Cultural and Creative Industries in Africa

Generating US$4.2bln and 547,500 jobs, the rapidly growing sector of cultural and creative industries (CCI) in Africa is believed to be on the verge of becoming one of the major drivers of the sustainable development and economic growth in the continent.

Since 2008, the CCI have been paid considerable attention by the UN agency on trade and development (UNCTAD). “To highlight the contribution of the creative industries across the globe in the face of the economic downturn” UNCTAD issued two reports (2008, 2010) where it is noted that “the creative industries hold great potential for developing countries that seek to diversify their economies and leapfrog into one of the most dynamic sectors of the world economy” (2010, p. xxiii).

This statement about the importance of cultural industries nowadays is very interesting especially from the point of how this term came into the use and became the focus of specific attention. First, the term “culture industry” in its singular form was introduced by T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* in 1947 and had a distinctly negative meaning, marked with consumerism, standardization, sameness, unanimity of modern culture because of the industrialization of culture amounted to a loss of the purity of ‘high’ culture: “all mass culture is identical, .. films and radio no longer need to present themselves as art; the truth that they are nothing but business is used as an ideology to legitimize the trash they intentionally produce” (Adorno & Horkheimer 2002, p. 95).

But in the 1990s cultural industries and creativity became an essential force of rapid growth for European economies, started with the UK, where Tony Blair’s government in 1997 decided to make the creative industries one of the main drivers of economic performance in the country. According to the *Creative Industries Mapping Document* (1998), CCI were defined as ”those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property”.

Given the success of focusing on these industries as a significant component of economy, as evidenced by the UK where in 1998 CCI employed 1.4 mln people employed, generating £60 billion a year or 5% of total UK national income (Flew 2012, p. 9), the 11 main sectors of the CCI – performing arts, visual arts, books, music, movies, architecture, gaming, newspapers and magazines, advertising, television and radio – offer a huge potential for Africa. CCI can create job opportunities, promote economic development, and, in addition to economic benefits, they can generate non-monetary value by giving a chance for unique imaginative and technical self-expression in each of above mentioned areas.

For example, to give women equal rights to access to the culture the African Development Bank’s Office of the Special Envoy on Gender in 2015 has launched several initiatives for the benefit of women and youth in textile and garment industry (*Fashionomics*, and *Financing for Impact*). African governments are implementing a wide range of policies designed for the inclusion of disadvantaged social groups (Ethiopia’s bazaar for disabled people; the School of Visual Arts and

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1. www.worldcreative.org

2. There are different classification of CCI, which figure out from 11 to 13 industries. Here the reference to 11 sectors marked out by the International Confederation of Societies of Authors and Composers (CISAC) in *Cultural Times: The First Global Map of Cultural and Creative Industries* (2015)
African countries have been gradually recognizing the significance and importance of the CCI as an instrument of achieving broader development goals. They did so in two ways: 1) by holding different conferences, summits, workshops (the Entertainment Conference in Nigeria; Ongea! the Eastern Africa Music Summit; Scenario Writing workshop in Algeria; Film Master classes in Rwanda); and 2) by integrating the development of the CCI and their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers – Ghana with her focus on the development and promotion of the music and film industries, Mali with the idea to link culture with religion, social harmony and security, Nigeria by providing a home to the film industry and Senegal with the promotion of local crafts as an essential element in reducing poverty.

Thus, African countries, blessed by ethnic diversity, perceiving culture as a vehicle to express their own identity, and possessing a unique sense of Aesthetics, can be not only the example for others in terms of the attention they pay to the preservation of their cultural heritage (traditional festivals in Ethiopia, Angola; UNESCO candidature files of Armara (Eritrea); ‘awareness campaign’ in Angola); but also in terms of the rich and diverse initiatives to promote creative talents (Zimbabwe Greatest Talent Show; “Kurema. Kureba, Kwiga” initiative; “Africa in 500 Years” initiative in Malawi).

In spite of the sharp increase of African export of creative goods from $740 mln (2002) to $2.2 bln (2008), African creative products are still under-represented in world markets: they are only 0.36% and 0.54% respectively (UNCTAD 2010, p. 130). These modest results, on the global stage, could be explained by the weaknesses and challenges that CCI face in Africa. As noted by Bamuturaki Musinguzi (2016), the countries encounter a wide range of obstacles: they lack governmental funding, have limited infrastructure, experience low priority of the CCI in the national development agenda, don’t have enough skilled and professionally trained people; the copyright law is not adequately enforced; and fail to provide high-quality products. For instance, only 7 countries in Africa have established performance industries, and most of the others have only “embryonic music industries” (UNCTAD 2010, p. 42).

That said, the products of CCI – movies, dances, paintings, music, games, etc., have never been consumed as much as they are consumed today. The appreciation of cultural products is not only an original/peculiar vehicle of communication between people of different nationalities, ‘the universal language’, used to be understood globally, but also a vehicle of introducing yourself; of shaping country’s identity, of sharing with others the cultural richness. Given such sociocultural significance, the aesthetic and symbolic meaning to the products, thus, one of the serious challenges the CCI in Africa faces, in the years of globalization, which promotes a kind of a culture homogenization, is not only how to meet technical problems mentioned above (the East African Community’s Culture and Creative Industries Bill introduced in March 2015 is exactly aimed “to create an environment that promotes talents and the necessary infrastructure to develop the industries, and to remove existing barriers”3) but also how to appropriately preserve a rich traditional culture and represent national identity through contemporary art.

