Session 2B: Culture: a driver and an enabler of social cohesion

Panel Discussion - How does culture drive and enable social cohesion and inclusion?

Promoting cultural diversity in national and international policies fosters social inclusion and equity. Culture-aware and culture-sensitive policies and operations are likely to yield equitable outcomes and inclusiveness. Culture-led projects have proven their effectiveness in addressing violence, especially among the youth. How can we build on culture in shaping inclusive and equitable policies and actions?

Background Note[1]

Culture and inclusive social development

The issue of socially inclusive development is often the area where need of culture-aware policies is strongly acknowledged. People are able to define themselves in society and more fully realise their aspirations when respect for their cultural diversity is guaranteed. Of particular significance in this regard, is the role of culture in enlarging people's capability to "lead the lives they have reason to value", through full participation in cultural life and access to cultural assets and resources in all their diversity.

Summarizing, the most important ways in which culture contributes to social inclusive development are the following:

• Guaranteeing the freedom of people "to be and to live what they choose", i.e. to define themselves in society and more fully realize their aspirations;
• Providing a sense of belonging, of being part of a community and maintaining close links to one's roots and land, with which many people identify;
• Fostering an environment conducive to tolerance and mutual understanding where there is mutual trust, diversities are acknowledged and respected, minorities are included, and societies are more stable and resilient;
• As a common good to be shared and protected, cultures provide an ideal "entry point" for social engagement and cooperation initiatives that bring people together around shared interests, strengthen their bonds and increase the "social capital" of a community.
• Ensuring the deep connection with a major source of learning, inspiration and self-accomplishment
• Offering the pleasure of living in a pleasant environment at the human scale;

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[1] Prepared by UNESCO with the contribution of Sophia Labadi.

Respecting cultural diversity fosters social inclusion

"*Inclusive society is defined as a society for all, in which every individual has an active role to play. Such a society is based on fundamental values of equity, equality, social justice, and human rights and freedoms, as well as on the principles of tolerance and embracing diversity. An inclusive society should also be equipped with appropriate mechanisms that enable all its citizens to participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives, and ultimately shape their common future*"[2]. As clearly highlighted by this definition, the recognition of and respect for cultural diversity (which cannot be invoked to infringe upon human rights or to limit their scope) is fundamental to foster social inclusion, to ensure peace and prevent tensions and conflicts between communities, emerging from situations of exclusions and discrimination, and ultimately to foster stability.

Currently, cultural diversity is too often viewed as leading to the exclusion of minorities. It is therefore important for projects to follow culturally sensitive approaches, right from their inception. A number of UN organizations, including UNESCO or UNFPA, have adopted a cultural diversity lens. This is a tool to understand better how the cultural practices, knowledge and know-how (e.g. local skills, knowledge transmission methods, etc.) of local populations can become full component of programmes and be used to fulfil their goals. This tool further facilitates full access and participation of all those concerned, through identifying cultural factors that might limit their access to a specific programme, as well as culturally appropriate participation and decision-making mechanisms[3].

Culture drives and enables social cohesion and inclusion

According to the UN, a 'cohesive society is one where all groups have a sense of belonging, participation, recognition and legitimacy'[4]. Culture, and cultural heritage in particular, is fundamental to ensure inclusive and cohesive societies, as it strengthens identities and creates a sense of rootedness and belonging within the nation, in particular for minorities.

Museums for social cohesion and inclusion

In our increasingly diverse societies, the results of complex migration and globalization phenomena, culture plays a fundamental role of inclusion and cohesion through representing diversity and giving it an official space within the narrative of nations. Countless museums around the world focus on cultural representation of minorities and their cultural heritage, to provide them with a sense of representation, recognition, belonging and legitimacy. The Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 (Halifax, Canada) is but one example.

Pier 21 was used as a passenger terminal for trans-Atlantic ocean liners from 1928 until 1971. Opened as a museum in 1999, it celebrates the contribution of migrants to Canada. Its 'Welcome Home to Canada' programme provides some newcomers with a six-month work

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[2] UN. 1995, Report of the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, Available at http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/wssd/text-version/agreements/index

[3] UNESCO. The Cultural Diversity Lens: A practical tool to integrate culture in development -Pedagogical guide. http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/The%20Cultural%20Diversity%20Lens_Pedagogical%20guide.pdf; http://www.unfpa.org/culture/culture.htm

[4] http://social.un.org/index/SocialIntegration/Definition.aspx

term at the museum, in order for them to acquire experience and integrate the values shared by Canadians, at the same time as cherishing their cultural difference. This museum thus contributes to the creation of a cohesive and inclusive society, based on the celebration of difference[5].

Many museums around the world also represent their multicultural society, giving minorities an official space within the narrative of the nation. This is the case for instance for the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology. It presents over 50 ethnic groups of Viet Nam, including some of their traditional architectures, gathered in their vast garden and displays on their lifestyles, thus symbolizing the belonging of these diverse populations to a very centralized nation. It is one the most successful museums in Viet Nam with 450,000 visitors in 2009.

Culture and Education

With regard to education, in particular, it is important to stress how integrating culture in education policies and curricula can enhance its effectiveness. The way people transmit and learn knowledge is very different depending on their geographic and historical background. Therefore, education strategies that are responsive to local cultures, contexts and needs, and that take into account mother tongue and local languages, whilst being planned with the communities concerned, are most effective.

Education, moreover, is about transmitting information, knowledge, skills and values. It is thus a major vehicle for the safeguard, creation and sharing of culture, in its larger anthropological sense. There is therefore great potential for education curricula to promote understanding, tolerance, diversity, human rights and democracy, in order to foster socially cohesive societies. Activities such as arts education (in the broadest sense), finally, can improve learning and make it more enjoyable, as well as develop the freedom of expression.

