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RESEARCH PAPER

THE PARTNERSHIP FOR CULTURAL TRADE IN THE NEW SOUTH

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Cultural trade is a dynamic engine for economic diversification in the New South. Despite decades of diversification rhetoric, however, this sector remains underrealized. Thus, many countries across Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, and the Middle East are still commodity-dependent, even though the global creative economy has grown roughly eightfold since 2002, to surpass $2 trillion—that figure, moreover, does not even account for the nonmonetary benefits that merit consideration in equal measure. In any case, given that conventional trade statistics understate the creative sector's potential, such approaches as trade in value added (TiVA) may prove essential: they could better capture the creative and cultural inputs embedded in global value chains, including products that are increasingly driven by artificial intelligence.

This paper examines the state of cultural and creative trade across the tourism, arts, and education sectors, as well as cultural diplomacy, with particular attention paid to South-South cooperation, digital technologies, infrastructure and intellectual-property gaps, and barriers to the movement of artists (visas). It also raises cross-cutting policy issues: professionalism and follow-through in creative production, fair attribution and value capture for New South creators, the non-monetary social and diplomatic benefits of cultural

exchange, and the risks of over-tourism and reputational 'value-subtraction.'

Building on this diagnosis, the study proposes institutional mechanisms for a 'Partnership for Cultural Trade in the New South.' These include a dedicated Cultural Fund, inter-South cultural exchange and library programs, visa facilitation for artists, and stronger interministerial and regional coordination. Cultural trade can advance economic diversification, while also fostering shared prosperity and peace among New South nations. But policymakers need to move beyond treating cultural diversification as rhetoric, and translate it into coordinated action.

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1. INTRODUCTION

For the nations of the New South,[1] trade in cultural goods and services—referred to here as cultural trade—is a promising area of international trade. This promise is particularly crucial because many nations across Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, and the Middle East have yet to achieve full-fledged economic diversification, even though the idea has been discussed for decades. The question then arises: how can cultural trade, which encompasses a diverse range of outputs across film, music, literature, dance, crafts, architecture, and tourism, play a meaningful role in diversifying these economies, given their immense cultural wealth? If countries in the New South can participate in cultural trade effectively, they are more likely to make gains in the creative economy, and even in seemingly unrelated areas.

How large is the sector and what is the current situation of cultural trade in the South, compared to the rest of the world? Cultural trade, like other forms of trade, can be broadly divided into two categories: trade in goods and trade in services. Though trade in the former is relatively easy to see, the story is different when it comes to trade in the latter. Whatever the case, services are those intangibles that range from architecture to tourism, education to transport. Imagine, in colloquial terms, "'everything you cannot drop on your foot.'"[2] But trade in goods and services tends to overlap.

For example, a book is a good, but writing a book is a service, and so is shipping one. The same can be said of paintings, sculptures, and so on. Moreover, even though events such as concerts and festivals are services, the equipment used in these events, such as musical instruments, falls under the category of goods. Needless to add, if some artists bring with them instruments and merchandize like CDs and t-shirts to sell at the concert, those items are goods (though the concert itself is a service). Overall, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the creative economy (which includes cultural trade) has enjoyed remarkable growth in recent years. It reached a global value of over $2 trillion in 2022; whether some of that growth may be attributed to better accounting is another matter, but for context, it was roughly $267 billion in 2002.[3]

Yet, according to the estimates of John Howkins, who is often said to have popularized the term 'creative economy,' the sector was $2.2 trillion worldwide in 2000 and growing at a rate of 5 percent per annum. How did Howkins arrive at that conclusion? He extended the term from the arts to science and technology, and applied it to 15 industries. Whether some of this growth can also be attributed to better accounting and statistical reporting is another story. But the majority of this commerce has been realized in services, which reached $1.4 trillion, almost doubling creative goods exports of $713 billion in 2022. The bulk of this trade, at least the way it is captured, occurs in high-income countries, except for China[4].

What is the creative economy? To some extent, the definition is subjective: there is no single definition, though some attempts have been made. For example, as UNCTAD observes, this type of economy is not static, but rather evolving; it "builds on the interplay between human creativity and ideas and intellectual property, knowledge and technology." It is essentially "the knowledge-based economic activities upon which the 'creative industries' are based."

1. Since the term 'Global South' has generated debate, the term 'New South' might likely do the same. That, nevertheless, is beyond the scope of this discussion. At any rate, see Letzing, 2023, "What's in a name? For the 'Global South,' it depends on who you ask."

2. Lester et al. 2008, 598; Public Citizen. n.d.; Kabanda 2018, 83, 250; see also WTO, n.d.b. "Services trade."

3. UNCTAD, 2024a, 2022a; Consultancy-me.com, 2026; Kabanda, 2018b, 19.

4. UNESCO and UNDP, 2013, 19–20; Kabanda, 2018b, 19, 28; UNCTAD, 2024a, 2022a; Consultancy-me.com, 2026.

The creative industries include "advertising, architecture, arts and crafts, design, fashion, film, video, photography, music, performing arts, publishing, research & development, software, computer games, electronic publishing, and TV/radio." Since creative industries are the creative economy's lifeblood, they are also considered a vital source of both commercial and cultural value.[5]

Meanwhile, though there are differences between the terms 'cultural economy' and 'creative economy', this paper largely considers these two concepts to mean the same thing[6]. But as the 'creative economy' is a broad notion, it includes even toys and games, and the domain of research and development (R&D) in its entirety. "Therefore, while recognizing cultural activities and processes as the core of a powerful new economy," as UNESCO notes, "it is also concerned with manifestations of creativity in domains that would not be understood as 'cultural.'"[7]

In their book The Orange Economy: An Infinite Opportunity, the former Colombian Minister of Culture Felipe Buitrago Restrepo and the former Colombian President Iván Duque Márquez labeled the creative economy the orange economy. This is because, they tell us, the color orange has been associated with the three pillars of culture, creativity, and identity. They go on to say: "The Orange Economy is the group of linked activities through which ideas are transformed into cultural goods and services whose value is determined by intellectual property. The orange universe includes: i) The Cultural Economy and the Creative industries which share the Conventional Cultural Industries; and ii) creativity supporting activities."[8]

Furthermore, as Buitrago and Duque reason, for an area that is "a valuable development opportunity that Latin America, the Caribbean and the world at large cannot afford to miss," the orange is an apt metaphor from which infinite opportunities can be squeezed[9]. Debates on concepts and definitions notwithstanding, UNESCO summarizes the creative economy as "the segment of the economy that involves the production and commercialization of creative goods and services, emphasizing culture and innovation"[10]. Given that artificial intelligence (AI) draws heavily on creative work, the question arises of how it fits into the concept of the creative economy.

While much can be said about the evolving nature of the creative economy, the sector surely has an extensive reach. When it comes to the multiplier effect, for each dollar spent, the sector generates some $2.50 additional for the economy, according to some estimates.[11] If the social dimension of the creative economy is factored in, including social capital, cultural diplomacy, and the therapeutic contribution and even knowledge facilitation, then the sector certainly contributes way more than what GDP figures can capture.[12] Moreover, consider another idea that warrants more attention than it currently gets: trade in value added.

Trade in value added (TiVA) is a "statistical method that traces where value is created in exports and imports, reducing the double-counting common in traditional trade stats." It

5. UNCTAD n.d.

6. For more about the distinction between the cultural economy and the creative economy, see Kabanda, 2018b, 27–28, Annex 1.2, 226–228. See also Kabanda, 2014, 68, Annex 1.1, 225–226, for more definitions of cultural industries; Buitrago and Duque, 2013, 36–37; UNESCO and UNDP, 2013, 20–21, 24.

7. UNESCO and UNDP, 2013, 20.

8. Buitrago and Duque, 2013, 40, 42.

9. Buitrago and Duque, 2013; Kabanda 2018b, 27–28.

10. UNESCO, n.d.d.

11. Pacific Trade Invest. n.d.; IFC. n.d.

12. For example, see Sen, 2004, "How Does Culture Matter?"

"traces the value added by each industry and country in the production chain to the final export, and allocates the value added to these source industries and countries."[13] In today's globalized economy, exports hinge on global value chains. These chains, as TiVA recognizes, involve intermediate goods and services from different sectors and industries from various countries. Though TiVa may not fully capture the workings of global trade, it sheds light on the issue of double or multiple counting. Equally importantly, the TiVA approach also calls to mind the issue of 'undercounting.'[14]

If the creative sector is considered in trade in value added, its contribution in all likelihood is much greater than the amount normally attributed to it. TiVA might also help in forming a more holistic picture of trade between countries in the 'South' and 'North', and also among countries of the South. For example, given that statements like 'Made in China' do not tell us much, consider the makeup of an iPhone exported from China.[15] If a phone exported from China has components from, say, the Congo, Brazil, and the Philippines, in the TiVA approach, 'Assembled in China' would make more sense. Even more important, if the phone incorporates creative inputs, including ringtones from Kenya, design from Morocco, and games from India, that could also shed light on the contribution to trade of the creative sector[16]. In addition, this could sharpen policy debates on sourcing and attributing the value-added of creative work in the training and enrichment of AI. This is essential since most debates seem to concentrate on AI's effects on labor markets, productivity, consumer behavior, and similar subjects.[17].

2. TOURISM

2.1. How Large is the Tourism Sector Globally?

The contribution of creative work to tourism, an area that ought to be a truly human-centered industry, cannot be underestimated. Moreover, with the advent of AI, this could become even more pronounced. Alongside the concept of value-added, however, there is also what we may call 'value-subtracted', especially in Africa's tourism sector: if a positive image can add value[18], a negative image can do the opposite, as countries and entities that have faced this can attest. Where there is over-tourism, meanwhile, too much of a good thing can turn negative and subtract value not only in monetary, but also in environmental and social dimensions. Indeed, as the British writer Sir V. S. Pritchett wrote in his book The Offensive Traveller, "I do not scream that I cannot get a good steak in Morocco — steak travellers are the hypochondriacs of motion — a decent haggis in Naples, or an edible chop suey on Ascension Island. I do not complain about the lack of Night Life in English villages or the absence of thatch in Ohio. One thing, of course, does annoy me: other tourists."[19] No matter how many more people have felt the same way since Pritchett shared his take more than six decades ago, tourism has been on an upward march.

13. Halton, 2026.
14. Halton, 2026; Kabanda, 2018b, 85–87.
15. Lamy, 2011; Kabanda, 2018b, 86.
16. For more about creative work and trade in value added, see Kabanda, 2018a.
17. Newton-Rex, 2025; Erickson, 2024.
18. From more on tourism value added, see UNOSSC, n.d.
19. Pritchett, 1964, 3.

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, global travel and tourism is expected to outpace wider economic growth in 2026. It is projected to contribute $12 trillion to the world economy, representing nearly 10 percent of 2026 global GDP, which the International Monetary Fund projects to reach $126 trillion. Whether disruptions such as the Iran conflict will have a significant impact on the sector, time will tell. But for some time, the sector has enjoyed an upward trend. As Elizabeth Becker wrote in her book Overbooked: The Exploding Business of Travel and Tourism over a decade ago, when the Cold War ended, the invisible industry was like an explosive waiting to detonate, and explode it did.[20]

In 2012, the number of tourists traveling the world reached one billion in a single year for the first time. Around the time Becker published Overbooked in 2013, tourism was on the path to become the largest global sector. It employed one in twelve people, and produced some $6.5 trillion for the global economy at the time. Today, global travel and tourism is anticipated to support almost 89 million new jobs globally over the next decade. Across the wider economy, those jobs are expected to be one-third of all new jobs. Moreover, over the same period, global travel and tourism is projected to grow 3.6 percent—faster than the wider global economy's 2.4 percent.[21]

2.2. How Large is the Sector in the New South?

For many countries in the New South, tourism is a substantial part of their economies. In 2025, for instance, the World Travel & Tourism Council projected that travel and tourism would contribute $167.6 billion, or 7.7 percent of GDP, to Brazil's economy. The sector, which, compared to 2019 saw an increase of over half a million jobs, was also projected to support 8.2 million jobs, or 8 percent of Brazil's total employment by end of 2025. In Morocco, tourism is a cornerstone of the economy. As the leading tourism destination in Africa currently, in just the first quarter of 2026, Morocco received $3.1 billion from the sector. This marked a 24 percent increase compared to same period in 2025. In Malaysia, where tourism is a massive economic pillar, the industry contributed 15.1 percent to GDP in 2024, compared to 14.9 percent in 2023. This amounted to a contribution of $74.3 billion in 2024 to Malaysia's economy, compared to around $68.6 billion in 2023.[22]

Whether those figures adequately capture tourism's indirect contributions is another matter. But since many airlines, hotels, and resorts may be owned by global corporations, it can be difficult to identify who exactly makes more money, or who has a better deal. That holds true even without accounting for issues such as over-tourism and environmental degradation. Therefore, this matter necessitates more analysis in the agenda to diversify the tourism sector. With respect to the sector's presence in the South, moreover, the question of how large the sector is in terms of tourism offerings, versus how large the income is for local economies, certainly warrants attention.

