

Session 2A

Cultural Approaches to addressing Poverty

From poor to emerging and developed contexts, the cultural sector encompassing cultural and creative industries, cultural tourism and culture-led urban revitalization, has demonstrated that it can effectively drive economic development and create jobs. The session will examine the state of the art in the area of culture-induced economic growth and cultural employment at the global level and future related avenues for sustainable and inclusive economic growth in the cultural sector.

Background Note¹

Global poverty remains a massive, urgent, and pressing challenge despite the enormous leaps in economic development over the last few decades. Despite unprecedented technological advances and the global increase in aggregated wealth, many forms of deprivation are observed in developed and developing countries alike. While sustained economic growth as well as the investments and entrepreneurship that urban areas attract are critical to poverty reduction, an increase in a country's GDP does not automatically trickle down to the poor and reduce poverty. The UN Millennium Development Goals (UN MDGs) recognized that eradicating extreme poverty, hunger, and disease required the concerted and consistent efforts of the international community. Although the UN MDGs were established as an action plan with time-bound targets to be achieved by 2015, the review summit in 2010 showed that not enough advances had been made in several of the goals.

The Challenges of Poverty**Urbanization and Migration**

Today, for the first time in history, more than half of the world's population lives in cities. 70 million people are added to the world's cities each year. More than 90 percent of this growth is in the cities of the Global South. Over the next two decades, the world's two poorest regions of South Asia and Sub-Saharan African will double the population of their cities. While some of this growth is due to the natural increase in population, much of it is also due to migration. Many low-skilled workers migrate from rural areas to the cities in search of employment and income. A World Bank report estimates that one-third of all urban residents are poor and that the incidence of poverty in small and medium-sized towns is greater than in big cities.

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Recent scholarship has pointed out the complex ways in which poverty is experienced, making it a more multi-dimensional concept. Deprivation and exclusion exists not only in the lack of material wealth, but also in a variety of other dimensions as well.

Limited Access to Income and Employment

Many of the poor have low skills and education and work in insecure jobs as daily wage labourers in agriculture, construction, or for contractors on a piece-work basis. The absence of an adequate, steady, and reliable source of income is a major source of deprivation. Illiteracy, as well as limited access to mobility and transport, further reduces such people's opportunities to find suitable employment. Those in small towns and rural areas are often unable to find alternative employment opportunities.

Poor Housing and Slums

The majority of the poor lives in sub-standard housing conditions that are unsafe, temporary, overcrowded, inadequate, and poorly serviced with little access to infrastructure, and they have little or no security of tenure. Very often, such housing is constructed using materials that are cheap and lightweight, making it quick to assemble and disassemble, and it is in locations vulnerable to natural hazards and risks, such as areas prone to earthquakes, floods, and landslides. The invisibility of poor housing in small towns and rural areas allows these unsafe and unhealthy conditions to persist.

Limited Access to Food, Nutrition, and Healthcare

In urban areas, dependence on income to buy food rather than growing, breeding, or collecting it forces many of the urban poor to battle against food insecurity and poor nutrition. Inadequate sanitation and an inadequate supply of clean water put them at risk of diseases and epidemics. In rural areas and small towns, those in traditional built environments may have better access to food that they are able to grow themselves, along with the food that comes from the animals they maintain or from collecting food from forests in the vicinity. However, those without access to these resources face hunger even in rural areas.

Social Conflicts and Biases

Crippling social problems such as crime and violence are greatly exacerbated in overcrowded and poorly serviced housing environments, where negotiations over scarce resources can easily lead to conflicts. Systemic biases and exclusionary practices may exclude certain groups from the benefits of development in other places.

Vulnerability to Environmental Risks, Including Climate-Related Disasters

The poor are most often located on the least desirable land and in parts of cities designated not for habitation. Locations such as seismic fault-lines, low-lying and marshy lands, the annual flood plains of rivers, and unstable hillocks leave the poor vulnerable to natural disasters. Furthermore, their houses, made of cheap and temporary materials, are easily destroyed and damaged. Floods, landslides, and earthquakes have often caused major destruction to the poor, who do not have the resilience to recover easily from disasters.

