



**IFACCA**

International Federation  
of Arts Councils  
and Culture Agencies

# Culture as a Public Good

NAVIGATING ITS ROLE IN POLICY DEBATES

July 2024

[ifacca.org](https://ifacca.org)

ISBN: 978-0-9871098-1-1

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1st edition July 2024. Sydney, Australia.

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Suggested reference: *Culture as a Public Good: Navigating its role in policy debates*, 2024, International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies, Sydney, Australia.

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# **Culture as a Public Good**

## Navigating its role in policy debates

July 2024

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This report is part of in IFACCA's Sustainable Futures Series.

## International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA)

The International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA) is the global network of arts councils and ministries of culture, with 91 Member government institutions representing over 65 countries. Our members operate in developed and developing countries across Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and the Pacific. Collectively we are committed to international dialogue and exchange, undertaken in a spirit of solidarity, inclusion, reciprocity, and mutual learning. The Federation represents plural voices and perspectives, unified in the belief that culture is a public good – with the potential to further inclusive social transformation – to be shaped and accessed equitably by all peoples.

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# Introduction

Arts and culture give expression to the diversity of human experience and enrich our lives in their own right: they contribute to health and wellbeing, foster social cohesion, build communities, help us make sense of the world, inspire experimentation and innovation, and nurture learning.

Culture brings vital value to all areas of public life and we must urgently acknowledge that any debate on future policy must start with critical reflection on the place of culture. The words and contexts in which we speak of culture are important because they recognise culture symbolically, as a dimension of our humanity; and concretely, as a sector that requires mechanisms of support, protection, promotion and development. Familiar ideas exist in global and local cultural policy discussions related to arguments to support and strengthen culture, such as public value, public need, development, or shared assets. More recently, discussions have begun to include the idea of culture as a public good.

Such discussions have gained significant traction since the release of the concluding declaration for the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2022. Supported by representatives at ministerial level from more than 150 countries, the declaration emphasised the role of culture as a driver for sustainable development and asked the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General to integrate and anchor culture as a global public good in the UN agenda beyond 2030, as a goal in its own right. In May 2024, culture was recognised in the revised draft of the Pact for the Future under Action 7, which states that ‘we will protect and promote culture as an integral component of sustainable development.’<sup>1</sup> As a roadmap for the post-2030 agenda, this recognition heralds a new era for culture.

Indeed, 2024 marks a critical year in the journey to ensure that culture is recognised and anchored in government agendas, with many upcoming key international events that will shape the global landscape on public policy. This report will be important for our inquiry and reflection throughout this journey. This includes in September 2024, when the United Nations will host its Summit of the Future with plans to confirm the aforementioned Pact for the Future; in May 2025, when IFACCA and Arts Council Korea will host the 10<sup>th</sup> World Summit on Arts and Culture in Seoul, Republic of Korea with the theme *Charting the future of arts and culture*; and in September 2025, when UNESCO and the Ministry of Culture of Spain will host the next MONDIACULT in Barcelona.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/soft-pact-for-the-future-rev.1.pdf>

While it may sometimes be challenging to move beyond the abstract to foresee future outcomes, the conversations and deliberations that will take place can only be purposeful if we work to ensure that they are informed by a broad range of interpretations based on our experiences. We must seize current momentum and robustly debate how we can advance arts and culture for the future – our future. As a global network of government agencies that advance arts and culture, IFACCA is action-oriented and focussed on the delivery of tangible results. We are in full support of culture as a standalone goal in the post-2030 agenda, and will work closely with our members and wider network to support and strengthen our shared common agenda.

This starts with discussion of how we conceive of public goods and how culture might feature. The greater our dialogue and exploration of diverse meanings and contexts, the better our understanding will be of different realities, terminologies, and applications. And the better equipped we will be to tackle challenges – known and as yet unknown – and ensure that culture remains at the centre.

This report is not intended to resolve or offer a universal definition of culture as a public good. Rather, it seeks to start an inclusive conversation that reminds us of culture's power and strength in difference, as we approach milestones that will help frame and reinforce its position. It comprises eight essays: *Culture as an Irreducibly Social Good* by Maru Mormina, *Cultural heritage: crossroads and challenges in uncertain times* by Sonia Montecino, *A Public Good Paradigm for Whose Culture? An African Perspective* by Farai Mpfunya, *Southeast Asia: A Region of Dynamic Diversity* by Dwinita Larasati, *Kia mua ka muri, walking backwards into the future: reflections for an arts strategy in Aotearoa New Zealand* by Stephen Wainwright, *Participatory Practices in the Narrative of Culture as a Public Good: A European Perspective* by Matina Magkou, *Museums as Public Goods: A Pacific Perspective* by Tarisi Vunidilo, and *The Dilemmas of Culture as a Public Good* by Pablo Raphael. It is also complemented with an overview on definitions of public good in economic and social terms; as well as a series of considerations and recommendations, which we hope will help clarify and demystify the concept of culture as a public good, and contribute to developing a nuanced narrative that is relevant to arts, culture, heritage, and related sub-sectors. This is a pressing need.

## Our report

Growing international interest in advancing culture as a public good presents an opportunity for culture to be recognised. It reflects a consensus among governments around the world that we need a common roadmap to strengthen public policies that support culture, within dedicated policy spaces and in other portfolios. We must recognise that the concept of public goods is primarily economic, and not universally understood, which may cause confusion and necessitate greater context.

Our report aims to explore the concept of public good and how it is understood from diverse and intersectoral perspectives; highlight case studies across sectors; examine policymaking opportunities and challenges; and assess how culture can make a unique contribution to drive sustainable futures. We approached our eight authors, experts in their field, and asked them to respond to the question: *what does culture as a public good mean to you and your work, and what could it mean for action and tangible outcomes?* Seven of our authors are from the cultural ecosystem – including practitioners and those working in government, civil society organisations, and academia – and the eighth is an academic working in the sciences.

Larasati (Indonesia) explores the role of culture in everyday life. Magkou (Greece) reflects on the importance of active civil societies and introduces the concept of the Commons in a European context. Montecino (Chile) writes on the dangers of cultural commodification and fetishism in Latin America. Mormina (United Kingdom) applies a science and knowledge lens to the notion of irreducible social goods and cultural capabilities. Mpfunya (Zimbabwe) provides an African perspective on the misuse of culture as a public good, and how to reclaim narratives and reparations. Raphael (Mexico) considers the perils of homogenisation and the importance of a common good that embraces and safeguards difference. Vunidilo (Fiji) reflects on reclaiming the museum as a public good and active space of storytelling in the Pacific. And Wainwright (New Zealand) assesses the legacies of the Westminster model and opportunities to embrace the Treaty of Waitangi to prioritise public value. All of our authors draw on lived experience and the imperatives that shape their diverse contexts. Their realities are interwoven and show us that dialogue is critical and urgent.

The discourse surrounding culture as a public good encompasses a wide array of perspectives and considerations, ranging from economic theory to social and political sciences. The recognition of culture as a public good holds significant implications for policymaking, resource allocation, and societal values. As outlined in our report, there is no singular definition or approach to understanding culture as a public good. Rather, it is a complex and multifaceted concept that requires ongoing debate, exploration, and refinement. To contribute to the debates, we present you with the perspectives of our eight authors.

Let us start the conversation now.

Magdalena Moreno Mujica  
Executive Director, IFACCA



# Defining public good in economic and social terms

To unpick the notion of culture as a public good, we must first delve into its history. The concept of public goods stands as a cornerstone in economics and other social and political sciences. It provides a framework to understand collective goods and services that are available to all members of society, which are most often administered and safeguarded by governments. The concept originates in economic theory but now transcends disciplinary boundaries. It is multifaceted in nature and interpretations have evolved and prompted experts to delve deeper into its meaning and application across diverse contexts. This now includes culture.

Below, we share some of the background information prepared by IFACCA to develop this report. It is by no means exhaustive, but we hope helps frame the essays that follow.

## PUBLIC GOOD IN ECONOMIC LITERATURE

The American economist and Nobel Prize Laureate Paul Anthony Samuelson (1915-2009) is often credited for introducing the theory of public goods to modern economics. In 1954, he authored 'The Pure Theory of Public Expenditures,' an essay that used the term 'collective consumption goods' to define goods 'which all enjoy in common in the sense that each individual's consumption of such a good lead to no subtractions from any other individual's consumption of that good' (Samuelson 1954, p.387). And in 1955, he elaborated with an article on the Pure Theory of Public Expenditures.

*Public goods are defined as goods that are both non-rival and nonexcludable.*

Although Samuelson's mathematical definition is generally used in models of public goods, the qualitative understanding of the specificity of public goods owes much to another American economist - Richard A. Musgrave (1910-2007) (M Desmarais-Tremblay 2014, p.1). In the book *Public in Theory and Practice* (1973), published in collaboration with Peggy B. Musgrave, public goods were defined as goods that are both non-rival and nonexcludable (p.7, p.43). These two components of the public good definition are common in contemporary economic theory on public goods. A non-rival good is typically described as a product that everyone can consume without reducing its availability for other consumers (Musgrave R & Musgrave P 1973, p.7); and goods are considered non-excludable when no one can be

barred from consuming them (ibid, p.43). Examples of goods that are both non-rival and non-excludable often cited in the literature include national defence, clean air, and streetlights. If these goods are provided in a certain territory, they are available to all living in this territory, and if one benefits from them, this does not diminish the benefit or availability of these goods for others.

However, it has been repeatedly acknowledged that pure public goods are rare. In a book commissioned by the UNDP in 1999, the authors discuss impure public goods, which are either non-rival but excludable or non-excludable but to some extent rival (Kaul, I, Grunberg, I & Stern, M, p.20). Therefore, the term 'public goods' is often used as an overarching concept for any product or service that is either non-excludable, non-rival, or both.

Economists generally discuss public goods in relation to the phenomenon of market failure. Since such goods are non-excludable and non-rivalrous in their consumption, they typically encounter supply problems (Kaul et al, p. 6). Another feature of public goods often emphasised in economic literature is their free-rider nature: non-excludability means that the supplier of a public good faces the risk that people can access it without paying. This issue can lead to overexploitation, underproduction, and undersupply of public goods due to the low incentive for commercial agents to produce something whose price is close to zero (Long, D & Woolley, F 2009, p.109), such as public libraries or public roads, as anyone can, in principle, use them an unlimited number of times without payment. Consequently, providing such services is not economically appealing for profit-oriented entities unless they are contracted by governments.

Since public goods are widely recognised as essential, and considering the issues of market failure and the free-riding issue, it is justified that governments play a key role in the production and provision of these goods and services. In short, as June Sekera, Research Fellow at the Global Development and Environment Institute, puts it, 'public goods are created to meet a need, not to produce revenue or profit' (Sekera, J n.d., p.15).

## PUBLIC GOOD IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCES

The social science notion of public good first appeared in *The Interpretation of Voting in the Allocation of Resources* by Howard R. Bowen in 1943. Bowen defined 'social goods' as those that are 'not divisible into units that can be the unique possession of individuals. Rather, they tend to become part of the general environment - available to all persons within that environment (e.g. education, protection against foreign enemies, beautification of the landscape, flood control). The amount of the good must be set by a single decision applicable jointly to all persons. Social goods, therefore, are subject to collective or political rather than individual demand' (p.23).

## *Social goods are subject to collective or political rather than individual demand.*

The social sciences introduced and focussed on the procedural dimension of public goods, arguing that what constitutes such a good and how it is provided is not only determined by the nature of the good but also through a political and social process and deliberate choices (Héritier, A 2001, Drahos, P 2004). There is an understanding in social and political sciences that, in practice, there are no strict and objective criteria for defining something as a public good, and the boundary between private and public goods can be fluid. This is explained by the fact that the production, provision, and prioritisation of public goods depend on contextual factors, including the decisions made by policymakers. For instance, ensuring access to free universal healthcare or secondary education can be prioritised by governments, as much as it can be partly left to the private market.

Many researchers stress the link between a public good and a public need, arguing that political decisions generally directly or indirectly respond to the needs and demands of citizens. Stewart Ranson and John Stewart argued that public goods and services ‘are provided following a collective choice and financed by collective funds’ (1994, p.55).

At the same time, there are public goods that exist regardless of collectively expressed public needs or political decisions. In this regard, Peter Drahos makes a distinction between norm-dependent and norm-independent public goods. The former are goods and services that become public goods through legal and non-legal norms. These could include peace, national legislation, or public order. Norm-independent public goods exist as public goods regardless of the regulatory framework, and, in principle, their consumption cannot be restricted by social norms and regulatory tools. For instance, forests or algae that consume carbon (Drahos, P 2014, p.321).

Furthermore, Drahos argues that the provision and distribution of public goods depends on the degree of excludability of those goods and the regulatory context of that excludability” (ibid). This implies that even if the government prioritises the creation of a product or service, and this product or service theoretically possesses the characteristics of a public good in its economic definition (being non-rivalrous and non-excludable in its consumption), the regulation of the provision and distribution of the good influences its ‘publicness’, using Drahos’ term. An example could be knowledge, which is inherently a public good, as an unlimited number of people can consume it without compromising the ability of others to do the same—unless access to it and its usage are restricted by intellectual property laws.

Kaul et al argued that another feature of public goods is their ‘substantial externalities’ (Kaul, et al, p.20). This tendency to assess the publicness of a product or service through the nature of its ripple effects is especially common when the matter concerns impure public

goods. In some cases, the aspiration to augment or preserve positive externalities of a product or service justifies why this product or service itself is not turned into a public good.

For instance, intellectual property law – when limiting free access to research or creative products – can be seen as one of the ways to support and stimulate researchers and creators to continue producing knowledge and creative work, which, even if not freely accessed by all, can generate positive ripple effects for society and the economy.

*The notion of common goods refers to goods, facilities or resources that benefit the entire community or society as a whole rather than specific individuals or groups within that society.*

A related concept in political science is the notion of common goods, which refer to goods, facilities —whether material, cultural or institutional— or resources that benefit the entire community or society as a whole rather than specific individuals or groups within that society. These goods are considered essential for the wellbeing and functioning of the community and are often provided or managed by the government or other public institutions. Implied in the concept of common goods is the idea that the members of a community provide it to all members in order to fulfil a relational obligation they all have to care for certain interests that they have in common. Examples of common goods include the road system; public parks; police protection and public safety; courts and the judicial system; public schools; museums and cultural institutions; and public transportation. The term itself may refer either to the interests that members have in common or to the facilities that serve common interests. The concept of the common good is central to discussions about governance, public policy, and the role of government in promoting the welfare of society.

In terms of the notion of global public good, the aforementioned UNDP publication edited by Kaul et al explored how the concept of public goods could be extended from the national level to the global level. This exploration was prompted by the world facing multiple challenges while becoming more integrated and interlinked. The editors defined global public goods as essential goods that can only be provided through collective action transcending national borders, such as a clean environment, peace, and financial stability.

The concept of public goods regained attention in 2021, taking centre stage in *Our Common Agenda*, a report of the UN Secretary-General. This report, aimed at delineating key pathways for global collaboration, particularly in the context of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), defines global public goods as

resources that belong to humanity and cannot be adequately provided by individual states or non-state actors. As a result, these goods must be collectively governed, delivered, and protected by all countries (p.18). The report also provides various examples of global public goods, including health, digital commons, biodiversity, and the global financial system.

The MONDIACULT Declaration 2022 was one of the first times that culture was recognised as a global public good at the international level. Earlier, UNESCO's *Global Report, ReShaping Policies for Creativity – Addressing culture as a global public good (2022)*, argued that culture encompasses all characteristics of the global public good concept. In parallel, the concept was featured in UNESCO's *Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2029*, which aims to ensure that education, the sciences, culture, communication and information are recognised internationally as global public goods (UNESCO 2022 (b), p.15). In 2023, as the world was taking stock of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and drawing perspectives for a better future, the UN Secretary-General recognised that culture is a global public good and acknowledged that it is undervalued in SDG progress (UN 2023, p.49).

As there has been a growing focus on the concept of public good in United Nations rhetoric, without a clear definition in international law, it is time to unravel the various notions that constitute public good and consider what the recognition of culture as a public good can mean in practice.

# Delving into culture as a public good: key insights from the authors

## What is culture?

How we define culture – as art, cultural practices, or as a conglomeration of beliefs, norms, aesthetics, and traditions of a community – will determine how it relates to public good, whether that is defined in economic or social terms. Throughout this publication our authors use a range of approaches. Montecino takes an anthropological reading which sees culture as ‘the group of symbols, values, attitudes, skills, knowledge, meanings, forms of communication and social organization, as well as material goods, that make the life of a given society possible and allow it to transform and reproduce as such, from a generation to come’ (Bonfil 2004, p.118).

Mormina refers to ‘culture – beyond artistic goods and services – as a constitutive feature of society, produced and consumed collectively, and for this reason its value does not accrue to individuals but to society as a whole.’ Larasati affirms that culture is practiced both actively and subconsciously, but is gradually being separated from daily conduct and confined to traditional ceremonies, rituals, performance, entertainment, education and heritage. Whereas Raphael asks whether culture can truly be defined by the objects, symbols and goods that populate a certain geographical area, given the homogenising effects of globalisation; and references UNESCO’s 1982 Mexico Declaration on Cultural Policies, which defines culture as a set of distinctive spiritual, material, and intellectual features that characterises a society or social group, based on reciprocal respect and the right to be different.

The language we use to speak about culture also presents inherent challenges and Larasati argues for us to take the broadest interpretation of culture possible and measure development with indicators relevant to that interpretation. She further suggests that a lack of incentive to advance arts, culture and creativity outside of the norms created by government results from nomenclature based on structural discrepancy, which can lead to parts of society being distanced from cultural practices.

## Culture as a dimension of existence and culture as a sector

If we accept that culture is a dimension of existence and a sector, we must acknowledge that we are dealing with a context of duality, which is at once symbolic (and not typically empirical) and practical (including as it does a workforce). These two aspects are not contradictory. We can promote the sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors (CCSs) and support culture as a public, common, and social good that is intrinsic to our humanity and measurable by core values-based systems, not the market. To disconnect social value does a disservice to culture, and places it in a deficit model as we continue to use predominantly empirical quantitative mechanisms to claim its justification and value in economic terms. As Wainwright affirms, the notion of collectively valued social outcomes becomes a much richer and more nuanced opportunity for articulating cultural value. Mormina creates a link between science and culture that offers a fresh perspective to position arts and culture as irreducible social goods, which has the potential to shift dynamics of supply and demand in favour of culture being valued as constitutive of society.

