Creating the future…was the theme of the High-level Policy Dialogue on Creative Economy and Development held on 26 April 2012, as a special event of UNCTAD XIII. The aim was to support governments to nurture their creative economies for advancing socio-economic growth, trade and innovation. At this intergovernmental debate governments discussed policy strategies, national experiences and global processes to foster the creative economy worldwide. The Minister of Culture, Arts and Heritage of Qatar, also President of UNCTAD XIII, chaired the session. He stated that the creative economy became a driver to diversify and modernize the economies of several countries in the Middle-East. In Qatar huge investments continue to be made for enhancing the creative sector; the Museum of Islamic Art and the new state-of-art image of the city of Doha are illustrations of how the creative economy is shaping the future and revitalizing the country. The Secretary General of UNCTAD reminded that the growth of the creative economy had exceeded all expectations; developing countries now have nearly 50% of the global market for creative goods. In response to the growing significance of the creative economy some countries are creating a Ministry on Creative Industries sometimes associated with Tourism. In concluding he emphasized three points: (i) the creative economy can be the pinnacle of inclusive development; (ii) the creative economy is a green industry that contributes to sustainable development; and (iii) the creative economy stimulates diversity in culture, ideas and thinking in a democratic way.

The Doha Mandate (TD/L.427/Rev.1) negotiated by UNCTAD Member States reaffirms that to foster sustained economic growth for sustainable and inclusive development, UNCTAD should provide analytical work and technical assistance to developing countries including sectors related to creative economy, entrepreneurship and other that generate more value addition. (Paragraph 65).

The session revisited the work of UNCTAD reasserting its key role in advancing the policy and the research agendas in this area. Pointing to the instability of the global economy, the Chief Creative Economy Programme made an overview of the market situation and prospects for the creative economy releasing data for world trade of creative goods and services up to 2010. A journalist from the Aljazeera Network moderated the three panels. The first focused on the policy and institutional framework and the role of the creative economy in the contemporary society. High-level government officials from Nigeria, South Africa, Finland and Australia shared views on how the creative economy can improve social, cultural and economic life. The linkages between technology and creativity should be reinforced through education, investments and business. Municipalities should be attentive to design, innovation and cultural services by engaging private and public services. The second panel centred on how to build a more creative, sustainable and inclusive society. The Minister of Trade and Industry of Zambia, the Secretary of Creative Economy of Brazil, the Director National Arts Council of Chile, and the General Manager of the International Federation of Arts Council Agencies, voicing the views of arts funding agencies, agreed that the creative economy is the path of the 21st century by linking the past with the future, and providing job opportunities for youth and women on an equitable basis. Job conditions, intellectual property rights, capacity-building and support to SMEs remain critical issues, as well as traditional knowledge and the contribution of indigenous culture. The third panel debated the role of the UN system. The role of UNCTAD in building synergy inside and outside the UN was praised. A video showing the work of the UNCTAD Creative Economy Programme since its creation in 2004 was presented. Representatives of ITC, UNESCO, UNIDO and the United Nations Alliance on Civilizations informed about their priorities for the future.

Special Issue

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The UN Conference on Sustainable Development - Rio+20, took place from 13 to 22 June in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The "Future We Want" was the theme of this mega conference that attracted about 100 Head of States and thousands of participants from all over the world. The Creative Economy Programme participated in several events of the “Rio+20 and You” organized by the Rio de Janeiro City Hall in collaboration with the Planetarium Foundation and Institute Humanitare. The Summit on Creative Economy and Tourism held on 16 June provided for lively debates on how the tourism sector and the creative economy can better support initiatives to ensure a sustainable future for all. UNCTAD emphasized that concerted policies should be in place to bring together objectives of ecotourism and the creative economy to promote the conservation of environmental endowments and cultural heritages, while promoting creative and cultural activities to revive local communities. Environmentally responsible tourism to undisturbed natural areas help to promote culture, including ethnic dances, songs, crafts but also cuisines based on local natural ingredients and traditional knowledge. By invitation of the Minister of Culture of Brazil, UNCTAD addressed the inaugural session of the "Sector Dialogues between Brazil and the European Union on Creative Economy" on 21 June 2012, a parallel event of the UN Rio+20. Recalling the historical, cultural and economic ties that nurture the international cooperation between Brazil and Europe, UNCTAD considers that there is scope to forge partnerships and technical cooperation projects of mutual interest around the creative economy. Brazil and Europe are large markets and jointly they can play a major role in promoting both the creative and the green economy.

