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Culture and Development in Africa: what is at stake in local cultural policies?

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Culture and Development in Africa: what is at stake in local cultural policies?

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1. The structural approach to development issues has highlighted the fact that progress cannot be reduced to economic growth alone. Quite the contrary, considering the plurality and diversity of situations, it underlines the need to reconstruct the whole picture, including social, cultural and economic realities; in other words, a global reality that must first be identified and subsequently unveiled respecting its complexity and resisting the urge to simplify and make rash generalisations. Development projects encompass aspects of culture that are inherent to their nature and these must be taken into account in strategies of action.¹ Nonetheless, it could be said that dealing with local community culture at a time of great gatherings and global visions is tantamount to swimming against the tide.

I. Justification and historical milestones

2. It is certainly the case that current trends in population movement, characterised by mass exoduses and large-scale migrations breaking down intercontinental barriers to transform the planet into a global town, should reduce concerns over local development. It might then be tempting to set the stakes for the future of human societies at the level of the world's great upheavals and the converging evolution of very similar societies seeking shared happiness; a happiness whose parameters can be identified in what the media can give and access to the wonders of communication technologies.

3. And yet, an opposition movement is surfacing faster than ever before to proclaim local cultural identities, even causing great states to shatter into numerous smaller ones whose frontiers coincide, interestingly, with the borders of linguistic realities, communities, traditions and history and with the community of heritage and hopes.

1 BAYONA-BA-MEYA and TOTTE-STEKKE (ed.), *Facteurs culturels et projets de développement rural en Afrique centrale*. CICIABA, Harmattan, Paris, 1989.

This entitles us to look beyond the manifestations in order to question the roots. Of course, local development remains an object of public policies that human societies has tried to implement over thousands of years. Evidence can be seen in the operation of the cities of ancient Greece and classical Rome in the west and in the kingdoms and empires of pre-colonial Africa. By locating Meroë in the northeast of the continent, Timbuktu in the west, Mbanza-kongo in the centre and Great Zimbabwe in the south, we can sketch out the axes of a global policy that defined the operation of cities, regulating the lives of their inhabitants and structuring relations between communities and external relations with neighbouring states. The place of ancestors and elders, the role of religion, education and the initiation of the young, initiation into the arts and the organisation of games and festivals, all existed in cities, encoded and passed down from generation to generation.²

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4. Moreover, the policy of decentralisation implemented today in many large African countries testifies to the desire to fulfil the wishes of the population, who want to take the reins, identify their needs and adopt policies in line with their view of life's ideal. All things considered, the recipe for successful decentralisation is tangible. They include the expansion of the public, the appropriation of heritage and the intensification of support for creativity and the conquest of new spaces of creation.

5. What is more, only a local approach will enable us to define political and social situations adequately. Examples include crime, ethnic disputes and social conflicts. It is more characteristic of governments of proximity to attack the roots of these evils and seek lasting remedies. Analysis of their causes and origins reveals that they very often find their roots in mindsets and traditions, habits and customs.

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6. The same can be said of the answers to questions posed by the training of young creators and craftworkers. Nevertheless, training is not direction. Nowhere more than in our immediate environment will we discover a better environment for inspiration and expression. But art is constantly moving and reformulating itself, the scene of flexibility and freedom par excellence!

2 DAVIDSON, Basil, *African Civilization Revisited*. AWP/Trenton, Asmara, 1998. Fourth printing

7. Indeed, art is a democratic scene par excellence in the full sense of the word. People identify their needs and see themselves as one. Together, they are able to express their desires and campaign for their rights; together they can form a common structure and build a common system of ideas and projects. This task is carried out at the base where communities are established, be they local, rural or urban.³

Therefore, there is a need to dig deeper in the contours of this basic expression for this complete process of development undertaken and, in all events, sought in basic communities.

