

The Cultural Governance Principles of MONDIACULT 2022: Ten Ideas Critical to a Substantive Debate

*Los principios que acompañan a Mondiacult
2022 en su gobernanza cultural: diez
ideas críticas para un debate sustancial*

César Villanueva Rivas

Department of International Studies, Universidad Iberoamericana
cesar.villanueva@ibero.mx



Abstract:

This article examines key aspects of the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development of 1982 (MONDIACULT 1982) and the Stockholm Intergovernmental Conference of 1998 (Stockholm 1998) to identify common themes and challenges. The author then suggests ten ideas intended to prompt substantive debate on contemporary cultural phenomena that could serve as the basis for proposals to be included in the final declaration of MONDIACULT 2022, with a view to promoting a constructive, integral and inclusive view of the world's cultures.



Resumen:

En este artículo se exponen diez ideas críticas sobre la Conferencia Mundial de la Unesco sobre Políticas Culturales y Desarrollo Sostenible (Mondiacult 2022) para promover un debate sustancial sobre asuntos que se podrían convertir en propuestas para formular una discusión que alimente la declaración final de Mondiacult 2022. Para ello, primero se hace una radiografía de los temas más relevantes de Mondiacult 1982 y Estocolmo 1998, con el propósito de observar las continuidades temáticas y los retos frente a los fenómenos culturales contemporáneos; posteriormente, se plantean diez ideas clave para abrir un debate que impulse una visión integradora, constructiva e incluyente de las culturas en el mundo.



Key Words:

MONDIACULT 1982, Stockholm 1998, UNESCO, culture, cultural governance, ICT, cultural heritage.



Palabras clave:

Mondiacult 1982, Estocolmo 1998, Unesco, cultura, gobernanza cultural, TIC, patrimonio cultural.

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As the various essays in this issue attest to, the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies (MONDIACULT 1982) was a diplomatic landmark in many respects. I have picked three of its most obvious achievements. Firstly, the organizations and governments of the world irrefutably acknowledged the importance of culture to international debate. Secondly, consensus was reached on a conceptual framework for what was primarily an anthropological definition of culture in a (relatively) universal sense and its transformation into state programs and public policy strategies commonly referred to as “cultural policy.” And thirdly, MONDIACULT 1982 produced a revised, forward-looking agenda for the future that showed an understanding of the cultural changes of the day, ones on the horizon and, even more admirable, many that could only be anticipated at the time, but that we are now witnessing.

It should be remembered that it was the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development (Stockholm 1998) that took over as the main forum for international debate on cultural issues before the end of the millennium. To its merit, Stockholm 1998 was able to establish the idea of culture as a component of sustainable development and foster mutual understanding in the face of cultural diversity. The twenty-first century has turned out to be hugely challenging in terms of addressing cultural issues in the absence of a clearly defined cultural governance framework. That said, it is important to recognize the tangible progress we have made over these last 40 years and that reunites us again in Mexico City for MONDIACULT 2022.

The goal of this article is to bring ten key ideas to the floor, with a view to encouraging substantive debate on matters that, in a best-case scenario, could evolve into concrete proposals for inclusion in the final declaration of MONDIACULT 2022. The first part consists of a comparison of the most relevant topics of the two aforementioned conferences, mainly to identify continuities, but also to determine what remains to be done to address the cultural phenomena of our times. Then, in the second part, I suggest ten key ideas to kick-start debate on ways of fostering a constructive, integral and inclusive view of the world's cultures.

Key ideas of the MONDIACULT 1982 and Stockholm 1998 conferences

To illustrate how these two conferences have brought us to MONDIACULT 2022, Table 1 shows the main issues on their respective agendas, which offer an initial understanding of how debate within UNESCO has evolved. Due to space limitations, I have focused on comparing and contrasting the two documents, so as to offer an overview of their contents. This will be my starting point for the propositional section that follows. My goal is to provide context for a proposal I hope will spark much broader debate, see Table 1.

