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**The Role of Culture and Creativity for  
the Sustainable Development of Humankind**  
- The triple emergency of the 3Cs and how to counter them with  
culture, creativity, and communications -

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The world is at a critical juncture. We need to make and take global decisions that have not been taken since the Second World War. We also need to make good on decisions and agreements that the international community and nations have failed to deliver on to date. The promises include those made after the Global Financial Crisis of 2008/09, the Paris Agreement, the Rio Earth Summit, and several commitments around Aid For Trade that have gone unmet. These failed vows have left people and the planet in peril, and the most vulnerable increasingly so, as inequality within and between nations rises. We know we cannot go on like this. That much is clear. And the COVID19 crisis is just the beginning of several that we will face on a global and human level. I am calling this a “triple emergency of the three Cs”: COVID19, climate change, and community and social unrest. But I don’t want to be dark. We all know what the future will bring, even if we do not want to face it. That’s the wonder of working on and in the creative industries, we see things others people do not.

There is an upside though. There are three other Cs in the arsenal that can help counter the first three. They are: Culture, creativity and communication. This is what I would like to talk to you about today: how to truly use these three tools to generate the step change that is needed to actually achieve sustainable development for humankind. If we are to score the global goals, or come anywhere near them, we need to lean on the power of culture to change minds and behaviours. We need to harness the creativity of all people everywhere to innovate and draw on ancient wisdom – intangible but irreplaceable. And we need to work hard to improve communications between people, communities, countries and cultures to find better ways of working together to solve what will undoubtedly be global crises.

I'd like to talk to you about these 3C's and why they are the cornerstone of the choices we must make if we are to embrace sustainable development on a global scale. To activate the 3C's we need to embrace our intangible cultural heritage – and that is why this conference is also critical right now. As the climate changes, communities fray, mistrust expands, and unrest becomes more common, we need to go back to basics. We must reconnect with our humanity and use the power of culture to embrace the changes we need to make and adopt new, sustainable practices that will ultimately save our civilization. We know that our heritage does not start or stop at a museum, or some faraway site, and that culture has power. We live it, experience it, re-shape it and create it constantly. Our stories, practices, rituals – the daily ones like taking children to school, reading books, eating dinner together, or observations such as Hannukah or Eid or Christmas – are cultural heritage in motion. And we need cultural heritage and the power of its diversity to map out how we will

- face extreme weather events
- welcome climate refugees
- support caregivers, children and the elderly
- change business practices
- figure out new rhythms and ways of being
- promote intercultural dialogue and be more respectful of other ways of life.

These pattern changes are the answer to our future. But to implement them we must turn to the past. And draw on the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through culture from one generation to the next. Intangible cultural heritage.

During the height of the pandemic artists and people in the creative industries showed us how we should do this. Early on in the pandemic creatives drove solidarity. Starting in March with digital fashion shows in Milan, Paris, Shanghai and Moscow. As the crisis escalated it moved to empty concert halls and onto apps. Then ultimately on to the couch and in the living room. Creativity – in all its wonder. They say necessity is the mother of invention – our artists helped us reinvent a new way of being together-apart. They helped us stave off boredom, encouraged connection and kept us entertained during the lockdowns. I remember watching an Andreas Bocelli concert and a West End show online, and then Chris Martin in his living room singing to a global audience, and then watching my South African friends in their band Meraki, perform on their roof to neighbours while streaming their “home concert”. In the process these creative people and artists showed us two things: 1. creativity makes us human, and 2. culture is how we respond in a crisis. The human spirit is indomitable. No more so was this more evident than in our global cohort of artists and creatives signing, dancing, painting, producing, and acting as a balm to the burning pain of isolation.

## STATUS QUO: CREATIVE ECONOMY

UNCTAD has been tracking the response of the creative industries to COVID-19. But for more than 20 years we've also been mapping the economic value of the creative economy. For many that deal with intangibles, this can seem like an incomplete science. Counting culture. How do you do that? Well, you measure the trade in goods and services. And it is critical that we try to “count culture” and track its impact – both its commercial and cultural value – so we can influence policy and drive investment, improve trade and create a better enabling environment so both the social and economic impacts can be felt by producers, consumers and communities.

So, what do we know about the creative economy? We know that the global GDP contribution – pre-COVID19 was between 3% (EY, UNESCO, 2015) and 5% (WIPO, 2020), often outperforming more traditional sectors such as agriculture. UNESCO is about to release new data which shows the exports of cultural goods doubled in value from \$132 billion in 2005 to reach \$271 billion in 2019, which is up 20 billion on the \$250-billion figure of 2018 (UNESCO, 2018). The global creative economy employs about 30 million people worldwide and it is growing with digital transformation. The creative economy is also a place for young people. 20% of people employed in the creative industries are aged 15–29, more than in any other sectors. UNESCO also notes that women have a more equal hold on creative jobs, seizing 45% of the creative occupations worldwide (UNESCO, 2018). This year is also the International Year of Creative Economy, and a critical moment to put creative economy issue front and centre on the Global Development Agenda.

