



Culture and the Sustainable Development Goals: An Outlook of Future Opportunities

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Abstract

The purpose of this integrative literature review paper is to examine, from an angle of sustainability, how culture can contribute to the localization and achievement of SDGs. Specifically, this paper is to 1) reflect on the synergies between culture, ESD, and people-based Sustainable Development (SD), and 2) examine studies involving youths as the future potential for achieving the SDGs through culture. A varied range of literature was analysed to set up a method of inductive thinking, starting with specific examples and inferring towards generalizations. Drawn on studies from tangible and intangible heritages, the results identified two emerging thematic areas: 1) how culture presents future opportunities for achieving SD and provides a solid understanding on the synergies between culture and ESD, and 2) how culture has aided the progression of SD through youth engagement. The implication of the present study is to uncover strong connections between culture and SDGs and inherited reasons why culture matters for SDGs. More importantly, the paper highlights culture is not “good to consider” but must be taken into consideration as an intrinsic domain of human existence in all efforts to achieve SD.

Keywords: culture, cultural sustainability; Education for Sustainable Development; SDG 18; youth empowerment; people-based Sustainable Development

Introduction

This integrative literature review paper is to explore through a lens of sustainability how culture, in its different expressions, is an essential provider of future opportunities for the success of Sustainable Development (SD). The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the question “Why culture matters in SD” by analysing the vitality of culture in achieving SD based on the current scholarly dialogue on culture, youth, and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

The term “culture” can be understood as the collective practices of a specific group of people, their history, literature, arts, and other practices (Mahfoodh and Alhashmi, 2020). For Murdock

(1932), individuals carry culture, and no individual is free of culture as everyone is raised in a cultural environment. Murdock (1932) further observes that culture is not innate. The continuity of culture depends on individuals of every generation acquiring the culture anew from the previous generations. Hence, particular elements of culture depend on intergenerational teaching and learning. Lamsal and Pokhrel (2021) state that humans and culture are mutually interdependent, for “man is a cultural animal” (Lamsal & Pokhrel, 2021). Levin and Mamlok (2021) see culture as “a human creation”. It is inferable that all peoples are cultural beings because culture is intrinsic to human existence, it is blended with, and permeates every human experience. Yet despite these insights, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have marginal mentions on culture or culture-related terms with only four targets containing such terms. The terms “culture” and “heritage” are entirely absent in the most recent text of *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021* (UN, 2021). In the literature on SDGs, culture is often referred to as a “driver”, “enabler” or “social glue”. However, various actors ascribe to culture a far stronger role than these terms. Culture’s contribution to the realization of the SDGs has not been sufficiently acknowledged (Hosagrahar, 2017). There are calls for culture to be named as a fourth pillar (Ruigrok, 2009; Dessein et al., 2015) or dimension for SD (besides the currently named social, economic and environmental pillars), or referring to culture as “SDG 18” (Voices of Culture, 2021; Poole, 2018). The British Council talks of culture as “The Missing Pillar” of the UN 2030 Agenda for SD (The British Council, 2020).

Similarly, the movement of global cultural networks that produced the joint communique “The Future We Want includes Culture”, released in 2015 by the Global Campaign for Culture “#culture2015goal”, was revitalized as “#culture2030goal” (Culture 2030 Goal Campaign, 2019). Further efforts are being made to relate SDGs more intrinsically with domains of culture. An example is the introduction by the UNESCO of a framework of twenty-two thematic indicators referring to culture, as a voluntary complement to the existing 2030 Agenda indicators (Culture|2030 Indicators, 2020). The structured dialogue between representatives and organisations of the cultural sector and the European Union and the European Commission, Voices of Culture, is an additional case in point. These global voices evidently indicate the need to acknowledge the importance of incorporating the cultural sector more strongly into SD.

The aim of this paper is to review how culture matters for SDGs by exploring the opportunities offered by the synergies generated between culture and ESD and identifying how culture can empower next generations (i.e., youth) to achieve holistic SD. The scope of the integrative literature review includes scholarly and grey literature, and web searched documents mainly within the time frame 2015 – 2022, coinciding with the SDG era. This paper seeks to answer the

following research question: What are the concrete opportunities that the synergies between culture, ESD, and youth offer in achieving SDGs? In terms of objectives, this paper proposes to 1) examine the synergies between culture and ESD, and 2) examine studies involving youths as the future potential for achieving the SDGs through culture.

In the following sections, it shall explain the methodology including the selection process and criteria of the integrative review. Findings are illustrated along with two thematic areas, namely culture and ESD, and culture and youth empowerment, providing reflections on the synergies between culture and ESD and future opportunities that these synergies hold towards achieving SD. Examples analysed in this paper include localizing SDGs efforts involving cultural domains as well as through youth engagement with tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The conclusion shall sum up the paper's synthesis, the limitations of the review, and further questions to explore.