## Context is everything

The views expressed in this report confirm that context remains a great challenge when seeking to create and purposefully apply international frameworks, as they risk misinterpreting – or completely missing – local realities. As such, we must be mindful not to force or overlap with existing models. This is reflected by both Magkou in her writing on the notion of Commons, and by Raphael writing on culture as a common good. Magkou maintains that the notion of the commons<sup>2</sup> empowers a specific community – rather than governmental entities or market actors – to assume responsibility for the use and governance of cultural resources, guided by the values of democracy, sharing, common ownership, solidarity and peer-to-peer interaction. Equally, Raphael affirms that we must clarify that in speaking of public good, we typically refer to government decisions and the functioning of the State, in terms of cultural policies as instruments (something concrete); and when we refer to common good, we refer to the construction of fair and equitable societies, able to guarantee balance between individual and collective interests (something ideational).

## Whose culture?

Terminology too remains complex. This is particularly true in cases where terminology is misappropriated and perpetuates colonial othering, as Mpfungya suggests when he questions whose culture should be taken to represent public good, and who decides upon

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<sup>2</sup> Commons is a form of social organisation, which serves as alternatives to both capitalist production and the traditional role of governments in defending and leading the public interest (Bertacchini et al 2012).

that narrative. He reflects on how historical racial segregation in Zimbabwe guided urban town planners to shape and sustain cultural landscapes – open spaces for culture and infrastructure such as cinemas and concert halls, municipal libraries and beer gardens, sports centres and schools and churches – that served to impose colonial education and control, alienating Africans from their cultures and material wealth; and to perversely construct culture as a public good to suppress and exploit black Africans. Moreover, he suggests that the worldview of ‘togetherness’ does not always find a place in dominant Western economic, social and political science theory beyond philosophical aspirations. Vunidilo expands on this in an Indigenous context, speaking to ‘official versions of knowledge’ and the marginalisation of native knowledge structures. While Wainwright reflects on how in New Zealand, in the wake of the Second World War elected parliamentary representatives turned their attention to culture in ways that were not neutral but imbued with a sense that ‘the English way’ was innately superior, politically, socially, financially, and culturally. Which for policymakers raises the question: for whom are such strategies designed?

### Tension points between the individual and the collective

There is another duality within the notion of culture as a public good, namely the individual versus the collective. Montecino suggests that cultural goods are seen either as individual legacies (as in ancient times and neoliberal conceptions) or as collective legacies (as by many Indigenous people and societies that promote and legislate on collective rights). This perception of either/or can seem to contradict the idea of culture as a public good, if we assume that it is part of market failure. It further emphasises that any attempt for policy to support, grow and diversify the CCSs could be perceived as futile, which is dangerous and ill-informed. On the one hand, Magkou states that culture should not be addressed merely as a shared asset and a universal right but also as a collective responsibility. Indeed, as Raphael claims, culture comprises multiple tensions – between the homogeneous and the diverse, the collective and the individual – and in a world that oscillates between defending individual guarantees and working for common good, we have left no room for nuance.

However, Mpfungya offers hope, suggesting that if we consider public good as collective consumption, imbued in beliefs, customs and traditions, it encapsulates the public goodness, and cultural institutions can emerge from deep belief in this notion of ‘gathering together.’ This suggests that while the State has a key role, responsibility is shared with societies and communities, which implies a need for multifaceted stakeholder spaces for dialogue, codesign and action where government, market, community and the sector come together.



## Commodification of culture

Another key concern expressed throughout this report is the commodification of culture. Mormina stresses that commodification upends the non-excludability of culture by turning it from a public good into a club good (that is, a good accessible only to those who can pay). She claims this also has the potential to homogenise cultural identities, as communities adapt their practices to meet external expectations and market demands. Moreover, Raphael emphasises that the commodification of culture has little to do with ideas of good, not even in economic terms, which define everything that is suitable to directly or indirectly satisfy a human need. Both Magkou and Wainwright argue that culture is still perceived as a cost rather than an asset, and the inclusion of culture as a public, social and common good should assist in changing this perception. Montecino argues to this point that the contribution of certain cultural outputs (especially in cultural industries) ensures that their contribution to gross domestic product is privileged over their symbolic and crucial development value, their social role, and the common destiny that culture and cultural heritage acquire in heterogeneous societies.

This perspective is crucial for holding public policymakers accountable and confronting them with their obligations. It also brings the urgency of the social and economic conditions of cultural workers to the forefront noting their high levels of informality and extremely precarious nature. Montecino claims that this leaves those who produce art and especially intangible cultural heritage economically vulnerable, with a lack of social protection and opportunities to develop their work and livelihood. Mpfunya shares that African momentum for collective action is propelling people to reclaim, reimagine and safeguard their culture and self-determination. Moreover, Magkou believes that any narrative about culture as a common good, which views people as equal rightsholders of culture – or as a public good, which addresses market failures – must not overlook the need for adequate support for cultural workers. There is a direct correlation between establishing sustainable and resilient policies that advance culture as a good and those that foster diversified opportunities for the growth of cultural professionals.

## Public benefit and public value

It is important to consider public benefit and value in relation to the provision of public goods. However, according to Mormina, when spending decisions are considered through a public good lens they can be shaped by narrow and oversimplified notions of cultural value. At times, there is a perception that the public fully supports and acknowledges culture's value, and that government creates barriers. This can be the case but as Wainwright points out the relationship between 'seeming out of step with mainstream public opinion and supporting a rights-based approach' is a challenge that governments also grapple with, especially when it connects to election cycles.

Magkou explains that in Europe, there have historically been two prevailing cultural policy paradigms that shape interpretation of public value: the turn to cultural industries in cultural policy during the 2008 economic downturn, with a shift away from regulation and subsidies and toward more market-oriented strategies to prove its value; and the now intricately linked notions of social returns on the public value of culture generated by cultural policies and a 'participatory turn in cultural policy.'

Public value will continue to be key on the policy agenda, as there are expectations for public impact to be measured. Wainwright proposes that public value account is required, which would achieve collectively valued social outcomes and consider both effectiveness and efficiency in its justice and fairness. As Larasati asks: what is at stake if we do not value culture, especially when the mechanisms to support, advance and measure cultural expressions are very limited?

### Irreducible social good and cultural capabilities

Mormina makes a strong case that treating culture as an irreducible social good would shift the policy focus from provision of cultural goods or resources, as the public good framing implies, to a commitment to enhancing society's cultural capabilities. She presents the argument that cultural capabilities are the opportunities to simultaneously and collectively create and enjoy culture through inclusive, equitable and diverse participation in the social life of the community.

Socially driven policy that reflects on culture as a dimension of existence and sector can also shift the gaze and fetishisation for which Montecino expresses extreme concern in the Latin American context. Moreover, Larasati shares that in the Southeast Asian context, cultural practice occurs far more organically beyond its formal definition at the government level and that the challenge lies in how people and communities use their collective capabilities to acquire various resources and maintain spaces to promote culture for all; and where diverse cultural heritages play a crucial role alongside policies related to sociocultural matters and are shaped by evolving traditions that consistently manifest as cultural identity.

Cultural capabilities are key in the notion of culture as a public and social good especially for levelling the playing field, and creating an enabling environment for self-determination and agency. Vunidilo speaks to this in the museum context, whereby it forms a bridge between museums and communities, where local community members visit the museum by contributing their time to participate in cultural activities as part of leisure and enjoyment.

## Role of government and issues of isolationism across portfolios

Magkou argues that the concept of public good – viewed through an economic lens, where being ‘public’ implies universal accessibility and non-excludability – positions the State as a primary overseer, regulator, and custodian. While Larasati argues that there are substantial challenges in securing engagement from authorities, who typically only implement and support programmes that are included in development plans and strategies, with multiple constraints in budgeting and performance targets – noting that often culture is usually not high on the priority list. If culture is not visible or part of the vernacular, how can we claim a seat at table if those that have a seat do not even realise that we are missing. This perspective is crucial for holding public policymakers accountable and confronting them with their obligations. The inclusion of culture as a standalone goal in the UN post-2030 agenda would substantially shift the parameters of government engagement and tangibly embed culture in broader policy discussions.

## Systemic inequalities and the perils of globalisation

International policy discussion on the role of culture is essential and can be very effective. An ongoing issue, and one expressed in this report, is that context is everything and the world is incredibly unequal. This requires consolidated efforts to ensure that the Global South – in its substantive diversity – has a say on how such agreements impact and are applicable and/or relevant to their realities. Moreover, we must not assume that the market is equal, accessible and robust for all. Montecino shares that globalisation, with its markets and cultural deterritorialisation and homogenisation, involves a double process. On one hand, identities of resistance and on the other, the disappearance or threats to the continuity of heritage.



# Dr Maru Mormina

United Kingdom

Dr Maru Mormina is an interdisciplinary thinker and scholar, with a dual training in the natural and the social sciences. Her work aims to understand the sociopolitical and ethical dimensions of knowledge production and use in decision making. Drawing on her scientific training, she has explored philosophical ideas of knowledge production as an inherently collective endeavour, later focusing on global inequalities in science capacity. Her current work focuses on the use (and non-use) of expert knowledge in public policy in the context of complex and uncertain ‘wicked problems’.

Dr Mormina is based in the UK having held appointments at Oxford, Cambridge, East Anglia and Winchester universities. Alongside her academic work, Dr Mormina provides consultancy and training, working with government departments and agencies, multilateral organisations, think tanks and NGOs. She is a public speaker and author and produces content for both academic and general audiences.

Image credit: Hayley Watkins

# Culture as an irreducibly social good

Maru Mormina

What is the value of culture? Answering this question only in terms of economic and other ancillary benefits considered at the level of individual preferences and choices may provide a limited perspective that obscures the irreducibly social character of culture. A broader understanding of value that extends beyond the individual level of analysis and captures culture's inherently social dimension can be articulated using the concept of irreducibly social goods developed by philosopher Charles Taylor. It helps us consider culture – beyond artistic goods and services – as a constitutive feature of society, produced and consumed collectively, and for this reason its value does not accrue to individuals but to society as a whole. Considering culture as a collective endeavour brings into focus the importance of developing cultural capabilities in society and highlights the role of the state in providing the institutional scaffolding for the development and strengthening of such capabilities.

## Public good - a narrow notion of culture value?

In its concluding declaration, the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development (MONDIACULT 2022) called for culture to be recognised a global public good and integrated as a specific goal in the United Nations agenda post-2030 (UNESCO, 2022). Against a backdrop of increased global economic instability, framing culture as a public good can strengthen the case for public sector support by highlighting culture's value in terms of its contribution to the economy, social inclusion, health, and sustainable development, among other things.

Affirming that something is a 'good' implies some normative notion of value requiring an obligation to make that good available to all those who have a claim to it. A good is public when it has public value and therefore is owed to the public – all individuals within a community, society or country.

By definition, public goods are non-excludable and non-rivalrous: they cannot be provided to some individuals without being provided to all, and consumption by some does not prevent consumption by others (Samuelson, 1954). Due to their positive externalities, public goods

are often defined in relation to market failure<sup>3</sup>, thus their provision falls to the state (Kaul, Grunberg and Stern, 1999). Recognising culture as a public good, consequently, entails positioning it within these market dynamics and appealing to an arguably narrow notion of value centred on economic and other ancillary benefits as a justification for public funding.

Public benefit and value are of course important considerations when prioritising provision of public goods. However, when filtered through a public good lens, spending decisions can be shaped by a narrow and oversimplified notion of cultural value. This can create policy blind spots, for example over power and misrecognition, if critical questions are not asked about how 'value' is defined, assigned and/or denied to certain cultural forms and practices, by whom and in which particular social contexts (Belfiore, 2020). Cultural policies can become the site of a politics of representation that creates winners and losers in the struggle over cultural value.

Narrow notions of value can also commodify culture. Cultural expressions (such as music, literature, or visual arts) often highlight aspects of culture that can be easily commodified and marketed to global audiences, including through tourism, particularly when the focus is on economic value (Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos, 2004). Commodification upends the non-excludability of culture by turning it from a public good into a club good, that is, a good accessible only to those who can pay. This also has the potential to homogenise cultural identities as communities adapt their practices to meet external expectations and market demands.

A more fruitful discussion of cultural value that avoids the above pitfalls requires a much broader frame of reference, beyond mere utility, to include a range of other considerations that reflect the much more complex environment in which the (multidimensional) value of culture emerges (Throsby and Hutter, 2008). Such a frame can be found in the notion of irreducibly social goods. Considering culture as a social rather than a public good shifts the focus from the dynamics of supply and demand to the intrinsic value of culture as a constitutive feature of society. This changes the goalpost of evaluation from access to cultural resources to the development of cultural capabilities, and from a focus on individuals as producers or consumers of culture to societies as the locus of cultural activity. The discussion that follows draws from similar arguments made in relation to scientific knowledge and by demonstrating parallels, it discusses the implications of applying a social value lens for shifting policy attention towards recognising the current and potential diversity of cultural activity and value.

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<sup>3</sup> With positive externalities, the social marginal benefit of consumption is greater than the private marginal benefit of production. Without the incentive of returns, free market mechanisms fail to provide these goods efficiently, hence market failure.

## The idea of irreducibly social goods

The public good perspective invokes a notion of culture akin to a resource that must be provided to and consumed by individuals, and as such exists independently of them, and whose value can be understood or measured solely in terms of aggregated individual benefits. Yet, such public good framing with its individualistic view of value does not fully capture the complex social and collective dimension of culture. Appreciating this dimension may reveal different ontological and value-related considerations.

In his last major prose work, *Notes towards the definition of culture* (1948), T.S. Eliot argues that treating culture as a separable part of society is impossible because culture is tied to the society that has produced it. Eliot sees culture as something intrinsic to the shared patterns of beliefs, values, behaviours, norms, symbols, customs, traditions, and institutions that characterise a particular group of people or society, at a particular time in history.

From this standpoint, perhaps a more promising avenue for understanding the value of culture may be found in philosopher Charles Taylor's concept of *irreducibly social goods* (Taylor, 1995). For Taylor, like Eliot, culture and knowledge are prime examples of goods that are irreducibly social because both are realised and sustained through social relationships (the former unplanned, the latter as the product of conscious efforts). They cannot be decomposed into individual benefits because they are simultaneously produced and enjoyed collectively. They are a *feature of society* – that is, inextricable from society – and *valuable to society as a whole* – that is, they cannot be understood as the aggregation of goods to individuals.

The idea of irreducibly social goods has previously helped articulate an understanding of the right to scientific knowledge as a collective right, and to ground obligations to strengthen the social institutions of science (Mormina, 2018). In a similar vein, the concept can help articulate an understanding of the value of culture beyond individual economic and quasi-economic benefits in ways that do not commodify it, but better accommodate the complexity and diversity of the cultural experience.

As a *feature of society*, irreducibly social goods cannot be reduced simply to individual actions or behaviours but are situated within a complex web of human relations, codes, institutions, and practices. Irreducibly social goods are fundamentally relational goods, they are the complex product of social relationships in a way that public goods are not. Scientific knowledge cannot be reduced to individual research efforts and acts of learning, rather it is situated within a scientific culture (codes, institutions and practices) and with which it co-evolves. Science determines and is determined by its specific social context: social values determine what scientific questions count as important, and the answers to those questions in turn shape society (Mormina, 2018).

Culture is not produced in isolation but, rather, it is embedded within social networks, institutions, and relationships, in the shared meanings, symbols, and narratives that are collectively constructed and maintained within a community (Patten, 2014). Cultural activities, traditions, and customs often emerge from the dynamic social interactions among individuals and groups. Like scientific knowledge, cultural knowledge, traditions, and values are transmitted and preserved through social processes such as education, storytelling (or scientific conferences), apprenticeship, and intergenerational exchange (or, in the case of scientific knowledge, building on past discoveries). This transmission ensures the continuity and evolution of the scientific and cultural heritage over time, linking past, present, and future generations within a social context.

*Irreducibly social goods are goods whose value accrues primarily to society and only indirectly to individuals.*

Irreducibly social goods are goods whose *value accrues primarily to society* and only indirectly to individuals. Scientific knowledge (especially basic or non-applied knowledge) is not instrumental to individual wellbeing and cannot be judged through its effects on individuals since it cannot be directly applied to them. For example, understanding the relationship between folic acid, mood and cognitive function is of no direct benefit to individuals but can help the scientific community develop effective treatments for depression or dementia. In this sense, scientific knowledge is a social good: it expands society's opportunities for developing the processes and applications (such as vaccines and medicines) necessary for advancing individual wellbeing (Mormina, 2018).

Against the atomism of individual utility, a social goods lens emphasises culture's intrinsic value to society as a whole. Culture is an assemblage of a wide range of shared practices, beliefs, customs, art, and traditions, and its value is deeply tied to social context. Cultural expressions require common understanding and collective appreciation to be valued (Kaszynska, 2020). Culture's significance lies in its ability to connect people, evoke emotions, and frame and articulate society's shared purpose. Culture shapes our collective identities and sense of belonging. To *be* British is to look at the world from a particular historical perspective, to embrace particular sets of values, to have a particular language and sense of humour, institutions, and so on (Easton, 2012). Britishness, as an irreducibly social good, has value only insofar it is a shared experience – we cannot be British on our own.



At the same time, by giving voice to those historically excluded from the public domain (Graves, 2005, p.17) culture contributes to the affirmation of diverse communities and society's fundamental celebration of difference – a necessary condition for living together in a multicultural world. The value of culture to society, therefore, also lies in its power not to homogenise identities through commodification but to foster unity in diversity.

### What does justice demand in relation to irreducibly social goods?

The notion of social goods is, as with public goods, essentially a normative argument about distributive justice and fair allocation of resources, precisely because it implies an entitlement – in this case, collective rather than individual.

Irreducibly social goods are not goods that people 'have' or can be provided with. They cannot be broken down into units of individual utility, because their benefits are collective. The benefits of science, as explained earlier, accrue directly to society and only indirectly to individuals. Therefore, an entitlement to scientific knowledge as an irreducibly social good is primarily an entitlement of the whole of society, not of individuals.

