communities possess ideas about cultural value, cultural diversity also enhances tangible heritage.

Intangible heritage is best defined as a map, or a compass, through which human beings interpret, select, reproduce and disseminate their cultural heritage as a whole. So, just as tangible heritage is not the sum total of all the physical possessions of a society, intangible heritage is not merely an encyclopaedia of its values and intangible treasures. Intangible heritage is a tool through which tangible heritage is defined and expressed, and through which the inert landscape of objects and monuments is turned into a living archive of cultural values. Without tangible heritage, intangible heritage becomes too abstract. Without intangible heritage, tangible heritage becomes an illegible series of objects or sites.

Thus intangible heritage must be seen as the larger framework within which tangible heritage takes on its shape and significance. It is the critical tool through which communities and societies define their archive of relationships between cultural values and cultural valuables. If cultural heritage can be seen as a major vehicle of human aspirations, tangible heritage is its physical shape but intangible heritage is its motor and steering mechanism. Seen this way, intangible and tangible heritage take on a dynamic and creative relationship, where each shapes the other over time in defining the common cultural wealth of humankind. This is the true basis for developing culture industries that benefit sustainable diversity. Cultural industries can sometimes be harmful, exploiting local populations for global consumption, turning local values into tourist spectacles, commodifying cultural products without regard for the dignity of their producers. But if we nurture those cultural industries which deepen the ties between cultural values and cultural valuables, we can help local communities enter the global market without the sacrifice of either their dignity or their creativity. Development, in UNESCO’s view, is a means of enhancing the relationship between material and spiritual well-being by stressing their reciprocity rather than just their simple complementarity. Many experts would agree that the record of development over the last fifty years has not been uniformly positive. Some would agree that this is because development has itself been defined far too exclusively by tangibles, such as dams, factories, houses, food and water, although these are undeniably vital goods. What we may call intangible development (which includes such issues as empowerment, participation, transparency, stakeholding and accountability) has only recently entered the discourse of development.
By insisting on creating a new dialogue between intangible and tangible development, UNESCO can leverage its insights on cultural heritage (and the principle of indivisibility) to the global debates on sustainable development.

Just as tangible heritage acquires meaning and legitimacy only through the tools of intangible heritage, so tangible development acquires shape and form only through the healthy use of the tools of intangible development.

**Intangible development** may be defined as that set of capacities that allows groups, communities and nations to define their futures in a holistic and integrated manner, stressing such values as participation, transparency and accountability. Intangible development, defined in this manner, is the critical link between cultural diversity and sustainable development. Cultural diversity enriches the pool of visions which mediate the relationships between meaningful pasts and desirable futures. The strength of this mediation provides a bridge to sustainability, since the major obstacle to sustainability has been the divorce between visions of tangible and intangible development.

## IV. DIVERSIFYING DEVELOPMENT

Cultural diversity is more than the fact of cultural difference. It is a value which recognizes that differences in human societies are parts of systems and relationships. Cultural diversity is the value through which differences are mutually related and reciprocally supportive. Furthermore, cultural diversity as a value expresses and implies other, even more fundamental, values. These fundamental values are those of creativity, dignity and community. UNESCO places a non-negotiable value upon cultural diversity because of its intimate link to this entire constellation of values. And without these values, no vision of development can be sustainable, since it will not rest on the moral commitment of the actors and subjects of development, who belong to particular cultural communities.

There is a broad recognition today of the mutuality between biodiversity and cultural diversity. But this intuitive understanding has not been spelled out as a systematic framework for relating these two forms of diversity in a broader vision of sustainable development. To build such a framework requires that we engage the following fundamental questions:

1. **How can diversity join the fight against poverty?**
   Since human beings belong to the biological universe but are often in a position to determine its future, they have a special obligation to assure that a proper balance is maintained between environmental health (especially biodiversity) and equitable development. In the era where markets and their logic seem to dominate global relationships, environmental concerns, market concerns and development concerns seem to be in constant tension with each other. In many parts of the world, there is a growing gap between environmental values, which are seen as middle-class or even élite values, and the needs of the world's poor for shelter, food and employment. For example, the efforts in India’s West Coast to preserve a carefully regulated environmental zone along the coast is being contested by groups of urban poor who are desperate for spaces in which to construct secure housing.

2. **What is the benefit of diverse visions of development?**
   Cultural diversity is the critical link between the intangible and the tangible dimensions of development. Tangible development can be measured in terms of human health, economic capabilities, commodity flows and physical guarantees of security and productivity. Intangible development consists of the spirit of participation, the enthusiasm of empowerment, the joys of recognition and the pleasures of aspiration. Although these intangible measures of development may seem obvious, overlooking them has often created massive failures in the worldwide effort to develop poorer economies and transfer life-sustaining technologies.

