

IS THE GLOBALIZATION  
OF THE ECONOMY  
CREATING VALUES  
FOR A NEW CIVILIZATION?<sup>1</sup>

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The theme of globalization and values is at the heart of UNESCO's concerns, and is of crucial importance at the dawn of this new century.

The inherent possibilities of globalization and the giant strides in science and technology that are being made in parallel with it, the gains that it secures, but also the legitimate questions that it raises as regards its risks, deviations or possible misuse, highlight a concept that is at the very heart of the founding of the United Nations system, and thus of UNESCO—that of universality.

Universality, if it is to have a meaning nowadays, must be perceived as the expression of the commitment by the members of the international community *to work together to build a system* which, over and above politics and the economy, would have ethics as its cornerstone. For ethics, or values, is what constitutes the real challenge of this 'globalization with a human face' which so many of us demand.

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Globalization is first and foremost an economic and financial process. And it is also a scientific and technological process, whose new information and communication technologies, by enmeshing the world in a network of links that are as dense as they are flexible, create a striking image.

But it is also, and above all, a cultural process. This is what places it at the heart of UNESCO's concerns. For globalization is spreading and imposing a new economy and hence a new form of social organization, based on knowledge. How can we ensure that this knowledge, which is circulating everywhere and creating wealth, benefits *everyone*, instead of generating new and extreme forms of exclusion and marginalization? How also can we ensure that in this universe of exchanges of information, knowledge, signs and symbols, everyone is simultaneously a receiver, a sender *and* a producer?

In short, the most profound issue raised by globalization is clearly universality. It is a practical universality that is today, and only today, within our grasp, made up of the sum total of individual contributions, just as light is produced by the fusion of all the colours of the rainbow. For UNESCO, this objective is embodied in a number of priorities, a few of which I will mention, and all of which are designed to create conditions conducive to the emergence of this universal civilization:

1. Education, and in particular basic education for all;
2. The ethics of the information society;
3. The ethics of science and technology;
4. The ethics of the environment;
5. The ethics of intercultural dialogue, which is contingent upon recognition and fuller appreciation of diversity.

## Basic education

The first field that I shall address is that of education, and, more specifically, basic education. The importance of education in coping with globalization is too often neglected. Yet it is probably the precondition for the equitable and responsible participation of each one of us in that process.

Basic education denotes the minimum knowledge and skills needed in order to be able to make a full contribution to one's local environment and to be in control of one's life. In an increasingly interdependent world, the contents, and therefore the very notion of the 'quality' of basic education, are evolving. It can no longer be reduced to learning reading, writing and arithmetic. It must also teach individuals to be, to do, to learn, and to live together.

Illiteracy, together with its Western form of 'functional illiteracy', is growing, despite the fact that technological aids should be enabling us to make exclusion and distance things of the past.

UNESCO has therefore placed basic education at the top of its agenda. The recent World Forum on Education for All, which was held in April 2000, reaffirmed the great expectations cherished by the international community regarding it. The Framework for Action that emerged from the meeting entrusted the

Organization with a major task, and confirmed its role as leader in the battle for education for all. The Organization is therefore planning to devote a great deal of its expertise to developing basic education services accessible to all, including the poorest members of society, illiterate adults, marginalized young people and children not enrolled in school, through a strategy which mobilizes both the formal school system and all the alternatives that belong to the non-formal sector. For the right to education is, I must emphasize, a basic human right, and as such it must be available to all without any exception on economic, social, cultural or geographical grounds.

## **The ethics of the information society**

The second field that we cannot fail to mention when we speak of globalization concerns the expansion of information and communication technologies and their dialectical link with globalization. Scientific and technological advances are in fact both the driving force and the effect of that development. They have radically reshaped the ways in which information and knowledge are produced, exchanged, shared and accessed.

But the new international civil society that is emerging through the new communication media has neither a shared history nor a shared vision of the future. Politicians, elected at the national level, are torn between the requirements for local action and an international reality over which they have scarcely any control, and which imposes itself on them. This situation calls for an international debate to which international organizations, and UNESCO in particular, have a contribution to make.

Undoubtedly, the Internet is an especially valuable tool for development and an extremely powerful means of disseminating information relatively cheaply. We are all aware, however, that the Internet benefits primarily those who are already educated and informed, and who can afford access to it. Unfortunately, it plays a key role in widening a gap that is already too large between the 'infopoor' and the 'inforich'. It can in some cases aggravate culture shock and exacerbate economic, social and political conflicts. It is also an instrument which lends itself to reprehensible uses, some of whose undesirable consequences we have already seen.

The international community cannot remain passive when faced with such a phenomenon. It must mobilize so that information in the public domain can be both promoted and protected as the 'global commons'. What we must do at this juncture is lay the groundwork for policy-making and for appropriate management of the global commons in relation to issues of general concern, in order to move towards a form of global governance that will take account of the collective challenges determining the fate of the planet. The new programme that will be launched shortly by UNESCO, 'Information for all', is aimed precisely at shaping a fairer information society, one that will guarantee universal access and the equitable participation of all in this global information society.

