

The importance of culture in the process of establishing Sustainable Development Goals

An opportunity for reflection

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Abstract

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an ambitious model of peace and prosperity globally. However, the presence of the cultural sector has been unfortunately scarce. Beyond different interpretations, culture did not integrate any of the seventeen goals as a priority. Despite the enormous efforts of groups and institutions, the cultural dimension was relegated to acting as a facilitating instrument. This analysis offers a brief review of the SDGs construction process from the speeches of the participants in the various sessions at the Open Working Group (OWG). The aim is to better understand the mechanisms of the constitutive process of the Agenda 2030 to contribute to the reflection on new proposals for action in support of culture, also in the museological sector.

“In the end, culture is the only thing that links us in an extraordinary way, both in utopia and reality.”

H. E. Mrs. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés
73rd session of the United Nations General Assembly (2019)

It is not anecdotal that during the presentation of the new advertising system for the subway in Barcelona the chosen images for the institutional journey were precisely on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In our country, and around the world, the campaign in support of the sustainable development project framed into the SDGs is characterized by a huge magnitude and extraordinary capillarity. The world of culture has certainly not been oblivious to this phenomenon. Countless partnerships and collaborations have been established within the field of arts, culture and creative economy. The Primavera Sound, the Museums Plan 2030 of the Government of Catalonia or the explicit pledge by the Municipal Libraries Network to promote and sustain the seventeen goals are just a few of the many examples of commitment in Catalonia.

However, as it has been widely noted and discussed, it is quite strange that none of the seventeen goals presents culture as a central field of action. To try to understand the process that led to this, it is important to analyze the interventions of the participants in the various sessions of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG), specially the contributions of member states. The aim of this study is to present a profound critical analysis on the documentary base of the work prior to the drafting of the Agenda 2030 in order to contribute to informed reflection on future proposals for action in support of culture in the field of sustainable development.



Culture as a peripheral element in the SDGs

In September 2015, all 193 countries of the United Nations General Assembly adopted the commitments contained in the document *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. The so-called Agenda 2030 originated through a mechanism of collective reflection and evaluation of the impacts of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It was seen as the culmination of an unprecedented participatory process structured through the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG). This process, initiated in 2013, aimed to respond to a number of issues that were not resolved properly in the MDGs relating to human rights, international collaboration and the role of civil society.

The seventeen SDGs are defined in paragraph 51 of the Agenda 2030, and so are the 169 subsequent “sub-objectives” –targets– and the 232 related indicators. The SDGs form a framework for defining the priorities and strategies of action and for balancing the economic, social and ecological needs of contemporary society. The aim is just as necessary as it is ambitious: aligning global efforts towards a model of prosperity that respects both people and the planet. The production of the SDGs is based on implementing the principles of sustainable development in all levels of society.

The importance of this process in the current social and historical context seems unquestionable. The SDGs are positioned as a major catalyst for development aid and the fight against poverty over the next ten years. Thus, they confirm themselves as the reference system that is expected to exert a decisive influence on global policies for development in the medium and long term. The definition and confirmation of SDGs transcends formal narrative and aims to contribute decisively to the sustainable development of the human society. It is in this context that the assessment of the cultural sphere has been considered as a fundamental and inescapable piece of the puzzle (Hosagrahar 2015).

UNESCO’s adherence to these principles was categorical. The agency declaimed that “Culture is who we are and what shapes our identity. No development can be sustainable without including culture.”⁽¹⁾ The same agency reaffirmed its commitment to recognize and promote the role of culture as a key player in the SDGs, considering it both a driver and enabler element, something essential for efficiently achieving the objectives fixed in the various dimensions of sustainable development.

Despite this clear positioning, it is necessary to admit that culture was not regarded as core in any of the seventeen goals, and only appeared as an explicit reference in 5 out of the 169 targets. Reactions to the final text through the

cultural community were fundamentally polarized. On the one hand, UNESCO proclaimed that the SDGs granted unprecedented significance to the cultural dimension, while, on the other hand, a considerable number of critical voices raised to claim the fact that culture had not found the expected centrality in Agenda 2030.

While recognizing the importance of the SDGs as a guide for fighting poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring peace and prosperity for all nations, several authors criticized the almost imperceptible presence of the cultural dimension in the final wording of the text (Hawkes 2015, Martinell 2015, Appe 2016, Pascual 2016). Other voices defended the need to prove that the actions on cultural policy should be recognized in relation to the effective achievement of the SDGs (Villaseñor Anaya 2016), and others highlighted the implicit mainstreaming and indirect contribution of the creative and cultural dimensions through the very conception of the SDGs (Hosagrahar 2016, Gupta & Vegelin 2016).