   Cultural diversity provides the key link between these two crucial dimensions of development, themselves fundamentally indivisible, by guaranteeing the survival of multiple visions of the good life, and of a large range of concrete ties between material and moral visions of well-being. Many development projects have failed because they have failed to make a persuasive link between these dimensions, or have tried to impose a single vision of human betterment and material well-being. Being a creative archive of visions of the good life, and also a natural source of motivation and commitment, cultural diversity is more than ornamental. It is a renewable resource for linking cultural values and material well-being.

3. **How can cosmologies co-exist with markets?**
   The main arguments for the importance of biodiversity are grounded in the reality that the earth does not have an infinite capacity for being abused and that the global commons depend on the preservation and nurture of biodiversity, at all environmental scales. Though many long-term factors have contributed to the environmen-
tal degradation of the planet and the atmosphere, the historical trend towards more powerful extractive technologies, more effective world-wide market integration, and more profit-oriented forms of market organization has generally sacrificed long-term productivity and equity for short-term gains for specific populations.

There is also a tendency for some cultures and societies to emerge as winners in the long-term history of technological change, and for others to become weak or marginal. The indigenous populations of many parts of the world have been shown to be brilliant trustees of the biodiversity of their own environments. Indigenous populations have also developed complex cosmologies in which the interdependence of man and nature has been a fundamental value, and balance and harmony have been stressed over growth and innovation.

4. How can diversity and creativity be nurtured for the long run?

The era of globalization poses common challenges to biodiversity and to cultural diversity, as well as to the special relationship between them. The growing autonomy of market processes (in combination with high-impact technologies) produces unforeseen risks to biodiversity and environmental safety. At the same time, globalization in its culturally most marketized forms threatens to erode and diminish more localized and historically vulnerable cultural forms, both within and across societies.

In the period since the birth of UNESCO, and especially since the rapid growth of global markets, cross-borders economic flows and deep technological interdependence (which we sometimes call globalization), we have also come to see that cultural diversity is fundamentally connected to questions of law, ethics and freedom. The forces of global consumerism make it difficult for many societies to maintain their cultural dignity, as products, slogans and images of glamour, wealth and modernity flood in from outside sources. Global financial markets place heavy pressure on national governments to sacrifice national cultural priorities in favour of global competitive trends. And as tourism becomes a vital source of income for many poorer countries, many living cultures are being forced to redesign themselves as Disneylands for the entertainment of visitors instead of exploring their own forms of cultural creativity. Finally, as migrants, refugees and other strangers come to be viewed as threats to economic stability, there is a growing tendency to demonize cultural minorities and to substitute ethnic purity for cultural diversity, often violently.

This shrinkage of the space for cultural creativity, dignity and innovation has dangerous implications for biodiversity as well. In both cases, a blind and monotheistic attachment to market principles tends to marginalize long-term values. Cultural diversity and biodiversity are both values of and for the long run. And cultural diversity guarantees the maximum range of visions of the good life within which relationships to nature can also be varied, specific, local and self-sustaining.

V. A PLAN FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

By focusing an important part of its mission for the coming millennium on sustainable diversity, UNESCO can provide a new global strategy linking cultural diversity, sustainable development and cultural heritage (both tangible and intangible).

To develop it fully requires a careful action agenda, a series of concrete priorities for policy and planning, a set of practical mechanisms for executing these plans and a benchmarking process for learning from the successes and failures of this effort. Such a detailed plan of action would require a high degree of consensus within UNESCO, its Member States and its United Nations partners, in order to warrant the scale of resources that it would require.

In addressing this question, we need to: assess the legal and fiscal capability of national states to undertake such an exercise; identify the main civil society organizations which they would regard as partners in such an exercise (museums, academic societies, media organizations, associations of culturally creative professionals, philanthropic bodies, etc.); determine the main ways in which democratic political processes are directly capitalized by sustainable diversity, by strengthening public consciousness of the positive correlation between material well-being and immaterial heritage.

To accomplish these tasks, we need to consider the following strategies:

- A NEW INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGY. The establishment of national task forces on sustainable diversity to suggest appropriate mechanisms at the national level for these purposes. These task forces should be appropriately funded and mandated so that they can assess legal feasibility, identify partners and strengthen consciousness in regard to sustainable development. The task forces should be designed as creative partnerships between the state and civil society, and not merely as forums for academic debate or administrative protocols. Their task should be to produce, within a concrete time
VI. TOWARDS A CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY

We have an historic opportunity to make a stronger case for the indivisibility of culture and development. Culture is more than a jewel in the crown of development. Because cultural diversity is the engine through which aspiration, heritage and empowerment can be maximized as capacities, culture must also be seen as a motor of development. In this vision, which brings intangible development into the centre of the picture, sustainability is tied to the diversity of cultural visions and aspirations. The global commitment to cultural diversity and the international yearning for sustainable development must join hands, as mutually enabling strategies. If this dual strategy, based on the recognition of the indivisibility of culture and development, can be the basis of a new consensus, then globalization can be shaped in the interest of dignity and equity, and not simply be left in the hands of the borderless market.