Methodology

The present paper is an integrative literature review that aims at generating contemporary reflections on culture and SD. Torraco (2005) defines integrative literature review as "a form of research that reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated". Integrative literature reviews address emerging topics and provide holistic conceptualizations. Thus, preliminary conceptualizations are generated that offer new perspectives on the topic e.g., taxonomies and other conceptual classification of constructs (Torraco, 2005). For the present review, the focus will lie solely on the youth as bearer of future sustainability issues (Johnson et al., 2021). The analysis shall complete a critical reading and review of a selection of literature on the chosen subject with the purpose of synthesizing findings. The sources of the literature selection are scholarly journal articles of peer-reviewed scientific articles from the academic databases of Scopus and JSTOR. For more current information on culture and sustainability and to broaden the search, the scholarly literature was complemented primarily with grey literature and documents of international organisations, NGOs, and the online web data from projects such as Voices of Culture, reports from Culture 2030 Goal Campaign, and the online presence of university departments, research programmes or initiatives. This search was conducted online by web searches with the search engine Google.

The literature review, in its function of setting a framework for defining the significance of the study (Creswell, 2014), contains inclusion and exclusion criteria. To select the literature for analysis,

some inclusion criteria were the presence of the keywords “culture”, “sustainable” or “sustainability”. In order to correlate present challenges of SDGs, their localization, and to provide an outlook into future opportunities, it is important to consider the present youth as representants of the future. As education is also closely related to youth and sustainability issues, literature concerning ESD was also considered. Therefore, as a second criterion for selection, the selected studies also include literature concerning “youth”, and “Education for Sustainable Development” (henceforth: ESD). The exclusion criteria narrowed down the results by limiting the documents taken into consideration to the years 2015 to the present year of 2022, to coincide with the SDG era. As a result of the inclusion and exclusion exercise, the total number of literatures reviewed for the current study is 53. The collected literature provided a starting point for the method of inductive thinking, beginning with specific examples and inferring towards generalized explanations (Creswell, 2014). Following the funnel method as proposed by Hofstee (2006), the literature is arranged thematically.

Findings

Culture and Education for Sustainable Development

As stated earlier, the notion of culture in SDGs is marginal. Within the text of the SDGs: *Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (UNDESA, 2022), a search for the word “culture” yielded a total of four matches (see Table 1). It appeared twice in Target 4.7, once in Target 8.9, and once in Target 12.b (see Table 1 for a detailed summary of results). A search for “heritage” yielded three matches, appearing all in SDG 11: once in Target 11.4, and twice in Indicator 11.4.1. The results show that culture is explicitly correlated to sustainable tourism in Targets 8.9 and 12.b, while Target 11.4 is mainly associated with tangible cultural heritage. Since the present paper excludes the economic dimension from its scope, the discussion shall focus on the implication of the search results for SDG 11 and SDG 4, leaving aside SDG 8 and SDG 12.

Table 1 SDG Text Containing “Culture” and “Heritage”

Goal	Target	Indicator
Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities	4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for	4.7.1 Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development are mainstreamed in (a) national

for all.	sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.	education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment.
Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.	8.9 By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.	8.9.1 Tourism direct GDP as a proportion of total GDP and in growth rate.
Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.	12.b Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.	12.b.1 Implementation of standard accounting tools to monitor the economic and environmental aspects of tourism sustainability.
Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.	11.4 Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage.	11.4.1 Total per capita expenditure on the preservation, protection and conservation of all cultural and natural heritage, by source of funding (public, private), type of heritage (cultural, natural) and level of government (national, regional, and local/municipal).

Source: UNDESA (2022)

Possible direct ways of associating culture to SD would be linking culture with education, i.e., emphasizing cultural and artistic education, education for cultural diversity, and formal and informal heritage education. Heritage education correlates culture and education for achieving target 11.4 and presents a synergy that is perhaps not explicit as such within the official SDG text. Jagielska-Burduk et al. (2021) argue that protecting cultural heritage requires more than solely protection policies, administrative apparatuses, laws, and legal instruments. Citizens also play a vital role in cultural heritage management, and the development and success of cultural heritage protection is determined by the relationship citizens have with their cultural heritage. For the successful protection of cultural heritage, the authors consider as vital the inclusion of citizens in cultural heritage management, and, for added success, the cultural heritage education of citizens (Jagielska-Burduk et al., 2021). Fontal and Gómez-Redondo (2016) echo this thought in their

affirmation that heritage education guarantees the attribution of values to tangible and intangible cultural heritage by society. In this manner, heritage education ensures that a society accepts and acknowledges the tangible and intangible heritage as its very own. This acceptance in turn assures the protection of tangible cultural heritage, or vitality of ICH, because the society will wish to take care of, enjoy, and transmit its accepted cultural heritage (Fontal and Gómez-Redondo, 2016).

As shown in Table 1, SDG 4 and target 4.7 provide an interesting point of departure for the present analysis of synergies between culture and SD. Here, within the general framework of education and lifelong learning of SDG 4, culture is associated with ESD and called upon, alongside other domains such as human rights and gender equality, to “ensure” that learners acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for SD. The text for target 4.7 is concise in its direct reference of SD towards promoting a “culture of peace and non-violence”. This is also the case as it details the target’s intent to appreciate “cultural diversity”. On the other hand, the last call of target 4.7 of “culture’s contribution to SD” is left vague, and open to interpretation.

