



Culture in the Post-2015 Agenda

6 January 2014

« *On ne développe pas, on se développe.* » – Joseph Ki-Zerbo

« *Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the presence of creative alternatives for responding to conflict.* » – Dorothy Thompson

« *La confédération suisse favorise la prospérité commune, le développement durable, la cohésion interne et la diversité culturelle du pays. La liberté de l'art y est garantie.* » – Swiss Constitution

A. Definitions

Culture is hereafter referred to as “the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group, [including] not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs”¹. It can be compared to a diverse stock of renewable resources passed on from generation to generation, upon which people draw inspiration and through which they express the meaning they give to their existence and its development.

Cultural diversity refers to the diverse forms that culture takes across time and space and is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. It is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations.²

Cultural and creative sectors are referred to in this position as sectors whose activities are based on cultural values and/or artistic and other creative expressions, whether those activities are market- or non-market-oriented. Those activities include the development, the creation, the production, the dissemination and the preservation of goods and services, as well as related functions such as education and management in sectors such as *inter alia* architecture, artistic crafts, audiovisual (including film), tangible and intangible cultural heritage, design, music, literature, performing arts, publishing, radio and visual arts.³

B. Culture in the post-2015 agenda: proposals and open questions

The roles of arts and culture have been paid growing attention over the past years as a response to the need for a more holistic and integrated approach to sustainable development and for paying attention to the processes behind the desired outcomes⁴. In the post-2015 debate, they have been acknowledged a two-fold role⁵:

¹ Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies, adopted by the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies, 1982

² UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2001

³ Adapted from EU Regulation establishing the Creative Europe Programme 2014 to 2020, November 2013

⁴ Cf. Outcome documents of the 2010 MDG Summit and of the 2012 Conference on sustainable development; resolutions of the UNGA on “Culture and development” in 2010, 2011 and 2012 calling for the mainstreaming of culture into development policies and strategies.

⁵ Thematic Think Piece of the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda “Culture: a driver and an enabler of sustainable development”, 2012

- Culture is a **driver** for sustainable development, as a source of meaning, knowledge and creativity. With its transformative power, the cultural and creative sectors make a specific contribution to inclusive social and economic development, as well as to peace and security.
- Culture is an **enabler** of sustainable development. Culture-sensitive approaches to development, human-centered and responsive to the cultural particularities of a place, are most effective in yielding sustainable, inclusive and equitable outcomes.

In its latest resolution on culture⁶, the United Nations General Assembly explicitly invites all member States – among other stakeholders – to give due consideration to culture in the elaboration of the Post-2015 Agenda.

The necessity for a self-standing goal on culture was put forward in different fora. The Hangzhou Congress' participants call in their final declaration for the integration of culture into all development policies and programmes as well as for a self-standing goal on culture based on heritage, diversity, creativity and the transmission of knowledge⁷. Four global cultural networks have jointly taken one more step by formulating the goal “Ensure cultural sustainability for the wellbeing of all”, and presenting a series of 10 items to be translated into specific targets and indicators⁸ that relate culture to all dimensions of sustainable development and focus among others on normative institutional framework; cultural and creative industries; education and training systems; and heritage.

While the importance of culture, cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue for sustainable development is generally not contested at governmental level, the above-mentioned proposals and the integration of culture in the Post-2015 Agenda have not been present enough in the discussions, where a certain lack of conceptual clarity often prevails. The definition of sustainable development relying on three pillars – social, economic and environmental – tends to eclipse the cultural dimension. The question of whether culture is “goalable” was put forward⁹ and the definition of measurable indicators is an issue that has to be further dealt with. The concern of having to face arguments of cultural relativism that would infringe upon universal human rights could also explain the reluctance of governments to enter the debate on the role of culture.

In the view of Switzerland, the human-right framework must be affirmed as a pre-condition for any discussion on culture, and the positive contribution of different aspects of culture to sustainable development must be valued.