2.3. What Potential is There for African Countries?

In Africa, the travel and tourism industry has immense potential, given the continent's vast richness in natural and cultural diversity. Moreover, the sector has more than doubled in value since 2000. In 2023, it was estimated to contribute $168 billion to the continent's economy over the next decade. But disease outbreaks, political instability, and other obstacles can

20. Becker, 2013, front cover; WTTC, 2026.

21. Becker, 2013, front cover, 17; WTTC, 2026.

22. WTTC, 2025; Faouzi, 2026; Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2025.

impede tourism. Such issues tend to especially hurt Africa in a macro way: what happens in one African country can hurt other African countries, even if they are distant. The idea of Africa as one entity has persisted stubbornly in many minds, even in an age when information can be accessed instantly. Public policy has much to offer in addressing such issues, though a one-size-fits-all approach is at best hollow.

2.4. Diversifying the Sector

Public policy in relation to boosting travel and tourism tends to emphasize the familiar: simplify visa processes, set up better intracontinental air connectivity, deliver marketing campaigns that highlight Africa's wealth of destinations.[23] These are all important suggestions. The last of these suggestions—marketing—is relevant to the broader call to diversify Africa's economy. Yet apart from such iconic images as Egyptian pyramids, many images of African tourism in reports, books, websites, and the media tend to showcase animals or safaris. Though there is nothing egregious about that, this approach tends to reinforce the idea that tourism in Africa is largely about seeing animals. Diversifying the sector should therefore also mean promoting holistic cultural tourism.

This can in fact be done in parallel with wildlife tourism; where the wildlife-focused tourism itinerary can be combined with excursions to places where musical instruments are made, cultural outfits are designed, traditional food is cooked, or, as Chinua Achebe noted, to participate in mbari, the Igbo people's concept of art as celebration.[24] As will be discussed later, this can even move beyond cultural tourism to creative tourism, with tourists doing more than observing how an instrument is made, also engaging in making that instrument. Or doing more than observing a dance, but also taking part. Or doing more than buying a mat, but taking a lesson in mat weaving. Or doing more than tasting traditional food, but taking part in preparing that food. Though such creative tourism can take time—and might not be for everyone—it can build more meaningful relationships between people. As it heightens cultural amity, it can even enrich people-to-people cultural diplomacy, and sidestep the superficial nature of what much of tourism has become.[25]

2.5. South-to-South Tourism

South-to-South tourism involves travel between countries of the South. This type of tourism is primarily driven by three factors: intra-regional flows, an expanding middle class (in the aforementioned regions), and shared cultural ties[26]. For example, this might involve tourists traveling between Nigeria and Brazil. It is less clear if South-to-South tourism also involves, say, Nigerian citizens living in the United States as expats or students who visit Brazil as tourists. But as it stands, cultural ties, affordability, and intra-regional travel are among the central features of this phenomenon.

If aspects such as religion are part of culture, then it can be argued that South-to-South tourism has long been happening between southern countries. This is because, for instance, many Muslims, from various corners of the New South, travel to Mecca each year. The visitors, who number between 1.5 million and 2 million, go to Mecca to perform the annual Hajj pilgrimage. The largest numbers of pilgrims come from non-Arab Asian countries, which in

23. WTTC, 2023.

24. Achebe, 2013, 56.

25. For more on cultural vs. creative tourism, see Kabanda, 2018b, "On Cultural Tourism," 138.

26. Nzereogu, 2025; UNOSSC and UNESCO, 2023; UNOSSC, 2022; UNCTAD, 2017; Crush and Williams, 2004.

2024, according to the Saudi Press Agency, represented more than 63 percent. This cohort was followed by 22.3 percent from Arab countries, and 11.3 percent from African non-Arab countries (the United States, Australia, Europe, and other unclassified regions accounted for 3.2 percent).[27]

The cultural factor, which is religious in this case, binds this culture tourism together. Even though it may be obvious to see why people from North Africa and the Middle East and Asia go to Mecca given the cultural proximity, including food and drink, visitors from other parts of the world are also linked to the travel because of a shared belief. But the convergence of various factors can also be considered, one being that the number of pilgrims from Latin America tends to be relatively small, for Latin America has a small number of Muslims[28]. In any event, given the way the statistics are captured, the question of whether, say, Egyptians who reside in Brazil for work or school, and go to Mecca for the pilgrimage, count as visitors from Egypt and not Brazil, invites deeper enquiry here also.

Another important factor is the propensity common in academic and policy circles of labeling things. Labeling or naming can be useful. Yet sometimes the nomenclature applied does not accurately capture the subject with precision, as it may simply place things in boxes for convenience, whether they fit or not. For instance, it might be convenient to categorize visitors to Mecca as cultural tourists, or in the subcategory of religious, pilgrimage, or faith tourists. Though applying 'tourism' types may be useful for statistical purposes, it can miss the true reasons for such pilgrimages, while simultaneously inflating tourist numbers. All this may have implications for policy deliberations.

In recent years, countries such as Brazil have taken a keener interest in their connection to Africa, potentially increasing tourism between the two regions. More analysis should be done on whether it counts as cultural tourism if a Brazilian tourist goes to Africa for a safari, rather than to trace their ancestry. All the same, when the Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva—known as Lula—took an unusual interest in Africa and Afro-Brazilians, the ties to both places got a boost. Besides opening more embassies in Africa, Lula has visited the continent more than any other world leader. "He usually took a coterie of businessmen," according to The Economist. "Trade between Brazil and Africa grew from $5bn in 2002 to $26bn in 2012. 'My government chose Africa as a priority,' he told Namibia's then-president in 2009."[29]

As Brazil seeks to embrace its African roots, cultural tourism between Africa and Brazil is rising. This increase, which is certainly expanded by flight connectivity, targeted heritage preservation, and mutual visa policies, has culture as the binding glue. It focuses on arts, festivals, and shared ancestral roots. The Brazilian government's 'Black Route' (Rotas Negras) initiative and Embratur, the Brazilian Agency for International Tourism Promotion, which serves as the nation's tourism board, have made efforts in this respect. They have heavily promoted Brazil's rich Afro-Brazilian roots, and this has drawn tourists interested in shared identity, ancestral history, and cultural exchange.[30]

The growing number of flights and expanded visa-free travel policies are welcome news, but a major force in tandem with this surge is 'Afrotourism.' This describes Black travelers from across the African diaspora visiting Brazil to explore Afro-Brazilian heritage and culture in cities such as Rio de Janeiro, home to 'Little Africa', and Salvador da Bahia. This illustrates

27. Saudi Press Agency, 2024.

28. Pew Research Center, 2012; for more on pilgrims to Mecca, see Bianchi, 2004.

29. The Economist, 2025.

30. D&B Bureau, 2026; Freelon, 2025; Routes, 2026; Pinho, 2018.

links based on shared culture, where if "the world is finally coming to Brazil", some of these visitors may be enticed by cultural ties.[31]

Cultural ties notwithstanding, as it has been argued, increasing creative tourism alongside cultural tourism may provide more holistic experiences. Hence, besides sight-seeing, Brazilian visitors, for instance, may travel to Africa to participate in making instruments such as the berimbau, a single-stringed musical bow with a gourd resonator that originated from sub-Saharan Africa, notably Angola. The same applies to the atabaque, the reco-reco, or the ganzá. And from dance to gastronomy, the same concept can be extended to other areas.

3. FILM, MUSIC, LITERATURE, DANCE, CERAMICS, CRAFTS, ARCHITECTURE (SOFTWARE)

3.1. Connection with Tourism

From dance, music, and literature, to film, crafts, and architecture, even countries that are poor in GDP terms possess immeasurable creative endowments. New South countries have this creative wealth to offer to the world, and also have much to offer one another, given the linkages between regions and across continents. For example, some Brazilian musical instruments share historical linkages with parts of Africa. From Argentina to Mexico, this can be said of the rest of Latin America in a variety of forms.

Meanwhile, the influence of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) on architecture, dress, food, and other aspects of culture in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia points to centuries of contact via the Silk Road, trans-Saharan trade, and maritime routes, and through the spread of Islam[32]. If the reverse is also true, one prime example is the reciprocal influence of Chinese and Persian ceramics. According to Oliver Watson, writing in the Encyclopaedia Iranica, "Chinese ceramics were the single most important stimulus to the development of fine pottery in the Islamic world," arriving first in the third century AH (Anno Hegirae) of the Islamic calendar, corresponding to the ninth century CE (Common Era), or AD, in the Western calendar.[33] Given this history, it is possible to see how cultural linkages can foster south-to-south tourism, and facilitate cultural diplomacy, as people from these regions seek to strengthen their ties.

3.2. The State of these Sectors in the New South

In the field of film production, the global box office hit $32.8 billion in 2025, though figures have yet to rebound to their pre-pandemic levels—the value is still roughly 22 percent below the 2019 peak of $42 billion. Of this figure, around $11 billion to $12 billion, or approximately 34 to 37 percent, was realized in developing and emerging film territories.[34] The bulk of this revenue is attributed to China, home to the world's second-largest film

31. Vieira Fernandes and Cifelli, 2024; Field, 2023; Bueno, 2026.

32. UNESCO, n.d.a; Global Middle Ages, n.d.; Musa, 2023.

33. Watson, 1991 (Last Updated 2015). See also Asia Society, 2017, and Dastan, 2025.

34. Hancock et al, 2026.

market; China alternates with North America (in this case the United States and Canada) for the first spot. Though organizations such as the International Monetary Fund classify China as an emerging economy,[35] its movie industry, largely driven by local hits such as Ne Zha 2, brought in some $7.4 billion, or 22.5 percent of the global total, in 2025.[36]

Another prominent emerging market is India, where the flourishing domestic box office generated some $1.5 billion, or 4.5 percent of the 2025 global share. Latin America, led by Mexico and Brazil, contributed roughly $2.4 billion, accounting for 7.3 percent of the global share. Other regions such as Southeast Asia, including Vietnam and Indonesia, and the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, which have seen rapid market growth, brought in the remaining 1.5 percent to 2.5 percent of the global film market share.[37]

But while the money from movies has not recovered to pre-pandemic levels, global film production has, and has even gone further. In 2024, 9,628 films were produced, 2.4 percent above the 2023 record. Output in 2023 was 4.4 percent above the 2019 pandemic peak of 9,223 films, which was more than double the 2004 output. Production has not only recovered after collapsing to 5,490 films in 2020. Even though at a slower pace, it has continued its long-running upward march. In emerging markets, India, in absolute terms, "leads global cinema production, with Bollywood and the Tamil-, Telugu- and Malayalam-language industries producing 2,605 films — over a quarter of the global total."[38]

Second in terms of the number of movies produced is Nigeria's Nollywood, which produces some 2,500 movies annually. We can recall that one reason why Nigeria's economy got mysteriously 89 percent larger one day in 2014—it jumped from $270 billion to $510 billion, making Nigeria the largest economy in Africa overnight—was that when the film and music industries were accounted for, alongside telecoms and e-commerce, Nigeria's economy was larger than previously thought. The recalculation showed that motion pictures, sound recording and music production contributed some 1.4 percent to Nigeria's GDP. (Under the old math of 1990, the film industry was lumped into the category of insignificant 'other services.')[39] But the significance of the creative industries can also be appreciated in other ways. For example, whereas countries such as China are movie-producing powerhouses, Bhutan and Mauritius, along with Estonia, are leaders in movie production relative to their populations.[40]

With 28.6 films per million working-age people aged between 15 and 69, Bhutan leads the world in terms of films produced per capita, followed by Mauritius at 27.7 (Estonia is at 24.5, Latvia at 21.6, and Iceland at 21.3). "That a Himalayan economy of under a million people tops the global per-capita ranking is a powerful illustration of the point: relative to the size of its workforce, Bhutan is among the most prolific film-producing nations on earth."[41] As the top two by this measure are small Asian and African nations (followed by three northern European countries), all of which are nowhere close to the absolute top rank, this serves as a reminder that "small countries can build film cultures that punch well above their weight,

35. The terms 'emerging economy' and 'emerging markets' have also generated debate. For example, see Knowledge at Wharton Staff, 2008, When Are Emerging Markets No Longer 'Emerging'?

