The role of cultural awareness and participation in sustainable development

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The Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth Collection

Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth (CH4IG) is a British Council action research programme which, since 2018, has been exploring how local culture can improve the lives of individuals around the world. The essays in this collection were originally commissioned by the British Council and Nordicity as independent thematic studies during the pilot phase of the programme. They have since been updated by their authors and edited for the British Council by Inherit.

The essays are published as part of the British Council’s What Works Cultural Heritage Protection programme, which is designed to support better outcomes for heritage protection and local communities by bringing the best available evidence to practitioners and other decision-makers across the international heritage protection sector.

Together, the essays explore the role of cultural heritage in bringing about the change which is needed to secure a sustainable future for people and the planet. The collection explores the relationship between heritage and sustainable development from different geographical, topical and philosophical perspectives. The diverse essays are bound by common themes, namely that cultural heritage is at the heart of human development; that cultural relations create conditions in which human development can occur, and; that human development is enabled by people-centred approaches and transparent, accountable and participatory governance.

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From 2018 to 2020, Leandro was a collaborator in Building the Barricades, an international research project which investigated the impact of armed conflict and urban violence on the mental health and wellbeing of residents in Rio de Janeiro’s largest favela complex, Maré. He discusses this case in his contribution to this collection – drawing on evidence from Building the Barricades and other research – and situates it within a wider analysis of cultural participation and wellbeing in the context of sustainable development.

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Introduction

This essay addresses the relationship between cultural participation and wellbeing in the context of sustainable development. The approach taken to the topic of cultural heritage and sustainable development is shaped by the field of economic development, specifically regarding the relationship between cultural value, heritage and the democratisation of cultural access and practices. This essay aims to identify the ties between cultural participation and the recognition of identity value as a driver to socioeconomic wellbeing (as a measure of sustainable development).

In a context in which economic indicators of impact (e.g. GDP) are increasingly placed at the centre of the debate to legitimise cultural policies, economically disadvantaged areas may lack public attention regarding heritage, identity, the capacity of agency and inclusion. In this sense, special consideration should be given to other relevant indicators that can be associated with cultural participation and its contribution to development. This essay aims to recommend some indicators addressing the analysis of cultural practices and their impacts on identity and wellbeing by looking at cultural value as a measure of wellbeing in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas.

To achieve the cited objectives, this work takes advantage of a previously-produced primary quantitative database about cultural consumption in the territory of Favela da Maré in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This data is used as the basis for an analysis of the profile of cultural consumption and of awareness about cultural venues in the area, two assumed elements of wellbeing, according to Amartya Sen’s developmental theory. Both act as inputs to public policies for inclusion. This essay has approached it as a secondary database to provide analytical references on cultural participation related to socioeconomic characteristics as well as cultural consumption. It is assumed that these are representative parts of the economic development giving an inclusive perspective to economic growth.

Therefore, to give evidence to this policy narrative, this essay aims to: a) define socioeconomic development wellbeing and value related to the arts and cultural practices, in the scenario of the emergence of creative industries; and b) build correlations between practices of art and culture and their impacts on sustainable development in the area studied. The shreds of evidence suggest a notable role for cultural policy on socioeconomic and territorial development beyond its traditional economic contributions (GDP and employment, for instance).

Context

Development, inclusive growth, the arts and the creative industries

In 1857, John Ruskin stated:

‘... there is ... a balanced division of his care between two great objects of utility and splendour: in the right hand, food and flask, for life and clothing; in the left hand, purple and needlework for honour and beauty.’

We can find a parallel for this dual ‘care’ in current concepts of development. On the one hand, development means the increase in overall economic productivity, with a tendency towards producing better and diminishing-cost goods and services; the perfect measurement of this phenomena is the GDP or GVA rates/values. On the other hand, development connects to broader elements such as distribution and structural socioeconomic improvement. Sometimes one element depends on another while at other times one could be a barrier for another. Most of the time development depends on a coherent economic policy balancing the needs of accumulation and distribution, embracing the recognition of historical changes in the system of capitalism towards the innovation of a productive system.

Regarding the global economic model, it is possible to find some privileged space for arts and culture, especially throughout the creative industries’ technologically innovative environment. Following the crisis of the Fordist regime of mass production – with a drop in industrial productivity gains from the mid-1960s in the developed capitalist countries – new patterns of production and work became evident in the industries and the service sector. The perceived drop in productivity, accompanied by high real wages, and the rising cost of fixed capital relative to the number of wage earners, caused a decline in corporate profits. The crisis of the Fordist development model is linked to the loss of efficiency of the current work organisation model, which would have, as its solution, ‘... new principles of work organisation, new norms in the orientation and social use of production, new habits and new modes of regulation.’