Sustainable Development Goals, Ubud, Bali.
Photography: by the author.

Culture's bumpy road

The relationship between culture and sustainable development has been widely advocated, just as it has been historically difficult when ratified through binding formal commitments (Brown 1991, Nurse 2006, Throsby 2008, Martinell 2015).

Some precedents can be traced to the Declaration of the Principles of International Cooperation (UNESCO 1966), the Mondiacult World Conference (1982) and the proclamation of the World Decade for Cultural Development (1988-1997) (Maraña 2010, Pascual 2015). With *Our Creative Diversity* (1995), UNESCO tried to deepen the relationship between culture and development, although the resulting report had a limited impact (Baltà *et al.* 2015). Unfortunately, the process that led to the drafting of the MDGs (2000) did not consider the opportunity to express the interdependence between culture and development as the protagonist of one of the axioms or objectives (Matsuura 2008).

In 2001, the Tutzinger Manifesto for the Strengthening of the Cultural-Aesthetic Dimension of Sustainable Development (2001) called for expanding the international sustainability strategies in relation to art and culture. That same year, UNESCO approved the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), which contains a significant mention in Article 3. This statement considers that the essence of development can not only be defined in terms of economic growth, since it responds to the achievement of a culturally, spiritually and emotionally satisfying existence. Meanwhile, in the seminal work of Jon Hawkes *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's Essential Role in Public Planning* (2001) he argued the need to consider culture as a fourth pillar of sustainability to ensure the cultural vitality of communities. He affirms that “a sustainable society depends upon a sustainable culture. If a society's culture disintegrates, so will everything else.”⁽²⁾

The Agenda 21 for Culture (2004) picked up the outlines of this thought and argued for the inclusion of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainability in international forums. Agenda 21 was ratified by the workgroup United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), and it pushed the definition of local policy actions coordinated by promoting culture in all areas. The subsequent conventions of Unesco – the Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) and the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) – complemented the conceptual and regulatory framework between the relations of culture and development (Pascual 2016). The International Congress “Culture: a Key to Sustainable Development” was the first international conference focused specifically on the links between culture and sustainable development, and concluded with the statement known as the Hangzhou Declaration (2013).



Irina Bokova at the International Hangzhou Congress. Photography: by Matthieu Guevel.

A few weeks later, the then Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon would echo the main conclusion of the conference. “Last month, some 500 participants from 82 countries came together in Hangzhou, China. [...] They had a clear message. They want to see culture integrated into the post-2015 Development Agenda through clear goals, targets and indicators.”⁽³⁾ he stated. The response from organizations in support of culture did not take long to appear. One of the most illustrative examples can be found in the global campaign The Future We Want Includes Culture, where the UCLG showed decisive leadership.

With the Declaration on the Inclusion of Culture in the Sustainable Development Goals (2014) the demand to include culture in the SDGs with a clear proposal for a joint objective became apparent. “The best way to include these considerations in the Post-2015 Development Agenda is through the inclusion of a goal explicitly focused on culture. [...] Ensure cultural sustainability for the wellbeing of all”⁽⁴⁾ It is a proposal which, unfortunately, and in view of the final draft, did not have the necessary factual support.

The SDGs as a process of collective synthesis

To critically assess the results of the Agenda 2030 it is important to deepen further in the specific architecture of the writing process. The starting point of this analysis is the mandate from Rio+20, which set out the need to activate a mechanism for collective discussion in order to ensure a participatory process for the constitution of the SDGs. Since 2013, this will materialized mainly in the thirteen sessions of the OWG.

The documentary analysis of the 1.634 texts that make up the body of work and the contributions of the different agents participating in the discussions of the OWG published in the Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform enable an informed approach to the various institutional positions regarding the inclusion of culture in the SDGs. This study furnishes relevant notes that may help inform future strategies of individual and collective action in relation to the full inclusion of culture in the sustainability debate.

As a general preamble it is important to highlight that none of the consulted documents brings frontal and explicit

notes against the inclusion of culture in the SDGs. The positions of all agents, however, vary greatly in a spectrum ranging from the most complete inattention to the explicit support of the inclusion of culture as a key element in the sustainable development agenda.

Following this text it is to be found a brief review of the institutional positions shown by member states, the specific positions held by Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) and the contributions of UNESCO, in addition to the notes edited by the various United Nations Technical Support Teams (TST).

