



UCLG – MEXICO CITY – CULTURE 21

5th EDITION - INTERNATIONAL AWARD

LOURDES ARIZPE



GOBIERNO DE LA
CIUDAD DE MÉXICO



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Text about Dr Lourdes Arizpe Schlosser

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INTRODUCTION

Within the framework of the 5th UCGL - Mexico City - Culture 21 International Award I am pleased to write about Dr Lourdes Arizpe Schlosser. This year, the prize has been awarded to Dr Arizpe for teaching us that culture is a means of dialogue that can serve to create, transform and develop realities.

While culture is a realm that astounds us with its creative and diverse freedom, it's also true to say that it now requires a conscious impulse based on the drawing up of public policies to help it to become a mechanism of transformation that can serve to shape sustainable behaviours. Cultural policies are no longer conceived solely as forms of respect for the autonomy of other forms of life, as they're now committed to inclusive models that take into account the relationships between cultures, citizens, environments and the different kinds of private, governmental and non-governmental institutions.

This fifth award acknowledges the anthropological work performed by Dr Arizpe

based on her research and teaching, as well as the positions she has held within national and international organisations. We'll therefore provide a very brief thematic overview of Dr Arizpe's intellectual work throughout these pages. On this journey we'll see how culture has always been a stimulating subject which, in addition to being studied and analysed conceptually, needs to be experienced, made visible and promoted. The way in which Dr Arizpe has developed her work on culture not only makes us applaud and acknowledge the huge intellectual endeavour of her proposal, it also turns our heads towards the vast and diverse cultural past of the Mexican lands, as several of her proposals (as well as Mexican anthropology) stem from them, and she emerges as an example of international dialogue on culture, politics and sustainability. Finally, with a planetary perspective that takes us into the future, we'll imagine how culture can create a new vision of the world.

INDIGENISM AND MIGRATION

Action number 2 of the document titled



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Culture 21: Actions Commitments on the role of culture in sustainable cities mentions that, during the multicultural and intercultural integration strategies (in other words, based on the recognition of different cultural backgrounds, strategies are created to link them), particular attention should be paid to how indigenous, minority and migrant communities develop their cultural spaces. Lourdes Arizpe's work began with groundbreaking research linking the socio-cultural reproduction strategies of indigenous and farming communities¹ to the Mexican government's development policies.

With the generation and implementation of effective cultural policies, the indigenous and migrant groups arriving in cities would find more suitable avenues for the expression and integration of their cultures and ways of life. Moreover, the cities' inhabitants would regard this dialogue as a way of enhancing the cultural wealth of their living space.

GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

There are occasions on which reflections are based on theory, but at other times they stem from shared experiences, in other words, the specific needs that civil groups encounter in their daily lives. Dr Arizpe has shown us that intellectual leadership must be linked to practical strategies in the social world, given that she's generated a proactive and political voice that's been transferred to gender studies and the creation of related development programmes.

Will must find places in which it can come to fruition in order to continue building. In 1977, in a show of leadership, Dr Arizpe promoted an event titled the "First Mexican-Central American Symposium on Research into Women". It was rewarding for the soul, says Dr Arizpe, because "we'd calculated that 50 women would take part and 450 turned up! From all the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. It was clearly the right time and we all had a lot to say" (Ibid.: 477).

Dr Arizpe noted the importance and relevance of creating study programmes devoted to women. In 1983 she played an important role in the creation of the first National Programme for the Participation of Women in the Achievement of Rural Development (PROMUDER). Her influence was particularly noticeable in the opening of the Interdisciplinary Programme for Women's Studies (PIEM), created at the Colegio de México in the same year, and in 1991 she also supported the University Programme for Gender Studies (PUEG) at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). The launching of these research programmes has led to the creation of research methodologies, workshops and in-depth studies of female farmers and day labourers, women and development, masculinity, gender and the environment, violence and numerous other topics that do no more than reflect the need to broaden the existing scientific research models in order to explore the great creative diversity of human beings, thus generating more equitable and egalitarian realities.

¹ The references in this article are made to the following compendium of articles: Arizpe, Lourdes (2015). *Vivir para crear historia. Antología de estudios sobre desarrollo, migración, Género e Indígenas, México: CRIM/UNAM, Porrúa.*



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DIPLOMACY, CULTURAL HERITAGE AND THE FUTURE

In addition to her intellectual wealth and her active involvement in the drawing up of public programmes for the benefit of social groups, in Dr Arizpe's work we can find a constant quest to explore the depths of cultures, civil groups, organisations and institutions, in order to understand them at their core and to bring out the more profound meanings with which new shared narratives can be generated. This way of constructing ideas has led her to occupy a number of posts; for example, in 1988 she was elected as the first President of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, the youngest person ever to hold the position and the first one from a Third World country, and she was subsequently appointed Assistant Director-General for Culture at UNESCO. Here we can observe the special influence she had on *Our Creative Diversity*, the work of the World Commission on Culture and Development, and the 1999 and 2000-2001 World Culture Reports, in which we can see that culture and development can go hand in hand in achieving better living conditions, freedom of expression and, very importantly, the possibility of enjoying the very best shared and individual life experiences.

I'd like to devote these final lines to considering the future. The five cities with the largest populations currently have between approximately 21 and 38 million inhabitants, and, according to different reports published by international organisations, there will be megacities with populations ranging from 57 to 88 million inhabitants by 2100. With this tiny vision of the future we can envisage that we

won't be able to experience otherness from a distance, that there will be megacities with populations much larger than those of many countries and that the latter will constitute nodes of confluence for different ways of life. To the above we must add that the connectivity resulting from the advance of technological devices and the creation of digital media will make it possible to communicate with anyone who's able to go online (in other words, billions of people). These forms of social connection make it essential for us to revamp or complement the model of the Nation State with the reinforcement and integration of Cities, Local Governments, Civil Groups and Institutions.

Dr Lourdes Arizpe has taught us with her concept of *conviviality*² that cultural creativity can form the basis for the possibility of building futures. Conviviality refers to the sharing of experiences, which, according to the author, should serve to redefine cultural codes and practices that can guarantee sustainable development. Culture should be regarded as a blueprint for building and shaping sustainable cities, environments and behaviours. In philosophy of mind it's often asked whether it's possible for two minds to have the same experience of the colour red; in anthropology we must ask ourselves whether it's possible for two minds to have the same cultural experience. The only way of knowing whether the above is possible is by generating cultural policies that can help us to create

² This concept is inspired by the fieldwork performed by Dr Arizpe with Nahuatl-speaking communities, in which the concept of *Nonteicniuhtlaco* means "to cause people to be friends". In Spanish the word *convivencia* has its roots in the verb *vivir* (to live) and the noun *vivencia* (experience).



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constructive dialogues with each other. Anthropology is faced with a new task in the building of a new world, that of helping us to understand that other kinds of culture are forms of experience that we can enjoy within our own experiences in order to create better shared futures. A great deal remains to be done to generate cultural and public policies and to ensure that institutions and other kinds of organisations understand that they form part of broad cultural environments, but I can imagine a world in which we refer to a unified utopia, a utopia that encourages us to rewrite our history, opting for the construction of a world in which the embracing of cultures leads to well-being.