The interpretation of these new forms of organisation was not only dealt with by economists but also by sociologists through studies of the characteristics of work in a post-industrial society and the discovery of new technologies in science, telecommunications and transport that have led to a new way of thinking and a questioning of the logic of serial production. These structural crises led to the progress of the service sector, demanding a more specialised workforce. Value formation is, in this context, linked to intellectual work (scientific, artistic and administrative, among others), as well as to the products and services they consume (such as information, culture and knowledge). Thus, culture is no longer an instrument of sociocultural reproduction, but a tool of knowledge and imaginative production, becoming a marketable object that has found a great ally in the advent of digitisation. Art and cultural value, in this sense, can be in the centre of a new paradigm of economic and human development.

The productive logic of the creative industries can be considered as an integral part of the described process of capitalist transformation. The increased impact of information and communication technologies, as well as globalisation, led to a shift towards a knowledge-based economy which demanded the assimilation of the creative abilities of individuals in the new context of the productive process. In this context, creativity becomes a source of new scientific discoveries, inventions,
artistic movements and social programmes; of new products, services and jobs; and of competitiveness among individuals, between societies and between organisations.7 The creative worker then, is at the heart of the process of moving to a knowledge-based post-industrial economy8 and the concept of the ‘creative industries’ has become widespread in policy.9

In the context of the creative industries policy, the valuation of cultural heritage has been widely used to highlight its importance to governments and society in general. Furthermore, the institutional sociocultural approach provides an understanding of cultural heritage as a multidimensional and multi-attribute value to an economic good, allowing a shift from purely economic indicators to indicators to assess risks, impacts, values, and the potential of cultural heritage and the traditions that surround it. Cultural heritage in general benefits from an economic approach because economics dominates public discourse and policies in contemporary economic systems. This approach can, therefore, enhance cultural heritage’s role in social agendas and influence decisions by policymakers.

Historically, studies of the impact and value of cultural goods and services have been conducted from the field of economics through standardised techniques, but a broader multidimensional approach can be taken which identifies, measures and builds a policy strategy for creative industries, arts and culture as drivers of sustainable development.

Culture can be defined as: ‘a broad anthropological or sociological framework to describe a set of activities, beliefs, conventions, costumes, values and practices that are common or shared by any group’.10 From these, the cultural value of the ‘economy of culture’ can be understood as a social value system:

Cultural value, like economic value, is a socially constructed measure. Its formation is not hidden in mind, as is the formation of individual preferences. Like, economic value, it is accessible to observation. While economic value finds expression in units of currencies which are generated and maintained by banking systems, cultural significance finds expression through mutual, collective judgement procedures.13

Given the association of these concepts, some interconnected ideas can be considered:

a. There are nets of meanings that are woven by people and are constructed from patterns of reproduction and consumption;

b. The system of reproduction of these networks regulates behaviour in a normative way and serves as a channel for the individual to adjust to the external environment (as a social or institutional space) and in regard to other people (asrepositories of certain values that endorse certain practices);

c. These identified networks, as well as the human strategies to reproduce them, are an anthropological framework of values and beliefs that constitute institutions (customs, shared values and practices), and have material effects resulting from the impression of such values and practices in physical environments that generate economic impacts within a production process.

This concept echoes the view of UNESCO about the value on Cultural Policies:

The whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterise a society or social group, which includes not only arts and letters but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs.14

The installed heritage, in this way, dialogues with the construction of the concept of the territorial value of art from the social aspects of consumption by the symbolic sanctuaries that are attributed to the protagonists of territorial art practices. The formation of cultural value and its connections with economic value goes beyond the utilitarian models of the view of ‘individual marginal utility’ as a determinant of value in the sphere of consumption. There are values associated with cultural goods that stand out for their diversity and not for their similarity, with different economic values given by agents in similar conditions. The worth of cultural goods isn’t just based on how useful they are to one person. It’s more complicated than just looking at each individual’s usefulness or ‘marginal utility’. Some cultural goods are valued for being unique, not just similar to other things. Even people in similar situations might put different economic values on the same cultural good.

