

## CULTURE AS THE FOURTH PILLAR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the important role of culture in achieving sustainable development. The connection of culture with the three pillars of sustainable development is nowadays evident through scientific articles, recorded policies and objectives. Specifically: a) CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are limited and climate change is dealt with cultural heritage management; b) investments are attracted and environmental management is ensured. This leads to stable and decent jobs related to activities such as preservation, construction, food production, traditional therapy and pharmacy, all kinds of crafts and arts in general and above all tourism. c) The acknowledgement and preservation of the diversity of cultural heritage, combined with fair access to it and equitable sharing of benefits arising from its use, enhances the sense of place and of belonging and respect for the others. It also strengthens the sense of purpose and collective capacity for maintaining the common welfare. All of the above demonstrate the role of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development.*

**Key words:** *culture, sustainable development, fourth pillar*

### **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the importance of culture as an essential component of the content and policies that should be designed for Sustainable Development.

The definition given for "sustainable development" is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". (Brundland Report, 1987)

The following data indicate that sustainable development differs from growth and takes two forms: a) the development that does not deprive natural resources between different generations, and b) the development that takes into account other aspects of the economy beyond those social and environmental factors. Culture is added to these factors not only because it is included in modern analysis of various scholars as an aspect of a regenerated sustainable development, but also because it may indeed contribute greatly to the three well-known and established pillars.

The text contains important information about how exactly culture or cultural heritage can contribute to the ideal of sustainable development. 1. To the environment: through environmental management of cultural heritage CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are being reduced and climate change is confronted; 2. To the economy: investments are attracted and environmental management is ensured. This leads to stable and decent jobs related to activities such as maintenance, construction, food production, traditional therapy and pharmacology, all kinds of crafts and arts in general and above all tourism. 3) To the society: The recognition and preservation of the diversity

of cultural heritage, combined with fair access to it and equitable sharing of benefits arising from its use, enhances the sense of place and of belonging and respect for the others.

All the above are supported and incorporated to the policies of the European Parliament in 2004 with specific positions. Specifically, the European Parliament considers that cultural heritage plays a very important role in achieving the objectives of the 2020 Strategy for a "smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. "Proof of this is the connection of culture and public policies with regional development, social cohesion, agriculture, shipping, the environment, tourism, education, digital agenda, research and innovation. Such policies have direct or indirect impacts on cultural heritage, while cultural heritage offers great opportunities to achieve their goals. It is clear that the interaction between the pillars of economy, society and environment culture can lead to a new form of regenerated sustainable development that supports the cohesion of society, economic development and environmental protection to an even greater extent. In short, these data support the role of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development.

## **2. The connection between sustainable development and culture**

At an international and European level there have been several attempts made on several occasions with questionable results and agreements aiming at Sustainable Development. Most of the results were related to definitive and binding rules to protect the environment, and promote economic and social content.

By the definition of sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs", the Norwegian prime minister Gro Harlem Brundland in her report (1987) gives the concept a broad political content. This definition is the common base until nowadays for all researchers-scientists dealing with the meaning and dimensions of Sustainable Development (Mitoula, et al., 2008).

In particular, the procedure for defining the concept of Sustainable Development has contributed to the enrichment and expansion of the term "development". Risking oversimplification, it could be argued that the debate on Sustainable Development explores the concept of development in two directions:

1. The development must be viewed in the broadest possible manner including, among other things, social and environmental, and not only economical issues; and
2. The development is to be achieved in a manner that does not reduce the ability of future generations, while at the same time ensuring generational equity. (Mitoula, et al., 2008)

It is evident that the expansion towards the first direction requires changes in the perception of the economy as a circular flow system. This is because while the economic concept of circular flow assumes a closed thermodynamic system, a comprehensive understanding of the ecological and socio-economic system refers clearly to an open economic system for and by the environment. Enlargement to the second direction, requires the integration of the evaluation of intra- and intergenerational equity, i.e. the assessment of purely moral values. The eradication of poverty in developing countries, and the reduction of income inequality in developed countries are imposed not only on the basis of moral values, but also because of the significant negative impacts they have on the natural environment. According to the second aspect, the generational equity rises as a condition for intergenerational equity. (Sartzetakis, Papandreou, 2002)

Consequently, it is a development<sup>1</sup> which in contrast with the average growth<sup>2</sup> term includes the concept of three thematic pillars. Moreover, according to the updated analysis of international organizations and scholars it includes four pillars:

Economy,  
Society,  
Environment and,  
Culture

In particular, Luke (2013) believes that the widespread acceptance of sustainable development of companies indicates that this illusory quality serves quite contradictory ideological purposes, cultural needs, economic agendas or social objectives, as it builds a weak consensus. However, this is a special and different time. Steady and strong consensus must be achieved for environmental protection, so that the obvious, and currently apparent, deteriorating environmental conditions on Earth could be controlled, and possibly reversed, and not just go through even greater degradation. (Luke 2013)

Sneddon and Howarth (2005) argue that the radical criticism of modern man- environment relationship that coexists within the concepts of sustainability (visible if anyone cares to see it) needs to be renewed and preserved by those advocates of SD that use it to promote growth agendas that are clearly unsustainable. Also, it needs to be rescued from the most extreme critics who have left only "ashes" in the process of the concept's deconstruction. This way, the concept will recover the ideals of sustainable development:

1. Equity through and between generations, places and social groups;
2. Ecological dignity; and
3. Human welfare and quality of life

A revived concept of sustainability built around the pluralist concept of sustainability, taking into account the political, cultural, technological, ecological and economic content of the spectrum of local and global human communities and even recognizing the most abstract and universal concepts of justice and equality. This will resolve false dichotomies, such as those manufactured between first and third countries. (Sneddon and Howarth, 2005)

However, the above relationship between man and the environment usually comes from a conventional view of sustainability that applies only to the natural "environment", creating a gap in the existing literature. This perception of SD excludes interaction stories between man and the environment created by the history of a place, its monuments and archaeological sites, as well as broader cultural landscapes. Although sustainable development (WCED, 1987) is a concept based on several principles, some of which are more useful in the management of cultural resources, for example, the 27 principles of the Rio Declaration (United Conference of the United Nations Environment and Development, 1992 / Conf. 151/26 Volume I [Robinson, 1993]). These principles relate to community involvement and are more applicable to the management of cultural resources, since communities are carriers, custodians and direct users of cultural heritage resources. (Keitumetse, 2011)

Furthermore, Tweet and Sutherland (2007) provide a framework under which culture, a part of which is the architectural heritage, is connected with the three pillars of sustainable development: environment, economy and society. In particular, the environmental dimension is the

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<sup>1</sup> Defined as an increase - in one year – of the economic prosperity enjoyed by the people of a country. The most important indicator of development is the long-term growth rate of per capita GDP, while the use of other indicators, such as indicators are related to the level of health, education and longevity.

<sup>2</sup> Long-term growth is GDP growth rate.

dominant concern of sustainable development and is designed as a limitation to human development. It is directed mainly to the use of resources - both natural and environmental. Since these are established research topics that are directly quantified, this aspect of development is considered as the most detectable. The growing importance of this dimension is guaranteed as it addresses needs that are fundamental to human survival. Until recently, the environmental focus on architectural heritage dealt mainly with the technical problems of maintaining the existing stock of buildings, for example, those subject to attack by chemical pollutants in urban environments. The economic dimension is considered as the most important prerequisite for the satisfaction of human needs and for any continuing improvements in the living conditions of citizens. However, it is now recognized that neither economic growth in general, nor the revenue growth on a personal level, are sufficient enough to guarantee the progress of society as a whole. More and more, qualitative aspects of progress are seen as equally important as the material improvements. In other words, economic growth (expansion) is no longer satisfactory in isolation from all other aspects of development. The role of historic buildings in the promotion of economic development through urban redevelopment is now recognized, at least in the UK (ODPM, 2004). The architectural heritage attracts tourists, especially in established cultural cities and thus stimulates the local and national economy. The Sustainable cultural tourism is the subject of a major research project, PICTURE (Pro-active management of the Impact of Cultural Tourism Resources in Urban and economies).

The social dimension of sustainable development also highlights the need to improve the quality of life for all citizens by increasing levels of material income and by strengthening social justice, so that all groups have equal access to education, livelihood and resources. This dimension is more relevant to the need of looking at the architectural and cultural heritage as part of sustainable development. The concept of intergenerational equity is particularly important for this discussion. Through this, the current generation preserves the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) for the benefit of future generations (UNIDO, 2005). Culture through the architectural heritage, therefore, has a role to play in all three dimensions, (Tweet, Sutherland, 2007)

### **3. The contribution of Cultural Heritage to Sustainable Development according to UNESCO**

But how specifically and in more detail can cultural heritage contribute to sustainable development? How can the relationship between cultural heritage and different dimensions-pillars of sustainable development be articulated?

