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Rethinking Development through Local Cultural Policies in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract

This article investigates the strategic role of local cultural public policies in promoting peace and development in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a focus on decentralization. Grounded in a constructivist and transdisciplinary framework, it draws on theories of culture, peacebuilding, and governance to show how localized cultural initiatives can support conflict transformation and sustainable development. Using Cameroon as a case study, the paper examines how regionalization and municipal autonomy enable the valorization of cultural heritage, strengthen social cohesion, and address identity-based tensions. Comparative insights from countries such as Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire highlight both successful cultural practices and ongoing challenges, including limited resources, political centralization, and weak institutional coordination. The study argues that repositioning culture as a tool for peace and development requires restructured public policy frameworks that prioritize local knowledge systems, intercultural dialogue, and investment in cultural infrastructure. It concludes by recommending stronger local capacities and multilevel partnerships to advance inclusive, culturally grounded development.

Keywords   Cultural Policies, Decentralization, Peace building, Local Governance, Sub-Saharan Africa

1. Introduction

Developing countries, particularly those on the African continent, remain prey to two major concerns: development and peace, with peace appearing as a *sine qua non* condition for development. Among the development approaches whose range of possibilities remains to be explored, culture is a determining factor that has delivered only a tiny part of its potential, which is guessed to be immense (UNESCO, 2009). In this vein, the examination of the implementation of cultural policies dedicated to the ideal of peace and in the service of development interests us in several aspects.

Since the end of the Cold War, Africa has endured its share of violent wars. These include wars of independence, but also various postcolonial conflicts over the sharing of power left by former colonists between national brothers, who are now enemies. Many inter-ethnic and political armed conflicts therefore persist there as avatars of the instrumentalization of difference for the purposes of hegemonic conquest and perpetual management of power (Mamdani, 1996). Over the past ten years, there has also been a resurgence of violent extremism, including terrorism, irredentist demands, cross-border insecurity and the return of unconstitutional military takeovers. Africa is thus traversed from north to south by armed conflicts of various kinds.

Developing countries, emerging from long civil wars, often experience challenges in managing ex-combatants, militia groups and armed civilians as well as the many displaced persons. There is also the question of the economic reconstruction of devastated areas. Violent conflicts have now become major obstacles to peace and development, particularly in countries weakened by the post-war period. Other challenges concern maintaining the rule of law, good governance and the distribution of social services on an equitable basis. As a result, a multifaceted violence, physical, psychological, cultural and structural, is spreading insidiously (Galtung, 1990).

Today, more than ever, a growing feeling is crystallising around the need for dialogue between people and cultures; but in a constantly changing world, there can be no question of fruitful cooperation or real dialogue between cultures and civilisations without a solemn recognition of the principle of cultural diversity. In the same vein, it has become imperative to promote an educational model focused on dialogue and respect for cultural diversity.

This cultural diversity is intended to be an essential bridge for peaceful coexistence between people, and therefore, considering a common future in the ideal of peace, indispensable to any development.

This dynamic from a perspective of transnationalism also fits in directly with the missions of international organisations in the United Nations system, such as the OIC[1] from ICESCO[2] and FUMI[3]. The OIC Action Plan for the period up to 2025 offers a framework of opportunities for multifaceted cooperation as reflected in its objectives and actions, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but also to the statutory missions of UNESCO[4]. The term "peacebuilding" was popularised as early as 1992 when Boutros Boutros Ghali, then Secretary-General of the United Nations, presented the report entitled: An Agenda for Peace. He defined it as a field of activities intended to identify and support structures that will strengthen and concretise peace in order to avoid relapses into conflict, introducing a distinction between making peace and keeping peace. This term was coined twenty years earlier by the peace scholar Johan Galtung who spoke of "approaches to peace". Together, making peace, keeping peace and building peace formulate a general theory for obtaining or maintaining peace. In 1999, Miall et al wrote: "Referring to the conflict triangle, it is possible to suggest that the aims of 'peace-making' are to change the attitudes of the main protagonists, 'peacekeeping' is to reduce the level of destructive behaviour and 'peacebuilding' is to try to overcome the contradictions at the root of the conflict." (Miall et al, 1999). (Miall, Ramsbotham, & Woodhouse, 1999)

The importance of implementing cultural policies for peacebuilding, while increasingly shared by States, still needs exchanges and sharing of experiences between the various actors involved. There are several approaches and techniques for building peace, such as art or music, dialogue and reconciliation, sports and nonviolent education. Each approach has its specificities, meanings and challenges. Lisa Schirch writes about this in "Strategic Peacebuilding": "Peacebuilding seeks to prevent, reduce, transform and help people heal from violence in all its forms, including structural violence, which has not yet led to massive civil unrest. Strategic peacebuilding recognizes

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[1]OIC, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, called until 2011 Organisation of the Islamic Conference is an intergovernmental organisation created in Rabat, Morocco in 1969. Its headquarters are located in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Bringing together 57 member states, its vocation is to promote cooperation in the economic, social, cultural and scientific fields. The organisation has a permanent delegation to the United Nations.