The debates on globalization and its cultural consequences displays a rich spectrum of voices: from those who believe that globalization has the power to eliminate cultural barriers and view this transformative process with excitement to those who experience anxiety at the prospect of losing their local voice.

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With regard to the impact of globalization, research studies offer three scenarios: homogenization/universalization/Westernization, which brings a homogeneous culture by universalizing the local values and traditions; polarization with inevitable conflict between different cultures (Huntington), and hybridization (Pieterse), where the last one is also titled either glocalization (Friedman) or interculturalism (Bouchard) depending on which nuances different scholars focused, but with the idea of integration global and local tendencies.

Notwithstanding which scenario would be chosen by the African countries in the development of their creative and cultural industries, the actors should, on the one hand, take into account the changing patterns of cultural environment which is no more developing as a close system but is influenced by a diverse range of transnational actors (Dewey 2003) and by the desire to have an ability to successfully export their creative goods. On the other hand, they should keep their unique ways to tell the story of their nation, nationalities and ethnicities, i.e. to introduce African soul to the international audience. In other words, African countries should “absorb influences that naturally fit into and can enrich [their] culture, to resist those things that are truly alien… be able to assimilate aspects of globalization in a way that adds to [its] growth and diversity, without overwhelming it” (Friedman 2000, p. 236).

Not “cow boy hats, boots and bikini replacing the traditional attires” (Musinguzi 2016), but cultural and historic heritage, nature imitable in its beauty, people who name this land ‘home’ shape social and psychological uniqueness of the country, its individuality. Creativity and uniqueness are the most attractive features would help see Africa differently – “as a fertile land for good ideas, not just coffee and cocoa”4, as a continent rich not only of natural resources, but also of the talented people. African museums, galleries, and exhibitions has so much wonderful to offer: the unique sculptures (Dominic Benhura), paintings (Nambowa Malue; Njogu Touray), music (mbira, nyatiti music), cultural heritage in unique architecture (Asmara, Eritrea), buildings (Bandiagara, Mali), cultural practices, and breathtaking natural landscape. The right presentation and usage not of ‘Western’ cliché, but rather of the richness of its own culture in creative industries will provide great long-term returns. The successful CCI market needs a plurality of heroes and innovators.

In that context, culture and creativity as a component of CCI could be implemented into the policies of cultural tourism representing cultural identity within the continent, or, otherwise, of cultural diplomacy activities to represent cultural uniqueness abroad – the policies which by supporting the development of the local art industries promote them as an element of cultural exchange programs, producing cultural events and creative entertainments of international interest. Thus, globalization and the technologies it brings should be used as an opportunity to engage with the rest of the world and share different experiences for the benefit of visual artists, choreographers, musicians, filmmakers and all the creators. Cultural policies and national strategies aimed to develop CCI should be devised in the way of harmonic coexistence of reaching the goal of economic development, and preserving traditions, beliefs and developing its indigenous values and ethical norms. As I.Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, notes, “to unlock the potential of the cultural and creative industries also means promoting the overall creativity of societies, affirming the distinctive identities of the places where it flourishes and clusters, improving the quality of life and providing resources for imagining diverse new futures” (CISAC 2015, p.5).

The development of the CCI is of a particular interest for Africa. They will help to diversify the economies, which is especially important in current situation, when “the oil sector fails to

contribute to the economy, [and thus] it is very hard for the country to experience the economic dynamism it enjoyed when oil prices were higher” (Pelizzo 2016). They will help to decrease the level of unemployment and eliminate the fears about the future among the young people (the case of Cameroon). They will help to attract cultural tourists, who travel in searching of cultural sights, seeing the lifestyle of indigenous people (Uganda, Kigaragara village; Tanzania, Nyinchoka village; Ethiopia, Omo Valley), and participate in different festivals and traditional activities (in Ethiopia Timket festival holding to commemorate the baptism of Christ; in Angola Luanda Carnival). Moreover, CCI are not an egalitarian scope of activity, they engage wide sections of populations: businessmen, corporations, government agencies, entrepreneurs, artisans, media, curators, and all of it causes excitement, a creative dazzle, that can create and shape a social environment that favors the emergence of new artists, their self-realization, and as a result their business initiatives.

CCI are becoming a mouthpiece of various communities, including the disadvantaged groups of people. And in that context, the independent galleries, festivals, artistic communities to some extent play the role of nutritional medium where using the local instruments new symbols and new meanings presented in books, music, dances, movies, advertising, tele programs are created, and give a chance to African products find its own place on the global market not only as Chinese opera, Latin American telenovelas, Hollywood and Bollywood movies, but with all its beauty and spiritual richness could avoid the production of homogenous, standardized artworks. In this regard, the African governments should not only be focusing on the economic benefits. Proper policy should prevent the commodification and the commercialization of the artworks and the degradation of the culture itself, while creating an artist-friendly environment where there is a place for creativity, phantasy, ideas, for both mainstream as well for new small-scale initiatives.

References:


