

MEETING OF THE EXPERTS COMMITTEE

ON

THE STRENGTHENING OF UNESCO'S ROLE
IN PROMOTING CULTURAL DIVERSITY
IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION

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I. Introduction

1. UNESCO, the only organization within the United Nations system with a mandate covering culture, has, since the early 1990s, tried to widen its actions and reflection to different aspects of globalization. As a result, the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development¹ convened in pursuance of a recommendation from the report *Our Creative Diversity*², underlined the need to promote public policies which recognize the central role of culture in development, including the creation of income generating activities, by mobilizing and sharing information and new technology in this domain, and in particular with regard to trade in cultural products. It also adopted a Plan of Action which recommends in objective 3.12 that Member States "*promote the idea that the cultural goods and services should be fully recognized and treated as being not like any other form of merchandise*".

2. In order to examine the implications of this recommendation more closely, a Symposium of experts on "Culture, the Market and Globalization" was organized 14 and 15 June 1999, in collaboration with the French National Commission for UNESCO and with the support of the Canadian and French governments. In addition, a Round Table of Ministers of Culture, meeting for the first time since the Stockholm Conference, was held at UNESCO's Headquarters on the 2 November 1999. The conclusions of the participants focused on the topic "cultural diversity in the face of globalization"³.

3. Shortly afterwards, the General Conference, at its 30th session (october-november 1999), approved a resolution⁴ which, in its preamble, underlines the need for the Organization and its Member States to promote cultural diversity in the context of globalization, particularly in view of the opening of a new round of multilateral trade negotiations, and the important implications of these negotiations for the status of cultural goods and services. In this regard, it is important to remember the role that UNESCO has played since the 1950s when, in agreement with the GATT authorities, it approved the "Agreement on the importation of educational, scientific and cultural materials" known as "The Florence Agreement", to which 94 countries have become party⁵, some quite recently. This Agreement was supplemented by the so-called "Nairobi Protocol" which widened its fields of action. The General Conference expressed the concern to strengthen the Organization's leadership role in the affirmation and promotion of cultural diversity in a world in transition. It invited the Director-General to continue the reflection by emphasizing the regional and sectoral dimensions of the issues; it also invited him to examine different options, by working with the principal countries and organizations concerned, and by establishing a working group.

4. The Director-General therefore decided to set up a (category VI) Experts Committee whose 18 members were chosen in consultation with the electoral groups so as to ensure adequate geographical representation. This Committee, which is meeting on the 21 and 22 September, is open to the participation of observers from other Member States as well as from interested institutions and organizations. Its mandate is to explore and evaluate the

¹ Stockholm, Sweden, 30 March-2 April 1998

² Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development, created by the UN and UNESCO in 1992 in the framework of the World Decade for Cultural Development.

³ A second Ministerial Round Table will be held on the 11 and 12 December 2000.

⁴ DR.13 Rev.

⁵ Including the United States of America, since 1966.

different approaches open to UNESCO and to formulate appropriate suggestions. These may also help Member States to identify priorities in their cultural policies.

5. This document aims to identify the main challenges facing the international community in the field of cultural diversity as well as the main initiatives being taken on an international level. It suggests, furthermore, different working hypotheses in order to develop UNESCO's contribution that take into consideration its possibilities of action. The Director General sent these suggestions to all Member States, Associate Member States and Observer Missions together with the circular letter in June⁶.

6. The expert's propositions together with the responses from the States will help UNESCO meet the new challenge it faces today; that of maximizing the use of its knowledge for the benefit of humanity in an area which falls eminently under its remit.

II. The main challenges

The notion of "cultural diversity"

7. The link between biodiversity and cultural diversity was first made in the report *Our Creative Diversity* by the World Commission on Culture and Development, created in 1992 by the United Nations and UNESCO. "Cultural diversity" is defined as the positive expression of the following general objective to be attained: the promotion and protection of cultures of the world, which are faced with the danger of uniformisation. Similar to other concepts such as "cultural pluralism", "cultural ecosystems" or "cultural identity", it covers a wide range of sociocultural areas (traditions, ways of life, languages, religions, etc.).