As can be seen from the table, the main idea underscoring both documents is the relationship between culture and development. This should come as no surprise: since the 1960s, UNESCO has taken part in International Development Decades, contributing proposals in the fields of education and science that have come to form the substance of the Millennium Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals.¹ The second is the fostering of creativity in the intellectual sense, with a definition heavily weighted toward the arts. In the Stockholm 1998 document, this idea centers on what should be understood as creativity in “cultural life” in general. The third idea shared by both documents is that of cultural heritage in its anthropological sense, *i.e.*, tangible and intangible heritage, which includes values,

¹ See proposals and history on the UNESCO website “Culture & Sustainable Development,” <https://en.unesco.org/culture-development>.

Table 1. Comparison of the MONDIACULT 1982 and Stockholm 1998 agendas

MONDIACULT 1982	Stockholm 1998
Cultural policy principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Cultural identity ■ Cultural dimension of development ■ Culture and democracy ■ Cultural heritage ■ Intellectual and artistic creation and artistic education ■ Relationship between culture, education, science and communications ■ Planning, management and financing of cultural activities ■ International cultural cooperation ■ UNESCO 	Cultural policy goals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Make cultural policy a central component of development policy ■ Promote creativity and participation in cultural life ■ Restructure policies and practices so as to conserve movable and immovable heritage, both tangible and intangible, accentuate its importance and promote the cultural industries ■ Promote cultural and linguistic diversity within and for the information society ■ Allocate more human and financial resources to cultural development

Note: The two documents are structured differently: the Mexico City Declaration (MONDIACULT 1982) talks about the *principles* governing cultural policies, while the Plan of Action on Cultural Policies for Development (Stockholm 1998) refers to cultural policy *goals*.

Source: World Conference on Cultural Policies, “Mexico City Declaration,” in *Final Report*, Paris, UNESCO, November 1982, pp. 43-46; and Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development, *Final Report*, Paris, UNESCO, August 1998, pp.14-18.

traditions and languages; the Stockholm 1998 document also refers to the role of the cultural industries. A fourth idea concerns the planning, management and financing of cultural policies as catalysts of cultural development.²

Conversely, the “democracy and culture” binomial has a presence at MONDIACULT 1982, but no longer makes an appearance at Stockholm 1988. Likewise, the MONDIACULT 1982 concept of “cultural identity” gives way to the notion of “cultural and linguistic diversity” at Stockholm 1998. By the same token, the call to place greater emphasis on “education, science

² See UNESCO, *Re[Shaping Cultural Policies: Advancing Creativity for Development, 2005 Convention Global Report, 2018*, Paris, UNESCO, 2017.

and communication” at MONDIACULT 1982 fizzles out into references to the “information society,” leaving science and education out in the cold. It is noteworthy that “cultural cooperation,” such a central issue to the 1982 debates, is no longer mentioned as such in the goals of Stockholm 1998. Likewise, the “UNESCO” paragraph included in the Mexico City Declaration and that is associated with the organization’s universal values, namely its contribution to peace, is absent from the 1998 document. It should also be noted that the goals of the Stockholm 1998 “Action Plan on Cultural Policies for Development” has no innovative ideas, unlike the Mexico City Declaration made at MONDIACULT 1982. This is not a shortcoming in and of itself, given that in the first part of the Plan’s Preamble, the fundamental principles of MONDIACULT 1982 are reaffirmed and its concept of culture appropriated with no changes whatsoever.

To better understand this line of argument, it should be remembered that the MONDIACULT 1982 agenda concentrated at least 12 years of regional debates and a series of concerns and proposals that gradually took shape over the 1970s within the organization. It is also important to understand the international context and the theories used to interpret the world at the time. Amadou-Mahtar M’Bow was director-general of UNESCO,³ we were in the throes of a Cold War whose main blocs were in a deadlock; neutral, non-aligned third world countries were engaged in constant activity; the Afghan-Soviet War (1978-1992) was in its early years; we were witnessing changes in international economic policy *vis-à-vis* the dollar, the gold standard and fossil fuels, especially oil; and military dictatorships were emerging in different parts of Latin America, Asia and Africa. The theories that informed the actions of UNESCO, both before and after 1982, were defined by an institutional liberalism focused on international cooperation, pluralism, freedom and democracy, with concern for development issues and inspired by modernization, urbanism and economic growth models, palliated by Marxist ideals of social equality and interventionism, and strong criticism of neocolonialism and the interference of imperialist powers.