36. Beranek, 2026; Jiawei, 2026;

37. Insights Desk, 2026; Meza, 2026.

38. Hancock et al, 2026.

39. ; see also Kabanda, 2018b, 16–17.

40. Hancock et al, 2026.

41. Hancock et al, 2026.

built on different economics of production and distribution but nonetheless important."[42]

Film generally incorporates other art forms. Italian film theorist Ricciotto Canudo called it the "seventh art", an artform that brings together the first six traditional arts of architecture, sculpture, painting, music, poetry/literature, and the performing arts.[43] Therefore, investment in cinema, even in small and medium economies, can have far-reaching benefits. This can also be said of music and other forms, for which cultural investments can have unprecedented impact in the New South. Take crafts. Without even considering the massive manufacturing and design powerhouses, including China, India, Turkey, and Vietnam, it would be a mistake to discount this area. Crafts play a mighty role in cultural trade and rural livelihoods, even though, in the entire creative sector, areas including digital media, design, and cultural tourism overshadow crafts[44].

The indirect value of crafts is not easily captured. Yet it is not unusual for tourists and travelers, whether interested in culture or not, to buy local craft products on their trips. Crafts themselves can inspire fashion, puppetry, architecture, and design.[45] Since there are connections between countries of the South across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, some of these crafts may have cultural ties between these regions that span ages.

3.3. The Role of Digital Technologies

Digital technologies have surely made their mark on the way cultural and creative content is made, distributed, and consumed. Though some of this change is not positive, it is notable that, daily, roughly 3.5 billion people in low- and middle-income countries consume digital creative content, including streamed music, video, and social media. This is driven by rapid smartphone penetration; in Africa, for example, cellphones are a kind of "digital Swiss Army knife," offering a flashlight, calculator, camera, and audio player.[46] Furthermore, Africa has a large young population. This vast audience commands some of the highest daily screen times globally, even though internet penetration is patchy and tightly connected to the level of development. Although in 2025 some 6 billion people (about 75 percent of the world's population) used the internet, 2.2 billion were offline. Of those offline, 96 percent—over 2 billion people—lived in low- and middle-income countries.[47]

As digital entertainment consumption is at the forefront in emerging economies, consider the following points: Latin America, enjoys one of the world's highest shares of music streaming activity. Though in 2023 the ten largest music markets included China, which took fifth place, a Latin American country ranked ninth: Brazil. When it comes to screen time, one study ranking the average time people aged 16 to 64 spent on the internet (on any device) daily showed that, apart from Russia, the highest users are in countries commonly classified as emerging economies: "South Africa: 9 hours, 24 minutes; Brazil: 9 hours, 13 minutes; Philippines: 8 hours, 52 minutes; Colombia: 8 hours, 43 minutes; Argentina: 8 hours, 41 minutes; Chile: 8 hours, 31 minutes; Russia: 8 hours, 21 minutes; Malaysia: 8 hours, 17

42. Hancock et al, 2026.

43. Welsh, 1975.

44. UNCTAD, 2022, 37. It must nonetheless be noted that, as the arts tend to feed off each other, there are cases of crafts inspiring other creative mediums and vice versa. Kabanda, 2018b, xii; see also Kabanda, 2022a, 858–860; and 2015, 7, 13.

45. Kabanda, 2022a.

46. Polgreen, 2015.

47. Ramirez, 2026; ITU, 2025.

minutes; United Arab Emirates (UAE): 8 hours, 11 minutes; Thailand: 7 hours, 58 minutes; Egypt:7 hours, 55 minutes; Indonesia; 7 hours, 38 minutes."[48]

High screen time has never meant meaningful engagement, however. Furthermore, some of this content could be addictive, and may even trigger mental health issues. Yet in terms of public policy, questions should be asked about how to better harvest this engagement in a way that can support South-to-South cultural policies.

3.4. Infrastructure/IP

Aspects of intellectual property are hot-button issues in development. Aggressive protection can potentially harm innovation. Weak protection, on the other hand, can lead to intellectual theft and even discourage innovation. Between these extremes, there must be a workable middle ground. Furthermore, differentiation is key. Indeed, as one of us has written before,[49] should IP protection for an HIV treatment drug or a COVID-19 vaccine really be treated the same as protecting copyright for a music score, album, film, or a textbook? Levels of income also matter, as do the wishes of creators, and cultural factors.

On the last point, many New South countries make significant use of customary law, even as a number of these countries have mixed legal systems[50]. Customary law, according to the World Intellectual Property Organization, "is a set of customs, practices and beliefs that are accepted as obligatory rules of conduct by indigenous peoples and local communities. Customary law forms an intrinsic part of their social and economic systems and way of life." Its distinguishing feature is that it comprises customs that a community, including people, tribes, ethnic, or religious groups, recognize and share collectively or communally: "This contrasts with written law emanating from a constituted political authority, the application of which is in the hands of that authority, generally the State."[51] Unlike Western legal systems that prioritize individual rights, however, customary law views land, resources, and cultural knowledge as shared possessions managed for the whole group's benefit. In sum, customary law places a heavy emphasis on communal ownership and collective responsibility.[52]

With that outlook, it is easy to assume that concepts such as intellectual property were invented in the West. Yet trade secrets can even be traced back to ancient Egypt[53]. In any event, it is difficult to police in the name of copyright protection students making copies of textbooks. At the same time there are stories of multinationals that extract plants from low- and middle-income countries to make drugs sold at high prices, or companies copying tribal textile designs, for which those communities receive little, if anything. Or, as will be discussed later, pop superstars such as Michael Jackson copying artists such as the legendary Emmanuel N'Djoké, aka Manu Dibango, only to be sued for copyright infringement.[54]

The relentless developments in AI, social media, and digital technologies will likely make IP even more of a grey area. The question is whether it is acceptable for tech companies, especially AI firms, to make money from cultural content from places where legal protection

48. UNCTAD, 2024a, 15; Sumra, 2025; George, 2026.

49. See Kabanda, 2016.

50. JuriGlobe, n.d.

51. WIPO, 2023.

52. WIPO, 2023. Globally, customary international law relies on two distinct elements: social practice and a legal conviction called opinio juris (an opinion of law or necessity). Cornell Law School, 2022.

53. Gollin, 2008, 26–28; Kabanda, 2018 105–106; Kabanda, 2016.

54. For more on these issues, see Finger and Schuler, 2004; Sean, 2009, for example.

is nonexistent or weak, or is fair compensation still a possibility? A South-to-South intellectual property framework might be needed to tackle such complex questions. That may mean that collective responsibility could even matter far more than collective ownership, especially in cases of individual ownership of communal material suffocating the collective. Moreover, as so-called 'distillation'—a new AI model trained by running prompts through an existing, better one—sparks debate over IP, AI firms themselves could file lawsuits for copyright infringement. As an NPR correspondent, Sacha Pfeiffer, said, "it would certainly be ironic for AI companies to accuse others of violating copyright rules, given the vacuuming up of so many publications they've done over the years."[55]

3.5. Movement of Artists/Visas

One effective way to facilitate cultural trade and cultural diplomacy is through the movement of people across different continents, regions, and countries. This is even more so if the movement of artists is simplified because, besides facilitating formal and informal cultural exchanges, artists can earn income through performances, teaching, and fellowships. The audience for their artistry can be educated and enriched in ways beyond monetary measure. Though artists may be able to sell physical items including books, artware, instruments, textiles, CDs, and DVDs, as noted earlier, this type of trade or exchange is a service, which falls into the broader category of trade in services.

Recognizing the robust nature of trade in services, the World Trade Organization (WTO) developed the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). The measure, which entered into force in 1995, was among the landmark achievements of the Uruguay Round.[56] The same objectives that inspired its counterpart in merchandise trade, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), inspired GATS as well. GATS categorizes services trade into four modes of supply: cross-border trade, consumption abroad, commercial presence, and presence of natural persons.[57]

The last of these modes would include, for example, artists from Morocco visiting Myanmar to conduct a workshop on the zellige, the traditional handmade Moroccan terracotta. Or those from Jamaica traveling to South Africa to teach reggae. Or those from Thailand visiting China for a pottery exhibition. As these modes operate in a self-enforcing cycle, it should not come as a surprise if, for example, some South Africans who attended a Jamaican reggae workshop decide to study abroad in Jamaica, or visit Jamaica as tourists. After all, they will be delighted to learn more about the home country of Bob Marley, who influenced the reggae music of their icon Lucky Dube. Such activities fall under GATS Mode II of 'consumption abroad.' And after noticing more interest in their work in South Africa, if Jamaican artists decide to do more workshops in South Africa, this cycles back to Mode IV, 'presence of natural persons.'[58]

But should Jamaican artists decide to establish, say, an arts institute in South Africa, or should a Jamaican hotel chain decide to establish a hotel in South Africa, this will fall under Mode III, 'commercial presence.' And if a Jamaican firm (or a firm from any WTO member

55. Ruwitch, 2026.

56. The Uruguay Round took place between September 20, 1986, and December 15, 1993. It was the eighth round of multilateral trade talks negotiated under the GATT—the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. "The 'Final Act Embodying the Results of the Uruguay Round' was signed by 124 governments and the European Communities on March 15, 1994, at a ministerial conference in Marrakesh, Morocco. The act expanded the multilateral trade regime by establishing rules for the further liberalization of trade in goods, introducing new rules for services and intellectual property rights and establishing the World Trade Organization (WTO)"—Encyclopedia.com, n.d.

57. WTO, n.d.c.

58. Kabanda, 2018b, 82–85.

country) supplies, say, architectural or accounting services via telecommunications or mail to South Africa, it would fall under Mode I, 'cross-border supply.' All of these scenarios can be applied in other ways. For example, Thai artists setting up shop in China (Mode III); Chinese tourists visiting Thailand (Mode II); Moroccan artists transmitting scores of their music to Myanmar via the internet (Mode I); folks from Myanmar virtually or physically enrolling in Arabic lessons in Morocco (Modes I and II respectively); and so on.[59]

3.6. South-South Cooperation

Film Shorts

In cities such as Washington DC, it is not unusual for foreign embassies to team up and jointly present cultural events. One popular program, which pairs different cultures, is EuroAsia Shorts. Originally called the Asian-European Short Film Showcase, the program has been happening for over two decades. Presented by the Washington DC-based European and Asian embassies and cultural centers, the EuroAsia Shorts festival is an annual week of free short films from their respective countries. Besides the usual 'cultural Q&A and discussion,' and special receptions, at the heart of EuroAsia Shorts are interesting, insightful, international films. Indeed, visitors are told: "Join an international cinematic dialogue that is uniquely Washingtonian."[60]

Countries in the south could also adapt such a model, creating something like the AfricaAsia Shorts or the Latin AmericaAsia Shorts or the MENAAsia Shorts. Moreover, although this kind of cinematic dialogue has been called 'uniquely Washingtonian,' these programs can be held beyond Washington, or even rotated beyond different continents each year. The reason for this is embedded in the framework of cultural diplomacy, which can foster "universality and cross-cultural understanding."[61] But if it is to be believed that 'where culture leads, trade follows,' this is another way South-to-South cooperation can be strengthened to foster trade and mutual benefits even beyond culture.

There have been similar festivals, such as the Afro-Asian Film Festival, which launched in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in 1958, to inspire creative and political solidarity. Though its original format belonged to the Cold War era, its cross-continental cinematic dialogue lives on in modern festival sidebars. There is also the Red Sea International Film Festival, situated literally at the crossroads of continents in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The festival's competitive program is deeply anchored in the works of Arab, Asian, and African filmmakers. The African, Asian, and Latin American Film Festival (FESCAAAL) is another example. Hosted in Milan, Italy, FESCAAAL has been running for over three decades. It features documentaries and short films originating from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Another event held annually since 1979 in Nantes, France, is the Festival des 3 Continents. Focused entirely on the cinemas of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, this exceedingly influential festival has spent decades introducing film directors from those regions to European audiences.[62]

The main purpose of engaging in a medium like film is its ability "to democratize knowledge, provoke ethical reflection, and animate socially engaged pedagogy across borders"[63]—that

59. Kabanda, 2018b, 82–85.

60. EuroAsia Shorts Film Festival, n.d.

61. Korean Cultural Center Washington, D.C., 2026.

62. Razlogova, 2021; Red Sea International Film Festival, 2026; Festival del Cinema Africano, d'Asia e America Latina, n.d; Festival des 3 Continents, n.d.