8. In UNESCO's meetings which followed publication of this report⁷, the notion of cultural diversity was increasingly linked to an awareness of developments in international trade. During the preparation of the WTO Ministerial Conference⁸, it increasingly forced its way onto the agenda of cultural goods and services. It was argued that, in the context of globalization, only appropriate cultural policies can guarantee the preservation of creative diversity against the risk of a monoculture, in the same way that only policies aimed at preserving biodiversity can guarantee the protection of natural ecosystems, and as a result, the diversity of the species.

The challenges of globalization

9. The phenomenon of globalization is certainly the most important factor of change facing the world today. It has become, practically in the absence of any regulation, omnipresent across the full range of social activities. It presents considerable opportunities, due mainly to the enormous scientific and technological progress which has accompanied it. The rapid development of **new information technologies** together with **an increasingly open market** which characterize the end of the century, offer new perspectives of development which can,

⁶ An analysis of the first results of this consultation is at the disposal of the participants of the Expert Committee (see the document CLT/CIC/BCI.DOC 6E)

⁷ The Stockholm Conference, the June 1999 symposium, the Round Table of Culture Ministers on 2 November 1999 and the 30th session of the General Conference, (see above).

⁸ The Conference took place in Seattle, USA, between 30th November and 3rd December 1999.

including on a cultural level, contribute to an evolution of the forms of dialogue. Globalization can create new forms of partnership, exchange and co-operation between individuals, populations, communities, cultures and civilizations, which are favourable to the development of comprehension, solidarity and peace at all levels. In this respect it creates new opportunities. Furthermore, it should be noted that as globalization progresses, an inverse trend towards localization has emerged, which can have positive effects for the participation of each person.

10. But the main challenge consists precisely in ensuring that **globalization benefits everyone**. However, up to now, while it has created unprecedented wealth and well-being, this has for the most part benefited rich countries and the well-off, while leaving the poor behind - countries or individuals - who are thus marginalized. Not only from the perspective of a global geopolitical balance but especially on an ethical level, the dawning of globalization highlights another concept which is the cornerstone of UNESCO as well as of the United Nations system: that of **universality**. As a result, a new set of values, leading to "globalization with a human face", needs to be envisaged. This implies that the conditions of a true dialogue be met. To achieve this, it seems necessary to widen the use of new technologies, especially to the least developed countries and that, more generally speaking, there exists a multipolar, harmonious and equitable flow of goods and services from many origins. In light of this, the main challenge is to avoid that **economic and social asymmetry** grows between industrialized and developing countries, that **social divisions** deepen within states and threaten social cohesion in societies which are increasingly mixed.

11. Today, there are several different factors of concern: the creation of a global free trade market, driven by technological convergence which leads to **company mergers** whose size and influence goes beyond the sphere of influence of States; a certain form of "commodification" of human societies which tends to undermine the preservation of immaterial cultural heritage; the development of a "virtual universe", in itself a rich source of new creativity, but which develops **in the absence of any legal framework** in the context of confused cultural, spatial and temporal frontiers. Furthermore, the emergence of commercial blocks - from the highly integrated European Union to the less consolidated but still evolving ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations), NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) or MERCOSUR (the Southern Cone Common Market) - is accompanied by growing decentralization of political power and increasingly common identity based demands which sometimes lead to armed conflict. Together, these trends are **weakening the role of the State** and reducing the importance of public space; they also explain the **emergence of a "global civil society"** which, through movements with varying degrees of structure, independence and activity, has quickly learnt how to use the Internet to express a social malaise which needs to be taken into account.

12. In addition, it is to be noted that the influence of globalization has logically spread to the world of cultural industries, which are particularly sensitive to technological convergence and **whose distinctiveness lies in their cultural and economic duality**, whether this is with regard to market concentration or to the emergence of new models of production, distribution and consumption of cultural goods and services. Cultural industries play an important role in encouraging human creativity, developing democratic access to culture, facilitating knowledge exchange and cultural dialogue. They are also an important source of employment and wealth creation, but subject to the rules of demand and of a market which is increasingly dependent on capital from outside the sector, their products are losing their originality, culture's critical role is weakening and decisions are increasingly being taken on the basis of financial and

commercial criteria - which harms lesser known creators and cultures as well as new forms of cultural or aesthetic expression. The issue of "**culture and trade**" has now acquired prime strategic significance due to the fact that cultural goods and services not only convey and construct messages and values which can reproduce or encourage an evolution of cultural identities and contribute to social cohesion, but that they are also a factor of production obeying its own logic in the new knowledge economy.

13. In short, at a time when culture is becoming a driving economic force, **the development and promotion of truly competitive cultural industries in all countries is imperative** in order to prevent the emergence of a monoculture which would destroy diversity, a form of global capital which the international community must make bear fruit, not only for economic, but also for ethical reasons of equity and justice. The adoption of a set of global rules which respect **the free circulation of ideas, in written and audiovisual form, but which also respect the guiding principles of harmonious trade** with regard to access, diversity and product competition, would constitute a favourable environment for the development of creative diversity, the freedom of choice in a plural cultural market place and the development of critical thinking; it would allow the creation of conditions favourable to a plural and fertile debate on the future of societies and cultures, which is the basis of democratic pluralism.

III. An overview of international and regional initiatives in the field of cultural diversity

International initiatives

14. In response to the challenges which have just been outlined, different approaches are emerging. They originate from both public and private actors who are looking to position themselves with regard to this question, and to develop strategies or conclude alliances. An exhaustive overview would be very difficult to produce. However, from a few examples, taken from an international as well as regional level, it seems possible to demonstrate the relative variety of initiatives which go beyond the national level.

15. UNESCO's role has already been detailed in this document, however two further points remain to be made:

- Firstly, the actions which have been described up to now do not cover all the dimensions of "cultural diversity" which constitute a recurring theme of the Organization's activities. Indeed, the relationship between culture and trade is but one of these aspects. In fact, all areas of the programme which touch on the preservation of tangible, and more especially, intangible heritage, the projects aimed at developing cultural dialogue as well as action which does not fall under the category of culture - e.g. communication, need to be looked at. UNESCO is certainly, by vocation, the Organization of cultural diversity, linked to the development of the unity of mankind through an ethical dialogue ranging from the universal to the particular.

- Secondly, even within the rather limited field of the relationship between culture and economy, the measures put in place by the General Conference include several aspects which have not been mentioned: the continuing reflection undertaken at both regional and sectoral levels (books, cinemas, music...) through meetings like the Symposium of experts on "Cultural Diversity in the light of globalization. The Future of the Cultural Industries in Eastern and Central Europe" organized in collaboration with the Polish National Commission for

UNESCO⁹ or the consultation which took place at Cotonou (Benin) for Africa¹⁰, or those planned for 2001 in other regions; the publications aimed at increasing awareness among interested groups (like the *World Report on Culture: "Culture, Creativity and Markets"* (1998) and the brochure *Culture, trade and globalization – Questions and answers* (2000); the support given to NGO initiatives like the International Councils for Music or for Cinema, Television and Audio-Visual Communication); the moral support given to important events such as the Forum on "Globalization and cultural diversity - challenges to the audiovisual industry"¹¹ which produced a Final Declaration, or the World Cultural Summit¹² on "Is economic internationalization leading to the creation of new values for a new civilization?" which produced a declaration and a *Charter of cultural identities and culture diversity rights*.

16. The **International Network on Cultural Policy (INCP)** is an informal network of ministers of Culture created after the International Meeting on Cultural Policy, held in Ottawa, Canada, in June 1998. The purpose of the Network, which is currently composed of 45 countries, is to build increased awareness and support for cultural diversity in an era of globalization and technological change. It is developing the idea of creating a New International Instrument on Cultural Diversity which would set out clear ground rules to enable countries to maintain policies that promote their culture, while respecting the rules governing the international trading system and ensuring markets for cultural exports.

