

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURE: HOW TO RECONCILE VALUES AND CREATE A FOUNDATION FOR POLICIES AND LAW IN THE EUROPEAN UNION?

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Abstract

The paper explores the link between culture and sustainable development within the framework of European Union policy. Sustainability is no longer just a theme for ecology; today, it encompasses social, economic, and ethical facets. Culture is an important component of heritage, serving as a reservoir of values and a stimulus to public policy. True sustainability, the authors maintain, can only be found in moral principles, in which notions of dignity, solidarity, prudence and justice are grounded. The EU aims to apply these values to all its policies in a manner that is feasible through legal systems, educational programs, and cross-cultural development. Reference is also made to the problems linked to the cultural richness of Member States and to the necessity of an adapted legal response. Attention is also drawn to the need for coordination between international and European protection, as well as the definition of cultural heritage. The article also addresses the challenges of globalization, digitization, climate change, and war. The authors advocate for establishing the rule of law and public policy on a more ethical basis, drawing upon classical virtues and Catholic social teaching. The final concludes that only value-based development is sustainable and truly humane.

Keywords: culture, values, sustainable development, Agenda 2023, European Union

1. Introduction

The project of sustainable development in the present has expanded

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from its ecological roots to encompass more broadly social, economic, and particularly political transformation. In the European Union (EU), this has been accepted as a one of central principle to help inform and guide EU policy. But the pursuit of sustainability is about more than regulatory calculation or technical coordination—it is about an ethical ground wherein shared values flourish. Particular attention has also been paid to the value of culture for sustainable development as an object for use, and an object in need of protection, as well as a source of inspiration.

At present, sustainable development has become not only the leading, but also a world development project. It was born on the impulse of a planetary crisis, one that is human-dimensional: the crisis of human values, of the principles of knowledge and of action, of ecology – due, among other things, to an irrational use of natural resources – and to society's institutions³.

The inter- and multidisciplinary nature of this notion makes it possible to apply its principles to many different issues in the fields of, e.g., economic, social, welfare, and environmental policy. The multi-dimensionality of sustainable development has resulted in the formation of many concepts created not only at academic centers, but also by actors in the socio-economic environment, understood in a broad sense.⁴ In response to climate change, the social crisis, and the economic concentration of wealth, sustainable development is now a political priority for the European Union⁵ and other international organizations (e.g., the UN).⁶ It seeks to promote an orderly and complementary development of society based on the meeting of present needs without compromising the well-being of future generations. Its aim is the reconciliation of environmental, social, and economic interests, while also ensuring that cultural values, which are instrumental in forging European identity, are able to thrive.

³ A. KLIMSKA, A. SYRYT, *Etyczne i prawne uwarunkowania zrównoważonego rozwoju – wprowadzenie do badań*, «Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Śląskiej: Organizacja i Zarządzanie» 123/2018, p. 199.

⁴ T. KLARIN, *The Concept of Sustainable Development: From its Beginning to the Contemporary Issues*, «Zagreb International Review of Economics and Business» 21(1)/2018, pp. 67-94, DOI:10.2478/zireb-2018-0005.

⁵ See more: Commission: https://commission.europa.eu/publications/sustainable-europe-2030_pl (accessed: 30.10.2024).

⁶ See: United Nations System Common Principles on Future Generations: <https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/Advance%20Unedited%20-%20United%20Nations%20System%20Common%20Principles%20on%20Future%20Generations.pdf> (accessed: 30.10.2024); SDG: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> (accessed: 30.10.2024).

This article examines how the European Union's legal policies can incorporate cultural heritage and values into the broader sustainable development agenda. This essay argues that sustainable development can only find stability and durability in the long term if rooted in timeless moral traditions – from the principles of Catholic social teaching and classical virtues such as justice, prudence, solidarity, and human dignity. These philosophical and ethical underpinnings are not only coherent with sustainability, but are necessary for a complete application of sustainability. This article also provides some general diagnosis of the present difficulties and the conceptual lacunae in incorporating cultural values into the legal and institutional tools of the EU's sustainable development, and in doing so aims to create a foundation for a more coherent and value-oriented policy design.