As recognised in the British Council’s report on Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth,15 cultural heritage is an integral part of the value chain formed by identity, wellbeing and preservation. Valuing certain material and immaterial assets is an essential step in identifying risks and catalysing a preservation chain. The protection of material and immaterial heritage can install a sustainable economic chain that feeds back into preservation through the systematic use of heritage stock as a generator of economic value. In this sense, cultural sustainability, through the identification of existing values and their strategic use, mitigates risks and points out new paths for a risk-generating economy.

Thus, the measures of impacts and results in the orbit of the broader sustainable development of creative and cultural industries’ strategies are either unclear or inconsistent with the professed transformative power of these industries. From one perspective, the impacts issued in economic growth (GDP, income increase, exports) are expressive, however, from another perspective, the effects on socioeconomic development (cultural diversity, social capital, value, distribution, agency exercise, meaningful transformations, and inclusion, for instance) are not adequately shown. It could be attributed mostly as a consequence of a lack of broader narratives about its impact, considering a multidisciplinary approach shaping a practical interdisciplinary tool.

Social Vulnerability, Economic Development and Cultural Value

The history of cultural development in Brazil is a tale with two faces. The high-level internationally competitive industry exists side-by-side with low-productive traditional practices. Inequalities and unmet potential are two strong elements in a vibrant and diversified economy in a country with a large amount of poverty and unequal distribution of profits. It is marked by high economic inequality and brutal social divisions. Conversely, in the cultural and artistic activities sphere, it is possible to recognise a closing of the gap between the inhabitants of highly vulnerable areas and other groups. In the scope of sustainable development, it is possible to assign an idea of the value produced by cultural practices leading to personal wellbeing earnings which, in their turn, are part of a broader concept of development if connected with a sustainable development strategy.

This approach is connected with Amartya Sen’s concept of economic development. The author

stands for a definite idea of freedom as liberty to choose and solidify one’s choices. Both are connected with capabilities. The first; freedom to make choices, and the second; capacity to exercise the preferences that one has made. For Sen.

According to a well-established tradition in economics, the real value of a set of options lies in the best use that can be made of them, and, given maximising behaviour and the absence of uncertainty—the use that made. The use-value of the opportunity, then, lies derivatively on the value of one element of it (to wit, the best option or the chosen option). In this case, focusing on a chosen functioning vector coincides with a concentration on the capability set, since the latter is judged, ultimately, by the former.16

The theme of the creative industries has been
examined recently in academia and public policy and could capture the dynamics of the new economy more thoroughly than the arts, media and cultural sectors. The emergence of the discourse around the creative industries which occurred in the 1990s was an indication of momentum in exploring cultural production in a new way on the economic agenda. In this sense, heritage, as an active element of sustainable development, depends on a strong connection between the creative industries’ policies and cultural values present in the worthiness of heritage. Specifically, looking at the role of the arts in the development of local areas which are subject to multiple stress factors, the productivity approach fails to capture the benefits generated for communities marginalised from resources that are accessible in central urban areas. It might be the presence (or absence) of lower-profile arts assets that differentiate neighbourhoods which otherwise have similar economic conditions when measured against a broader range of social indicators and the ‘artistic dividend’ that flows from community-based cultural initiatives is likely to be associated with more balanced local development than that of the growth-driven regeneration narrative. Research supports the suggestion that commercial arts industries (eg film, music and design-based industries) emerge as strongly associated with gentrification in urban areas undergoing rapid change, whereas those that balance for-profit and non-profit (visual, performing arts companies, museums, excellent art schools) are associated with stable, slow-growth neighbourhoods. The arts have an ability to mitigate the impact of economic inequality on low-wealth communities.

A systemic approach is needed because the economic, social, cultural and environmental sectors are interconnected and should not be seen in isolation. The interdependence of culture impacts all dimensions of sustainability. This is significantly relevant in an area of strong vulnerability, such as Favela da Maré (discussed below), and other examples around the world.

There are many elements of value derived from cultural activities, especially in vulnerable areas, such as belonging; agency; reflexive individual capacity; social capital expansion; social engagement; the evolution of perspectives; cultural democracy; the capability to broaden access to the labour market; creative skills; territorial access and mobility; living space; and perception of social reality, among others. These are examples of impact and externalities — relevant elements to the scope of development. When people feel a sense of responsibility towards future generations, they may be willing to pay for their descendants to have access to cultural experiences that are less widespread in their society. This creates a collective benefit or externality. Based on this, the urban elements of culture and identification are strongly verified, such as: leaving a legacy for future generations; the feeling of group identity and prestige; benefits for the local economy; the social improvement of consumers of art and artistic innovations, among others.