As mentioned earlier, culture is intrinsic to human existence and people are cultural beings. Therefore, if culture is to contribute to SD, then a spectrum of opportunities arises because the manifold and diverse experiences of human existence are recognized as valid and possible pathways to contribute to SD. It can be inferred that this recognition allows a tripartite relationship to form between culture-education and SD, and that SD becomes more people-based.

This tripartite relationship of culture-education and SD has the potential to release more synergies. In spite of this, neither the 17 SDGs nor its associated global indicator framework of **231** unique indicators (UNDESA, 2022) reflects these synergies extensively and adequately. This expanded and more resourceful approach to understanding the synergies between culture-education and a people-based SD has more recently been manifested with the selection of UNESCO’s suggested voluntary thematic indicators to measure and monitor the contribution of culture to the SDGs (UNESCO, 2019). In the publication introducing twenty-two Culture|2030 Indicators, the word “education” features 141 times. One of the four transversal thematic dimensions constituting its conceptual framework is “Knowledge and Skills” (UNESCO, 2019). This dimension includes a total of five indicators with an educational component: ESD, cultural knowledge, multilingual education, cultural and artistic education, and cultural training. Based on the document analysis above, it can be inferred that the introduction of the twenty-two Culture|2030 Indicators is a recent development that reveals a major shift towards acknowledging the synergies between culture-education and people-based SD.

The absence of acknowledgement for the diverse contributions of culture for SDGs has also prompted scholars to advocate for the inclusion of culture in the discourse on ESD. For instance, the authors Batista & Andrade (2021) declare that for comprehending the challenges posed to the SDGs on different dimensions – economic, environmental, social, cultural – it is also necessary to understand the relationship between said dimensions. They assert the critical importance of biocultural diversity, and define the latter as the indivisible nexus and the existent synergies between linguistic, cultural, and biological diversity (Batista & Andrade, 2021). From their perspective of biocultural diversity, all species, languages and cultures are valued as heritages of humanity, and as such, the balanced use of environmental resources is encouraged (Batista & Andrade, 2021). They put forward the affirmation that ESD entails educating for biocultural diversity because “concerns associated with the social, environmental, and economic spheres are faced based on a personal, linguistic, cultural, and environmental history to consider, respect, value, and to preserve” (Batista & Andrade, 2021). Poole (2018) reasons along the same lines, arguing that the dynamics between cultural heritage and SD are a gap of the SDGs that have remained unaddressed. Poole broadens the discourse by adding the notion of biocultural heritage. For Poole (2018), biocultural heritage is the wealth of cultural memory and heritage, language, values, and ecological knowledge (local ecological knowledge (LEK) and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK)) carried by human culture and accumulated over time and generations. Poole (2018) proposes that the loss of biocultural heritage is an indirect driver of changes in the ecosystem leading to unsustainable practices (Poole, 2018). If cultural heritage containing LEK and TEK is lost, then so too is the tangible and intangible knowledge about environment, culture, and language that affects the well-being of all living creatures. Ultimately, this loss is a key driver of environmental crises and the subsequent creation of poverty (Poole, 2018).

This dialogue is central to the issue at hand – culture’s contribution to SDGs – and especially with regard to ESD. The above discussion affirms that individuals facing the current social, environmental, and economic sustainability issues are, after all, people with specific cultural and linguistic belongings, cultural beings that have a relationship with their surrounding environment. The implication here is that the general discourse of sustainability must not only acknowledge the condition of people as cultural beings, but more importantly, seek to understand and value cultural heritage as a condition to achieve sustainability.

These extrapolations regarding culture and education indicate that it is imperative to incorporate a cultural dimension to the SDGs if SDGs are to attain a more holistic outlook. Indeed, the

Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (henceforth: The 2003 Convention) affirmed already at its inception in 2003 that sustaining ICH is regarded as a “guarantee” of SD: “Considering the importance of [ICH] as a mainspring of cultural diversity and a guarantee of sustainable development” (The 2003 Convention, 2020). This notion is repeated in its Operational Directives (Chapter VI, “Safeguarding ICH and Sustainable Development at the National Level”), Article 170 as it states “State Parties shall endeavour ... to recognize the importance and strengthen the role of [ICH] as a driver and guarantee of sustainable development” (The 2003 Convention, 2020). Instances of success are those in which culture observably bridges the gap between SDG policy, goals, and practice. In other words, culture is a means to achieve human development. For instance, interventions for health and well-being (SDG 3) are most effective or sometimes the only resource when they are designed with a cultural approach and are responsive to the local cultural context (Hosagrahar, 2017). Another example are the arts (theatre) as a tool for communicating HIV/AIDS public awareness campaigns in locations where cultural taboo subjects prevail (Ruigrok, 2009).

It is inferred from the above that keeping the vitality of cultural intergenerational knowledge constant and shared over time, from one generation to the next, is of utmost importance for a people-based SD. However, especially regarding ICH, intergenerational sharing of knowledge is inherently fragile because it depends on memory and continued practice (Melis and Chambers, 2021). Moreover, safeguarding ICH requires human, economic, and material resources (Celi and Moore, 2015). These arguments establish the importance of undertaking conscious efforts in ESD to share cultural knowledge with future generations, which youths are a significant part of. For the youth to benefit from culture and to gain cultural empowerment, culture needs to be an integral part of ESD and SDGs. Therefore, the next section will focus more on the involvement of youth in the SDG discourse and their role in achieving them.