## **The ethics of science and technology**

A third field which I think particularly relevant when we seek to perceive what universal values might emerge from the globalization process is that of the ethics of science and technology.

The rapid strides that have been made in science and technology in recent years and the convergence of informatics and the life sciences have resulted in considerable progress in the sphere of genetics and biotechnology. Human life—indeed, the very concept of living matter—is now being cast in a new light by advances in the biosciences and by the development of biomedical and gene technologies.

Here again, UNESCO, by taking the initiative of a Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights, has played its role to the full. That Declaration strikes a balance between guaranteeing respect for human rights and allowing the necessary freedom for research. Among the ethical principles that it sets forth, the free exchange of knowledge and scientific information is gaining in importance as the mapping of the human genome progresses. UNESCO's objective is the construction of a shared bioethics, that is of universal principles in bioethics.

The recent statement by French President Jacques Chirac in favour of making the data from the sequencing available to all scientists is in line with this aim. The United States of America and the United Kingdom followed France in coming out clearly in favour of the principles laid down in the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights. Other fields, such as energy, outer space and water, also deserve our attention so that we can lay the foundations of a common universal ethics.

## **The ethics of the environment**

The environment is one area that is greatly endangered by globalization. Scientific and technological advances have too often been exploited with no heed paid to their effects on the environment. UNESCO has played a pioneering role in attempting to change this state of affairs, and notes with satisfaction the dawning of worldwide awareness in this field.

One of the major concerns is drinking water. Water is scarce and very unevenly distributed around the world: nearly a quarter of humanity does not have direct access to drinking water. The uses made of scientific and technological progress have not taken account of this unavoidable fact of life. This failure makes the prospect of a global water crisis a very real one, threatening not only sustainable development but also peace and security. UNESCO is endeavouring to promote a pro-active, integrated and multi-disciplinary approach to the problem of water resources management, combining political, social, scientific and environmental factors.

I have therefore launched a new programme which is to work out a global method for the assessment of water resources and set up ongoing monitoring of

trends. It will enlist the participation of twenty-four organizations in the United Nations system and must develop instruments to facilitate the resolution of water-related conflicts.

## The ethics of intercultural dialogue

However, the field which is perhaps the most sensitive to the effects of globalization is that of culture. Globalization is undoubtedly a powerful means of bringing people closer together. However, it must not thereby lead to worldwide cultural uniformity or to the hegemony of one or more cultures over all the others. Nor should it encourage fragmentation or a ghetto mentality. On the contrary, it must encourage pluralism with a view to dialogue and mutual enrichment.

This is the direction of UNESCO's action for the conservation of the world's tangible and intangible heritage, and for the promotion of linguistic diversity and multilingual education.

The impact of globalization on trade is by no means without consequences for intercultural dialogue. If there is to be genuine dialogue, there must first be a harmonious and equitable multi-directional flow of cultural goods and services of many different origins. It is not acceptable that most of humanity should be restricted to the mere consumption of imported cultural products. The rules of international trade must allow spaces to be created in which all the planet's inhabitants can create and express themselves through cultural goods and services, make real choices about what they wish to acquire, and do so in conditions of justice and fairness. And, in that regard, the cultures of the countries of the South are of course the most vulnerable. Their specific identity, their symbolic references and the cultural goods available to their citizens are held in the grip of trade and technology.

Cultural diversity means being able to produce and disseminate a wide range of high-quality cultural goods. It also heightens the sense of identity as the source of creativity and living culture.

UNESCO has just launched a large-scale international consultation on that subject. A group of experts will meet, starting in September 2000, to prepare the ground for the full-scale promotion of cultural diversity, particularly now that a new round of international trade negotiations is beginning.

On the same lines, UNESCO is preparing to draw up a convention for the safeguarding of the intangible heritage, comparable to the one which exists already for the tangible heritage and which has proved its usefulness and its especial relevance. The recognition of worldwide cultural diversity, spanning traditions, values and symbolic relations, will not only lead to acknowledgement and better appreciation of the culture of the Other, but will also bring out the history of intercultural contacts, with their mutual borrowings and contributions. This common sense of belonging, albeit pluralistic, will also facilitate action to combat mutual ignorance and misunderstanding, thereby strengthening the fundamental values of democracy, justice and human rights.

## Conclusion

In response to the globalization of the economy, the international community must be resolute in promoting universality in the most profound sense of the word: a type of universality which both challenges all models and acknowledges and respects the contribution of all peoples to universal civilization.

UNESCO sees globalization as extending far beyond economic issues. It disrupts life styles and behaviour patterns, and overturns habits of decision-making and governance and forms of artistic expression. The challenge that it poses for UNESCO is that of perceiving all the complexity of its ramifications, so that in an interdisciplinary and intercultural spirit we can devise strategies and policies to ensure that it works for the benefit of all, particularly those who are at present excluded from it.

## Note

1. This text has been adapted from a speech made at the closing meeting of the *Rencontres de Versailles* on the theme of 'Is the globalization of the economy creating values for a new civilization?', held at the Château de Versailles, France, on 17 June 2000.