2. *Culture and the Ethical Core of Sustainability*

Although culture has been the subject of interest for many thinkers and has been defined in almost two hundred ways, it remains a vague concept that is difficult to define unambiguously. Herder already noted its vagueness, and Williams emphasized its complexity, which shows that despite the passage of time, this problem has not lost its relevance⁷. According to Robert Bierstedt, «Culture is everything that people think, do, and possess as members of society.»⁸ Culture encompasses the entirety of humanity's material, intellectual, and spiritual achievements, including the results of human creative activity and the set of values, norms, and principles that apply in a given community.⁹ St. John Paul II stated that «Everything that man 'has' is important for culture and contributes to the creation of culture to the extent that, through what he possesses, man can at the same time 'be' more fully as a human being, become more fully human in all the dimensions of his existence that are proper to humanity.»¹⁰

The cultural sphere is built around three fundamental values: truth, goodness, and beauty. These values determine the role of culture in po-

⁷ P. Sztompka, *O pojęciu kultura raz jeszcze*, «Studia Socjologiczne» 1/2019, p. 7-8; DOI: 10.24425/122488.

⁸ R. BIERSTEDT, *The Social Order*, New York: McGraw Hill 1963, p. 129.

⁹ D. CAPAŁA, *Kultura*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, t. 10, Lublin 2004, para. 188.

¹⁰ JAN PAWEŁ II, *Przemówienie w UNESCO, Paryż, 2 czerwca 1980*, in: JAN PAWEŁ II, *Wiara i kultura. Dokumenty, przemówienia, homilie*, Rome – Lublin 1988, p. 55.

litical, social, and economic life and should serve as a framework for the actions of public authorities, international organizations, and other factors and actors that influence society. Culture shapes how societies understand progress, interpret justice, and assign value to nature and history. It provides the ethical and symbolic vocabulary through which policies gain meaning and legitimacy. In Catholic teaching, culture is regarded as a dimension of human flourishing, reflecting the God-given vocation to cultivate and transmit creation. Culture's formative power is not neutral: it shapes consciousness, instills virtues, and orients individuals toward the common good.

This anthropological understanding affirms that sustainability is not simply a technocratic challenge but a humanistic one. Culture supports sustainable development by embedding values such as stewardship, responsibility, and intergenerational solidarity. It encourages the preservation of heritage and diversity, which in turn strengthens social cohesion and fosters a sense of identity.

Culture is present in the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in an indirect way, although it is not explicitly listed as a standalone goal. Nevertheless, it plays a significant role in supporting sustainable development and appears in several goals and their respective targets. The influence of the culture is embedded in targets related to education (Goal 4.7)¹¹, urban development (Goal 11.4)¹², responsible production and consumption¹³, employment and tourism (Goal 8.9)¹⁴, and peace and justice (Goal 16)¹⁵.

¹¹ Target 4.7 of the 2030 Agenda stresses that education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles are promoted, with consideration for diversity and cultural contribution to sustainable development. Culture in Education promotes openness and respect as well as global citizenship.

¹² Target 11.4 explicitly deals with conservation of cultural and natural heritage. Culture is the essential ingredient for the development of sustainable communities that revere and capitalise on historic buildings and local traditions. It helps define a city's image and encourages social and economic urban development.

¹³ Local cultural norms surrounding consumption and resource use can promote responsible consumption behaviors. Local traditions and handicrafts can encourage the development of more sustainable, resource-efficient modes of production and consumption.

¹⁴ Culture is an engine of economic development, notably through the creative economy and cultural tourism, which sustain local economies, create jobs and foster a sense of place. Target of 8.9– sustainable tourism is to cultivate the culture and nature.

¹⁵ The culture and its role in building peace, stability, social order will be at the heart of this objective. Fighting discrimination, protecting human rights and fostering intercultural dialogue contribute to the development of resilient and fair institutions.

In this context, it is essential to emphasize that the European Union and UNESCO, in particular, highlight the role of culture in achieving the SDGs, underlining its importance in fostering peace, supporting social integration, and shaping long-term development. Through culture, more cohesive and socially accepted actions can be implemented, which are crucial for sustainable development and the strengthening of social identity and integration.