Culture and Youth Empowerment

As shown in Table 2, the word “youth” appears a total of nine times in the SDG texts (UNDESA, 2022). Apart from SDG 4, youths are also mentioned in SDG 8 and SDG 13. They are related thus not only to education but also strongly to employment and decent work, and, on a lesser scale, to action to combat climate change.

Table 2 SDG Text Containing “Youth”

Goal	Target	Indicator
Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.	4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.	4.3.1 Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex.
	4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.	4.4.1 Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill.
Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.	8.6 By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training.	8.6.1 Proportion of youth (aged 15–24 years) not in education, employment or training.
	8.b By 2020, develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organization.	8.b.1 Existence of a developed and operationalized national strategy for youth employment, as a distinct strategy or as part of a national employment strategy.
Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.	13.b Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities.	

Source: UNDESA (2022)

An outlook of future opportunities of culture and SD must focus on youth given the critical characteristics of this group. According to the United Nations, in 2018 the worldwide number of young people was 1.8 billion, with approximately 90% living in developing countries and representing a large segment of the population (UN, 2018). This youth generation will experience in one way or the other the ubiquitous process of globalization. Among many of its impacts, globalization is known to create alterations in cultural ecology and changes in cultural practices (Lopes, 2020; Guo, 2020; Rodil and Winschiers-Theophilus, 2016). In the discourse of some scholars, globalization presents a threat to local cultures because globalization terminates autochthone cultures, amalgamating and homogenizing different cultures into a hybrid multi-culture (Guo, 2020; Mahfoodh and Alhashmi, 2020). In the view of others, globalization as a

cultural wave poses a threat to individual cultures, endangering cultural heritage and diversity (Medina-Carrión et al., 2018) thus causing ethnophagy (Díaz Polanco, 2011). Ethnophagy dissipates Indigenous cultures because as a process it causes “a smooth transition to the dominant culture through which differences are erased over time” (Despagne, 2013). Whether globalization is understood as either a homogenizing, erasing, hybridizing effect or as ethnophagy, current developments give strong reason to predict that globalization will continue to impact local cultures. Consequently, current youth generations will continue to experience impacts in their cultural environment. The concept of youth empowerment is translated by the UNESCO as improved access to multilingual information and sources of knowledge, enhancing ICT skills, and facilitating youth with disabilities to access ICT training (UNESCO, 2014). Based on observations from literature on the present subject, this paper suggests that involving youths in projects founded on the tripartite relationship of culture-education and SD creates a form of cultural empowerment for youths. This synergy presents the youth with a potential to achieve SD.

A synthesis of the reviewed literature on studies involving culture, youths, and youth empowerment reveals that the levels of youth involvement in cultural heritage projects differs widely across different case studies and contexts. Observably, three patterns emerged from the reviewed literature: Youth as passive receptors of cultural heritage, youth as active participants in cultural heritage, and youth as leaders of community heritages initiatives.

Youth as Passive Receptors of Cultural Heritage

The first category refers to projects designed for youths, but without the active co-design, leadership or decision-making of youths in the project. Five examples stand out from the literature review.

Culture offers youth opportunities to become empowered by furthering and developing their skills in the arts. Receiving heritage education as part of formal education can raise the youth's employability or their ability to become entrepreneurs. Examples are in Argentina, as the Teatro Argentino de La Plata in Buenos Aires offered vocational training to 610 unemployed adults and youths in performing arts skills (Hosagrahar, 2017). A similar example of cultural heritage combined with vocational training was the Syrian Stonemasonry Training Scheme, funded by the British Council and implemented in Northern Jordan. The beneficiaries were Syrian and Jordanian students, especially youths from the Syrian refugee community. The project's objectives were to engage youth in cultural heritage by learning conservation and stonemasonry skills, while also supporting the preservation of Syria's war-damaged heritage. The project also sought to engage

primary school aged children by offering them six one-day workshops. In the outcomes and results, the British Council listed that the project formed a cohort of tradition bearers, access to employment for marginalised groups, and enhanced cohesion between Jordanian hosts and Syrian refugees (The British Council, 2018). A further example is the project proposal put forward by Coscia & Rubino (2021) to introduce a social dimension to ongoing projects of built heritage by including NEETs (youths Not in Education, Employment, or Training) for generating a positive social impact. All three above-mentioned examples are similar in that they have measurable social outcomes and impacts. For example, in the case of redeveloping historical farmhouses in Italy with the social inclusion of NEETs, Coscia & Rubino (2021) suggest as indicators the percentage of youths in an employment six months after program end, the number of volunteers participating, and the levels of awareness of heritage. This suggestion would also be applicable to the first two listed projects of vocational training for youths in cultural heritage projects.