[2]ICESCO, Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, formerly known as the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO), is an international organisation that emerged from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Its missions include contributing to world peace and security through various means, disseminating the true image of Islam and Islamic culture, fostering dialogue among civilisations, cultures and religions, promoting cultural interactions and fostering cultural diversity in member States.

[3]FUMI, the Federation of Universities of the Islamic World, is part of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ICESCO).

[4]UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, is a specialised agency created in 1945. Its objective is to "contribute to the maintenance of peace and security by strengthening, through education, science and culture, collaboration between nations...". Its headquarters are in Paris, France, and it brings together 194 States.

the complexity of the tasks required to build pacifism. It becomes strategic when resources, actors and approaches are coordinated to achieve multiple goals and address multiple issues for the long term. Therefore, building peace requires diverse and well-coordinated approaches to transform violence and conflict into more sustainable and peaceful relationships and structures." (Schirch, 2015).

Furthermore, placing culture at the heart of development constitutes a capital investment in the future of the world, the condition for the success of a well-understood globalization that takes into account the principles of cultural diversity: UNESCO has the mission of reminding nations of this crucial issue. As the failure of projects carried out since the 1970s has shown, development is not synonymous with economic growth alone. It is a means of achieving a satisfying intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence. Understood as such, development is inseparable from culture. Strengthening the consideration of culture in sustainable development projects is an objective that began in the framework of the "World Decade for Cultural Development" of UNESCO's programme in 1985 and continues to this day.

In addition, decentralization posed as a mode and form of governability of States (Owona Awoumou, 1999a) whose implementation has been underway for thirty years in Africa, poses the local governance level as a privileged field of public action. Thus, in our African experience, projects to build peace are more effective if they are intended and adapted to the socio-cultural, economic and political needs of the local population. There is no single size, nor "one best way" that can solve African problems. Because each context is unique in Africa and finding African solutions to African problems requires analyses and understanding of the complexity of cultures, values, norms and traditions. We therefore wonder: what role can culture play in the effort to build peace and development in Africa in a context of decentralization? Or better, how can cultural policies contribute more to the consolidation of peace and the development effort from the local level in sub-Saharan Africa? This could involve assessing the ability of countries to deal with situations of threat to peace and formulating recommendations on the means by which developing countries, particularly in Africa, can (re)build peace and return to the path of sustainable development. Taking up the hypothesis *development through culture in situations of threat to peace* highlights the relationship between cultural diversity and local development in the context of implementing decentralization policy as is the case in Cameroon, a developing country in central Africa.

In a constructivist approach, following a syncretic theoretical framework essentially made up of transnationalism (Nye & Keohane, 1977), cultural studies (Sardar, 1994) including policies and cultural public action, we propose to examine the theoretical framework of culture in the service of peace and development in a local anchoring, as well as the governance of public development action in Cameroon and in sub-Saharan Africa.

2. Cultural framework for peace and decentralization of cultural policies

The framework in question here integrates the theoretical and praxeological framework of cultural policies for peace and development and subsequently examines cultural policies for development, in the context of decentralization in sub-Saharan Africa.

2.1. The theoretical and praxeological framework of cultural policies for peace and development

This involves presenting the cultural springs of peace as a fundamental concept indispensable to any development as well as the praxeological contribution of international organisations to this end, then some theories of development according to a cultural perspective.

2.1.1. Culture and peace

Peace is a fundamental concept that transcends borders and cultures. In a contemporary world marked by a multifaceted resurgence of conflicts and tensions, the international framework of peace through culture emerges as an innovative approach to promote peaceful coexistence. This framework is based on the idea that culture, as a set of shared values, beliefs and practices, plays a crucial role in building peace through at least three elements: intercultural dialogue, peace education and the enhancement of collective memory (UNESCO, 2013; Lederach, 1997).

It is well-known that culture promotes intercultural dialogue. By highlighting cultural diversity, this framework encourages exchanges between different peoples, thus allowing for a better understanding of the perspectives, symbolic representations, imaginaries, cosmogonies and realities of others (Bhabha, 1994; Kymlicka, 1995). This helps to attenuate stereotypes and reduce prejudices, all of which are often at the root of conflicts (Allport, 1954; Galtung, 1996).

Culture also appears as a vector of education for peace. Through art, literature, music and other forms of cultural expression, it is possible to convey messages of tolerance and respect. Cultural initiatives help to raise awareness among younger generations about the importance of peace, by providing them with positive role models to follow. For example, collaborative artistic projects bring together individuals from different backgrounds around a common goal: the construction of a harmonious society in which living together is a tangible reality (Owona Awoumou, 2024b).