Contributions of member states

The interventions of member states – the 193 sovereign states with equal representation in the General Assembly of the UN – will be grouped by criteria of the proximity of their approaches regarding the centrality of culture in sustainable development processes.

Among the member states that did not show any sensitivity on the inclusion of culture, those who give centrality to culture in their own national policies but did not transfer this concern to the discussions of the SDGs can be highlighted. Canada, as part of the troika with Israel and the United States, did not consider it appropriate to make any amendment, despite the importance of their public efforts in support of national institutions such as the Creative City Network. Similarly, the contributions of the troika formed by Australia, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom were virtually insignificant and were limited to generic comments on the value of cultural diversity. The unsubstantiality of these interventions was significant in relation to culture's level of integration within the Dutch public policies from the *Wet op het specifiek cultuurbeleid* (1993) to the policies promoted by The Regional Arts Fund in Australia or the various Sustainable Development Action Plan prepared by the British Department for Digital Culture, Media and Sport.

The Group of 77 and China stuck to the definitions of UNESCO, without advancing any additional claim to considerations of culture as enabler and driver for sustainable development. Likewise, the contributions of the troika formed by France, Germany and Switzerland were restricted to recognizing the cultural dimension regarding international rights that were already defined in previous summits. Uganda and the Troika of Cyprus, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates only claimed the role of the cultural differences between countries and the importance of cultural exchange, placing culture as a canonical motor of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

The countries of the Pacific Small Island Developing States group, Venezuela, Nigeria and the African states focused on vindicating aspects relative to indigenous culture and traditional knowledge, leaving aside other modernizing and universalist features. Nepal urged to consider the need for visibility on issues of urban historical heritage, and the Maldives demanded oceanic and natural resources to be considered as an integral part of the culture of peoples. Mentions on the inescapable respect for national sovereignty and local traditions from some countries with strong spiritual permeability such as India, Bangladesh, Tunisia and Egypt are also notable.

The troika formed by Italy, Spain and Turkey gave way to some required demands in terms of culture, advocating the awareness of the importance of culture in economic, political, social or educational issues. They defined the meaning of culture as a key element, and called for a greater emphasis on the cultural dimension of sustainable development, without, however, establishing a binding level of operational concretion in their proposals. Despite their significant extension, the contributions of Spain can be considered a step backwards when compared to the leading role achieved in the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund (MDG-F). It is important to recall the decisive impulse that Spain exerted on that occasion, when culture was considered as an explicit constituent of the eight areas of intervention. It was an approach that, unfortunately, was not repeated in the context of the OWG.

In a more incisive line, the demands of the Islamic Republic of Iran considered culture a cross-disciplinary element integrated consciously and proactively in the development programs. Peru and Mexico stressed the transversality of the cultural dimension and the need to preserve the intergenerational transmission of heritage. Argentina, Bolivia and Ecuador bet on the effective inclusion of the cultural dimension in the SDGs, and the Republic of Korea urged to review the treatment given to the culture to assert its relevance and essentiality. As an example of the Group of Friends on Culture and Development, Qatar stood out on one of the most significant projects. In its speech, the need

for a cross-disciplinary approach in the SDGs was stated, and so was the deepening the in relationships between culture and other dimensions of sustainable development. It is important to highlight that this group is comprised by thirty countries, and it is positioned as the only alliance between member states for the inclusion of culture on the international agenda.

Out of all submitted speeches by member states, only two called for the drafting of a specific cultural objective. The intervention of Cuba was, without any doubt, the one that most specifically advocated for the full integration of culture in the SDGs. Cuba proposed the creation of a new cultural dimension of the social pillar of sustainability and defined its main associated instruments, but did not get as far as considering culture itself as the fourth pillar of sustainability. Similarly, Bulgaria and Croatia proposed the idea of loving culture as an essential dimension, and as an underlying one to the three pillars of sustainable development, and also asked for a target for its specific recognition.

Contributions from Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS)

The production of the SDGs needed a huge cross-disciplinary consensus. The Earth Summit (1992) recognized the need for active participation of all social sectors. These contributions were formalized in the so-called Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS), which included representation of sectors as diverse as women, children and youth, indigenous peoples, non-governmental organizations, local authorities, workers and trade unions, companies and industry, scientific and technological community, farmers or people with disabilities.