Creativity

The creative sector fosters human creativity and context-based development approaches that can deliver benefits well beyond the economic dimension. It contributes to an increase in capabilities and well-being, especially in cities, which are of the utmost importance for future development challenges, by means of poverty reduction and the inclusion of women, ethnic minorities, youth and other marginalised groups. In the face of urban growth resulting from exponential migration flows and the development of multicultural societies, a dynamic

creative sector is key to building sustainable cities and ensuring social inclusion. The elaboration of youth programmes introducing ideas of cultural diversity and a culture of peace into the urban environment demonstrates successful results. Different forms of creativity deliver cultural and social values, in addition to economic value, thereby increasing human resilience in financial, social and ecological terms. For instance, apart from its social

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[5] http://www.pier21.ca/about/welcome-home-to-canada

and economic contribution to sustainable development, innovative architectural and urban development using materials and techniques that respect the environment enables the building of sustainable infrastructures and energy saving.

Creativity fosters resilience, builds the capacity to aspire, can foster democracy building, freedom of expression, and the capacity of living together
Communities all over the world, especially in urban contexts, have increasingly unequal access to services and resources. Creativity helps to connect communities and to foster the capacity of living together both within an urban environment and at individual and community levels. At city level, design has been a widely used strategy to upgrade urban spaces; to foster democracy through participatory approaches enabling citizens to make choices about their living environment, and to facilitate the capacity of living together through innovative approaches on access and movement.
The revitalisation of downtown Cape Town (South Africa), which will be World Design Capital in 2014, is but one example of a city divided by the legacy of Apartheid, where democracy, freedom and the capacity of living together are being restored through the arts.

A number of associations are also using the power of the creative industries to provide underprivileged communities from Cape Town with essential skills in order to bring about social and economic development at grassroots levels, an essential step in building the foundations of a diverse yet cohesive national identity. This is the case, for instance, for the Harlequin Foundation, supported by UNESCO's International Fund for Cultural Diversity. This project aims to train members of underprivileged communities from the Cape Town area in recycled arts and to give them the skills to set-up micro businesses related to carnivals and festivals.

Culture, Diversity and human-right based approaches

The need to incorporate a human rights-based approach in sustainable development has been repeatedly advocated, notably in relation to promoting self-determination of indigenous people, the empowerment of women, and other marginalised groups in taking part in and shaping their course of development. Human rights and participation of women in development are major cultural issues as their roles, responsibilities, access to resources and opportunities to develop capabilities greatly vary across place and cultural groups.

It has been sometimes suggested that an emphasis on cultural differences and the continuity of traditions would necessarily lead to social and political conflicts, be incompatible with the exercise of human rights, perpetuate inefficient governance and thus hamper development. It has also been stated that some cultures are inherently less likely than others to foster developmental progress, for instance, in terms of democracy and economic development.

Acknowledging cultural diversity, however, should not be understood to imply raising barriers between communities and genders. On the contrary, it should mean promoting the capabilities of individuals, both women and men, in addressing the issues of poverty and

inclusion, in terms of material conditions and incomes, as well as capabilities and opportunities.

Notably concerning gender equality, the dynamic and transformative nature of culture, constantly evolving in relation to the environment and societal needs, acts as an enabler to allow women "to find paths through which we may view tradition with new eyes, in such a way that it will not violate our rights and restore dignity to … women… [and] change those traditions which diminish our dignity"[6].

Promoting human rights in general involves working on attitudes and perceptions, which are often deeply rooted in cultures. UNESCO promotes human rights as guarantees of cultural diversity. The Universal Declaration of 2001 on Cultural diversity clearly states that "no one may invoke cultural diversity to infringe upon human rights guaranteed by international law, nor to limit their scope."

Cultural programmes to empower women
Culture and creativity can be a powerful tool to address harmful practices and empower girls and women to live fully the life they have chosen. This is because cultural programmes involve concerned stakeholders directly. Cultural programmes also fully engage with the daily and human dilemma women face. Cultural programmes have been important, for instance, for addressing child marriage in India. Legislation has been passed but its effective implementation remains a challenge. Tharuni is a voluntary organization working for the empowerment of adolescent girls, women and the aged. Tharuni produced a puppet show "Bommala Pelli" (marriage of dolls) which carried a strong message against child marriage. This show was staged in 40 villages and was highly successful in generating awareness of the issues relating to this practice.

Culture-led projects have proven their effectiveness in coping with violence and disasters, especially among the youth
Creative and artistic activities play major roles, though often overlooked, in helping individuals and communities cope with situations of wars or disasters. Such artistic expressions are often an entry point for individuals and in particular for children to realize, address and start to forget the trauma of having lived through situations of political or urban violence or wars. Indeed, art activities are widely used in refugee camps by the UNHCR all over the world, as a medium for children to start addressing the traumatic experiences they have lived through.

Cultural centres can, second, structure the life of young people, affected by violent environments. Children and adolescents can express themselves freely in these safe, culturally aware settings. Cultural activities in these centres positively affect the self-esteem of the participating children and help to empower them. UNESO, aware of the importance of such structures, participated in the creation of DREAM centres. The first one was inaugurated in April 2004 in Kabul (Afghanistan), in cooperation with the Polish

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[6] The Report of the Special Rapporteur in the Note by the Secretary-General on Cultural Right (A/67/287), August 2012.

Humanitarian Organization and a local partner, the Afghan Street Working Children and New Approach (ASCHIANA). This centre provides cultural and sport activities and facilities to underprivileged children who do not have any other opportunities, to develop their talents, abilities and simply have some fun. Most importantly, every decision concerning the activities of the Centre is taken after consultation with children and teachers. Such participatory approach valorises children, and gives them some essential leadership skills and a sense of control of their lives.