



International colloquium

Culture for the Future

Creativity, Innovation and Dialogue for Inclusive
Development

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Intercultural Dialogue

SUMMARY

Culture plays a fundamental role in the pursuit of sustainable human development, structured governance systems and respect for human rights through the strengthening of citizenship and democratic processes, peace, stability and social inclusion. In this context, intercultural dialogue is one of the main instruments that need to be fostered and supported through specific normative instruments and targeted policies.

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In its White Paper the Council of Europe states that intercultural dialogue is “an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures that leads to a deeper understanding of the other’s global perception”. It also suggests that the crucial challenge lies in the identification of the conditions, or “enabling factors”, that lead to a meaningful process; among these, it mentions the need to ensure the equal dignity of all those involved and their voluntary engagement in dialogue, with an open, curious and committed mindset and an absence of a desire to “win”.

The European Union designated the year 2008 as the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, highlighting the value of active citizenship, and it supported the launch of the civil society Platform for Intercultural Europe, by the European Culture Foundation and Culture Action Europe, to promote a European community that values its diverse people and enables their free, full and equal participation in society. In 2017, in the context of the migratory and refugee crisis, the European Commission and EU Members States published a report with recommendations as to how culture and the arts contribute towards intercultural dialogue highlighting, among the different priorities to be addressed, the need to empower citizens and cultural operators through intercultural dialogue, and to support intersectoral and partnership mechanisms.

UNESCO approaches the issue from the perspective of cultural diversity and cultural pluralism, against the background of the 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity which states that, in a democratic framework, “cultural pluralism is conducive to cultural exchange and to the flourishing of creative capacities that sustain public life” (Art. 2). In the same line, the United Nations’ 2030 Development Agenda pledges “to foster intercultural understanding, tolerance, mutual respect and an ethic of global citizenship and shared responsibility” and recognizes “that all cultures and civilizations can contribute to, and are crucial enablers of, sustainable development” (Art. 36). This is indeed the first document by the international community that acknowledges that sustainable development can only be achieved if there is a sense of global citizenship, based on respect and tolerance.

In a recent publication by the suggestive title “Why Development Needs Culture” the authors defend the idea that culture, the creative industries and cultural heritage contribute to development “in terms not only of quantitative economic growth (income, employment), but also of qualitative standards of equity and well-being”.



1. Inclusiveness and job creation

The Council of Europe White Paper suggests that social integration and inclusion should be understood as “the capacity of people to participate in social, cultural, economic and political life”. For it to be effective, it requires the right to create and to innovate and should cover all aspects of social development (Art. 27). The 2030 Development Agenda addresses the issue of job creation under Goal 8 to “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all” and, more specifically, it states that there is a need to “Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services” (para.8.3). It also considers that “private business activity, investment and innovation are major drivers of productivity, inclusive economic growth and job creation” (para. 67).

Against this background, intercultural dialogue should be understood as a main instrument to generate inclusion and integration and, as such, it should be duly taken into account through targeted policies. In fact, it is a means to ensure active citizenship and, in this sense, inclusive participation by citizens in society. Furthermore, creation and innovation should be understood as vectors of territorial development, both economic and social. More specifically, it should be noted that the cultural and creative sectors, highly resilient in times of crisis, offer an incredible potential for job creation and employment, in particular as regards young people and women.

2. Financing for the cultural sector

In a recent post on the issue of funding for the arts and culture, François Matarasso suggests that the changes that are necessary to bring about and ensure sound funding mechanisms will only happen if there is “a profound realignment of social and political values”. Indeed, funding for the arts and culture has been, and is, one of the crucial issues that have not been fully resolved neither by public nor private funding approaches and mechanisms. Unfortunately, there seems to be no perfect solution and all that has been tried has failed to one extent or another.

In this context and as regards intercultural dialogue, funding should prioritize the development and strengthening of safe and neutral spaces, such as conventional and



innovative “spaces of proximity”, where different groups in need of information, empowerment and identity can gather and be involved in cultural activities that foster mutual understanding and relationships with a sustainable impact. Indeed, such spaces can effectively foster social cohesion. Also, improving, strengthening and recovering such spaces is critical especially in all those areas affected by a high prevalence of migration, both transnational and rural, which become settings for isolation, identity loss, social tensions and extremist influences. Such an approach would contribute to capacity-building that fosters, in turn, intercultural dialogue and relations between different groups of society as a necessary means for inclusive and sustainable human development.

