Concept note

Context

It is estimated that today between 370 and 500 million indigenous peoples are living in 90 countries (The World Bank, 2021) around the world. Indigenous Peoples as repositories of knowledge, practices, worldviews, wisdom, and heritage are key vehicles for addressing environmental, social, economic, and political dimensions, as well as remediing past and persistent inequalities. Despite their fundamental role as guardians of biological and cultural diversity, wherever they live, they remain one of the most disadvantaged and marginalised populations, representing 15% of the world’s population living in poverty (Idem), a situation that has been greatly exacerbated by the pandemic.

The 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages and the regional consultations for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2032, led by UNESCO, have shown that Indigenous Peoples around the world face systemic discrimination and unequal treatment concerning their identity, cultural expressions and heritage, use of their lands, territories, and cultural and natural resources. All this is reflected in Los Pinos Declaration [Chapoltepek] Making a Decade of Action for Indigenous Languages.

Furthermore, in many countries, their linguistic and cultural rights are not respected due to a lack of constitutional recognition. This also applies to the lack of systemic policies to safeguard and protect Indigenous cultures and languages. It is estimated that 40% of the 7000 indigenous languages – and the cultures intrinsically linked to them – are in danger of disappearing (UNESCO, 2020).
In terms of cultural policies, while some regions have made progress, recognising cultural and ethnic diversity within countries, including through harmonizing legal and institutional frameworks, policies are still lagging behind to adequately address policy concerns with regard to the safeguarding of Indigenous cultures, which is detrimental to the sustainable development of these communities.

At the national level, addressing cultural policies for the benefit of Indigenous Peoples requires a comprehensive and multi-layered approach, encompassing a broad spectrum of dimensions; from the preservation and use of Indigenous languages, to the safeguarding of living heritage practices, and the protection of Indigenous cultural heritage.

As the only United Nations agency with a specific global mandate in culture, and lead agency for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032), UNESCO is scaling up efforts to strengthen consultations with and engagement of Indigenous Peoples to enhance their contribution to the protection and promotion of cultural diversity and sustainable development, including in the context of existing international mechanisms and programmes, in line with the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), as well as UNESCO’s Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples (2017) and the UNESCO normative instruments in the field of culture, particularly the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

As we enter the final decade of action for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UNESCO considers of paramount importance to identify current challenges and opportunities to address the safeguarding of Indigenous cultures and their contribution to sustainable development. This is particularly relevant in the context of the abovementioned International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032) proclaimed by the United Nations, and in the perspective of the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies – MONDIACULT 2022– that will be hosted by the Government of Mexico in September next year.

Objectives and outcomes

In this context, this seminar aims to initiate a reflection on cultural policies in relation to Indigenous Peoples, notably through an exchange of experiences and a mapping of current actions, priorities and needs, to support the design and implementation of policies concerning Indigenous Peoples, their identity and their cultures. The webinar is also intended to delineate directions for future action building on UNESCO’s experience and knowledge.

What are the challenges in terms of addressing cultural policies that have an impact on Indigenous Peoples? What are the priorities to be considered to strengthen the preservation and use of Indigenous languages; to safeguard living heritage practices, promote cultural diversity and protect cultural heritage for sustainable development? How can UNESCO’s normative instruments and programmes contribute to informing cultural policies and advancing the concerns and priorities of Indigenous Peoples?

The webinar equally provides a follow-up to the preliminary study on cultural policies and Indigenous Peoples and on existing national institutions in charge of cultural policies for Indigenous Peoples conducted by UNESCO in 2019.
Technical specifications

The webinar will take place online via the Zoom platform. Participants will receive the meeting link upon confirmation of participation and are invited to follow the technical guidance note.

Interpretation will be ensured in English, French and Spanish.