17. In holding the international Conference "Culture and Development at the Millennium: The Challenges and the Response", in collaboration with UNESCO¹³, **the World Bank**, as its President James D. Wolfensohn has underlined, has also recognized that respect for the culture and identity of peoples is an important element in any viable approach to human-centred development. It is in this spirit that a new "Culture in Sustainable Development" strategy has been under preparation by the Bank for several years and that a 'Culture and Development Action Network' has been set up to link the efforts of many organizations, both public and private, international and regional, that are active in cultural conservation efforts. For the first time the Bank is providing loans to cultural projects. It has also established a new policy, that of "cultural screening", for project approval. In 1999, the World Bank and the Government of Italy organized a Conference on "Culture Counts", in co-operation with UNESCO¹⁴

18. In 1995, **the G7** recognized in their summit declaration on the *Principles for an Information Society* the importance of preserving linguistic and cultural diversity in new and emerging technologies. In 1996, the *Information Society and Development Conference (ISAD)* widened the debate to include the views of the developing world. The **G7** thus recognized the necessity of world-wide co-operation giving particular attention to developing countries. At its July 2000 meeting, **the G8** recognized UNESCO's leadership role in the promotion of cultural diversity, described as a "source of social and economic dynamism which has the potential to enrich human life in the 21st century". They also encourage programmes dedicated to protect

⁹ Warsaw, Poland, 30 June and 1 July 2000

¹⁰ 4-9 September 2000

¹¹ Valence, Spain, 22-24 May 2000.

¹² Versailles, France, 15-17 June 2000.

¹³ Washington, USA, September 1998

¹⁴ Florence, Italy, 4-7 September 1999

movable art and archaeological wealth in developing countries, as well as UNESCO's projects on "Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity".

19. Other initiatives at international level are also emerging such as the creation of the **Institute for Cultural Enterprise (ICE)**, an autonomous non-profit institution for project management and strategy formulation in this field, supported by the Ford Foundation and the New York Foundation for the Arts¹⁵.

Regional Initiatives

20. Initiatives taken on a regional level are not unique to any one region. As a means of illustration, some of the initiatives will be analyzed, in particular those which are at an advanced stage of development.

21. The European Cultural Convention underlines the existence of a "European culture" which should be protected and developed by means of a "policy of common action". A recent **Council of Europe** working paper highlighted some of the contradictions between trade liberalization and cultural policy and examined the possibility of the elaboration of an *International charter on cultural diversity*. Furthermore, the Council has developed a new initiative to examine the management of cultural diversity in seven different countries through national reports and visits by a team of experts. Finally, the promotion of cultural diversity is one of the areas of co-operation between the Council of Europe and UNESCO.

22. The question of cultural diversity is of particular interest to the **European Union**, especially with regard to the development of the audiovisual sector and the protection of the cultural values it projects through its content. The European Union attaches great importance to the link between cultural and audiovisual policies. In March 2000 an informal meeting of Ministers of Culture and Audio-Visual policies focused primarily on the development of a European strategy for the promotion of cultural diversity in the context of globalization. The Ministers agreed to continue to argue for an audiovisual exemption to the clause of *the most favoured nation* (MFN).

23. The **Organization of American States** aims at introducing a "human element" into the current process of trade integration. In 1998, the OAS approved an Inter-American Programme of Culture designed to support the efforts of Member states and to encourage co-operation between them in the fields of culture diversity, dissemination and protection of cultural heritage, human resource training, creativity incentives and promotion of cultural tourism.

24. Many other regional initiatives have recently been taken. For instance, the joint **SELA**¹⁶/**UNESCO** approach in developing strategies for the promotion of cultural industries and the revision of the programmes of the 'Andrés Bello' Convention – aimed at endowing them with a cultural dimension. In addition, in 1999, the **Asia-Europe Foundation** organized the "Cultural Industries and Cultural Development Conference", the first of its kind ever held in the People's Republic of China, whose aim was to link European and Asian approaches. The **MERCOSUR** agreements also include a cultural as well as an economic and social approach to regional integration processes. Finally, the 2nd International Forum on "Cultural Integration

¹⁵New York, USA, 23 June 2000.

¹⁶ Latin-American economic system.

without frontiers” will be held in November 2000, in Brazil. Its objective is to bring together different ways of thinking in Latin America in order to strengthen cultural integration and to develop the flow of cultural goods between the countries. This new spirit is also opening up new prospects for regional financial institutions such as the Inter-American Development Bank, which has recently approved a 50 million US project for Brazilian heritage rehabilitation and conservation.