The international framework of peace through culture highlights the importance of collective memory. The recognition of historical traumas and past injustices is essential to move towards sustainable reconciliation in post-conflict situations. Cultural events, such as commemorations or festivals, can play a cathartic role, promoting forgiveness and the healing of old psychological and traumatic wounds.

The international framework for peace through culture supported by the United Nations through its dedicated organisations (OIC, FUMI, ICESCO, UNESCO, etc.), offers a new perspective on the mechanisms of peace. By highlighting the importance of cultural exchanges, education through art and collective memory, this approach offers concrete solutions for building a peaceful and inclusive future. In a constantly changing world, in which conflict is now a given, even an unavoidable constraint, promoting culture as a means of peace is *ipso facto* an imperative necessity (UNESCO, 2010).

2.1.2. UNESCO's peace and development missions

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), makes a decisive contribution to the promotion of peace and development on a global scale, as its main mission. Created in 1945, this institution's mission is to contribute to the construction of peace by promoting inclusive education, cultural exchange, and sustainable development. Its actions are part of a multidimensional framework that integrates culture, education, science, and communication. One of UNESCO's main focuses is education. The Organisation promotes equitable access to quality education, recognising that education is a fundamental lever for peace. An initiatives such as the Education for All Program [5](EFA) aims to reduce inequalities and ensure that every individual, regardless of their background, can benefit from an adequate education. By investing in education, UNESCO strives to combat ignorance and promote values of tolerance and respect.

At the same time, the preservation of cultural heritage is another essential mission of UNESCO. The protection of World Heritage sites, as well as the support of local cultural practices, contributes to the creation of a collective identity and the consolidation of social cohesion. In contexts marked by conflict, the safeguarding of cultural heritage becomes a question of peace, as it strengthens community ties and fosters intercultural dialogue. The Institution is also engaged in sustainable development programmes, aligning its operations with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By integrating sustainable approaches into its action, UNESCO encourages countries to build resilient societies, capable of facing contemporary challenges such as climate change, poverty and inequalities. UNESCO's peace and development missions are inseparable. They are based on the idea that education, culture and sustainable development are essential foundations for building a peaceful world. Through its action, UNESCO aims to promote harmonious coexistence, where each individual can flourish fully within a united society, which guarantees their rights (individual and collective) and which promotes the blossoming of their full potential.

2.1.3. The peace and development missions of the OIC and ICESCO

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Islamic Centre for Culture and Development (ICESCO) are two key institutions working for peace and development within member countries and beyond. As international organisations, they share common goals, but each also bears specific responsibilities in promoting peace, cooperation and sustainable development.

The OIC, founded in 1969, is composed of 57 member states and has as its primary mission to defend the interests of Muslims throughout the world. In matters of peace, the OIC is committed to resolving armed conflicts within Muslim nations and promoting inter-religious dialogue. Its initiatives include mediating crises, sending international observers and supporting post-conflict reconstruction. The OIC also plays a vital role in promoting human rights and combating Islamophobia, thereby contributing to a climate of peace and mutual respect.

For its part, ICESCO, established in 1980, focuses on education, culture and science, with a focus on human development in member countries. Its missions aim to strengthen the educational and cultural capacities of states, while promoting sustainable development. ICESCO implements programmes aimed at improving access to quality education, promoting Islamic cultural heritage and encouraging scientific innovation. Through its actions, ICESCO contributes to the social and economic stability of Muslim countries, thus promoting an environment of lasting peace.

The OIC and ICESCO thus hold a central place in the promotion of peace and development. This is not limited only to the Islamic community but covers the entire planet and particularly Africa where terrorist violence is too often easily associated with a form of Islamism. Their respective missions combine to create a framework conducive to conflict resolution and societal advancement through the recognition of the universal values of peace, which underlines the importance of bilateral and multilateral inter-state cooperation in a constantly changing world. By consolidating

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[5]EFA, Education For All is a global commitment made by UNESCO at the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000. It is the largest fund in the world dedicated exclusively to transforming education in low-income countries. It aims to provide quality education to every boy and girl in the world.

their efforts, these Organisations work not only for peace but also, by promoting the establishment of development conditions, for a better future for future generations.

2.2. Cultural perspectives and development theories

A review of scholarly writing on culture and development from our perspective allows us to present a global approach to cultural theories of development but also a singularly connoted Africanist perspective. Cultural theories of development are located at the intersection of anthropology, sociology, economics and politics. They seek to understand how cultural dynamics influence the development of societies. Several authors, both Western and African, have brought varied perspectives to this subject, exploring the interactions between culture and socio-economic progress.