At the time, UNESCO was also defined by the leadership of Amadou-Mahtar M’Bow of Senegal, who served as director-general from 1974 to 1987. The first

³ Fernando Valderrama, *A History of UNESCO*, Paris, UNESCO, 1995.

African to head the agency, he stamped on it his own vision that, in many ways, ran counter to the inclinations of a bipolar world. By seeking to include Islamic, Asian and African countries and hear the concerns of third world countries—many of which put developed countries ill at ease—, M’Bow created controversy and several countries expressed displeasure at his approach, culminating in the decision of the United States to leave the organization in 1984, due to its “extreme politicization” and constant hostility toward developed nations and institutions governed by the free market and free press.⁴

Stockholm 1998 took place in a totally different context. The radical shift in the international system brought about by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dismembering of the Soviet Union in 1991, followed by a declaration of the “end of history” by certain Western powers led to heated debate within UNESCO as to how to promote a peaceful, diverse, inclusive, sustainable international order that would foster cultural wellbeing and the protection of world heritage. Nonetheless, the idea of international union translated into globalization (the Francophile world prefers the term “*mondialisation*”) remained a process based primarily on transnational trade and the unrestricted movement of capital, while exponential growth in technologies like the Internet and telecommunications gave us the impression we were closer as societies—a belief Stockholm 1998 called into question.

Several intellectual debates took place within the organization and should be viewed as interpretive frameworks and responses to perceived changes. Jacques Delors, who coordinated the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century, submitted his *Learning: The Treasure Within* report, which makes it clear there can be no process of world convergence unless this is underpinned by an educational project based on the values of civilization rooted in development, recognition of others, peaceful coexistence and active participation.⁵ Also significant was debate instigated by the *Our Creative Diversity*⁶ report published by the World Commission

⁴ “Major News U.S. Parts Ways with UNESCO,” *The New York Times*, December 23, 1984, section 4, p. 1.

⁵ Jacques Delors (dir.), *Learning: The Treasure Within*, Paris, UNESCO, 1996.

⁶ Javier Pérez de Cuellar (dir.), *Our Creative Diversity: Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development*, Paris, UNESCO, 1996.

on Culture and Development, headed by Javier Pérez de Cuellar. Federico Mayor Zaragoza, who was director-general of UNESCO at the time, encouraged these reflections and, together with Lourdes Arizpe, was instrumental in seeing that the concerns of many of these discussions were aired via documents and comparative statistics, including two world reports on culture, one in 1998 and another in 2000.⁷ The ideas to emerge from these debates formed the agenda for Stockholm 1998, which left no doubt whatsoever that sustainable development and culture are interconnected and interdependent, and because they foster comprehensive human development, they should be deemed human rights and be protected by cultural policies. This conference highlighted intercultural dialogue (in response to the “clash of civilizations”) as a means of fostering the creativity, diversity, inclusion and pluralism that, together, are the glue of world peace.

I would like to end this section by acknowledging that there are more similarities than differences between the two aforementioned documents. The final declarations of these international conferences, that took place in a context of contemporary history, were the result of their specific dynamics and interactions between the delegates of participating countries, UNESCO representatives and consultations conducted among members of society and groups of experts. In terms of ideas, what we are left with are four pillars that would seem to have continuity in the present and that shape many contemporary debates: the *culture and sustainable development* binomial, *cultural diversity*, *cultural creation* and *cultural heritage*. I will not be repeating these ideas below because it goes without saying that they are important to the final declaration of MONDIACULT 2022, but they should be borne in mind at all times.