Although culture is indirectly present within the SDGs, it constitutes a fundamental element that supports the achievement of numerous goals, especially those related to education, social equality, environmental protection, and building lasting, strong communities. Culture is the foundation of communities, shaping how individuals and social groups view the world and defining their relationships with nature, the economy, and society. This is particularly relevant in the context of sustainable development, where actions aimed at environmental protection, social equity, and economic justice must be adapted to local cultural contexts. Cultural patterns influence attitudes toward environmental protection, consumption behaviors, and interpersonal relationships, all of which directly affect the effectiveness of sustainable development initiatives.

The European Union recognizes this broader function of culture, yet faces challenges in translating cultural considerations into coherent legal and institutional action.

3. The European Union's Approach to Culture and Sustainability

The EU's commitment to sustainable development is formalized in several key documents and legal frameworks. Chief among them is Article 3(3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU)¹⁶, which states that the Union shall work for «the sustainable development of Europe based on balanced economic growth and price stability, a highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress, and a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment.»

Additionally, Article 2 of the TEU outlines the Union's foundational values: respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minori-

¹⁶ Official Journal of the European Union, C 326/13.

ties. These principles are reflected in EU initiatives, such as the European Green Deal (2019)¹⁷, which integrates sustainability and culture into economic transformation, as well as programs like Urbact¹⁸ and the European Sustainable Development Week, which promote inclusive urban development and public engagement.¹⁹

Culture is also addressed in the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage (2018)²⁰, which operationalizes cultural heritage as a strategic resource for sustainable development across EU policies. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), in Article 167, mandates the EU to «contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States» and to encourage cooperation and the conservation of cultural heritage of European significance.

The principle of subsidiarity contained in Protocol No 2 on the Application of the Principles of Subsidiarity and Proportionality (attached to the TEU and to the TFEU) gives legal and moral architecture to such a balance between European ambitions and national self-reliance. If policies of sustainable development consistent with European culture(s) are to be implemented in Central Europe, nothing must be overlooked regarding specific circumstances and the diversity of Europe. If EU policies are to be meaningful, they must take into account the divergent traditions, values, and beliefs among member states. Even if Article 2 of the TEU declares that the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the member states in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail, in practice, however, although those values are interpreted differently in different member states, which makes it difficult to shape the concrete legal solutions and standards.

The variety of these sentiments and attitudes stems from the different historical and cultural backgrounds of the member states, which necessi-

¹⁷ European Council/Council of the European Union: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-green-deal/> (accessed: 12.11.2024).

¹⁸ URBACT: <https://urbact.eu/> (accessed: 12.11.2024).

¹⁹ ESDW: <https://www.esdw.eu/esdw> (accessed: 13.11.2024).

²⁰ The text of a draft document is <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-07/European%20framework%20for%20action%20on%20cultural%20heritage.pdf> (accessed: 12.11.2024).

tate a differentiated policy approach within the EU. Therefore, developing coherent legal frameworks and standards that are not only accommodating but also respectful of this diversity continues to represent a central challenge.²¹

Therefore, it is necessary, in addition to the legislative measures, to also implement non-legislative measures that would contribute to the balance in the cultural framework, based on respect for the history and culture of Europe and bearing in mind its axiological roots. They could involve educational schemes, cross-cultural visits, and events that encourage intercultural dialogue, designed to support common European values and celebrate the differences that define individual nations.²²

These non-legislative tools help foster mutual understanding and camaraderie, thanks to the EU's unwavering commitment to pluralism and diversity, without compromising the core values that unite its member states. Among them is intercultural dialogue that fosters the sharing of experiences and best practices between countries. Between them, there is a conversation that enables the different cultural experiences to come to the fore and for there to be a recognition that cultures see sustainable development in different ways, so that better solutions, better alignment of policies with the community needs, result.

Education is also a key link between culture and sustainable development. Insofar as education is concerned, there is a need to develop formal and informal educational programs for this area. Increasing social awareness must go hand in hand with respecting local values and traditions to foster a deeper understanding of the importance of sustainable development. It must be emphasized that the production of laws compatible

²¹ See more: A. KOTOWSKI, A. SYRYT, *Wartości Unii Europejskiej w świetle art. 2 Traktatu o Unii Europejskiej* [Values of the European Union in Light of Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union], Warsaw 2023, <https://cbpe.pl/2023/03/24/wartosci-unii-europejskiej-w-swietle-art-2-traktatu-o-unii-europejskiej-red-artur-kotowski-aleksandra-syryt/> (accessed: 10.11.2024).