But what is the creative economy? If you read a digital newspaper or buy your broadcasts from a news stand, subscribe to a video streamer or go to your local cinema, buy clothes or furniture online or in a mall, read a book or listen to a music streaming service, or podcasts or an LP at home, you are consuming a creative product or service. Today, the creative economy is intimately bound with the interplay between human creativity and ideas and IP, knowledge and technology. The creatives industries include everything from architecture to furniture production, computer games to software, art to design. As they industries grow, underpinned by rapid technological change, it is important to understand how they are doing so and what the impact is. For example, Indonesia reaps the benefits of the orange economy daily. Their latest data shows the creative economy contributes 7.4% to its GDP. It also employs 14.3% of its workforce in various sub-sectors from craft to gaming, fashion to furniture. The demand for creative goods, and more specifically, services – delivered digitally – has never been greater than right now.

Now back to the three things. To counter our triple emergency, we can:

- a. Use culture to drive behavioural change
- b. Harness creativity and innovation to create a future that is sustainable
- c. Reshape global communications and the media machine to inspire action

### **a. Using culture to drive behavioural change**

Heritage is not history. It is very much alive in our daily thoughts, actions and practices. Intangible cultural heritage is one of the driving forces in the creative industry and indeed shapes our perceptions and behaviours. If we want to combat climate change, we must change our behaviour. If we want to build

more cohesive communities as we become more globalized and ironically more polarized, we must change our behaviour. Recycling plastic bottles and lobbying for more circular practices requires a new culture of doing so. Cultural programming – from theatre to TV shows and sitcoms – has the power to stimulate this change. It's been proven for example that the American sitcom Will and Grace help shift the national needle and reduce homophobia in the United States. I remember from my own childhood the impact of a theatre activations called LoveLife how it shaped my understanding of HIV/ Aids and my own personal safe sex practices. Photography can inspire people to action. I was recently moved by student photographers exhibiting on an EU programme who documented the plight of the Roma living outside of Novi Sad. Film can highlight misunderstood situations. Music can bring people together and generate empathy. The same can be achieved today. Greta Thunberg's School Strike for Climate IS a cultural movement. But we can get more granular and high impact at the local level by leveraging artists, creatives, activists, innovators and educators to actively drive change using cultural practices and moments and speak to them in a language of cultural change they understand. This is where intangible cultural heritage is so important.

### **b. Harnessing creativity and innovation to create a future that is sustainable**

Then there is the inherent role of creative thinking and the problem-solving mindset that must be embedded in all science, technology and innovation activities for them to tackle our triple Cs. I recently saw that Patagonia, the jacket makers, have partnered with a start-up that's recycling old fishing nets to turn into fabric for a new line they are producing. That's science, technology, innovation, fashion and a change of business practice all in one – and all of

which took creativity to find a sustainable solution to a big global problem: fishing nets. Fishing gear accounts for roughly 10% of the 12 million tons of plastic end up in our seas every year. Discarded nets, lines, and ropes make up about 46% of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. As traditional industry goes into decline, trade patterns shift, and digital transformation takes hold, the creative industries are likely to play a central and growing role. Countries that want better prospects for their people should work to leverage their local talent and skills in sub-sectors of the creative economy to increase GDP contributions. They can also harness creativity to find new solutions to existing challenges under the sustainable development agenda. This means using the creative industries as allies to tackle the climate crisis, drive clean industrialization, and innovate through technology. Sustainability is more about more than greener and cleaner industries and buildings, it is also about sustainable growth, development, jobs and communities. The creative industries can help here too. For example by investing and diversifying in these areas, developing nations in particular can potentially escape the commodity dependence trap through new services and products. Indonesia, for example, is betting on its tech, gaming and music industries as turkey subsectors for GDP growth.

### **c. Reshaping communications to inspire action**

Finally, we need to tap our oral histories to find new ways of generating breakthrough communications to change people's minds – so we can have the cultural change we spoke about in 1. Fake news is killing our scientific inquiry and our ability to think clearly. Cultural institutions, creatives, marketers, journalists, musicians, influencers and artists can play a major role in not only countering fake news, but actually being part of campaigns that inspire us to take action on our 3Cs and their impacts. We must reshape the way we

communicate and the way information is being relayed so that it drives people to take action and become involved. But for this we need solid, true and factual information. We need to counter misinformation and also embrace a culture of critical thinking and inquiry. Good communication is not a relic of the past quite yet. We have a great history of using communications campaigns to change minds and drive action. The CFCs campaign to shrink the Ozone layer is but one example. But in the age of fake news, we can use our heritage, oral history, novel cultural ways of communicating to both reinvigorate scientific rigour while making it palatable and cool to be future proofing ourselves in the face of crises.

So let's think about what you can do. Right now you may not think the work you do counters the 3Cs but I challenge you to think out of the box about the way your work uses culture, creativity and communications to drive sustainable development. Maybe you are not feeling it, but you are doing something. Whether you attend an event, raise money, support an artist, buy a reputable newspaper, support and share good online content, put on a production, promote great start-ups pursuing sustainable innovation – YOU are making a difference. If you encourage others to do the same, the network effects will amplify our mutual and necessary journey to sustainable development. I ask you to think about what you can do for culture and creativity drawing on your own intangible heritages and experiences and intensify them so that what is counter becomes mainstream through this wonderful tool that we all have called culture.