Regarding their respective interventions during the thirteen sessions of the OWG, be noted that, in general, contributions showed greater sensitivity to the cultural dimension than those from member states. The first evidence is the fact that no MGoS specifically supports the cultural dimension in the SDGs. Of all groups that participated in the process, three stood out for making specific demands in favor of culture: Women Major Group, the Indigenous People and Local Authorities, although these demands were not the main objective of their respective interventions.



Mafikizolo, Johannesburg, South Africa (2016).
Photograph: by Project Everyone.

Women's Major Group included the cultural element in most of their interventions, which were organized into three main storylines. First, the claim for the ratified agreements to be honored; second, the demand for greater attention to the impact of cultural practices in the welfare of women and girls; and third, the promotion of culture as an effective mechanism for the sustained reduction of poverty in all its forms. Just as they did at Rio+20, the Indigenous People Major Group highlighted with their interventions the determining impact of culture on development, with particular emphasis on the preservation and promotion of indigenous cultures.

The Local Authorities Major Group (LAMG) was established as a mechanism for coordination and consultation on the main international networks of local governments. Through the many interventions of the LAMG in the OWG, they only appealed vehemently to the inclusion of culture in the SDGs in the fourth session, in accordance with the

action lines agreed in the Agenda 21 for Culture. Specifically, they opted for a change of model that includes culture as a fourth pillar of sustainability, and demanded a comprehensive implementation of policies that understand the cultural dimension as enabler and driver of sustainable development. Unfortunately, this momentum was strongly diluted in other interventions in the group.

Contributions of the UN and partner agencies

The interventions of the various UN agencies and partners deserve specific appraisal. Throughout these contributions, the UN positioned in accordance with the previous regulations and conventions, reiterating the need to ensure the practice of culture, respect for cultural diversity, the protection of cultural and natural heritage, the promotion of cultural institutions, the promotion of cultural tourism and the strengthening of the cultural and creative industries. The UNCCD contributed with explicit reflections on the cultural dimension of natural heritage, stressing the importance of ecosystems as providers of cultural services.

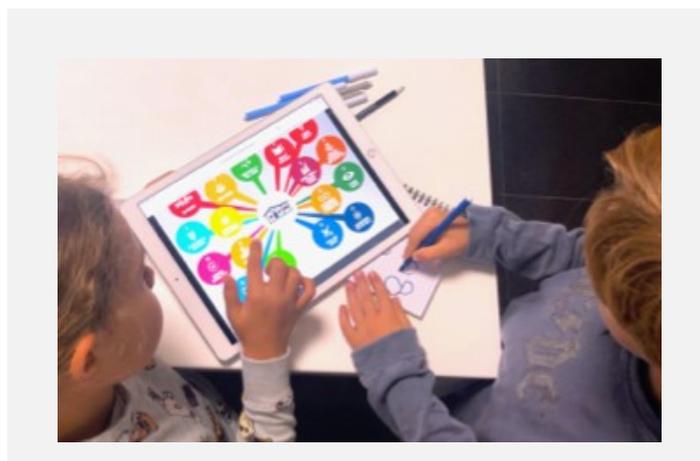
UNESCO's intervention was particularly important, given its exclusive mandate. In opening statements of the OWG, UNESCO opted to complete the paradigm of sustainability with an explicit cultural element, yet without sharing any details. In the declaration International Congress Culture: Key to Sustainable Development (2013) in Hangzhou, UNESCO signed a demand for a specific target culture focused on the promotion and protection of heritage, diversity, creativity and knowledge transfer. This proposal was completed with a series of sub-objectives and clear indicators that linked culture with all dimensions of sustainable development.

The implications of the agreements reached in Hangzhou were only recognized in the documents produced by the UN TST and in particular by the TST Issues Brief: Education and Culture (2013). This document assessed the state of affairs and urged the integration of culture in development policies and strategies through a specific objective, stressing the intrinsic contribution of culture to sustainable development and demanding the integration of culture in all development policies and programs in accordance with international normative instruments. It is significant that UNESCO did not hold such a position in any of its speeches at the OWG.

Yes to culture, but in small doses

On the basis of the analysis above, it can be argued that the presence of culture in the final drafting of the SDGs reflected consistently predominant positions during the OWG, both from Unesco and from the majority of member states.

One argued fact stands out in the positive importance of culture during the OWG. The Agenda 2030 showed the body of precedent knowledge about the links between culture and sustainable development and reaffirmed already recognized cultural rights – yet did not surpass them. A generous interpretation of the introductory text and its different targets and indicators can admit general but hardly operating measures in areas such as the integration of culture in development policies and programs, the promotion of culture and mutual understanding to promote peace and reconciliation, or the protection of cultural rights within the framework of inclusive social development.