63. Mclean, 2025.

is, if used positively. Also, given that film has been called the 'seventh art', its ability to galvanize artists from different domains cannot be underestimated. What may be uniquely vital in such South-to-South film shorts is not the content per se. Rather, it could be the ability to get artists from, say, the Congo to work with artists from Argentina to exchange ideas, to consider collective hopes and challenges. Moreover, as public servants and diplomats work together to present these films, this can open up windows to other opportunities. From tourism to education, all these prospects have a place in the trade framework noted earlier.

On the Movement of Artists

Dilip Ratha, a leading figure on global migration, has shown that remittances play a big role in development. But so does the movement of people[64]. Given that most of the focus tends to be on remittances from developed to developing countries, what is happening now in countries such as the United States[65] should be a wakeup call for low- and middle-income countries to build greater cooperation. Yet, for a number of reasons, movement between South-to-South countries is far from straightforward. Though in recent years, progress has been made and countries such as Brazil have built closer ties to Africa,[66] the reality is this: apart from the acceleration driven by Asian economies, primarily China and India, even intra-regional trade remains stubbornly low for most countries, particularly in Africa and Latin America. This is due to major structural, financial, and political barriers.[67]

One way to begin breaking down these barriers and to promote more cultural trade is to facilitate the movement of artists between countries of the South. One idea is an Artist Visa, a temporary visa for artists. Specific provisions would have to be worked out clearly, in a case-by-case scenario involving different countries. But this could alleviate the visa problems many artists face.[68]

Though such a provision may sound unworkable, an institutional framework already exists. Many low- and middle-income countries are WTO members. Under the WTO's Mode 4, via GATS, which includes the temporary movement of natural persons, they could work out such visa provisions.[69] After all, "members remain free to operate measures regarding citizenship, residence or access to the employment market on a permanent basis," as the WTO Annex on Movement of Natural Persons specifies.[70]

4. ARTS IN EDUCATION

4.1. The Role of Academic Institutions

When Nelson Mandela said "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world," he was not just echoing a platitude that has become a favorite of predatory institutions. He meant the power of what education or knowledge can provide,

64. Ratha, 2023.

65. For example, see American Immigration Council, 2025.

66. Between 2003 and 2010, during his first two terms in office, President Lula opened 19 embassies in Africa and visited the continent 12 times; moreover, as discussed earlier, from 2002 to 2012 trade between Brazil and Africa grew from $5 billion to $26 billion, a 420 percent increase.

67. The Economist, 2025; UNCTAD, 2024b.

68. Kabanda, 2018b, 131-135.

69. Kabanda, 2018b, 116.

70. WTO, n.d.c.

even beyond the instrumental dimension, or 'human capital.' As Amartya Sen and other champions of the human development framework have proposed, 'human capital,' which is often linked to education without much thinking, differs from 'human capability.' Though there is some congruence, human capability—which Adam Smith also championed—is concerned with more than 'capital' accumulation. It embraces holistic knowledge or wisdom that goes beyond seeing education in merely instrumental terms.[71] While there is nothing terribly wrong with the 'capital' angle, many low- and middle-income countries pay an especially high price for this kind of thinking.[72]

That price is paid in various ways. Apart from the common trope of discouraging students from studying the arts, marginalizing the arts in the curricula, or underfunding arts agencies, there is more to the loss. Consider the negative perception inculcated in people's minds between and within these nations, not to mention in the West. One familiar story is that European colonialists, for instance, reduced African music to disorganized sound. At the same time, in India, Thomas Macaulay, who introduced the country's first penal code, had the nerve to write that "the entire body of Indian philosophy was worth less than a single bookshelf of European books"[73]. Such illusory thinking, or half-baked education, if we can call it that, functions as a deceptive kind of schooling. It blinds people from seeing these countries in their wholeness, from considering the vast richness of the cultural wealth of these countries. Consequently, the narrow instrumental approach prevails, even though, as repeatedly said, GDP does not show the whole picture. As we constantly see, this has implications for policy decisions from trade to migration—and you need not be a strategist from the Government of Wakanda to realize that[74].

What is more, in today's digital information age with the injection of AI, genuine and useful knowledge has never been more important. This is because fake news, including mis- and disinformation, can do great damage. A country with a strong tourism sector, for instance, can have its seasonal business almost wiped out because of fake reports about Ebola or COVID-19 outbreaks there. As prospective guests stay away, by the time the truth comes out, the damage done can be unimaginable. Moreover, though the pain may be in the short-run, in the long-run tourism businesses and related agencies may lower their prices as they work to attract tourists to return, or they may keep prices high but take fewer guests. The result may be loss of jobs, missing school fees, and dreams shattered for those who rely on tourism and related businesses at the bottom rank of this sector.

One of the best ways to promote holistic learning is through the arts and humanities. And given that academic institutions in a number of countries in the New South are likely to mimic the curricula of the West, or their former colonial masters, an opportunity arises: institutions in the New South can offer meaningful education about the arts in their own countries and those of their counterparts. The latter might mean Indonesia and Mali, for example, teaching more about each other's arts, covering similarities, differences, and mutual challenges.

4.2. The Role of Development Agencies

Development agencies such as the InterAmerican Development Bank, the African Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the Islamic Development Bank have an opportunity to be custodians of art and arts education in their respective regions.

71. Sen, 2000, 292–297; Sen, 1997.

72. Kabanda, 2018, 48–62.

73. Farndon, 2007, 6.

74. Kabanda, 2018, 48–62; for the Wakanda reference see Disney UK, n.d.

They can also play leading roles in the promotion of South-to-South arts collaboration that places a greater emphasis on arts-infused pedagogy. Although this can be done through exhibitions and the sponsorship of inter- and cross-regional performances, questions need to be asked about how these agencies can assist in promoting arts education in the curricula of their member states.

4.3. Interministerial Collaboration

Interministerial cooperation is also important. Tourism ministries could work with the ministries of education and culture to promote arts education, focusing on what tourists can learn about the arts of their host nations. The agencies can even work together to produce manuals, or prospectuses, showing what this partnership could look like. In addition, they could contribute to school curriculums that emphasize the role of arts and culture in the development of their respective countries.

4.4. Intergovernmental Collaboration

Meanwhile, as discussed in relation to the EuroAsia Shorts example, different governments from different regions can work together to promote the arts of their countries. This, for instance, could mean Chile working with Argentina with a university in Washington DC, to host a season of Chilean and Argentine arts at this university. Moreover, academic exchanges can be arranged between the aforementioned parties. Another arrangement might involve, say, India working with Ethiopia, Uruguay working with Algeria, or Eswatini working with Singapore to promote arts education exchanges. Arrangements could include fellowships involving student and faculty exchanges, during which similarities and differences can be discussed as part of an ongoing process to elevate arts education in New South curricula.

4.5. South-South Cooperation

South-South cooperation here might mean identifying opportunities and challenges in relation to diversifying the curriculum in the New South. As cultural differences may be a factor, the common thread might be identifying what works and what does not in certain regions, if not countries. Also, since countries are likely to allocate different budgets to ministries, such as their culture and education ministries, a comparative analysis of funding and policy priorities might shed light on how to get more arts pedagogy into the process of learning from each other, in asking the question: how and why does arts education matter in promoting diversified trade and development in the New South? Here, as former World Bank President James D. Wolfensohn said, it is highly unlikely that ministers of culture from such places as Africa get together to discuss how to project an African image.[75] To take this further, while it is encouraging that the Organization of American States, for instance, has since 2002 held Meetings of Ministers of Culture and Highest Appropriate Authorities generally every two to three years (one of us attended the 2019 Meeting, which was held in Bridgetown, Barbados),[76] more can be done on South-South cooperation.

Along with UNESCO's World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development (MONDIACULT), the world's largest cultural policy conference, there are other major global

75. Kabanda, 2020a.

76. OAS, n.d.

cultural conferences[77]. These include the Group of 77 and China's first Meeting of Ministers of Culture, which was held in 2023 in Havana, Cuba. MONDIACULT 2022 "promoted dialogue and reflection on the development of [culture] and the promotion of mechanisms and alternatives for South-South cooperation of the nations that make up the G77 and China in the cultural field."[78] There is also the BRICS Culture Ministers Meetings, the tenth of which took place in 2025 in Brasilia, Brazil.[79]

According to Brazilian journalist Leandro Molina, the 10th BRICS culture meeting "marked a new chapter in cultural cooperation among member states": it approved the Brasilia Declaration, a document that reaffirms "culture as the foundation for more inclusive, sustainable, and multipolar global governance."[80] Such meetings provide opportunities for New South ministers of culture and other leaders to caucus. But it should not come as a surprise to learn that these meetings, even if virtual, can create more work for some ministries or agencies that in all likelihood are understaffed or underfunded. Moreover, in the list of priorities, it is unlikely that the topic of the arts pedagogy gets sufficient attention, if any.

Questions then have to be asked on how these summits can also be engines to propel arts pedagogy alongside their other obligations. If education is the most powerful tool one can use to change the world, what is the role of arts in education? If we are to believe the philosopher John Dewey, each and every person has the capacity to be an artist, to live an artful life, a life that engenders communal interaction that benefits and thereby transforms the world into a beautified canvas. Art carries messages that stimulate reflections on purposeful living. It not only changes perceptions; it also expands interests and moral sensitivity. When it comes to collective roles and responsibilities, moreover, art kindles not only thoughts but also actions.[81] So, how can arts education become a powerful vector in which such ideals can be realized?

5. CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

5.1. 'Where Culture Leads, Trade Follows'

As per the adage 'where culture leads, trade follows', though culture is hard to capture in monetary metrics such as GDP, its contribution to facilitating commerce cannot be underestimated. Broadly speaking, however, some painful overtures of colonization and hegemony are embedded in the cultural context. In a remarkable example, as Archbishop Desmond Tutu said: "There is a story, which is fairly well known, about when the missionaries came to Africa. They had the Bible and we, the natives, had the land. They said 'Let us pray,' and we dutifully shut our eyes. When we opened them, why, they now had the land and we had the Bible."[82]

Though Archbishop Tutu contributed to the popularity of that anecdote (which is often attributed to the first Kenyan President Jomo Kenyatta), it likely stems from the broader

77. UNESCO, n.d.c

78. UNESCO, n.d.b.

79. University of Toronto, n.d.

80. Molina, 2025.

81. Goldblatt, 2006, 17–18; Dewey, 1934. Kabanda, 2018b, 64.

82. Tutu, 1996, ix; see also Tutu, 2001.

canon of African satirical folktales[83]. Thematic variants can even be found in some literature, including Achebe's 1958 debut novel Things Fall Apart[84]. Indeed, things fall apart when, in the name of a cultural element like religion, colonial masters pacify local populations, as was the case during the 'Scramble for Africa' in the nineteenth century. European missionaries often arrived ahead of, if not alongside, colonial military forces. Although many missionaries focused on education, medical care, and religious conversion, their presence frequently had a bigger purpose linked to the so-called 'three Cs' (Christianity, commerce, and civilization): to subjugate the local population and introduce European cultural norms.[85]

It therefore should not come as a surprise that Europe has long been Africa's largest trading partner. The economies of most African countries were designed to be feeders, places to harvest and supply cheap raw materials to firms based in the countries of their former colonial masters. After processing, some of these goods were exported back to Africa, a situation that remains common today. Besides colonization, proximity can certainly also be a factor. But there is a reason why the former WTO Deputy Director-General Valentine Rugwabiza, in a speech at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg in 2012, said: "Africa can and should trade more with Africa if it is to secure its future growth and integration in the global economy"[86].

Improvements have certainly been made since Rugwabiza made her remarks more than a decade ago. Moreover, as noted earlier, when a figure such as Brazil's President Lula took an interest in Africa, trade between Brazil and Africa grew at an extraordinary rate.[87] But even as the numbers fluctuate between the reporting agencies, distorted analytics, and formal versus informal trade,[88] the statistics are still unflattering: intra-African trade ranges between 14 percent and 15 percent of the continent's total trade. It thus continues to lag far behind the rest of the world. Meanwhile, intra-regional trade in Europe hovers around 66 percent to 70 percent . In Asia, it is around 59 percent, and roughly 44 percent to 50 percent in the Americas.[89]

In the sense of culture leading and trade following as we apply it here, as David Throsby said, "sending a symphony orchestra or a dance troupe or an art exhibition to a potential trading partner may increase mutual understanding between countries and facilitate trade deals in commodities far removed from the arts and culture."[90] This concept links to building bridges with soft power, "the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment," according to the political scientist Joseph Nye Jr., who coined the term. "A country's soft power," as Nye adds, "rests on its resources of culture, values and policies"[91]. Because a cultural leading role may promote a country's image and induce positive nation branding, soft power can plant seedlings of trade that can bear fruit for generations. Many cultural elements,

83. Jackson, 2011, 203; Klinken, 2022; Mazrui, 2004.

84. Achebe, 2001. Variants of this have also been attributed to others, including Sagoyewatha, the great Native American Seneca chief and orator; see Russell's 'Indian Oratory', 1930.