2.2.1. Global Perspectives

One of the leading figures of this theoretical dynamic is Amartya Sen, an Indian economist and philosopher whose approach emphasizes human capacities and the role of cultural values in development. The latter argues that development must be seen as a process of expanding the real freedoms enjoyed by individuals (Sen: 1999). This perspective invites us to go beyond simple economic growth to include the improvement of living conditions and individual freedoms. Thus, he advocates for an adaptation of development policies that take into account specific cultural contexts. His work allowed him to develop the Human Development Index (HDI) in 1990, measured every year since then by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Another influential author is Clifford Geertz, who popularised the idea that culture is a "set of shared meanings" that can shape behaviours and institutions (Geertz, 1973). In his 1973 book, The Interpretations of Culture, Geertz emphasizes the importance of cultural symbols and practices in the construction of identities and social structures. These elements profoundly influence economic and political dynamics. Their understanding is therefore essential for the implementation of effective development interventions.

Furthermore, Pierre Bourdieu offers a critique of traditional economic approaches by introducing the notions of habitus and cultural capital. Bourdieu argues that inequalities in development are rooted in social and cultural structures that reproduce inequalities (Bourdieu, 1986). He thus asserts that cultural practices and forms of capital, whether economic or symbolic, play a fundamental, even determining role in the perpetuation or overcoming of these inequalities.

Mary Douglas's work highlights how culture shapes perceptions of risk and opportunity within societies. She argues that institutions are simply systems of thought reinforced by social behaviours (Douglas, 1986), which highlights the importance of cultural structures in how development priorities are defined and responses to contemporary challenges are adapted.

2.2.2. Tropical Perspectives

The examination of the African contribution (with an obvious postcolonial colouring) to development through culture, allows the highlighting of some of the most significant authors. Also, as a non-exhaustive review, we present a brief overview of some of the most persistent intuitions.

Cheikh Anta Diop, a prolific author recognized as a key figure in African thought, particularly on issues of (endogenous) development. He remains convinced that the development of Africa requires a reappropriation of its cultural identity. Diop states that the denial of African cultural identity was one of the greatest intellectual impostures of the 20th century and one of the major obstacles to the emancipation and development of the continent (Diop1981). For him, understanding and valuing the richness of pre-colonial African cultures is an essential key, a real civilisational challenge. He highlights the historical links between African and world civilisations, and insists on the need to recognize these foundations as a basis for building a prosperous Africa. The latter also advocates for the promotion of African languages, which he considers to be essential vectors of knowledge and cultural transmission. According to the latter, a language always carries the seeds of a unique worldview. He sees this approach as an ideal solution to strengthen social cohesion and encourage endogenous economic and social models, better adapted to local contexts. Furthermore, in an intellectual context dominated by Western systems of thought that have often ignored or minimised African contributions, it is a question of restoring Africa's rightful place in world history. This constitutes a preliminary and decisive step to revive the feelings of pride, confidence, responsibility and self-determination, necessary for development, within the African population.

Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of independent Ghana, is another major icon of cultural development in Africa. He emphasized the importance of Pan-Africanism, advocating intercontinental unity to promote the economic, cultural and political progress of Africa. In his book Africa Must Unite (1963), he asserted that "independence must not only be political, but also economic and cultural." He thus emphasized that intellectual and cultural emancipation was essential to free Africa from the paradigms imposed by colonisation. Nkrumah also insisted on the need to develop educational systems adapted to African realities. As he asserted, an educational system without cultural

roots was disconnected from the fundamental needs of the people. By advocating for an education rooted in local traditions and combined with universal values, he proposed to forge a youth capable of leading Africa towards autonomous and sustainable development. His intellectual legacy ultimately rests on the idea that culture and collective identity are indispensable drivers of social transformation.

Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan thinker, insists on the need for cultural decolonisation. He maintains that language and culture are the keys to the liberation of peoples, because they carry the values and histories of communities, so he proposes to decolonise mentalities (Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o: 1986). Encouraging the use of African languages and recognising avant-garde traditional arts, are economic drivers for development rooted in local culture.

In short, cultural theories of development, through the contributions of Amartya Sen, Clifford Geertz, Pierre Bourdieu, Cheikh Anta Diop, Kwame Nkrumah, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o and Mary Douglas, highlight the complexity of the interactions between culture, society and economy. These authors, both Western and African, invite us to reconsider classical approaches to development and to adopt cultural perspectives to better meet the needs and aspirations of the population. The analysis of cultural dimensions thus becomes essential for developing inclusive and sustainable development policies, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