8. In the last decade of the 20th century, UNESCO launched a programme to acknowledge the actions of the cities towards encouraging peace in their districts. It was followed, at the turn of the 21st century, by the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), which was followed by the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005). Two years later, UNESCO signed a framework agreement with United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), which had previously adopted the Agenda 21 for culture in 2004 in Porto Alegre, an instrument designed to act as a compass for systematic action to raise awareness among local authorities. This global stance encompasses the affirmation of local democracy, the governance of towns, research on culture, urban policies and local development.

9. In the same year of its adoption on the occasion of the Universal Forum of Cultures in Barcelona (2004), the Agenda 21 for culture was used as a guide for a study by the emerging pan-African OCPA (Observatory of Cultural Policies in Africa), which was to form part of its programme.

II. The OCPA Project

10. The project developed by the OCPA clearly had to be integrated into Africa's regional framework while positioning itself in the general context of the world's position, seeking to identify the responsibilities of local authorities in the development of culture and clarifying the mechanisms of local and urban cultural policies. Specifically, the project involves the production of case studies -a summary of this series of studies emphasising trends and problems encountered or barriers-, promoting good examples, drawing up a guide for decision-makers and administrators, and creating a database of specialists in the field at the end of the project.

11. After the first stage – the production of case studies and drafting of an interim summary – the project, which has since extended its geographical scope of study to support the relevance of its conclusions, moved on to the drafting of the text for publication while the audio-visual productions were at the mixing stage. Completed and almost completed studies include research on the following cities: Algiers and Cairo in the north of the continent, Accra, Ouagadougou and Ziguinchor in the west, Djibouti, Kampala and Nairobi in the east, Brazzaville, Kinshasa and Yaoundé in the centre, and Cape Town, Harare and Maputo in the south.

3 W. MAKGOBA, Malegapuru (ed.), "The Missing Link between culture and education", African Renaissance, Mafulu, Tofelberg, Cape Town, 1999.

Research was undertaken in Algiers and Cairo in the north of the continent, Accra, Ouagadougou and Ziguinchor in the west, Djibouti, Kampala and Nairobi in the east, Brazzaville, Kinshasa and Yaoundé in the centre, and Cape Town, Harare and Maputo in the south.

12. Due to the extent of the work undertaken, contributions were required. The first contributions were made by individuals in charge of cities, who allowed the research team access to essential infrastructures and documentation. Other vital partners included the Spanish Agency for Development Cooperation (AECID) and TRUSTAFRICA. Previously though, the OCPA's participation in the regional seminar on the Agenda 21 for culture organised for member countries of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) in July 2008 in Dakar, following UCLG's kind invitation, led to an exchange of field data and principles and an evaluation of the guidelines obtained while taking into account the limitations of answers to questions raised by certain approaches and situations.

13. UCLG's early reflections also served to test the relevance of fields set aside for initial research by the OCPA for the case studies produced. These fields include infrastructures and spaces, access to cultural assets, proven attention to respect for diversity, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, artistic creation, festivals and artistic events, creative products and industries, the rights of minorities and marginal groups, the rights of holders of tradition and primary sovereign peoples and cultural exchanges.

Nevertheless, many problems were encountered during implementation of this project.

III. Problems encountered

Problems were encountered in the drafting of the case studies and in the analysis of early fieldwork results.

14. This concerned the effective autonomy of the cities and their administrators in politics and administration. From the way in which decision-making was approached, it was clear that mayors often revealed an absolute dependence on the authority of the state, to the point where, in several cases, the city's cultural policy was no different to the policy of the Ministry of Culture, where there was one.

15. There was then the matter of the level of funding available to cities to identify and make investments or even carry out straightforward public actions. Where there was a clear need and the action was expected, such as actions to organise sporadic events in the city or support for deserving creators in need or the community's representation in regional or national competitions, the town was often ill-equipped.

16. Thus, it was a matter of expertise or, to be more precise, lack of expertise of the person in charge of those responsible for city services dealing with the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes and activities. Where these are available, the city council must be in a position to recruit them. It would also be a good idea to provide training opportunities for those in charge.

IV. Recommendations

17. Since it is true that problems do not arise overnight and some of those mentioned above will have a solution, we could nevertheless set up courses of action allowing the individuals in charge in cities to carry out consistent and visible cultural actions. While it is true that the cultural influence of a city is a reflection of the cultural life of countries, we know that over half the world's population is concentrated in cities.