3. Mobility and access to markets

Mobility of both professionals active in the cultural sector and of artists is crucial in fostering development, respect, and peace: having the opportunity to travel to experience other environments is a prerequisite to expand our understanding of other cultures and to increase our skills and competences. Cultural mobility is therefore a prerequisite to combat intolerance, xenophobia and prejudice. Indeed, the legal basis of the EU Erasmus+ programme states that it aims at improving “the level of key competences and skills of young people, including those with fewer opportunities, as well as to promote participation in democratic life in Europe and the labour market, active citizenship, intercultural dialogue, social inclusion and solidarity, in particular through increased learning mobility opportunities for young people” (Art. 11.1.a). Furthermore, the 2018 KEA report suggests the need for an EU mobility framework that should “promote cultural diversity, stimulate artistic creation, foster career internationalisation of cultural workers, pan-European networking, cross-disciplinary innovation and entrepreneurship and would enhance Europe’s external cultural relations”. The statements in both documents are valid and applicable to any other world region.

As regards market access and development, ensuring the conditions for increased and sustained circulation of cultural goods and services, including digital distribution, leads to increased access to these goods and services as well as to increased visibility of artists and cultural and creative professionals. It also contributes to audience development and engagement, and, consequently, to the understanding that audiences might have of other, diverse cultural expressions. Still, access to markets of cultural and creative goods and services is not sufficiently supported and/or strengthened. In this context, and as

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stated in the European Commission's website, supporting the mobility of artists and culture professionals is essential to improve both their career development and their opportunities to access new markets. It is also a means for job creation as well as a means to build partnerships and create networks.

4. Digital revolution

In 2008, the Culturelink Network addressed the issue of intercultural dialogue and digital culture: "Digital culture is a new complex notion: digital trends are increasingly interloping with the world of culture and arts, involving different aspects of convergence of cultures, media and information technologies, and influencing new forms of communication and dialogue". As regards intercultural dialogue, it argued that it "happens in shared spaces – physical, situational and communicational" and that, consequently, there is the need for a shared public space in which to exchange, debate and learn. In this respect culture and the arts as well as the digital media play a major role. Beyond this aspect, the work carried out by the European Expert Network on Culture (EENC) is relevant since it underlines other crucial elements. One of the main ideas put forward is that digital and technological developments "make it virtually impossible for cultural institutions to maintain a traditional institutional narrative and maintain "power" over the story". Consequently, these institutions have to constructively address their capacity to develop and engage audiences and the major challenge that they face regards their ability to understand that audiences have to be given the possibility to actively participate and contribute to co-creation processes but also to appropriate themselves of the cultural content that is generated. Another idea is that since "the old logic of online services and web content provision based on the "supply through your website and users will come" premise, has proven ineffective" there is a need not only to understand but, especially, to make full use of the potential offered by digital networks. Ultimately, to ensure the basis for a full deployment of the potential of digital culture, also as regards intercultural dialogue, there is a need to rely on a set of values that includes trust, transparency, economic empowerment, creative expression, authenticity, community resilience and human connection. Without all these premises, again we might run into a situation by which all the efforts made are ineffective, at best, or even counterproductive.



Conclusions

The concept of intercultural dialogue has come to the forefront of international debates on public policies for and governance of culture. Yet there is no definitive and consensual definition of what intercultural dialogue is or should be. There is, rather, a widespread acknowledgement of its relevance and an acceptance that, although highly difficult to determine and define, this is the concept that, today, affords the best approach to policy-making in societies in which diversity is not only increasing but also growing in complexity.

The two initial frameworks, by UNESCO and the Council of Europe, that address intercultural dialogue do so from two different, but complementary, perspectives: the first, emphasizes the values connected to intercultural dialogue as a tool for cultural diversity management; the second, puts the accent on tradition, understood as the set of elements which characterize human groups and communities. Nevertheless, both approaches acknowledge that our current societies are not only globalized but also highly and easily interconnected and that these elements are what makes intercultural dialogue not only relevant but necessary.

Furthermore, all the current approaches to the concept stress the idea that to be effective intercultural dialogue relies on equality as a non-negotiable and necessary feature: without equal dignity among and between all of the actors involved in the process there cannot be full and equitable human development. This, of course, relates to gender equality but not only. Public policies, also for culture, should be geared towards enabling integration processes, notwithstanding the position, role and status of those involved. However, this poses a highly relevant political question that should be addressed: most governance systems grant and facilitate full access to and participation in, in this case culture, because it is recognized as a right of citizens. In this line, in its current normative definition, citizenship indeed limits access to and participation in culture only to right-holders. Possibly, at least for the sake of debate and to foster progressive approaches, this idea should be tackled from a more complex perspective, in which the underlying fundamental idea is one of freedom rather than one of exclusivity.



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