School workshop days on SDGs – Lausana,
Switzerland. Photography: by the author.

Despite this interpretation, not only was the opportunity of a specific target for culture eventually rejected, but the very goalable nature of culture came to question during the process of the OWG. The final text did neither define the essential operating mechanisms for the effective application of the general principles proposed in culture nor addressed extensively the concept of cultural poverty.

Thus, despite the double definition of enabler and driver, the presence of the cultural dimension became an underlying element in the sustainable development agenda. The final ratified text did not include the agreements made in Hangzhou nor reflected the most innovative narrative – despite having significantly minor support – which considered culture as an entity worthy of specific objectives.

Culture and sustainability, a solidary project for the future

We must remember that the opportunity of collective transformation through the definition of the SDGs cannot be considered concluded.

There are new voices every day, new ideas and new mechanisms to anchor the principles of sustainable development in multiple realities. It is precisely in this context where there is the particular opportunity to effectively and explicitly put the specific importance of culture in the heart of the debate on sustainability.

On one hand, the SDGs are a static document, and as such a wasted opportunity to stress explicitly the indissoluble relationship between culture and sustainability. On the other hand, however, these seventeen goals are an instrument in a dynamic and irrepressible process towards a future of peace, progress and sustainability. A future where culture is a key element and where industry professionals have the opportunity to assert their commitment and conviction on the need to increase the presence of culture in the sustainable development agenda.

A critical and informed reflection on the results, the defended positions and the privileged strategies during the OWG can bring new prospective for defining renewed action models. As this study shows, there are significant opportunities regarding mainly three areas: the coordination of stakeholders in support of culture, the consolidation of a specific Major Group and the strengthening and spreading of the term “cultural poverty.”

In the light of the documentary analysis, the coordination of efforts and programs seems a key element for success throughout this challenge. The need for joint action among agents who defend positions in which culture is a central element becomes evident. Aligning the efforts and messages between large institutions such as UNESCO, the UCGL or the Group of Friends on Culture and Development would be a step forward in creating a critical mass in support of culture. Meanwhile, establishing connections between the various social stakeholders who showed active and explicit support to culture during the OWG could also strengthen their presence in international decision-making circles. Exploring sustained involvement with Indigenous People, and especially with the feminist movement represented by the Women Major Group could enhance the relevance and centrality of culture in the global development agenda.

Although it is not the subject of this study, further research on synergies between ecofeminism and movements for the inclusion of culture as a fundamental aspect of sustainable development in the context of the SDGs could provide innovative aspects and considerable interest for a leap forward of the position of culture in the context of global sustainability.

Considering this study, the creation of a specific group of high-level influence for culture, a Major Group for Culture – as proposed in the recent “Culture in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda: A Report by the Culture 2030 Goal Campaign” (2019) – represents a necessary and unavoidable element. The consolidation of such Major Group would not only be a crucial step for the recognition of culture as a central element in sustainable development, but it would also provide the groups that form it with tools and practical capacities for their full

participation in the process, as they are defined in article 15 of Resolution 67/290. These prerogatives include, among others, access to official documents, and the possibility of intervention and issuing recommendations. These possibilities would definitely help promoting the centrality of culture in the international framework.

This study also provides evidence that the concept of cultural poverty did not generally appear in the documents discussed during the OWG. As part of a global campaign to eradicate poverty in all its forms, cultural institutions appear as the most suitable communities to contribute to the necessary definition of this term in the context of the SDGs, to the assessment of its scope and its consequences, and to the elaboration of plans of resolution. The relevance of the problem behind the concept “cultural poverty” must go beyond the specific sector and reach the public opinion so it becomes a general concern. Without this boost from the public, it will be very difficult for culture to accumulate enough support in order to become an autonomous objective in the sustainable development plans.

Museums as a key asset

In this context, which requires establishing urgent shared objectives and means of dialogue, the network of museums and its professionals occupy a privileged position.

Currently, the contributions of museums in response to the challenges posed by the SDGs are extensive and cover an extraordinary range of initiatives. There are countless examples to be found – from the efforts to transform infrastructures in order to reach further levels of efficiency and sustainability (Byrro Ribeiro & Bittencourt Lomardo 2014), to paying renewed attention to management practices and processes with own collections and also itinerant exhibitions (Sutter 2008; Lord 2012), as well as actions towards a more solidary paradigm of tourism and heritage management (Stylianou-Lambert *et al.* 2015). The digital transformation of museums and galleries has been positively associated with a reduction of the carbon footprint thanks to virtual reality, interactive exhibitions and e-museum activities (Pop, I. L. 2014, 2019). Also in the non-formal education field, museums have emerged as key organizations in the education for sustainability (Chiou & Wang 2018).

