



culture 21

Agenda 21 for culture

Cultural Rights within the
Development Grammar

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Cultural Rights within the Development Grammar

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Conceptual Clarity and Strategic Clarity

Culture enables each person to touch and be touched as well as to choose and be chosen. There is nothing more private and yet more social. The culture of a person, a family, a group or a community is seen as the acquisition of the ability to understand, allowing people to freely recognise and commit to themselves, to others and to things, to choose their own cultural references and to modify their choices.¹

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Cultural rights, within the system of human rights, guarantee each person's right to fully participate in life. This right, which is also a freedom and a responsibility like other individual rights, is found at a very fundamental and specific level. It is a right to experience knowledge, beauty and reciprocity, which cannot be regarded as something additional once every individual's fundamental needs have been fulfilled but is a fundamental principle of development. Without this experience, the word dignity is meaningless. Without this experience, people, immobilised by shame, have no freedom nor dynamism.

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¹ See the definition adopted by the Fribourg Declaration (art. 2): "The term 'culture' covers those values, beliefs, convictions, languages, knowledge and the arts, traditions, institutions and ways of life through which a person or a group expresses their humanity and the meanings that they give to their existence and to their development." It is a necessarily long definition, but it is focused on people, which makes it practical.

It is therefore an agenda, in the regulatory sense of the term: *the things to be done*, the activities which those adopting it commit to because they want to recognise each person's right to participate in cultural life and, by extension, in society. An agenda must, however, have certain political readability; in other words, it must be demonstrative and provide evidence to those who read it attentively. This readability undoubtedly develops through the media and the means of information, although its source lies in its capacity to persuade; in other words, the coherence between conceptual clarity and strategic clarity. If culture means the capacity to link and engage with the milieu, if each person's culture is like their skin, both superficial and deep, exposed and intimate, then all cultural resources are opportunities to link, communicate and occupy cultural domains as well as channels and places of meeting, mutual enrichment and pacification (languages, arts, sciences, spaces, religions, crafts, skills of all kinds, group sports...). *This linking capacity must also be clear both at the level of concepts and strategic engagements, and this is mutually demonstrative.*

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1. People at the Core of the Democratic Grammar

Freedoms are written, otherwise they cannot support each other in order to develop. It is the very principle of democracy. The writing of freedoms is our political grammar. The human rights system, in its current imperfection, is the grammar we need to implement, adapt and correct according to needs. It should be recognised that each human right, as a conductor of capacities (work, health, freedom of speech, education...) is a factor of sustainable development because it forms an integral part of it based on equality rather than an abstract principle. Thus, each human right must be understood as a way to highlight the value of all freedoms and responsibilities.

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The first way of freeing ourselves from a monolithic thought (*pensée unique*), even if it involves three or four pillars, consists of distancing ourselves from an approach based on needs, even fundamental needs. As long as sustainable development is defined as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the capacity of future generations to fulfil their own needs, we continue to rely on a mainly conservative conception of duration, based on a logic of needs. Needs-based approaches tend to reduce shortcomings, while human rights-based approaches (HRBAs) develop capacities.² It is completely different. People's capacities are the first principles and the first goals of development.

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According to this HRBA, each right is seen both as a purpose (health, freedom of speech...) and as a means: *each human right is a "conductor of capacities"* (difficult to develop by someone who is sick and yet receives no treatment or unable to express themselves because of censorship or lack of resources...). Moreover, each capacity is at the service of others and only exists through others. It is the only way of taking into account the complexity of the factors that make up an ecosystem, whether it is an "environment" in which people evolve or a milieu (biological, cultural, social...) inherent to each person.

This refocusing is clear at an ethical level: "human development" is a tautology. This should be apparent at the following levels:

- **economic:** people are the primary resources,
- **ecological:** they are the closest to their milieu, even though they are not always capable of understanding all its logics,
- **social:** they make and unmake the social links and feed from them,
- **cultural:** the development of knowledge is paramount to exercising choices in all their dimensions,
- and, finally, **democratic:** people must define and achieve goals and means of development through processes of participation.

Development inseparably involves the mutual development or enrichment of people and systems, or milieus. Hence, diversity, like human rights, is a cross-over principle and does not specifically include culture, other than creativity. Nevertheless, we can say that the cultural dimension of the economy, society, ecology and politics guarantees the value of diversity and creativity in other fields.

² See the Synthesis Document (DS 19) of the Interdisciplinary Institute for Ethics and Human Rights: L'approche basée sur les droits de l'homme en développement (ABDH) : un renouveau grâce à la prise en compte des droits culturels ? / A Human Rights-Based Approach to Development (HRBA). New perspectives by taking cultural rights into account? <http://www.unifr.ch/iiedh/fr/publications/ds>

2. Core Function of Cultural Rights

2.1. Cultural Rights Are Capacities of Capacities

All the fundamental rights of people designate capacities, but more specifically within human rights as a whole, *cultural rights, as bearers of knowledge, are capacities of capacities*: the knowledge and recognition necessary to exercise all rights, freedoms and responsibilities. A similar thing happens with the conception of development and the evolution of human rights: we have largely ignored the importance of cultural rights to respect for dignity and the development of people and communities. There are many who still believe that culture occupies the last position when “fundamental needs” have been fulfilled, as if human beings were above all consumers whose needs must continuously be fulfilled or users to be satisfied.