The historical and ethnographic investigation by Lai (2020) examined the potential of *urumi mēlam*, Tamil folk drumming, for engaging and empowering Tamil Hindu youths-at-risk by keeping them from engaging in criminal behaviour in Singapore. Following the music and youth empowerment discourse, the author examines how engaging with Tamil folk drumming presents an opportunity for the Tamil Hindu youths' empowerment. The author concludes that empowerment is made possible because the youths receive training for learning the required instruments and songs to become ritual music specialists, and because they perform collectively, and earn the respect of the Tamil Hindu community in Singapore by doing so. Moreover, the author points out that for the youths, participating in rituals for Tamil Folk Hindu deities is associated with certain spiritual beliefs. The youths believe their performance confers them with blessings, that it can ease the granting of wishes, and that it invokes powers to eliminate harmful energies (Lai, 2020).

In Kim's (2015) case study of the Tatebayashi Noodle Grand Prix festival in Japan it is mentioned that university students and young people from local and regional middle and high schools voluntarily participated as helpers. After their first-hand experience of the festival, the study found that the youth volunteers had increased community pride and heightened sense of belonging. These studies show that the cultural sector is a source for acquiring skills for enhancing the employability of youths through education and training, that it provides a common ground to nurture social cohesion with the local community, and that it can also be a source for spiritual well-being.

Youth as Active Participants in Cultural Heritage

The second category involves projects where youths had an active, decisive role, and either co-designed or partly led cultural projects.

An example of youth as active participants in cultural heritage projects is a cross-generational activity consisting of learning and collecting memories, presenting how schoolchildren can support and interact with senior citizens to bridge the digital divide (Dibeltulo et al., 2020). Taking cinema-going memories as an element of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), the project's main aim was to foster digital cross-generational encounters between schoolchildren and senior citizens. Thereby, older generations would also be empowered by sharing the ownership of their cultural heritage while also engaging with ICT skills. The study utilized the online resource Historypin. Historypin is a web-based, user-generated archive of crowdsourced historical material. The senior citizens were novice users of the online archive Historypin. Five senior citizens volunteers above the age of sixty-five years met with eighteen middle school students for the project. Youths took the key role of moderators and data collectors as they helped the volunteers share their cinematic cultural heritage on Historypin. In small groups, the students carried out video-interviews on their smartphones and uploaded the content onto Historypin. Additionally, the students showed the senior volunteers further ICH material, eliciting more memories through visual triggers. The feedback of the students was that it was a "valuable project" (Dibeltulo et al., 2020). More importantly, the authors mention that post-pilot activities revealed a continued interest of the students for the online platform and the project. After the project had ended, students interviewed their own senior family members about their cinema-going memories. Some students uploaded their family's cinema-related photos on Historypin, enriching further the community's cinema-going ICH. Within the framework of the present paper, these outcomes point to empowering youths in three ways: the youths became agents of their community by helping to preserve ICH as digital cultural heritage; they gained insights into their own cultural heritage and community identity; and finally, they collaborated with older generations to support their accessibility and participation in digital environments. The study's post-pilot observation has an important implication for the present synthesis: by being proactive and continuing the project on their own (taking the initiative to interview family members and do uploads), the youth showed that they had a willingness to collaborate with family members on a topic of shared interest.

In a similar vein to Dibeltulo et al. (2020), Masucci et al., (2016) reviewed the outcomes and implementation of a university-community partnership, Building Information Technology Skills (BITS), involving high-school aged youths and designed to be culturally relevant. The youths were

trained in geographic field methods in order to encourage civic engagement, to persevere in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) disciplines, and to generate a digital archive of historic markers. The cultural dimension was introduced by focussing the youth-led and community-based geographic information system (GIS) on a set of historic markers of African American sites of interest in Philadelphia. The participants in this youth-led social action research initiative were local public high school students, students and faculty members at Temple University, and community members. The authors concluded that the engagement of the youth was successful. Evidence for this assessment was the project outcome: the participating high school students developed digital maps by collecting geospatial information through fieldwork, by using information from archives on historic markers and digital mapping technologies. In doing so, they gained digital technology skills, they also carried out geographic fieldwork and data analysis, and they experienced map-making and critical thinking throughout the process. Youth empowerment was a goal in several ways: through the digital inclusion and content creation of under-represented cultural and economic histories of African American heritage of North Philadelphia, by fostering STEM skills, by engaging with a university context, and by combining local cultural history and digital fieldwork. The authors note that various community stakeholders – teachers, parents, university course instructors – valued and used the digital maps created by students. Here, once more, it is observable that the success of the project was in part due to the project's cultural relevance, the digital mapping of African American historic markers, represented a shared interest of all stakeholders involved and motivated their willingness to engage on issues of common interest.

Youth as Leaders of Community Heritage Initiatives

The third and final category identifies youths as co-designing or taking leadership in cultural projects. Three examples stand out from the literature review.