²² See more: D.A. JELINCIC, D. GLIVETIĆ, *Cultural Heritage and Sustainability: Practical Guide*, Interreg Europe programme: 2020, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343255611_Cultural_Heritage_and_Sustainability_Practical_Guide (accessed: 08.11.2024). Cf. S. LUTZ, G. KOCH, Sustainability, *Sustainable Development, and Culture: Diverging Concepts and Practices in European Heritage Work*, in: *Going Beyond. Heritage Studies*, M.T. ALBERT, F. BANDARIN, A. PEREIRA RODERS (eds), Springer, Cham. 2017, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-57165-2_6; L. PETTII, C. TRILLO, B. NCUBE MAKORE, *Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Development-Targets: A Possible Harmonisation? Insights from the European Perspective*, «Sustainability» 12(3)/2020, DOI:10.3390/su12030926.

with sustainable development principles and respectful of cultural values implies a flexible approach. For instance, legislation on sustainable urban development should take into account the cultural and environmental specificities of EU regions in order to ensure more successful and accepted actions from local communities. Also vital is respect for the national identity of each participating country and observance of the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity.

4. *Law, Culture, and the Moral Framework of Regulation*

Legal systems express a society's vision of the common good and justice. From a classical and Catholic perspective, law must promote virtue and protect the dignity of the human person. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000), legally binding since the Treaty of Lisbon (2009), affirms the right to cultural life (Article 22) and explicitly states that the Union shall respect cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity.²³

The effective legal protection of cultural heritage in the EU also draws on international instruments such as the Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Granada Convention, 1985)²⁴ and the Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention, 2005)²⁵, both under the Council of Europe. At the global level, the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972)²⁶ and the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)²⁷ serve as foundational texts for international cooperation.

The European Union employs both binding legal instruments (hard law), such as regulations, directives, and international treaties, and non-binding in-

²³ Official Journal of the European Union, C 326/39. See more: X. ARZOZ, *Introduction: Respecting linguistic diversity in the European Union*, in: X. ARZOZ (ed.) *Respecting Linguistic Diversity in the European Union*, «Studies in World Language Problems» 2/2008, pp. 1-13, DOI: 10.1075/wlp.2.02arz.

²⁴ Council of Europe: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/granada-convention> (accessed: 10.11.2024).

²⁵ Council of Europe: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/faro-convention> (accessed: 10.11.2024).

²⁶ UNESCO: <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-concerning-protection-world-cultural-and-natural-heritage> (accessed: 14.11.2024).

²⁷ UNESCO: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention> (accessed: 14.11.2024).

struments (soft law), including recommendations, communications, resolutions, and codes of good practice. This is evident in the Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning²⁸, which promotes cultural awareness as a fundamental competence, and A New European Agenda for Culture (2018), which outlines strategic priorities for cultural cooperation.²⁹

This complementarity allows for enforceability and flexibility. It reflects a prudent application of the classical virtue of phronesis (practical wisdom), enabling institutions to respond effectively to both universal standards and diverse cultural realities.

The European Commission mandates Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) as part of its Better Regulation agenda. RIA is guided by documents such as the Better Regulation Toolbox and the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making.³⁰ These tools are designed to assess not only economic effects but also social, environmental, and cultural impacts.³¹

When aligned with Catholic social teaching, RIA should be understood as more than a cost-benefit analysis - it is a moral framework for assessing whether laws advance the integral development of the person, the common good, and environmental stewardship.

5. Contemporary Challenges and Ethical Imperatives for the Culture

In a globalised world the conservation, creation and transmission of culture are all under intense pressure, from the contemporary and the historical. These are being compounded by globalisation, digitalisation, conflicts and climate change – which are endangering heritage, diversity and access. Tackling these challenges not only calls for ethical reflection, but also for the activation and implementation of international legal arrangements that understand culture as a basic human right and a key to achieving sustainable development. When free flow of cultural expressions

²⁸ European Commission: <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/improving-quality/key-competences> (accessed: 10.11.2024).