A cultural right is the right and freedom to experience the process of identification throughout life, which involves people’s freedom and responsibility to have access to the cultural resources necessary for the implementation and coherence of their choices and responsibilities. This involves being able to:

1. freely experience their own path of identification,
2. participate in works (not only have access to major works), as well as to works enabling them to weave together (not only “experience together”) the social and personal links of mutual recognition,
3. acquire the capacities necessary to assume responsibilities.³



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Where are the freedoms that enable people and their political communities to choose the values that they wish to develop and transmit to their children? Specifically, cultural rights protect, within the indivisible and interdependent whole of human rights, all the knowledge necessary to express, inform and be informed, live in a more balanced way with our environment, care and be cared for, feed and be fed, choose the best education or the best political system. In each of the fields, the right and capacities to choose, personally or collectively, are not only ethical conditions but also of intelligence in situation and therefore of efficiency.

³ Along with the “Fribourg Declaration”, available in several languages, with many explanatory Synthesis Documents, <http://www.unifmer.ch/iiedh/fr/recherches/cultural>, see the website: www.droitsculturels.org. For a more detailed analysis, article by article, see P. Meyer-Bisch and M. Bidault, *Déclarer les droits culturels. Commentaire de la Déclaration de Fribourg*, Zurich, Brussels, 2010, Schulthess, Bruylant.

The development of cultural freedoms enables progress from a blind and anarchic liberalism that has a preponderant role in all fields to a true democratic liberalism, which pursues freedoms for all, as only *cultivated freedoms* can know and understand their own responsibilities.

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2.2. A Fourth Pillar or a Factor of Development Integration?

Although the introduction of the metaphor of the fourth pillar has involved major progress, I believe that it is now necessary to go beyond it because it is closely linked to a linear and segmented logic.⁴ At present we need *to focus on human capacities*, where everybody must be able to choose and participate in responsibilities, where they specifically commit to their milieu by deploying universal values. This approach is not only humanistic, it also has to do with a good economy, a development which can only be sustainable if it manages to continuously improve people's capacities within balanced social systems. *The aim is not to define a development that respects human rights but rather policies that take into account each human right as a development factor, both as a means and an end.* The end is not to define a sustainable development that leaves room for diversity and cultural rights but rather a development based on them as fundamental resources to exercise freedoms and responsibilities in a sustainable way.⁵ In short, it is not enough to say that everything is linked; it is necessary to explain why.

The three or four pillars on which the general sustainable development policies are supposed to rest shape this still dominant paradigm. This poses at least two problems.

- It more or less explicitly presupposes a hierarchy: even though this defect is generally challenged given that the metaphor of the pillars must designate dimensions, without a hierarchy.
- The second problem is that the distinction between different fields, albeit with intersections, is beyond the systemic approach that culture particularly underlines: each dimension is at the core of the others and contributes to shaping them. There are no intersections between the Venn circles: everything intersects. The "sustainable" is all-encompassing rather than intersecting; it is a coherence between necessarily interlinked dimensions.

⁴ See the article that I have written with Jordi Pascual: "Rio + 20 et la dimension culturelle de la durabilité", in *Culture et développement durable*, Supplement of *Mouvement*, No. 64 (July-August 2012), pp. 2-6. Available on the website of Agenda 21 for culture: www.agenda21culture.net. The present contribution develops the critique of the metaphor of the pillars.

⁵ "It is necessary to move from a culture contributing to development to a culture that conditions it", Jean-Michel Lucas, *Culture et développement durable. Il est temps d'organiser la parole...*, Paris, 2012, Irma, p. 81.