Considering these multidimensional elements of value, this essay addresses the indicators of capabilities, inspired by Sen’s approach, regarding the idea of the awareness of cultural spaces and practices as a two-handed indicator, both related to acknowledgement and practices as a proxy to cultural development.

Methodology

Combined with the theoretical review of development, the creative industries and the arts, this essay will also take advantage of baseline data about cultural participation and awareness, already produced in previous studies about Favela da Maré and Rio de Janeiro. These include the interdisciplinary research project Building the Barricades, about cultural practices and mental health (led by Professor Paul Heritage), in which the author is a co-investigator; the Maré Inventory of Cultural and Artistic Practices (produced by Observatório of Favelas); and the research of cultural habits and practices in Rio de Janeiro produced by the Brazilian research company, J Leiva. For this essay, the segment of the complete database which is used includes the socioeconomic profile, the list of cultural practices and the recognition of urban cultural equipment (ie which examples are considered the repository of physical and symbolic heritage).

The methodology consists of:
I. A literature review about the role of the creative industries and the arts in economic development and human wellbeing.
II. A cross-section of the primary database to extract information about practices, such as: internet access, cinema, online movies, videos, television, theatre, live music, internet music, literature, museums and dance.
III. Analysis of practice awareness as central elements of wellbeing, as a measure of sustainable development.
Complex da Maré is an urban conglomeration of 16 favelas in Rio de Janeiro with a population of over 140,000 people²⁵ living in unregulated, improvised neighbourhoods dominated by armed criminal organisations. The absence of the state in the provision of adequate access to public services such as health, education, security, social assistance, mobility and leisure for the residents of Maré is characteristic of vulnerable urban territories in Brazil and other LMIC or DAC listed countries. The situation forces them to develop alternative ways to meet their development needs other than relying on ineffective direct governmental support. Similar realities characterise many territories of the world’s poorest and least developed countries, particularly in Latin America. Considering this situation, culture and heritage could represent a novel route towards sustainable development. In the scope of this essay, regarding this scenario, the objective is to undertake an analysis of the level of cultural practices and the awareness of potentialities to be reached by public policies for sustainable development.

In the Observatory of Favelas Inventory,²⁶ the territorial, cultural scenario of recognition is analysed from the supply-side perspective. It is complex and shows the diverse range of nominations made by the inhabitants about the performance venues inside the favela: Cultural Centre – 38%; Street/square – 30%; School – 10%; At home – 9%; Bar – 6%; Library – 2%; Church – 1%; Sports court – 1%. It is very concentrated inside the borders of Maré; what is perceived as the location of these venues is nominated by the same group, considering the realisation of their cultural practices in the broader city of Rio de Janeiro informs that only roughly 30% of these activities are shown only inside Maré. It shows an intense inbound local cultural richness. Considering the demand-side perspective, Figure 1 below shows the occurrences of cultural practices in a comparative way between Favela da Maré and Rio de Janeiro (poorer and richer social layers):

As shown in the graph, it is possible to affirm that the cultural consumption rates in the Favela da Maré are equivalent to the poorer rent area of the city of Rio de Janeiro, even with less infrastructure. In the outdoor activities, such as dance and live music, there is a prevalence of these practices in the favela area that shows territorial engagement superior to the other part of the city of Rio de Janeiro. This is relevant evidence to the occupancy and valuation of this area, exposing an essential alternative to policies for local development. Enlarging the comparative perspective to a European scenario, it was possible to bring up some comparisons in the two activities measured by Eurostat. Figure 2 below compares the cultural consumption in music and movies between the first quintile of rent in Europe, the ‘D’ classes in Rio de Janeiro as well as Favela da Maré.

These pieces of evidence have shown an essential amount of cultural consumption placed at Maré, equivalent to the level of the poorest inhabitants of countries like Spain and Germany and superior to Rio de Janeiro and Romania, for instance. The Building Barricades research also looked at the demand-side perspective, revealing the shreds of evidence below about cultural consumption and awareness, as prerogatives of cultural inclusion and development:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Awareness</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Awareness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internet Access</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>Theatre</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Movies</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>Live Music</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Movies</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>Books</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Video</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>Museums</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>71%</td>
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<tr>
<td>TV</td>
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<td>6%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>Dance</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

²⁵ Population data source: IBGE - Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics’ Profile of Brazilian Municipalities, 2011
²⁶ Barbosa & Teixeira, 2019
The role of cultural awareness and participation in sustainable development

Conclusions and recommendations

Considering the economic concept of development as freedom of choice, it is possible to consider that consumption and cultural practices in an area of social vulnerability can be an important vector in the construction of valuing local culture (substantive heritage). Economic literature identifies cultural capital as a stock of cultural assets that intertemporally provides an origin for cultural services, having as its prominent example cultural heritage. It is defined by the tangible and intangible cultural assets inherited from the previous generations which, if preserved, will be transferred to the next.27 In this sense, given the reproducibility, it systematises three measures of cultural activities: the flow (activities with a beginning and end of use), the stock (activities that can raise the condition of permanency, because of the repeated products) and the equity (stock with intertemporal valuation).

