

A UNESCO Strategy for Philosophy

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In 2005, and for the first time in its history, UNESCO adopted an Intersectoral Strategy on Philosophy, aiming to establish an institutional framework for its programme in favor of this key discipline in the Social and Human Sciences Sector. This Strategy proved necessary in view of the increasing amount of activities in this field implemented in close cooperation with Member States and a broad number of institutional partners, particularly since the launching in 2002 of the celebration of Philosophy Day at UNESCO.

It is upon the initiative of Turkey that the project of a strategy concerning philosophy was submitted to the Executive Board of the Organization. During discussions held on this topic at the 169th session of the Executive Board, a great number of its members insisted on the importance of this programme unique within the UN system and essential for the action of UNESCO in its capacity as 'intellectual and ethical conscience' of the United Nations. The representatives of Member States put forward the necessity of reflecting together on the formulation of a strategy integrating dialogue and philosophical analysis, the encouragement of the teaching of philosophy, the promotion of philosophical thinking and research, all of them reflected in the three pillars of this Strategy.

This Strategy is thus an outcome of a process resulting from broad consultations, numerous debates and exchanges about the priorities that UNESCO must consider for the promotion of philosophy. Over a period of two years, Permanent Delegations to UNESCO, National Commissions for UNESCO, more than 500 NGOs, 600 universities and 150 philosophers and eminent personalities from the field of philosophy were invited to express their opinion on the Strategy and to contribute to it.

The Strategy is implemented in particular within the framework of Major Programme III, in cooperation with other programme sectors concerned as well as National Commissions for UNESCO. Special efforts will be made in order to mobilize the extra-budgetary funds necessary for its implementation.

Being essentially a place for exchange and encounter, UNESCO is well positioned to reflect that 'yearning for philosophy' mentioned by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,

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UNESCO's Director General, at the opening of Philosophy Day on 18 November 2004. This expression conveys the growing interest for this discipline expressed by young pupils and students sensitive to the problems and challenges arising for humanity today.

Since its inception, UNESCO has endeavored to create a space of debate for all thinkers. One of the major concerns of the Social and Human Sciences Sector is to act as an interface providing philosophers with the possibility to establish cooperation frameworks between them in all regions of the world, both in terms of university exchanges, particularly in the field of research, and in terms of mutual understanding and better knowledge.

The Intersectoral Strategy on Philosophy aims precisely at conveying this dynamic into concrete activities that will boost cooperation and the reciprocal enrichment between philosophers of various regions of the world. Three main pillars of action were thus identified in order to respond in a more appropriate way to the expectations of philosophy experts and advocates of this discipline: (i) the promotion of dialogue and philosophical analysis of contemporary questions, a pillar whose priority is the establishment of networks among philosophers, as well as a large public disclosure of the key outcomes of reflection that should influence major decision making in today's societies, such as the concepts of justice and citizenship, the ethical requirements in the field of sciences or the evolution of the history of philosophical ideas; (ii) the encouragement of the teaching of philosophy, whose crucial role for the development of free and well informed thought must constantly be underlined, as well as the rigor in the teaching of this discipline in order to guarantee philosophy's total independence and relevance; and (iii) the promotion and dissemination of philosophical knowledge in order to make sure that philosophy is accessible to all.

By adopting this Strategy, UNESCO's aim was to unite the activities developed in this field in a coherent and methodological framework that would follow an integrated and intersectoral procedure aimed at tackling the greatest number of problems challenging the world today. Moreover, UNESCO's Intersectoral Strategy on Philosophy promotes philosophy itself as a true exercise of freedom.

It is the duty of philosophy to extend beyond its own field in order to enlighten all other disciplines as much as possible, thus contributing to the refining and renewal of the analysis of world problems and ongoing changes in all societies.

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