These are certainly aspects of unquestionable importance to achieve more sustainable museums and communities, but we must remember that there is a legitimate opportunity for museums and for their professionals to actively bolster the importance of the cultural sphere as pillar of development.

On one hand, the strengthening of the conceptual term “cultural poverty” seems an essential step when it comes to considering action plans and synergies between stakeholders. A bolder taxonomic effort would not only serve to define cultural poverty as the basic unit of communication and measure in the context of the SDGs, but it would also provide the pillars for comparison with other types of poverty, and would help to inform the formal framework for designing, executing and assessing palliative proposals. This conceptual enhancement would also implies a stronger communication capability. Just like in recent years concepts such as “energy poverty” have become central elements of social agglutination in the processes that call for a fairer future, spreading the concept of cultural poverty to the general public can generate a specific opportunity to join forces. The museums network and their highly qualified professionals can represent crucial voices in this collective process of construction of meaning.

The application of the “abstract” and “generic” concept to the different specific realities is a necessary step to deepen on its actual characteristics and on the practical consequences for the individual and collective well-being of affected populations. Carbó remembered how the concepts of “culture” and “poverty” have been traditionally studied from segregated angles until the work of Amartya Sen (1992), who described the difference between being able to participate in culture and having the ability to do so (Carbó 2018). The research programs of the museological sector sustain the undeniable ability to provide deferred considerations on the relationship between the two.

In addition, the deep regional presence and prestige enjoyed by museums allows them to delve into the different realities that shape the original meaning of the term “cultural poverty” as part of their commitment to the public. The fragmented structure of the museums network establishes optimal premises for the efficient identification of the components of cultural poverty in different social nuclei, while their non-normative educational role gives these

organizations the ability to engage it effectively. From this perspective, museums and galleries are called to reevaluate their prevailing commitments and to develop specific actions aimed at strengthening their impact on the process of building a future of solidarity.

Thus, in the framework of the SDGs, museums could be protagonists in the fight against cultural poverty through researching, designing and implementing referential programs on social innovation through cultural training.

Moreover, the museums network can take a stance ahead of the latest efforts directly related to the objectives outlined in the Agenda 2030 – “Partnership for the Goals” (SDG Goal 17).

The very definition of the SDGs recognizes joint and coordinated action to be necessary to successfully achieving the common project. The creation and promotion of local, regional, national and global networks becomes an imperative to transport the established objectives from a theoretical scope to necessarily operative action. The powers of museums and their qualified professionals to mediate are ideal to create spaces for debate and cross-disciplinary exchange between civil society, productive sectors, public agencies and institutions. According to the conclusions of this research, these spaces for dialogue were partially neglected during the process of the OWG, but have opportunities to promote sustainability through culture, both in the present and the future.

The possibility to give voice to the concerns and aspirations of the social mass from a critical perspective puts museums at the center of public debate. Recently, Sutton recalled in his speech at the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action (2019) the intrinsic ability of museums to contribute positively to this global commitment through both its physical and its economic impact on the communities they serve, as well as through its huge social influence. Thus, museums become first class scenarios to promote sustainable development, because, according to the author, “they have the license, likely a particular authority to do so as trusted, easily-recognizable, community-centered institutions.”⁽⁵⁾

As discussed in the recent ICOM General Conference in Kyoto (2019), museums globally offer an infrastructure of logistics and talent that facilitates collective action through networking, public awareness, support to research and knowledge creation. Perhaps one of the most significant consequences of this debate has been the acceptance of the new definition of the term. Museums are understood as “Democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. [...] They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing.”⁽⁶⁾

This deferred definition explicitly includes the involvement of museums in sustainable development and recognizes their role in actively promoting the social framework required to achieve necessary structural changes. For this purpose, research, participatory dialogue, coordinated and effective action, key knowledge dissemination and intersectoral collaboration become essential mechanisms to fight cultural poverty and to praise culture on a well-deserved level of essentiality, and not only in the framework of the SDGs.

To meet this challenge of unprecedented magnitude and urgency, the museological sector comes up as a fundamental asset.

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Notes

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