First, a youth empowerment program for young Aboriginal women, aimed at gender equity in conservation through Aboriginal biocultural resource management in remote northern Australia (Daniels et al., 2022). In this three-year study, 60 participants aged between eighteen and thirty-five years acquired and practiced leadership skills. The project involved an Aboriginal-led adaptive co-design approach, and a “learning by doing” approach. Pre and post-tests of plant and cross-cultural animal knowledge were conducted to investigate learning gains. The results showed the significant learning gain in twenty species in three languages spoken by the Ngukurr *Yangbala* Rangers. Leadership was expressed e.g., through community engagement with the Ngukurr School. The project's Ngukurr *Yangbala* Rangers conducted fauna surveys, delivered workshops

for senior classes, and helped the senior school class complete a certificate in conservation and land management. Besides community engagement, the participants experienced leadership by one-on-one mentoring through local Elders and Rangers, presenting their work at conferences, and completing training on leadership and confidence building. An outcome of the project was that the youth acquired employment and progressed into higher education programmes. The project also helped to link Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal knowledge as a concept of “two-way knowledge and skills” (Daniels et al., 2022). This represents a decisive empowerment approach because it is culturally inclusive as it acknowledges and integrates local levels of education into SD.

Second, in the study of Kope & Arellano (2016), the authors applied the model of Critical Youth Empowerment (CYE) to explore Indigenous youth experiences in a Youth Leadership Program (YLP) for Indigenous resurgence in Whitefish River First Nation (WRFN), Ontario, Canada. The participants of WRFN in the YLP program belonged to two age groups, 9 – 13 and 14 – 18-year-olds. Using an experiential learning approach, each YLP program module aimed for the participating youth to plan and deliver a youth led-event (traditional games, outings, crafting, intergenerational sport tournaments). The youths developed the events and participated in all stages of their created events from fundraising to the implementation stage. Leadership and empowerment were enhanced as youth members became older, by being encouraged to use their acquired learning from YLP to apply it to decision-making situations in their community for improving power-sharing between them and adults. In their study of youths that participated in YLP, Kope and Arellano (2016) also identified a wide range of leadership qualities and empowerment of youths: in their capacity for improved critical reflection on their interpersonal lives; by empowering their community as they helped foster intergenerational relationships (e.g. using their leadership skills to plan and facilitate intergenerational events, giving back to the community by coaching and helping in sport tournaments); and by forging intercommunity friendships in youth symposiums.

The authors point to one expected outcome that was not successful. In examining the youth’s capacity for engaging in critical self-reflection and socio-political processes of resurgence, the authors found that youths first had to recognize and overcome trauma. In observing the involvement of youth and their interest in participating in cultural ceremonies and intergenerational learning, one of the main findings of the authors is that culture and traditions were central for youth empowerment. The authors discuss that therefore, youth empowerment can only be complete if accompanied by practices to fortify cultural elements such as cultural identity, philosophy, Indigenous knowledge, values and spirituality. Thus, they conclude that for

empowerment to be critical and effective for social change, it must rest on cultural and spiritual re-grounding instead of solely in terms of socio-political mobilization.

Third, for a qualitative study of the cultural importance of forest products, Johnson et al., (2021) partnered with Alaska Native Tribes and engaged local youth programs in the research work for the heritage project. Sixteen members of the youth group Alaskan Youth Stewards (AYS) Program aged 14 to 21 years were provided with training on basic interviewing and research procedures. The youth cohort then posed relevant community discussion questions for interviews, they contacted the interviewees, led discussions with community members, and recorded responses into the project's data collection online app. Eight youth interns also carried out field activities with culture bearers (carvers and weavers), and helped to set up a two-year seedling experiment. The youths led a total of 58 community discussions in 11 communities.

The authors found that youth researchers engaged with their community by leading discussions with culture bearers, elders, non-government workers and government agency employees. The collected messages and reflections post-discussion revealed that the project experience inspired youth researchers to be more active stewards of their land and culture. The study also found that Alaska Native youth-led community discussions across Alaskan communities seemed to generate a more culturally relevant dialogue than with researches that were not directly linked with Alaska Tribes. Apart from the added benefit for the youths of gaining and sharing traditional ecological knowledge and ecosystem services, the youth engagement itself presented a “powerful communication link” between local communities and official land-management agencies.

It is noteworthy that all three studies can be categorised as a youth-driven approach for decolonisation purposes. Engaging youths as leaders supports the argument that culture can help share communication because it is based on common values, an important aspect of SD. It can be concluded that the above-mentioned culturally integrated approaches of youth empowerment initiatives are multi-layered and interdisciplinary. They typically involve various stakeholders, interests, and disciplines. These observations extrapolated from the previous three examples have implications for the potential of youths in achieving SD that reach further than the examples presented in subsections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2. The potential of culturally empowered youths to achieve SD resides in that they can fulfil leadership roles and become a ‘nexus’ between generations and stakeholders within their social environment. As a ‘nexus’, the youth represent shared interests and values for their community. When the youth become an axis around which information revolves, they are able to initiate dialogues in community between generations and between different stakeholders.

In the present paper, the review of studies on culture and youth empowerment has shown the potential of culture for SD beyond a simplistic and limited relation of culture-education. Culture, as an intrinsic part of human existence and experience, can be leveraged in multiple ways to empower, educate, and preserve knowledge that is vital for sustainable ways of life. It can be concluded that youth involvement in cultural heritage projects also leads to cultural empowerment, as the youth, representing future generations, are empowered. However, most of the presented and reviewed studies do not make explicit mention of ESD or ground their studies in theories of learning. The following subsection presents some recommendations for learning theories and pedagogy that can be coupled to holistic approaches of studies of culture, ESD, and people-based SD.

