
Cultures and Civilisations

A proposal by

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Issue

A paradox has acquired increasing importance and has diffused in scientific and social contexts. On the one hand, the scientific community has attracted the attention of public opinion on issues essentially concerned with climate change and its consequences, and on questions related to the exploitation and management of natural resources. On the other hand, human communities have become increasingly sensitive to the interactions, even conflicting, among cultures and among civilisations, and they have attached increasing importance to safeguarding and validating their cultural identities in the face of globalisation processes.

Up till now, the scientific community has mobilised the public by proclaiming international years devoted to crucial ecological issues of our times. By way of contrast, human communities and the media have paid increased attention to issues rooted in geopolitics and culture. Wars and international terrorism might foster the belief that conflicts among cultures and among civilisations are ineluctable and, as a result, they may lead people to overlook the existence of conditions deeply rooted in today's world that favour dialogue among different cultures and civilisations.

This framework, which is evolving rapidly, could cause an increasing gap between the issues deemed crucial by science and the issues perceived to be crucial by human communities. Consequently, persistent proclamations of international years focused on physical earth systems could result in decreased public interest and motivation owing to greater priority for other existential conditions.

This potential gap leads us to consider the opportunity of putting forth initiatives of broad international scope in order to inspire a positive and constructive attitude in human communities toward topics concerning the future of cultures and civilisations.

Goal

Where the considerations outlined above are shared, it might be helpful if policy makers, science and the humanities, together with media, are mobilised towards:

- illustrating the width and depth of the endowment the civilisations human mankind has developed since the Neolithic constitute;
- demonstrating how this extended endowment has been built, not only through the evolution of individual civilisations, but also, and especially, because civilisations have interacted positively with each other;

- reaffirming the universal value of the dialogue among cultures among civilisations and of the existence of conditions that could lead to advanced and constructive forms of civilisation, bringing about increasingly progressive stages of human development;
- promoting initiatives that — in the frameworks of education, communication, and relations with the public — aim to strengthen and diffuse an accurate and positive vision of civilisations and the awareness of the values appropriate to intercultural and intercivilisational dialogue.

Means

In order to pursue the goals noted above, proclamation of an

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF CULTURES AND CIVILISATIONS

would be opportune. This event would be marked by substantial ethical motivations, would trigger productive discussions in scientific and cultural arenas, could have profound effects on the media and the public, and, finally, could help disseminate peaceful sentiments and confidence in the universal values of human progress.