Moreover, because irreducibly social goods are simultaneously produced and enjoyed through social relationships and practices, the entitlement is not just to the enjoyment of these goods but also to the capacity to produce them. Societies cannot have an entitlement to use science and innovation to further economic and social development without also having an entitlement to the capability to produce scientific knowledge. Realising this capability requires institutional arrangements (universities, science academies, industries, enabling policies), and therefore an entitlement to the capability to produce scientific knowledge translates, in practice, into an entitlement to strengthening the institutions of knowledge production (Mormina, 2018).

Similarly, if culture is an irreducibly social good that is simultaneously produced and enjoyed through participation in the shared experience of the community, justice cannot be simply discharged through the equitable provision of cultural benefits to citizens, for example through the public funding of museums, sports centres, libraries and so on. Culture's meaning and value are deeply intertwined with social interactions, collective practices, and shared understandings within a community or society. **Hence, what matters from the perspective of justice is not only the enjoyment of cultural resources but the capability of the community to meaningfully weave the social relationships and collective actions that contribute to the creation, exchange, evolution and manifestation of culture.**

Recognising culture's irreducibly social character, therefore demands a form of distributive justice whose subject is not the individual but society and whose currency is not individual access to cultural resources but 'cultural capabilities'. Cultural capabilities are social

capabilities – they cannot be realised by individuals alone but must be realised by society as a whole. They are an entitlement that people hold collectively to the shared and dynamic process of creating meaning, making sense of the world, interpreting reality, and understanding one's place within it.

*Cultural capabilities [...] are an entitlement that people hold collectively to the shared and dynamic process of creating meaning, making sense of the world, interpreting reality, and understanding one's place within it.*

Realising social capabilities requires strengthening what French philosopher Paul Ricoeur calls the 'structures of living together' (Ricoeur, 1992). These are the social institutions consisting of individuals bound by common norms, codes and practices beyond individual relationships, and from where power in common – the capacity to act together – emerges. **Realising the cultural capability to collectively create meaning requires strengthening the myriad institutions where our collective identities are formed and culture is shaped**, including not only purpose-built cultural buildings, or small-scale adapted spaces, but also institutions such as care homes and prisons, and most commonly the home and the virtual space of the Internet (Crossick and Kasznska, 2016).

### Implications for policy

Recognising the irreducibly social nature of culture as the assemblage of expressions that emerge from the actions of individuals interconnected through common norms and practices brings to the fore the importance of local social structures where those interconnections are formed. An entitlement to a cultural capability, therefore, creates a duty to strengthening those structures. This is precisely what underpins the notion of cultural rights.

In practice, this means that protecting cultural rights requires cultural policies that go beyond simple provision and access to cultural resources. **Protecting culture as an irreducibly social good requires a comprehensive policy scaffolding**, that is, a policy approach aimed at supporting the whole network or system of institutions (political, legal, social, and economic structures, civil society, the family and so on) that exist in dynamic relation to one another and provide the milieu for social relationships.

Strengthening these institutions in a way that does not commodify or homogenise culture but supports the multicultural nature of many contemporary societies necessitates **public policies that foster social inclusion and diversity by addressing systemic barriers to**

**participation.** This requires, first and foremost, an explicit recognition of the capacity of every person, individually and collectively, to meaningfully contribute to society. From this, policy approaches can emerge to **level the playing field by guaranteeing access to social opportunities (to work, education, leisure, culture) for all, but especially those most left behind, in ways that are equitable and respectful of diverse needs.** This creates the enabling environment where cultural capabilities can flourish, and a diversity of cultural activities can find expression.

Given its **irreducibly social dimension, culture cannot be considered in isolation**, but must be considered in relation to the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, and live their social lives. This means systematically and explicitly embedding cultural considerations across all policy decisions and looking for synergies between culture and other core objectives of government work. In practice, this entails a whole-of-government approach to ensure that cultural considerations are integrated into various policy domains. Such integration acknowledges the impossibility to separate culture from other aspects of society. Indeed, it recognises the inherently social nature of culture and the intrinsically cultural nature of society.

## Conclusion

Considering culture as an irreducibly social good helps us look beyond public benefit and value, and recognise cultural activity as inextricably interwoven with the ebbs and flows of social relationships that shape the norms, practices, beliefs, behaviours and traditions of a particular society.

It shifts the policy focus from provision of cultural goods or resources, as the public good framing implies, to a commitment to enhancing society's cultural capabilities. Cultural capabilities are the opportunities to simultaneously and collectively create and enjoy culture through inclusive, equitable and diverse participation in the social life of the community. A commitment to enhancing cultural capabilities, therefore, is a commitment to strengthening the structures of living together, the social institutions that make tangible the intangible power of communities.

Why should the state support culture? Not just because of some public benefit but because its irreducibly social nature means that to not do so diminishes us as a society.



# Sonia Montecino Aguirre

Chile

Professor Sonia Montecino is an anthropologist and writer. She is a Professor in the Department of Anthropology and Coordinator of the Indigenous Chair of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Chile. She received the National Prize for Humanities and Social Sciences in 2013. Professor Montecino served as a member of the Evaluation Body of the Intergovernmental Committee for Intangible Cultural Heritage of UNESCO (2017-2020) and Advisor on Heritage at the National Council for Culture and the Arts (2016-2018).

Professor Montecino's published research in essays, books and specialist articles, examines the symbolic construction of gender, cultural identities, narratives on myths, cuisines and mestizaje as a conflictive synthesis in Chile and Latin America. Her books include *Madres y Huachos (Mothers and Spares)*, *Allegories of Chilean Mestizaje* (1993); *Fuegos, Hornos y Donaciones (Fires, Ovens and Donations)*, *Food and Culture in Rapa Nui* (2015); *Chilean Women. Fragments of a history* (2017); *El Pelo de Chile (The Hair of Chile and other huacho texts)* (2020); *Culinary constellations of Choapa. Voices and Memory* (2023).

Image credit: Rolf Foerster

# Cultural heritage: crossroads and challenges in uncertain times

Sonia Montecino Aguirre

with the collaboration of Fernanda Castillo

*“Now, let’s work strong and hard, so that the initiative does not remain as just another burst of good will, without assured continuity. Let’s work, to give the dream a clear outline and secure steps with equals, so we can walk the continent. We will go on telling as faithful storytellers the good things they will achieve.”*

Mistral, Gabriela (1934/2023)

## Introduction

To address the crossroads and challenges of cultural heritage we need to look at surrounding concepts and stories, and assess the unleashed processes that displaced cultural heritage from an individual legacy – as inheritance from the *pater*<sup>4</sup> – to a collective and worldwide legacy (as it features in international conventions).<sup>5</sup> There is no research that broadly addresses these processes and current contexts of war, globalisation, digitalisation, accelerated ecosystem loss, new phenomena that challenge social and public policies, and the emergence of the view that individuals are fundamental to heritage, and its construction, safeguarding and agency. Similarly, the understanding of culture as a public good raises questions about how we conceptualise and manage it.

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<sup>4</sup>The term *patrimonium* meaning heritage in Latin is derived from *pater* (father) and *monium* (obligation). It refers to the estate or assets are passed from father to son.

<sup>5</sup> The idea of displacement does not imply a unilinear passage, but rather a historical development that triggers and encourages ways of thinking and acting about cultural heritage, understanding that this as a concept is rooted in the 20th century, but that its antecedents as ‘ownership’ of objects and goods transmitted and preserved is of long standing.

### Ways of saying: concepts and their social effectiveness

In order to see the processes and policies through which cultural heritage has developed in Latin America, and especially in Chile, we must first focus on previous concepts of culture. Undoubtedly, it is a disciplinary concept, but it is also a general one that remains at the core of many contemporary discussions on heritage.

A conflict inheres in ideas and practices that understand culture as a manifestation of the arts (literature, visual arts, music, painting, and cinema), which builds on dominant social practices related to so-called high culture: enjoyment by elites, and restricted access for certain social groups based on class (for example, galleries that are located in 'upper' city neighbourhoods or gentrified spaces). In contrast there is so-called low culture, which relates to crafts; Indigenous peoples; and certain cultural expressions of the *mestizo* (religious dance and popular iconography), people on the social margins (rap, reggaeton, drug culture), and people who live in poorer areas (murals in *poblaciones*<sup>6</sup>). This false dichotomy is frequently reproduced in social imaginaries, as well as in public and private institutions that formulate policies and develop culture. Within a scale of prestige, these approaches assume high culture must be taught and be taken to the people (Bonfil, 2004); and they exclude low culture, as if its meanings do not relate to the rest of society. On the contrary,

Culture is a way of inhabiting the world through the meaning that people attribute to reality within the framework of a socially determined encounter. The nature of this encounter is both convivial (in the sense that Gadamer refers to the role of the spoken word, gathered especially in his classes on the hermeneutics of the text) and sapiential, an expression that denotes the intergenerational transmission of the meaning that a generation puts at the disposal of the new generation, its way of signifying the world with a purpose of renewal and updating (Morandé, *Sociological Texts*, 2017:15).

Moreover, as Bonfil maintains, in the anthropological sense:

...Culture is the group of symbols, values, attitudes, skills, knowledge, meanings, forms of communication and social organization, as well as material goods, that make the life of a given society possible and allow it to transform and reproduce as such, from a generation to come (2004:118).

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<sup>6</sup> Precarious living settings in Chile.

These approaches assume two things. The first is that all people and societies have culture which builds a human ecology<sup>7</sup> and is transformed and transmitted trans-generationally. The second is that there is a false dichotomy between what comprises intangible and tangible culture, as these come together in the meanings they express for communities and societies.

These concepts suppose that the ideas of so-called high and low culture denote legitimised inequalities in Latin American societies and the prestige systems established by colonisation, and its grammar of power. Today, it is imperative to understand and promote a new notion that values the sense of collective belonging – and ecosystemic interdependence – related to so-called cultural goods. And we must be moved by threats to culture or its potential disappearance, paying attention to the iconoclastic movements<sup>8</sup> that question its fetishisation.

The differences among these cultural goods – their origins, their specific genealogies and development – do not lead us to consider them as unequal, because their rich diversity shows us that there are different ways to give meaning to the human world, its interspecies relations and its earthly residence, our common space. Today, more than ever, how we create security – and how we are unable to – sets the meaning of cultural goods. This is because people – who are key to their creation, reproduction or innovation – are entangled in knots of migration, war, climate crises, and economic, political, and ethical abuses, including racism, human rights violations, and trafficking (especially women and children). In contemporary society, cannibalised by social media and by the voracity of the market as the axis of life, ancient problems of organisation and social cohesion are amplified and reproduced. Immersed in the fluid and the experimental, this affects culture, how it is promoted, its development potential, and the fundamental role of cultural goods in improving how we live in the world.

### Heritage and sustainability processes

Understood in this way, on the one hand culture, knowledge, symbols, meanings and experiences related to tangible and intangible cultural goods form identities of shared group belonging (local, regional, national). On the other hand, culture produces shared resources that are transmitted. Over time, such resources, belonging and inheritance have come to define our concept of heritage. In other words, this is how they have been socially constructed. In this process, we see that cultural goods are seen either as individual

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<sup>7</sup> Morandé uses this term to account for the interdependence of human beings with nature and with each other.

<sup>8</sup> According to the meaning given to the term by José de Nordenflycht. Nordenflycht, J. (2021). Iconoclasm, Heritage and Art in Public Space, *Academia Topics*, XVIII, pp.1-10.

legacies (as in ancient times and neoliberal conceptions), or as collective legacies (as by many Indigenous people and societies that promote and legislate on collective rights).

The evolution of these representations and concepts in dominant Western societies reveals historical folds and tensions that persist to this day: spoils of war, collectionism, cabinets of curiosities, museumisation, monumentalisation, colonialism. Perhaps most relevant in this conceptual shift is the notion of this heritage as a public good that, regardless of ownership, everyone has the right to enjoy (Hernández cited by Muriel, 1954).<sup>9</sup> This idea implied related notions such as the democratisation, management and contextualisation of heritage. At the same time, it brought with it the development of a heritage market (tourism, museums, publishing) and consumption, as well as the fetishisation of certain goods. Assuming heritage as a public good consequently saw the emergence of its global valorisation through conventions which seek commitment to protect linked to UNESCO.<sup>10</sup>

Globalisation, with its consequent markets and cultural deterritorialization and homogenization, will involve a double process. On one hand, identity resistance and, on the other, the disappearance or threats to the continuity of heritage (climate change, new wars, iconoclasm). The emergence of cultural rights will have a major impact on protection and safeguarding policies, as citizens' participation acquires a special value every time people reproduce, care for and recreate cultural heritage claiming its centrality. However, international conventions guidelines timidly adopt this need, even as heritage communities strive for recognition as essential actors.<sup>11</sup>

A particularly relevant phenomenon is that of so-called uncomfortable heritages variously linked to identity politics and undoubtedly, to human and cultural rights. The relationship between heritage and memory will be pivotal to the appearance of a series of goods in community or self-managed museums that reveal violence not registered in official histories of national heritage.

However, there are also other tensions that challenge the way in which cultural heritage is managed, conceived of and displayed. For women – now with agency and demands for symbolic and material representation – there are historical questions, for example: in museums are they included in central narratives, or differentiated and ghettoised? In intangible cultural heritage policies, are they considered as a community with particular

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<sup>9</sup> It will be in 1954 with the UNESCO Convention in The Hague that this concept gains strength.

<sup>10</sup> We refer specifically to those of 1972, 2001, 2003

<sup>11</sup> This can be seen in the text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage: "Article 15 Participation of communities, groups and individuals. Within the framework of its safeguarding activities of the intangible cultural heritage, each State Party shall endeavour to ensure the widest possible participation of communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals that create, maintain and transmit such heritage, and to involve them actively in its management. Thus the "shall endeavour to ensure" relativises what should be an imperative: without the full participation of those who have safeguarded their heritage it is not possible to recognise and generate public policies that support their efforts.



expressions or simply mentioned for political correctness? And in relation to participation, how they are represented and are they considered owners of a certain heritage? Not all states that adhere to international conventions understand or accept certain concepts of gender, which construct sexual difference socially and culturally. This will raise new challenges for understanding and managing cultural heritage, especially when it derives from the politics of identities (Roudinesco, 2022) and tends to fragment the social fabric.

*The apparently fine line between promotion for sustainability and lucrative industry warrants a debate about how we understand culture, its transformations and its inevitable nexus with development.*

One problem we see in the heritage processes of cultural goods results from an essentialised gaze that on the one hand fetishises and associates them with specific territories, promoting nationalism and regionalism,<sup>12</sup> and on the other hand transforms them into commodities whose circulation favours neither the communities that hold them, nor a conception of public good. The apparently fine line between promotion for sustainability and lucrative industry warrants a debate about how we understand culture, its transformations and its inevitable nexus with development. Nationalism, regionalism and the market are factors that often negatively impact on cultural heritage and its sustainability.

### Public policies and the emergency of the cultural worker

At a glance, the way in which cultural policies are applied by the public sector (State) show that there is no clear agreement between international guidelines (conventions) and their interpretation and application. Typically, and forcibly driven into market policies, many governments do not build or respect long-term policies. In such settings, safeguarding processes, museum spaces or cultural institutions, and specific artform areas that are not self-funded, are affected by new government changes whereby authorities seek to leave their mark, by ideologically driven cancellations or the elimination of support programmes. We also observe, in different areas, the phenomenon of clientelism, which generates a bond of dependency between communities, cultural bearers and those working in government. Furthermore, the sustainability mediated by the market – in contexts where the notion of high/low culture and unequal access to cultural goods prevail – raises doubt about

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<sup>12</sup> Lists of global or local recognition of cultural heritage can sometimes become sources of identity conflicts or unleash processes of inequality in terms of shared cultural goods, both between countries and international organisations.

the idea of shared heritage and public good. This phenomenon should be the object of deep reflection when it relates to social orientations on the role of the State, governments and the private and not-for-profit sectors (philanthropy, foundations and NGOs) in safeguarding what is collectively held, especially in countries where a series of alliances are necessary for this to be realised.

Current perspectives place emphasis on the people who produce cultural heritage; however, considering sustainability, it is ironic that the definition of cultural worker emerges superficially in texts, public policy discussions and within public and private organisations, especially in Latin America. The future survival of the people who daily dedicate themselves to creating and recreating cultural manifestations must be addressed. The invisibility of the individual dedicated to cultural production shows that fetishisation is stronger than the awareness of the human production of a work, a story, a craft. This is because the contribution that these works make to the gross domestic product (especially in cultural industries) is privileged over their symbolic and crucial development value, their social role, and the common destiny that culture and cultural heritage acquire in heterogeneous societies such as ours.

*The future survival of the people who daily dedicate themselves to creating and recreating cultural manifestations must be addressed.*

Including cultural workers in our thinking about public policies means recognising that the nature of cultural work is diverse and relies on the body as an essential tool (for performing artists, artisans, sculptors, textile creators, set designers, oral narrators, musicians, and others). These workers create and recreate, connected to others through disciplines and within a significant ecosystem. Their processes require time and space to develop with dignity, but there is no legal system that embraces them. This situation exists because their work is categorised as an 'atypical form' of employment, this leaves those who produce art and especially intangible cultural heritage economically vulnerable, with a lack of social protection and opportunities to develop their work. In some countries, such as Chile, the incentive of Competitive Grants Funds was instituted as a democratising policy after the dictatorship experience. However, today it is becoming obsolete as an instrument to support the creation and appreciation of culture in the long term: it does not ensure working conditions as it encourages work intermittency; and it does not value cultural and heritage work, as it restricts remuneration. There are no equal conditions when applying for funding, which creates elites and experts in filling out forms and marginalises cultural creators and communities who do not have adequate digital literacy. In short, it does not ensure full cultural participation.

## Conclusion

Challenges and crossroads of cultural heritage in Latin America unfold in several interrelated dimensions: conceptual, political, economic, in relation to sustainability and how we recognise the people who produce and reproduce cultural goods (symbolic and tangible). These challenges are related to the crossroads that place the market as a synthesis of values (commodity and fetishisation of cultural symbols and practices), threats to the sustainability of cultural heritage due to collapsed ecosystems, participation of communities in managing their knowledge, and the invisibility and precariousness of those who generate cultural goods.

