



Culture for social transformation *by Federica Mogherini **

A country's culture is a natural resource like oil and gas. But unlike oil and gas, culture is a renewable source of jobs and economic growth. Our cultural reserves are unlimited. They can grow in size and in quality if we make the right investments. Investing in culture is not simply about preserving our past. It is an investment in our present and our future.

Far from being a luxury good that only rich countries can afford, culture can bring economic prosperity to depressed areas. Latin America and the Caribbean know very well the huge potential of tourism and cultural economy. The Zócalo, in Mexico City, is the second most visited site in the world. Peru's Cusco region attracts two million visitors every year. A sustainable use of the national heritage can pull in scholars, students, artists and visitors for continuously different events. Besides the direct revenues of museums or other attractions, the economic multiplier of cultural tourism is immense – profiting entire sectors and stimulating investments.

Some time ago, I was talking to a group of young people of different nationalities residing in Berlin. When I asked why they had chosen to live there, they mentioned as one of the main reasons the presence of a vital cultural environment contributing to a good quality of life and offering job opportunities. Cultural economic is not simply about creative industries: the benefits can reach the entire population.

Culture is art and science, but also music and cuisine. Culture can be created by the street artist making the face of a building anew, or by the artisan whose technique has been refined through the centuries. Culture belongs to our peoples and springs from our history, but it also requires to be supported by consistent public policies. Institutions have a duty not only to invest on quality education and on skills, but on the infrastructure, on public transport, on the security of tourist attractions.

Latin America and the Caribbean have their own success stories. Take Medellín, in Colombia. The starting point was very difficult indeed, but the efforts devoted to the objective were coherent and steady. The home of Pablo Escobar is now home to music festivals, international conferences and urban innovation.

Cultural projects may also be valuable in post-conflict situations, for example in certain regions of Colombia, or in areas plagued by violence like the Northern Triangle of Central America. They can be a catalyst of economic growth and can help rebuild a shared sense of community. A more inclusive approach to culture – one that is less directed to the cultural establishment itself and more open to people-to-people relations, directly involving cultural operators from different countries – can consolidate and reinforce our societies.



Culture is a powerful vehicle for social inclusion. Venezuela's El Sistema is a music program that has changed the life of thousands of children in need. Sistema orchestras have now been established in Europe, too: it is an excellent example of the potential of our bi-regional cooperation for progress and for cultural development.

Another example is the use of culture inside prisons. In Italy, several theatre companies composed by inmates stage high quality dramas. The rate of recidivism for inmates who have taken part in rehabilitation activities falls almost to zero, compared to an average of three recidivists for every four released prisoners. Similar initiatives also exist in other countries, for example in Mexico: they are of fundamental importance in offering prisoners better prospects for social reintegration.

There is a space for cultural cooperation among our regions, going well beyond the traditional promotion of our cultures abroad. This kind of cooperation could benefit us all, from the lower income to the high-income countries.

Too often international relations leave culture in the background, focusing on other subjects like trade or conflict resolution. Today we finally understand that these sectors are closely linked to one another. For this reason, on June 2016 I presented to the Council and the European Parliament a Communication "Towards an EU strategy in international cultural relations." The Communication intends exactly to push forward the idea of culture as both a resource and a goal for our external action.

Relations between the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean have come of age. Our partnership has never been stronger, ranging from innovative investments to the fight against drugs. It is time to move a step further. Our most ancient tie – that is, our shared culture – can help us build our common future.

***Federica Mogherini** is the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission. Official Website: http://ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019/mogherini_en

This paper was prepared for the EU-LAC Foundation's Newsletter of July 2017 on the theme "Culture". This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the EU-LAC Foundation.