Culture as an Economic Driver for Poverty Alleviation

Investing in the dynamic cultural and creative sectors can help to revitalize local economies in areas that are rich in cultural heritage and the creative industries. Besides heritage tourism, cities may have thriving art and cultural institutions such as museums, the performing arts, and cultural festivals that tap directly into local resources and employ a variety of creative professionals. They can provide opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship in areas that build on existing skills and knowledge. In particular, the cultural and creative industries can offer greater opportunities for livelihood generation among women and marginalized groups, including in crafts or the performing arts.

The creative and cultural industries are one of the most dynamic and rapidly expanding sectors in the global economy, with a growth rate of 17.6 percent in the Middle East, 13.9 percent in Africa, 11.9 percent in Latin America, 9.7 percent in Asia, 6.9 percent in Oceania, and 4.3 percent in North and Central America.² In 2007, the cultural industries accounted for more than 3.4 percent of global GDP, with a global market share of approximately US\$1.6 trillion.³ In Tunisia, 300,000 craft workers produce 3.8 percent of the country's annual GDP.⁴ In Ecuador in 2010, private and formal cultural activities represented 4.76 percent of GDP, being only the tip of the iceberg of what could be a much larger contribution of the culture sector to the national economy if all informal and non-commercial activities related to culture were accounted for.⁵ In Indonesia, US\$54.72 billion, the equivalent of 7.08 percent of GDP and 10 percent of exports, was represented by the creative industries in 2010. In Thailand in the same year, US\$36.4

² PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2008. The major fields of the cultural and creative economy relate to the diversity of cultural expressions and heritage preservation, the development of creative cities, citizenships and cultural rights, as well as to all related capacity-building activities.

³ PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2008.

⁴ UNESCO World Culture Report: Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue, 2009.

⁵ Censo Económico de Ecuador de 2010, El Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INEC), following the methodology of the UNESCO Culture for Development Indicator Suite.

billion, the equivalent of 10.33 percent of GDP, was represented by the creative industries.⁶

Culture as an Enabler of Poverty Alleviation and Social Inclusion

Non-Monetary Goals and Assets

Redefining development goals in terms of human well-being to include health and education rather than economic growth alone helps place the emphasis on human development. Sustainable approaches to development demand that economic growth, environmental considerations, and human development be made mutually reinforcing. Beyond the economic dimensions, recent scholarship on development has broadened the understanding of development to mean the achievement of a more fulfilled existence in the material, social, and spiritual senses. Recognizing human dignity and creating enabling environments at community and societal levels are objectives of human development. A vibrant and meaningful cultural life is an important dimension of human well-being and an end goal of development.

Participation and Agency

Cultural considerations engage with the processes through which poverty is addressed. Sustainable transformative change comes only when people are recognized as having the agency to act and direct their own destinies, thus ensuring that development efforts operate within the given cultural framework of society. Valuing cultural sensibilities and shaping locally appropriate development projects and interventions would enable the empowerment of those who are intended to benefit most from development efforts: the poor, the marginalized, and the disadvantaged. Broader and more genuine participation among stakeholders is also realized when development practitioners accept heterodoxies, diversities, and multiple systems by espousing a plurality of strategies, institutional organizations, modes, and scales responsive to local cultures, communities, and contexts with the intention of achieving grander visions of progress.⁷

In contrast to previous efforts at top-down development programmes and policies that international agencies and national governments have devised and implemented, in recent years scholars like John Friedmann and Marshall Sahlins have proposed alternative approaches to development that restore the agency for change to those whom development efforts are most intended to impact, such as the poor. From such a perspective, giving members of the community an active role in directing their own destinies is crucial to sustainable and long-term progress, as well as being a way of accomplishing development within the cultural framework of a given society. The loss of

⁶ WIPO, 2012.