In these challenges, the State's action should focus on critically evaluating the various processes that it has unleashed (or those that it has demolished), promoting participatory studies, discussion tables and reflections that allow us to understand the consequences and outcomes of public policies regarding cultural heritage, as well as the effects of world policies (nationalism, conflicts in common cultural areas given by declarations of shared heritage, commercialisation, among other things). From this critical evaluation it will be possible to rethink and relocate horizons that add meaning to cultural policies. On the other hand, it is essential to raise awareness about understanding culture as the possibility of democratising knowledge, of promoting cohesion and peace around the idea of diverse but collective heritage. For this reason, the different people that safeguard, produce and transform heritage, States and civil society organisations, local and global, should be able to jointly assume a narrative and practices that make possible this 'distinct shape' with 'equals parts' – as the Chilean poet and diplomat Gabriela Mistral says – which preserves what the Anthropocene now threatens: cultural heritage as a public good and as the ecology of humanity.



# Farai Mpfunya

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Mr Mpfunya is a member of the EU/UNESCO Expert Facility, shaping governance, practices and perspectives on culture's role in different societal and international contexts. He contributes to the 'Fair Culture Charter' editorial team and was a member of the International Programme Advisory Committee (IPAC) for the 9th World Summit on Arts and Culture. Mr Mpfunya also has grant-making advisor roles for organisations like UNESCO Aschberg, the Nordic Culture Fund, as well as UNESCO IFCD.

Image credit: Winston Chaniwa

# A public good paradigm for *whose culture? An African perspective*

Farai Mpfunya

In its vastness, with multifaceted and richly diverse cultures, Africa seeks improved acknowledgement of its own perspectives and contributions to navigating the public good paradigm for culture. Despite legal complexities, many on the continent are demanding reparations from former and neo-colonial powers; repatriation of human remains; and sanctions for malpractices in international museums and art-auction systems. Consequently, this has brought to the fore advocacy to address historical injustices against Africa and discourse on public good and culture. Over centuries, immeasurable public good heritage was lost through cultural landscape appropriation, cultural genocide, disrobing of cultural dignity, and the renaming of cultural spaces and people. Many Africans and their cultures continue to experience intergenerational afflictions. Distorted definitions and notions of the public good for culture will perpetuate the *othering* and alienation of Africans if cultural policy-making processes are neither willing nor capable of reversing this injustice.

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There is an urgent need for new institutional instruments – alongside the individual African consciousness – to better affirm local cultures and proffer alternative ways to navigate the public good paradigm for culture in the African context, by examining the case of institutional and counter colonial institutional constructs, the public dimension versus the individual.

In many parts of Africa, notions of public good, public value and common good for culture are used and manifest themselves interchangeably. While key to reference public good

elements – non-excludable, non-reducible and non-rival in their purest form – there are many examples that highlight African communal cultures in relation to individualistic cultures; and the manifestation of public goodness and the public value of culture – opening alternative policymaking options. Goodness in culture is an example of how public good can provide value. Variances in excludability, reducibility, rivalry and market economy relationships interplay in the African philosophical context such as *Ubuntu*, where communities collectively own and manage public good resources, which individual community members cannot deliver nor enjoy on their own.

Africans imbue notions of public good in their humanistic worldviews; human togetherness as one way of constructing assets for achieving the greater good. Public good is identifiable in communal beliefs, customs, traditions and the land. The protection of biodiversity, wetlands and aquifers, community welfare, open spaces for culture, human and cultural dignity – among other things – are manifestations of the good. The worldview of ‘togetherness’, going beyond philosophical aspirations, does not always find a place in the Western economic, social and political science theory that is dominant in public good definitions and notions. For instance, Zimbabwe’s *mbira* music and *mbende* dance are collective practices and performative art forms, where the group is more important than the individual. This nurtures collective consciousness on public good and engenders social harmony. This contrasts the music concert hall and art-gallery cultural participation in the Western worldview. Colonialism disrupted this kind of African public good, its systems of culture and its governance, institutionalising foreign notions and sub-structures.

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These African perspectives make the navigation of the public good for culture – specifically whose culture – a prickly affair. Nigerian writer, Ngozi Chimamanda Adiche, boldly and eloquently asserts, “Culture does not make people. People make culture ...” She advocates for new ways of navigating the public good for culture paradigm, following the long history of women actively leading and shaping African cultures and realities. In his stirring 1996 inauguration speech (*I am an African*), South African president – Thabo Mbeki – evoked *Africanness* consciousness, pivoting policymaking to confronting complex cultural and historic particularities in his country and suggesting balanced approaches to tackling the social and economic dimensions of culture. Mbeki challenged the individual African to reaffirm their identity and culture.

### Culture as a public good - institutional and counter colonial institutional constructs

The black township of Mbare in colonial Rhodesia – now Zimbabwe – offers a good example for illustrating institutional constructs of the public good for culture. It located the reality of the individual colonised African within imposed institutions, as levers of subjugation. Racial segregation guided urban town planners in shaping and sustaining cultural landscapes, open spaces for culture and infrastructure such as cinemas and concert halls, municipal libraries and beer gardens, sports centres and schools and churches. They served as instruments for the imposition of colonial education and control, alienating Africans from their cultures and material wealth. Just like apartheid South Africa, Rhodesia perversely constructed culture as a public good; to suppress and exploit black Africans for capitalistic imperatives. In *Being Afrikan: Rediscovering the Traditional Unhu-Ubuntu-Botho Pathways of Being Human* (2007), Professor Rukuni invites Africans to reexamine this period; with the aim of imagining new institutional instruments and an African consciousness.

Counter colonial institutional constructs emerged in many parts of colonial Africa. The Negritude Movement and Steve Biko led a black consciousness movement, proposed un-educating the African mind and fighting for education systems anchored in Africanness (*I Write What I Like*, 1978). They sought benefit for the majority, not just for the continent's settler minorities. Soweto schoolchildren revolted against learning Afrikaans, the language of their oppressors. Many died for their resistance. The US Civil Rights Movement and artists such as Thomas Mapfumo, Fela Kuti and Bob Marley inspired consciousness and resistance agency in Africa – in Mbare and other ghettos. Marley composed the song, *Zimbabwe*. He performed live in Mbare on Zimbabwe Independence Day in April 1980. Resistance for liberation and nation building efforts pivoted to redefine public good. African knowledge and culture instruments – including the arts – became vital tools for changing the colour and foundations of the colonial facade. Africans found new ways to reclaim aspects of their culture and define public good for culture in their context.

In their insightful book, *Socialism, Education and Development: A Challenge to Zimbabwe* (1985), Fay Chung and Emmanuel Ngara examine colonial institutional constructs. They imagine a scientific-socialist remedy for a newly independent Zimbabwe. The scholars identified the school system, the church, the cinema, theatre halls and the English language as key levers used to drive the colonial public good offering, as “man-made fetters.” The individual African had indeed lived within this reality. It now propelled the African momentum for collective action to reclaim, reimagine and safeguard their culture and self-determination.

Resistance to colonial institutions placed culture at the centre of the struggle for justice: action to unshackle Africans from mental and physical oppression. Some cultural participation and expressions went underground – into *shebeens*, *mbira-bira* ceremonies and literary texts by authors such as Charles Mungoshi, who wrote *Coming of the Dry Season* (1972). Peoples' institutions became defiant arenas for counter-discourse and resistance impulses. Professor Musaemura Zimunya's essay, *Thomas Tafirenyika Mapfumo and the Zimbabwean Music Revolution* (2023), is instructive on music in the ghettos and its role in Zimbabwe's war of liberation. In *African Music, Power and Being in Colonial Zimbabwe* (2015), scholar Mhoze Chikowero keenly observes that music is a form of resistance. Culture became a people's vector, helping shift minds, political and military tides. After Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, UNESCO inscribed *mbira* (music and the instrument) and *mbende jerusarema* (dance and music) on its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

### Reclaiming and navigating African narratives and new imaginaries

There are many examples of public good for culture manifestations across the continent, as vehicles through which African public goodness is conveyed. The metaphors of togetherness and African humanism open ways to reimagine public good for culture policymaking that best suits the African continent.

The Culture Fund of Zimbabwe Trust was born out of public good ethos, emerging from the international development cooperation paradigm. Around 2003, some 40 Zimbabwean culture practitioners laid foundational instruments for conceiving, driving and delivering benefit for the culture sector and society in general. To date, the model has promoted Africanness through grants to and collaborations with over 2,000 projects. Community-based projects such as the Binga Craft Centre and Avuxeni Culture Village are examples of support extended to projects that bring communities together: common ground for transmitting traditional basket-making skills. Rural women collectively governed, delivered, and protected folk-art traditions. They also claimed the right to draw benefits from their craft practices. While their Tonga and Tsonga traditional folk-art is non-excludable, non-reducible and non-rival, market forces are impinging on their culture derivatives: posing risks to the public goodness of culture. Commercial interest in their basketry, for example, often requires them to alter both the collective nature of the practice and product design processes to suit export-market demands.

Other models of sustaining access to and participation in culture emerge from individual or family resources and investment. Engagement with external funding, especially from foreign sources, happens on a project or programme basis. Despite financial continuity challenges, it gives this kind of initiative greater autonomy and local institutional ownership.



Amagugu International Heritage Centre works collaboratively within the environs of the Matobo World Heritage Site, while Gonamombe Mbira Centre is located in Zimbabwe's capital city, Harare. Both are anchored in non-excludable and non-rivalrous African knowledge and cultural heritage, promoting intergenerational transmission of knowledge and skills. Amagugu's *My Beautiful Home* and Mbira Centre's *Mbira in Schools* projects are institutional instruments delivering public good for culture under market logic pressures. Amagugu founder, Pathisa Nyathi, fosters individual and institutional transformation anchored in African worldviews and spirituality. Mbira Centre founder, Albert Chimedza, advocates sustainable creative practices, leveraging Africa-centred intellectual and creative value chain capacities and capabilities. The two thought leaders advocate for locally anchored public good processes. They caution against cultural appropriation through instruments like data mining, arguing for policymaking that prioritises and strengthens public good elements within Africa-centred education systems.

Writing in the 1950s, Nigeria's Chinua Achebe (*Things Fall Apart*, 1958) powerfully examines how the individual nineteenth century African confronted significant social and cultural change: their communal-oriented values pitted against foreign political, cultural and religious encroachment. Achebe's main character, Okonkwo, contemplates, "A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their own homes. When we gather together in the moonlit village ground, it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so" (p. 137). This perspective of public good as collective consumption, imbued in beliefs, customs and traditions, encapsulates the public good and the goodness in an African context. Culture institutions emerged from deep belief in this notion of "gathering together".

### *New models [...] are emerging on the continent, driven by younger generations of Africans.*

New models exhibiting elements of culture as a public good are emerging on the continent, driven by younger generations of Africans, with new forces and energy for culture in music, film, food and fashion. The younger generation seeks new mechanisms – social and economic – for creating and providing culture as a public good. For example, some young fashion designers (such as *I Wear My Culture*) are working with rural communities, reclaiming and re-embracing African symbols and motifs, infusing them into high-end clothing, accessories, and designs and curating catwalks or performances. Others are reclaiming green protected zones and public and open spaces for culture, delivering performances and festivals that benefit communities.

Creative and production practices and processes are adapting – straddling sustainability, public good and market logic dimensions within African contexts. Others still, are embracing fair trade and fair culture ethos and movements. Powerful market forces, including digital environment ones, will pose a significant threat to their ability to navigate the frontier of public good for culture. They will need to be supported through multifaceted policies and measures and concomitant strategies. There are those on the continent who continue to focus their energies on the unfinished business of colonial dispossession, cultural appropriation (*Open Restitution Africa*), resource plunder and fettered cultural institutions, aiming to restore Africa-centred public good for culture – their culture.

## Conclusion

While highlighting historical disadvantages caused by slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism, it is critical to offer African models and practices for exploring new forces for an African consciousness and impetus for action within the public good for culture paradigm. The models illuminate tensions between the public good and market logic. And it introduces the notion of goodness as a derivative of public good in the African context. The resource constraints flagged threaten the sustainability of institutional autonomy in the governance of African culture. Continued confrontations with remnants of colonial institutions and substructures compound Africa's navigation of the public good for culture paradigm, provoking the need to re-examine whose culture is considered a public good and who derives benefit.

Within increasingly fluid global realities, Africans are spearheading transformed practices and institutions of culture, testing Africa-centeredness, mindset shifts, public good approaches and instruments that new generations of Africans will build upon. The African perspective on public good will continue to be shaped by its dynamic and diverse cultures. Urgency must be placed on the need to understand the African contextual factors as prerequisite to navigating the public good paradigm for culture; and to enriching policymaking instruments that are suited to Africa.

## Definitions

*Bira*: An all-night ritual, celebrated by Shona people in Zimbabwe.

*Chimurenga*: Zimbabwe's liberation war against British and Rhodesian colonial rule

*Mbende Jerusarema*: A popular dance style practiced by the Zezuru Shona people living in eastern Zimbabwe, viewed 04 March 2024, <https://ich.unesco.org/mbende-jerusarema>.

*Mbira*: A family of musical instruments, traditional to the Shona people of Zimbabwe, UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

<https://ich.unesco.org/en/state/zimbabwe-ZW?info=elements-on-the-lists>

*Shebeen*: An informal licensed drinking place in a township (in South Africa and Rhodesia).



# Dr Dwinita (Tita) Larasati

Indonesia

Dr Dwinita Larasati studied Industrial Product Design and Sustainability at Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB) Indonesia, Design Academy Eindhoven, and Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands. She serves as the Focal Point of Bandung City of Design, UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN), an Expert Council member of Bandung Creative Economy Committee, and an Advisor to the West Java Creative Economy and Innovation Committee.

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# Southeast Asia: A region of dynamic diversity

Dwinita Larasati

with the collaboration of Amira Rahardiani and Qonita Afnani Firdaus

## Introduction: what is at stake?

Archipelagic with a tropical climate, containing a chain of active volcanoes across the islands, Southeast Asia is one of the most biodiverse regions in the world due to its fertile lands and waters. Its rich natural resources initially determined the traditional customs and livelihoods of its people, who have incorporated natural phenomena into their social systems and beliefs, which are still practiced today. Southeast Asia is also among the most populated regions in the world, with a demography currently dominated by young people. Its cities have grown rapidly, along with economies and advanced technologies. Culture is practiced both actively and subconsciously; and the cultural sector has become formalised within governmental nomenclature, requiring policy reinforcement for its management and impact. Within the Southeast Asian context, culture should be recognised as a public good, considering its widespread practice and important role in society at large, which governments must acknowledge.

A renowned author and international adviser best known for popularising the Creative City concept, Charles Landry highlighted the following point in 2020 in one of his online lectures during the pandemic: it is not a question of “‘what is the value of culture’, but ‘what is the cost of NOT valuing arts/culture?’” How does this translate into realities in the Southeast Asian context? What is at stake if we do not value culture when the mechanisms to support, advance and measure cultural expressions are very limited? Could the current discussion on culture as a public good potentially open new conversations to address these issues, or are there more culturally responsive and relevant approaches?

## Cultural life in Southeast Asia

For people in Southeast Asia, culture is embedded in all aspects of life and reflected in traditional houses, objects, and tools. Southeast Asian languages dictate their manners and gestures; and their behaviours have evolved into ways of life. Their knowledge and skills have integrated with the natural environments and resources of their surroundings. Their social and belief systems have given rise to expressions and rituals in various forms, and so on; all of which are still evident today.

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Starting in the 15th century, cultural exchange occurred due to overseas trade and colonisation, which facilitated the movement of people and settlements. More recently, the momentum of cultural dynamics persisted with the rapid advancement of information media and technology. Given the region is mainly composed of archipelagoes, challenges lie in the even distribution of knowledge and technology, as well as the provision of basic services and infrastructure. Settlements in remote areas, including small islands and deep forests, such as the eastern part of Indonesia, are hardly accessible in terms of modernised infrastructure. As a consequence, rural people continue to predominantly engage in their daily occupations using traditional methods, often regarded as ‘living in closer harmony with nature,’ and demonstrate a stronger commitment to traditional ceremonies. Although subtle, the distinction between individuals residing in remote settlements and those in cities can be observed in the extent to which they naturally integrate traditional rituals and beliefs into their decision-making processes and in commemorating life’s milestones. These subtleties of practices and the crossover between culture and life make it complex to design appropriate and responsive cultural policies that are empathetic to this context. Framing culture as a public good could help bridge this situation between the urban, rural and remote, provided that cultural practices are comprehended within a similar sphere among individuals in a society. And the government should play a determined role to guarantee cultural rights and collective capabilities for all levels of society.

### **Culture, tourism and the impact of globalisation**

There is a structural discrepancy within governmental nomenclature that leads to a lack of incentives for the advancement of arts, culture and creativity outside of their norms, often resulting in parts of society becoming distanced from cultural practices. In many cases, cultural activities at the formal level are associated primarily with performances, entertainment, or events. In this context, there are different perceptions and interpretations of culture when practiced in different environments which can alter their actual meanings. There should be a narrative to introduce these meanings to the general public in order to establish a shared understanding.

The term 'culture' is commonly perceived as referring to 'traditional' customs, with 'traditional' encompassing both formal and informal institutions, including extended families, kinship-based organisations, and communal oversight of natural resources (Hoben, 1982, p.352; Rahardiani, 2022, p.15). This is influenced by globalisation, among other things, through common conduct established by some nations in parts of the world. This is evident in school/education systems and housing/neighbourhood arrangements, including perceptions of aesthetics; in urbanisation, where advanced facilities, services and infrastructure are widely accessible; and in population growth, particularly where generations who were born and raised in urban settlements dominate the demography (Fischer, 2000). These factors and other tangible aspects of the region become the global indicators of so-called progress, pursued by local, regional and national leaders and encouraged by policies, which often regard arts, culture and creativity as a tertiary sector in development strategies.

Culture – within the confined contexts of traditional ceremonies or rituals, performance or entertainment, heritage or historical assets, and educational materials – is gradually separated from daily conduct. Since cultural factors are not currently included in indicators for the primary measurement of development, there is no sense of urgency to systematically nurture and develop the cultural sector in modern society. Cultural practices flow organically, accommodated by the social fabric of Southeast Asian communities, which are often believed to be guided by customs and traditions that have persisted for decades. However, these traditions may not always align with people's daily behaviours, which leads to a disconnect between urban individuals and their cultural heritage and raises questions about which aspects of culture are truly embraced, and who has access. The decision is determined by the spiritual consensus and longstanding beliefs of the people in respective areas (Nugroho et al., 2018).

