International Cultural Cooperation as Key to Sustainability: The Case of EU’s Implementation of UNESCO’s 2005 Convention on Cultural Diversity

Maryam Rashidi
Research School of Humanities & the Arts, Australian National University, Australia

This paper addresses the role of cultural policies in sustainable development processes and programs, positing international cultural cooperation as essential to the pursuit of sustainability. The frame of reference for my arguments is the so-called ‘Magna Carta’ of cultural policy for sustainable development, UNESCO’s 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (hereafter, the Convention). Articles 11, 12, 14, 16, and 18 of the Convention and their respective operational guidelines outline multiple forms of cooperation and collaborative arrangements as the main mechanisms for its implementation at all local, national, regional, and international levels. The Convention thus provides an important ground for assessing, as I will in this paper, the extent to which the nature of cooperative mechanisms used in operationalising cultural policies may influence the sustainability of development processes and programs and their outcomes.

Taking the example of European Union’s (the EU) differentiated policy strands regarding the implementation of the Convention in its external and internal relations, I will highlight the fundamental interdependence of different international cultural cooperation mechanisms and the sustainability of development outcomes. The key to understanding this interdependence, I will argue, is the variable social and economic value implicitly attributed to the ‘cultural content’ of the diverse cultural goods and services that are used or produced under EU’s development programs in the wake of the Convention. ‘Cultural content’, as defined in the Convention, ‘refers to the symbolic meaning, artistic dimension and cultural values that originate from or express cultural identities’. My paper will investigate the ways in which the EU’s methods of cultural cooperation for development in its external and internal relations are based, respectively, on the instrumentalisation and de-instrumentalisation of this ‘cultural content’. Finally, the implications of these for the sustainability of EU’s culturally-based development programs will be considered.

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