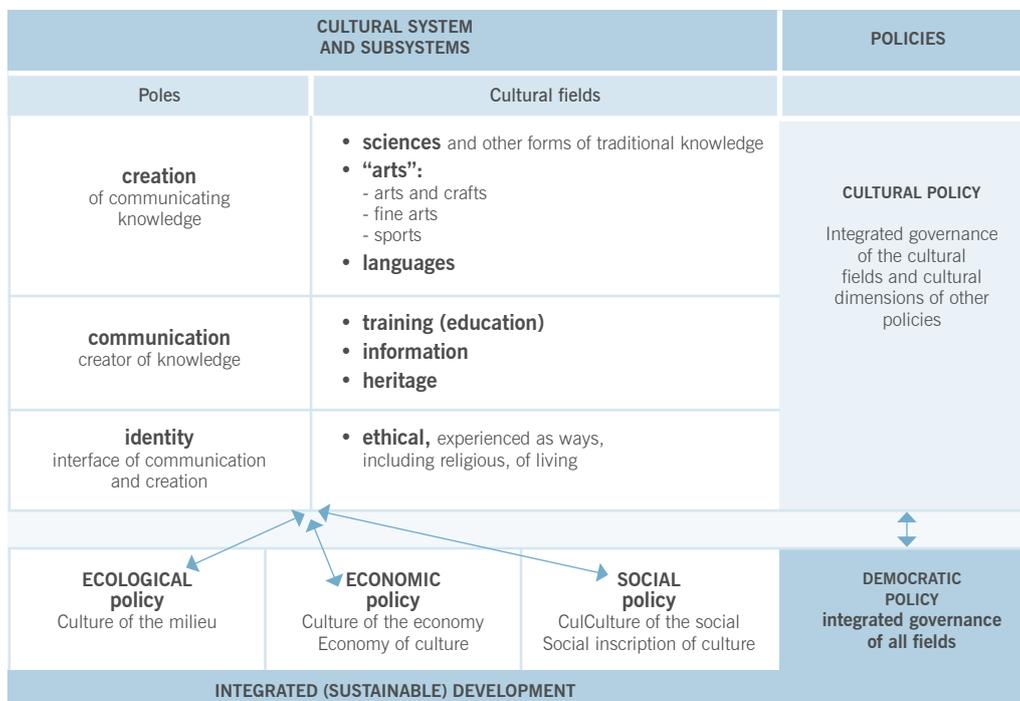
Culture is the most powerful link: it is not one of the dimensions that interacts with the others but rather a central factor of regeneration and inclusion of an integrated and adapted development. This also allows abandonment of the “illusion” of development: cultural diversity is also the diversity of developments. The cultural factor, with regard to other development factors, impacts on their democratic legitimacy and adaptation to the milieu.

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2.3. The Political Field of Culture and the Loop Approach

This means at a political level that it is not enough to consider an expansion of the specifically cultural field but that it is still worth identifying the cultural dimensions of other fields, with their responsibilities, not only for the political authorities but for all citizens and all civil and private organisations. The chart below is one possible representation of the cultural field.

Figure 1: Proposal for a description of the cultural field and its governance



Given that, along with the systemic intersection between the cultural subsystems and the other social systems, in democracy each of the political fields can be defined by its skills and capacities to fulfil human rights, it is appropriate to look, among these rights, for particularly significant systemic loops. These loops allow the dismantling of links of reciprocal causality, which should replace the lists of important points and good intentions. Once again, we are dealing with an interpretation of a grammar that conditions the demonstrative force, from the principles to the strategies.

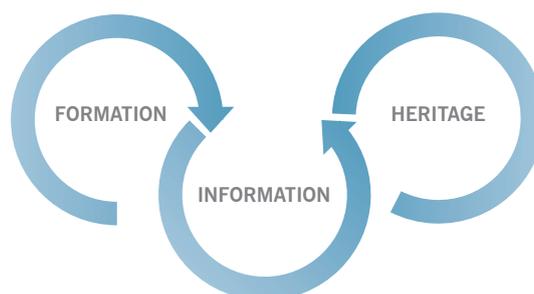
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We should rework the current Agenda 21 for culture in order to replace the reference to needs with a human rights-based approach. This suggests demanding, concrete and interactive ways to implement it. For instance, paragraph 6 states a need and the desire for eradication. Nobody can oppose this, because this statement lacks content. It is worth demonstrating how the sharing of quality cultural resources is a factor of meeting and pacification: therefore it indicates a cause-effect link and a strategy instead of referring to a double negative (the fight against violence). A *peacemaking force* can be defined by the quality and variety of the cultural references that we can all freely access, as they are spaces of communication: *production of shared pride and recognition*. In contrast, a cause of violence is characterised by the very few connections that exist with their consequences: exclusions, self-withdrawal and the incapacity to establish links... in short, the incapacity to create, the *production of humiliation*. This also applies to the “fight against poverty”.

The eight cultural rights, as set out in the Fribourg Declaration, make up particularly interesting ecosystemic loops. They involve choosing and seeing one’s own identity respected, knowing and having one’s own culture respected as well as the other cultures, having access to cultural heritages, relating or not to cultural communities, participating in cultural life, rights to training (education), to information and cultural cooperation.

The figure on the right shows a loop that can be found in all dimensions of a democratic policy. Training and information make up a loop whose content is participation in the cultural resources set up as heritage, i.e., available knowledge.

Figure 2: Communication loop





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Ownership of Territories

Our freedoms interpenetrate. A democratisation is sustainable when a people, constituted as a democratic community, find the means to assess and permanently highlight the importance of all their cultural resources, both at the level of each individual and the institutions. Their resources allow them to develop sovereignty in tune with both their milieu and with universal values. Whatever unity of political community is considered, and above all at the levels closest to citizens, the priority is to link all the inhabitants to processes of participatory observation. It is the condition for them to own their cultural rights, freedoms and responsibility and, consequently, democratic dynamics at all levels. By having an overall view, they will be trained and forge their own information and training tools and will develop a much greater desire for all the necessary disciplines, means and ends of development.⁶

What is a democratic territory? It is not only a managed surface but a network of knowledge and authorities that make it possible to highlight the value of the known resources the best way possible and for them to be admired and used by and for everyone. An agenda for culture is an agenda to develop public spaces suitable for each territory, in connection with the other territories and interlinked temporalities.



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