

## The Contribution of Creativity to Sustainable Development

Creativity is a flexible, versatile phenomenon which is applicable in various ways and on a multitude of levels. What is creative in one system can be obsolete in another one.

This concerns situations in various parts of the world, in different domains and disciplines, and from an autonomous individual creative act to the development in the behavior of a large group.

As a consequence it is difficult to formulate a definition of creativity which can meet general acceptance.

It is generally accepted that a creation means the coming into existence of something that did not exist before; on the other side for a creative act one needs innovative, unexpected ways of thinking, whilst the receivers and/or perceivers of the creative act are confronted with something they didn't know before.

But then comes the question: do we know what we don't know, and how and why?

Innovation, out-of-the-box thinking, the de-freezing of the established, going undercover and suddenly jump forward, surprise, all are possible elements of creativity.

If applied well and without wrong intentions creativity can deliver a strong contribution to human and societal development.

There are good examples of the encouragement of creativity, imagination, and innovation, both inside and outside the arts sector, but negative tendencies as well. On the waves of eternity we have in the many regions of the world and in the many domains of public and private systems good and bad developments without any logical explanations except those of 'high and low tide'. Society and those who govern us seem not inclined to learn from the good and the bad examples. There is e.g. no consistent approach leading to improvement of living circumstances in creative, stimulative and clean environments; serious warnings are neglected (the banking system!); big cities blow themselves up in clouds of pollution; there is mass exploitation in the clothing, agro and food industry, and on the labour market. One would not like to state that we can find here inspiration for the installation of spaces for creative production.

It can, as well, not be denied that an important aim and objective of the so-called creative industries is to achieve return on investment and a strong economic output: their creativity will always be limited by these guiding principles.

One should however not be amazed to find all of this, if we look how governments effectively dealt with the call of UNESCO in 2005 for a governance that promotes artistic creativity in the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Ambitions to achieve unsmart economic growth and short term profit seem to have priority.

Calls from supranational and intergovernmental organisations for increased innovation and more imagination have as such no impact on decision making processes by individual governments. A few give follow up, many construct their own paths 'in the spirit of', many more just don't pay attention. There are on top no possibilities for sanctions.

The only sound decision makers listen at are in the end the voices of voters, the population of a country or region itself. And sometimes we see that crowds or visionary, forward looking (rich) individuals have arrived at the opinion that something innovative, imaginative and creative is really necessary.

I do not like to divide the world in developed and developing (so: suggesting underdeveloped) countries, a generalization which ignores high grades of development in certain parts and layers in society in so-called developing countries.

I gladly take up the invitation to present a few good examples:

- The precious and very developed way the organization Cerdotola (Centre for Research and Documentation on African Traditions and Languages) in Cameroon takes care of the knowledge, protection and enhancement of Africa's cultural heritage.
- The breathtaking El Sistema music education program in Venezuela, now spreading out over the rest of the world, with all improvements the project still needs to carry out.

- The unique decision by people's referendum in Switzerland to include in the National Constitution the right on music education for every citizen.
- The decision in some cities in some countries – however sparse – that every youngster in primary education shall receive (basic) education in the arts.

If we want that mass movements come into action, either by themselves or telling governments what to do, all citizens should be convinced of the importance of creativity in all domains of society.

The best way to get this 'on the map' is to implement creative and especially arts education as from the early childhood.

Arts education, music education is the core of the International Music Council and its over 100 member organisations, reaching out to 200 million people. The five musical rights of the IMC deal mainly with access to music for all, as well as the free right of expression.

If this were in the minds of many more millions we would arrive in a society which is truly creative, socially cohesive and stable, improving well-being and self-esteem, and supporting the dynamics of pluralism and the quality of diversity.

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