85. Pakenham, 2003; see also Korieh Njoku, eds, 2011.

86. Rugwabiza, 2012.

87. The Economist, 2025.

88. Mold and Chowdhury, 2021.

89. UNCTAD, 2024, 14; African Export-Import Bank, 2024, 13. UN and UNCTAD, 2023, 16; DW, n.d.

90. Throsby 2010, 52. Kabanda 2018b, 4.

91. Nye Jr., 2019; Kabanda, 2018, 90.

including languages and the arts, can also induce commercial activities that may not even be connected to arts and culture initially[92].

5.2. What is the Current State of Cultural Diplomacy in the South?

Cultural diplomacy, according to the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, "may best be described as a course of actions, which are based on and utilize the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation or promote national interests." Though the term 'cultural diplomacy' is a recent coinage, the tradition and practice it denotes has long been part of the human story. It can moreover "be practiced by either the public sector, private sector or civil society."[93] But whether or not cultural diplomacy is practiced in order to strengthen ties that lead to trade or amity between countries, it is unlikely that it is often practiced for its own sake. Furthermore, since some of its benefits may not be obvious and may take time to pay off, cultural diplomacy sometimes does not garner the policy attention it deserves.

Nevertheless, cultural diplomacy can be regarded as a subset of public diplomacy, which, according to the University of Southern California Center on Public Diplomacy, is "the practice of engaging with foreign audiences to strengthen ties, build trust, and promote cooperation."[94] Although traditionally treated as one of public diplomacy's core pillars, cultural diplomacy can also operate independently, and it often does.[95] What is more, cultural diplomacy can be used to achieve soft power.[96]

In the New South, even beyond China, developments in cultural diplomacy can be seen. Instead of merely relying on military might or 'hard power', these countries apply their arts, culture, and heritage to expand their soft power, fuel economic advancement, and establish alliances.[97] But it must be remembered that besides cultural diplomacy, the concepts of soft power and public diplomacy are also not new. Nor are they just ascribed to Western civilization. The roots of public diplomacy stretch as far back as antiquity; even in Biblical texts evidence can be found of shaping a nation's image.[98] Similar concepts of soft power can moreover be traced to ancient philosophers such as Lao Tse.[99] To use the metaphor of water, Lao Tse (also Lao Tzu or Laozi) famously observed that even though water is incredibly soft and yielding, it can easily wear away rigid rocks and earth.[100] (Needless to say, it was the same yielding substance that was tapped to generate water power, which contributed to the industrial revolution.[101])

The promotion of Buddhism as statecraft across Asia by last great Mauryan emperor Ashoka is also a prime example of early cultural diplomacy. Ashoka, who prioritized moral authority

92. Throsby, 2010, 52; Kabanda, 2018b, 4.
93. ICD, n.d.
94. USC Center on Public Diplomacy, 2014.
95. Cull, 2008; Arndt, 2006.
96. Nawaz, 2025.
97. UNESCO, 2022; Tamta and Yadav, 2025; Yaqoub et al, 2026; Tran, Nguyen and Tran, 2024.
98. Jarosz, 2023.
99. Nye Jr., 2022.
100. Lao Tzu, n.d.
101. Viollet, 2017.

over military conquest, sent monks, medical experts, and diplomats to spread dhamma, or dharma (righteousness) from India to Sri Lanka and the Mediterranean.[102] The Amarna Letters, dating back to the fourteenth century BCE, also show proof that the Pharaohs of Egypt and the rulers of the Near East practiced cultural diplomacy.[103] State officials in empires including Mali and Ghana employed hereditary oral historians, musicians, and storytellers known as griots and griottes. Armed with their talents in epic storytelling and magnificent song-making, these virtuosi projected cultural power. They performed before visiting foreign dignitaries and accompanied royal envoys abroad to proclaim their kings' glorious lineages. They hence burnished their national brands and cultivated soft power.[104]

Finally, in pre-Columbian Latin America, Mesoamerican and Andean civilizations engaged in public diplomacy in various ways. These efforts ranged from managing foreign relations to projecting power. To build alliances, they deployed visible public spectacles, lavish gift exchanges, and monumental architecture. Public feasts, ritualized offerings, and the strategic gifting of exotic goods were thus part of their diplomatic artistry.[105]

To what extent is the value of cultural diplomacy reflected in the national budgets? Though countries including China, India, Brazil, Peru, Mexico, Vietnam, and South Africa have made conscious efforts to advance cultural diplomacy, many other countries have so far not.[106] One needs only consider the concept of the military industrial complex in connection with funding for ministries of defense versus those of culture. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), global military spending reached a staggering $2.887 trillion in 2025. This points to an average of 6.9 percent to 7.1 percent of total government budgets worldwide.[107] Though these figures are global, when it comes to cultural funding in general the picture is telling.

Consider the longstanding reality echoed by UNESCO. Although institutional gains have to be acknowledged, if not celebrated, "the cultural sector remains hindered by deep-seated structural imbalances and vulnerabilities. Despite increases in direct government funding for culture in developing countries, the global average remains below 0.6 percent of gross domestic product." With respect to international funding, moreover, the situation is dismal: "in 2022, only 0.15 percent of Country Programmable Aid went to culture and recreation, and between 2006 and 2022, the cultural and creative industries received only a small share of Aid for Trade."[108]

As Themrise Khan wrote in The End of Aid, instead of spending on social services, most New South countries are busy ramping up their military budgets. Across Africa, military expenditure in 2024 rose by 3 percent from 2023, according to SIPRI data. Likewise, in Mexico, military spending in 2024 rose by 39 percent from the previous year. Yet, as a percentage of GDP, the country's research and development expenditure has remained virtually flat. This situation, which is common elsewhere, is surely out of tune with what development should be about: improving people's lives, especially those who are less fortunate. It severely skewers "domestic resources away from social services that could otherwise be easily provided," as Khan concluded. "This is not about demilitarisation (which

102. Olivelle, 2023.

103. Geneva Graduate Institute, 2025; see also Diplo, n.d.; and Niazi, 2023.

104. Counsel, 1997; Nwala, 2024; Lott, 2002.

105. Zaharna, 2013; Moore, 1996; Morris, 1982; Smith, 2022.

106. UNESCO, 2022; UNESCO, 2018; Deliana, 2025; José, 2024.

107. Liang et al, 2026 and 2025.

108. UNESCO, 2026, 13.

would be ideal), but about depoliticising budgetary allocations towards people and not war."[109]

Though cultural diplomacy can kindle people-to-people interactions and help mitigate conflicts that lead to wars, it is insufficiently funded and underutilized in many countries. Even rich countries such as the U.S. exhibit what seems to be an insatiable propensity to privilege military might over diplomacy. Though the U.S. has enjoyed the ability to still entice and attract in various ways, it remains to be seen if that trend will continue. But many countries in the New South, with their immense cultural diversity, have an opportunity to utilize cultural diplomacy; meaningful funding to that end is a good start.[110]

5.3. What is the Current State of South-to-South Cultural Exchange?

The major players in today's New South cultural diplomacy seem to be China and India. This is not surprising. First, the huge populations of these countries mean that combined, they represent over a third of the entire global population (2.89 billion out of 8.3 billion). Second, the combined GDP of China and India in 2024 was some $22.65 trillion on a nominal basis. When adjusted for purchasing power parity, it was $63.2 trillion. Accordingly, as of 2024, China and India accounted for some 20 percent of global nominal wealth and represented more than 55 percent of Asia's total economic output.[111] So, one could argue that with populations in the billions and economies in the trillions, it is much easier for China and India to engage in cultural diplomacy. Yet that thesis deserves more investigation.

China is best known for its Confucius Institutes, about which opinions are split between positive and negative. If we are to judge them in terms of soft power, they are indeed a form of power rendered via cultural diplomacy. Moreover, even as they face intense scrutiny in the West, the Institutes enjoy a presence in Africa, Latin America, Middle East, and Southeast Asia.[112]

In Africa, as of June 2026, there were Confucius Institutes in 49 countries out of the continent's 54.[113] It is little wonder, therefore, that at the 2024 Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), China's President Xi Jinping said that both sides agreed to designate 2026 as the China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges. Though one can suggest that the reciprocal nature of this relationship is open to question, language from the Chinese government suggests otherwise: "To implement the important consensus reached by Chinese and African leaders and the outcomes of the FOCAC Beijing Summit, the two sides will host a series of people-to-people exchange activities under the theme of Consolidate All-Weather Friendship, Pursue Shared Dream of Modernization, as we celebrate in 2026 the 70th anniversary of the start of diplomatic relations between China and African countries," according to the Permanent Mission of China to the United Nations. "These activities aim to promote exchanges and mutual learning among the Chinese and African civilizations and strengthen people-to-people bonds, amity and cooperation, thus solidifying the public support for China-Africa friendship."[114]

109. Khan, 2025; see also UNDP, 2025.

110. For more on this see, Lee et al, 2025; Mbira, 2024; Saaida, 2023; UNESCO, 2022c; Donfried, 2012.

111. Statistics Times, 2026.

112. Urhová, 2024.

113. Schwikowski, 2025; Confucius Institute, n.d; Permanent Mission of China to the UN, 2025.

114. Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN, 2025.

India has also long been active in Africa. Alongside the Arab influence, Indian spices and foods such as samosa, chapati, and mandazi are common in East Africa and elsewhere on the continent. But India also has objectives for such far-flung places as Latin America. Consider the following examples: In 1997, India and Bolivia formalized cultural cooperation that led to substantial cultural exchanges. Bollywood films, music, and dance have enjoyed a surge of popularity in Bolivia. In cities such as La Paz, Cochabamba, Potosí, and Oruro, Indian dance groups and Bollywood dance academies are active. Among Bolivians, these cultural expressions have nurtured a deeper appreciation for Indian culture.[115]

Besides events in Brazil, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Peru, and elsewhere, India was the Guest of Honor at Latin America's largest cultural festival, the Cervantino International Festival, in 2018. The event, which takes place annually in Guanajuato, Mexico, was a major milestone in India's cultural engagement in the region: in addition to Kathakali (a major classical dance-drama from Kerala), Bollywood dance, and yoga demonstrations, the festival showcased A Passage to Bollywood, a special production by the celebrated Indian-Australian choreographer Ashley Lobo. Lobo is considered a pioneer of international dance in India, and the production showcased the fusion of Indian and Latin American artistry. India's participation in the festival, according to Shveta Dhaliwal, who teaches political philosophy, demonstrated its commitment to cultural diplomacy and growing its influence in Latin America.[116]

The above examples suggest that cultural diplomacy from Africa aimed at China, or Latin America to India is not as robust as the other way around. Even though there are some exceptions, it is no exaggeration to say South-to-South cultural diplomacy needs a boost.

6. OTHER POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

6.1. On Time, Professionalism, and Development

The concept of 'African time' is widely understood as a situation in which someone can be late for an appointment or a commitment, not for a mere five to 10 minutes, but sometimes up to even more than two hours—this is also common in Latin America, the Middle East, and some parts of Asia. For those who are not used to this kind of cultural view of punctuality, this can be a shock. Though it may be acceptable for meeting friends for coffee, it is arguably not acceptable in professional affairs. In the creative domain, moreover, a few artists may take their time to keep time. But in a world that is increasingly globalized, this is hard to sustain, if one is to retain business and stay relevant. From meeting with investors to working with others, a new direction in respecting time management is crucial. Respecting time also means making an effort to deliver goods and services in a timely manner.

This is crucial because, on a personal level, one of us (the authors) usually approaches creatives—including ceramicists, carpenters, and tailors—to order items, often after discussing the designs. But nine times out of ten, these creatives fail to meet deadlines, if they deliver the items at all. That happens even if they have already been paid half of the money they requested for their services. What follows is frustration and a breach of trust, elements that compromise the running of a successful business. What disappoints most is that the same people say they need jobs, or that they do not have enough work.

115. Dhaliwal, 2025.

116. Dhaliwal, 2025.

Take such an experience and extrapolate it to a country or region and the outcome is a system that is nearly impossible to work in effectively and efficiently. While there are broader reasons why time management and action follow-through are huge issues in Africa and countries with similar cultural traits, this issue can be addressed. Whereas change will not happen overnight, if countries recognize this, it can be incorporated into education systems, cultural institutions, and even public policies, beyond the usual professional development workshops.

