

UNESCO Intersectoral Strategy on Philosophy

Overview: UNESCO's Role

The importance of philosophy to the work of UNESCO is evident, since philosophical analysis and reflection are undeniably linked to the establishment and maintenance of peace, the core mission of the Organization. The Organization's Constitution provides that peace must be founded "upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind". By developing the intellectual tools to analyse and understand key concepts such as justice, dignity and freedom, by building capacities for independent thought and judgment, by enhancing the critical skills to understand and question the world and its challenges, and by fostering reflection on values and principles, philosophy is a 'school of freedom'.

The necessity of a Philosophy Programme at UNESCO was underscored from the very inception of the Organization. One of the tasks proposed for UNESCO in 1946 by the Preparatory Commission of the first General Conference of that year was for a Philosophy Programme to 'imbue the public mind with a certain number of philosophical and moral notions to be regarded as a minimum equipment, and which are calculated to reinforce respect for human personality, love of peace, hatred of narrow nationalism and the rule of brute force, solidarity, and devotion to the ideal of culture'. Philosophy, then, can also be considered a school for human solidarity, and as a basis for better mutual understanding and respect, fundamental to fostering dialogue among civilizations. Any dialogue between cultures as well as reconciliation of communities must be founded on the values of peace and coexistence. Such ethical and principled dialogue presupposes a basic comprehension of the philosophical and moral notions essential to a true intersubjective and open exchange.

The importance of philosophy was reaffirmed in February 1995, when philosophers gathered in Paris to adopt a Paris Declaration for Philosophy. It was stated that all individuals everywhere should be entitled to engage in the free pursuit of philosophy, and that the teaching of philosophy should be maintained or expanded where it exists, and introduced where it does not yet exist. Moreover, it was stated that the knowledge of philosophical insight in different cultures and their comparison, as well as the analysis of their commonalities and differences, should be supported.

UNESCO interprets philosophy in a broad sense as dealing with universal problems of human life and existence and instilling independent thinking for individuals. Philosophy is at the heart of human knowledge, and its scope is as wide as UNESCO's

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own fields of competence. The major issues dealt with by the Organization, such as education for all, cultural diversity, the ethics of science, human rights, knowledge societies, democracy, intercultural dialogue and dialogue among civilizations need to have a solid philosophical foundation and analytical and conceptual rigour. Critical analysis of the concepts, norms and standards implied in the major programmes of UNESCO is necessary to enhance the effectiveness and relevance of the activities.

The UNESCO Philosophy Programme has always aimed at fostering philosophical dialogue and mutual learning of philosophical trends. The present document presents a long-term strategy for the UNESCO Philosophy Programme, and aims at giving coherence to the activities of the Programme. It is the result of a two-year consultation process in which Permanent Delegations to UNESCO, National Commissions for UNESCO, 500 NGOs and 600 universities, as well as approximately 150 philosophers and eminent personalities, were invited to give comments and suggestions.

Global aims for the intersectoral strategy on philosophy

- To serve as a laboratory of ideas;
- To act as a catalyst for international cooperation on philosophical dialogue, study and research and to nourish the teaching of philosophy and public debate;
- To contribute to international reflection and debate on current world problems, in particular by strengthening the philosophical foundations of UNESCO's major programmes and issues of concern and facilitating debate on philosophical insights with decision-makers;
- To popularize philosophy among the general public;
- To promote the teaching of philosophy in the world, in particular, but not exclusively, through education institutions and to contribute in building capacities in Member States for philosophical scholarship, especially in countries where philosophy is not formally taught;
- To function as a clearing house in all the above-mentioned domains;
- To serve as a catalyst and facilitator to the process of dialogue among civilizations.