Cultural diversity is a rich and endless source of inspiration for the creation of distinct products and services in Southeast Asia, contributing to the income of production units at all scales with the rise of digitalisation (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2021). Countries whose government nomenclature combines the sectors of tourism and creative economy, such as Indonesia, have published statistical reports concerning cultural and creative industries as small and medium enterprises (Kementerian Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif, 2023). In Southeast Asia, this trend is particularly evident in destinations and venues that provide MICE (Meeting, Incentive, Convention, and Exhibition) facilities. A profound example can be seen in Doi Tung area, Chiang Rai, Thailand, where the late Princess Mother Srinagarindra initiated a reforestation project in 1986. Since then, Doi Tung has become a destination for wellness, while also being developed into a brand for locally produced items with premium quality.

This tendency is also derived from the Cultural and Creative Sectors (CCS) in the formulation of policy recommendations, and further reiterated in recent regional and global forums such as the G20 and the International Council of Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. Among the most notable reports, including *Inclusive Creative Economy and The Future of Work* (Larasati et al., 2020), these discussions focus on the strength of the region, with a demography dominated by younger generations, whose tech-savviness encourages the creation of inclusive works. The limited perception of art, culture and creativity as mere entertainment also warrants attention, related to the demand for stronger commitments to develop the sector (Buchoud et al., 2021). It is therefore critical to raise the following issues in global conversations on the cultural sector: access to funding resources, management of the informal economy in the cultural and creative sectors, support for the mobility of the sector's practitioners, recognition and protection of intellectual property (IP), and strategies for the roles of intermediaries in the cultural and creative sectors (CCSs).

In Southeast Asia, the CCSs are strongly connected to the tourism sector, and are therefore also tightly related to the contexts of place for its implementation, which comprises local people and customs, artefacts and history, and natural and built environments, which also determine the social system. All of this requires a framework that accommodates cultural expressions while providing opportunities for livelihood improvement. A strong connection can be seen in areas with unique historical artefacts or heritage that formulate the main narratives of the place. Take Borobudur Temple, a Buddhist Temple from the 8th century in Central Java, as an example. Visitors to Borobudur contribute to local revenue, a percentage of which is used to maintain the area and improve infrastructure. A comparable situation is evident in Duong Lam Village, Hanoi, the birthplace of Viet Nam's kings Phu Hung (761-802) and Ngo Quyen (896-944). The village conserves ancient artefacts and architectural heritage, attracting visitors and providing an opportunity for local inhabitants to sell their homemade products, accommodated by the village's tourism management. These activities enhance the mutually beneficial relationship between the villagers and visitors. However, an authority is required to manage the collective and IP rights, to control the local resources and to avoid overexploitation of the area.

### The practice of culture in Indonesia: from formal definitions to collective capabilities

At the national level, Indonesia has passed the Law on Cultural Advancement (No.5 Year 2017) which serves as a legal basis for formulating regulations and guidelines on the protection and development of cultural assets and expressions. The law states that: (1) The Central and/or Regional Governments are obliged to safeguard the Objects of Cultural Advancement; (2) Everyone can play an active role in safeguarding the Objects of Cultural Advancement; (3) Safeguarding the Objects of Cultural Advancement comprises of: a. Revitalization, b. Repatriation, and/or c. Restoration. The law also encourages government commitment to guarantee cultural expressions, and to allocate a cultural endowment fund.



The dissemination of the law's purposes requires substantial resources and literacy in order to yield concrete results. The central government has administered a number of measures at the national level, such as repatriating a number of historical artefacts from Netherlands and conducting the biannual National Cultural Week (Pekan Budaya Nasional). However, the main challenge remains in collecting data on cultural practitioners in all regions of Indonesia, including categorising and classifying their fields and skill levels. This data is particularly crucial for the government to be able to justify all forms of facilitations, and to formulate measurable strategies for cultural advancement.

Meanwhile, cultural practice occurs far more organically beyond its formal definition at the government level. The challenge lies in how people and communities use their collective capabilities to acquire various resources and maintain spaces and hubs to promote culture for all. This is particularly relevant in the context of Southeast Asian regions, where diverse cultural heritages play a crucial role alongside policies related to socio-cultural matters and are shaped by evolving traditions that consistently manifest as cultural identity.

*...cultural practice occurs far more organically beyond its formal definition at government level.*

In Indonesia, a common concern has emerged regarding diminishing cultural practices that commonly represent ethnically diverse identities, such as the use of vernacular languages, the comprehension and enactments of local wisdom, and the knowledge of artefacts related to traditional customs and occupations. Efforts have been made to make these appealing for the younger generation, by making them relevant to their current needs and contexts. An example for sustaining such local cultural practices is the Samsara Living Museum in Karangasem, Bali. Samsara was initiated and is run by a family who owns the area, employing local villagers and collaborating with the local government. The premises consist of huts for different purposes: one contains authentic artefacts for each phase of Balinese life, accompanied by the ritual scripts; another contains an installation that shows how a traditional alcoholic beverage is produced; while more spaces serve as an open kitchen, a small stage, and a meeting place. All objects are traditionally made of local materials, and all personnel are local inhabitants who conduct their daily occupations as accustomed but have additional hospitality skills to welcome visitors. The programmes of Samsara are tailored to accommodate activities for all ages, such as yoga, cooking, herbal-drink making, dancing, and script reading on lontar leaves. Overall, Samsara livens up Karangasem and generates income for the area, which is categorised as the poorest and the most disaster-prone area in Bali.

Another example can be taken from Ternate in East Nusa Tenggara Province, an establishment named Cengkeh Afo, home to the oldest *cengkeh* (clove) trees which are more than 200 years old. Set on these hills are walking paths and wooden huts, where visitors can enjoy local meals cooked with traditional manners and utensils, by women from nearby villages. At a smaller scale, Bandung Creative City Forum (BCCF) activated dense urban villages (*kampung*) by implementing the Design Thinking method and Urban Acupuncture concept. The programmes are adjusted to the characteristics of each *kampung*, with different outcomes: murals, pop-up cafes, public artworks, micro businesses, open air exhibitions, festivals, and many more.

The impacts of these activities may vary, and although the Cultural Advancement Law is enacted, the indicators of success of these programmes are not recorded in an organised manner due to their organic nature. In some cases, these activities have evidently encouraged the local governments to adopt relevant strategies of culture-based, participatory-method, urban space intervention into policies at the city level.

### Towards a cultural index system

There are various challenges for presentation and promotion of cultural expressions in Southeast Asia. These may commonly appear as restrictions in content, limitations in funding resources and lack of support from authorities. On restrictions in content, these emerge where activities and works of arts must not offend particular ethnicities and religions or beliefs, nor the governments or leaders. On the limitations in financial resources, a challenge emerges when cultural activities are discouraged from making a profit as they are regarded as a cost centre instead of an income generator, having a detrimental impact on their sustainability. And finally, the challenges on securing engagement from authorities, who typically only implement and support programmes that are included in development plans and strategies, with multiple constraints in budgeting and performance targets – noting that often culture is usually not high on the priority list.

If we position culture as a public good, referring to the technical definition that it is ‘non-rivalrous and non-excludable’, and that it should be primarily provided by the government, we need a certain mechanism that would guarantee support from authorities and policymakers to include art, culture and creativity as critical aspects in the development agenda. Moreover, we need an index system beyond economic and hard infrastructure achievements as the main indicators of growth and progress; and this kind of index system needs to be acknowledged as a measuring tool that can be applied consistently, and which acknowledges contextual nuance.

Indonesia Creative Cities Network (ICCN), a hub organisation established in 2015 that gathers leading creative communities in more than 260 cities in Indonesia, has attempted to elevate the roles of culture and creativity in its Creative City Index, piloted in 2017. An index system with a similar train of thought was developed by the West Java Creative Economy and Innovation Committee (KREASI) for West Java Province, which consists of 27 cities. In 2020, KREASI released an annual report on West Java Creative Economy Performance, including the creative city index with 10 determining variables, from aspects of cultural facilities, to access and practitioners. It is evident that mayors in West Java refer to these variables as an attempt to improve their performance index within the cultural and creative sectors. Due to this index, recent years have seen CCS improvements in cities whose leaders believe that advancement of the CCSs contributes to the positive impacts of city development, and therefore are committed to allocate a more substantial budget and programmes to the sectors.

## Conclusion

If positioning culture as a public good means binding the government to commit, support, facilitate and guarantee cultural practices, then this should result in nurturing a society that embraces its evolving identity, progresses history and dynamic attributes, and assures its right to express them. Governments in Southeast Asia should aim to promote culture as a basis for inspiration, knowledge and innovation, in an effort to strengthen identities and cooperation among countries in the region. Cultural and creative sectors will always include culture in their research and development phases, to achieve competitive advantages. Cultural practitioners in local traditional groups proceed with their society and cultural systems; and they should benefit from cultural policies.

It is important to consider culture as a public good. Still, there should be a determined role from the government to guarantee cultural rights and collective capabilities for all levels of society. A society with such comprehension of culture and cultural practices will be resilient, and adaptive to current and future disruptions. After all, valuing culture is not an option, but an inevitable consequence of being human.



# Stephen Wainwright

New Zealand

Mr Stephen Wainwright has been the Chief Executive of Creative New Zealand since 2006 and is a former Chair of IFACCA (2014-2019). Prior to being appointed Chief Executive, Mr Wainwright was Acting Chief Executive and had been a member of Creative New Zealand's senior management team since 2002 as Manager of Arts Infrastructure Services.

He has been involved in the strategic and business planning of Creative New Zealand for several years and has worked closely with many of New Zealand's leading arts organisations. Mr Wainwright graduated from Victoria University with a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Commerce and Administration.

Image credit: Creative New Zealand

# *Kia mua ka muri*, walking backwards into the future: reflections for an arts strategy in Aotearoa New Zealand

Stephen Wainwright

## Introduction

As shapers of content, arts practitioners and cultural actors are acutely alert to the significance of context and perspective. In New Zealand, the context for arts and culture will be broadly familiar to readers who understand the experiences of nations in the southern hemisphere.

New Zealand is a recently settled country – about 1,000 years ago Polynesians arrived in a series of great *waka* (canoe) fleets, followed much later in the 1800s by mostly British migrants. When the settlers were very much a minority they signed, on behalf of the British Crown, an agreement called the Treaty of Waitangi/Te Tiriti o Waitangi with the Indigenous people who became known as Māori.

As settler numbers grew, the agreement was increasingly dishonoured, a pattern that only worsened after the first New Zealand Parliament was elected in 1854. The actions of that body, their mental furniture, and institutional arrangements established New Zealand as an independent nation operating firmly within the British Empire, the Westminster system of government, and, ultimately, the wider British Commonwealth. Within such a Westminster system – aligned to the views of English theorist John Locke – the public good of the people was conferred through the political power of elected representatives in the parliament.

A century later, in the wake of World War Two, elected parliamentary representatives began turning their attention to culture. This they did with a gaze held firmly on the English model. This context was not neutral, rather it was imbued with a sense that ‘the English way’ was innately superior, politically, socially, financially, and culturally. Fast forward nearly 80 years to 2024, and it is striking how little dialogue there has been around where we have been, where we are now, and where we should head in terms of art, culture, and the role of government. This lack of dialogue has been accompanied by a lack of intention and appetite to do the hard policy work from the Centre, to set and regularly re-set direction.

Walking backwards towards the future has a key circular dimension. The year 2040 will mark 200 years since the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Arts practitioners in New Zealand have held that Te Tiriti is a compass that should guide any national cultural strategy work. In *Recognizing public value* (2013), the public value work of Professor Mark H Moore is a further compass that can be employed in the process. Jointly, these compasses will enable us to confidently and ambitiously chart a path forward. A path informed by our distinct historical perspectives, and home in the South Pacific.

### The role of culture in the Westminster system of New Zealand

The Westminster system of democracy brought constitutional monarchy to New Zealand and, more broadly, the South Pacific. It also brought the colonial gaze, which turned New Zealand's sights, with most intention and regularity, back to Britain. This shift was particularly pronounced when it came to government support of arts and culture.

The main Government vehicle for supporting arts practitioners is the Arts Council. The Arts Council of Great Britain was established in 1946. Eighteen years later, the monarch gifted her name to the establishment of New Zealand's Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council. It is indicative that the first Chief Executive in New Zealand was plucked straight from the Arts Council of Great Britain.

New Zealand culture was once summarised by as being comprised of 'rugby, racing, and beer.'<sup>13</sup> If this suggests to the reader that arts and culture were peripheral to the interests of the general public at the time, let alone the Crown, this is because they were. For a long time, from a government point of view arts and culture were seen as marginal. The establishment of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council pointed to a clear, if slight, shift in thinking in 1964. Arts and culture would not have dedicated governmental representation until the Ministry of Cultural Affairs was established in 1991. The development of New Zealand cultural institutions post-World War Two was not part of some grand plan – it was ad hoc.

### *National market dynamics, the role of parliament, and 'public' benefit in legislation*

In 1945, New Zealand had a population of only 1.7 million people, so it was understood that if arts and cultural activities, at any scale, were deemed to be socially desirable, then it would be the responsibility of the Crown to support those activities. However, from a simple 'citizen consumption' point of view, the domestic market was simply too small, and demand for cultural deliverables too nascent, to expect such offerings as opera, orchestra, ballet or theatre to be self-sustaining.

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<sup>13</sup> Written and sung by Rod Derret. 1965. *Rugby, racing and beer*. His Masters Voice. Phonograph, 45 rpm.

It fell, then, to Parliament to arbitrate value by passing legislation to support the establishment of new institutions like the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, through annual appropriations of the Crown's budget.

Good legislation is both clear and enabling. The statutory purpose of Arts Councils has remained, when significantly reviewed by parliament at regular intervals (1963, 1974, 1994, 2014), as being 'to encourage, promote, and support the arts for the benefit of all New Zealanders.'<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that there is nothing in the legislation that seeks to describe the nature of those benefits.

### *Inconsistent and incomplete 'government' public good thinking*

New Zealand has two tiers of government – local and central. Local government is comprised of 78 divergent territorial authorities. The *Local Government Act 2022* is quite clear in its stipulation that these councils are responsible for 'promoting the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of their communities.'<sup>15</sup>

Conversely, unlike local governments, the central government – that is, the New Zealand Government through which political authority is exercised – has no agreed 'higher level or longer-term outcomes' expressed with such clarity towards which it can work. Instead, its goals are as a consequence political, short-term, and variable. NZ Treasury officials under the last Labour Government (2017-2023) advanced a 'Living Standards Framework.' This framework identified and described three capitals – natural human, social, and physical – alongside traditional financial (economic) capital, positioning them as four, equally important dimensions of societal wellbeing. This was not adopted by the Government or implemented.

The far-sighted Welsh Government's *Well-being of Future Generations Act of 2015*<sup>16</sup> sets out a clear framework. It provides a legally binding common purpose and sets out seven wellbeing goals that any government must address including a 'Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language.'

### Go your own way – approaches to public value in culture

In this domestic government context, then, entities like the Arts Council have a permissive environment in which to articulate how they will encourage, promote, and support the arts for the benefit of all New Zealanders. There are many philosophical approaches to public value in culture, three of which are outlined ahead.

#### *The rights-based approach*

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<sup>14</sup> The Arts Council of New Zealand/ Toi Aotearoa Act, 2014, p.3.

<sup>15</sup> The Local Government Act 2002. Part 2. Subpart 1 -Purpose of Local Government. Section 10. (1) b. p.37.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.gov.wales/well-being-of-future-generations-wales>

This approach was referenced by culture Ministers at UNESCO's Mondiacult World Conference (2022), and is potentially on the radar of the United Nations in terms of culture as a Sustainable Development Goal. Further, it is an approach that many Indigenous people and arts practitioners would likely favour, and it is one that certainly repositions culture from a nice-to-have to something more fundamental.

In Western countries where this approach has some traction, for example Eire (the Republic of Ireland), a prerequisite seems to be that culture already has an elevated place in the collective public consciousness. It follows, then, that Eire is notable for its suite of policies that support creatives, including by delivering tax relief and trialling a basic income<sup>17</sup> for arts practitioners. In New Zealand Political leadership have felt that a rights-based approach such as a universal basic income for practitioners would be out-of-step with mainstream public opinion, and have not been comfortable promoting a rights based approach.

#### *The market-based economic development/market failure approach*

The market-based economic development approach generally involves public money acting as a lure to attract and leverage other money. This approach is common in the film industry. The economic benefits can be measured broadly. For example, former New Zealand Prime Minister John Key (2008-2016) was confident that government investment in the filming of *The Hobbit* would have direct and indirect benefits. Direct benefits included the economic benefits from the exceptionally large cast and crew spending a lot of money over a long time in New Zealand. Prime Minister Key also anticipated the indirect benefits of a commercially successful film franchise encouraging tourism.<sup>18</sup>

With a lot of smaller scale performing arts ventures such as theatre, orchestra, and ballet, the main economic rationale for government support is so-called market failure. From a public good point of view – where a public good is something that is not provided to some individuals without being provided to all – this approach enables the arts company to reduce ticket prices to the point they are affordable enough that the market no longer fails, and enough people can afford to buy subsidised tickets to ensure the organisation is sustainable (at least under somewhat stable and predictable market conditions).

#### *The 'in-between' approach*

The current approach for government support of the arts in New Zealand tends to occupy a space between the rights-based approach and the market-based approach; a type of 'in-between approach.' Occasionally there is extra investment by the Crown such as the year 2000 Cultural Recovery Package, advanced by Prime Minister Helen Clark. That 'Package' was primarily a response to a financial crisis – namely, arts institutions teetering on the edge of

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<sup>17</sup> The [Basic Income for the Arts](#) (BIA) is a pilot scheme in Ireland that aims to support artists and creative workers.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/hobbit-movies-be-made-new-zealand>



insolvency following a period of financial austerity – for which a recovery package was designed and implemented.

The New Zealand Cultural Recovery Package was over 20 years ago. In the wider Asia Pacific Region, we have recently seen the Singapore Government allocate an extra SGD\$100 million (€160,000 approx.) to the *SG Arts Plan* over the 2023-2027 period. Meanwhile, the Australian Government's National Cultural Policy, *Revive*, is a five-year plan to invest an additional AUD\$286 million (€180 million approx.) over four years, primarily through Creative Australia (formerly the Australia Council for the Arts).