This issue is not confined to the arts, nor is it unique to Africa. Yet, it brings to mind a different but interrelated observation, one that Theodore Levitt made in his article, 'Creativity Is Not Enough.' From pop talks to business culture, 'creativity' enjoys a high premium. It is often conflated with innovation—the process through which ideas are put into action. Ideas, however, "are useless unless used. The proof of their value is in their implementation. Until then they are in limbo." This limbo can stretch from "'creative types'" who fail to deliver to organizations that confuse "brilliant talk" with "constructive action." Whatever the case, in many situations, a powerful idea can circulate for years, not because it is unsound, but because it has not been implemented. It is worth recalling that creativity is seldom lacking. What is often lacking is the impetus to follow through, to put ideas to work.[117]

6.2. On Value-Added

The idea of getting raw materials from the so-called 'developing countries' for processing in so-called 'developed countries' has disturbed many in policy circles, at least those who weigh the jobs and development aspects of the former. Although this is hard to change with products such as coffee, which may need final processing near the front-end customer, looking at it from a creative point of view invites plenty of scrutiny. Sometimes what may be needed is adequate attribution. When Michael Jackson copied Manu Dibango's music, for example, it is safe to say that few of the pop icon's fans knew, or even if they did, few of them cared. But Dibango, a Cameroonian singer and saxophonist who was known as the Lion of Cameroon, only found out when friends and relatives called to congratulate him for having Michael Jackson, 'the King of Pop', play his music. When Dibango sued Jackson for lifting a hook in his 1983 single "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'" from Dibango's 1972 track "Soul Makossa," the matter was settled out of court, with Jackson agreeing to pay Dibango one million French francs.[118]

Those one million francs—about $151,000 in 1986 when the settlement was made—would be worth about $430,000 today: small change compared to what Jackson made. Yet the matter did not end there. In 2007, the drama repeated once again when Rihanna asked Jackson to sample the hook for her song "Don't Stop the Music." He apparently agreed but without contacting Dibango. Dibango sued again for €500,000. But this time, the court threw out the claim, reasoning that, based on the original 1980s settlement, Dibango had waived his right to further legal action.[119]

But one could argue that for a continent that has had its share of a negative image, by fittingly attributing the sample to Dibango in the first place, Jackson and Rihanna would have played a much bigger role: attributing this creative value added not only to Dibango, but also to a continent that played the prime role in shaping Dibango's genius.

117. Levitt, 2002.

118. Udugba, 2024; Michaels, 2009; Sanneh, 2009; Kabanda, 2018b, 104–105.

119. Ibid.

The policy lesson here might therefore be not just about enforcing copyright or intellectual property. It is also about elevating the attribution of knowledge from places such as Africa, especially since such incidents are common. This can be done in formal and informal ways within the academy and with other partners, including embassies and international organizations. After all, since technologies such as AI amalgamate knowledge from different corners of the globe, attributing where value comes from in both tangible and intangible ways is arguably more important than ever today.

One would nonetheless hope that attribution should not just be for attribution's sake, as alluded to above. If knowledge is power, then attribution can surely help with structural issues such as country branding—many countries in the New South could use a better image. This can link to attracting tourism, education exchanges, and investments in all sorts of areas. Furthermore, as Joseph Stiglitz, who chaired the 1998 World Development Report on Knowledge for Development during his tenure as World Bank Chief Economist, once observed: what separates 'developing countries' from 'developed countries' is not just a resource gap, but a knowledge gap. If that is to be believed, then properly attributing knowledge from the New South could also highlight the immense potential of the knowledge wealth in these countries.[120]

New South countries could share knowledge—including cultural knowledge—and consider how to deal with aspects such as intellectual property legal frameworks, deliberating the pros and cons of aligning them with creative work. Calls for South-to-South knowledge sharing are common. That acknowledged, is such knowledge sharing in the creative and cultural domains common in development policy? Given that such knowledge is largely categorized as services, frameworks such as the WTO's Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement come to the fore. The treaty, which came into force in 1995, "plays a critical role in facilitating trade in knowledge and creativity, in resolving trade disputes over intellectual property, and in assuring WTO members the latitude to achieve their domestic objectives."[121] This is well and good, but some voices have been skeptical about it from the beginning.

One of these voices is that of Stiglitz. Stiglitz, who was serving on President Bill Clinton's Council of Economic Advisers when TRIPS was in the making, said: "I had seen firsthand how TRIPS was shaped, not by the concerns of U.S. science, but by our pharmaceutical and entertainment industries."[122] It was therefore special-interest legislation, according to his account. Indeed, as noted in The Creative Wealth of Nations, even J. Michael Finger, who was formerly lead economist and chief of the World Bank's Trade Policy Research Group, said TRIPS was about the knowledge that existed in developed countries, the developing countries' access to that knowledge, and, in particular, about developing countries paying for that access.[123]

What the United States Patent and Trademark Office noted a decade after TRIPS came into force remains largely true: the Agreement "does not address several new developments, such as the Internet and digital copyright issues, advanced biotechnology, and international harmonization, the process of creating uniform global standards of laws or practice." Moreover, while such innovations as 'TRIPS-plus' have been enacted, the treaty "sets the floor for minimum IPR protection, not the ceiling."[124] Technological change alone, including

120. Stiglitz, 2009, 141; Kabanda, 2018b, 103–4.

121. WTO, n.d.a.

122. Stiglitz, 2009, 141.

123. J. Michael Finger, interview with Patrick Kabanda, November 2011; Kabanda, 2018b, 106–7.

124. USPTO, n.d.

AI, may now mean that countries in the New South have a heavier load in coming up with provisions that will work for them. This might mean creating tools like a South-to-South TRIPS (StS TRIPS) framework, under which they can negotiate a treaty that works among them. Yet, even if finer points are agreed, it is unlikely that enforcing such a treaty will be easy.

What can be done though is to adopt for the New South what U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders has proposed for America regarding new tech developments, notably AI. "Since AI is built on the collective knowledge of humanity," Sanders has said, "the wealth it generates must benefit humanity." Accordingly, he proposed to introduce the American AI Sovereign Wealth Fund Act. "This legislation would give the public a direct ownership stake in the largest A.I. companies in our country. How? It would create a sovereign wealth fund through a one-time 50 percent tax—not on the profits of OpenAI, Anthropic, xAI and other companies, but paid with something far more valuable than that: the stock." In Sanders's calculus, to begin with, the dollars in the billions, if not trillions, generated by this fund would be paid directly to the American people.[125]

As Sanders acknowledged, this idea is not new. Some scholars have already proposed it, and so have some leading U.S. AI companies.[126] The question then is this: since AI is not just amassing knowledge from America but from all corners of the globe, what can countries in the New South do? Should they establish individual AI sovereign wealth funds, or should they band together and create something like an AI Sovereign Wealth Fund for the New South?

Whatever the case, the current moment suggests that something needs to be done. Income from such funds could help finance ministries of culture and education. It could facilitate cultural diplomacy and educational exchanges. And it could provide seed funding and structural support to many artists and creative entrepreneurs who often struggle financially as they chase grant after grant in perpetuity—if they are lucky enough to even know in the first place about the foundations that might fund their work. The possibilities are endless.

In the same vein, as legal battles involving tech firms including Anthropic, Meta, and Google rage, this also opens up other avenues. For example, if Anthropic "agreed to pay $1.5 billion to settle a class-action lawsuit by book authors who say the company took pirated copies of their works to train its chatbot,"[127] what lessons can be drawn from such cases to generate funds for the arts?

6.3. On Social Benefits

Another area in which culture adds value in a different sense is the social dimension. Though this paper has not dwelt on that, the contribution of the arts to non-monetary gains, which may run from religious tolerance and social capital to identity and gender parity, is extraordinary. Of course, the arts themselves can be used to sow division, and this a common reaction for those who may have a negative bias about arts policy. But used in a positive manner, the arts have the power to transform people's lives for the better. From helping people start difficult conversations and dealing with difficult situations, to learning about and from each other, the arts can be utilized to engender positive outcomes. For instance, in a world

125. Sanders, 2026. For a related discussion on AI companies and community-based agreements, see Darrell West's interview with Tonya Mosley, "Who Benefits When Massive AI Data Centers Come to Town?" (West, 2026).

126. Sanders, 2026; Bearer-Friend and Polcz, 2026, 2025. OpenAI, 2026.

127. Associated Press, 2025; Brittain, 2026.

in which issues like climate change and science face mounting skepticism, it is important reach people's hearts and minds. Although numbers and statistics are important, is throwing numbers at people without a good story an apt policy?

One of the challenges is that much economic knowledge is channeled through an instrumental lens. Money is certainly important. But as thinkers such as Amartya Sen have observed repeatedly, there is a need to move away from the 'capital' to the 'capability' outlook. Yet, for instance, a quick search can show how much the term 'human capital' enjoys extraordinary usage, even by well-meaning scholars and policymakers. If it is acknowledged that trade in the arts can even bring non-monetary benefits, it can also be true that the non-instrumental aspects of the arts can boost trade and other economic benefits.

For example, suppose country A and country B have been locked in hostility or misunderstanding, and commerce between the two has declined. If a free music concert involving artists from these two countries paves the way for peace negotiations that break this impasse, it is likely that trade, which may not have anything to do with music, would now expand. Consideration should be given to how the arts in general can promote a better environment (that may even boost trade), regardless of the income garnered from cultural trade. Areas including arts education and cultural diplomacy have much to offer in this respect.

6.4. On Trade Diversification and Trading with Each Other

As noted earlier, South-South trade, which now accounts for more than a third of global commerce, has been growing much faster than North-South trade in recent years. This momentum is certainly welcome. But its full potential remains untapped, as was noted at UNCTAD16, the 16th United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, in October 2025 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. Besides facing high trade costs and financing constraints, many countries in the low- and middle-income bracket exhibit limited trade diversity.[128]

The last point bears emphasizing because, even though the idea of economic diversification has been preached to death, many low- and middle-income countries have few economic diversification measures. Consider Africa, where the model of commodity-led exports persists: in 2023 alone, out of total exports of some $700 billion, 80 percent came from just a few sectors—35 percent ($247 billion) from fuel and related products; 18 percent ($127 billion) from precious metals and stones; 15 percent ($107 billion) from other minerals and metals; and 12 percent ($84 billion) from agriculture and food products. This shows that Africa's high dependency on commodities renders its export earnings highly sensitive, if not outright exposed, to global commodity price fluctuations, which can arise because of natural disasters, medical outbreaks, changes in geopolitical winds, and wars, which Africa may have nothing to do with.[129]

Diversification is not only about exports. It is also about markets: not just about what is being traded, but also where it is traded. Africa-Asia trade is rising. Africa's trading partnerships have shifted significantly in the past two decades and Asia that has emerged as Africa's leading trading partner. The 2021 data indicate Asia has surpassed Europe in both exports and imports, to account for over 40 percent of Africa's trade. Most of this trade, however, is commodity exports, as noted above. Whereas China, among individual countries, has become Africa's primary trading partner, the single largest market for African goods and the

128. UNCTAD, 2025; Soltani, 2025b.

129. Soltani, 2025a; see also Kabanda, 2018b, 100–101.

largest source of African imports is the European Union. Meanwhile, trade with India, Africa's third largest trading partner, has surged elevenfold since 2000.[130]

But Africa is the continent with countries that trade the least with each other. In 2024, South Africa, which dominates, contributed more than 19 percent to intra-African trade.[131] It is encouraging that African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) has shifted from negotiation to implementation. That shift was the salient feature of the Biashara Afrika 2026 summit. This high-level platform, held in Lomé, Togo, brought together governments, institutions, investors, and businesses to push forward the implementation of AfCFTA and intra-African trade.[132]. But whether the outcomes of AfCFTA will be broadly inclusive, and will include meaningful cultural trade that even benefits local artisans, remains to be seen.

The agreement by which China removed all tariffs on 53 African nations, which debuted on May 1, 2026, could be another opportunity to increase trade in creative products. Since a number of these products may be inputs rather than final products, attributing the value they add calls for considerable attention. Although accounting for trade in value added may not be a simple or convenient exercise, as noted earlier, it could reveal a different picture in trade statistics, and hence inform policy discussions.[133] Deliberations may for instance include negotiations on payments for inputs that may be cheap, but which add immense value to final products. Yet considering the aspects of value added deserves greater consideration. This is especially the case in the creative domain, where intricacies of intellectual property aside, opportunities to make new variations from the original are almost infinite.