Implementation of the strategy

The assumption is that the present strategy applies to the UNESCO Secretariat and to the National Commissions for UNESCO, and that it will be implemented through close intersectoral collaboration and in partnership with relevant partners (universities, NGOs, institutes, academic societies, UNESCO Chairs, etc.). National Commissions will be invited to set up subcommittees on philosophy in order to:

- liaise with the Secretariat;
- disseminate information and materials;
- promote the teaching of philosophy at secondary and university levels;
- organize events to promote philosophy.

Particular efforts will be made to mobilize extrabudgetary funds for the implementation of the Strategy.

Expected results

- Research fostered and disseminated on key issues relative to the priority programmes of UNESCO (education for all, bioethics, knowledge societies, etc.) and to the challenges of contemporary society;
- Publications and textbooks produced from the interregional and intercultural philosophical dialogues;
- The teaching of philosophy enhanced internationally at both secondary and university levels;
- The informal teaching and popularization of philosophy regarding the contemporary philosophical debates fostered among the general public;
- Capacities of National Commissions for UNESCO to carry out the Strategy enhanced.

Key Pillars of Action for UNESCO in the field of philosophy

- I. Philosophy facing world problems
- II. Teaching philosophy in the world
- III. Promotion of philosophical thought and research

These three Pillars are interconnected, with each Pillar nourishing the others. The results of research and dialogues obtained in Pillar I will feed into Pillar II and its programme of teaching philosophy, and into Pillar III and its activities on the promotion of philosophical thought.

I. Philosophy facing world problems. Dialogue, analysis and questioning of contemporary society

UNESCO will support philosophical analysis and research that would focus on contemporary problems and its concrete consequences for social stability and peace-building, starting with UNESCO's priority programmes. Efforts will be made to encourage thinkers to tackle emerging global problems in order to foster new ideas and research. By supporting reflection by philosophers on the major problems facing humanity today, UNESCO will incite philosophers to play an influential role beyond their traditional academic sphere and participate actively in responding to contemporary problems, thus complementing ongoing academic research.

UNESCO, as an intellectual and ethical organization, has a role to play in creating a public space within which dialogue can acquire an authentic international dimension that is open to all. This dialogue, nourished by the concepts and ideas produced by thinkers, should also penetrate the realm of decision-makers, and give inspiration

to the general public for action. The connection between reflection, debate and action will be reinforced by bringing together thinkers, policymakers and civil society. The main challenge will thus be to make a link between research and action.

In line with the United Nations Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations, the activities in this Pillar will contribute to fostering a genuine process of dialogue by reviewing the concept of, and approaches to, dialogue among civilizations, with a view to broadening its scope and enhancing its relevance to current challenges which humanity is facing. Identification of obstacles to dialogue, analysis of what constitutes dialogue in relation to other forms of communication, and searching for the epistemological foundations of dialogue will be some of the key issues that will be given attention.

The proposed activities include:

- Philosophical reflections and dialogues on the central themes relevant to the priorities of UNESCO: dialogue among civilizations, education for all, bioethics, knowledge societies, cultural diversity, ethics of the environment, poverty, sustainable development, etc.;
- Philosophical reflections and dialogues on the central themes relative to the World Congress of Philosophy 'Philosophy facing world problems', topics such as globalization and responsibility, equality, collective and individual action, identity and justice;
- Interregional Philosophical Dialogues: Launched in 2004, this programme aims at establishing philosophical dialogues among scholars of various regions of the world, e.g. the Arab world and Asia, Africa and Latin America, Africa and the Arab world, Western and Eastern Europe, etc.;
- Virtual Resource Centre: A website containing reference documents, current research papers, summaries of papers presented in various UNESCO conferences and seminars, online discussions and a virtual library would be set up under the section of the UNESCO Philosophy website to serve researchers, students and scholars in the field of philosophy.

These activities will be implemented in partnership with the relevant UNESCO sectors, NGOs, universities, research institutes and philosophers.