The safeguarding of cherished cultural heritage sites and of the ensemble of intangible cultural expressions, knowledge and skills that collectively define a community can be considered in itself as a contribution to human well-being. Without the cultural heritage - the famous sights of our cities and landscapes, traditions and unique lifestyle inherited from our ancestors - our very existence as individuals would be hard to imagine.

This view, as obvious it may be, was still not enough to ensure for heritage and culture in general, a place within the international framework of sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Therefore, apart from its intrinsic value for present and future generations, it is important to explore how one's cultural heritage can make a critical and decisive contribution to sustainable development in all its core dimensions, as defined, for example, in the United Nations report 'Realizing the Future We Want for All'<sup>3</sup> - in other words, the sustainability of the environment, including the pillars of social and economic development, peace and security.

By providing a variety of related products and services, a well-protected historic environment (including cultural landscapes and protected areas that are rich in biodiversity and nurturing the traditional knowledge and practices related to its care) Sustainable Development may contribute directly to the alleviation of poverty and inequality. The last is also achieved, by providing safety and promoting health, as well as contributing to the provision of shelter, clean air, clean water, food and other essential resources that provide the livelihood of communities. This is especially true in developing regions, where cultural heritage tends to be less "monumental" and is linked to the practical living of communities.

The preservation of cultural heritage is also important to address the risks associated with natural and manmade disasters. Experience has shown that the degradation of natural resources, neglected rural areas, urban sprawl and mechanically-poor, new constructions, increase the vulnerability of communities and disaster risk, particularly in the poorest countries. On the other hand, a well-preserved natural and historical environment based on traditional knowledge and skills combined with a cohesive society based on strong cultural capital, can significantly reduce underlying risk factors disasters, strengthen the resilience of communities and save lives. Whole communities indigenous to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands survived the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2005 that killed over 200,000 people in the region, for example, as a result of conservation of mangroves which provided an effective shield to soften the impact of the tsunami and the preservation of oral traditions relating to the experience of past earthquakes. Stories involving "massive shaking of the ground followed by a high wall of water", which were transmitted from generation to generation reflected the collective memory of the earthquakes and tsunamis in the past, causing these communities to move to higher ground and allowing them to escape before the tsunami hit.

The activities related to the management of cultural heritage are "by design" green and embody an inherently sustainable pattern of land use, consumption and production that has been developed over centuries, if not millennia, of continuous adjustment between communities and their environment. For this reason, investment in the preservation of cultural heritage has been recognized by major players such as the World Bank as a good way to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and tackling climate change.

Cultural heritage is a powerful asset for economic development since it attracts investment and ensures green, locally based, stable and decent jobs that relate to a wide range of sustainable activities in fields such as conservation, construction, food production, traditional treatments and pharmacy, all kinds of crafts and arts in general, and of course tourism. These jobs are based on human and other resources that can not be moved out of the communities related. Moreover, in comparison to other sectors, they offer economic opportunities to all groups in society, including women and young people.

Above all, however, cultural heritage is closely linked to the fundamental components of inclusive social development. As a vehicle that expresses the values and identity and organizes the communities and their relationships through its powerful symbolic and aesthetic dimensions, cultural heritage is essential for the spiritual welfare of the people in the most profound sense. The acknowledgement and preservation of the diversity of cultural heritage, combined with fair access to it and equitable sharing of benefits arising from its use, enhances the sense of place and of belonging and respect for others and a sense of purpose and collective capacity for maintaining the common welfare. All these contribute to the cohesion of communities while reducing inequalities.

The strengthening of the traditional ways of knowledge dissemination and integration of cultural heritage in formal and non-formal education, allows people to fully benefit from the educational potential of the intangible cultural heritage. Families, tribes, elders, peer groups and

traditional constructions, all play an important role in this collective effort. The transmission and practice of the intangible cultural heritage of these communities carries a wealth of knowledge and skills to the younger generations, including basic concepts of science and technology, participatory forms of governance and socio-economic activities. For this reason, the ability to access, enjoy and care for cultural heritage is a basic cultural right and primary component of what the economist Amartya Sen has called the "ability of people to live and be what you choose", which is an essential part of the definition of human development.

The fundamental roles of cultural heritage are now threatened by a number of factors, including massive urbanization that is now underway in many parts of the world, which lead to the destruction of structured cultural heritage and new challenges for the intangible cultural heritage. These new expanding cities accommodate a growing number of immigrants and heterogeneous communities, and are stigmatized by a growing number of conflicts and political tensions.

In such times of crisis, access and care for cultural heritage can help vulnerable people to regain a sense of continuity, dignity and empowerment. In post-conflict situations, in particular, the acknowledgement and protection of cultural heritage, when based on common values and interests, can help to promote mutual recognition and understanding, tolerance and respect among different communities, which are prerequisites for society's peaceful development.