25. Another group among the most active are the Member States of the **Francophonie**. At the follow-up meeting of the Ministerial Summit held in Moncton, Canada in 1995, discussions centred on how to mobilize Francophonie support for the promotion of cultural diversity. Following on from discussions on cultural diversity, culture and trade, the participants looked at the possibility of creating an international instrument on cultural diversity which would give governments the flexibility to maintain and promote their cultural policies while respecting the rules governing the international trading system. In light of these discussions, the Francophonie members agreed to establish a permanent working group, in which UNESCO participates, to follow negotiations on culture and cultural policies as well as to advance the reflection on the development of this cultural instrument. In 2001 a Ministers of Culture Conference will examine the issues of cultural diversity and the next Francophonie Summit will be on culture.

26. Returning to **UNESCO** in conclusion, it is important to point out that many of the initiatives described above are linked, to varying degrees, to the Organization. Inter-institutional co-operation thus constitutes one of the Organization's approaches in this field.

IV. Working hypotheses for UNESCO

27. In the light of these different elements and forms of action which have been tried and tested by UNESCO, several different areas of reflection can be identified. These were proposed, for information purposes only, in the circular letter sent by the Director-General to the Member States, Associate Member States and Observer Missions. The final option was left open for complementary or alternative propositions/suggestions. When the need arose, extra details were requested so that the answers were not limited to positive affirmations, but rather that they included, as far as possible, detailed indications concerning the expectations.

28. It is particularly important to take the following factors into consideration: the existence of work already carried out by UNESCO or other bodies (see above) in order to avoid repetition and a duplication of roles as well as UNESCO's own ability to produce results which may be impossible to achieve without its participation - or in less favourable conditions: what we can call its *added value*. It goes without saying that the majority of approaches suggested are not mutually exclusive. However, it would be better to establish an order of priority considering the limited means of the Organization, and the need therefore to make choices.

29. The same terms of reference are suggested to the Experts Committee. The areas of reflection are not different. However, to facilitate the discussion they have been grouped into four categories: (1) intellectual forum, (2) technical assistance and co-operation for development, (3) normative action and (4) other options. Furthermore, other examples have been added in order to enrich the debate.

An Intellectual Forum

30. The notion of an "intellectual forum" was used in the resolution approved by the General Conference which speaks of " *the development of the role of UNESCO as an intellectual forum looking at the impact of the new international context on cultural goods*". The term « *intellectual watch* » has also been used. In this sense, the following could be envisaged:

i. **Probing more deeply** into the very concept of "cultural diversity", which in its broad sense touches upon all fields covered by UNESCO's programme, and is germane to other concepts such as "cultural identity", "cultural pluralism", "dialogue between civilizations, religions", etc. It would be appropriate, in this case, to identify additional issues to be explored, which are relevant in the current international context, in particular to the ongoing debate on the liberalization of trade;

ii. **Increasing the awareness** of Member States and different partners in civil society concerning the cultural challenges posed by the above-mentioned developments; foster UNESCO's role as an intellectual forum; specify possible means of communication and exchange to be developed. For example an E-mail "Alert" network could be established that would contain news related to cultural diversity; printed and/or audiovisual material; comparative studies on the consumption of cultural products; the carrying out of studies on sectoral policies¹⁷; the organization of debates at Headquarters or in field offices; the organization of information sessions aimed at ambassadors/negotiators in Geneva; encouraging the participation of interested ambassadors, and working towards the introduction of a cultural diversity dimension into all the activities sponsored by UNESCO, etc.

ii. **Multiplying opportunities to discuss these matters between States**, in the framework of UNESCO, for example by encouraging the organization of debates in the regional groups (UNESCO), coordinating meetings in co-operation with regional blocks (e.g. MERCOSUR, etc.) or by giving the Committee of Experts a permanent character (concrete suggestions in relation to the mandate and resulting characteristics of this Committee would be welcome)

Technical assistance and co-operation for development

31. This is a field of action common to all the organizations belonging to the United Nations system, but which attach varying degrees of importance and develop distinctive approaches. With regard to UNESCO, its objective could be:

i. **Strengthening action in support** of cultural policies in Member states and/or with particular attention being paid to action in support of national sectoral policies – as UNESCO has already done, notably in the books sector – as well as support of regional strategies for the development of cultural industries with the participation of the different administrations involved and the private sector. It will be important to identify the areas which should be considered as a priority; the type of partnerships to be developed with financial backers and the role that the Participation Programme could play in this respect; in return, what actions could be required of the beneficiaries States in view of sharing information with other states, etc. - with due reference paid to the international context and, as has already been underlined, taking into account the *added value* which UNESCO can bring to the chosen areas (interdisciplinarity, ethical vocation, neutrality, a clearing house function, links between researchers and political decision makers, with civil society, etc.)