Ten ideas critical to MONDIACULT 2022

I have put together ten ideas intended to prompt an intellectual and necessary debate on the implications of MONDIACULT 2022 at this critical moment in time we are living in. Underscoring all these ideas is an appreciation

⁷ Lourdes Arizpe (dir.), *World Culture Report, 1998: Culture, Creativity and Markets*, Paris, UNESCO, 1998; L. Arizpe (dir.), *World Culture Report, 2000: Cultural Diversity, Conflict and Pluralism*, Paris, UNESCO, 2000.

of the great amount of work that goes into all the different international forums, their global implications and their lofty ideals. It is in no way my intention to minimize, much less ignore the enormous progress that has been made in this area, at least since 1946, with the founding of UNESCO. The ideas below are inspired by protean views and faith in the importance of culture to daily life, the vitality of UNESCO, its constructive, humanist spirit, and its capacity to innovate and reinvent itself over and over again.

First. Revise the definition of culture in the final declaration of MONDIACULT 2022

One of the principal achievements of the Mexico City Declaration was that it provided an empirical- and anthropological-based standard definition of the different dimensions of culture and its importance to understanding human endeavor. Thanks to this ground-breaking conference, we had a conceptual framework that defined culture as a component of all human activity, while key aspects of signification, materiality, historicity, sociability and political hierarchies were operationalized. The challenge facing us now is to come up with a new definition that, without sacrificing the merits of the previous one, unequivocally incorporates the dimensions of sustainable development, diversity, intersectionality and creativity, and integrates these with technology, communications, information, entertainment, sports, science, art, symbolic industrial and popular cultural expressions and gastronomy, among other aspects. The concept of culture needs to be injected with a strong dose of humanism, without losing sight of its interdisciplinary capacity that is a potential source of great enrichment.

Second. Propose a form of international cultural governance that incorporates all State cultural policies and diplomacies

The mission of the United Nations is to promote the basic conditions for the proper provision of global public goods, such as peace, development, the environment, human rights, etc. To achieve this, UNESCO would do well to formalize a form of “international cultural governance,”

as has been proposed at several internal forums,⁸ to strengthen those aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and those not directly engaged, but that are part of the organization's institutional essence, for example, as regards diversity, heritage and education with its cultural nuance. The issues at stake are by no means new—they have been mentioned here and in other documents—and could become specific objectives of the 2045 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To this end, it would be advisable to strengthen ties between the notions of cultural policy in the internal sphere of States, as has already been discussed within the organization, and cultural diplomacy, in the sphere of foreign policy, where international cooperation strategies, intercultural dialogue and cosmopolitan constructivism all play a part.

Third. Think of culture as a strategy capable of influencing the foreign policy of States and furthering the goals of UNESCO

Despite gushing diplomatic speeches by international organizations, States continue to view culture as a secondary option when it comes to foreign policy, one subject to the utilitarianism of soft power and public diplomacy on the one hand, and the pragmatism of the cultural industries and the global economy on the other. In international relations since the fall of the Berlin Wall, “cultural” has become an adjective that adorns governance and its power-balancing acts. UNESCO has done more than its bit by promoting multilateral diplomacy,⁹ and actions and plans with noble, beneficial objectives. However, when we analyze the cultural policies of UN member states, we find little attention and limited resources are allocated to the subject.¹⁰ Furthermore, a look at the contributions

⁸ See UNESCO, “Governance for Culture,” at <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/capacity-building/programmes/governance-culture> (date of access: September 5, 2022).

⁹ See UNESCO, *65 Ways UNESCO Benefits Countries All Over the World*, Paris, UNESCO, 2010.

¹⁰ See contributions of UNESCO member countries in “Assessed Contributions,” April 21, 2022, at <https://www.unesco.org/en/member-states-portal/assessed-contributions> (date of access: September 5, 2022).

States have made to UNESCO over the last 40 years reveals that only a dozen or so countries unwaveringly honor their commitments—barely enough for the organization to achieve its goals. Countries continue to view culture as peripheral to their external actions, certainly not as a priority. A change to this way of thinking most definitely needs to be proposed.