Sometimes, and possibly for these reasons, cultural heritage is deliberately destroyed, with the intention to erase the identity of individuals and groups, cutting ties with the land and the bonds that keep them together as a community. This happened in 2001 in Afghanistan, when the giant statues of Buddha in Bamiyan, were destroyed and similar disaster is being witnessed today in northern Mali.

Apart from the loss of the benefits associated with the enjoyment and management of cultural heritage, such intentional acts of destruction or persecution make reconciliation between the warring parties much more difficult in the future, and prevent the communities from turning the page towards peace. The protection of cultural heritage from the risks associated with conflict situations, even when lives are in danger and humanitarian concerns are a priority, is therefore not a luxury but a basic safety issue. In contrast, in the post-conflict phase, the reinstatement of cultural heritage can help to heal the wounds of war. (UNESCO 2013)

#### **4. The connection of Sustainable Development with culture as an EU policy**

The Council meeting in Brussels on May, 20, 2014 reached some important conclusions concerning cultural heritage and its treatment/consideration as a strategic resource to achieve a sustainable Europe.

The Treaty stipulates that the EU shall ensure that cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced. This will be achieved through the sustainable management of all resources that constitute the cultural heritage. Those inherited from the past in all its forms and aspects - intangible and digital (both-digital and digitized), including monuments, landmarks, landscapes, skills, practices, knowledge and expressions of human creativity, as well as collections conserved and managed by public and private institutions, such as museums, libraries and archives. These resources are of great value to society in cultural, environmental, social and economic terms because they come from the interaction between people and places through time and it is constantly evolving.

Cultural heritage is an important asset for Europe. Its value is obvious and self-evident. It is a non-renewable resource, a unique one, than can not be replaced. Cultural heritage is currently confronted with important challenges related to cultural, environmental, social, economic and

technological transformations that affect all aspects of contemporary life. Thus, its safeguarding becomes vitally important.

Cultural heritage plays an important role in creating and enhancing social capital because it has the ability to:

- a) Inspire and promote citizens participation in public life.
- b) Improve the quality of life and well-being of individuals and communities.
- c) Promote diversity and intercultural dialogue by contributing to a stronger sense of "belonging" to a wider community and a better understanding and respect among peoples.
- d) Contribute to the reduction of social inequalities; facilitate social inclusion, cultural and social participation and promote intergenerational dialogue and social cohesion.
- e) Provide opportunities to develop skills, knowledge, creativity and innovation.
- f) Be an effective training tool for the formal, non-formal and informal education, lifelong learning and training.

Cultural heritage has a significant effect on the economic pillar, because it contributes, as an integral part of the cultural and creative sectors, to participatory local and regional development and creates significant externalities, in particular through the enhancement of sustainable cultural tourism. Additionally, it supports sustainable development and regeneration of the countryside and the cities as illustrated by initiatives implemented by many European regions and cities. Consequently, it generates diverse types of employment.

The Cultural heritage plays a specific role in achieving the objectives of the 2020 Strategy for a "smart, sustainable and inclusive growth", because it has social and economic impacts and contributes to environmental sustainability. This is demonstrated by the fact that the field of cultural heritage goes beyond the cultural unity and is related to public policies towards regional development, social cohesion, and agriculture, while it is closely linked to policies on shipping, environment, tourism, education, digital agenda, research and innovation. These policies have a direct or indirect impact on cultural heritage and at the same time cultural heritage offers a strong potential for the achievement of their objectives. Therefore, this potential should be fully recognised and developed.

According to the above, the European Parliament called on the Member States and the Commission within their respective areas of responsibility, and taking into account the principle of subsidiarity to take the following actions:

1. To recognize the intrinsic value of cultural heritage and develop the potential of culture and cultural heritage as a common strategic resource for the development of a society based on democratic, ethical, aesthetic and ecological values, particularly at a time of intense economic and social value crisis.
2. To reinforce the dialogue with the cultural heritage stakeholders to identify and implement coordinated policies and measures for sustainable management and development of cultural issues, cultural heritage and the promotion of cooperation with international and intergovernmental organizations, particularly with the Council of Europe.
3. To mobilize available resources to support, enhance and promote cultural heritage through an integrated, holistic approach, taking into account the cultural, economic, social, environmental and scientific components.
4. To contribute to the integration of cultural heritage in national and European policies.
5. To identify and exploit synergies created between the EU and national public policies beyond cultural policy, such as regional development, cohesion, agriculture, maritime, environment, energy and climate change, tourism, education, research and innovation to create added value.

