

## Session 2B

## Culture: a Driver and Enabler of Social Cohesion

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

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**Background Note<sup>1</sup>**
**Culture and Inclusive Social Development**

The issue of socially inclusive development is an area where the need for culture-aware policies is widely acknowledged. People are able to define themselves in society and more fully realize their aspirations when respect for cultural diversity is guaranteed. Of particular significance in this regard is the role that culture plays in enlarging people's capabilities 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.

Among the most important ways in which culture contributes to socially 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 of maintaining close links to the roots and land with which many people identify;
- Fostering an environment that is conducive to tolerance and mutual understanding and where there is mutual trust, diversity is acknowledged and respected, and minorities are included, leading to more stable and resilient societies;
- Acting as a common good to be shared and protected and providing an ideal "entry point" for social engagement and cooperation, helping to develop initiatives that bring people together around shared interests, strengthening bonds and increasing the social capital of a community;
- Ensuring a deep connection with a major source of learning, inspiration and accomplishment;

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by UNESCO with the contribution of Sophia Labadi.

- Offering the pleasure of living in a pleasant environment and on a human scale.

### **Respecting Cultural Diversity Fosters Social Inclusion**

“An 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.”<sup>2</sup> As highlighted in this definition, the recognition of and respect for cultural diversity is fundamental to fostering social inclusion, ensuring peace and preventing tensions and conflicts between communities emerging from situations of exclusion and discrimination, and ultimately to fostering stability. It cannot be invoked to infringe upon human rights or to limit their scope.

Yet, cultural diversity is still too often viewed as leading to the exclusion of minorities. It is therefore important for projects in this area to follow culturally sensitive approaches from their inception. A number of UN organizations, including UNESCO and UNFPA, have adopted a cultural diversity lens in this regard, using it as a tool to understand better how the cultural practices, knowledge and know-how such as local skills and methods of knowledge-transmission of local populations can be drawn upon in programme activities and used to fulfil their goals. This can further facilitate the access and participation of those concerned, identifying the cultural factors that might limit their access to specific programmes, as well as culturally appropriate participation and decision-making mechanisms.<sup>3</sup>

### **Culture Drives and Enables Social Cohesion and Inclusion**

According to the UN definition, a “cohesive society is one where all groups have a sense of belonging, participation, recognition and legitimacy.”<sup>4</sup> Culture, and cultural heritage in particular, is fundamental to ensuring inclusive and cohesive societies, as it strengthens identities and creates a sense of rootedness and belonging, in particular for minorities.

### **Museums for Social Cohesion and Inclusion**

In today’s increasingly diverse societies that are the result of complex phenomena of migration and globalization, culture can play a fundamental role in bringing about inclusion and cohesion through representing diversity and giving it official space within national narratives. Museums around the world are focusing on the cultural representation of

<sup>2</sup> Report of the World Summit for Social Development (1995), held in Copenhagen. Available at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/wssd/text-version/agreements/index>

<sup>3</sup> *The Cultural Diversity Lens: A Practical Tool to Integrate Culture into Development: A Pedagogical Guide.* [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/The%20Cultural%20Diversity%20Lens\\_Pedagogical%20guide.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/The%20Cultural%20Diversity%20Lens_Pedagogical%20guide.pdf); <http://www.unfpa.org/culture/culture.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <http://social.un.org/index/SocialIntegration/Definition.aspx>

minorities and their cultural heritage, for example, as a way of providing them with representation, recognition, and belonging.

The Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax, Canada, is but one example of how museums can play this role. Pier 21 was used as a passenger terminal for trans-Atlantic ocean liners from 1928 until 1971. Turned into a museum in 1999, it now celebrates the contribution of migrants to Canada. The Museum's "Welcome Home to Canada" programme provides newcomers with six-monthly work at the Museum, helping them to acquire and understand the values shared by all Canadians while at the same time cherishing their own cultural differences. This Museum thus contributes to the creation of a cohesive and inclusive society, based on the celebration of difference, and it is only one example of this growing emphasis in other museums worldwide.<sup>5</sup>

Many museums around the world have also been concerned to represent multicultural society, giving minorities an official space within national narratives. The Viet Nam Museum of Ethnology in Hanoi, for example, presents the cultures of the more than 50 ethnic groups of Viet Nam, including their traditional architecture which is on display in the Museum's large gardens. The Museum thus works to symbolize the belonging of these diverse minority populations to the Vietnamese nation. It is one of the most successful museums in Viet Nam, having 450,000 visitors in 2009.

### **Culture and Education**

It is important to stress how integrating culture into educational policies and curricula can enhance their effectiveness. The way people learn and transmit knowledge is very different depending on their geographical and historical backgrounds. As a result, educational strategies that are responsive to local cultures, contexts and needs and that take into account mother tongue and local languages and are designed in cooperation with the communities concerned have been found to achieve the most effective results.

Moreover, education is fundamentally a matter of transmitting knowledge, skills and values. It is thus a major vehicle for the safeguarding and sharing of culture, in the larger anthropological sense of the word. There is great potential for educational curricula to promote understanding, tolerance, diversity, human rights and democracy, in order to foster socially cohesive societies. Activities such as arts education conceived in the broadest sense can also heighten learning and make it more enjoyable, as well as develop freedom of expression.

