



UCLG - MEXICO CITY - CULTURE 21

4th EDITION - INTERNATIONAL AWARD

VANDANA SHIVA

DIVERSITY AND COOPERATION:
THE ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES
OF CULTURAL POLICIES AND
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



GOBIERNO DE LA
CIUDAD DE MÉXICO



UCLG

United Cities
and Local Governments



culture 21
UCLG Committee



4th INTERNATIONAL AWARD

UCLG – MEXICO CITY – CULTURE 21



GOBIERNO DE LA
CIUDAD DE MÉXICO



UCLG
United Cities
and Local Governments



culture 21
UCLG Committee



VANDANA SHIVA

DIVERSITY AND COOPERATION: THE ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES OF CULTURAL POLICIES AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

DIVERSITY IS THE ORGANISING PRINCIPLE OF LIFE IN NATURE AND SOCIETY.

Cultural diversity and biological diversity go hand in hand.

Nature does not work on the principle of sameness, uniformity and monocultures. The natural world is a constant striving for diversity of expression. Cultures too strive for diversity. Cultural diversity flows from nature's ways and her biodiversity.

Diverse ecosystems give rise to diverse life forms, and to diverse cultures. The Co-evolution of cultures, life forms and habitats has created, regenerated and conserved the biological diversity and cultural diversity on this planet.

Cultural diversity evolves when societies and communities are free to take care of their ecosystems and resources, share them in the commons, and use them sustainably for the common good.

Reclaiming the commons is vital to protection of cultural biodiversity. The commons create identity of place, a shared life, a common responsibility. Just as in a forest diversity of life thrives, when human societies view themselves as interconnected, unity in diversity thrives, cultural diversity is enriched, sustained and celebrated. We are united through our common humanity and our common earth citizenship. In India we refer to the Earth as One Family, VasudhaivaKutumbkam.

Humans as part of the earth family have the potential to regenerate resources, create wealth cooperatively and share it equitably.

The Earth and her resources are living, human beings and communities take care of nature, regenerate her resources and create shared abundance. Shared abundance creates the conditions of peace.

The colonial, mechanistic world view ignored the interconnectedness and



4th INTERNATIONAL AWARD

UCLG – MEXICO CITY – CULTURE 21



GOBIERNO DE LA
CIUDAD DE MÉXICO



UCLG
United Cities
and Local Governments



culture 21
UCLG Committee

widespread cooperation among species and cultures for mutual support. Commons were enclosed, identities were fragmented, and cultural conflicts have been created as part of Divide and Rule. Divide et impera.

The fragmented, atomistic view of society was imposed on complex, interconnected living organisms and ecosystems. Each individual life form was assumed to be evolving in isolation competing with all others for scarce and shrinking resources. Humans were divided and separated from nature through Anthropocentrism. People were divided on the basis of gender, race, religion.

The violence against people specially women, indigenous peoples, farmers and workers, is connected to the violence against the Earth and enclosures of the infrastructure of life.

Violence and conflicts in society grow when our commons are enclosed, our identities are engineered to become fragmented and negative. Non-sustainability of our use of the Earth's resources gives rise to scarcity, scarcity gives rise to competition and conflict.

Extractivism to create profits for a few imposes Monocultures on nature and society. Biodiversity and Cultural Diversity are replaced by uniformity.

Monocultures and greed go hand in hand.
Diversity and care go hand in hand.

The mechanistic view of separation and atomisation was blind to the fact that Nature

and society are based on cooperation, not competition.

Scientists are now finding out that cooperation shapes evolution, not competition. From the molecules in a cell, to organisms, ecosystems and the planet as a whole, cooperation and mutuality is the organising principle of life.

Diversity is the basis of ecological stability in nature and social stability in societies.

With destruction of diversity and imposition of uniformity and what I have called Monocultures of the mind, homogenous systems are created which are vulnerable to social and ecological breakdown. We are witnessing breakdowns of the Earth's ecosystems and ecological cycles. We are also living through breakdown of societies as diversity is transformed from being the cohesive glue of society into the basis of creating cracks in social cohesion.

Non-sustainability and uniformity mean that a disturbance to one part is translated into a disturbance to all other parts. Instead of being contained.

Ecological destabilization tends to be amplified.

Sustainability and diversity are ecologically linked because diversity offers the multiplicity of interaction which can heal ecological disturbance to any part of the system.



4th INTERNATIONAL AWARD

UCLG – MEXICO CITY – CULTURE 21



GOBIERNO DE LA
CIUDAD DE MÉXICO



UCLG
United Cities
and Local Governments



culture 21
UCLG Committee

In addition to providing ecological stability, diversity also ensures diverse livelihoods and provides for multiple needs through reciprocal arrangements. Homogeneous and one-dimensional production systems break up community structure, displace people from diverse occupations, and make production dependent on external inputs and external market. Dependency creates vulnerability.

Diversity gives rise to mutuality and symbiosis. Diversity gives rise to ecological space for give and take, for cooperation and reciprocity. Destruction of diversity linked to the creation of monocultures. With creation of monocultures, the self – regulated and decentralized organization of diverse systems gives way to external inputs and centralized control.