Discussion

In section 3.2.1. youth as passive receptors of cultural heritage, the reviewed cases had instances of vocational training and musical training. In section 3.2.2. youth as active participants in cultural heritage, the reviewed cases involved youth in middle school and high school and the examples were thus part of formal education. In the third section 3.2.3 youth as leaders of community heritage initiatives, one case has a “learning by doing” approach, one an experiential learning approach, and in a third example the youth engaged in research work without following a specific learning theory. In the reviewed cases, the youth involvement in cultural projects also represented instances of advancing SD. However, except for the study on forest products by Johnson et al., (2021), the learning they experienced was not explicitly related to ESD, nor measured or categorized as such.

Firstly, directly correlating such studies with ESD and the SDGs would present an advancement because the scholarly landscape on the SDGs would become more transparent and measurable. Secondly, grounding youth empowerment initiatives on established learning theories would provide ESD with a scientific foundation. Applying scientific knowledge on learning and teaching to culturally integrated educational approaches would have the added value that ESD projects would be scientifically informed in their project design and provide learning assessment, thus measuring learning results and means to measure project outcomes.

For future outlooks, a learning theory that can be applied is the collaborative learning approach rooted in Vygotsky’s social constructivism (1978). From a collaborative learning perspective, small groups of learners with varied performance levels work together, mediated by cultural means and

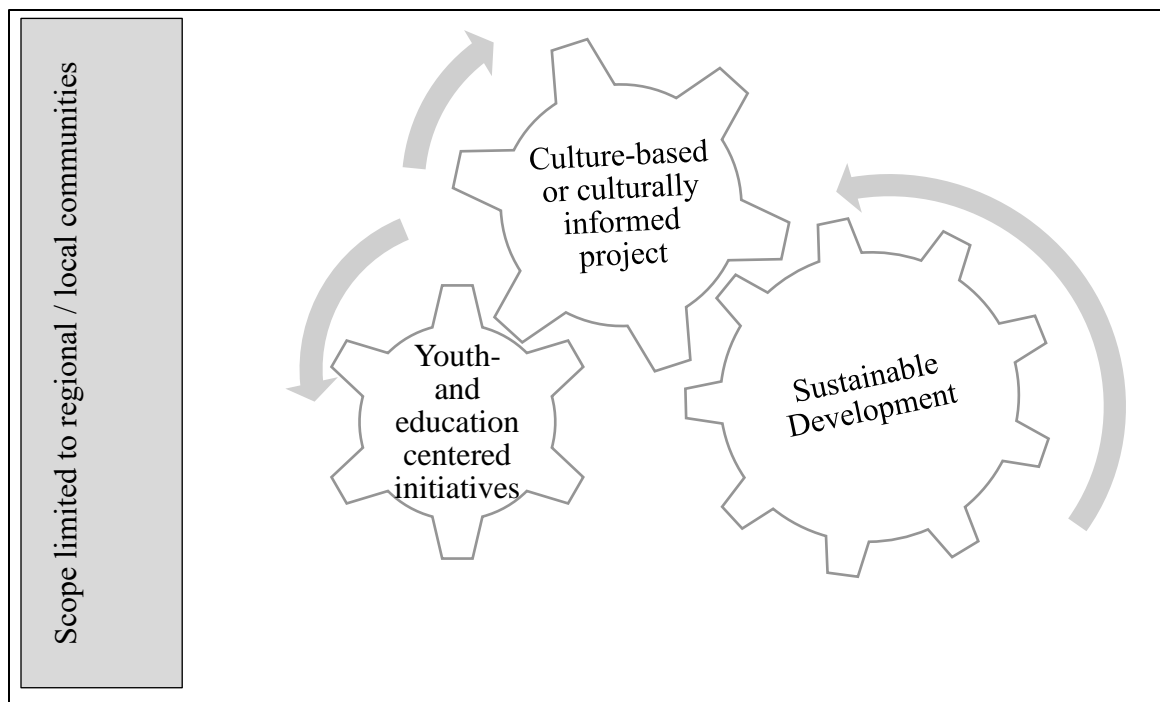
artifacts, and collaborate to create a product, find a solution to a problem, or complete a task (Laal and Ghodsi, 2012). This learning theory is fitting e.g., for communal learning of ICH elements when it involves a limited number of participants (e.g., community members of a village, culture bearers and youths) who must collaborate with the goal of teaching ICH knowledge to future culture inheritors, or to create a cultural product. Built on social interdependence theory (where the results of learners are affected by their own and others' actions), some outcomes can be classified in terms of the quality of interpersonal relationships (Johnson and Johnson, 2009). Laal and Ghodsi point to further benefits of the collaborative learning approach as they conclude that typical outcomes of collaborative learning are higher achievements, more caring and committed relationships, social competence and self-esteem. One of the expected outcomes and main social benefits of collaborative learning is that it develops learning communities (Laal and Ghodsi, 2012). These social learning systems can further be analysed as communities of practice (Wenger, 2000). Creating communities of practice is not only a desirable outcome for sustaining social cohesion of the community but also suitable for communities based on oral cultures. For instance, as Daniels et al. (2022) note, Aboriginal knowledge is largely taught orally (Daniels et al., 2022). Moreover, a community of practice approach has elements that would enhance the design of culture-related ESD. These elements are: events that bring the community together; multiple forms of internal leadership to develop the community; a rich connectivity among its people; a membership that is significant but its number still allows participation; learning projects that fill gaps in community practice; and lastly, artifacts that remain useful as the community develops (Wenger, 2000).