2.2.3. Cultural public policies

By examining the future of cultural policies in France (DEPS), (Négrier and Teillet, 2014), it appears that three dynamics play a fundamental role: globalisation, digital transformation and the relationship between individualism and society. Although in one way or another Africa does not escape these dynamics, the latter remains concerned about cultural diversity which can both constitute an opportunity for development and when it is instrumentalized (Owona Awoumou, 2024b) a threat to peace. Globally, faced with these dynamics which can be part of transnationalism[6], (Nye & Keohane, 1977) the State can no longer produce and implement cultural policies alone. New players in the cultural products market, cultural authorities but also international Organisations (UNESCO, ICESCO, the European Union, the African Union, etc.) and other major public and private operators will now be involved. This philosophy of alternative action is strongly supported by these international Organisations as well as States in order to guarantee a pluralism jeopardised by the risk of uniformity induced by globality. It is therefore now impossible to detach cultural affairs from technological, digital, educational, diplomatic issues, etc. This results in a "democratization of culture" as a significant benchmark for the analysis of cultural public policies, although the paradigm of cultural diversity persists (Bonet and Négrier, 2008). The issue of cultural diversity is also based on the situation of plurinational States (like those of sub-Saharan Africa) which can find in them the means to found or regenerate their social and political order (Négrier and Teillet, 2014). The analysis of changes within cultural policies, for its part, invites us to pay closer attention to the way in which these policies are concretely conducted and implemented. This allows the examination of public policy instruments (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2004a). They propose to favour both technical and social devices which organise the social relations between public authorities and their recipients according to the representations and meanings they carry (Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2004b). Our analysis focuses on the impact of cultural policies on development. In terms of foresight, the instruments here concern the strategic axes that these policies could take in their operational deployment as well as the reappropriations that would result from them by local public and private actors, as well as international Organisations. This in a context where the resources allocated to sectoral levels (Ministries of Culture),are structurally insufficient, but which are deployed in a favourable legal and governance framework that constitutes the local. This ultimately authorises, the examination of the deployment of these cultural policies in the regions and municipalities.

2.2.4 Local cultural policies

Local cultural policies play a key role in the development and diversification of territories. They are based on a growing recognition of culture as a key factor in social cohesion, collective identity and economic growth. Several theories shed light on the issues and practices relating to these policies.

The theory of cultural governance (Meyer-Bish, 2002), for example, highlights the importance of involving local actors in the definition and implementation of policies. By promoting a participatory approach, this theory emphasizes the need to integrate the aspirations and needs of citizens into decisions regarding cultural offerings. This participation enriches the local cultural project and strengthens the sense of belonging to the community.

Furthermore, the theory of creative territories (Debroux, 2013) highlights the notion of creativity as a driver of local development. It postulates that cities and regions that encourage cultural innovation can attract talent and investment, thus helping to boost the local economy. This paradigm underlines the need for synergy between culture, economy and environment in order to generate sustainable benefits for the community.

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[6]The term was popularised in the early 20th century by writer Randolph Bourne to describe "a new way of thinking about the relationships between cultures."

Furthermore, the social and solidarity economy model (Laville, 2001) is also part of local cultural policies by placing emphasis on equitable access to culture. This approach aims to ensure that all members of the community, regardless of their socio-economic status, benefit from the cultural riches of the territory. This may involve initiatives aimed at reducing barriers to access to culture, such as arts education programmes or subsidies for free cultural events.

In short, theories on local cultural policies call for a multidimensional reflection where the principles of participation, creativity and equity are intertwined. They demonstrate a desire to adapt cultural initiatives to the specificities of local contexts, thus contributing to a mutual enrichment between culture and territorial development. The effective implementation of these policies requires constant vigilance and collective commitment to respond to contemporary challenges.

This juxtaposition of cultures does not seem to be held by any central core that would ensure its ethnic unity. Anthropologists and ethnologists have been working for years to find traces of Cameroon's ethnic unity, relying on the anthropological power of blood as the cement of national unity and living together. Such an exercise can be part of the political project or a positive hope in the virtue of fraternity. It is an established fact that anthropology has its say in the reflection on what it is convenient to call "Cameroonian living together".

However, considering basing a project on contacts, interactions between peoples to find a single origin, a fraternity or consanguinity in no way imposes the peace of peoples who would label in tribal manner xenophobia. The theme of enemy brothers in anthropology should however alert to the fact that there is no direct causal link between fraternity and peaceful coexistence. (Mbida Mbida, 2023)

The instrumentation of culture, one could say, corresponds to its deployment as a teleological action. That is to say, a practice oriented towards a specific purpose. Not only does culture constitute a way of being, seeing and doing, but it also serves as communication, of this singular and universal being at the same time. This communication is the expression of the will of individuals. A cultural policy is in this context, a way of integrating the different identities and cultural actions into a common framework of expression, which pools them and gives them a force and a projection, which no singularity would have on its own. According to another meaning, cultural policy directs towards the realisation of a common social project, diverse cultural elements and expressions. These elements being the witnesses of the identities of which they are the markers, cultural policy also becomes the integration of these identities into a larger social framework which, moreover, increases their projection tenfold. Also, for such an enterprise to be possible, it is important to politically hold both aspects of culture, one as an identifier and the other as a good. (Mbida Mbida 2023).

3. Cultural policies and development in Africa in the context of decentralisation

Here, decentralization is presented as a framework conducive to the emergence of cultural policies at the local level. Then, also, a highlight of the multidimensional scope of cultural development policies.