Fourth. Engage social and state actors in efforts to offset the power of the communications media and improve the quality of the information they provide

The plethora of communications media now available to us and the accompanying glut of information has to be one of the most significant developments of the first two decades of the millennium, while the COVID-19 pandemic accentuated what was already emerging as a cultural trend. Information and communications technologies (ICT), from geolocation to virtual, augmented and mixed reality, have radically changed the way we socialize, acquire contents, learn and work, giving rise to phenomena such as remote work, digital nomads and tribe gaming. Plus, there are enormous deficiencies in the use and control of ICT, whose contents tend to be monopolized by “ICT quasi-nations” like Google, Amazon, MSN, Apple, Twitter, Meta, Netflix, Walt Disney¹¹ and dozens more companies whose market value exceeds the GDP of many poorer countries on the planet, with manifold repercussions. It is possible to talk of “post truth” models in which empirical fact is presented as less credible than falsehoods on social and other media, creating confusion, psychological problems and even provoking violence. Add to this censure, social cancellation, discrimination, sexism, virtual harassment and other digital ills and it becomes clear States need to introduce better habits, conducts and regulations for these media in collaboration with society.

¹¹ See United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), “Assessing the Scope for Value Creation and Capture in Developing Countries,” in *Digital Economy Report 2019. Value Creation and Capture: Implications for Developing Countries*, New York, UNCTAD, 2019, pp. 103-122.

Fifth. Propose a universal cultural goods system as a framework for public policy actions and governance

Assuming, without conceding, that culture, as per the definition proposed by UNESCO, can be conceptualized as a global public good, then all such goods (highly unlikely) or some such goods (more feasible) could be financed with State taxes. This reflection is based on a public goods model as conceived of in public policy, where the goal is to favor and subsidize non-rival cultural goods in which the costs of exclusion are exceedingly high, as would be the case of public broadcast television, while other aspects could be left in the hands of the cultural industries, because the cultural good in question is non-rivalrous and the costs of exclusion are low, for instance, in the case of videogames. Intermediate areas would have to be determined for mixed cultural goods, like art museums, symphonic orchestras or folk music, in which assistance and subsidies would be granted based on more specific technical assessments. Basically, the idea would be to draw up a list of public cultural goods with positive externalities, especially ones that foster social cohesion and a sense of belonging. Coincidentally, in February 2022, UNESCO published a report on this very topic.¹²

Sixth. Address technological revolutions, the digital gap, and their impact on global culture.

Many analysts somewhat naively continue to talk about the “fourth technological revolution,” as if this process could still be described using traditional narratives. Given the rate at which technological change is taking place, it would almost seem futile to put a number on it. There are so many fields where technology has sparked drastic change that disruptions can take place in a matter of months, weeks or even days. Take biotechnology, large-scale data handling and processing, aerospace engineering, genetics, artificial intelligence and robotics, mediated learning, e-commerce, e-libraries and repositories, and behavioral modelling and simulation with machine

¹² UNESCO, *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity: Addressing Culture as a Global Public Good*, Paris, UNESCO, 2022.

learning in real time, to name just a few.¹³ The technological gap, especially when it comes to digital technologies, is wider and more worrisome than ever. Investment in research and development (R+D), which is what drives technological development, should be approximately 3% of a country's GDP in order to keep up with the pace of change, but 90% of countries cannot invest this much and the vast majority can barely manage 1% of GDP.¹⁴ Furthermore, most of the world population lacks technological skills, especially women, gender being a variable that accentuates disadvantages, while minority groups, particularly indigenous peoples, and rural communities lack access to technologies and quality training. Technological revolutions are primarily cultural revolutions and this is where MONDIACULT 2022 has an opportunity to promote trends beneficial to humanity.