6. Where possible, to improve access to funds, in order to make full use of the available programs for the public and private sector, to encourage investment in cultural heritage as part of an integrated strategy for sustainable local and regional development in the context of available national and Community programs and the Structural Funds of the EU.
7. To continue to support EU action on European Cultural Identity (European Heritage Label).
8. To continue to promote education for cultural heritage, public awareness on the potential of cultural heritage for sustainable development and to encourage the participation of the public, particularly children and young people, in collaboration with civil society.
9. To improve the collection and analysis of qualitative evidence and quantitative data, including statistical data, on cultural heritage.
10. To encourage the funding, development and dissemination of digital cultural content and innovative services available to the heritage associated with the cultural and educational value for their citizens, and to promote public access to these resources and the digital cultural heritage, including the means of Europeana (Europeana Foundation and its network are creating new ways for people to deal with cultural history, whether it be for work, learning and leisure. According to Europeana cultural heritage should be freely accessible in a digital way, to promote the exchange of ideas and information. This helps to understand better cultural diversity and contributes to a thriving knowledge-based economy). (Council of the European Union, 2014)

## **5. Conclusions**

Sustainable Development was the key answer to the emerging environmental problems caused by the industrialization of the economy. The object of this paper was to approach controversial and pluralistic concept of sustainable development –in modern times- by demonstrating the necessity to include the pillar of culture. Its importance was presented at international and European level.

From the analysis of the above issues it is clear that Sustainable Development has two directions:

1. The development must be viewed in the broadest possible manner including, not only economical but also social and environmental issues; and
2. The development is to be achieved in a manner that does not reduce the ability of future generations, while at the same time ensuring generational equity.

Therefore, it is about the concept of development in contrast to the concept of average growth and includes three thematic pillars and according to the latest analysis of international organizations and scholars for:

Economy,  
Society,  
Environment, and  
Culture

Specifically, analysts like Luke (2013) but also Sneddon and Howarth (2005) argue that a regenerated pluralistic concept of sustainable development should take into account the political, cultural, technological, ecological and economic content of the spectrum of local and global human communities and even recognize the most abstract and universal concepts of justice and equality.

Other scholars, such as Keitumetse 2011, go even further and point out that the human-environment relationship can not exclude stories of interaction between the two that have been created by the history of a place, its monuments and archaeological sites, as well as the wider cultural landscapes.



Additionally, Tweet and Sutherland (2007) emphasize the contribution of cultural heritage using the example of architectural heritage to the three pillars of sustainable development: the environment, economy and society.

Consequently the connection between sustainable development and culture is achieved. Specifically, we have an even clearer picture of the contribution of culture to sustainable development through UNESCO and the European Parliament.

The interface of culture with the three pillars of sustainable development is evident because: a) CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are limited and climate change is treated through cultural heritage management, b) investments are attracted and environmental management is ensured. Stable and decent jobs related to activities such as preservation, construction, food production, traditional therapy and pharmacy, all kinds of crafts and arts in general and above all tourism, are brought about. c) The acknowledgement and preservation of the diversity of cultural heritage, combined with fair access to this and equitable sharing of benefits arising from its use, enhances the sense of place and of belonging and respect for the others. Also it strengthens the sense of purpose and collective capacity of maintaining the common good. All these contribute to the cohesion of communities.

Finally, the Council of the EU at the meeting on May 2014 confirms the positions of UNESCO stated above. E.C. fully endorses the value of cultural heritage as a powerful European asset, which is obvious and self-evident. It is also a non-renewable resource, a unique one that can not be replaced. Especially in the modern era, Europe faces major challenges related to cultural environmental, social, economic and technological changes affecting all aspects of modern life. Therefore the protection of cultural heritage becomes vital. Additionally, it is emphasized that cultural heritage plays a specific role in achieving the goals of the 2020 Strategy for a "smart, sustainable and inclusive growth". This is evident from the fact that the field of cultural heritage is associated with public policies on regional development, social cohesion, agriculture, closely linked to policies on shipping, the environment, tourism, education, digital agenda, research and innovation. Such policies have direct or indirect impacts on cultural heritage while cultural heritage offers great opportunities to achieve their goals.

It is therefore common ground that sustainable development can be enhanced by incorporating the pillar of culture in its semantic content, but also in the next stage of sustainable development policies. The interaction between the pillars of economy, society, culture and environment, sustainable development can be regenerated and support policies that will enhance the cohesion of society, economic development and environmental protection in an even greater degree.

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