3.1. Decentralization: a framework conducive to the emergence of local cultural policies

Decentralization is both a crucial issue and a window of opportunity for cultural policies in Africa, where cultural diversity is both an asset and a challenge. This analysis explores the interactions between decentralisation, cultural policies and socio-economic development on the continent. We analyse how local dynamics influence the formulation and implementation of cultural policies and assess their impact on sustainable development, particularly at the local level. Africa is a continent marked by a unique cultural plurality, reflecting its history, languages, traditions and local identities. Decentralisation, which began in many African countries in the 1990s, has redefined modes of governance and created opportunities for better consideration of local dynamics. In this context, cultural policies have become a strategic tool to promote local development while preserving cultural wealth (Nguessan, 2001; Diawara, 2014; Zeleza, 1997 ;).

Historically, African cultural policies emerged in a context that encouraged the affirmation of cultural values but also of national identity. As "guiding principles" we can find the statements recorded in the Pan-African cultural manifesto of Algiers (1969) [7] and similarly in the African Cultural Charter (Port-Louis, Mauritius, 1976) [8] and the intergovernmental conference on the state and trends of African cultural policies (Africacult. Accra, 1975) [9] a few years later. As a result of implementation, the production of several normative tools has strengthened the conservation of cultural property and the fight against illicit trafficking by uniting States around common principles reaffirmed in their national legislation. The legal provisions describing the components of cultural heritage have

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[7] At the initiative of the Algerian government with the support of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the Pan-African Festival of Algiers in 1969 aimed to bring together the diversity of Africa in the Algerian capital to celebrate the cultures of the continent while reaffirming the commitment to anti-colonial struggles. It led to the promulgation of the Pan-African Cultural Manifesto of Ager.

[8] The Cultural Charter of Africa was adopted by the heads of state and government of the OAU meeting at the thirteenth ordinary session in Port-Louis, Mauritius, from 2 to 5 July 1976.

[9] The Accra Declaration of the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies in Africa, promulgated in 1975, held from October 27 to November 6 in Accra, Ghana, by representatives of the governments of the OAU States with the support of UNESCO.

been developed and ratified. We can detect the expression of their variety as well as the diversity of the strategies deployed for their protection. It is clear that the legal, organic and infrastructural systems that house them, as well as the policies in charge of their implementation, remain rather unknown.

To understand the impact of this transformation, it is important to examine the challenges and opportunities related to the implementation of cultural policies in the decentralised framework. We analyse the economic, social and environmental dimensions while proposing recommendations adapted to the African reality.

3.1.1. Regionalisation as a framework for the emergence of cultural development policies

Regionalisation in Cameroon presents itself as a complex political Organisation system. In this, it combines on the one hand the imperative of unity and the requirements of particularism. It is a method of managing the State in a unitary form. The concern for unity in this perspective stems from national history and political will. National history having been built on the world of the aggregation of micro-nations and civilisations, the fear of political authorities was to avoid the breakup. As a result, the transition from federalism to the unitary State in 1972 was an important moment in the morphogenesis of Cameroon. The successive political regimes that have presided over the destinies of Cameroon have continually made the unitary form a "sacred cow". Since the constitution of January 1996, decentralisation has been enshrined in a dual form, combining regions and municipalities.

3.1.2. The region as a space for the development of cultural policies

The region, thanks to the decentralising reform, is positioned as an element of modulation of the administrative cartography of Cameroon. In this, it succeeds the province, long considered as a relevant framework for public decision-making and action. In this, it constitutes an evolution in the institutional dynamics of the country. The emergence of the region in the political-economic landscape certainly meets a social expectation. Following the numerous socio-political and post-electoral crises that have occurred since the beginning of the 1990s, and whose political and social violence evolves in a sawtooth manner, with significant peaks. The constitution of January 18, 1996 revised in 2008 by dedicating the region within the framework of decentralisation, made it the space for the deployment of State action, the privileged place for the implementation of public policies.

The country is recognised for its exceptional cultural diversity, but there is a real risk of instrumentalization of identities that can lead to conflicts that negatively impact development at the local level. We remember the social and economic consequences of the war against Boko Haram in the Far North of the country, as well as the low-intensity armed conflict between the armed forces and the separatist rebels of Ambazonia in the North-West and South-West regions. But also, the efforts of the government and its partners including the Organisation of the Major National Dialogue from September 30 to October 4, 2019 in Yaoundé, aimed at resolving the Anglophone crisis, the creation of dedicated institutions including the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration, for ex-combatants of Boko Haram and armed groups in the North-West and South-West regions created on November 30, 2018. We can also mention the Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism founded in January 2017, the various reconstruction plans for the Far North, North-West and South-West regions. In terms of governance, the new changes in the decentralisation policy, including the creation of a dedicated ministry, the Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development (MINDDEVEL), the effective establishment of the regions, the Senate, the effective transfer of skills and resources, the new law on the general code of decentralisation promulgated on December 24, 2019, but also the action of non-state and local international actors, etc.