### A Cultural Strategy for New Zealand?

It is a basic premise, especially in government, that if something matters, direction should be set through a corresponding strategy or plan that garners attention, support, and resources in a way that is meaningful at both the political and community level.

In October 2023, New Zealanders elected a new government and now have a new Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage. Arts sector organisations and participants are keen to lean into any interest from the Minister to develop a strategy, as they consider that the system is ripe for a fresh approach, that moves the system forward from the ambivalence of the 'in between' approach. A national strategy for the arts in New Zealand also raises the prospect of a rich intersection between different ideological perspectives playing out in public. The question of 'whose strategy?' is fundamentally important, both politically and substantively.

Minister Goldsmith, Minister for Arts and Culture signalled his interest in progressing a Ministry-led 'top-down' strategy that Crown and community players can feed into. The Ministry's authority to do this is not in question, though how it is done is symbolically and practically significant.

*At Creative New Zealand and at a local community level the better policy work has tended to result from a 'for, by, and with' codesign approach.*

Approaches to policymaking and direction-setting vary widely – there is no one right way to go about it. At Creative New Zealand and at a local community level the better policy work has tended to result from a 'for, by, and with' codesign approach.

### The place of Te Tiriti in any cultural policy

Many leaders in New Zealand's cultural sector anticipate that any cultural policy would be necessarily shaped by Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi – New Zealand's founding document representing a partnership between Māori and the British Crown.

Genuine partnership and power-sharing with Māori are implicit here, as is the idea that the Crown should be using its authority to empower others to self-determine, in particular Māori. Interestingly, Creative Australia is adopting this approach with its *Revive* policy, partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and a separate Board to advance this work.

How any cultural policy might acknowledge and reflect different worldviews becomes very real at this point. Māori knowledge, epistemology, values, and methodologies are quite different from those of the Crown, which borrows significantly from the Westminster model. The inherent and dynamic tension between these two positions can be a great strength, however, and critical to expressing perspectives that are unique to New Zealand's place in the world, as a cultural policy should. The interest in resetting in a way that honours Te Tiriti/The Treaty is timely, as the nation fast approaches the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the document.

The central place of Te Tiriti/The Treaty in any cultural policy must be emphasised. Further, it is important to highlight that there are now, more than ever, many other community perspectives including NZLGBTQI+, Pacific, and other significant recent migrant communities more assertively seeking a seat at the proverbial policy shaping table.

### Towards a Public Value Account for culture

The absence of an overarching philosophical tree from which to graft a strategy can be viewed as both a limitation and opportunity, and it takes us back to where we started – public value and, indeed, the role of the political environment in determining public value.

The following passages make the case for the Public Value Account championed by Mark H Moore in his publication *Recognizing Public Value* (2013). What is superior about this approach is that it is a practical and actionable tool for policymakers that can be applied at any level of interest – on something as broad as a national cultural policy or as granular as the work of individual institutions. If an organisation has a legislative mission, so much the better.

Moore's key elements of the Public Value Account are: (a) Achievement of Collectively Valued Social Outcomes; (b) Mission Achievement and (c) Consideration of both effectiveness and efficiency and Justice and Fairness.

This definition of public value recognises that if the wider system cannot manage (a)-(c) then it leaves the door open for every entity to lay out for themselves the ultimate values their enterprises seek to produce and embody in their operations.

Ideally there would be some synergy between the Public Value Account of: (1) those accountable for the perspectives of the wider cultural system at a national level; and (2) each organisation working within that wider cultural system.

This approach is very appealing for three reasons. Firstly, the three elements of the Public Value Account compel anyone who engages with it to be clear about what should really matter and communicate that to any reader. Secondly, the explicit recognition of the three dimensions of value is also succinct and salient – the significance of the views of the external authorising environment (that is, elected officials) as the ultimate arbiters of value is clever. This critical element is invisible in most frameworks. Thirdly, it is the essence of wise simplicity – a two-page scorecard featuring a crisp and powerful articulation of value that is vastly more fit for purpose than current accountability documents like statements of intent and cultural strategies that have eloquent prose but are murky on articulating value.

## Conclusion

Articulating the higher purpose(s) of why the Crown spends public money on arts and culture is a critical aspect of Moore's public value approach. It reflects John Locke's view of parliament as the arbiter of public good on behalf of the community.

Pleasingly, the thinking of both Locke and Moore transcend the dominant economic perspectives of value. They veer towards and make space for the wider wellbeing outcomes in a way that caters well to individuation by organisations and reflects the range of community perspectives.

In New Zealand, where Te Tiriti/The Treaty between the Crown and Māori is a founding document, the notion of collectively valued social outcomes becomes a much richer and more nuanced opportunity for articulating cultural value.

A fresh, practical, and actionable approach is recommended to foster more conducive policymaking, as are utilising the key levers of Te Tiriti/The Treaty partnership design and a Public Value Account for culture.

A cultural strategy is therefore critical, and well overdue. As Dr Michael King, one of New Zealand's great historians and navigators of race, culture, and identity cautioned: 'We've got to be able to trace our own footsteps and listen to our own voices, or we'll cease to be New Zealanders, or being New Zealanders will cease to have any meaning.'



# Dr Matina Magkou

Greece

Dr Matina Magkou is a researcher, lecturer and consultant in cultural and creative industries, cultural policies and international cultural cooperation. She is an associated researcher at the SIC.Lab Méditerranée of the University Côte d'Azur in France. She holds a PhD in Leisure, Communication and Culture from the University of Deusto (Spain). Dr Magkou has lectured at various universities in Greece, Spain, Belgium, Germany and France and is a Fulbright Schuman fellow.

She has worked for festivals, theatre productions and large-scale events (Olympic Games Athens 2004, European Capital of Culture Patras 2006, International Expo Zaragoza 2008) and for public institutions such as the European Parliament, the Greek Ministry of Education and the Municipality of Athens. Her consultancy work involves collaborating with cultural networks and organisations, evaluating projects, facilitating learning processes and project managing complex projects. Dr Magkou serves as a Board member of ENCATC (2024-25) and co-founder of KOΛEKTIVA for culture and social innovation.

Image credit: Salzburg Global Seminar/Richard Schabetsberger

# Participatory practices in the narrative of culture as a public good: A European perspective

Matina Magkou

## Introduction

Within the European context,<sup>19</sup> the narrative of culture as a public good entails tracing the shift from an historical tradition in which the state provides for the arts and culture, to a neo-liberal and entrepreneurial perspective that positions culture as an industry and a driver of economic growth, distanced from state responsibility. The paradigm of culture as a public good has the potential to situate culture as a legitimate area of policy, whether or not we believe that the state should intervene where the market fails to produce socially efficient outcomes.

In recent years in Europe, civil society and participatory decision-making practices that place citizens at the centre of cultural governance have been strengthened. As such, it is crucial to initiate public discussions within cultural policy debates – in Europe and globally – to unpick the notion of culture as a public good, as it remains somewhat ambiguous. It is also important to consider whether alternative notions of culture and public value could provide a more suitable framework to bring about necessary change.

## The weight of culture's public value

Although Europe is home to diverse cultural policy models, there exists a robust tradition of recognising and safeguarding the public value of culture, at both national and regional levels. Nevertheless, as a recent European Parliament briefing on culture and development maintains: 'Although the notion of culture as a public good and public support for cultural public institutions are widely accepted in the EU, culture is still perceived as a cost, rather than an asset' (Pasikowska-Scnass & Widuto 2022, p.2).

The public value of culture and its intrinsic and instrumental worth are topics that have long

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<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that when discussing Europe in this text, the insights predominantly originate from within the European Union framework, which has set the scene in cultural policy developments in the continent.

been debated across the continent. This is linked to two prevailing cultural policy paradigms that have coexisted in most countries in the European Union (EU) over the past few decades, each of which is rooted in distinct interpretations of culture's public value.

The first paradigm relates to the 'cultural industries turn in cultural policy' (Beauregard 2018) that coincided with the 2008 economic downturn. Budget cuts in the cultural sector were rationalised, leading to a shift away from regulation and subsidies and toward more market-oriented strategies. These strategies included diversification of income-generating streams, heightened reliance on private investment policies and fostering an entrepreneurial ethos. This paradigm shift emphasised the imperative of the sector's self-sustainability and the need to prove its 'value' to continue receiving public sector support. Consequently, funders have been gripped by 'evaluation mania' and the sector has strived to demonstrate its (public) value, a necessity further highlighted during the COVID-19 crisis (Magkou 2021).

Secondly, the public value of culture is now intricately linked with notions of social returns generated by cultural policies and a 'participatory turn in cultural policy' (Bonet & Négrier 2018). Driven by EU initiatives, there has been clear political commitment to recognise culture's role to foster social inclusion and diversity. These elements have become vital in a continent founded on the principle of unity in diversity and shaped by significant migration flows in recent decades. The EU has placed significant emphasis on recognising citizens' participation in cultural activities as a catalyst for enhancing civic engagement, democracy and social cohesion (European Commission 2023). Concurrently, the issue of cultural participation has remained a shared concern (Stevenson et al 2015), with policymaking and public funding efforts to address 'non-participation' often falling short of achieving a fully democratised culture or some kind of cultural democracy (Jancovich & Stevenson 2023).

Both approaches have validated policy decisions in countries across the region and have strengthened civil society. This development came as a response to the retreat of the state from funding culture in many countries and a growing awareness among populations of the power of collective agency.

### European civil society as a pivotal force in the governance of culture

Since the 1980s, civil society engagement in the cultural sector has grown stronger through cooperation across Europe. This growth was initially driven by cultural operators' desire to connect with peers, but since the 1990s it has been equally supported by a concerted effort by the EU to foster a shared cultural space. This effort has simultaneously advanced the regional politics of belonging by using culture to bridge the gap between citizens and the EU; made a case for the use of participatory practices in decision-making; and developed cultural audiences' engagement with democratic practices. All of which serve as arguments for public funding for culture at the EU level and across member states.

In 2007, the European Agenda for Culture set a pace for Europe's strategic objectives. Since then, several tools for cooperation and participatory policymaking have been introduced. This includes the open method of coordination and Voices of Culture and Cultural Forums, which facilitate exchanges between policymakers and the sector. Despite imperfections, these developments highlight the role, dynamism and diversity of civil society, which has urged governments to dedicate at least 2 percent of the EU's pandemic Recovery Fund to culture through the #CulturalDealforEurope<sup>20</sup> campaign; and following the 2024 European elections, pushed for an overarching strategy to ensure the sustainability and future of the European project. We have also seen an increasing role for regional cultural networks as multilevel cultural governance platforms.

### The emergence of a politics of the commons

In response to malaise stemming from economic crises, climate change, political disillusionment, and discrepancies within liberal democracies, in recent years Europe has seen the emergence of commons as sites for new value systems within the cultural sphere. Commons is a form of social organisation, which serves as alternatives to both capitalist production and the traditional role of governments in defending and leading the public interest (Bertacchini et al 2012).

*The notion of commons empowers a specific community – rather than government [...] or market actors – to assume responsibility for the use and governance of a cultural resource, guided by values of democracy, sharing, common ownership, solidarity and peer-to-peer interactions.*

The notion of commons empowers a specific community – rather than governmental entities or market actors – to assume responsibility for the use and governance of a cultural resource, guided by the values of democracy, sharing, common ownership, solidarity and peer-to-peer interactions.

Regionally, there has been interest in exploring such arrangements further. One example has been the Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities<sup>21</sup> project, funded by the EU, which brought

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<sup>20</sup> <https://culturaldeal.eu/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.spacesandcities.com/>

together cultural actors and local governments to explore urban challenges from the perspective of the commons and encouraged collaboration between citizens and public authorities to codesign public policies. The project proposed support and recognition for a commons policy framework that could address democracy, inclusion, and social justice. In addition, GLAMMONS<sup>22</sup>, funded by the EU via its key funding programme for research and innovation Horizon Europe, explores commons arrangements, financing and participation strategies that emerge around community-led organisations in the GLAM<sup>23</sup> sector. Such an approach gives agency to citizens as rightsholders of culture and has inspired funding practices in neighbouring regions. For example, in the Arab region, Al Mawred recently launched a call for Reclaiming Our Commons<sup>24</sup> which aims to contribute to building cooperative, participatory, and commons-based approaches to creative processes.

Alongside strong and publicly funded cultural institutions, there is a wealth of alternative cultural spaces in European countries, which often result from grassroots and citizen-led movements. This phenomenon is rooted in claims by young people and artistic movements to reclaim spaces for artists, creatives and communities established in the 1980s. These spaces are mainly organised via community-based management practices, separate to dominant (market) dynamics, that emerge from a desire for social and grassroots-led spatial requalification, and promote a model of autonomous and non-institutional citizen participation, focused on self-management and cocreation.

In recent years, France has implemented a public policy aimed at supporting spaces that foster citizen-led encounters<sup>25</sup> – such as fab labs, coworking spaces and alternative cultural spaces – under the general term *tiers lieux* (Aroufoune et al 2024). The policy promotes the commons as a part of the identity of these places, based on the conviction that commons allow for the renewal of partnership tools in public action by legitimising experiments in codesigning public policies, founded on the dynamics of citizen engagement.

### Public spaces, cultural rights and citizen participation in cultural life

The 2019 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on cultural rights emphasised the significant role that public spaces play to facilitate people's ability to exercise their rights, and called for a human rights-based approach to policymaking. In Europe there is growing recognition of the importance of access to public space, however, across countries peoples' experience using public space as common cultural ground differs. This is particularly evident considering the rise of nationalist, populist, and far-right regimes, which often restrict participatory approaches in public spaces. But the artistic sector has been very committed in approaching communities on the ground and using public space as an arena for democratic cultural activity. An example of

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<sup>22</sup> <https://glammons.eu/>

<sup>23</sup> GLAMs stands for Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums.

<sup>24</sup> <https://mawred.org/reclaiming-our-commons/?lang=en>

<sup>25</sup> <https://francetierslieux.fr>



this is the recent EU funded project, (UN)COMMON SPACES<sup>26</sup> of the IN SITU platform for arts in public space, in which artists engaged closely with citizens to create meaningful work for the communities, reflecting on audience development practices beyond merely numerical indicators of success (Magkou 2024). And while public funding for such kinds of work has shrunk in various countries, artists and cultural operators have found ways to make things happen and mobilise various resources and communities. However, this does not mean that such cultural activity should be excluded from the idea of culture as public good, as it is accessible to all and irreducible. On the contrary, it just proves that the sector has the resilience to venture into difficult places and do meaningful work against all odds.

### Europe's responsibility for culture and impact at a global level

Today, Europe remains a central actor in the global landscape of public funding architecture for culture and development – through both EU mechanisms, reinforced by the *EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations* (European Commission 2016), and through the actions of its member states. The EU has made significant progress to redefine cultural diplomacy, by placing emphasis on cultural relations, people-to-people exchanges and mutual understanding as foundational elements of its engagement with other continents and recognising the important role of non-state actors.

In recent years, we have seen a growing movement of critical reflection around international cultural cooperation that challenges dominant Eurocentric discourses and classical epistemological frameworks, advocating for *fairness* as a conceptual and operational framework for cultural cooperation practices (Magkou *et al* 2023; Hampel 2017). This is exemplified by the European Union National Institutes of Culture (EUNIC) toolkit on fairness in cultural relations.<sup>27</sup> Such a stance requires us to not only acknowledge inequality and injustice in historical contexts, but also in present-day knowledge systems and cultural practices. It also necessitates a thorough examination of public funders' roles in determining whose culture, or ways of doing and experiencing culture, should be considered as a public good.

### Culture as a public or a common good?

Contemplating the concept of culture as a public good from a European perspective should underscore the complexity of this approach. It should also ask whether this is an economic, a social or a political term, as this will influence its deployment.

The term 'culture as a public good' has been subject to debate and remains ambiguous, not only for cultural actors but also for society as a whole. The concept of *public good* – viewed through an economic lens, where being 'public' implies universal accessibility and non-

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.in-situ.info/activities/un-common-spaces-2020-2024-e39316eb>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.eunicglobal.eu/fair-collaboration>

excludability – positions the state as a primary overseer, regulator, and custodian of this good. This perspective is crucial for holding public policymakers accountable and confronting them with their obligations. Nevertheless, culture should not be addressed merely as a shared asset and a universal right for all but also as a *collective responsibility*. We must honour its diversity, preserve it in all its forms, and ensure it remains accessible to everyone. Recognising the importance of civil society in the cultural sector and its governance will be essential for us to achieve this.

*The concept of public good – viewed through an economic lens, where being ‘public’ implies universal accessibility and non-excludability – positions the state as a primary overseer, regulator, and custodian of this good.*

The term ‘common good,’ rooted in moral and political philosophy, can encompass either the shared interests among members or the resources and amenities that cater to these shared interests. In his *Politics* Aristotle articulated a conception of the common good employing the terms *koinon agathon* (common good) and *koinei sumpheron* (mutual advantage). For Aristotle, this term holds a political and moral significance, as it refers to the welfare and flourishing of a community, not merely regarding its conditions of living, but of *living well*.

There are two perspectives on approaching culture as a *common good*: one views culture as serving the common good; the other sees culture as part of the common good. In both cases, it is crucial to establish the mechanisms that enable civil society actors to equally participate in cultural life and to manage culture. Not in the sense of replacing the state or other public actors but working hand-in-hand to cocreate better conditions for culture collectively.

## Conclusion

Delving into the intricacies of the term ‘culture as a public good’, as well as its diverse epistemological foundations, is essential to unpack its meaning and possible application. The UNESCO publication *Re-shaping policies for creativity* states that participatory cultural policymaking strengthens culture as a public good (UNESCO 2022, p. 37). Perhaps here lies the meeting point of the notions of public and common good; in that they are interrelated and interdependent.

Any narrative about culture as a common good, which views people as equal rightsholders of culture, or as a public good, which addresses market failures, must not overlook the need for adequate support for cultural workers. There is a direct correlation between establishing sustainable and resilient policies that advance culture as a good and those that foster diversified opportunities for the growth of cultural professionals.