II. Teaching philosophy in the world. Fostering critical reflection and independent thinking

The teaching of philosophy contributes to the development of free citizens. It 'encourages one to judge for oneself, to confront all sorts of arguments, to respect what others have to say, and to submit only to the authority of reason'. In other words, the teaching of philosophy is highly relevant to understanding the world-views and philosophical foundations of human rights, and contributes to building the capacity for individuals to have genuine freedom of thought, freedom from dogmas and unquestioned 'wisdom'. It also fosters the ability for a human being to make judgements concerning his/her situation. This is inevitably linked to the possibility for evaluation, critique and choice for action or non-action.

The importance of philosophy education was affirmed in 1950 at the fifth session

of the General Conference which decided that UNESCO should make 'an inquiry into the place of the teaching of philosophy in the several educational systems, the way in which it is given, and its influence upon the moulding of the citizen' (5 C/Resolution 4.1212). The first survey, produced in 1953 under the direction of Georges Canguilhem on nine countries, was followed up in 1995, with a more complete survey on 66 countries. However, there has not been a systematic follow-up to the recommendations of the experts on the survey regarding philosophy education.

The proposed activities include:

- Conducting a state-of-the-art assessment and evaluation study on the teaching of philosophy in the world today;
- Developing policy recommendations on the teaching of philosophy at secondary and university levels through the National Commissions for UNESCO. The recommendation package will also include monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to inform Member States of the current state of teaching philosophy in the world (in partnership with the UNESCO Education and Culture Sectors);
- Developing recommendations to Member States on comprehensive curriculum development, which would include the teaching of different philosophical trends as well as comparative philosophy;
- Developing manuals, exchange programmes, seminars, etc. in order to foster the teaching of philosophy in the world (in partnership with the UNESCO Education Sector);
- Supporting the development of International Philosophy Olympiads: the Olympiads, initiated by the International Federation of Philosophical Societies, presently gather students of high-school level from over 20 countries for an essay competition in philosophy. Efforts will be made to support this initiative in other countries (in partnership with the relevant NGOs);
- Strengthening the network of UNESCO Chairs in Philosophy: In addition to giving coherence to existing Chairs, efforts will be made to establish Chairs in Africa and South-East Asia, as well as other regions in the world (in partnership with existing Chairs and the UNESCO Education Sector);
- Disseminating materials produced by the research activities in Pillar I through CD-ROMs and through the UNESCO website: these materials can be used as reference texts in order to foster a comprehensive approach to the teaching of philosophy with respect to the various philosophical trends in the different regions of the world (in partnership with NGOs, universities and institutions).

III. Promotion of philosophical thought and research

Popularization of philosophy is essential in developing a democratic and peaceful culture. Linking the knowledge generated in philosophy and fostering independent thought in the minds of the general public is crucial to peace, especially in countries where philosophy is not yet formally taught. Special emphasis will be put on the translation of philosophical works.

The proposed activities include:

- Organizing the celebration of UNESCO Philosophy Day: This is essentially a forum for reflection which aims at promoting and popularizing philosophy. Launched in 2002, events to celebrate philosophy are organized at Paris Headquarters and in Member States in cooperation with various partners. Special emphasis will be given to work, through the National Commissions for UNESCO, with various cities on their initiatives for the popularization of philosophy (in partnership with NGOs, universities, institutes);
- Developing a series of interviews with philosophers from all regions of the world: *Philosophers Today: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers*. The interviews which will be recorded and filmed will be published in a booklet with a CD-ROM attached for wide dissemination. This can also be used as a teaching material. The aim is to establish an evolving Encyclopaedia of Philosophers, following the model of RAI Television and their programme of interviews with philosophers and their multimedia Philosophical Encyclopaedia (in partnership with television networks such as RAI, NGOs, universities and institutes);
- Developing programmes for television and/or radio on philosophy which would complement the work already done through Internet sites on philosophy (in partnership with NGOs, universities and institutes);
- Encouraging and promoting the translation of philosophical works (in partnership with research institutes and universities).