The example of Cameroon adequately demonstrates the problematic interweaving of peace and development issues. If development deficits expressed in terms of insufficient basic social services are indeed part of the problem (Owona Awoumou, 2024b), the revision of the normative framework, a flagship recommendation of the major national dialogue, resulted in the promulgation of the law on the general code of decentralisation. On the normative scale, this law establishes the region as the framework for development policies at the local level. The same law also introduces a special status for the two regions of the North-West and South-West concerned. With legislative powers conducive to more effective implementation of local development policies. The analysis also makes it possible to broaden the understanding of local cultures and to build a coherent socio-cultural sensitivity, approaches intended to build peace while promoting sustainable local development.

3.1.3. Cultural policies and local development

The contributions of local cultural policies can be decisive in the ideal of local development, provided that their implementation is inclusive. These possible contributions include, among others; the valorisation of tangible and intangible heritage, the possibility of adapting cultural policies to local specificities for greater effectiveness, the facilitation of greater participation of local actors.

Regarding the valorisation of tangible and intangible heritage, it can be said that decentralisation allows local authorities to take direct charge of the preservation and promotion of tangible heritage such as historical monuments, archaeological sites, and museums present in their territories. As an illustration, Ghana has developed a

decentralised policy for the management of its forts and castles, classified as UNESCO world heritage sites. On the intangible level, traditional dances, tales, and local medicinal knowledge are benefiting from renewed attention thanks to local management that is more sensitive to cultural realities (Kouassi, 2016; Eboussi-Boulaga, 1981).

In Cameroon, local cultural festivals such as the "Ngondo" of the Sawa people of the coast, inscribed on the Representative List of the Common Heritage of Humanity in 2024, or the "Nguon" of the Bamoun people, recognized as intangible heritage of humanity by UNESCO in 2023 as a "set of governance rituals", constitute significant events with proven tourist and economic impact. Although obvious limitations persist, including the lack of adequate technical and financial resources. It is becoming essential to provide local communities with resources, including specific funds for cultural safeguarding. It is also a question of strengthening cooperation with specialized international Organisations.

Local governments have a deep understanding of the cultural realities of their territory, which allows them to formulate more appropriate policies. In Burkina Faso, for example, educational programmes integrating local languages into the school curriculum have helped preserve ethnic identities while strengthening social cohesion (Zongo, 2012; Meyer, 2004). However, this adaptation is not without challenges. Weak regulatory frameworks and political interference at the national level can limit the autonomy of local governments.

Decentralisation offers local actors and stakeholders the opportunity to increase their participation in the implementation of cultural policies. Communities thus benefit from the opportunity to be directly involved in decisions related to their culture. Local committees and other development committees, composed of community actors, contribute to the Organisation of events such as festivals or the preservation of traditional rites (Kamdem, 2018; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991). However, this participation is sometimes hampered by a lack of training for local actors and by low representation of marginalised groups, particularly women and young people.

3.2. Cultural policies and development: a multidimensional link

Cultural policies certainly offer, in many respects, multifaceted development opportunities. They also inevitably face challenges to overcome.

3.2.1. Development opportunities through cultural policies

The contribution of cultural policies to development is indeed of several kinds. The economic development driven by cultural policies extends to cultural and creative industries, such as cinema, music and crafts, which generate substantial income. In Nigeria, the Nollywood film industry produces more than 2,000 films per year, directly employing nearly a million people. Similarly, in Côte d'Ivoire, the FEMUA music festival contributes to economic dynamism by attracting international visitors and stimulating local tourism (Thiam, 2020; Ampofo et al., 2004). Similarly, FESPACO (Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou) created in 1969 in Burkina Faso has promoted the emergence of African film production for decades. However, these sectors remain underfunded, and artists often lack social and legal protection. Better structuring and increased financing of the creative industries are needed to maximise their economic potential.

Cultural policies strengthen social cohesion and cultural identity by promoting spaces for intercultural exchange. Pan-African festivals, such as the aforementioned FESPACO, celebrate diversity while fostering dialogue between different ethnic communities. In addition, the promotion of local languages in education and the media plays a crucial role in preserving cultural identities (Mbembe, 2000; Hountondji, 1997). Tensions persist, particularly in regions where identity claims clash with competing economic or political interests.

Innovative cultural practices stimulate creativity, such as community theatre or digital arts, offer unique solutions to local challenges. For example, in South Africa, theatre troupes use interactive performances to raise awareness about public health issues such as HIV/AIDS (Bakary, 2021; Obadare, 2004).

Preserving the environment through an international framework that prioritizes climate risks and biodiversity includes the cultural dimension. Traditional practices, such as agroforestry and community forest management, demonstrate the importance of local knowledge in biodiversity conservation. In Senegal, traditional fishing practices based on the lunar calendar promote sustainable exploitation of marine resources (Nguema, 2018; Fairhead & Leach, 1996).

