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Focused Thematic Discussions and Interactive Dialogues
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The impact of AI on creative industries, cultural rights, and the right to development

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Transcript of statement by Ms. Andrea Detmer Latorre, UNESCO

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Chair,
Vice Chair,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the invitation. It's an honor on behalf of UNESCO to share with you some thoughts of the certain matter and to discuss them.

So, I'm going to focus today on the debate that was held at the global conference on cultural policies on Sustainable Development held a month ago at Barcelona, and it was a ministerial level meeting, meaning that there were 163 Member States represented. And we discussed 8 topics, one of which was AI and cultural policy. So, I would like briefly to share with you some of the key outputs of that debate. To give you a little bit of context in preparation for the conference, UNESCO, in partnership with several organizations, prepared set of documents, some of which also were prepared before.

They are at your disposal, so if you want to further into these materials. So, one is the actual outcome document validated by all member states that touches upon AI and sets some ethical frameworks to develop cultural policies. The second is the UNESCO global report on cultural policies, the culture, and the missing SDG that has a specific chapter on digital technologies. Then we have a framework for cultural arts education and its implementation guidelines, and AI appears as an enabling condition. Then we have the report of the Independent Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence and Culture, here also available for you, and I will briefly name the topics that we discussed because I think that it summarizes what are the key elements to consider on the debate of AI and cultural policies and actually culture and policies, because there are several policies affecting culture that are not necessarily bounded by the scope of cultural policies. Then we have the digital culture for all by 2035.

How can we increase success and empower creation? This was done with Amazon and several experts. And I would like to highlight here two important issues that I think are considered in a way in this work. One is the importance of bringing into the same table different voices, perhaps contested voices and ideas to advance. We need really to have that kind of difficult conversation sometimes to see how we can move on forward. And that includes the private sector, civil society, international organizations, policymakers, researchers. I think we need to create that kind of dialogue.

And the second aspect I would like to highlight on this report is that in a very brief document, it sets a desirable, hopefully feasible vision for 2035. And I think that's really important in a context in which we are seeing a lot of pessimism and negativity, understandably, because there are huge risks associated to AI. But I think also to be constructive, we need to set a vision so that we can move on

forward. And I think that this report sets one vision, you know. We also have the recommendations of the UNESCO reflection group on the diversity of cultural expressions in the digital environment. and finally the MONDIACULT Declaration that was set in 2022 identifying digital technologies as a priority domain.

So, in this document, as I said, there are 7 topics that summarize, I think, the scope of policies in relation to AI and culture. First, ethics, the baseline, what are the principles to move forward? Second, cultural rights, and how we understand them in the digital area. And also in this case, I would like to mention that to understand cultural rights and several of the other issues, actually, we need not only this kind of dialogue, but new knowledge, new conceptual development to characterize the problem because it's a new phenomenon and we need to understand it with new language, you know, with new conceptualizations and theories so that we can actually create a constructive dialogue because we are using terms that perhaps are not updated. So, for example, cultural data, what does it mean today? What it means transparency or autonomy, what does it mean originality? It's all shifting somehow. So then we have AI and cultural value chains in the creative economy, of course, as Klentiana was mentioning, the creative industries there are changing in many ways in terms of what are the actors involved, what are the processes, what are the power balances or imbalances, what are the ways in which transactions are made, etc.

Then we have cultural education in the AI era related to actually general education. And to me, that's a critical aspect. Climate and sustainability, endangered heritage, and finally, but very importantly, freedom and cultural sovereignty. So now I would like to do a little bit of a summary of what were the key aspects discussed. So first of all, the challenges are many actually, and difficult.

First, we have a governance lag because of the very nature of policy systems and technological development. So, the adoption and the development of technologies is way faster than the development and implementation of policy frameworks. But also, as I was saying before, we lack conceptual tools. We lack mechanisms to have these kinds of conversations among the different stakeholders to move fast, and also to learn, and to share from others' experiences, because differently from what has happened in other, let's say, radical innovations, transformations. Here, the processes are so fast that we don't have really much time to wait 10 years until another country has some examples to show and to do a benchmarking. You know, we really need to act fast and learn fast from others' experiences, both that are fruitful and perhaps not. And of course, that implies a lot of collaboration across sectors, across stakeholders.

