

ECONOMY AND CULTURE AS THE BASIS FOR A REGIONAL STRATEGY

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Currently, to progress towards the creation of new parameters of development represents a challenge for the Latin American and Caribbean countries; this, given the negative influence of globalization on the different sectors of our lives. This is why we should take a path towards the necessary recuperation and strengthening of the cultural identities and values. In this context, the cultural matter would come as a powerful element to mark the difference and at the same time, reposition creation's potential as an added value in our economies.

However, the background for promoting culture as a dimension of development has been economists' conceptions, that prevented the actual materialization - particularly from the State - into actions towards a model that truly turns culture into a key component in the development strategy. In another hand, the existence since several years of a "culturalist" conception on the arena of the cultural policies represents the other extreme. Perceiving culture "as a homogenous, integral and consistent unit", limiting therefore the potential of the cultural activity and preventing it from being seen further than its symbolic value and further than the borders of each nation.

In the Forum on Development and Culture organized by the Interamerican Development Bank and UNESCO, in March of the current year, were reaffirmed the conceptions that appeared in 1998 in the UNESCO's World Report, considering that "cultures cannot be analyzed as if they were islands of an Archipelago. The current globalization of the economic, political and social life entailed even greater cultural penetration and superposition, the coexistence of different traditions within a determined social space...". Consequently, "specific local spaces and conditions need to be examined, and a way should be found for those spaces to adapt themselves, react, creatively feed-back each other as they face the dangers and opportunities coming from the exterior"¹.

About the preceding, it should be noted that in facing these emergencies brought up by universal tendencies to the economies, there remains the unavoidable challenge of keeping alive the historical memory and the patrimonial richness of our peoples, while building a space that offers opportunities to the cultural diversity, precisely so that in a globalized world, the processes of technological homogenization and economic uniformity, they serve as spaces for the diversity of the symbolic representations.

As we may see, we are facing a process that changes the order of the cultural matter, putting us in a new dimension. From there, the importance of the strategies that reposition culture further than the simply instrumental matter, as usually the link is being established between economy and culture.

Because of the lack of cultural policies for development in our countries, we must state the necessity to strengthen the sectorial aspect, as a mean to insure that the national States will

¹ The Value of Culture, Forum on Development and Culture, Interamerican Development Bank - UNESCO, see page 7.

commit their actions in favor of concrete results in the building of cultural development objectives, and particularly, on the matter of cultural rights. In this sense, the link between economy and culture will be a link that takes culture into account in its constitutive and strategic elements.

Institutional strengthening, through the creation of national and/or regional systems for culture, is mandatory. This can be achieved only by firmly establishing national and regional policies and making commitments at the highest level between countries, particularly between those such as ours, positioned more like importing countries than like cultural goods and services exporting countries. This is what happens when facing the unregulated and transnational offensive of the production and spreading of culture.

The economic integration efforts currently underway, accumulated experience and show us the tendencies that will eventually be followed by the world that we will open during the forthcoming millenium. We will have to insure that those processes go further than the usual "economicism", establishing the cultural matter as the essence. From the integration perspective, culture must not be seen exclusively through its commercial component, but also, and above all, within an order that makes cultural integration feasible.

The creation and strengthening of the national structures in the cultural sector, represent the first step towards the materialization of the agreements and proposals for a sustainable development of the region.

About the previous, it should be noted that the National States will have to hold on to their comparative and competitive advantages, knowing that "success in competition depends on the national economic structures, history, culture, and the values system"².

The cultural industries favorably fit into the sustainable development strategy; and in this framework their stimulation will provide for the consolidation of culture's economy in our countries. According to recent data, the medium and long term growth rates of the cultural industries, is of about 10%, showing the impact that they have on production, exports, and jobs creation; they are becoming a key element of the economic activity.

We are talking about the fact that for their incentive, the national States should canalize their financial resources towards the sector, stimulating new investments from the private sector; in the regional context, it is vital that the international financing organizations create programs aimed at promoting the cultural industries, given the proven impact of these industries for the amelioration of the quality of life and the democratic governance of our countries.

Moreover, at the regional level, it would be convenient to create an entity responsible for promoting economic development strategies in the cultural environment, through opportunities offered to the contents and symbolic markets, insuring therefore maximum benefits from the great wealth generated by the culture of our peoples.

It is also our opinion that it would be beneficial that an entity such as that above described promotes the creation of an information system collecting data on the cultural investments made by the private and public sectors, as well as the production and consuming of the

² See Gregorio Recondo, « Identidad, Integración y Creación Cultural en América Latina, p. 39, Ed. UNESCO/Ed. de Belgrano.

cultural industries; contributing to the training of specialized human resources, both at the management and technical level requested by cultural economy. In addition, it is important that this regional organization insures the respect of rights on intellectual property, given that this would allow us to create a new investment basis for the sector.

With such a regional instrument, we would strengthen the economic and cultural integration processes by creating a safe space for the other initiatives that will be formulated in the near future.

Allow me to finish repeating the words of Nestor García Canclini: "We share a space, and we are about to know whether or not this space can be a market for us to collaborate between us and compete with others, and also a public space in which controversy and cooperation may be negotiated taking into account collective and multicultural interests. The 'Latin American' is not a faith revealed by the earth nor is it by the blood, it has often been a frustrated project, today it is a task that is relatively open and problematically possible".³

Thank you very much.

³ Nestor García Canclini, «políticas Culturales : de las Identidades Nacionales al Espacio Latinoamericano », Seminar on the Economic Integration and Cultural Industries in Latin America. Buenos Aires, July 30 and 31, 1998.