3.2.2. The challenges of implementing cultural policies in a context of decentralisation

African cultural policies have been shown to play a central and decisive role in promoting the identity, diversity and heritage of the continent's various nations. They aim to strengthen social cohesion and foster economic development through culture, taking into account the specific socio-political realities of each country (Owona 2019b). Africa, rich in its traditions and multiple cultures, faces unique challenges, including globalisation, poverty and internal conflicts. In this context, African States have recognised the importance of structuring their cultural policies to protect and

promote their cultures. These policies are manifested in initiatives aimed at encouraging artistic creation, supporting cultural industries, as well as preserving languages and traditional knowledge.

One of the main axes of cultural policies is the valorisation of intangible heritage. Governments collaborate with non-governmental Organisations and local actors to inventory and transmit cultural practices, such as music, dance and crafts. These initiatives are essential for the education of the younger generations, who must become aware of the richness of their cultural heritage.

In addition, African cultural policies promote regional and international cooperation. Cultural exchanges, festivals and artist residencies help to create links between African countries and with the rest of the world. These collaborations help to highlight African creativity and attract investment in the cultural sector, thus stimulating economic development.

However, despite these efforts, many challenges remain. Insufficient funding for cultural projects and difficulty accessing infrastructure remain major obstacles. In the same vein, the recognition of culture as a vector of development is not yet fully integrated into public policies, in the vast majority of countries, this is aggravated when security concerns and threats to peace remain strong. The challenges mainly concern the improvement of governance which suffers among other things on the instrumental level from poorly appropriate managerial engineering by the various actors involved. The policies do indeed exist but the implementation is not effective. Among the main grievances is the persistent centralisation and despite the advances in decentralisation, many countries maintain centralized control over major cultural orientations. This has the effect of limiting the autonomy of local authorities and slowing down innovation (Abdou, 2022; Ferguson, 2006). Another complaint is insufficient coordination. Indeed, the absence of effective mechanisms for collaboration between the different levels of governance creates redundancies and reduces the impact of cultural policies (Diallo, 2016; Chabal & Daloz, 1999). And also insufficient resources. The scarcity of funding and the absence of adequate infrastructure limit the effectiveness of cultural policies. A study conducted in Mali reveals that more than 60% of local authorities do not have a specific budget for culture (Tchamou, 2017; Mamdani, 1996). Following this unflattering observation, measures must be taken in order to definitively take the virtuous path of development through culture.

4. Conclusion

Local cultural policies are an essential lever for the promotion of peace and sustainable development in Africa. Faced with contemporary challenges, such as internal and transnational conflicts, poverty and social inequalities, it becomes imperative to recognise the fundamental role of culture in building peace through the consolidation of strong identities and harmonious relationships within African societies.

Culture, as a vector of social cohesion, helps to strengthen community ties. Local cultural policies, which include the promotion of indigenous languages, traditions and know-how, foster a sense of belonging and collective pride. Furthermore, by integrating ethnic and cultural diversity into the development process, these policies facilitate intercultural dialogue and reduce tensions that can lead to conflict.

Furthermore, economic development can find significant momentum through the encouragement of cultural and creative industries. Initiatives aimed at promoting local crafts, music, dance and visual arts contribute not only to the preservation of cultural heritage, but also to job creation and improvement of the living conditions of the population. The contribution of international Organisations committed to this end is appreciable. Thus, by aligning cultural policies with economic development objectives, African countries can build resilient and sustainable economies.

Finally, the implementation of effective cultural policies requires the active participation of local communities. This implies the recognition of community leaders and cultural actors as key partners in the planning and implementation of projects, an appropriate regulatory framework, but also the provision of sufficient human, material and financial resources, as well as innovative infrastructures. By promoting a participatory approach, cultural policies no longer simply meet development needs; they also embody a proactive response to the challenges of peace in Africa.

Ultimately, the synergy between local cultural policies, peace and development is therefore not only desirable but even more essential. By integrating culture into development initiatives, African countries can build more stable, inclusive and prosperous societies, thus laying the foundations for a better future in an increasingly uncertain world.

4. Some recommendations

In order to strengthen the impact of cultural policies in Africa in the context of decentralization, some avenues of recommendation are proposed as follows:

- Promoting cultural policies as a sustainable development issue;
- Invest massively in local cultural infrastructure;
- Integrating culture into peace processes;
- Train local stakeholders in cultural management;

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- Establish clear and precise normative frameworks (legal and regulatory) to ensure better coordination and guarantee the impact of local cultural policies;
- Promote public-private partnerships to mobilize additional resources (Konaté, 2014; Sachs, 2015);
- Integrate regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for local initiatives to maximize their impact.

It is established that decentralization constitutes an opportunity to revalue African cultural wealth and stimulate inclusive development. However, the success of this approach depends on a strong political will, increased mobilization of resources, and active involvement of all stakeholders and local communities. In the era of wild globalization, fertile ground for the export of conflict, all-digital and the explosion of artificial intelligence, it becomes essential to protect African cultural specificities while being part of *glocal dynamics* (Roudometof, 2015), of peace and sustainable development.

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