C. Why should culture be part of the future sustainable development agenda?

Switzerland shares the view that cultural diversity and the cultural and creative sectors should strongly be taken into consideration in shaping the sustainable development agenda for the following reasons:

1. Culture is a critical component of human rights

Cultural rights – namely the rights to freely participate in the cultural life of the community and to enjoy the arts – are recognized as fundamental human rights¹⁰ and are indispensable to people's dignity and free development of personality. To guarantee them is crucial for forging inclusive and equitable societies, and an effective, people-centred approach to sustainable development.

⁶ Culture and sustainable development, A/C.2/68/L.69, December 2013

⁷ Declaration of the Hangzhou International Congress organized by UNESCO, May 2013

⁸ Culture as a goal in the post-2015 development agenda, September 2013, promoted by the International Federation of arts councils and culture agencies (IFACCA), Culture 21, International Federation of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity (IFCCD) and Culture Action Europe

⁹ Concluding Remarks of Co-Chairs, OWG 4, June 2013

¹⁰ Art 27 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human rights; Art 15 of the 1966 International Covenant on economic, social and cultural rights; Art 29; 30; 31 of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Culture – as an end or a means – is further closely linked to other human rights. Cultural development and the development of cultural identity are objectives of several basic human rights, namely the **right to education**. Artistic expression can powerfully contribute to implement the right to a holistic education directed to the full development of human personality and talents. Artistic expression and cultural activities effectively contribute to put in practice the **right to freedom of expression** and to **peaceful assembly** where these are challenged. Cultural practitioners and institutions are often among the most vibrant, engaged and outspoken stakeholders in civil society, and can play an important role in claiming rights, namely of minorities, thus fostering governance.

2. Respecting and promoting cultural diversity contributes to the sustainability of development

One size does not fit all: acknowledging and respecting cultural diversity

Failure of well-intentioned development programmes and the gaps in achieving the Millennium Development Goals revealed the inadequacy of universal policies and approaches to development regardless of the specificity of each cultural context. Culture is a crucial factor in negotiation processes related to development of individuals and societies. It should not be forgotten that international cooperation is an intercultural endeavour in the first place. While recognizing that measurable results are the desired output of the post-2015 debate, Switzerland is particularly concerned with the quality of processes leading to the desired results and targets. Such processes should be people-centred, participative and ensure that sufficient attention is paid to cultural specificities. They should foster endogenous development and empowerment of populations by building on their cultural assets. This is a *sine qua non* condition for the sustainability of development cooperation programmes results and for their ownership by individuals and communities. While cultural patterns are sometimes considered to hamper development (e.g. related to health, gender), it must also be recognised that culture is never static and that building on cultural assets holds the potential to accelerate the process of development.

This is in particular relevant in the field of **education**, where Switzerland is keen to put the focus on quality, with access for everyone to an education that responds to his or her needs, taking into account values and shaping the ability to live together. It is equally relevant when it comes to **environmental sustainability and food security**: local and indigenous knowledge systems and environmental management practices provide valuable insight and tools for tackling ecological challenges and disaster risk reduction, preventing biodiversity loss, reducing land degradation, and mitigating the effects of climate change. The same logic prevails for traditional healing systems that can, in combination with science, contribute to achieving **health** objectives.

To consider the importance of culture within a human-right framework puts clear limits to the interpretation of the scope of cultural relativism: “No-one may invoke cultural diversity as an excuse to infringe upon human rights, nor to limit their scope.”¹¹

Promoting cultural diversity for peaceful and resilient societies

A source of identity, self-confidence and human dignity, culture produces social capital and strengthens resistance to unfair treatment by the authorities. While culture, with such assets, can foster social cohesion, it can also be misused to establish the dominancy of one part of a given society over others, and nurture conflicts.

Highly attached to its own cultural diversity, Switzerland therefore strongly believes in cultural diversity as a source of resilience, stability and adaptability of a society. To promote cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, within a human-right based approach, can facilitate mutual tolerance, prevent conflicts and protect the rights of marginalized groups, within and between nations. It thus creates optimal conditions for achieving development goals in the context of globalization and important migration flows. It must be

¹¹ UNESCO’s universal declaration on cultural diversity, 2001

emphasized that culture is a dynamic concept, and that diversity as such is at stake here, not its historical content at a given time.