Second, we have a concentration of AI power. There are a handful of companies, most American and Chinese that have the concentration of the infrastructure, of the data, of the processes, and of the economic benefits related to AI systems. And that, in a way, decreases the bargaining power, the voices of marginalized communities of the Global South. And of course, that needs strong attention and action. Then we have lack of transparency in AI systems and notably in the training data that is used. But it's also technologically and technically very difficult to set standards for transparency. And therefore, we need to redefine in a way what we mean by transparency, how does that translates into actual policies.

We have a North-South starting with access to Internet, followed by access to AI tools, followed by the support that SMEs and individual artists can receive. And all of that risks increasing the gap.

We have a high environmental footprint. So, we know that AI is very expensive, let's say, in energy terms and in the cultural sector. That's of course the case. However, as I will say later, there's also an opportunity for cultural professionals to help in that.

All of this, the boxes that you see in blue here, lead to some more specific, if you want, challenges, reinforced biases, cultural homogenization, linguistic loss, the undermining of cultural rights, the erosion of creative cognitive and social, emotional and skills. To me personally, this is the biggest risk of all, how by over reliance on AI, we humans and our civilization, if you want, may decrease the muscle, you know, of thinking, of analyzing, of critical thinking, of creativity, and also some emotional skills on how we relate with ourselves and with others. And on that, I think we need to take urgent systemic action. We have, of course, the risk of misuse, bias, and distortion in cultural heritage. And the risk that cultural economies become extractive rather than generative. And so, with that, like if you want a third line of risk is really important as well. The marginalization of minority voices, the threats to creators' compensation and remuneration, threats to human creativity and agency, the vulnerability of culture to disinformation and sovereignty that is at risks.

The positive news, the good news is that we have some opportunities also. So, AI can expand access by personalizing experiences, by reaching diverse audiences, it can enhance creativity and new forms of artistic expression. It also lowers the market entry barriers, widening the opportunities in artistic production. It can create new jobs, and it can increase the productivity, especially of SMEs. It can also, and it requires to some extent, interdisciplinary collaboration and cross-sectoral collaboration between artists, researchers and technologists. It can also, if ethically used and intentionally promoted, it can support linguistic diversity, and it can help connect local knowledge systems with global systems. Importantly, it can support heritage protection through the monitoring, the digital reconstruction, combating illicit trafficking and risk preparedness, and finally, it can improve efficiency.

As we know, art more specifically can be used to raise awareness. So, there have been important installations in which users can tangibilize the cost of using AI into, for example, how many liters of water it implies. So really, art can make it more accessible to the everyday user, what it means actually putting something on GPT you know, and I get some answers. So, with this I'm finalizing this short intervention, considering the challenges and the opportunities and policy guidance that were developed and discussed that … called are the following.

First and foremost, what are the principles of ethics, equitable, inclusive, unsustainable governance? So first we need to integrate culture into the national AI strategies. You know, the global report I was mentioning was saying culture, the missing SDG, as we know, culture is not in the current framework included. There has been a whole debate on hopefully in the next face of the global development agenda, it will be included, but we need to recognize that culture has a role in social cohesion, in creativity, and in sustainable development. Second, to ensure ethical governance, we need to focus on how to make it, to make policies that sustain cultural rights, transparency, cultural diversity and accountability. But all of that in a way understanding the nuances and the shifts that these terms require in the AI era. Then we need to promote digital equity, but by reducing the gaps in the access in infrastructure and capacity, especially in the Global South, we need to encourage eco-responsible AI practices by reducing the environmental footprints and promoting low carbon models. We need to advance in AI literacy and training, and that includes technical, ethical education for artists, cultural managers, communities, and learners in general. And we need to ensure fair distribution of the value generated by cultural data. And in that sense, some of the instruments that we have been discussing include, for example, an AI tax.

So how can perhaps large companies retribute to society for the use of cultural expressions that might have not been developed intentionally with that aim, but that in the aggregation of data points become an actual asset that these big AI systems use? So, we know that technically it's very difficult to do backwards engineering to identify to what extent one single expression was used in a new creation. And because of that and many other issues, one of the solutions perhaps to work collaboratively between lawyers, economists, etc., is actually to see, okay, how can systemically, we could, well,

companies can actually pay for this society data, cultural data use, and finally to call for interoperable governance frameworks? Because of course, Member States, countries have their own policies. But in this case, because of the nature of this kind of technology, and because of the speed of development, we need frameworks that work across countries and across sectors. So, with that, I thank you and I look forward to the conversation.

Thank you very much.

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