²⁹ COM (2018) 267 final.

³⁰ EU: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/interinstitutional-agreement-on-better-law-making.html> (accessed: 14.11.2024).

³¹ EU: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM%3A01030301_1#:~:text=The%20European%20Commission%20%E2%80%99s%202015%20communication%20establishing%20the,bring%20tangible%20and%20sustainable%20benefits%20for%20EU%20citizens (accessed: 10.11.2024).

is encouraged, it naturally encourages cultural intermingle as well; however, globalization, on the other hand, has resulted in the standardization of culture. Dominant cultures may marginalize other cultures, a phenomenon that is particularly likely when one culture becomes economically dominant. Thus, the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) has established a legal framework for preserving cultural diversity, recognizing the universal right of all peoples to express, preserve, and share their cultural heritage.³²

Yet, there are ethical questions whenever elements of a culture are appropriated without permission and without benefit-sharing, aspects of which international law should be utilized more effectively to facilitate the enforcement of cultural rights. The digitalisation has become a democratic vehicle for accessing cultural content and a moral and legal impasse over intellectual property, ownership and digital sovereignty. The establishment of the WIPO Copyright Treaty (1996) and the continuing work in this area at the WIPO are an expression of attempts to find the right balance between the protection of creators' rights and the right to access cultural goods by the public.³³

It is morally imperative that digital technology does not increase the divide between the Global South and North in terms of cultural participation and profit.

Cultural property has long been a casualty of armed conflict, from the raiding of museums to the bombing of religious sites. The 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its Protocols are essential legal standards that set out the State parties' obligation to protect cultural property during war.³⁴

The 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court also includes intentional cultural destruction as a war crime, evident in the Al Mahdi Case.³⁵

³² UNESCO: <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-protection-and-promotion-diversity-cultural-expressions> (accessed: 10.11.2024).

³³ WIPO: <https://www.wipo.int/treaties/en/ip/wct/#:~:text=The%20WIPO%20Copyright%20Treaty%20%28WCT%29%20is%20a%20special,Berne%20Convention%2C%20they%20are%20granted%20certain%20economic%20rights.> (accessed: 14.11.2024).

³⁴ IHL Database: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/assets/treaties/400-IHL-60-EN.pdf> (accessed: 11.11.2024).

³⁵ On 22 August 2016, the trial in the case *The Prosecutor v. Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi* opened before Trial Chamber VIII at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, the Netherlands. Mr Al Mahdi admitted guilt as to the war crime consisting in the destruction of

Morally, the world community is confronted with the need not to play the fire brigade when it comes to such a loss. Indigenous people still push for the repatriation of these and other items that were looted during colonial times. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) states the rights of indigenous peoples to their cultural property and traditional knowledge.³⁶

The return is now more and more accepted by the legislation and ethics, but it is still difficult to be put into practice, as a consequence of the specific interest of countries, resistance of the institutions and legal uncertainty. Sea level rise and climate events increasingly threaten both tangible and intangible heritage at historic and cultural sites and in the environment where these resources are located, especially in small island states and other vulnerable environments. International legal documents, including the Paris Agreement (2015), acknowledge that cultural aspects lie at the foundation of addressing climate change, although the enforcement is shallow.³⁷ The culturally ethical urge is to ensure that cultural resilience is woven into environmental policy, and that we honor the cultural ways of the communities most severely affected by environmental decline.

Rights in culture and heritage are not symbolic; they are integral to identity, dignity and social solidarity. The international legal architecture constitutes the framework for the protection and promotion of these rights, but without ethical commitment and solidarity on a worldwide scale law is not just enough. Culture's current challenges call for a collective response that respects justice, inclusivity and the freedom of the diversity of human expression. Enhancing interstate cooperation is the need to achieve the objectives of developing international legal norms and intercultural dialogue as on way of ensuring a balanced and sustainable existence in the cultural sphere.