### **Creativity**

The creative sector fosters human creativity and context-based development approaches that can deliver benefits well beyond a narrow economic dimension. It contributes to an increase in capabilities and well-being, especially in urban environments, these being of the

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<sup>5</sup> For information, see: <http://www.pier21.ca/about/welcome-home-to-canada>

utmost importance in meeting future development challenges, notably by means of poverty reduction and the inclusion of women, ethnic minorities, youth and other marginalized groups. In the face of urban growth resulting from exponential migration flows and the development of multicultural societies, a dynamic creative sector can be key to building sustainable cities and ensuring social inclusion.

The design of youth programmes introducing ideas of cultural diversity and a culture of peace into these environments has also demonstrated successful results. Different forms of creativity deliver cultural and social values in addition to economic value, and they thereby increase human resilience in social and ecological terms as well as in economic ones. Apart from its social and economic contribution to sustainable development, innovative architectural and urban development using materials and techniques that respect cultural diversity and the environment also enables the building of sustainable infrastructure and energy saving.

Creativity fosters resilience and builds the capacity to aspire. It can foster democracy building, freedom of expression, and the capacity of people to live in peace together. Today, communities all over the world have increasingly unequal access to services and resources, notably in urban contexts. Fostering creativity can help in this regard by connecting communities together and fostering their capacity to live together both within the urban environment and at individual and community levels.

At city level, creative design has been a widely used strategy to upgrade urban space, to foster democracy through participatory approaches enabling citizens to make choices about their living environments, and to facilitate the capacity of living together through innovative approaches to access and movement. The revitalization of downtown Cape Town in South Africa, for example, which will be World Design Capital in 2014, is one example of how a city divided by the legacy of Apartheid has seen democracy, freedom and the capacity of living together restored through creative design and the arts.

In this example, various associations have been using the creative industries to provide underprivileged communities from Cape Town with essential skills in order to bring about social and economic development at grassroots level, an essential step in building the foundations of a diverse yet cohesive national identity. The Harlequin Foundation, for example, supported by UNESCO's International Fund for Cultural Diversity, has trained people from underprivileged communities in the Cape Town area in working in the recycled arts, giving them the skills required to set up micro-businesses related to carnivals, festivals and other creative endeavours.

### **Culture, Diversity and Human Rights-Based Approaches**

The need to incorporate a human rights-based approach into sustainable development has often been advocated, notably in relation to promoting the self-determination of indigenous peoples, the empowerment of women, and helping marginalized groups take part in and

shape the course of development. Fostering human rights and the participation of women in development are major cultural issues, as roles, responsibilities, access to resources and opportunities to develop capabilities vary greatly from place to place and across cultural groups.

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

However, the acknowledgement of cultural diversity should not be understood to imply the raising of barriers between communities or genders. On the contrary, it should mean promoting the capabilities of individuals, both women and men, to address the issues of poverty and inclusion in terms of material conditions and incomes as well as capabilities and opportunities. With regard to gender equality in particular, the dynamic and transformative nature of culture, constantly evolving in relation to the environment and societal needs, can act 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 [will] restore dignity... [and] change those traditions which diminish our dignity.”<sup>6</sup>

Promoting human rights involves working on attitudes and perceptions that are often deeply rooted in cultures. UNESCO promotes human rights as guarantees of cultural diversity. The 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, for example, 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 powerful tools in addressing harmful practices and in empowering girls and women to live fully the lives they chose for themselves. This is because cultural programmes involve stakeholders directly, and they engage fully with the daily challenges women face. Such programmes have been important in addressing child marriage in India, for example, where, despite the passage of legislation outlawing child marriage, effective implementation remains a challenge.

The voluntary organization Tharuni, for example, works for the empowerment of girls and women using a cultural approach, producing a puppet show entitled “Bommala Pelli” (The Marriage of Dolls) which carries a strong message against child marriage. The show has been

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<sup>6</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur in Note by the Secretary-General on Cultural Rights (A/67/287), August 2012.

staged in 40 Indian villages, and it has been highly successful in raising awareness of issues relating to this practice.

### **Culture-Led Projects in Violence or Disasters**

Creative and cultural activities also have a major role to play in helping individuals and communities to cope with wars or disaster situations, though this is a role that is sometimes overlooked. Such practices can often be an entry point for individuals and in particular for children and young people to address and to start to overcome the trauma of situations of political or urban violence or wars. As a result, creative and artistic activities are widely used in UNHCR refugee camps across the world as a way for children and young people to start addressing the traumatic experiences they have lived through.

Cultural centres can also help structure the lives of young people affected by violence. Children and adolescents can express themselves freely in such safe settings, and the activities that these cultural centres provide can help to build the self-esteem of the children and young people participating, helping to empower them.

Aware of the importance of such centres, UNESCO participated in the creation of DREAM Centres, the first inaugurated in April 2004 in Kabul, Afghanistan, in cooperation with the Polish Humanitarian Organization and a local partner, the Afghan Street Working Children and New Approach (ASCHIANA). The Centre provides cultural and sports activities to underprivileged children who do not have other opportunities, helping them to develop their talents and also simply to have fun. Decisions concerning the activities of the Centre are taken after consultation with the children and their teachers. This participatory approach helps to give the children control over their lives and a stake in the Centre, while also giving them essential leadership skills and self-empowerment.