⁷ Cf. Jyoti Hosagrahar, *Integrating Culture and Development: Framing UNESCO's Engagement with Culture and Development*, 2012.

indigenous and local culture also leads to a loss of agency, where modernization and development become external forces driving change from the outside.⁸ The application of universal recipes for development can assume that local people are passive consumers with no role in managing their own resources.

Inclusion and Diversity

A dynamic creative and cultural sector is key to building sustainable cities and settlements and ensuring social inclusion. Social cohesion creates conditions for development interventions, while cultural approaches promote inclusiveness, equity, and diversity by recognizing and protecting cultural assets as valuable resources.

Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Culture is at the heart of gender and development in that cultures frame and define gender relations. The roles, responsibilities, access to resources, and opportunities for women and men to participate in or benefit from mainstream development efforts vary greatly across place and cultural groups. Also, women in many societies are often the producers, transmitters, and caretakers of heritage, traditional knowledge, and creative expressions. The human rights of women are also a cultural issue, as they can pit universal values and ethics against local particularities. The issue of the human rights of women is particularly important in the development context, as it empowers vulnerable and disadvantaged women such as the poor and marginalized to assert their rights and become the agents of their own development.

Effectiveness

Culture's role in development includes facilitating more effective development interventions and the better fit between goals and processes and local conditions in development projects from healthcare to education and infrastructure. Culturally informed approaches recognize the role and agency of the poor, as well as the direct and indirect impacts on them of development projects, whether these are targeted to benefit them or to exclude them from considerations of their benefit. Hence, development projects would be more effective in reducing urban poverty if they were made more responsive to locality and culture by their integration into a cultural framework. Culturally informed development interventions would facilitate a better fit with local values, conditions, resources, skills, and limitations.

Culturally informed development efforts could also enhance effectiveness and sustainability by creating the pre-conditions for development through efforts aimed at building peace and social cohesiveness. Although the results of supporting cultural

⁸ Cf. Jyoti Hosagrahar, *Integrating Culture and Development: Framing UNESCO's Engagement with Culture and Development*, 2012

interventions are not easily monetized, such actions can contribute to the effectiveness of achieving human-development and well-being goals.

Building Place-Based Capabilities towards Reducing Poverty

The emphasis on placed-based solutions and local resources also promotes sustainable development. Amartya Sen's important work on underdevelopment and inequalities has emphasized local causes and inherent patterns as the backdrop to development efforts. Arjun Appadurai has asserted the importance of expanding the opportunities of the poor to exercise their choices, to have their voices heard and to build the capacities to which they aspire. People turn to culture as a means of self-definition and mobilization, while asserting that their cultural values are often the sole assets they have a claim to.

As an extension of Amartya Sen's idea of "substantial freedom"⁹ and Martha Nussbaum's conception of "central capabilities"¹⁰, "place-based capabilities approaches" can be proposed¹¹. Such approaches aim for individuals, households, communities, institutions, and governments to achieve culturally informed sustainable human development by building on existing local assets and overcoming obstacles and limitations.

A place-based capabilities approach would empower people to actively pursue the benefits of human development using their cultural resources. For the marginalized, cultural and creative expressions can be an empowering and enabling force that recognizes their inherited knowledge and skills. Building on existing local assets and analyzing enabling and hindering elements, such approaches can enable communities and institutions to engage with development processes in order to overcome obstacles and limitations.

In addition to the identification of local assets for development, it is equally important to identify cultural obstacles that perpetuate practices that may be socially divisive or detrimental to people's health or the environment. Cultural approaches to development also enable the specific causes of poverty in a given place and community to be identified by applying the principles of human rights and gender equality to the identification of systemic imbalances between different groups and exclusionary cultural practices. The need to incorporate a human rights-based approach into sustainable development has been repeatedly advocated, notably in relation to promoting the self-determination of indigenous people, the empowerment of women, and in helping other marginalized groups to take part in shaping their own course of development.

⁹ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 2000.

¹⁰ Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*, 2011