A complete answer to today's challenges concerning cultural heritage and its legal safeguarding cannot limit itself to making technical and formal modifications. Such reinvigoration will need to cut at the cultural and moral roots

historical and religious monuments in Timbuktu (Mali), between around 30 June 2012 and 11 July 2012. This is the first international trial focusing on the destruction of historical and religious monuments, and the first International Criminal Court case where the defendant made an admission of guilt (<https://www.icc-cpi.int/mali/al-mahdi>, accessed: 14.11.2024).

³⁶ OHCHR: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/indigenous-peoples/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples> (accessed: 12.11.2024).

³⁷ UN: <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement> (accessed: 11.11.2024).

of legal systems. Essentially, this task to to define and consolidate what cultural heritage definition would be, it's kind in all legal instruments that will be taken into consideration. And in the absence of a clear and agreed-upon definition of what cultural heritage is – whether tangible or intangible, historical or living – any legal protections are piecemeal at best. This harmonisation has to take place internationally as well as at regional level, especially in the European Union and in the context of major international instruments.

Just as importantly, we need to reinforce the existing instruments for their implementation. Several international treaties and EU directives also provide robust frameworks for cultural heritage protection; however, these are increasingly eroded due to poor enforcement or a lack of political will. Stronger collaboration amongst member states, through tighter control and better-resourced heritage organisations, will be necessary for these legal mechanisms to have concrete and real value.

More fundamentally, however, moral and cultural values should influence RIA, as well as policy, more widely. Policy does not occur in a moral vacuum, and it must understand and be sensitive to the cultural and spiritual aspects of human life. In the process, governments and institutions can prevent decisions that uphold the letter of the law from erasing the values and traditions from which those laws emerge.

This comprehensive strategy should also involve long-term investments in programs for civic and moral education. They are most successful when they have access to the resources of the classical and Christian humanist traditions—traditions that emphasize the innate dignity of every human being, the development of personal virtue, and the centrality of community and moral duty. A society based on education of that mold is not only one which respects the past, but also one that is moral enough to protect it.

The spiritual foundations of these endeavours can be usefully based on the teachings (values) promulgated in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*³⁸ (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004).³⁹ Noteworthy are the dignity of the human person which grounds the affirmation of cultural identity and memory; the principle of subsidiarity, which calls for empowering local communities in matters of heritage; and a moral

³⁸ Especially, a dignity of the person (Chapter III), the principle of subsidiarity (Chapter IV), and the moral responsibility for the environment (Chapter X).

³⁹ VATICAN: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html (accessed: 10.11.2024).

responsibility for the landscape, including cultural landscapes, and traditions associated with it. By linking legal and policy reforms to those values, the preservation of cultural heritage is transformed from an issue of law to one of a society's conscience and identity.

6. *Conclusion*

Culture can contribute to sustainable development by promoting values of solidarity, responsibility, and respect for nature. Local practices, which are commonly based on the sustainable utilization of natural resources, constitute a valuable source for the development of policies and laws. Cultural values can thus serve as a springboard for initiatives that are respectful for the environment and society, which is particularly relevant for the EU, as it is a diverse region in terms of culture. Sustainable development and culture, even if they appear to be separate, are deeply related to each other and mutually beneficial. Culture adds value of a different order and content, enabling the “what for” of sustainable development and opening opportunities for innovative thinking. By virtue of the shared identity and cultural diversity of Europe, these may be devised as not only efficacious but also consistent with communal values. The reasons underlying the diagnosis given above are substantial: culture remains poorly defined, legal fragmentation is far-reaching, application, likely with some realization and legal implementation, is at risk, enforcement is weak, and ethical behavioural discussions are too superficial in the regulatory process. These divides are symptomatic of a wider cultural and moral divide in European institutional and policymaking. The EU must seek answers to these problems by drawing on some of the perennial sources of wisdom that underlie its conception. Yes, the classical virtues – justice, prudence, fortitude, temperance – and the principles of Catholic social teaching – dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity, stewardship – are more than philosophic agglomerations; they are a coherent and time-tested framework for addressing the purposes of the day. If sustainability itself is to be sustainable, it must be conceived within a vision of the human person that includes memory, meaning, and moral responsibility. The European Union, with its deep cultural and spiritual roots, can make a significant contribution to this path. It must be more than a political, economic union; it must be a community of culture and of ethics, one that defends the patrimony of what it has inherited and strives for what it hopes to become.