¹⁷ For example, see the *Survey on National Cinematography*, 1999.
http://www.unesco.org/culture/industries/cinema/html_eng/survey.htm

ii. **Reinforcing inter-Secretariat collaboration** with other relevant international organizations, governmental or non-governmental, and whether or not belonging to the United Nations system. An indicative list of organizations with which UNESCO could co-operate more closely, in order to increase awareness of the positions that UNESCO will have adopted with regard to cultural diversity and/or to develop joint actions in the area, could be proposed.

Normative action¹⁸:

32. Normative action falls under the remit of UNESCO, in its areas of competence. With regard to the liberalization of trade in cultural goods, UNESCO's role has been recognized since the early 1950s when it approved, in consultation with the GATT authorities, the "Agreement on the importation of educational, scientific and cultural materials" known as the Florence Agreement.

33. There are several different forms of normative action: declaration, recommendation, convention, etc. Each category has its own particular legal characteristics, (ways of elaboration and adoption, the question of new signatories, binding mechanisms and follow-up mechanisms or not, etc.) as well as other factors such as the average length of time needed to draw up the instrument. With regard to this area of discussion, the following actions could be envisaged:

i. Elaborating a Draft Declaration on "cultural diversity", similar to the one on "Biodiversity" or on the "Human Rights and Human Genome". It will be important to specify the extent to which this instrument could contribute to advancing the international debate on trade liberalization. A UNESCO Declaration – or a Recommendation – might offer an alternative to the idea of a "Charter" mentioned in other forums;

ii. Preparing a **Special Agreement** or a **separate instrument** regarding cultural industries which would – or would not – be integrated with WTO Agreements¹⁹;

iii. Establishing **another type of normative instrument** to be determined, for example the negotiation of a new protocol to the Florence Agreement (see above).

Other options

34. This section was left open to the suggestions that will come from the consultation as well as those of the Expert Committee. The ideas raised could eventually be added to the previous sections. The following suggestions could already be included in the above list.

i. The development of a **Plan of Action**, taking into consideration the context of increasing internationalization of trade and technological change affecting cultural activities, and taking into account not only the work already carried out by UNESCO, but also by other organizations, in order to highlight priorities and to allow States to eventually adjust their cultural policies.

34.ii. The idea of a **Global Alliance for Cultural Diversity** has been suggested. This Alliance would aim to safeguard and promote cultural diversity in the field of cultural goods and services by tapping into the potential of North-South co-operation through private and public

¹⁸ Subject a prior decision by the General Conference, in accordance with the relevant rules.

¹⁹ Subject to the prior agreement of WTO.

partnerships. The Global Alliance for Cultural Diversity would actively seek the participation of individual business and corporate associations in developed countries which operate in the cultural industries field, and which would be prepared to work within the framework of the Alliance to preserve and promote cultural diversity in different ways, particularly in developing countries. The aim would be to open market space for endogenous cultural products and provide a transfer of professional and technical expertise to developing countries. In return, participating developing countries should seek to adopt measures to eradicate copyright piracy and to ensure strong copyright protection²⁰.

iii. All other appropriate suggestions recommended by the Experts Committee.

²⁰ In addition to these objectives, the Alliance could also aim to: encourage the work of developing country's creators and artists to be locally produced and marketed; develop a wider, more plural supply of cultural goods on a global level; achieve a better balance between national and foreign products of a cultural and entertainment nature in developing countries; improve the image of participating corporations, often accused of being the sole beneficiaries of globalization; help developing countries eradicate piracy and in doing so, improve their chances of attracting foreign direct investment; build confidence between governments and the private sector. The Global Alliance for Cultural Diversity reflects the evolution in "culture and development" operations which, no longer restricted to mere assistance, should aim at creating conducive environments for the growth of a developing country's domestic cultural industries.