Seventh. Call on UNESCO to take a self-critical look at its leadership and cultural bureaucracy in the present-day context

If we look at the institutional history of UNESCO, we can see what different administrations achieved with what they had available to them in the international context of their time. From Julian Huxley (1946) to Audrey Azoulay (2022), the organization has experienced a pronounced learning curve spanning 76 years. There can be no denying strong, creative leadership can achieve great things in the international arena, but it tends to create controversy that oftentimes erodes the foundations of an organization. Then there are leaders and bureaucracies that take a lower profile, but that manage to strengthen procedures and systematize institutional goals. The question is, what kind of leadership does UNESCO need to make progress on the challenges facing it today? In its recommenda-

¹³ For 2022 examples, see Christian Rast and Jens Rassloff, "The Top Tech Trends of 2022," in KPMG Blog, January 24, 2022, at <https://home.kpmg/xx/en/blogs/home/posts/2022/01/the-top-10-tech-trends-of-2022.html> (date of access: September 5, 2022); Victoria Masterson, "5 Tech Trends to Watch in 2022," World Economic Forum (WEF), January 14, 2022, at <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/01/tech-trends-in-2022/> (date of access: September 5, 2022).

¹⁴ Cfr. José Ramón López-Portillo Romano, *La gran transición. Retos y oportunidades del cambio tecnológico exponencial*, Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2018.

tions to the director-general, the final declaration of MONDIACULT 2022 should establish the kind of leadership its agenda calls for and the characteristics of the accompanying cultural bureaucracy needed to achieve its goals. This is not the place to go into details on the subject, but major changes in the general management of the organization are required to shore up efficient, consensual and transparent leadership.

Eighth. Draft more effective legislation for the protection and ethical management of cultural heritage, intellectual property and patents

Broad sectors of the world population, cultural institutions, governments and international organizations are legitimately concerned about how cultural heritage in general should be treated from a legal standpoint and its effects as part of intellectual property. This raises questions as to the nature of cultural heritage and ways of registering, distributing and acquiring it in societies where private property is the norm. These concerns are completely justified when it comes to cultural heritage of communal, scientific, industrial, artistic, identity or design-related value, especially as regards the rights (individual or collective) of native peoples and laws—or lack thereof—governing the appropriation of that heritage. The ubiquity of the digital world has caused companies, researchers, promoters, institutions and experts to frequently, albeit inadvertently, infringe upon the rights and interests of the owners of cultural heritage. Conversely, the entertainment, computer, programming, pharmaceutical, technology and other such industries are well informed of their intellectual property and patent rights and have a well-organized apparatus in place to ensure they reap the economic benefits of their inventions, discoveries or prototypes. In this regard, there is an international divide running between the global North and the global South. MONDIACULT 2022 is an opportunity to set standards on this issue that is so central to the cultural industries in our day and age.¹⁵

¹⁵ Since at least 1999, the issue of cultural heritage and intellectual property has been systematically addressed by UNESCO. See “UNESCO and Intellectual Property,” in *Sources UNESCO*, no.

Ninth. Encourage the developed West to adopt a more inclusive, supportive and proactive approach to the cultural affairs of the world

Culture in its singular form is not an accurate term to describe the diversity of the world's cultures. The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions¹⁶ emphasizes this plurality and the need for more inclusive development of peoples and their nations. That said, there can be no avoiding the elephant in the room: the fact remains that developed countries have much more resources at their disposal to implement declarations, regulations, diplomatic agreements and other such mechanisms, while countries with fewer resources and even developing ones, but with major internal schisms as reflected in their inequality indicators, do not have the tools to enforce inclusion. According to Oxfam methodology and data,¹⁷ the richest 1 percent of the world's population accounts for 60% of global revenues. Most of these ultra-millionaires live in a dozen countries in the global North, are white, generally male and a good many are American. The control they wield over the cultural industries, cultural processes and public debate affords them incredible power that cannot be overlooked. That said, cultures today are less compliant and more critical; they recognize the need for a more inclusive approach to development, one that takes into account the materiality of these processes. MONDIACULT 2022 could be the forum at which the global South and North embark on a necessary and authentic cultural debate, with a view to transitioning from policies of resentment, hatred and dissent to ones of wellbeing, inclusion and peace.

