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INTERNATIONAL AWARD - 6TH EDITION

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Reviewing the connections between local life and cultural life

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During the first revision process of the Agenda 21 for culture, which culminated with the adoption of Culture 21 Actions, 10 years ago, we participated with the text 'Cultural life, local life' (2014). This document called for greater attention to be paid to local cultural policies, as they are the most efficient in terms of their impact on development and the closest to the needs and problems of the population. We considered that the expression 'cultural life', which provides the foundations of cultural rights¹, finds its best articulation with the different dimensions of local life. These are ideal spaces for sustainable human development processes.

In the period between these two publications, the importance of the cultural dimension in sustainable development has remained constant, despite the (incomprehensible) absence of a Culture SDG in the 2030 Agenda. The response from the sector and cultural

agents in different contexts stimulated a series of new practices in cultural management, leading to new scenarios on the role of culture in sustainability and engagement in major problems of our societies.

In today's open context between the advances and difficulties of the 2030 Agenda, but also with the hopes of the Summit of the Future and post-2030, we dare to present some elements and lessons learned from these cultural journeys:

- The concept of culture configured by the political projects of the nation state presents great difficulties of adaptation and response to the new cultural needs of the citizens. It is built on the basis of a certain structural paternalism without considering the foundations of fundamental rights, while different colonial forms of culture are also maintained in some contexts. The debate on the role of the State in culture

¹ UN (1948) [Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 27](#) and UN (1966) [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(ICESCR\), Art. 15, 1.a.](#)



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is not confined to a guiding function or to a logic of regulating a liberal market, but to the defence of a new social contract for culture on the basis of cultural rights. A State facilitating social processes that influence our cultural systems while modestly not pretending to direct it based on the respect of cultural freedom, a context in which local administration, as part of the State, must acquire a fundamental role due to its proximity to, and capacity to understand, the needs and problems of the population in order to contribute to their well-being.

- The traditional policies of democratisation and access to culture, in spite of their good intentions, from a certain historical perspective show results with limited effectiveness with regard to their initial objectives. An important part of the population remains alienated from classical offers, be them institutional, market or cultural civil society, maintaining and increasing significant gaps for different reasons. Fighting against these cultural iniquities requires new foundations and the re-founding of local cultural policies to reduce these disadvantages and achieve a greater universal guarantee in the exercise of cultural rights in proximity.
- As Mondiacult 22² reminds us, we are moving towards 'multicultural human societies', mainly in urban territories, where a majority of the world's population resides. Translating this reality to the local level requires major adaptations to traditional cultural dynamics.

The cultural life of cities represents a non-homogeneous cultural mosaic that requires plural governance to ensure coexistence between different cultures. Once again, local contexts become citizen laboratories for new practices and ways of exercising a citizenship of respect for cultural rights within a framework of diversity. This is a situation in new globalised and interconnected societies resulting from high levels of mobility (Bauman)³ that affects people and cultures for different reasons.

- From the perspective of rights, the cultural life of people and communities in today's societies, as well as their inclusion in sustainable development processes, require a systemic vision of culture to interact with the different social subsystems that compose it. The concept of sustainability emerged from the scientific contributions of different disciplines and theories, without reference to culture, which converged in a transcendental agreement known as the Brundtlan Report (1987). What we could refer to as the cultural system in contemporary societies does not have a scientific diagnosis backed up by extensive contrasted research on its correlation with sustainable development. Due to its morphology and background, culture (or the cultural system) is based on subjective and opinionated approaches, despite the advances in some of its dimensions. The understanding of a cultural system (ecosystem) enables the analysis and interdependencies with other

² UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development (MONDIACULT 2022) (Mexico City, 28-30 September 2022)

³ Bauman, Z (1998): *La Globalización: Consecuencias Humanas*, Mexico, FCE.



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social systems that sustainable development requires to expand and interact with them. To evidence its contribution to this common goal, it needs to increase its contributions to the knowledge on sustainability.

- For decades we have been witnessing a cultural revolution, which Castells⁴ already predicted. Changes in the forms of cultural propagation and production, the digitalisation of cultural content, and the existence of the internet and social networks, have had a profound impact on the forms of cultural creation, dissemination and consumption. These facts have an important impact on what has been called 'eculture'⁵, which is installed in our societies amidst fears and possibilities; artificial intelligence fosters a broad debate because we are unaware or we currently cannot know its own limits. Although it appears to be a global and imprecise space (which we call the 'cloud'), we must interpret current and future repercussions at the local level.
- The emergence of a pandemic without borders has further globalised the world, both in the search for solutions and in cultural consumption, but there has also been a reaction among citizens not to accept only a private, digital and closed cultural life in their homes. A demand has emerged to recover normality through a certain yearning for greater presence, for collective cultural activities, a desire to go out into public spaces and participate in other forms of
- cultural expressions. This reminds us of the significance of culture for citizenship, the appreciation of direct, face-to-face contact or, as Jesús Martín Barbero said, the culture of contact and 'friction', as opposed to (or combined with) virtuality. The local public space is essential in the construction of the cultural life of citizens.
- In Our Creative Diversity⁶, the diversity of cultures was advocated as an element comparable to biological diversity, placing the need to avoid the loss of all kinds of diversities as an essential factor in the scenario of a sustainable development model. In this sense, the concept of integral cultural heritage was broadened to include the environment and natural landscapes. Nowadays, with the climate emergency and its severe effects, the efforts to connect and interact culture and the environment have greatly evolved, having a broad impact on the local rural world and small cities.
- The foundations of sustainable human development (A. Sen)⁷ gravitate, among other variables, on the possibilities of generating capacities for the exercise of fundamental rights and decision-making to act in one's own development. We cannot ignore the great potential of our cultural systems as providers of human capacities which, together with the dynamics of local life, have a direct and effective impact on sustainable development processes. This

⁴ Castells, M., (1996). *La era de la Información Vol1*. Madrid: Alianza editorial.

⁵ Teixeira Coleho, J. (2019). *eCultura a utopia final. Inteligência artificial e humanidades*, Ed Iluminarias, Sao Paulo.

⁶ UNESCO (1997). *Our Creative Diversity*, Paris. In response to the Brundtland Report, the World Decade for Cultural Development was promoted.

⁷ SEN, Amartya K. (2000). *Desarrollo y libertad*. Barcelona, Editorial Planeta.



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relationship is sustained with the education system, in all its levels and forms, artistic training, but also in the public space of our cities able of creating conditions for broad learning and the promotion of creativity and innovation. Cultural capacities become essential factors for local development, as has been demonstrated in studies of the economy and creative cities.

- The current scenarios with their major problems presented by the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs require greater transversality with other sectors of sustainable development, such as the climate crisis, health, migration, poverty, etc., and with interrupted armed conflicts, while not forgetting the need to broaden international solidarity and multilateralism despite populist tendencies. A very different cooperation from that of the last decades, introducing new values such as fair and loyal cooperation, and respect for cultural diversity through solidarity with cultural systems that do not have the capacity to sustain it. In this sense, a new generation of international development cooperation policies must intensively take on board these new values and principles in order to adapt to increasingly complex and interdependent realities.

These scenarios indicate that maintaining the advances in local cultural policies is not enough, and call for greater attention to the permanent adaptation to the social changes we are experiencing. On the basis of sustainability, cultural systems need to envisage future scenarios and intergenerational engagement for the societies that will follow. All this under the

principle of respecting cultural diversity as the heritage of humanity. Hence the need for a post-2030 Culture Goal that consolidates the commitment and responsibility of culture in these contexts .

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