3. The cultural and creative sectors contribute to more equitable growth and social change

Cultural and creative sectors are currently among the most resilient and rapidly expanding sectors. This can be observed both in industrialized¹² and developing economies¹³, at local, national and global levels. Cultural tourism – that relies on tangible and intangible cultural assets – accounts for a large share of world tourism revenues. Investment in culture and creativity has also proven an excellent means for revitalizing the economy of cities, where a growing proportion of the world population is living. Promoting this sector requires limited capital investment and can have a direct impact on youth and vulnerable populations, including women, as well as on the safeguarding of natural and cultural heritage. The cultural sector should therefore not be left aside by any strategy or objective related to creating **decent employment and income**.

The value of artistic expressions can however not be measured by market standards alone. Artists are playing key roles in a given society, whether they are issued from it or integrate it as part of a migrant community. With their symbolic means of expression, talking to the rational mind as well as to emotions, they have a unique way to change perceptions, and to foster dialogue and reflection on sensitive issues and cultural norms. They can be catalysts of **social change** and contribute to fight against exclusion and inequality, to imagine new ways into the future and to restore hope. In (post) conflict-affected situations, cultural activities and artistic expression make it possible to start healing the scars of war and violence, and restoring a sense of normalcy and identity.

D. Way forward

1. The opportunities to take the different dimensions of culture into account in the Post-2015 Agenda should not be missed. The **risk of ignoring cultural resources and cultural diversity** is that of overlooking a powerful resource for development and peace, but also that of designing “one size fits all” approaches that won’t deliver for all, particularly for the most marginalized, and measuring systems that miss the point.
2. The case for a possible self-standing, all-encompassing “culture goal” may be difficult to make, all the more so in the context of an agenda that should come up with goals limited in number. **Alternatives to a standalone goal** to integrate culture in the Post-2015 Agenda must be explored. **In particular, the contributions of culture to goals in other areas have to be explicitly formulated.** It is not about “mainstreaming” culture but about highlighting focused, crucial contribution of specific aspects of culture to the different dimensions of sustainable development.
3. Switzerland will continue to bring these aspects into the discussion on the post-2015 framework. It sees the following entry points:
 - Ensure that the principle of a people-centered, culture-sensitive approach to development cooperation is taken into account within the human-right-based implementation framework of the Post-2015 Agenda.
 - Ensure that the specific roles of culture, cultural diversity and/or artistic and cultural expressions in contributing to sustainable development are accordingly reflected in the goals or transversal

¹² Switzerland is well placed to value the economic and social benefits of the cultural economy: This above-average growth sector accounts for 10% of the country’s enterprises and they employ 5% of the workforce. Cultural economy contributes as much as the watch and pharma industry sectors to Swiss GDP (source: 3rd Report on creative economy, C. Weckerle et al., Zurich, 2010)

¹³ Creative Economy Report 2013 Special Edition – Widening local development pathways, UNESCO-UNDP, 2013

approaches, whenever appropriate with targets and indicators, in particular on following themes (non-exhaustive list):

- Poverty reduction
- Adapted education for all
- Peace and security
- Governance
- Decent work and income for all
- Sustainable cities
- Food security for all and sustainable agri-food systems
- Disaster risk reduction and climate change mitigation

Switzerland shall in any case continue engaging beyond 2015 at least to the current extent in supporting the cultural sector in the South and the East and intercultural exchange as ways to implement its international development cooperation with the mandate to reduce poverty¹⁴. It shall continue to conceive its development cooperation also as an intercultural endeavour, to recognise the cultural identity of its partners, and to consider cultural development as one of the objectives of its development cooperation¹⁵.

¹⁴ Implementing thereby the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions

¹⁵ Based on Swiss Law (1976) and the Dispatch 2013-16 on international cooperation adopted by the Swiss Parliament