117, November 1999, p. 9, at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000118085> (date of access: September 5, 2022).

¹⁶ See UNESCO, "Diversity of Cultural Expressions," at <https://es.unesco.org/creativity/> (date of access: September 5, 2022).

¹⁷ See Nabil Ahmed, Anna Marriott, Nafkote Dabi, Megan Lowthers, Max Lawson and Leah Mugehera, *Inequality Kills: The Unparalleled Action Needed to Combat Unprecedented Inequality in the Wake of COVID-19*, Oxford, Oxfam, January 2022, at <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/inequality-kills> (date of access: September 5, 2022); see also WEF, *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*, Geneva, WEF, 2021, at <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2021/digest> (date of access: September 5, 2022).

Tenth. Raise awareness of the Anthropocene and actively promote sensitivity toward a new culture based on humanism

Partly in response to the challenge posed by idea number five, one way forward would be to propose a new human awareness, based on recognition of the enormous impact our species, *homo sapiens*, has had on the Earth and the notion that the Holocene (Quaternary Period) is giving way to the Anthropocene.¹⁸ If we could only comprehend the Anthropocene as the vanishing point of our present, we would see the relative impact of total human activity on the planet and the extent of the environmental changes of the last 15 000 years, rediscover the effect the modern world has had on our lives and be humbled on realizing our presence on this planet is limited. MONDIACULT 2022 has ample and sufficient tools in its kit to help bring about this change in mindset, first and foremost, by appealing to the development of thymotic processes in the global community,¹⁹ and secondly, by fostering practices that take communities into consideration, that respect their presence and value their contributions in real and lasting ways. The Anthropocene also forces us to move away from eurocentrism, from a predominantly Western view of the world toward a reappraisal of other civilizations. MONDIACULT 2022 could promote the reaffirmation of local, autochthonous cultural values and the principle that all lives are meaningful and welcome in the world. All that is required is the simple admission that we are willing to respect ourselves and others for who we are.

Conclusion

For reasons both personal and professional, I am not optimistic about what we can expect from MONDIACULT 2022. Allow me to share my con-

¹⁸ L. Arizpe, *Culture, International Transactions and the Anthropocene*, New York, Springer, 2019.

¹⁹ See Peter Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2010.

cerns: from a purely existential standpoint, the COVID-19 pandemic made it clear that international cooperation is a concept very few countries, especially developed ones, respect, promote and practice; the issue of international migration, be it for economic, environmental or violence-related reasons, is one of the most visible afflictions of our modern world, one that has triggered discrimination, racism, xenophobia and cultural stigmatization of unprecedented viciousness; the news on climate change and the environmental crisis remains alarming and there is little hope the international community will achieve the minimum targets specialized organizations say we need to meet to mitigate their impact; the erosion of liberal democracies parallel to a rise in populism and authoritarianism worldwide are very negative harbingers for a world that needs just the opposite; the main monotheistic religions have failed to engage in global interreligious dialogue with a view to facilitating peace and in most countries, ecumenist Christian denominations cannot agree on a “global code of ethics” that would benefit their congregations. Yet another example of this systemic global conflict is Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (2022) and the human and material losses caused by a war that can only be described as unjust and unjustified.

I would like to take this opportunity to warn of a highly complex, testing context in terms of culture and international relations, one that is not propitious to good governance. I see a murky, treacherous atmosphere with actors poised to create conflict and discord. There are three potential risks. First, MONDIACULT 2022 could take the easy way out by opting to reiterate the obvious and taking refuge in platitudes to avoid getting to the root cause of our problems. Second, debate could become polarized, which would result in many proposals not getting the consensus they need. And third, there is the risk of failure to listen to society, with the conference degenerating into a closed club of delegates negotiating behind the backs of the very people they are supposed to represent. One of the main challenges of MONDIACULT 2022 will be to deploy culture to address all these different issues that affect humanity, paving the way for international action that brings States closer to their citizens.