# Dr Tarisi Vunidilo

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Dr Tarisi Vunidilo holds an MSc in Anthropology and a Postgraduate Diploma in Māori and Pacific Development, from the University of Waikato, New Zealand. In 2016, she completed her PhD in Pacific Studies at the Centre of Pacific Island Studies, University of Auckland, New Zealand. She has also obtained a Postgraduate Diploma in Arts, majoring in Archaeology from Australian National University, Canberra, and a BA in Geography, History and Sociology from University of South Pacific, Suva, Fiji. Dr Vunidilo worked at the Fiji Museum from 1994 -2001, before relocating to New Zealand.

From 2012-2018, Dr Vunidilo served as a Professional Teaching Fellow and Lecturer at the University of Auckland. She then became an Assistant Professor in Anthropology at the University of Hawaii-Hilo from 2013-2023. She currently holds the position of Assistant Professor at the College of Ethnic Studies, California State University in Los Angeles. Dr Vunidilo currently holds a Research Fellow position at the University of Gottingen, Germany as part of the Sensitive Provenances-Human Remains from Colonial Contexts (2021-2024).

Image credit: Tarisi Vunidilo

# Museums as public goods: A Pacific perspective

Tarisi Vunidilo

Issues of culture as a public good are the subject of much discussion and debate, particularly in the fields of social and cultural studies. A public good is a commodity or service that every member of a society can use without reducing its availability to all others. Typically, a public good is provided by a government and funded through taxes. Examples of a public good include a town road, park, or school. National defence is a public good. A public good may also be a basic need such as access to clean air and drinking water (Fernando, 2024).

In the culture and heritage sector, museums should be recognised as public goods, as they offer services that are extensions of cultural education from homes and schools and deserve public funding and should be freely accessed by members of communities. In the Pacific today, museums are being reclaimed as sites of decolonisation by centring local and Indigenous knowledge and highlighting self-determination for communities concerned.

Amongst the current debates within the social and cultural spheres, national museums lie at the heart of discussions. In 2022, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) adopted a new definition for museums: 'A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.' Their collections, the presentation and interpretation of collections, as well as processes of repatriation, are inextricably linked to restoring cultural identity.

It is of great importance to clarify and demystify the idea and links between museums and public goods, and to provide case studies on how to contextualise museums and culture in Pacific communities. Moreover, there should be an increase in the recognition of culture and museums as public goods beyond their economic aspect but rather as a dimension of society.

## Reclaiming Museums

Over the past few decades, relationships between museums and specific cultural groups, as sources of cultural content including for Indigenous peoples, have changed dramatically for the better. Communities have demanded a bigger voice in how their cultural heritage, in both tangible and intangible forms, is curated and represented in museums.

*Communities have demanded a bigger voice in how their cultural heritage, in both tangible and intangible forms, is curated and represented in museums.*

These changes have led to increased collaborations between museums and source communities. Such collaborative work, among other things, has revealed diversity in the way people experience and understand their cultural heritage. Changing relationships have also given rise to the demand of traditional artifacts currently housed in international museum collections in Europe, including ancestral remains to be returned to their source communities, especially in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and the state of Hawai'i in the United States of America.

Between 2021 and 2022, ancestral remains were returned from Germany to the State of New South Wales from Grassi Museum in Leipzig, as well as from the University of Gottingen to the Museum of New Zealand in Wellington, and to the Office of Hawaiian Affairs in Hawai'i. This requires new museum ethics to be applied that recognise and reflect greater respect for people's cultural and human rights. Cultural rights are human rights that aim at assuring the enjoyment of culture, group identity, sense of being, claim to territory and resources, legitimacy and historical continuity. Some of the components include language, cultural and artistic production, participation in cultural life, cultural heritage, intellectual property rights, authors' rights, and minorities' access to culture, which are all key in a museum setting.

Museums around the world today should strive to be relevant to their communities and stakeholders, as they are where scholarship and inspiration take place. Culturally specific museums set the example in how to achieve these goals, such as the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Vanuatu Cultural Centre and the Fiji Museum. In the case of the Te Papa Museum in New Zealand, it hosts Māori tribes (*iwi*) that are invited to showcase their tribal stories and traditions. They also invite community groups – such as Indian, Italian and Polish communities who have called New Zealand home – to be represented in their museums, drawing from their existing collections as well as accessing community stories and voices. In fact, these have shown how programmes that serve the community can be placed at the centre of the museum model – so much so that many museums today, including natural

history museums, are developing successful public programmes that highlight particular cultural group/s in the community. These museum programmes form a bridge between museums and communities, where local community members visit the museum by contributing their time to participate in cultural activities as part of leisure and enjoyment. The notion of leisure is key to communities, encouraging them to spend quality time with their loved ones in museums and cultural hubs.

In recent years, with several nations activating processes of decolonisation, many museum critics still believe that museums are agents of colonial influence on colonised nations. Over time, there has been an element of acceptance in this view, in particular with those who sympathise with the colonised against the colonisers. For instance, the Native American communities' museums and cultural centres embody, represent, and reinforce tribal knowledge, sensibilities, and morality in ways that are not necessarily consonant with conventional museum practices (Lonetree, 2008, p. 44). Lonetree goes on to say that 'for generations, native knowledge structures have been marginalized relative to official versions of knowledge. This does not necessarily mean that this subjugated knowledge remains marginalized, however – on the contrary, Native American communities' museums have proven themselves to be innovative centres that attempt to infuse alternative ways of knowing into a public sphere' (Lonetree, 2008).

In many cases, museums have subsidies on entry that contribute to the coffers of the museum and serve to fund outreach to communities. Cultural institutions are no doubt contributors to the economy of a nation as they employ people and services; while many also have ancillary activities that help with their turnover to bring in philanthropic and sponsorship financial opportunities. In addition, audiences from near and far contribute to tourism and other hospitality associated services, amongst other means, that also contribute to the creative economy.

In bad economic times, most museums are vulnerable. Culturally specific museums can weather this challenge if they remain relevant to their communities and reflect broader themes of universal human experience, and provided they have leadership that supports local communities. As long as these institutions think carefully about their mission and who they serve, they will play a vital and relevant role in the lives of their constituents in how they experience the museum. In a society that values diverse viewpoints, they can make an especially important cultural and economic contribution.

For example, the island nation of Fiji relies on tourism as its main economic driver. Tourists who visit the country contribute tourist dollars to the local communities through accommodation, transport and other local activities. It is critical that culture is embedded in the tourism outputs and equally that tourism sees culture as a key driver. In the 1990s, the influence of regional organizations such as South Pacific Tourism Organization (formerly The Tourism Council of the South Pacific), the Australian South Pacific Cultures Fund (ASPC) now

renamed as the Pacific Regional Development Program, UNESCO and the Pacific Islands Museums Association made a huge impact in the growth of museums and cultural centres in the Pacific to strengthen the links between the culture and tourism. The capacity building initiatives funded by ASPC provided support to Pacific Island museums to have local people trained in the various fields of employment in the museum sector, which again has contributed to job creation. These programmes need to continue on an ongoing basis to support Pacific museums in capacity building at the local level in both the medium and long term.

### Indigenous and Pacific Island Sustainable Approaches to Museums

From an Indigenous perspective, museums are buildings created for visitors and tourists. Many believe that museums are institutions that do not serve local communities. The word 'museum' has classical origins. In its Greek form, *mouseion*, it meant 'seat of the muses' and designated a philosophical institution or a place of contemplation (Lewis, 2012).

*Pacific museums these days are becoming places of diverse knowledge systems transforming into spaces of decolonisation [...] decisionmakers in the institution are no longer solely coming from a coloniser perspective, but from within the community, informed and influenced...*

Pacific museums these days are becoming places of diverse knowledge systems transforming into spaces of decolonisation – especially in the Global South, where decisionmakers in the institution are no longer solely coming from a coloniser perspective, but from within the community, informed and influenced by the source community. There has been international research and debate around the roles of museums, collections and repatriation that is critical to today's discussion. In the history of museum development, it is well known that objects were acquired and reshuffled with other institutions.

Since the Second World War, more collections were returned to their rightful owners as a result of decolonisation and the reassertion of Indigenous and minority culture (Bouquet, 2012, p. 10). Many museums around the world have had to rethink their position and responsibilities in relation to repatriation and colonial legacies. Negotiation processes are in place to legally prepare museums for demands by owners.

In the Pacific, colonial governments and their respective leaders from Great Britain and France were influential in the colonial mindset in the development of museums. In the case of Fiji, the



Fiji Museum was developed in the early 1900s (and opened to the public in 1955), even though one of its old legislations (*the Archaeological and Palaeontological Interests Act*) has been in effect since 1904. This reflected the growing interest in archaeology and palaeontology in Fiji at that time. Missionaries also took part in collecting artefacts after converting locals to Christianity and destroying their objects of worship, or took away with them in some cases. With increasing numbers of museums and cultural centres in the Pacific region (currently numbered at 45), a regional organisation was created in 1994 known as the Pacific Islands Museums Association. The organisation aims to facilitate the safeguarding and preservation of the Pacific's heritage by disseminating cultural heritage information among Pacific Islanders and advising governments on policies to manage cultural heritage.

### Towards a future of museums as public goods

There are numerous possible avenues and actions to ensure that culture and heritage (and museums) can be considered public goods. The first is to encourage the establishment of culturally appropriate and inclusive cultural centres, to reclaim cultural narratives. Museums are places of congregation that present cultural experiences to unite and inspire rather than divide. Curators and cultural practitioners share a renewed focus on how culture and heritage shape who we are. In the United States for example, in the last 40 years, a vibrant mix of the arts, natural history and history museums have been established that contribute to the increasing numbers of culturally specific museums around the country, such as the Museum of the American Indian in Washington DC, the Arab American National Museum in Michigan, the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, and the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco.

The second is to celebrate and acknowledge cultural diversity in every country in the world, for example through a shift from ethnographic notions of museums in Europe to an approach that celebrates diversity as an integral part of the fabric of society, such as the notions of museums of world cultures. In Sweden and Netherlands, the Museums of World Cultures are inclusive, contemporary and relevant to our communities. There are so many benefits deriving from the roles that museums play in supporting diverse cultural heritages of communities in country.

## *Seeing ourselves reflected in our cultural institutions is a cultural right...*

Changes are inevitable and the roles of museums have definitely evolved over time, and types of museums have expanded as well. Museums must remain relevant to their stakeholders and audiences. One common denominator that remains unchanged is the role of the museum in collections and artefacts. These are important physical manifestations of the cultures that they represent; and are the cultural markers and heritage identifiers of peoples from around the world. Seeing ourselves reflected in our cultural institutions is a cultural right, as such these

objects and artefacts have become embodiments of unity and empowerment for those that need emotional strengthening and ethnic affirmations.

The third avenue is the role of museums as social connectors. Many museums have developed an arrangement called 'shared ownership' between artefacts and source communities. For example, at the Waikato Museum of Art and History in New Zealand, they developed a unique museum programme known as 'Cultural Days'. A brainchild of the then Museum Director, Ms Kate Vusoniwailala, such days were meant to showcase museum objects and cultures of diverse cultural communities that live in Hamilton City and are represented in the Waikato District. Museum curators and education officers worked collaboratively with selected community members to deliver enriching exhibition openings and cultural programmes that made community members of that cultural group 'feel at home.' In 2008, the museum won a national award with recognition by the Human Rights Commission New Zealand Diversity Action Programme Award.

The last is how for many Indigenous communities, museums can be associated with cultural wealth, even though they know that outsiders have plundered this to create their collections and from a coloniser's perspective. Marstine (2006, p. 14) highlighted that many museums claim to have had benevolent motivations, to salvage objects that could not be protected by the source communities. The focus of such forms of collecting was more about the wealth and status of the collector, the museum and the state, rather than safeguarding the cultural artefacts. Thus, it is important to identify the key motivating factor for collecting in the first place.

The Auckland Museum in New Zealand is an example on how this thinking can be shifted from the collector to the source community, by embarking on a three-year project called the Pacific Collections Access project. The museum shifted its focus to the community as the source of 'cultural wealth' that enhances its current collection with supporting relevant information. Since 2016, the museum has successfully collaborated with 'Indigenous knowledge holders' from the Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Fiji, Hawaii, Samoa, Tonga, Tokelau and Wallis and Futuna. Storytelling was the key methodology in adding voices to the collections, as well as prioritising Indigenous names of artefacts to be added to the museum database and display labels. More museums in the Pacific are reclaiming themselves as sites of decolonisation by centring local and Indigenous knowledge and through self-determination, which reaffirms them as institutions for the public good.

## Conclusion

There is clear evidence of museums contributing to social and economic activities in communities; however, the journey of recognition as public goods still lies ahead. Our roadmap should factor in the implementation of these four avenues by: establishing culturally appropriate centres, celebrating the cultural diversity of their contexts, amplifying their role as social connectors, and focusing on the cultural wealth of source communities.

It is important to demonstrate that culture and the arts can be and are celebrated in heritage locations such as museums. Many museums in metropolitan areas comprise international quality collections of art, history and natural history; many have tried to achieve various objectives to make 'high culture' widely accessible, providing a recreational and educational facility for local people and Indigenous communities, expressing civic pride and protection of Pacific culture and heritage. Like culture, museums are living active cultural spaces that should benefit all and are a responsibility for both the people and their governments.



# Pablo Raphael

Mexico

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Image credit: Pablo Raphael

# The dilemmas of culture as a public good

Pablo Raphael

Let us be archaeologists of disaster. If culture truly can be defined by the objects, symbols and goods that populate a certain geographical area, and that these are placed in a particular period of time, repeating over and over, we can say that the materials found in the aftermath of the fall of the Twin Towers in 2001 match exactly the types of goods found in the aftermath of recent bombings in Gaza, Aleppo or Kyiv. The same construction rods, identical glass and concrete, and the same cups and types of paper. This likeness in materials and structures was unthinkable less than 100 years ago in the Second World War, when bombing debris in London barely resembled the wood and urban structures in Polish territory destroyed by the Nazis.

This sad example makes two points. First: we are approaching an increasingly homogeneous world society, where each civilization's right to difference faces the risk of being buried under the rubble of a monolithic universal culture. Second: converted into museum pieces, our found objects could be part of a museum of public goods which reveal everything that we have failed to protect despite aspirations for the common good.

If we want to reflect on the paradigm of culture as a public good, we must understand that this idea is no different to the notion of a common good, and that there is a relation of obvious coexistence between both concepts. Now, if we assume that we are talking about interrelated concepts which are applied to reality depending on the approach (legal, sociological, economic or cultural studies) we will also assume that the common good and public good form a multifaceted prism with infinite tensions.

Before we consider these tensions, we must clarify that in speaking of public good, we refer to government decisions and the functioning of the State, in terms of cultural policies as instruments; and when we refer to common good, we refer to the construction of fair and equitable societies, able to guarantee balance between individual and collective interests. If 'public good' explains culture as something concrete, 'common good' refers to culture as an idea. Understanding them separately would make no sense.

*If public good explains culture as something concrete, common good refers to culture as an idea. Understanding them separately would make no sense.*

Culture comprises multiple tensions: between the homogeneous and the diverse; between the collective and the individual; and, for this specific topic of culture as a public good, between relativism – where each community defines and adapts the idea of common good according to its cultural circumstances – and globalism, where it is seen as a *global public good*, an umbrella concept.<sup>28</sup> This raises several dilemmas if we consider UNESCO's 1982 Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies, which defines culture as a set of distinctive, spiritual, material, and intellectual features that characterises a society or social group, based on reciprocal respect and the right to be different.<sup>29</sup>

When we speak of public good in relation to culture as an instrument for achieving the objectives of the United Nations 2030 Agenda and future agenda, we must also think about the challenges of plurality; the necessary redistribution of income; minority rights; and the respect for different creative practices and perspectives which has been at the heart of discussions about the essential role of culture in development for more than 40 years. That is, culture understood as both a common good (an idea) and a public good (something concrete). Considering different dimensions of culture, presented below are three dilemmas that seek to unravel the relationship between ideas of common good and public goods through the complex lens of culture, which we all comprehend, but each understand differently.

### Economic dimension of public good

Some critics have pointed out that the idea of 'culture as a good' belongs to a market logic that profits from society's values. Just as maritime or gastronomic vernacular create elaborate metaphors (beacon of wisdom, appetite for knowledge), economic terms aid and add meaning to cultural policies: symbolic capital, redistribution of cultural wealth, and billboard type of offering and supply of services. Those of us dedicated to cultural management fear that one day governments will abandon cultural policies and then only profitable creative industries will be backed by large companies. For some critics of the system, profiting from culture is a capital sin, or rather a sin of the Capital.

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<sup>28</sup> As proposed at the second UNESCO World Conference on Culture and Sustainable Development, Mondiacult 2022, held in Mexico on 28-30 September 2022.

<sup>29</sup> Final report on the World Conference on Cultural Policies, Mondiacult 1982, [https://derechodelacultura.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/d\\_inf\\_mondiacult\\_1982.pdf](https://derechodelacultura.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/d_inf_mondiacult_1982.pdf)

In truth, the commodification of culture has little to do with ideas of good, not even in economic terms, which define everything that is suitable to directly or indirectly satisfy a human need. If this is one of the social purposes of art, and if we assume that the economy is a cultural fact, we are on the right track. And if this definition connects with the anthropological vision of culture, recognising the framework of everything we are, it is correct.

*Anyone that believes that the term ‘culture as a good’ responds only to a commercial logic is mistaken.*

If we add the legal definition which says that a good is a material or immaterial thing subject to law, culture understood as a good becomes a safeguard that protects the material production of humanity (architecture, industrial design, artisan creation) and guards everything that cannot be touched (words, music, ideas, traditions). Anyone that believes that the term ‘culture as a good’ responds only to a commercial logic is also mistaken. Capital goods (which can also be cultural goods) are one thing and cultural goods in their multifaceted dimension are something else: they have symbolic capital; they satisfy human needs; they simply *are* and exist as such; and, at the same time, they contain within them goods and responsibilities. In other words, as goods culture and the arts contribute (thinking, beauty, anticipation, social cohesion) and confer upon society as a whole (local or international) responsibility and obligation to guarantee the exercise of cultural rights, creative freedom and the protection of historical heritage.

Equally, the economic dimension of culture as a public good must take into account the supply (support for creators and development of cultural infrastructure) but also the cultural demand, that is, everything related to developing audiences, promoting communities of readers, and creating guarantees that provide free access to culture without it being limited by individuals’ financial means. Otherwise, culture will continue to be an exclusive, rather than common, good.