6.5. Engaging Regional Organizations

In addition to organizations such as the World Intellectual Property Organization, regional bodies could be useful partners in gathering data and discussing policy. In the field of IP, these include the African Regional Intellectual Property Organization, Organisation Africaine de la Propriété Intellectuelle, the Pan-African Intellectual Property Organization, the ASEAN Intellectual Property Association, the ASEAN Intellectual Property Portal, the Patent Office of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, Eurasian Patent Organization, and the Association of Caribbean Copyright Societies. In Latin America and the Caribbean, where a single unified IP system is yet to be finalized as of this writing, individual country IP offices may be the best approach for now.[134]

Regional arts organizations and festivals that may also be a resource for coordination, research, and policy implementation. These include well-known ones, such as the Arterial Network and the World Culture Festival, which was founded by Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. Others include the Association of Asian Performing Arts Festivals; the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States; the Aotearoa New Zealand Festival of the Arts; the Festival of Pacific Arts & Culture; the Pacific Arts Association; Southern African Music Rights Organization; MERCOSUR Cultural (Mercado Común del Sur or Common Market of the South; IberCultura Viva; Cultura Viva; Fiesta del Fuego (Festival del Caribe); Culture Resource (Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafy); the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture; Jerash Festival of Culture and Arts; Red Sea International Film Festival; Caribbean Culture Fund; Caribbean Linked; and CARIFESTA (Caribbean Festival of Arts).

130. Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2023; see also Kabanda, 2018b, 100–101.

131. Afreximbank, 2025, 63.

132. Hlophe, 2026; Biashara Afrika, n.d.

133. Lamy, 2011.

134. WIPO, n.d.; Covarrubia, 2024; Santamaría Hernández, 2022; CARICOM, 2024.

6.6. Creating a Cultural Fund for the New South

Some of the above entities deal with cultural funding, but given that the objective is to link culture across the countries in the south-to-south network, this invites another question: should something like a Cultural Fund for the New South (CFNS) be created? Though this may be akin to the International Cultural Fund proposed in an earlier essay, the CFNS would focus on funding initiatives for the countries in the New South. Details on how this may work can be deliberated. But funds could be raised from states, the private sector, and the third sector.[135]

Models already exist. In Brazil, for instance, they include Cultura Viva and Social Service of Commerce (SESC). The latter, "owes its enviable position largely to a financing model that its leaders believe is unique in the world," as American journalist Larry Rohter wrote. "A private, nonprofit entity whose role is enshrined in the national Constitution, the organization derives its budget from a 1.5 percent payroll tax imposed on and collected by Brazilian companies, so as the workforce in this nation of nearly 200 million people expands, so does the organization's budget." More than two decades ago, SESC's bounty amounted to $600 million a year. So, though the leitmotif for cultural organizations to tighten budgets and pare back productions is common worldwide, SESC has been doing the opposite: as the headline for Rohter's article puts it, "Brazil's Unique Culture Group Stays Busy Sharing the Wealth." For anyone who cares about cultural funding, SESC provides a wealth of lessons.[136]

Other models worthy of study include Muhammad Yunus's Grameen Bank and Social Business approach. Though this approach is not strictly about funding the arts, it could provide lessons on how to craft alternative funding models.[137] There is also the Colombia 'orange bonds' innovation, which financed the country's Orange Economy via Bancóldex (Banco de Comercio Exterior de Colombia S.A.), the state-owned entrepreneurial development bank. In its first auction, over 320 investors bid on $124 million of the bonds. Though there are no similar initiatives currently, as the framework continues to evolve, what lessons could be drawn from it?[138]

There is also the option for taxes on items including alcohol, cigarettes, soda (so-called 'sin taxes'), and tourism. Taxes tend to elicit strong, if not fierce, debates. But as one example from the U.S. city of Philadelphia shows, perceptions of a soda tax's fairness depended on how the participants "experienced its benefits in their neighborhoods—a finding highlighting the importance of transparency and accountability in what happens to the tax revenue."[139] Here, among other benefits, the soda tax revenue was intended to expand opportunities for high-impact arts and culture access for thousands of Philadelphians.[140]

To turn to cigarettes, as of this writing, as far as the authors can tell, there is no public example of a country in the New South with a tax on cigarettes to support the arts. But consider another example: Cuyahoga County, Ohio (some 450 miles west of Philadelphia). Cuyahoga Arts & Culture is funded by a levy on cigarettes sold in Cuyahoga County. The County voters approved the first 10-year tax levy in 2006. In 2015, the tax was renewed for a further 10 years, and in 2024, it was not only replaced, but also expanded. The tax has

135. Kabanda, 2022b, 244–5.

136. Bordat-Chauvin, 2025; Queen Mary University of London, n.d.; Rohter, 2012; Kabanda, 2022b, 244–5.

137. See Yunus with Weber, 2007, Chapter 2, esp. p. 24; and Yunus Social Business, n.d.

138. Sonneland, 2018; Sustainable Fitch, 2025; Kabanda, 2022b, 244–5.

139. Tachibana, 2022; Edmondson et al, 2022.

140. Lyon, 2016.

generated over $285 million since 2007. Around 95 percent of that money—more than $270 million—has gone to Cuyahoga County nonprofits in the form of grants to support the arts and culture.[141]

In Latvia, the government introduced tax increases on alcohol, tobacco, and gambling to fund its State Culture Capital Foundation. Under the new system, which commenced in 2022, the Foundation receives "3 percent of an excise alcohol tax, 2 percent of an excise tobacco tax, 2.21 percent of a gambling tax, and 1.37 [percent] of a tax on lottery operations." The proceeds enhance funding for Latvia's cultural projects, events, and activities. Similar measures are in place in the neighboring Baltic states of Lithuania and Estonia.[142]

Even though a question may arise on how to determine taxation rates, according to Adam Hoffer, the Director of Excise Tax Policy at the Tax Foundation, taxing an item such as alcohol is remarkably simple: "Higher alcohol content means more tax paid." In most European countries and the U.S., the yardstick for determining taxes on spirits is already based on alcohol content. Elsewhere, alcohol by volume (ABV) taxes are gaining traction. In Brazil, where a proposal passed the country's lower house in 2024, there have been talks about a potential nationwide rollout. A comparable proposal is ongoing in Mexico.[143] These ABV taxes would not be about funding the arts per se. Nonetheless, the methodology could be useful in crafting such policies as taxing alcohol to fund the arts.

If these taxes curb usage of harmful products, they can also become, at least when it comes to raising revenue, a 'double-edged sword.' Consider what has happened in Cuyahoga County: "The innovative model has been so successful, raising money by making cigarettes more expensive, that it threatened its own demise," as Michaela Towfighi wrote in The New York Times. In the City Cleveland, the heart of Cuyahoga County, smoking over the past decade fell from 35 percent of adults to 19 percent. The tax revenue followed—it dropped by half.[144]

'Sin taxes' aside, other tax initiatives invite enquiry. "In St. Paul, Minnesota, for example, the city enacted a Sales Tax Revitalization (STAR) Program in which the city applies 10 percent of [the funds from its dedicated half-cent local] sales tax revenue to arts and cultural projects." As Elleni Avila concluded, the STAR Program, which via its Cultural STAR Grant Program has awarded over $1 million annually in cultural grants to dozens of arts organizations across St. Paul since 1994, "has been both successful and well-received in the community."[145]

Meanwhile, in 2019 the city of Columbus, Ohio, introduced a new model called the Columbus Admissions Tax—colloquially dubbed the 'ticket tax.' According to the Greater Columbus Arts Council, the tax "now provides significant funding to invest in the arts and public cultural facilities. The funds generated by the 5 percent admissions tax is invested in two major funds – The Creation, Innovation & Inclusion Fund and the Facility Stabilization Fund – and is implemented through grants managed by the Greater Columbus Arts Council." Because it generates funds from a sales tax instead of a flat fee, the Columbus approach aligns with the successful St. Paul STAR model.[146] These results invite inquiry because the U.S. is one of

141. Cuyahoga Arts & Culture, 2026.

142. Movendi International, 2018.

143. Hoffer, 2025.

144. Towfighi, 2026.

145. Avila, 2020; City of Saint Paul, 2026a. NB: The Saint Paul City Council officially established the STAR program in 1994. "STAR programs include Neighborhood STAR, which provides competitive funding for capital projects in Saint Paul neighborhoods, and Cultural STAR, which provides grants for cultural organizations and events in Saint Paul." For details, see City of Saint Paul, 2026b.

146. Avila, 2020.

the high-income countries where, broadly speaking, taxes are resisted the most.

To return to Colombia, when the mathematician, philosopher, and politician Antanas Mockus was mayor of Bogotá, he asked people to pay an extra voluntary tax of 10 percent. "To the surprise of many, 63,000 people voluntarily paid the extra taxes. A dramatic indicator of the shift in the attitude of 'Bogotanos' during Mockus' tenure is that, in 2002, the city collected more than three times the revenues it had garnered in 1990."[147] As some of the funds generated supported artistic initiatives, this raises the question of whether such an approach could work elsewhere in creating an arts fund.

Given that some corporations already fund cultural initiatives, or have their own cultural foundations, it should also be possible to consider how these entities could contribute to a cultural fund, in turn receiving tax incentives (as they often do anyway). This approach may even help sidestep the problem of corporations tending to largely fund certain art forms, which they believe could bring them greater prestige or influence.[148] If they placed their contributions in a pot without strings attached, those elected to manage the fund would make the funding decisions, taking into account issues such as equity. This may be a viable solution to the question of equity in arts funding.

There is also the prospect of enacting some form of tourism tax to finance a cultural fund. A "tourist tax—sometimes called lodging tax, city tax, or occupancy tax—is a fee charged to travelers when they stay overnight in a destination," according to Australian travel and food writer Daniela Sunde-Brown. "The money is collected by local or national governments to support tourism infrastructure, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability." But in some cases, the tax is also applied to other tourist activities besides lodging. Bhutan, for instance, charges a towering tourist tax called a Sustainable Development Fee. The fee, which was reduced from $200 to $100 in 2023, is part of Bhutan's model of 'high value, low impact' tourism. The model, it is argued, placed the fee at such a high premium to preserve the nation's culture and environment. Meanwhile, Mexico applies a two-pronged approach: a 16 percent value-added tax (IVA)—for all goods and services, this is currently the standard federal sales tax levied—is included in all hotel stays. In addition, most states collect a local lodging tax. This, depending on the region, ranges between two and five percent, if not more.[149]

From 'sin taxes' to tourism taxes, countries should determine which types of funding mechanisms work best for them in order to contribute to a cultural fund. But how would a Cultural Fund for the New South work? Alongside Brazil's SESC, South Korea provides another example. The nation's Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, which works with organizations such as Arts Council Korea, Korea's largest arts funding agency and nonprofit, also administers funding mechanisms that could be worthy of study.[150]

There is also the UN Fund for South-South Cooperation, which supports the New South-South Development Center (GSSDC), a flagship initiative of the UN Office for South-South Cooperation funded by China. GSSDC is undergoing a thematic and geographic expansion in its Phase II (2024–2030). From agriculture and rural transformation, to green development

147. Caballero, 2004.

148. This could certainly also be seen as an investment in soft power. For example, see Arts and Sciences, 2026, in which Dartmouth College Professors Sunglim Kim and Chad Elias investigated how Korean corporations use art to expand their global influence. But, as the Professors document, "tax avoidance schemes, the concentration of elite influence, and the potential for governments to use corporate patronage as an excuse to cut public funding" are also real dangers that can come with these arrangements.

149. Sunde-Brown, 2025.

150. Rohter, 2012; Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, n.d.; ASEF culture360, 2011; Avila, 2020.

and new industrialization, its priorities will also include the cultural and creative economy.[151] Countries will have to consider options that work for them. But though supporting the arts is surely taxing,[152] the ideas put forth here could provide a blueprint for what can be done.

6.7. Facilitating South-to-South Cultural Exchanges

In 2009, the writer and musician Edward Pearlman started a petition urging the U.S. administration to create the Cultural Exchange Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA). The Agreement "would permit temporary visits for the purposes of cultural exchange by acknowledged experts in traditional arts among countries participating in this agreement. It would seek to separate cultural exchange visits from commercial visits, by setting criteria to distinguish the two." As of this writing, nearly two decades have passed since Pearlman's proposal, and of the 750 signatures needed, it has garnered over 560. It is unlikely that the provision, which "would be facilitated by low visa fees, quick turnaround for approval of a visa, and flexibility for the visiting experts to add engagements without submitting contracts or dates for approval in advance,"[153] would have much luck passing if it were to be submitted today, given the current political climate in the U.S.