As established earlier, culture can permeate all aspects of people's lived experience. In this sense, not only the content that is the object of learning can be related to culture but also the very act of teaching itself contains cultural aspects. Therefore, culture is also an aspect of pedagogy that can be taken into consideration, especially when the teaching is for ESD. Culturally relevant pedagogy, the theoretical model of Ladson-Billings (1995), takes into account the cultural patterns and backgrounds of teachers and learners, and the broad social and cultural context of students. It proposes teaching must meet three main criteria: support student learning, nurture cultural competence, and develop critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In this educational approach, teachers include the student's culture as "official knowledge" and thereby help them assert and take pride in their cultural identity (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This pedagogy is an example of how culture-education and people-based SD is strongly interrelated: culturally integrated approaches can be applied not only on *what* is taught (cultural and artistic education, heritage education, ICH), but also *how* it is taught (culturally relevant pedagogy, communities of practice approach) depending on *who* is being taught (individuals with an intrinsic cultural

experience).

In sum, the tripartite relationship of culture-education and SD can be illustrated as in Figure 1. If local or regional youth- and ESD centred initiatives take a culture-based approach or are culturally informed, then synergies are created. These synergies in turn generate a major traction towards achieving results in SD.

Figure 1. Visual Diagram of Synergies of Culture-education and Sustainable Development



Source: the authors

Conclusions

This paper is focused on exploring the synergies between culture, SD, and youth. The paper presents an integrative literature review of selected studies that provides an overview of the interrelationship between culture-education and SD.

The review reflects on how culture is underrepresented in the SDGs, and why this absence matters for SD. It further seeks to identify how the tripartite relationship of culture-education and SD can create synergies, empower youth and give youth the potential of achieving SD.

The analysis provides strong evidence to support the argument that youths can be empowered through culture and possess a high potential for achieving SD. The reviewed studies were classified according to the level of youth engagement. A major implication of this subsection is that culturally empowered youths in leadership roles are a potential for achieving SD because they become an information and support agent in their community.

Additionally, the presented studies showed a recurrence of the element of collaboration and collective learning. Mutual engagement was present in the study on digital engagements of older adults with cinema-related ICH as a partnership across generations between the young and elderly, promoting thus intergenerational dialogue through shared interests (Dibeltulo et al. 2020). In Masucci et al. (2016), a collaborative, cross-disciplinary project took place with amongst several community stakeholders (e.g., neighbourhood and community organizations, families, youth). Collective learning also featured in the Aboriginal-led, co-designed and cross-cultural project Ngukurr *Yangbala* (Young People) Project in remote northern Australia (Daniels et al., 2022). It also included “two-way knowledge and skills”, linking the knowledge and science of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities and presenting thus a kind of mutual engagement between cultural paradigms of knowledge.

These observations lead firstly to the conclusion that culturally integrated approaches in SD can provide a common ground of shared values and common interests that allow different stakeholders to collaborate and thus enhance SD. Secondly, the element of collective learning allows to draw the conclusion that the collaborative learning approach and the communities of practice approach can be used as a framework of reference for designing and evaluating projects on culture and ESD. Since pedagogy can also be viewed through the lens of culture, ESD can also rely on culturally informed theories of teaching for culture-sensitive projects. Lastly, these arguments also lead to the conclusion that cultural approaches can be considered across all 17 SDGs because people as cultural beings will experience SD through the lens of their cultural heritage.

The strength of the reviewed literature is that scholarly texts provide a vast variety of contexts in which SD is being practiced with the help of culture and ESD. The present paper highlighted some examples containing studies of youth empowerment and reflections on the synergies between culture-education and SD. In this way, this paper underscores the vitality of culture in achieving the SDGs, especially with the focus on youth and ESD. Future studies must look into how to take advantage of the synergies created when cultural approaches are considered in advancing people-based SD. The importance of these observations is immediate given the challenges

present in post-pandemic outlooks. Estimates indicate that the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on education could cause approximately 24 million children and youth, from pre-primary to tertiary education, to drop out of school (Klaassen, 2021). The cultural sector offers resourceful opportunities to collaborate with stakeholders sharing common interests to further youth empowerment outside of formal education.

The limitation of this paper is its sole focus on educational aspects of culture and youth. Further studies are needed to explore other equally important yet understudied aspects of culture and SDGs, such as the informal economy of the cultural sector, the labour legislation, and lack of social protection of cultural workers and professionals.

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