Puppet Planet Show in Rio+20

The Puppet Planet Project designed by UNCTAD and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) promotes climate literacy, culture and the creative economy in developing countries. The aim is to raise awareness about environmental issues and climate change. The Puppet Planet Show was commissioned to have its inaugural performance at the UN Rio+20. This one-man show was created and performed by Liviu Berehoi, a well-known actor-puppeteer who also has extensive experience in training young artists. Five performances of the show attracted nearly 1,000 children on 16 and 17 June to the Planetarium Theatre of Rio de Janeiro. By using the creative industries (puppetry, new media, music and photography) the show helps to sensitize the civil society about the need to preserve the environment and avoid waste. Funny creative images and simple but sensitive language help to pass ecological messages to children; later they will educate their parents. The show calls for immediate action appealing to all of us to be more ecologically-responsible and change our daily attitudes. The originality of this project is to contribute to the transition towards the green economy through the creative economy. The project is also expected to create job opportunities for the youth by providing capacity-building to young artists and creative entrepreneurs interested in theatre, puppetry, video-clips, music and photography, etc. Another aspect is to assist governments of developing countries to use culture to articulate educational campaigns on environmental issues by presenting the show in schools and small communities. UNCTAD intends to work in partnership with local institutions to implement a pilot project in Brazil.

International Forum Preparatory for the UN Rio+20 Conference

The Francophone International Organization hosted an international forum to discuss the preparations aiming at a successful outcome for the Rio+20. The purpose was to share views on possible proposals and concrete actions to promote sustainable development. UNCTAD and UNESCO shared ideas on the round-table on "culture and sustainable development" emphasizing the role played by culture for shaping a new economic model that supports cultural diversity and social inclusion. Participants agreed that culture, in addition to the economic, social and environmental aspects should be the forth pillar to ensure sustainable development. UNCTAD voiced that the creative industries should be used to promote climate literacy and environmental protection. The Puppet Planet Project, was presented as a concrete way to promote climate literacy, culture, education and training for young creative talents. This innovative idea attracted great interest from the part of Francophone countries, particularly from Africa.
The School of Arts of the Utrecht University at the occasion of its 25th anniversary hosted this event with focus on cultural sustainability and its social and environmental dimensions. The Dutch government included the creative industries among the priorities for its innovation strategy and the university is one of the partners. The city of Utrecht is one of the oldest towns in the country but has a young population and many new knowledge-intensive ventures. Round-tables discussed creative opportunities to develop alternative ways of sustainable production, including on the renewing of cities and social innovation. Recalling the UN Year of the Cooperatives 2012, the experience of the Dutch Rabobank that has grown as a cooperative structure may inspire the use of cooperative principles for creative enterprises. The Chief UNCTAD Creative Economy Programme delivered a keynote on the topic “The Creative and the Green Economy: towards a more inclusive and sustainable development” underlying that creativity and intellectual capital are inexhaustible human resources and most creative industries are environmentally-friendly able to generate greener products. During the event, two Dutch and one Belgian academic universities joined the UNCTAD Academic Exchange Network on Creative Economy.

The British Council’s Creative and Cultural Economy team organized an informal roundtable dialogue session that gathered a small group of UK experts and professionals from the creative industries for an exchange of views with UNCTAD and WIPO. The purpose was to discuss possible ways to foster collaboration and harmonize views on how to better develop, connect and support the global creative economy and its professionals. The idea is to improve synergy among collaborating institutions with a view to complement research and analytical methodologies, as well as to identify areas of work aiming at greater impact on international policymaking, including in the social and educational agendas. Some key themes requiring further policy-oriented research were identified, including the need to better understand how new business models operate and how they connect with investors, as well as the policy implications of how digitisation is transforming ownership and exploitation of intellectual property. The meeting provided for a constructive discussion and pave the way for better coordinated cooperation in the future. The next BC round table took place in June 18, the emphasis was on the intersection between creative industries and international development.
I am retiring from my professional life at UNCTAD, but intellectually I will remain connected with the creative economy. My sincere thanks for the cooperation, support and friendship that we were able to nurture over the years.

My hope to remain in contact with many of you.

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Pending the nomination of my successor, please contact: creative.industries@unctad.org