Accordingly:

The confluence of artistic and cultural practices makes of Maré a territory of popular, inventive aesthetics that, despite the well-known constraints on resources and essential public and private equipment, turns squares, streets, alleys, walls, flat rooftops and bars into territorialities showing different aesthetic scenes. From sound and dance parties to theatrical experimentations, from the production and exhibition of visual products to the stylish gliding of skates, from the colourful graffiti on the walls to pagode parties with barbecue cooked on flat rooftops, we see the configuration of the meetings, routes and tactics that are part of one single territory of belonging in the complexity of urban life. Furthermore: these are assets that must be socially recognised and taken as benchmarks for public cultural policies. It is precisely from this angle that our research on the inventive territorialities of the Maré Slum gained sense and a horizon of performance.28

This is a strong case to show how cultural heritage, as a broad concept involving different scales of value, could be enabled as a driver to development. Assuming the overall context that the arts and heritage sector has a role to play in development, it is possible to observe that the cultural heritage in deprived areas with high social vulnerability has a consistent inductive potential. In this specific case, the referred prospect could be found under two levels: sharing and community valuing.

At the community level, local communities’ contributions, particularly those which are showing the highest outdoor cultural consumption tradition, are related to their proactivity in acting as partners in the planning, protection and management of their heritage.

At an individual level, cultural consumption generates new skills, which can expand the simple formal education of the human capital measures and generation. There is also a relevant contribution in people learning and understanding their heritage, to increase their skills and awareness of values as well as more robust social and economic networks.

At the policy level, decision-makers could follow this evidence to gain better knowledge, understanding and catalysis of the broader potential of cultural heritage and the needs of local communities, mainly towards three levels:

I. Acknowledging that cultural practices are persistent in vulnerable communities, even in a situation of multidimensional deprivation; and

II. That these practices have a marked social-territorial focus, which is a strong element for policies aiming at the valorisation of the local heritage (both physical and symbolic); and

III. That there are distinct levels of awareness of...
cultural heritage venues related to different cultural practices, which means that focused policies on the enlargement of cultural practices aiming valuations of local cultural environment could be effective.

Considering these pieces of evidence, it seems possible to suggest some policy strategies regarding vulnerable areas, such as:

1. To create strategies of outreach in specific cultural spaces to improve the engagement of the community. These activities, such as art education activities, political participation forums, arts classes etc, could be relevant vectors to take advantage of an audience already engaged personally in improving social participation.

2. To launch strategies of digitisation of arts supply to not only inform and disseminate to a broader audience, but also to produce a placemaking empowerment of the territory as a starting point to surpass violence and territorial exclusion.

3. To establish a process of sharing between different art practices to improve the ecosystem of arts as well as capacity building. It could embrace the sharing of venues to offers arts and cultural activities; systems of local cultural management; costs of production; intertwining abilities and artistic languages.

4. To offer a different stimulus to the generation of economic use of the tangible and intangible heritage elements in the vulnerable territory. It could produce revenues and improve the employability of the cultural sector in the area. The impact could be expressive, considering the lack of economic sustainability opportunities in those areas.

5. To evoke an ambitious strategy of the mapping of local cultural values and artistic practices, enabling a joint plan of value, conservation, preservation and local economic appropriation of its fruits. It should be firmly connected with the knowledge of the local formal structure of cultural offers as well as with the intangible practices, traditions and commonly acknowledgeable forms of local artistic and cultural practices.

6. To improve the local governance of cultural policies under a co-created strategy between socioeconomic development and cultural policies, gathering together local values and needs and strategically connecting it with pre-existent funds for development and arts in general.

7. To invest massively in generating human capital towards arts and cultural activities, enabling socioeconomic development under an inclusive labour market connected to artistic activities. Those jobs could provide better salaries and self-esteem at a higher level than traditional occupations commonly existing in vulnerable areas.

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