Diversity, Democracy and Self organisation go hand in hand. Monocultures, domination and control go hand in hand.

Monocultures, Competition and greed have brought humanity to the brink. We face multiple emergencies: a health emergency, a climate emergency, an extinction crisis, brutal economic inequality and deepening cultural divides.

Diversity can provide the healing that nature and societies need. From the conservation and regeneration of biodiversity we can learn how to conserve and regenerate cultural diversity. We are after all a part of nature, not separate from, and apart from nature.

From nature we can learn how to cultivate, nourish, and allow the flourishing of diversity, and through cultural diversity sow the seeds of peace, justice, sustainability and resilience.

The science of interconnected, self-organised living systems creates and is inspired by economies of caring and sharing, of conserving and regenerating.

Living economies are based on diversity as an organising principle. Living economies are based on cocreativity with nature's biodiversity. Biodiversity and cultural diversity coevolve. Diversity, decentralisation and democracy go hand in hand. Living economies are based on decentralisation and localisation. Economic Diversity includes diversity of livelihood and knowledges, diversity of spheres -local, national and international. Earth Democracy.

COOPERATION PROVIDES THE COHESION IN NATURAL SYSTEMS AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS.

Adam Smith brought competition and scarcity to the centre of the economy.

Even though Adam Smith was writing during the violent appropriation of the lands of the peasantry through “Enclosures of the Commons”, there is no mention of land as commons or the 3,380 bills that had to be passed by British parliament to rob the



4th INTERNATIONAL AWARD

UCLG – MEXICO CITY – CULTURE 21



GOBIERNO DE LA
CIUDAD DE MÉXICO



UCLG
United Cities
and Local Governments



culture 21
UCLG Committee

peasants of their land. Private property in land is made timeless in Smith's fictions of how wealth is created. Collection of rents from land is central to his extractivism paradigm.

While writing "Origin of Species", Charles Darwin was influenced by Adam Smith. He reinforced Smith's assumption of Competition and Survival of the Fittest and made it the principles of Biology and Evolution, even though humans and other species survive through cooperation and mutuality. The fragmented, atomistic view of society was imposed on complex, interconnected living organisms and ecosystems. Each individual life form was assumed to be evolving in isolation competing with all others for scarce and shrinking resources.

The mechanistic view of separation and atomisation was blind to the fact that the Earth and her resources are living, and humans as part of the Earth have the potential to regenerate resources, create wealth cooperatively and share it equitably. The mechanistic reductionism fragmented nature and atomised society, with each atom competing with everyone else. The mechanistic world view ignored the interconnectedness and widespread cooperation among species for mutual support. It was blind to the capacity of human beings and communities to take care of nature and each other, regenerate her resources and create shared abundance.

Scientists are now finding out that cooperation shapes evolution, not competition. From the molecules in a cell, to organisms, ecosystems and the planet as a whole, cooperation and mutuality is the organising principle of life.

Lynn Margulis opposed competition-oriented views of evolution. She is well known for her contributions on symbiosis in evolution. Her research highlighted the importance of symbiotic or cooperative relationships between species. She also worked with James Lovelock on the Gaia Hypothesis that the Earth is alive.¹

The science of interconnected, self-organised living systems creates and is inspired by economies of caring and sharing, of conserving and regenerating.

As the Secwepemc leader George Manuel describes in *The Fourth World*: "Our economy carried on because it was being held together by a substance much stronger than the simple list of raw materials with which we worked. The roots and berries, fish and meat, bark and moss, are a list of ingredients that cannot by themselves make a whole cloth. There is only organizing when those raw materials are brought together on the loom of social values toward which people choose to work".²

¹ Margulis, Lynn, and Dorion Sagan. *Microcosmos: Four Billion Years of Evolution from Our Microbial Ancestors*. New York: Summit Books, 1986.

² Manuel, George, and Michael Posluns. *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality*. New York: The Free Press, 1974, page 41.



4th INTERNATIONAL AWARD

UCLG – MEXICO CITY – CULTURE 21



GOBIERNO DE LA
CIUDAD DE MÉXICO



UCLG
United Cities
and Local Governments



culture 21
UCLG Committee

It is the underpinning value system that provides (or denies) the conditions for well-being, true wealth.

Indigenous economies are based on values of caring, sharing and belonging, cooperation and giving.

The multiple crises we are living through are “a direct result of an economic system predicated upon accumulation and dispossession, that denigrates the sacred in all of us.” It is what LaDuke calls the Wiindigo economy, the Cannibal or Wasichu figure in Anishinaabe legend that destroys itself through addictive indulgence in its craven desires. Wiindigo infrastructure consumes the Earth it needs to survive through pipelines, industrial sprawl, and chemical contaminations of all kinds.³

Cooperation, solidarity, mutuality, circular economies in which we sustain the Earth and her beings, and primary producers get a fair and just share, have become survival imperatives.

³ LaDuke, Winona, and Deborah Cowen, “Beyond Wiindigo Infrastructure”, *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 119, no. 2 (April 2020), page 244.