We can devise a minimum programme for average-sized cities based on seven points.

We could thus devise a minimum programme for average-sized cities based on the following seven points:

- a. Environmental conservation: the creation of leisure areas, parks and gardens.
- b. Heritage promotion: the rehabilitation of historical monuments, the construction of artistic monuments at strategic points in towns and the artistic decoration of public monuments.
- c. Welfare: the adaptation or construction of youth and community centres for women.
- d. Fostering of creativity: the creation or grouping of craft workshops.
- e. Organisation of a culture market: organisation of regular artistic and cultural events (art festivals, exhibitions, book fairs, competitions, etc.) and encouraging of national sponsors to back them.
- f. Public education: raising awareness of basic cultural values as an agglutinating force in society, with regular radio and television broadcasts and a culture newspaper.
- g. Participation in management: the creation of a council for culture with the participation of representatives of civil society and a secretariat to oversee and organise these activities.

18. These points will be developed in more depth in accordance with the final results of the project. We have seen how African cities such as Cape Town and Ouagadougou have already undertaken promising actions in this sense. These experiences will be taken into account in the preparation of a methodological guide for individuals in charge of cities and local communities, which will also include considerations on partnerships and cooperation.

In its assessment of the actions taken over five years of active operation, UCLG will be able to find aspects for further reflection. It will also find other useful references for developing its stance in:

i) OCPA studies and publications:

- *Indicateurs culturels pour le développement humain*, OCPA, Maputo, December 2006.
- *Recueil de documents de référence pour les politiques culturelles en Afrique*, Maputo, December 2006.
- *Guidelines for the design and evaluation of a national cultural policy*, OCPA, Maputo, April 2008.

ii) Reports on projects by the OCPA's technical network: particularly the experience of the 'cultures de quartiers' ('neighbourhood cultures') project on the outskirts of Yaoundé (Cameroon) and Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso).

iii) Lastly, studies and official documents of the OAU and the African Union, especially its Charter for African Cultural Renaissance, and UNESCO, in particular those published on the 'Cities for Peace Prizes' section of its website.

19. There is one statement that enables us to trace a line to guide our research on the promotion of a cultural policy for the development of basic communities: the turn of the 21st century appears to show that globalisation fosters the need for local identities and diversity. 'A new world is being sketched out... it will belong to those who know how to develop and spread their ideas, for it is ideas that make politics and not the other way around.'⁴

X

X

X

20. One recent initiative was implemented during the rehabilitation of two cultural heritage sites, Chibuene and Manyikeni, on the outskirts of Vilankulos in Mozambique, essentially a tourist destination. The idea was put to the administrators of the municipality of creating a global culture programme for the town based on these two sites. It would first consist of two rooms for explaining the heritage sites to researchers and informed visitors, a museum showing objects found in archaeological digs of the sites, a reading room for young people from nearby schools, a workshop in which independent craftworkers could make and sell their works and an annual music and dance festival. Lastly, a meeting centre would be installed by converting an existing building for academic meetings organised by the Tourism Department of the university Eduardo Mondlane in the Inhambane province: the OCPA was prepared to organise its inauguration.

A recommendation. If the political will exists, it needs to become practice. A very practical way is the elaboration of a cultural policy aimed at the local community. It is worth trying to elaborate it. Nonetheless, it can always be assessed and adapted in practice. For culture, a field that moves by its very nature, will always be this proud antenna, receiving incessant calls from all over and broadcasting the good news in all directions while remaining firmly fixed to its base. The observation and study of its changes will follow its transformations and conquests.

4 CHEVALIER, Benoît, *La mondialisation démythifiée, un Iphone à Bamako*. Autrement, Paris, 2008.

- The article and the full report are available on-line at <http://www.cities-localgovernments.org> and <http://www.agenda21culture.net>. They can be reproduced for free as long as UCLG and Barcelona City Council are cited as sources.
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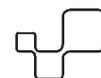
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