

Let's cut this slogan to size

'The contribution of creativity to sustainable development': an unexamined and overextended slogan if there ever was one!

'Creativity' is such an easy to use and 'feelgood' buzzword. It has become everybody's mantra. So what are we, the cultural players, really talking about? And what about the 'sustainable development' to which we say creativity contributes? What do we really mean when we use this term?

'Creativity' as defined by the OED is 'the ability to produce new and original ideas and things'. This is an ability that exists not just in the arts and culture. There's technological creativity, scientific creativity, social creativity, political creativity, and not least business creativity... So what is distinctive about *cultural* creativity? The main arguments today seem to turn on its contribution to income and employment. But surely even greater returns on investment can and do emerge from other sectors. Focusing on the creative industries, some enthusiasts claim something deeper: that they are key elements of the entire innovation system of post-industrial societies. But seriously, can we go that far? Do we even need to? Wouldn't it be more constructive to foreground dimensions other than the economic that make culture central to human development? To begin with, its intrinsic value. But also the energy and inspiration cultural expression provides. Or the empowerment and agency that free cultural expression affords, particularly to the downtrodden and the oppressed. Or the cultural pluralism that allows us all to choose how we represent ourselves and/or are represented by others, and build better ways of living together in our increasingly diverse societies. Or the intercultural dialogue that leads, both within and among societies, to the development 'good' of greater comity rather than its opposite, exclusion or conflict, clearly a major development 'bad'. Or the traditional knowledge we must deploy for the better husbanding of natural resources and ecosystems. Or the nurture and/or design of the built environment for the enhancement of both our wellbeing and sense of place.

These last two dimensions take us into the terrain of sustainability. Here too, we need to be far more clear about what we mean by the term. In current usage, the Brundtland Commission's essential idea of inter-generational responsibility has been quietly forgotten. Instead, the word is deployed *ad nauseam* and indiscriminately as a ritual qualifier. It can refer to the maintainability of development itself; or to the viability of a project or institution, in particular its financial soundness; or to the ways in which certain practices may be conducive to a better quality of life. There is even the trope of 'cultural sustainability'... And the list could go on. Ultimately, to be sure, we are all free to choose what we mean by the words we use. But we need to use them consistently and mean something specific and actionable, so that the marriage of 'culture' and 'sustainability' generates a development agenda that truly allows us to make a difference.