Likewise, the cycle of culture as an economic good cannot ignore the need to strengthen a sector that oscillates between formal and informal employment arrangements and that needs to reinforce the value chain of cultural workers, especially in referring to labour, health and housing rights, which are necessary to build the common good in any society. The great lesson revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic was the vulnerability of the cultural sector, whose production of cultural goods (books, music, films) saved us from shipwreck and proved to be fantastic instruments for public health.

### Social dimension of the common good

But if culture is a good, it also means that it belongs to someone, to one, to a few or to many. In a world that oscillates between defending individual guarantees and working for common good, we have left no room for nuance. The scale that the greys cast is not understood in tremendously individualistic societies, masses expropriated in the name of the proletariat or mass consumer societies. From one pole to the other there are very few experiences where the wellbeing of individuals coincides with the wellbeing of the majority.

While individualists believe that the wellbeing of each person translates into the wellbeing of all, collectivists are committed to the community of equals where the so-called proletariat, mass or society, is capable of governing itself on equal terms. Ultimately, from all corners we have produced a culture that encourages selfishness, whether through individual competition – where those who are most skilled or luckiest survive – or at the other extreme, through increased bureaucratisation under the banner of equality, which creates powerful elites who decide the destiny of the herd.

*...the truth is that the social dimension of the common good faces the challenge of reconciling the defence of individual rights with collective rights.*

While these tensions – which seem longstanding – hold opposing positions when it comes to assuming public responsibilities, the truth is that the social dimension of the common good faces the challenge of reconciling the defence of individual rights with collective rights. The legal framework of global public goods still faces many pending challenges related to such reconciliation. In a world where First Nations and Indigenous people represent just over six percent of the world's population, and where collective rights are still far from realised according to international regulations, the idea of culture as a common good warrants the creation of a legal framework capable of reconciling the tension that is naturally woven between individuals and collectives. In this sense, let us make way for the next dimension of culture as a public good that depends on a legal framework conducive to decision-making.

### Legal dimension of culture as a public and common good

How do we ensure that common good avoids uniformity and focuses on the human act of sharing? Let us look at legal philosophy and the ways in which this tension between the individual, their freedoms, and society has been resolved (not always successfully).



From sinkholes we inherit legacies. By the 6th century BC, after all the civilizations that disappeared along the way, humanity had produced the first treatises on theatre, written in Sanskrit; the astronomical knowledge of the Mayans; the Confucian philosophy; Buddhism; the mathematics of Pythagoras; and the first idea of diversity built by Sappho with her poetry.

Rome inherited, then perfected, almost everything from Greece, from mythology to the invention of democracy and public law. At the same time, the Renaissance took from the Middle Ages all the monastic records that rescued Greco-Latin thinking; while the invention of the Americas drew on Christianity, and during the Middle Ages worked as a copy of the cultures from Greece and Rome. Along the way, the American tomato and Chinese noodles were found, leading to Italian gastronomy; in the same way, national independences in the Americas were nourished by the French revolution, following monarchical crises inherited from feudal life.

If it is assumed that cultural appropriation inherent to human nature is one thing and improper cultural appropriation is another, when we talk about culture and public goods, we actually speak of norms that guarantee the future of creative freedom, and protect creators from plagiarism and unfair market appropriations.

In all societies, from Plato to contemporary legal theory, the purpose of the State (from its most fledgling to most developed forms) has related to the wellbeing of the majority, at least in its foundations and discursive purposes. According to Rainer Olaf Schultze, common good (in Latin *bonum commune*) refers in general to the good (wellbeing) of all members of a community and to the public interest, as opposed to private and particular interests.<sup>30</sup>

If culture is understood more as a common good, it means that the encounter between cultures can serve as a guarantee and mechanism of public justice that protects the security and freedom of individuals within a given community. On the contrary, if culture is understood as a public good, we must think about those cultural policies, legislative reforms and new relation schemes between the State and society that guarantee the existence of common good.

Here, the axiom *what belongs to everyone belongs to no one*, can find an antidote if we affirm that what is mine is yours. Luigi Ferrajoli's theory of guaranteeism sustains that common good is achieved through fundamental rights which, above all, limit State action.<sup>31</sup> In this sense, the State must regulate everything that guarantees coexistence, but it cannot go against the freedom that it protects, the security of each citizen for which it is responsible, or

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<sup>30</sup> Schultze Rainer-Olaf (2014), *The Common Good, chapter 10 of Fundamentals, Theory and Political Ideas*, Volume I, Mexico, p. 157.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

the justice that it applies to guarantee that the limits it imposes actually work. Whether positive or negative, public good is the possible guarantee of individuals and communities brought together based on the norms and rules of the game that are granted to define their identity. Paraphrasing Mexican poet Octavio Paz, saying what is mine is yours, that is, *I am others and I recognise myself in them*. That is 'common'.

To say that museums, theatres and books are public goods is to recognise their quality of service. That is why Shakespeare belongs to us all, as much as a New Zealand Haka. No one imagines that reading Shakespeare should only be allowed for the English or heirs of the bard, nor that the performance of hakas would be prohibited before audiences outside the Māori community. This does not imply that each creator, each artist or each community has institutional supports, local and international legal frameworks, rules that protect them and provide them with rights, cultural guardians in charge of safeguarding tangible and intangible heritage on behalf of everyone, while safeguarding the feelings of belonging that link us intimately and directly with the culture that we feel is our own.

Culture is a common good because each person has the right to discover and enjoy the streets; to know who we are and from what stories we come; to live with dignity regardless of our profession; to preserve the memory of our grandparents and the flavours of our towns. To recognise ourselves in the movies, art and books of the world and to get to know different people, live together, ask questions, give our opinions. To put an end to that, would mean ending the ideas and dialogue that, through difference, make us human. Without doubt, and although it is sometimes confused, culture is a public good and a common good simultaneously.

Under the anthropological principle that defines culture as a model of behaviour common to a group of people, the time has come to recognise that a verdict which denies the existence of a *common* global culture because each one is particular, that is, a real culture, is actually incomplete. After inhabiting this planet for half a million years, we are increasingly similar, especially if we think about large cities and megalopolises where difference is erased in proportion to the norms established for generalised behaviour, but also where songs and stories, images and symbols are part of universal history and the personal history of those of us who shape the human species.

Let us say that our honeycombs, pollen, honey, ways of humming and ways of organising ourselves are increasingly similar. But let us also say that the grace of humanity is in its imperfection and its greatest richness in its cultural diversity. In this sense, the idea of culture as a public good requires regulatory frameworks and national and international commitments that allow universal culture to be sustained in memory and the way of being equals in our diversity.

For many experts, academics and politicians, the dilemma of globalisation versus the worldwide is related to neoliberal policies and for this reason it is demanded that the paradigm eliminates the word 'global' when mentioning that culture is in fact a worldwide public good, that *culture is a public good of the world*. This is a rejection that, if not faced with care and intelligence, can ignite countries of the Global South and block the path of access for culture to form a central part of the future strategies and agenda discussed in the United Nations system.

Let us sing together the famous Beatles song *All together now*, against a future of a monolithic global society, as part of a shared world culture, honouring everything that unites us, but also let us make the idea of culture as a common good, a right that guarantees the ability to understand plurality and the right of human beings to be different.

## Conclusion

We live in societies subjected to polarisation that puts democracies at risk. In this sense, it is worth recognising that existing cultural changes in humanity (resulting from globalisation, global warming, the digital revolution and the COVID-19 pandemic) also makes it possible to build necessary social intelligence to solve our dilemmas. This is not an aspiration for a naive revolution of consciousness, system redesign, nor reinventing the wheel. On the contrary, it is about recognising that around the planet there are cultural agents that require points of access that can be shared. The future of culture, and the future of humanity, depend on decisionmakers' ability to recognise existing best practices, and multiply proven models (for example through idea banks and financing models).

Understanding culture as a public good means recognising government policies and regulatory frameworks as multipliers of best practices, and making culture, creativity and imagination privileged tools for peace building, social cohesion and sustainable development. It is about connecting with the people of society and investing in them not as a gift but understanding the centrality of culture in uncertain times. Tensions, when brought into harmony, produce balance. This is the role of culture as a public good.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Some of the ideas explored in this essay will be further elaborated upon in the author's forthcoming book: *The submerged cathedral, praise of culture and plea against its stupidity*, work in progress (2024).



## Considerations

With the era of artificial intelligence and machine learning, it is imperative to be human-centred and culture is our point of difference. Creativity is the key to unlocking the innovation thinking required to tackle the systemic challenges of today and chart a better future, investing, supporting, advancing and championing culture and its artistic and creative manifestations is key to the future we want and need.

Consequently, how can culture be effectively positioned within the public good debate, and what does culture as a public good mean in practice? Building on the approaches to the concept of public good outlined and the eight essays, it is essential to consider the following.

- ❖ It is crucial to be mindful of the **definitions of public good** and the extent to which they are applied. According to the economic definition of a public good, recognising culture as such implies acknowledging it as a non-excludable and non-rivalrous resource. Following the free-rider concept inherent in the economic approach to public goods, it would be considered that anyone can consume culture without paying for it. Furthermore, culture's relationship with the market would be assumed, by definition, a case of market failure. This can imply that governments should not only bear the responsibility for the provision of culture but should also be cautious not to allow market logic to erode its inherently public nature.
- ❖ Public goods are not only **determined by their nature but also by various contextual factors**, such as social and legal norms and political priorities that, in principle, respond to public needs. Following the approaches developed in the social sciences, if culture is determined as a public good, it must be prioritised by the government in terms of ensuring its creation, supply, and equitable distribution, using state resources and relevant regulatory norms. This recognition can have significant implications for public investment in culture, cultural policies, and the regulatory environment in which cultural and creative sectors operate
- ❖ Recognising culture as an **irreducibly social good**, in its purpose to fulfil a public need and meet collective demand, can change the ways in which culture is valued and measured. Moreover, by building **cultural capabilities**, it shifts the goal post from a deficit model failing the market to a stronger cultural and social ecosystem where culture is placed at the heart of national agendas; culture budgets would become more substantial and stable; cultural rights would be embraced as a key goal in cultural policies; and key regulations would protect cultural workers from instabilities and other effects of the atypical nature of their work

- ❖ It is possible to focus on the **ancillary benefits of culture** even when it is recognised as a public good. Sometimes either non-rival or non-excludable goods are integrated into the public good discourse only because they create essential ripple effects for the whole of society. This is especially applicable when a product or service contributes to the production or provision of a pure public good. For instance, if one recognises public health as a public good and emphasises culture's contribution to health, culture's links with the public good rhetoric become more tangible, even if the actual features of culture as a public good remain abstract.
- ❖ The **ripple effect approach** can be applied even when basic components of a public good are absent. For instance, attending a theatre performance played a limited number of times in a building with a limited number of chairs is an excludable and rivalrous practice. One may argue, however, that theatre as such contributes to social cohesion, creates public awareness about important issues and ultimately enhances public wellbeing. In this regard, it is important to envisage how such a public good approach to culture can improve and make more effective the current way of valuing and positioning it within the political and social debate.
- ❖ It remains crucial to **define what is meant by culture** when it is referred to as a public good. Even if we abstract culture from the market economy, it needs to be closely considered that the concepts of public need and collective demand are not in the same relationship with various understandings of culture. This is why in some national policy discourse, it is not culture as a whole, but a specific fraction of it, that is officially proclaimed as a public good. For instance, in its principles the Ministry of Cultures, Arts, and Heritage, Chile confines the notion of public good to cultural heritage, recognising it as 'a space for reflection, recognition, construction, and reconstruction of identities and national identity.' Culture and the arts, however, are not directly proclaimed as a public good in this context. Everyone's right to enjoy the culture they need and want can be considered a public good, as it is an essential need that cannot be adequately addressed within the confines of a market economy. In this context, one could argue that it is the government's responsibility to ensure that the entire society has access to culture that caters to their needs.
- ❖ Seeing the **concept of public good through the lens of everyone's right to access** culture is an approach that could underscore the value of the diversity of cultural expressions, affirm cultural rights, and recognise the intrinsic value of culture itself, without shifting the focus to culture's external benefits, which remain more difficult to measure. It could be a challenge to apply any overarching conceptual framework to a very diverse field of culture. Therefore, ensuring that every citizen feels represented within the diverse cultures vibrantly living in their community as well as in the cultural offer this community shapes and has access to, rather than focusing on making every art discipline and cultural practice accessible by all at once.

# Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the 10 key insights and related findings from the essays, as well as key considerations put forward by IFACCA. Not all recommendations are equally weighted, nor will they be applicable for all contexts, roles and responsibilities. However, we hope they will nurture key debates in cultural policy development in diverse contexts, especially as it feeds into international debates and cross-border agreements. Finally, we propose an interplay between the notion of culture as: a public good, an irreducibly social good; a common good; a shared good; especially as a dimension of humanity.

## 1. Recognise culture in both its symbolic and its sectoral forms:

- develop multi-pronged approaches to policymaking that confirms culture as a public good, as a dimension of society that is non-rival and non-reducible for all, and that support culture as a sector that is integral to future sustainability.
- embed culture (and its duality) across government portfolios and establish methods of collaboration to develop and implement policy, across ministries and tiers of government.
- provide access to resources and recognise the sector as a workforce, especially to address the informal economy in the cultural and creative sectors, and civil society actors as active participants.
- recognise and protect intellectual property (IP) and support strategies for the role of intermediaries in the cultural and creative sectors (CCSs), while embracing culture's universality when it comes to the right for all to participate fully in cultural life.

## 2. Protect and promote culture as an irreducibly social good, create:

- comprehensive policy scaffolding across multiple portfolios with feedback loops
- a whole-of-government approach to ensure that cultural considerations are integrated into various policy domains aimed at supporting the whole network or system of institutions (political, legal, social, and economic structures, civil society and beyond).
- conditions to avoid isolation and systematically and explicitly embed cultural considerations across all policy decisions and look for synergies between culture and other government core objectives.
- new dynamics of supply and demand in favour of culture being valued as constitutive of society, rather than only providing cultural goods and resources.

### 3. Avoid the commodification of culture, see culture beyond the economic frame:

- ensure social outputs and outcomes are embedded into cultural policy development and implementation.
- strengthen institutions in a way that does not commodify or homogenise culture but supports and celebrates diversity (both contemporary and traditional), heritage, knowledge and ancestry.
- foster social inclusion and diversity to address systemic barriers to participation in public policy by developing culture and inclusion competencies in government.
- assure that the value of culture to society does not homogenise identities through commodification but fosters unity in diversity of expressions.
- transcend the dominant economic perspectives of value, tend towards and make space for wider wellbeing outcomes in a way that caters to individuation by organisations and reflects the range of community perspectives.
- develop an index system to measure value beyond economics and hard infrastructure as the main indicators of growth and progress, to also ensure the use qualitative medium to longer-term indicators.

### 4. Develop cultural capabilities for resilience and adaptivity:

- recognise every person's capacity to contribute meaningfully to society's culture and invest in the development of those capacities, that:
  - guarantee cultural rights and collective capabilities for all levels of society and government
  - level the playing field and ensure access to social opportunities for all (to work, education, leisure, culture), and in ways that are equitable and respectful of diverse needs.
- implement policies that promote social inclusion and diversity in cultural participation that address systemic barriers to cultural participation, especially for marginalised and underrepresented groups.
- establish mechanisms and partnership frameworks for public action and experimentation that enable civil society actors, government and other stakeholders to:
  - promote active participation in the governance of culture
  - understand the consequences and outcomes of public policies for culture and cultural heritage, and the effects of international policies.



- nurture government commitments for a society that embraces its evolving identity, history and dynamic attributes, and assures its right to express them.

## 5. Address systemic inequalities locally and globally, and embrace diversity as a key lever:

- celebrate cultural diversity as one of humanity's greatest riches and promote the idea of culture as a common good, as plural, and related to the right to be different.
- commit to and provide regulatory frameworks (national and international) that:
  - will sustain culture as both universal and diverse in the future
  - address structural discrepancies within governmental nomenclature which may result in parts of society becoming distanced from cultural practices, and parts of the world being made invisible
  - ensure that when we use public good to refer to culture as instrumental to the objectives of the UN post-2030 agenda, we address plurality; recognise the uneven distribution of resources; and respect for different creative practices and perspectives.
- support multifaceted policies, measures and parallel strategies to mitigate against market forces that pose a threat to for diverse cultural expressions to thrive and be sustainable.
- affirm local cultures and provide alternatives to navigate the public good paradigm for culture in different contexts, and different dimensions.
- address threats to the continuity of cultural heritage due to cultural deterritorialisation and homogenisation in global markets.

## 6. Provide an enabling environment for agency and self-determination in cultural narratives:

- develop local and inclusive narratives and avoid the misuse of culture as a public good that perpetuates othering, which:
  - reclaim aspects of culture through defining public good for culture in the terms of local cultural contexts and narratives, especially across the Global South
  - argue for policymaking that prioritises and strengthens public good elements within locally driven systems
  - caution against cultural appropriation through instruments like data mining.

- decolonise instruments that have imposed colonial control and alienate people from local cultures and material wealth.
- ensure accessible and self-determined mechanisms and conditions exist for First Nations, marginalised and other underrepresented communities and cultural centres to embody, represent, and reinforce their own knowledge, sensibilities, and way of life.
- develop mechanisms to ensure more equitable distribution of knowledge and technology, and the provision of cultural services and infrastructure, especially outside of major cities, that:
  - establish culturally appropriate centres and meeting points that celebrate the cultural diversity of different contexts and focus on cultural wealth.
  - foster individual and institutional transformation anchored in local context that champions sustainable creative practices.

## 7. Ensure policy work is practical, actionable, understood and inclusive:

- adopt a whole-of-government approach, including legislation, to embed cultural considerations across all policy decisions to enable fresh, porous, practical, and actionable approaches to policymaking.
- support the creation of legal frameworks for individual and collective rights aligned to the idea of culture as a common good.
- develop a public value account for culture with collectively valued social outcomes that is effective and efficient in its justice and fairness.
- develop medium to long term policies beyond cycles forced by markets, elections or government terms.
- reciprocally embed culture and tourism (amongst other portfolios) as key drivers for development, particularly in government contexts that engage in development dialogue to support local livelihoods and safeguard cultural expressions.



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