But something can be drawn from Pearlman's proposal. Countries in the New South could draft a CEFTA for the South. Matters such as visas, fees, and related paperwork could be simplified, or even eliminated, to fuel cultural exchanges within the New South. Furthermore, as was proposed in The Creative Wealth of Nations (see section 6.2), besides the Cultural Trade Index, a Cultural Exchange Index for the New South could be created. Its objective would be to provide an indicator of what cultural exchanges in the New South look like. Though numbers do not tell the whole story, such statistics could help shed light on what policy decisions need to be made to encourage more South-to-South cultural exchange, especially between places where it is weakest.[154]

6.8. Developing Inter-South to South Libraries

In many countries, libraries rarely receive the attention they deserve. Yet libraries are not just libraries. They are also community centers. As Sue Halpern wrote in The New Yorker, a resource such as a public library "is predicated on an ethos of sharing and egalitarianism. It is nonjudgmental. It stands in stark opposition to the materialism and individualism that otherwise define our culture. It is defiantly, proudly, communal."[155] Given that libraries are such rich resources, something like an Inter-South-to-South Library initiative could be started, through which countries in the New South can exchange books on a rotating basis, and even host author events. For example, Egypt's Bibliotheca Alexandrina could partner with Brazil's Fundação Biblioteca Nacional to showcase books from both countries for, say, six months. Other partnerships could link Morocco with South Africa, Malaysia with Mexico, Angola with Argentina, and so on. Topics could include culture, economics, and history. The participating parties could include public libraries and libraries at academic institutions and development agencies.

151. UNOSSC, n.d.

152. Avila, 2020.

153. iPetitions, n.d.; Kabanda, 2018, 134–5.

154. Kabanda, 2018, 217–19.

155. Halpern, 2019.

A somewhat similar initiative is the Brazil-Africa: Crossed Stories program. But its objective was specific in a different way: "to promote African history and cultures to transform relations between the different racial groups that coexist in [Brazil]." Moreover, the initiative, which ran from 2003 to 2013, was established as a partnership with Brazil's Ministry of Education and UNESCO Brasilia after the approval of National Law 10.639, a law that advocated teaching Afro-Brazilian history and culture throughout Brazil's schools.[156] In contrast, the South-to-South Library project would be voluntary and the topics would be broader. Yet perhaps the common feature of both initiatives would be their aim: to learn more about each other. In our increasingly interconnected world, where challenges such as fake news and half-truths move from Jakarta to Santiago at breakneck speed, the role of libraries in facilitating genuine knowledge and promoting a culture of critical reading and reasoning has never been more important.

In the domain of visual arts, the same library initiative could partner with galleries and even development agencies to exhibit artworks from different regions of the New South. For example, the Bibliothèque Nationale de Madagascar could partner with the Biblioteca Nacional de Panamá (officially known as the Biblioteca Nacional Ernesto J. Castillero R.) to showcase arts from both countries. From Pakistan to Peru, other libraries could do the same. In addition to showcasing works like textile art, paintings, and ceramics, they could even host community photography exhibitions.

6.9. Visas for Cultural Exchange

It would not be a surprise were such initiatives to draw in curious tourists. Though it is hard to say that such initiatives would attract massive tourism instantly, it is clear that most people from the New South struggle to get visas even within and between their regions. It is not an exaggeration to say that it might be easier for a person in the Global North to get a visa for country A in the New South, if it is required at all. Yet the story is different when it comes to someone from the New South getting a visa for the same country.[157]

So, what can be done? Although the debate here is beyond the scope of this discussion, what is clear is that there is a genuine and longstanding problem. Since development should go beyond putting up skyscrapers, and should also be about building knowledge and updating customs, issues such as inward-looking visa regimes should be revisited. They should not remain backward, or 'underdeveloped.' So, besides the Artist Visa mentioned in section 3.6,[158] broadly speaking, the question of visa equity in relation to movement across the New South merits investigation.

Since trade is not just about moving goods, but also services, including the movement of people, making it easier for people from the New South to move across the New South is likely to strengthen linkages between these countries. This could also boost activities such as educational exchanges and tourism, areas that link to other industries. If tourists engage in creative tourism, even better. This is because, by participating in hands-on cultural experiences, tourists are more likely to create a deeper connection, rather than the shallow link that, whether transparently or opaquely, has engulfed much of tourism.[159]

156. UNESCO, 2023.

157. For example, see Ullah and Chattoraj, 2025.

158. See Kabanda, 2018b, Annex 5.1, 231–233.

159. Becker, 2015.

6.10. Cultural Diplomacy

The functions of cultural diplomacy surely go beyond culture. From facilitating peace talks to setting the stage for trade negotiations, it is invaluable. That is the case even if it deserves to be valued for the role it plays in elevating culture, in enabling cultural exchanges. Yet, cultural diplomacy is largely underutilized in the New South. Countries like Indonesia might provide a road map of how to increase culture diplomacy in the New South. Indonesia hosted the Young Public Diplomacy Summit (2026) and the Indonesia International Conference on Cultural Diplomacy (2025), for instance. Indonesia is also a partner in the ASEF LinkUp | Asia-Europe Cultural Diplomacy Lab, a forum in which the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) partners with the Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture.

The initiative is a "laboratory for cultural diplomacy in action," according to ASEF. "It creates rare meeting grounds between the arts and government sectors in Asia and Europe, fostering encounters that would not otherwise take place and offering safe spaces for exchange, reflection and experimentation."[160] The last statement could also inspire something like a South-to-South Cultural Diplomacy Lab, in which governments would engage in cultural diplomacy with one another. This may certainly involve private partners, including those in arts, education, tourism, and other sectors. But given that funding is often an issue, governments could do more.

Though the debate is often about allocating scarce resources efficiently, the direct and indirect benefits are immense. First, if it to be believed that 'where culture leads, trade follows,' a leitmotif echoed in this paper, such cultural exchanges can also promote trade in other areas. Second, given today's world in which it is no longer necessarily the case that the one with the right story wins, but the one with the loudest, or most heard story, countries in the New South have an opportunity to shape their own true narratives. This should not be confused with false propaganda. But in world in which stories from the Global North persistently take center stage, many New South countries can be reduced to deceptive stereotypes.[161]

Yet the way the New South is portrayed can have implications for issues from immigration to tourism, trade and compensation. Reactive diplomacy happens when, instead of shaping their own narratives proactively, New South countries end up defending their images against unwelcome foreign stereotypes.[162] It is worth recalling that though initiatives, like investing fully in cultural diplomacy, cannot tackle these challenges immediately, they are a huge step toward strengthening South-South cooperation.

160. ASEF, n.d.

161. For more on stories and influence, see, for example, Simmons, 2015, Whoever Tells the Best Story Wins, and Nye Jr., 2011, The Future of Power.

162. FutureLearn, n.d.

6.11. Creative Shipments from South to South

It is not unusual for members of the diaspora and visitors with roots in the South to buy items in the Global North and send them to their home countries.[163] Another common practice is bringing gifts from abroad.[164] These purchases sometimes include creative products. This exchange likely skews global trade statistics, which consistently show that the developed economies lead in the imports of creative goods.[165] For a number of these items are made in the South in the first place. Furthermore, it is likely that New South countries miss out on the much-needed taxes they could collect from this trade, including import duties and domestic consumption taxes. This might not change soon, but a concerted effort to address this issue is needed. Though many countries in the New South lack street addresses, items can be shipped to local post offices, community centers, schools, or airports. This may require working with e-commerce companies to consider how this can be achieved.

Although this effort might not be a priority for governments, the current system of turning to shippers such as UPS and FedEx, or to other sea and air cargo providers, likely discourages some people from doing more commerce here. For if it is not the exorbitant cost, it is the length of time it takes to get these items from country A to country B. Relying on friends or relatives to take these items in suitcases on flights is also suboptimal. This is because, besides the inconvenience and cost, it likely skews global trade data, as it is nearly impossible to capture what is in people's suitcases, even if they fill out customs forms. Conversely, the same group of people, in addition to tourists and foreigners in the New South, are also likely to buy creative items such as crafts and bring them back to the Global North. Yet, this practice is nearly impossible to capture in trade data.[166]

7. FINAL THOUGHTS

The WTO's objective is to help its members "use trade as a means to raise living standards, create jobs and [improve] people's lives."[167] Most New South countries are WTO members—they represent about two-thirds of the organization's 166 members.[168] So, if the aim is to use trade to improve people's lives, cultural trade should have a prominent place. Given their troves of cultural wealth, New South countries are likely to accrue gains in the creative economy and beyond if they engage in cultural trade in a meaningful way. Accordingly, the idea of economic diversification cannot remain a refrain in policy pronouncements and academic texts. It has to be applied on the ground.

This is especially crucial now, because the political winds have shifted to the point that rich countries such as the United States claim they are being taken advantage of through

163. Broadly speaking, the common shipments here include the so-called 'Balikbayan boxes' in the Philippines or 'barriles' in the Caribbean. The factors leading to this activity may include quality, with goods in the Global North possibly having stricter standards. This links to trust, with markets in the Global South more susceptible to counterfeits; cost, where some types of goods bought in bulk from the Global North might be cheaper, hence offsetting the shipping costs; and, as in gift-giving, 'in-kind remittances,' which may be shielded from costs including banking fees and unfavorable exchange rates and may be seen as a form of social safety net. Prestige may also be a factor. Besides the items, the very act of buying things from the Global North could be seen as prestigious and hence raise status.

164. On the ritual of gift-giving, see Appau and Crockett, 2022.

165. UNCTAD, 2024a, 38–39.

166. As this discussion opens inquiry into such concepts as 'mirror trade asymmetries' (or 'mirror flows') and 're-export distortions,' it perhaps merits a paper of its own. But, in the meantime, for related discourse, see Cassimon et al., 2025 and Gutierrez, 2026, for example.

167. WTO, n.d.d.

168. WTO, n.d.e. The numbers are as of this writing.

trade. That perception notwithstanding, as the American trade economist Paul Krugman has explained, international trade is about mutual benefit.[169] It would be disingenuous not to allow that some players may seek to game the system and create an unequal playing field in their favor. Mutual benefit, however, means that trade is not about winners and losers; it is about reciprocal gain. Furthermore, as we have repeatedly noted, given that culture can provide both monetary and non-monetary benefits, cultural trade may not only generate commerce in other areas; it can also lead to non-monetary benefits that foster shared prosperity in direct and indirect ways.

In some ways, as some literature has argued, trade is likely to promote peace and vice versa. Though conflicts such as the U.S.-Iran and the Russia-Ukraine wars have tested that hypothesis, consider what the WTO has to say: "While cross-border trade alone cannot guarantee peace, it can bring economic stability and promote peace within a country. On the other hand, peaceful relations between economies can promote trade as well." Among other studies, Malkawi (2007) argued that "trade guarantees peace, as strengthening trade ties between countries helps them open up economically and politically, and enhances cross-cultural understanding."[170] If such statements are to be believed, cultural trade must have a prominent role to play. This is indeed another dimension in which culture leads and trade follows.

Thus, the New South has an opportunity to put cultural trade at the center of its diversification agenda, including in areas like those discussed in this paper. The benefits are not only cultural; they also link to other areas, which can propel and sustain peace and prosperity.

Finally, if cultural trade falls into the areas of trade in goods and services, it also falls into the domains of 'art for art's sake' and 'art for life's sake.' Though there is nothing terrible about 'art for art's sake,' that reading tends to cloud policy decisions. As Kaushik Basu has noted, there are people who are offended in "one breath" when you mention art and commerce.[171] But as this lurks in the background—like silent apps draining a phone battery—various entities are making money out of art, if not in overt ways. As Wolf Kramer wrote in a letter to The Economist, music today, for example, "is being used to sell smartphones, tablets, computers, recurring subscription fees, operating systems and to generate market share."[172] Meanwhile, the notion of the 'starving artist' is probably present in every language on earth. But more immediately, in the age of AI—a technology that is making some people super rich in astonishing ways—besides their data centers, can the 'intelligence' that powers AI be decoupled from the arts?

How can this be handled? The one-word answer is choice. Economic theory that drives much of trade and development discourse can give us choices. That said, it cannot lead us to choose. It only sheds light on the consequences of our choices, as Todd G. Buchholz argued.[173] If cultural trade can be chosen to contribute to economic diversification, to lead to shared peace and prosperity in the New South, it will be another way of showing that where the arts lead, a good life follows.

169. Krugman, 1993, 24–25.

170. WTO, 2025, 38; Malkawi, 2007.

171. Basu, 2011,

172. Kramer, 2015; for more about this, see Kabanda, 2018b, 120.

173. Buchholz, 2007, 1; Kabanda, 2018b, 223.

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